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LIVERPOOL IN SIGHT OF CL SEMIS



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GALFAR WINS RO 75 M YITI CITY CONTRACT



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ADVOCATING SUSTAINABLE FISHING



MUSCAT

GOLD PRICES STABILISE, BUT DEMAND PERSISTS

There has been a reasonable demand for gold in the Sultanate of Oman despite the volatility in prices in recent months. According to traders, gold prices have stabilised after weeks of surge in March due to various geopolitical factors. The price of gold for 22 carat was RO 23.50 and according to traders, the surge was due to rising oil prices that followed the Russian-Ukrainian war. **DETAILS ON P2**

VACCINES FACTORY IN KHAZAEN CITY

Khazaen Economic City signed an agreement with Opal for biopharmaceuticals and business company to establish a factory for the production of biological human vaccines to the tune of RO 20 million. The first phase of the project will be set up on a total area of 37,000 square metres. This project will be the first vaccines factory in Khazaen Economic City and it targets local and international markets. The agreement comes as part of Khazaen's efforts in attracting local and international investments. **DETAILS ON P13**

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Ramadhan 1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr 04:37 AM

dhuhr 12:14 PM

asr 03:42 PM

maghrib 06:30 PM

isha 07:41 PM

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CHINA REPORTS HIGHEST DAILY COVID CASES

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FIXING OUR FAILING FOOD SYSTEMS

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HM greetings to NZ Governor General

Cindy Kiro, Governor General of New Zealand, received in Wellington on Wednesday Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, who presented his credentials as the Sultanate of Oman's extraordinary and plenipotentiary non-resident Ambassador to New Zealand. The ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Governor General and His Majesty's wishes of further progress for the people of New Zealand. **DETAILS ON P2**



'Flexible duty' in public sector during Ramadhan

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour on Wednesday issued a decision to implement a 'flexible duty' system of operation in the units of the State's Administrative Apparatus (public sector departments) governed by the Civil Service Law and its Executive Regulation, so that their daily duty is carried out in two overlapping shifts equivalent to five hours, each, during Ramadhan 1443 AH. Accordingly, an employee can attend office from 8 am to 1 pm (first shift) or from 9 am to 2 pm (second shift). The decision mandates public sector units to regulate the attendance of their respective employees during the two shifts in a manner that ensures the smooth flow of work and good quality of services rendered to the public. — ONA

Salalah festival at multiple venues

STAFF REPORTER
SALALAH, APRIL 6

Dhofar Municipality has clarified to social media reports which said that the Salalah Tourism Festival will be cancelled for the year 2022. In response to a query from the Observer, Dhofar Municipality's Department of Public Relations said the events and activities of the khareef season will be held at various locations such as parks, gardens and natural and tourist sites in order to attract large number of tourists. The events will also introduce them to tourist sites and landscapes.

VIOLATORS WILL BE ISSUED FINES IN ACCORDANCE WITH RULES

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPORTANT

TARAWEEH CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER ONLY FOR VACCINATED

MASS IFTARS IN MOSQUES AND PUBLIC PLACES BANNED

CHILDREN UNDER 12 NOT ALLOWED FOR TARAWEEH PRAYER

VIOLATIONS COULD LEAD TO CLOSURE OF MOSQUES

FOLLOW COVID NORMS

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Wednesday called on citizens and residents to abide by the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling developments resulting from Covid-19 related to the precautionary measures against the virus during the holy month of Ramadhan.

The ROP said it will be working in coordination with the authorities concerned to follow and arrest violators and issue fines in accordance with the regulations stipulated earlier.

The ROP called on the public to adhere to the decisions of the Supreme Committee for the sake of community health and safety. ROP also called for avoidance of any violations that could lead to the closure of mosques, urging citizens and residents to report violations to 1099.

Last Tuesday, the Supreme Committee has issued decisions restricting Taraweeh prayer to the vaccinated only, and prohibiting the unvaccinated and children under 12 years from attending Taraweeh prayer.

The Supreme Committee also banned mass Iftars in mosques and other public places and the continuation of the precautionary measures such as social distancing and wearing face masks in indoor settings including mosques.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Earlier, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs urged worshippers at the mosques to follow Covid-19 protocols for the sake of public health. It said many of those visiting places of worship for prayer do not bring their own prayer mat or wear face masks.

"We have noticed that some worshippers do not abide by the decisions of the Supreme Committee while performing prayers especially during Friday and Taraweeh prayers," a spokesperson said.

"One must carry his/her prayer mat and wear a face mask throughout the prayer. Besides, keep social distance while standing for prayer and avoid gathering or hugging each other," he said.

One shouldn't share his prayer mat with others for any reason which is a clear violation of the rule. During the holy month of Ramadhan, mosques shall be open for Taraweeh prayers but there should be a mechanism to check the vaccination certificate of two doses and temperature checks at the entrance.

Rare glimpse of giant planet, 9 times the mass of Jupiter

WASHINGTON: Scientists have observed an enormous planet about nine times the mass of Jupiter at a remarkably early stage of formation — describing it as still in the womb — in a discovery that challenges the current understanding of planetary formation.

The researchers used the Subaru telescope, near the summit of an inactive Hawaiian volcano, and the orbiting Hubble space telescope to detect and study the planet called AB Aurigae b, a gas giant orbiting

unusually far from its young host star. Gas giants are planets, like our solar system's largest ones Jupiter and Saturn, composed mostly of hydrogen and helium, with swirling gases surrounding a smaller solid core.

"We think it is still very early on in its birthing' process," said astrophysicist Thayne Currie of the Subaru Telescope and the Nasa-Ames research centre, lead author of the study published in the journal Nature Astronomy.

"Evidence suggests that this is



the earliest stage of formation ever observed for a gas giant."

It is embedded in an expansive disk of gas and dust that bears the

material that forms planets and surrounds a star called AB Aurigae. It lies 508 light years from Earth. This star had a fleeting moment of fame when its image appeared in a scene in the film *Don't Look Up*.

About 5,000 planets beyond our solar system, or exoplanets, have been identified. This one is among the largest. It is approaching the maximum size to be classified as a planet rather than a brown dwarf, a body intermediate between planet and star. It is heated by gas and dust falling into it. Planets in

the process of formation — called protoplanets — have been observed around only one other star. Almost all known exoplanets have orbits around their stars within the distance that separates our sun and its most faraway planet Neptune. But this planet orbits three times as far as Neptune from the sun and 93 times Earth's distance from the sun. Its birth appears to be following a different process than the standard planetary formation model, the *Guardian* newspaper reported. — Agencies



Gold prices stabilise, but demand persists

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

There has been a reasonable demand for gold in the Sultanate of Oman despite the volatility in prices in recent months. According to traders, gold prices have stabilised after weeks of surge in March due to various geopolitical factors. The price of gold in the Sultanate of Oman for 22 karat was RO 23.50 and according to traders, the surge was due to rising oil prices that followed the Russian-Ukrainian war. “Consumers have been purchasing despite high prices for it is seen as a safe haven. Especially among some citizens, we have seen this tendency to take advantage of the current market trends and sell the gold in their possession,” sales manager of a leading



The price of gold in the Sultanate of Oman for 22 karat was RO 23.50 and according to traders, the surge was due to rising oil prices that followed the Russian-Ukrainian war.

jewellery brand said. Globally, gold prices have eased recently, but some factors could still trigger another rally in gold. “High rate of inflation which could lead to an economic recession or collapse in the Ukraine/Russia can expect a further surge in gold prices. In Oman markets, the 22-karat gold started crossing the RO 23 per gramme mark on February 18, touching the RO25 per gramme mark on March 9. Prices have since maintained the RO 23.5-mark level. “Unlike other commodities, gold has proved to be a safe asset for the long term. With economic uncertainties increasing for people across all age groups, investing in gold makes sense anytime, anywhere,” said Maryam al Balushi, who generally invests in gold coins.

Envoy to New Zealand presents credentials

WELLINGTON : Cindy Kiro, Governor General of New Zealand, received Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, who presented his credentials as the Sultanate of Oman’s extraordinary and plenipotentiary non-resident Ambassador to New Zealand, in Wellington on Wednesday. The ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Governor General and His Majesty’s wishes of further progress for the people of New Zealand. On her turn, the Governor General of New Zealand asked the ambassador to convey her sincere sentiments to His Majesty the Sultan, wishing him continuous health and happiness. She also wished the people of Oman further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. The Governor General of New Zealand also wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties in promoting the bilateral relations towards broader horizons in all spheres. The meeting underscored the keenness of Oman in developing the bilateral relations in a manner that serves the joint interests of the two countries’ peoples. The ambassador reiterated that he will exert all his efforts to promote the relations between Oman and New Zealand. — ONA

Students design green electric generator



SHINAS: Students from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Shinas have invented a solar and wind-powered electric generator that utilises the Clean Energy Interoperability system. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Washahi, an engineering student and one of the team members, said the idea of the device is based on two different ways for generating electrical power through solar cells and a windmill system thus combining

two sources of renewable energy to generate electricity. The new electrical generator can be used for camping and in remote areas that lack permanent electricity sources. He added that the device is easy to use and ensures production of clean and environmentally-friendly electric energy. He pointed out that the team is currently developing the invention by making an electric generator that works on sustainable magnetic energy. — ONA

Farmer, worker caught for working as optometrist, laser technician

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Private Health Establishments has received more than 150 applications for setting up of private health institutions in the Sultanate of Oman, eleven of which are for new hospitals. Director-General Dr Muhana al Maslahi pointed out that the number of private health establishments, besides pharmacies, had reached around 1,700. This number is expected to go up to 2,000 in the coming years, he said. The Director-General said the Ministry is currently working out the modalities, including administrative facilities, fee structure, etc with a view to exercise greater control over them and devise a process of evaluation so that safety of the patients could be ensured and irregularities committed by them were checked. The safety and health of the people could not be compromised. He said the evaluation teams had recently compiled a record of offences committed by them, including the instance of an ex-



More than 150 applications for setting up of private health institutions in the Sultanate of Oman, eleven of which are for new hospitals clinic in Muscat Governorate, he said. All irregularities have been referred to the Violation Committees and assigned to legal authorities in the country for appropriate action, the Director-General said. Dr Al Maslahi said the Directorate would continue to take resolute action against irregularities and simultaneously provide facilities for the development of private health establishments even as it would strive to encourage investments in this sector. patriate farmer working as an optometrist in Al Buraimi Governorate. In another case, a domestic worker was caught working as laser technician in a dermatology

Students organise campaign for greener community

MAZID MUSTAHAIL AKA
MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Public Relations students of the Department of Mass Communication at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Salalah, organised a campaign to educate people on the importance of conserving and protecting the ecosystem around them while prompting them to actively participate in planting of trees. The four-day campaign, called ‘Working Towards a Greener Community,’ consisted of four events spread across one week and was made possible through the support of the 21 local businesses that sponsored it. “Our main goal is to involve the local community, specifically children and university students, in activities that will give them the enthusiasm to plant trees and take care of the environment,” said Anwah al Aamri, one of the

organisers of the campaign. On the day immediately following the campaign’s opening, the team of students went on a visit to Al Moutaza Elementary School, where they organised various environment-oriented recreational activities such as quiz and crafts with the students there. At the end of the visit, the organisers assisted the schoolchildren in the planting of 20 trees on the school premises. The third day of the campaign, called ‘Planting Day,’ saw the student organisers returning once more to their university, this time to do some planting with their fellow students, but only after listening to a lecture on the importance of protecting the environment, and how best to do so, which was presented by a guest lecturer: Ecological Researcher, Mohammed Akaak. After the lecture was complete



and the audience’s questions were answered, students of the university planted trees across the campus. “The moment that students and lecturers took plants and started planting them all around was the best part of the entire campaign,” said Muna Al Aamri, a team member. In all, over 90 trees were planted on the university campus that day, most of which were generously provided by Saadah Nursery. The final day of the campaign, the organisers took the time to

express thanks to their sponsors, supporters and participants and to leave their audience with a final message. The event featured a guest lecture by Shaikh Musalam al Masheli, who spoke about the importance of protecting the environment from a religious perspective. The final day included games, a play performed by the university’s acting troupe, and competitions for art and photography. Lama al Jabri, an organiser, said, “The best part is seeing the audience interacting with us, and seeing how we can get them to take action.” Anwah added that seeing the audience’s enthusiasm and passion on planting day was “an extraordinary moment in my life” and that she hopes that the campaign will “continue to reach more people in the local community and influence them for the better.”



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Pact signed to run Oman Research Repository

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) signed a programme of cooperation to run and manage the Oman Research Repository or 'Shuaa' in Muscat on Wednesday.

The programme was signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice Chancellor of SQU. As per the programme, SQU will archive, review and contract with data entry specialists, as well as monitoring the entries to the platform by using the DSpace software.

The signing ceremony coincided with the launch of the electronic platform of Shuaa. Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under Secretary for Research and Inno-

vation said that the repository is considered a central archive for Omani intellectual production.

Shuaa is based on co-operation between individuals, Omani academic institutions and higher education institutions, as well as research, intellectual and cultural establishments. He added that Shuaa supports and publishes e-academic research papers and the content can be accessed through a single e-portal.

On his turn, Dr Nabhan bin Harith al Harasi, Dean of the College of Arts and Social Sciences at SQU, Head of the Executive Committee of Shuaa, said that over 10,000 full-text scientific resources have already been uploaded into the platform and the committee aims to add another 10,000 resources annually, starting from 2022.

— ONA

Together for a safe Ramadhan

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Individual safety and societal well-being should be the slogans during the holy month of Ramadhan, and people should follow safety guidelines in all areas for a safe Ramadhan, according to the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

Start a bit early to reach the destination on time as people tend to speed up for iftar, ending up in accidents.

"Road safety should be the responsibility of every individual on the road, and people behind the wheels should follow precautions to reach home safely, especially during the fast-breaking time", urged the Public Relations Department at the ROP.

Reports released by the ROP suggest that the last-minute rush to reach home before iftar and the tendency to speed on-road and drive while exhausted are major reasons behind major accidents during the holy month.

"Motorists are advised to ensure that they avoid tail-gating to stay safe on the roads. Drivers must be patient and focused while driving, especially during periods of peak traffic before iftar and not engage themselves in altercations with fellow drivers", he said.

Air-conditioners in the vehicle should be functional to avoid getting exhausted. Changes in sleep timings and variation in work and sleep patterns affect workers who fast.

While feeling sleepy, one shouldn't drive. It is better to pull the vehicle aside and take a catnap before proceeding further.

However, care should be taken not to sleep inside a vehicle keeping all windows closed and the A/C switched on in closed areas, as it can cause suffocation and death.

Additionally, one should avoid



Motorists are advised to ensure that they avoid tail-gating to stay safe on the roads. Drivers must be patient and focused while driving, especially during periods of peak traffic before iftar and not engage themselves in altercations with fellow drivers

ROP OFFICIAL

using a mobile phone while driving, especially reading and writing messages or browsing websites and electronic programmes, as all are wrong behaviours that pose a danger to the person and other road users.

ROP prohibits both drivers and pedestrians from such acts.

"Offenders who caused an accident and raised a threat to themselves and others on the road shall be dealt with accordingly", he added.

Shopping spree

Shopping post-iftar and Taraweeh shall be avoided as it tends to break the precautions of social distancing and observing the preventive measures against the pandemic, which is causing a menace in other countries, according to religious scholars.

They might as well do shopping during the day and, if not possible, do quick shopping at night.

"Shopkeepers must be prepared to close well in time, and overcrowding inside or outside the outlets, shopping malls, markets and places of purchase must be avoided. Besides, it is advisable to wear the face mask, follow social distancing rules and adhere to other Covid-19 protocols", he adds.

Safety at home

Ramadhan is equally a time that poses the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) with many domestic accidents, including fire and other incidents resulting from reckless behaviour.

A number of accidents at home, including incidents related to gas cylinders, occur due to mismanagement, burns, choking, falling of loose objects, bruises, cuts, sprains, small children pulling things down and dropping objects on them, and food poisoning are some of the main domestic accidents reported during the month as kitchens usually witness heavy workload from afternoon till late night. "Be attentive to even the slightest possibilities of accidents at home and try to prevent an accident before it happens and safeguard the family members at home more than the properties of things in and around the house. Alert the ROP for rescue operations", said Mohammed Khadoury, a safety and security trainer with ICEM.

Over 12,000 seedlings planted in North Al Batinah

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Over 12,000 seedlings were planted in North Al Batinah on Wednesday to combat desertification, reduce land degradation and preserve wild plants through their multiplication and expansion of green spaces as part of the Ashjar initiative of the Environment Authority. The project aims at planting 10 million seedlings across the Sultanate of Oman.

An official said 12,300 seedlings were planted till March in various wilayats of the governorate. The seedlings were planted in schools, office premises, homes and open spaces in cooperation with the community members, students



and officials.

The seedlings include Ghaf (Prosopis cineraria), Samar (Acacia tortilis), Sidr (Ziziphus spina-christi), Acacia gerrardii, Sarh (Maerua crassifolia), Juniperus excelsa, Bot

(Sideroxylon muscatencesanea), Shua (Moringa peregrina), frankincense (Boswellia sacra), Tayyiq (ficus sycomorus) and other wild trees.

The project also includes awareness campaigns and



lectures. Individuals and institutions can communicate with the administration to obtain seedlings.

The Omani Sidr Association is providing Sidr seedlings to all governorates of the Sultanate of

Oman, along with community members and institutions for their interest in afforestation and their participation in achieving the goals.

Ashjar was launched on the Omani Environment Day,

January 8, 2020. The objectives are improving and restoring biodiversity and protecting endangered species; securing fresh air and scenic views and increasing the percentage of green spaces in the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman; lowering the temperature and absorbing carbon dioxide to reduce climate change and pollution; increasing and improving the vegetation cover in the pastoral and degraded natural areas and reducing desertification in order to reach a sustainable environment and natural resources; strengthening partnerships between various sectors with regard to preserving the vegetation cover in the Sultanate of Oman and promoting environmental sustainability.



AN ACT OF SACRIFICE



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Muslims across the globe are observing the fast during the holy month of Ramadhan. The question often in a non-Muslim's mind is, 'How difficult is it to practice Islam?'

An active speaker at Sultan Qaboos Islamic Information Centre, Saif al Raheili, who is by profession an electrical engineer, said, "I would be honest with you. Practising Islam is not easy because it's an act of worship towards an oath you have taken with your Lord Allah. This is very heavy. When you say that I bear witness that there is no God, but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet, peace be upon him and the Holy Book, the Quran is the holy book that you believe in. So whatever commands in this holy book you are entitled to and whatever you are requested to stop doing requires a fight with

oneself."

He explained that this is like a journey where you need to prove your oath by deeds and actions and this exactly can determine how difficult it is for a person to make that commitment.

"It is definitely a commitment and you will be asked about it in the next life. This is part of the oath you have taken that is you believe in the hereafter or the next life.

The next life is basically a concept of meeting the Lord himself. And then you will be questioned about the deeds you have done in accordance with the witness you have given. So it is difficult for those who cannot keep an oath or cannot make that commitment.

It is easy and can be made easy for those who are sincere, serious about that oath, their commitment and witness they have given," he explained.

Fasting is an important

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When you say that I bear witness that there is no God, but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet, peace be upon him and the Holy Book, the Quran is the holy book that you believe in. So whatever commands in this holy book you are entitled to and whatever you are requested to stop doing requires a fight with oneself.

SAIF AL RAHEILI

aspect of Islam, an important part of being a Muslim. So why fasting, and why was it prescribed?

"Fasting is called one of the five pillars of Islam. In the Quran, Allah says we are not the only nation that is obligated to fasting. There were previous nations also that were asked to do so."

"This is an act of worship that you show yourself that you actually believe in. This is an act of worship. You need to prove this to yourself and you need to show this to the public that they know that you are actually a slave of Allah working or living this life according to his commands," explained Al Raheili.

The month of Ramadhan is a month of changes, and it is not to do with just physical actions. According to Al Raheili, fasting is not just about eating and drinking but also the acts of the 'nafs' - the soul.

"You are not supposed to lie. You are not supposed to cheat. You are not supposed to steal. So whatever bad habit or whatever is considered as a sin, can violate that fasting or that act of worship," he pointed out.

Fasting is for the soul and the body at the same time.

"When you fast, it is better for you because this is a chance as a group act. Everyone is doing it, so it becomes easier for you to follow, and then you can proceed with the other months with the same concept," he noted.

In other words, the month of Ramadhan is a journey of body, mind and soul.

"Exactly. And that's when the Muslims try to be kind to the poor and spend lots of money because they want the Lord to accept this act of worship. So they try to give as much as they can to humanity to prove that they are good believers," said Said al Raheili.



A photograph showing four men seated around a large wooden conference table in a meeting room. From left to right: a man in a white thobe and ghutra, a man in a white thobe, a man in a white thobe and red ghutra, and a man in a blue polo shirt. They are all looking towards the right side of the frame. The room has large windows with vertical blinds and a clock on the wall.

A large concrete mixer truck is shown pouring concrete into a trench on a mountain road. Several workers are visible in the foreground, some standing near the trench and others further back. The background features steep, rocky mountains under a clear sky.



Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Defence

ENGINEERING SERVICES



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors/consultant specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
008/2022	Consulting services (supervision) - roads work	First and Above	12 April 2022	18 April 2022	105/- R.O
009/2022	Quantity surveying consulting services (supervision) - roads work	Specialists/ registered in field of quantity surveying	12 April 2022	18 April 2022	53/- R.O

***For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)**

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as soft copy (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated from bill(3))
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.



China reports highest daily Covid count

China reported more than 20,000 Covid-19 cases on Wednesday, the highest daily tally given since the start of the pandemic as millions in locked-down Shanghai began a new round of testing.

The country's 'zero-Covid' strategy has come under immense strain as cases spike, with around 25 million residents of Shanghai — China's largest city and economic engine room — ordered to stay at home as the authorities struggle to contain the outbreak.

Until March, China had kept daily cases low with snap localised lockdowns, mass testing, and strict restrictions on international travel.

But the caseload has hit thousands per day in recent weeks, with Shanghai driving the surge of the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

The city locked down in phases last week and complaints have swelled online of fresh food shortages caused by logistics disruptions and panic buying, which has left many residents waking early to try to beat the queues on grocery apps.

State broadcaster CCTV reported that the city will launch a fresh round of tests on the entire population on Wednesday.

Shanghai's 'prevention and

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Shanghai's 'prevention and control situation is very severe.' The outbreak is still 'in its peak phase'

LEI ZHENGLONG

National Health
Commission official

control situation is very severe," National Health Commission official Lei Zhenglong said on Wednesday, adding the outbreak is still "in its peak phase."

It was the latest dour warning suggesting a long run in lockdown may be ahead, while city health officials have converted a convention centre into a makeshift Covid hospital for 40,000 people.

China recorded 20,472 infections on Wednesday, according to the National Health Commission. It is the country's highest daily infection number given by authorities, even during the peak of the initial outbreak



which centred around Wuhan.

The majority of the cases are, however, asymptomatic.

Authorities reported no new deaths, in a country which says only two people have died of the virus in nearly two years.

Yet China faces low vaccination rates, especially among the elderly,

leaving officials with a high-wire balancing act of maintaining public health while keeping the economy moving.

Omicron can only be thwarted by vaccination "protecting high-risk populations like the elderly and those with underlying conditions," Wang Guiqing, an

infectious disease expert of Peking University said in a Wednesday press conference.

In Shanghai quarantine facilities are bulging with people who test positive — even if they are asymptomatic — as city officials stick rigidly to virus protocols.

Those include separating

Covid-positive babies and children from parents who test negative, a policy that has anguished worried families.

City officials said on Wednesday that parents of some child patients with "special needs" would now be allowed to remain with their Covid-positive children.

Anger over lack of fresh food and curtailed movements is rising among residents as officials extend what was originally intended to be a short lockdown.

The Weibo hashtag "buying groceries in Shanghai" was censored from the platform, even though many of the posts detailing residents' efforts to nab coveted vegetables were still visible on Wednesday.

Shanghai, China's largest city, accounted for more than 80 per cent of the national tally, city officials said on Wednesday.

A top Shanghai official has conceded that the financial hub had been "insufficiently prepared" for the outbreak.

China, the country where the coronavirus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019, is among the last remaining places in the world following a zero-Covid approach to the pandemic. — AFP

Pakistan president wants election date set



Pakistan's Supreme Court building during a hearing in Islamabad. — AFP

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan President Arif Alvi told the country's election commission on Wednesday to fix a date for a new national ballot, as the supreme court adjourned a hearing into the legality of political manoeuvres that led to parliament being dissolved.

The court — which will sit for a fourth day on Thursday — must rule if the deputy speaker of the national assembly violated the constitution by refusing to allow a no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Imran Khan at the weekend. Had the vote taken place Khan was certain to have been booted from office, but the move allowed him to get

the loyalist president to dissolve parliament and order an election.

The opposition have cried foul and are refusing to cooperate with forming an interim government to oversee any ballot, but on Wednesday Alvi upped the ante.

A statement from his office said the election commission had been told to propose a date "in order to carry out the mandate of the Constitution". While the opposition applied its resources to the court, Khan effectively hit the campaign trail — telling party workers in Lahore late on Tuesday that he would be more careful in picking candidates to stand for his Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. — AFP

Lanka parliament speaker warns crisis

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's crippling economic crisis risks causing starvation across the island nation of 22 million while acute shortages of essentials and debilitating blackouts will get worse, the speaker of parliament warned on Wednesday.

Scarce supplies of food and fuel, along with record inflation and electricity rationing, have inflicted widespread misery in the country's most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

Public anger is at a fever pitch, with crowds attempting to storm the homes of several government figures — including President Gotabaya Rajapaksa — and large demonstrations elsewhere.

Parliamentary Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana told legislators that more hardships were to come as the country appeared at the brink of a political impasse.

"We are told this is the worst crisis, but I think this is just the beginning," Abeywardana said at the start of a two-day debate on the worsening economic woes. "The food, gas and electricity



Police officers scuffle with a medical student along with others against Sri Lanka's crippling economic crisis outside the Health Ministry in Colombo. — AFP

shortages will get worse. There will be very acute food shortages and starvation."

The parliamentary session was disrupted twice as opposition lawmakers shouted slogans denouncing members of Rajapaksa's once powerful ruling family and demanding they step down.

But chief government whip Johnston Fernando vowed that the president would stay in office to shepherd the country through

the crisis.

"We say very clearly that he will not resign under any circumstances," Fernando said, drawing loud catcalls from opposition MPs.

Security forces have dispersed protests with tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets, but a state of emergency imposed by the president last week to quell demonstrations was lifted at midnight.

Hundreds of medical students

stormed and occupied the health ministry in the capital Colombo on Wednesday while spontaneous protests were reported from across the island where people were queued to buy fuel.

More than 60 people had been arrested in connection with the unrest and many have said they were tortured in police custody.

Legislators had pushed for a debate on the emergency decree during this week's session of parliament, where the government has lost its majority after the desertion of political allies — several of whom have since called for Rajapaksa's resignation.

Opposition parties had already rejected the president's overture to form a unity administration after the resignation of nearly the entire cabinet late on Sunday.

But there has so far been no clear signal that opposition legislators will attempt a no-confidence motion to topple the Rajapaksa administration. A critical foreign currency shortage has left Sri Lanka struggling to import essential goods, with the pandemic torpedoing vital revenue from tourism and remittances. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ISTANBUL

Turkey spots naval mine off Black Sea

Turkey has discovered another naval mine off the Black Sea coast of Kefken, some 140 kilometres to the north-east of Istanbul, the Defence Ministry said. Special units were on site to 'intervene' after the mine was spotted by a reconnaissance plane, the ministry said on Twitter.

It follows the discovery of two mines in the final week of March. The two mines were defused after being discovered in the Bosphorus Strait and in the Black Sea near the Bulgarian border,



respectively.

As a result, Turkish authorities banned night-time fishing off the north-western coast until further notice. It remains unclear whether the mines are connected to the war in Ukraine. — dpa

KUALA LUMPUR

Four European divers missing in Malaysia

Four European divers went missing off Malaysia's southeast coast on Wednesday and authorities have launched a search, the coastguard said. Two British men aged 14 and 46, an 18-year-old Frenchwoman and a 35-year-old Norwegian woman disappeared after going diving near a small island, they said. A hunt involving boats from the coastguard, the police and the fisheries department was launched at 2:45 pm, said senior coastguard official Nurul Hizam



Zakaria in a statement.

The island where they disappeared, Pulau Tokong Sanggol, is about 15 kilometres, off the coast. The area is popular with foreign and domestic visitors. — AFP

KABUL

Eleven hurt in grenade attack in Kabul

Eleven people were wounded in a grenade blast at a mosque in the Afghan capital police said, minutes after worshippers offered midday prayers marking Ramadhan. Attacks on public targets have largely diminished since the Taliban seized power in August last year, but the IS group continues to operate across the country.

"We had finished the prayers and were heading out of the mosque when the blast occurred," worshipper Mohammed Yasin



said. Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran said a grenade was thrown inside the Pul-e-Khisti mosque and a suspect was arrested at the scene.

No group has claimed responsibility. — AFP



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In brief

■ HELSINKI



FINLAND SEIZES RUSSIAN-BOUND ART WORTH €42M

Three consignments of valuable artworks bound for Russia were seized by Finnish customs last weekend, suspected of contravening EU sanctions, officials said. The shipments “include works which cannot be valued, they are priceless,” customs enforcement director Hannu Sinkkonen told a press conference, adding that for insurance purposes the works have been valued at over €42 million.

Having been on loan from Russian galleries to museums in Italy and Japan, the paintings, statues and antiques were being returned, with head of enforcement Sami Rakshit confirming that some of the artworks were from St Petersburg’s Hermitage gallery.

■ WASHINGTON



NASA DELAYS FINAL TEST FOR MOON SHOT

The latest test of Nasa’s giant Moon rocket SLS has been suspended to allow for a SpaceX rocket to launch later this week, the US space agency announced. The dress rehearsal for the giant Space Launch System is taking at launch pad 39B at Cape Canaveral, Florida — where SpaceX is scheduled to lift off from pad 39A on Friday.

The test of the rocket, which is to return humans to the Moon, is now expected to resume shortly after the take-off of the SpaceX flight, which is to carry three businessmen and a former astronaut to the International Space Station. The 322-foot SLS rocket will remain on its launch pad while waiting.

■ OUAGADOUGOU



BURKINA FASO EX-PRESIDENT GETS LIFE FOR KILLING

A military court in Burkina Faso handed down a life term to former president Blaise Compaore over the 1987 assassination of revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara. Applause erupted in the courtroom as the long-awaited verdict was read out, bringing the curtain down on a case that has afflicted the impoverished and volatile state for 34 years.

The court also issued life terms to Hyacinthe Kafando, an officer suspected of having led the hit squad, and General Gilbert Dienderé, an army commander at the time of the assassination, which coincided with a coup that brought Compaore to power. — AFP



A woman stands by a destroyed apartment building in Chernihiv amid Russian attack on Ukraine. — AFP

West readies new sanctions on Russia

KYIV: Western powers were readying new sanctions against Russia on Wednesday after Ukraine’s president called for tougher action and accused Moscow of atrocities during the six-week war. The measures follow an international outcry over hundreds of civilians found dead in areas from which Russian troops have withdrawn around Ukraine’s capital, including the town of Bucha.

In a video address to the UN Security Council on Tuesday, Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky showed harrowing images of corpses — including of children — that he said were victims of Russian atrocities.

“They cut off limbs... slashed their throats. Women were raped and killed in front of their children,” he said, after earlier comparing Russia’s attack to the 1937 Nazi bombing of the town of Guernica.

The Kremlin has denied any civilian killings, claiming the images emerging from Bucha and other sites are fakes produced by Ukrainian forces, or that the

US sanctions two Russian banks, Putin’s children and foreign minister, indicts Russian oligarch for sanctions violations

deaths occurred after Russian soldiers pulled out.

Zelensky called for Russia’s exclusion from the UN Security Council, where it is one of five members with veto power, saying it was blocking the UN from carrying out “the functions for which it was created.”

On Wednesday, Pope Francis — who has repeatedly called for peace, while not naming Russia or President Vladimir Putin — also deplored the “powerlessness of international organisations.”

At his weekly audience at the Vatican, the 85-year-old pontiff kissed a flag he said had come from “that martyred city Bucha”, condemning “ever more

horrendous cruelties” in Ukraine.

The UN General Assembly announced later it would vote on Thursday on suspending Russia from the body’s Human Rights Council, after moves by the US and Britain to have it excluded.

Thousands of people have been killed and more than 11 million displaced as refugees or within Ukraine since Russia’s war on February 24.

Western powers have already pummelled Russia with debilitating economic sanctions, which forced Moscow on Wednesday to make foreign debt payments on dollar-denominated bonds in rubles.

But the killings in Bucha and elsewhere have galvanised support for Kyiv, with Washington announcing another \$100 million in military aid, and produced new momentum for additional sanctions on Moscow.

Washington, in coordination with the G7 and the European Union, is expected on Wednesday to announce measures including a ban on all new investments in Russia. — AFP

Tear gas fired at Sudan protesters

KHARTOUM: Thousands protested across Sudan against military rule on the anniversary on Wednesday of previous popular uprisings, most recently against ruler Omar al Bashir three years ago.

In the capital Khartoum, where thousands took to the streets, security forces fired tear gas at the crowd, said witnesses.

The security forces also “stormed Al Jawda hospital and fired tear gas inside, scaring patients and health workers and causing suffocation among some of them,” said the independent Central Committee of Sudan Doctors.

Sudan has grappled with an October 25 coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan that has derailed a political transition period and hammered the economy of one of the world’s poorest countries.

Pro-democracy activists have warned online of a people power “earthquake of April 6” — a momentous day in Sudan’s history that was key in bringing down earlier strongmen.

In 1985, the day saw the ouster of president Jaafar Nimeiri following a popular uprising. In 2019, it marked the start of a mass sit-in outside army headquarters, after months of protests, against Bashir’s three decades in power.

“It is an important day... so we expect many to take to the streets despite the heat and Ramadhan,” the Muslim month of fasting, said

one Khartoum protester, Badwi Bashir.

“We just want to bring down the coup (leadership) and end the prospect of any future coups.”

Sudan’s latest putsch has “set fire to all aspects of life, turning our country into an arena of crises,” said the civilian alliance Forces of Freedom and Change, or FFC.

As protesters started to gather in the capital, security forces sealed off key bridges and deployed around the presidential palace and army headquarters.

In Khartoum’s twin city of Omdurman, they set up barbed wire blockades on streets leading to the parliament building.

Protesters marched in the eastern state of Gedaref with banners that read “No to military rule” and “Away with the government of hunger”, said one witness, Ahmed Salah.

Demonstrations were also held in several cities across the Darfur region, the central state of North Kordofan and the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, as well as Wad Madani to the south of Khartoum, according to witnesses.

Five days after the start of the 2019 sit-in, generals bowed to the pressure on the streets to remove Bashir. But the protesters stayed on to press for civilian rule, only to be dispersed in a crackdown in June that year by men in military fatigues that claimed 128 lives according to medics.

— AFP



Sudanese protesters take part in a rally against military rule on the anniversary of previous popular uprisings in Khartoum. — AFP

US, UK, Australia vow to work on hypersonic weapons

LONDON: The United States, Britain and Australia said on Tuesday they would begin collaborating on hypersonic missile strike and defence capacity, as rivals Russia and China advance rapidly in the cutting-edge technology.

The trio said they would work on hypersonics in an expansion of their recent AUKUS defence alliance, which is to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines to counter China’s growing military clout.

They pledged “new trilateral cooperation on hypersonics and counter-hypersonics, and electronic warfare capabilities” in a statement by US President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Hypersonic missiles can travel

more than five times the speed of sound and manoeuvre in mid-flight, making them much harder to track and intercept than traditional projectiles. They may carry conventional or nuclear warheads.

Hypersonics and related technologies were now “very much a part of what the AUKUS partnership is striving to deliver”, Australia’s Morrison told reporters on Wednesday. But there were few details about what the leaders’ hypersonic plan entailed.

Marcus Hellyer, defence analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said it was hard to judge “what is actually new” in the statement.

Australia and the United States were already working together on hypersonics, he said, although the new commitment may open



US President Joe Biden participates in a virtual press conference with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison in Washington, DC. — AFP

up new areas of cooperation with Britain.

Australia announced in December 2020 it would work with the United States on developing

hypersonic weapons in a so-called SCIFIRE programme.

And Canberra committed in its 2020 defence strategy programme to invest Aus\$6.2 billion-9.3 billion

in high-speed, long-range strike and missile defence, including hypersonics.

On the same day as the latest AUKUS announcement, the US military said it had recently completed a free-flight test of an aircraft-launched hypersonic missile that maintained a speed of more than Mach 5. But rival powers are making rapid advances.

Russia is the most advanced nation in hypersonics while China is also aggressively developing the technology, according to the US Congressional Research Service.

Last month, Moscow claimed it had twice fired its newest Kinzhal hypersonic missiles to hit targets in Ukraine.

Russia has also claimed a series of successful tests including firing a Zircon hypersonic missile from a submerged submarine. — AFP

Can city living beat climate change?



AMELIE BOTTOLLIER-DEPOIS

The writer is a AFP correspondent who writes on environment issues

With a whopping 70 per cent of humanity predicted to be living in urban areas by the middle of the century, UN climate experts see a huge opportunity to create ideal cities that are walkable, leafy and energy efficient.

Urban areas currently account for around 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, notes a comprehensive report on climate change solutions from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released this week.

We are in the "urban century", the report says, with nearly 7 billion people expected to live in built-up areas by 2050.

If this rapid expansion is chaotic, unplanned and inefficient it could cause emissions to explode.

But the IPCC says there is another option.

"Although urbanisation is a global trend often associated with increased incomes and higher consumption, the growing concentration of people and activities is an opportunity to increase resource efficiency and decarbonise at scale," the report says.

Cities are already more efficient: For the same level of consumption, a city dweller often needs less energy than their neighbour in the countryside.

That's because of the economies of scale in densely populated areas, where people share infrastructure and services, it says.

The IPCC did not give specific

THE REPORT PAINTS A PICTURE OF A 'COMPACT AND WALKABLE' URBAN AREA, WITH HIGH DENSITY OF HOUSING, SHOPS AND OFFICES LOCATED CLOSE TOGETHER, SO THAT THE JOURNEY FROM HOME TO WORK IS SHORT

price tags for the measures it outlines, since they would vary considerably from place to place, but stressed that electrification, for example, was a "feasible, scalable and affordable" way of

decarbonising public transport systems.

Overall, the IPCC makes clear that the economic benefits of cutting carbon pollution outweigh the costs of climate inaction.

Air pollution, for example, causes some seven million premature deaths each year around the world.

The report said the economic payback from reducing air pollution alone would be on the "same order of magnitude" as the investments needed to slash emissions, potentially even larger.

And the value of improvements in health and quality of life go beyond money. So what would an ideal city look like?

The IPCC paints a picture of

a "compact and walkable" urban area, with relatively high density of housing, shops and offices located close together, so that the journey from home to work and to services is short.

"Larger cities around smaller communities," said Diana Reckien, of Utwente University in the Netherlands, citing the example of recent restructuring of urban planning in Berlin.

"A community is really four-by-four blocks, with only small streets, either a playground or a market square, mostly in the middle and all basic services (grocery stores, stationery, doctors, hairdresser)," said the researcher, who was not involved in the IPCC analysis.

— AFP

Ukraine war brings bitter harvest to Moldovan orchards

MIHAELA RODINA

A warehouse in Moldova is piled high with crates of red apples but for an industry reeling from war in neighbouring Ukraine, the sight is far from appetising. The conflict has all but ended apple exports to Russia, traditionally the main buyer of produce from Moldova's orchards.

"I don't know what we are going to do with the apples that are left over," admits grower Valeriu Matcovschi. "There are too many for us to sell on the Moldovan market," he says in the northern village of Bilicenii-Vechi.

In normal times, lorries would arrive at least five times a week to take his 2,000-tonne yearly harvest to Russia. Now he is scrambling to find new customers.

In late March he sent a first shipment to Kuwait, but he had to slash his prices by a third and accommodate clients with different demands about which varieties of apple they will take. "I hope I won't have to start pulping the fruit. That would be a tragedy," he says.

Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe. The former Soviet republic of around 2.6 million people is sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania.

Moldova is in a "difficult situation", senior government official Dumitru Udrea said. More than 360,000 Ukrainians have fled into Moldova since the start of Russia's assault. The vast majority have travelled on elsewhere, but 90,000 have stayed.

Energy price hikes, already rising but now exacerbated by the war, could push inflation to 30 per cent by the end of the year. Udrea fears the effects of the war mean that "in 2022 we could see a recession of between three and 15 per cent".

The largely rural country, whose gross domestic product (GDP) is 0.4 per cent that of Britain's, was already struggling to recover from a string of political and economic crises.

These came on top of a 2014-15 banking scandal that led to the disappearance of around \$1 billion.

Responding to desperate appeals from Moldova — which formally asked to begin the process of joining the EU at the beginning of March — Germany, France and Romania are holding a donors' conference in Berlin to help lighten the load.

Udrea says the government hopes for €4 billion from donors to boost energy security and protect Moldovans' purchasing power.

Thanks in part to a 2014 association agreement with the EU — which drew the ire of Moscow — trade with countries to its west now accounts for more than 60 per cent of Moldova's total foreign trade.

But some traditional economic ties with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus have been less easy to replace.

"At first sight the share of exports to these countries — 15 per cent — doesn't seem huge but several sectors are very dependent on it, above all apple growers," economist Adrian Lupusor, from the Expert-Grup think tank, said.

— AFP

Is Emmanuel Macron about to blow it?



HENRY GRABAR

The author is a staff writer at Slate Magazine

Posters have gone up across France for Sunday's presidential election, a 12-way contest that pits the centrist incumbent, Emmanuel Macron, against a range of challengers of varying degrees of seriousness.

Some hardly get recognised in the street; others are fixtures of protest marches and television specials; only one, the anti-immigrant candidate Marine Le Pen, appears capable of running a close race against the president in the runoff on April 24.

This two-round system, a so-called "jungle" primary followed by a head-to-head matchup, has been a feature of French politics since the 1960s.

Historically, this has given voters the freedom to vote with their hearts in the first round, because the second round has usually boiled down to a battle between the two establishments parties, Socialists versus Republicans.

The far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine's father, upset that dynamic in 2002; the fresh-faced former finance minister Macron, who started his own party (La République En Marche!) in 2016, has ended it.

Instead, in a crowded field where Macron seems to have locked down a spot in the runoff, but second place might still be up for grabs, voters, pundits and politicians have been riveted by the polls and are strategising about the "vote utile"—the useful vote. Things have come to the point where some of the president's own supporters might vote against him in the first round, in the hopes of delivering a more favourable matchup in the second. "It's so beautiful when a democracy resembles Koh-Lanta," the comedian Alex Vizorek said this week, referring to the French version of Survivor.

"The vote utile — that's me," Valérie Pécresse, the president of the Parisian region running as the mainstream right-wing candidate, offered last week. Pécresse has struggled to distinguish her platform from the president's. Instead, she has accused him of copying her ideas, such as investing in nuclear power, raising the retirement age from 62 to 65, and reforming the welfare system.

The less doctrinaire members of her party have flocked to the president's coalition; even the last Republican president, Nicolas Sarkozy, is suspected of supporting Macron.

Meanwhile right-wingers more

French presidential election

Main declared candidates for the election on April 10 (1st round vote)

FABIEEN ROUSSEL French Communist Party (PCF)	JEAN-LUC MELENCHON France Unbowed (LFI) candidate in 2017	ANNE HIDALGO Socialist mayor of Paris	GREENS YANNICK JADOT Eurodeputy, former Greenpeace campaigner
EMMANUEL MACRON President of France	RIGHT VALERIE PECRESSE Former minister, head of Ile-de-France region including Paris	FAR-RIGHT MARINE LE PEN National Rally (RN), lost to Emmanuel Macron in 2017 2 nd round runoff	ERIC ZEMMOUR Pundit

AFP Photos

fixated on immigration, public safety and culture war issues have thrown their support behind the far-right candidates — Marine Le Pen and to her right, the grotesque polemicist Eric Zemmour.

Pécresse's pitch, basically, is that what has failed to set her apart in the primary will become an asset in

FRENCH VOTERS TRY TO AVOID A REMATCH BETWEEN MACRON AND LE PEN.

the runoff—that she's more likely to triumph over the president than her toxic right-wing rivals. It was a position that made more sense a month ago, when she was hovering around second place in the polls.

Since then she has switched places with Le Pen, who is now favoured to advance to the second round — and is creeping closer and closer to Macron in head-to-head polling.

For a quarter-century, the French political establishment has considered the prospect of a President Le Pen unthinkable. Le Pen père was tainted by, among other things, his support for the Vichy regime and the record of the

French military in its colonial wars.

But his daughter Marine, now in her third presidential contest, has led a 20-year campaign to "de-demonise" the National Rally party her father founded in 1972, jettisoning some of its extreme positions (like exiting the European Union) and extreme members (like her dad). It's working.

She still wants to systematically expel France's undocumented immigrants, end the right to birthright citizenship and give French nationals priority in hiring, housing and benefits, but she has run most of this campaign as an economic populist. Her party performs best in the de-industrialised regions of Northern France that were once left-wing strongholds.

She's gotten help from the centre, where Macron's conservative cabinet members have parroted her voters' anxiety about the influence of Islam, helping to legitimise her views and from the right, where the ex-journalist Eric Zemmour's extraordinarily nasty campaign — he'd like to require children born in France to have French names — has served to make her own look moderate.

On the left, meanwhile, the prospect of a second Macron–Le Pen runoff is filling voters with dread. The question of the vote utile is front of mind this week, because the left has four candidates dividing up the first-round vote, and only one of them — Jean-Luc Mélenchon — appears capable of making it to the runoff.

— New York Times

When the flowers will bloom again?



SONIA AMBROSIO
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The world appears to be perfect as one looks across fields of sunflowers. Heaven and Earth seem to be in harmony. The birds' tweeting and chirping create a soothing symphony that is devoid of worry and anxiety. The vibrantly coloured natural images delight

the eyes as great paintings like those created by Van Gogh to immortalise the 'happy flower.' Flowers have always had a cultural significance in societies. But the sunflower is special: It rotates slowly on its stalks to face the sun. People's minds are filled with joy when they consider sunflowers in the context of poetry, songs and art. Despite its beauty, the plant also serves important purposes: It was used to remove toxins from the soil following the 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine. It was used as a form of protest when people placed the plant outside the Russian Embassy in London to mark the first week of war on Ukraine. Sunflower seeds, sunflower oil and sunflower to decorate houses are all products of this exuberant plant, which has grown in popularity since the war. It is Ukraine's national flower. Until the Russian war, the country was the world's largest producer of sunflower seed and exporter of sunflower oil.

The ugly destruction of schools, hospitals, buildings, infrastructure and farming fields does not go well with the 'happy flower' meadows. They are dying because there are more urgent matters to attend to. The planting season has arrived in Ukraine, but, like the flowers, wheat, corn, vegetables and fruits are taking a back seat. Ukraine is not alone. Similar situations exist in Crimea, Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Georgia, Afghanistan and other countries. Men don't seem to learn from history. WE NEED FLOWERS, NOT MISSILES. THE SUNFLOWERS ARE BRIGHT AND STRONG. THEY CAN REPRESENT THAT EVEN IN ADVERSITY, BEAUTIFUL THINGS CAN HAPPEN

They believe they are little gods, that they have the right to enslave populations to satisfy their domineering ambitions. It's troubling to believe that humans were designed to be bombed. We may have varied skin tones but we are on an equal footing. This equality does not grant permission to anyone to ruin families, livelihoods, or entire populations. Slavery existed in the past, and we can still see it around us. Having money or a high position in government institutions are ephemeral circumstances that do not entitle anyone to control the lives of others. Once we become dust, we become nothing more than a shadow in the memories of a few until we are forgotten entirely. I've asked the angels to bring hope to those who don't have a roof over their heads or food on their table. I try not to read about the suffering of millions of people around the world who have been displaced. I choose to turn off the lights and gaze up at the stars, dreaming of a day when there will be no famine, no wars, no refugees, no diseases and no evil. I prefer to focus on the moon rather than the competition between nations for space conquest. I choose to be grateful for the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of our surroundings and listen to the most amazing natural sounds – without the echoes of explosions. A daydream is a luxury in a changing world that has not yet recovered from a pandemic and then the start and continuation of wars. The fields that produced food, the fields that were adorned with flowers, the land that provided a decent living and optimism to so many are now carpeted with explosives. On the one hand, technology advances, while on the other, men diminish their significance. We need flowers, not missiles. The sunflowers are bright and strong. They can represent that even in adversity, beautiful things can happen.



Fixing our failing food systems

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI,
OLIVER CAMP

Food prices are surging to record highs in many countries, driven by factors including climate change, violent conflict, the Covid-19 pandemic and supply-chain disruptions. This perfect storm has exposed the inefficiencies and flaws of global food systems, leading some to warn of a looming food crisis. Last September, a United Nations summit brought together key actors in food and agriculture and produced new national and international commitments to improve food systems for people and the planet. The summit's five Action Tracks identified powerful solutions to end hunger and malnutrition, and to ensure environmental sustainability throughout food value chains. Governments and businesses had an ideal opportunity – shortly before the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November – to act decisively to transform food systems. That opportunity has not been realised. But with time running out in the critical UN Decade of Action on Nutrition from 2016 to 2025, we must measure progress in months, not years – and COP26 largely relegated food systems to the sidelines. In UN climate negotiations, coal, cars, trees, cement and steel – and cash – continue to capture political and media attention, while the urgent need to change the way we produce and consume food is generally overlooked. This is extremely short-sighted, given that food systems are responsible for one-third of global greenhouse-gas emissions. Even if every other sector were to reach net-zero emissions tomorrow, it would be impossible to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius without significant changes to food systems. Today, food systems use 70 per cent of freshwater resources, cover 40 per cent of the planet's ice-free land, and are a primary factor driving deforestation, the extinction of thousands of species, and the collapse of the ecosystems upon which we depend. At the same time, food systems are also failing in their primary goal of nourishing the world's growing population. Rapid increases in hunger and malnutrition, exacerbated by Covid-19 disruptions and increasing poverty rates, are erasing a decade of progress. Three billion people cannot afford a healthy and nutritious diet, and millions are at risk of death, disease and debilitating physical and cognitive impairments as a result. It is widely feared that the war in Ukraine will worsen food insecurity in developing countries. Still, there is hope. A food system based on sustainable production, respect for natural ecosystems, a circular economy and responsible stewardship of land and

resources throughout the value chain will greatly benefit human and planetary health, and boost jobs and livelihoods. Moreover, the solutions identified during the UN Food Systems Summit process are ready to be implemented. Organisations focusing on health, nutrition, poverty and development began CURRENT PATTERNS OF FOOD PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION ARE DRIVING THE COLLAPSE OF THE ECOSYSTEMS UPON WHICH HUMANITY DEPENDS. BUT BUILDING A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM IS POSSIBLE, AND REQUIRES ONLY THE POLITICAL WILL TO ACT NOW

to overcome barriers to collective action. By reviving the momentum towards reforming food systems generated last year, we can ensure that the UN's decade of action achieves its goal: To “eliminate malnutrition in all its forms, everywhere, leaving no one behind.” And stronger collective efforts can help to achieve the goals of the 2015 Paris climate agreement in the harvests that remain between now and 2030. This will not happen without political will; governments and businesses, together with partners in civil society, must step up. The transformation we desperately need will be possible only if we

invest the necessary time and resources to turn national and international commitments into action. As a next step, action on food systems must become a mainstay of global climate policymaking in all major fora. These include COP27 (which will take place in Egypt in November) and each subsequent COP; global action agendas on methane and deforestation; Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris climate agreement; Covid-19 recovery plans; green infrastructure programmes; public health measures; and sustainable trade initiatives. High-level meetings throughout 2022 present opportunities to consolidate and implement national plans and commitments. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) in Kunming, China, should finalise an ambitious new global biodiversity framework, with food systems at its core. The G7, under Germany's presidency, could mobilise new financial pledges to address hunger and protect nature. The Indonesian presidency of the G20 offers an opportunity for member countries to increase efforts to strengthen food-system resilience, combat hunger and reduce food loss and waste. At COP27, the Egyptian presidency can place food systems at the heart of the climate agenda with a proposed Agriculture, Nutrition and Food Systems Day — or a food fortnight. Companies, meanwhile, must act on their commitments to reduce hunger and malnutrition, provide healthy foods, adopt and meet science-based targets and tackle deforestation. Multilateral development banks, international institutions, donors and philanthropists can increase financing of all kinds, explicitly targeting the need for healthy food produced by sustainable methods. The World Trade Organization should put this issue at the centre of the global trade agenda.

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Workers load sacks of food supplies at the Red Sea port of Hodeidah in western Yemen on Wednesday. – AFP

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Manchester City's Dutch defender Nathan Ake (L) vies with Atletico Madrid's Croatian defender Sime Vrsaljko (R) during the Uefa Champions League quarterfinal first leg match at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. – AFP

LIVERPOOL IN SIGHT OF CL SEMIS

CITY EDGE ATLETICO AT HOME, BENFICA SLUMP

BERLIN: Liverpool took a big step towards the Champions League semifinals with a 3-1 victory at Benfica on Tuesday while their big English rivals Manchester City laboured to a 1-0 home win over Atletico Madrid.

Ibrahima Konate and Sadio Mane gave Liverpool a 2-0 half-time lead in Lisbon, Darwin Nunez pulled one back but a late Luis Diaz strike means that Jurgen Klopp's team are heavy favourites to wrap up the quarterfinal tie at home next week.

Before that comes a Sunday Premier League table topper at City who got their win on the night from Kevin de Bruyne in the 70th minute against Atletico who had ousted Manchester United in the previous round and can still reverse matters at home on April 13.



Liverpool's Colombian midfielder Luis Diaz (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's third goal against SL Benfica at the Luz stadium in Lisbon. – AFP

As expected, last year's runners-up City dominated possession at the Etihad but lacked ideas against Atletico who defended deep with a five-man back line.

De Bruyne broke the deadlock with 20 minutes left for Pep

Guardiola's side with a low shot into the far left corner off a pass from the lively substitute Phil Foden.

"Phil found me perfectly, I just needed to stay composed and luckily I did," De Bruyne told

BT Sport of his goal.

"It was a very hard game. The first half was tight, in the second half we had a couple of chances and it was good that we took one.

"We have to stay composed. 1-0 is 1-0. I expect similar over there.If

the game is tight they will have to attack a little bit more," De Bruyne added.

In Lisbon, Konate headed Liverpool 1-0 up in the 17th off Andrew Robertson's corner kick. Captain Nicolas Otamendi

nodded wide on Benfica's best chance and they were punished seconds later when Mane made it 2-0 off Diaz heading on Trent Alexander-Arnold's long cross-field ball in the 34th.

Benfica were back in the game in the 49th after Konate failed to clear a cross and Nunez behind him happily accepted this gift.

But Diaz ended all doubts in the 87th, slotting into the empty net after rounding keeper Odysseas Vlachodimos to put the Reds firmly in command as they head to Anfield. — dpa

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS ON TUESDAY: Quarterfinal first legs
In Manchester
Manchester City (ENG) 1 (De Bruyne 70) Atletico Madrid (ESP) 0
In Lisbon
Benfica (POR) 1 (Nunez 49) v Liverpool (ENG) 3 (Konate 17, Mane 34, Diaz 87)

Lebanon edge Oman in Asian Cup futsal qualifier



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Oman futsal team commenced their campaign in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup Kuwait 2022 Qualifiers with a 2-1 loss against Lebanon in the opening game on Tuesday night at the Zayed Sports Complex. In the same group, Saudi Arabia registered a tough 5-4 win over fighting Palestine in their opener. With the triumph of Lebanon and Saudi, both teams are leading in the group and Oman futsal team meet Saudi Arabia in a late match on Wednesday while Lebanon take on Palestine later on the same day.

Oman head coach Younis al Fahdi began the match with a line-up that featured Hisham al Balushi as the goalkeeper, Samer al Balushi and Mohammed Taqi were in defence while Zamil al Balushi and Mutasim al Shamsi were the attackers.

Lebanon started the match strongly while coach Younis al Fahdi's men were in defence to prevent and break their attacks. The opening goal was scored in the 16th minute after a move from Lebanon that resulted in Mohammed al Lawati scoring an own goal. Later, Lebanese got more momentum to dominate the game and Mustafa Rhyem doubled their lead in the 25th minute.

Mutasim al Shamsi returned one goal for Oman in the 30th minute. Later, series of scoring attempts were unsuccessful for Oman, who were looking for an equaliser. Lebanon stayed on to keep the score at 2-1 and pick up three points.

In group B fixtures, hosts UAE suffered a 2-0 loss against Iraq as the latter snatched three crucial points in the group. Rafid al Maatoq and Salim al Husaynat confirmed Iraq's victory as they netted the winning goals.



Finch, Ellis help Australia thump Pakistan in T20I

LAHORE: Skipper Aaron Finch returned to form with a half century and pace bowler Nathan Ellis took four wickets as world champions Australia beat Pakistan by three wickets in the only Twenty20 international in Lahore on Tuesday.

Finch scored a 45-ball 55 to anchor Australia's chase a 163-run target after Ellis took 4-28 kept Pakistan down to 162-8 in their allotted 20 overs.

Pakistan failed to reach a big score despite skipper Babar Azam's brisk 46-ball 66 with six fours and two sixes.

Finch, who had not scored a half century in the last 13 T20Is, ensured he not only removed doubts over his batting but also helped Australia overhaul the target in 19.1 overs for the loss of seven wickets. When Finch holed out Australia needed just four runs and despite Sean Abbott fell for nought in the same Shaheen Shah Afridi over, Ben McDermott hit the winning boundary in his 19-ball 22 not out to achieve Australia's fourth successive win in T20Is against Pakistan.

Finch, who hit six boundaries, put on a brisk 40 for the opening stand with Travis Head (14-ball 26 with three fours and a six) and another 44 for the second with Josh Inglis who made 15-ball 24 with two fours and a six.

Pakistan did pull back with leg-spinner Usman Qadir (2-33) and pacer Mohammad Wasim (2-30) brought the home team back in the game. But Marcus Stoinis



Australian captain Aaron Finch plays a shot during the Twenty20I match against Pakistan at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore. — AFP

(nine-ball 23 with five boundaries) and McDermott ensured they supplement their skipper to achieve the chase.

"I thought the way our bowlers attacked that game were fantastic," said Finch. "Nathan Ellis

had a tough start but showed real character and we took wickets up front."

Pakistan skipper Azam rued loss of wickets after a good start.

"We had a very good start but then lost couple of wickets that

took away the momentum," said Azam. "We lost momentum and in the end were 20-30 runs short."

Pakistan made a brisk start.

Azam, who hit back to back hundreds in Pakistan's 2-1 win in the one-day international series, put on 67 for the opening wicket with Mohammad Rizwan (23) after Australia sent the home team in to bat at Gaddafi Stadium.

But Green dismissed Rizwan in his first over and Fakhar Zaman off next ball to pull things for Australia. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan	
Mohammad Rizwan b Green	23
Babar Azam c Ellis b Zampa	66
Fakhar Zaman c Finch b Green	0
Ifthikhar Ahmed c Inglis b Ellis	13
Khushdil Shah c McDermott b Ellis	24
Asif Ali c Labuschagne b Ellis	3
Hasan Ali b Abbott	10
Shaheen Shah Afridi c Stoinis b Ellis	0
Mohammad Wasim not out	2
Usman Qadir not out	18
Extras: (lb2, nb1)	3
Total (for eight wts; 20 overs)	162
Fall of wickets: 1-67, 2-67, 3-93, 4-118, 5-127, 6-142, 7-142, 8-142	
Bowling: Head 2-0-17-0, Dwarshuis 3-0-42-0, Abbott 4-0-28-1, Ellis 4-0-28-4, Zampa 4-0-29-1, Green 3-0-16-2	
Australia	
T Head c Qadir b Rauf	26
A Finch c Asif b Shaheen	55
J Inglis c Rizwan b Qadir	24
M Labuschagne st Rizwan b Qadir	2
M Stoinis b Wasim	23
C Green b Wasim	2
B McDermott not out	22
S Abbott b Shaheen	0
B Dwarshuis not out	0
Extras: (lb5, nb1, w3)	9
Total (for 7 wts; 19.1 overs)	163
Fall of wickets: 1-40, 2-84, 3-95, 4-119, 5-129, 6-158, 7-159	
Bowling: Shaheen 4-0-21-2, Hasan 3-0-30-0, Rauf 3-1-0-35-1, Qadir 4-0-33-2, Khushdil 1-0-9-0, Wasim 4-0-30-2	



Oman Cricket announces 4-match tour in UAE

MUSCAT: The next leg of Oman's qualification run for the ICC ODI World Cup 2023 in India will begin on April 10 with a tri-series against PNG and Scotland in the United Arab Emirates. A double-round robin format will be followed, with the matches being played as part of the ICC Men's CWC League 2.

Head Coach and Chief Development Officer Duleep Mendis said, "As a team, we are very excited to get started with these next set of games in the CWC League 2. Our last trip to the UAE was a successful one and we will look to deliver at a similar level this time around too. The boys have played some great cricket on the domestic circuit recently and look hungry and sharp for this tour. Scotland and PNG are both good sides and I look forward to some competitive and high-quality cricket over

the next two weeks."

Oman currently hold a 14-point advantage over second-placed UAE in the table, having played 10 games more.

All the matches can be viewed live on icc.tv worldwide.

Oman's squad for the upcoming tri-series:

Zeeshan Maqsood (captain), Jatinder Singh, Kashyupkumar Prajapati, Shoaib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Mohammad Naseem (W/K), Ayaan Khan, Nester Dhamba, Khawar Ali, Fayaz Butt, Kaleemullah, Suraj Kumar (W/K), Bilal Khan, Sandeep Goud; Support Staff: Duleep Mendis (Head Coach), Amir Ali (Assistant Coach), Zeeshan Siddiqui (Analyst), Evert Laubscher (Trainer), Sean Nowak (Physio), Avishkar Selvi (Fast Bowling Coach)

OMAN'S FIXTURES

(matches start at 9.30 am):
Oman v Scotland (April 10)
Oman v PNG (April 12)
Oman v Scotland (April 15)
Oman v PNG (April 16)

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Lions XI, Muscat Thunders post wins

MUSCAT: The Lions XI and Muscat Thunders registered wins in the first round of Danube Ramadhan Tennex Ball Cricket tournament 2022, organised by Al Hail Cricket Team on Monday.

In the opening match, Muscat Thunders beat Aramax Muscat by 9 wickets. Muscat Thunders captain Farhan won the toss elected to field first. The Aramax team scored 20 for 4 wickets.

The Muscat Thunders team chased the target in 5 overs with the loss of one wicket only. Farood of Muscat Thunders was declared man of the match.



In the other match, Lions XI defeated Super Sun-raisers by 9 wickets and qualified to next round. Jose top-scored for Lions XI with 18 runs in 12 balls and was declared man of the match. Ibrahim from Ayan International presided as the chief guest of the

ceremony.

Building materials company Al Danube are sponsoring the event for the third year in a row. Al Mudhish Company, Oman Oasis Company, Ayan International LLC and Baab Al Hail Trading are the support sponsors.

PSM to hold Ramadhan soft ball cricket

MUSCAT: The Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) has announced the resumption of Ramadhan Soft Ball Night cricket tournament at PSM green ground in Darsait from second week of April.

The entry forms can be collected from Pakistan School Muscat with an entry fees of RO 50. All valid resident card holders can play in the tournament. Last date for submission of entries is April 12 at PSM office Muscat from 8 am till 1 pm.

The tournament is open to all nationalities in Oman. It will be a knockout tournament. Entries are restricted to 32 teams only on first come first serve basis.

All teams should wear colour jerseys. Players from Premier and other divisions can



participate.

Any other information can be had from Jameel Zaidi, chief coordinator, on 99383935 and Abdul Qayyum, HOD Sports PSM (coordinator) on 93351170.

Du Plessis hails 'great asset' Karthik after Bangalore win

MUMBAI: Skipper Faf du Plessis on Tuesday praised Dinesh Karthik for his "composure under pressure" after the wicketkeeper-batter steered Royal Challengers Bangalore to a four-wicket IPL win over Rajasthan Royals on Tuesday.

Chasing 170 for victory, Bangalore were in trouble at 87-5 when Karthik (44 not out) and Shahbaz Ahmed (45) put on an attacking partnership of 67 to achieve the target with five balls to spare in Mumbai.

The effort trumped Jos Buttler's unbeaten 70 that steered Royals to 169-3 and two wickets by leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal who rattled the Bangalore batting before the Karthik-Ahmed blitz.

"To pull it out of nowhere, you need some great characters and DK is as great a character as you can get," Du Plessis said after his team's second successive victory after their opening loss this season. "His composure under pressure is amazing. He is really calm and such a great asset to us."

Karthik, who has remained unbeaten in the three matches so far, took on Ravichandran Ashwin in a 21-run over and finished with seven fours and one six in his 23-ball blitz.

The left-handed Shahbaz was equally destructive as he took on the Royals bowlers including Trent Boult for a four and six before being bowled by the New Zealand left-arm quick.

Karthik, 36, stood firm with Harshal Patel who hit the winning six



RCB's Dinesh Karthik gestures after beating Rajasthan Royals.

to hand Royals their first loss in three games.

Karthik, who last played a white-ball international in 2019 and was picked by Bangalore in the February auction, said he is "not done yet".

"I made a conscious effort to do justice to myself. Felt I could have done better in the last few years," said man of the match Karthik. "The way I've trained has been different. I was telling myself I'm not done yet. I have a goal and I want to achieve something."

Earlier Buttler, who made 100 in the team's previous win over five-time champions Mumbai Indians, and Shimron Hetmyer, who made 42 off 31 deliveries, boosted Bangalore's total. The right-left batting pair put on an unbeaten stand off 83 for the fourth wicket as they plundered 42 runs off

the final two overs after being put into bat first. Buttler raised his fifty with a hit over the fence and smashed six sixes in his 47-ball knock.

In reply, Du Plessis and Anuj Rawat started strongly with an opening stand of 55 before Chahal broke through to send back the veteran South African out for 29.

Chahal then ran out of Virat Kohli, for five, at the non-strikers end and the upbeat bowler bowled David Willey on the next ball. But Karthik and Shahbaz built a winning partnership for Bangalore, who hunt for their maiden IPL title. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES: Royal Challengers Bangalore 173-6 (Shahbaz Ahmed 45, Dinesh Karthik 44*; Yuzvendra Chahal 2-15) beat Rajasthan Royals 169-3 (Jos Buttler 70*, Shimron Hetmyer 42; Harshal Patel 1-18) beat by 4 wickets.

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MAKING IT EASY

Oman’s Dhamani health insurance platform on-boards over 100 entities

New milestone: The CMA is currently doing the groundwork to facilitate a scientific costing and pricing study to help standardise the pricing of services

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The first 100 stakeholders participating in the delivery of the National Health Insurance Project (Dhamani) have now been on-boarded and registered on the Dhamani platform underpinning the implementation of the compulsory health insurance programme in the Sultanate of Oman.

It marks the successful completion of a key milestone ahead of the planned roll-out of the Dhamani project – an initiative spearheaded by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) with the support of various government agencies. When eventually launched in a series of phases, starting from later this year, the scheme will cover private sector employees – Omani and expatriate (along with their dependents) – domestic and farm workers and all tourists and visitors entering the Sultanate of Oman.

According to a senior official of the CMA, around 100 healthcare providers have been on-boarded and registered with the Dhamani Health Insurance Exchange Platform – the technological hub of the Dhamani project. Also enrolled are insurance companies



and health insurance Third Party Administrators (TPA).

“With the initiation of the onboarding and registration process, we have now completed Phase 1A of the Dhamani Health Insurance Exchange Platform project, which serves as a key enabler for the implementation and monitoring of the entire Dhamani scheme,” said Dr Mohamed Ghazaly, Medical Insurance Expert – Capital Market Authority.

“The Dhamani platform is based on state-of-the-art technology, coding and messaging standards that will transform and digitalise the healthcare and health insurance industries in the Sultanate of Oman,” Dr Ghazaly added in a recent presentation to members of the Omani Medical Association (OMA) on the salient features of the Dhamani project.

Significantly, Phase 1B of the platform project is due to go live shortly, said the official. This phase will integrate the healthcare providers, insurance companies and health insurance TPAs and facilitate live health insurance transactions between them.

At the same time, all of the key government stakeholder bodies, notably the Ministry of Health, Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Labour, and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology will be integrated into the system as well.

“Following the Phase 1B Go-live, the Dhamani e-pay facility will be implemented as well, enabling near real-time settlement of adjudicated claims,” Dr Ghazaly stated.

Importantly, the roll-out of the Dhamani scheme will have a transformational impact on the

healthcare sector, as well as the wider economy, according to the official.

“We envision the market evolving as greater numbers of people are covered by health insurance, which in turn will spur the growth of healthcare providers. In fact, the health insurance industry will serve as a credible funding source to enable the organic growth of the private healthcare industry,” he stated.

Furthermore, to ensure the equitable and sustainable operation of the scheme, the CMA is currently doing the groundwork to facilitate a scientific costing and pricing study to help standardise the pricing of services, said Dr Ghazaly.

This study, undertaken in collaboration with the various stakeholders including the Ministry of Health, will also

We envision the market evolving as greater numbers of people are covered by health insurance, which in turn will spur the growth of healthcare providers. In fact, the health insurance industry will serve as a credible funding source to enable the organic growth of the private healthcare industry

DR MOHAMED
GHAZALY
Medical Insurance Expert, CMA

support adequate capacity planning for the healthcare sector. At the same time, the CMA is working with the Ministry of Health to implement the Evidence-Based Clinical Guidelines that will help address the differences in opinions and inconsistencies in payer-provider interactions, promote optimal utilisation and improve efficiencies, he added.

During a Q&A session that followed the presentation, representatives of the Omani Medical Association highlighted the importance of having in place treatment guides for various health services, as well as the need to set up the necessary controls and procedures to avoid price inflation for treatment services.

RO 20m
vaccines
plant to
come up in
Khazaen



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Khazaen Economic City signed here on Wednesday an agreement for the establishment of a pharmaceutical plant manufacturing biological human vaccines with an investment of RO 20 million.

The promoter is Opal for Biopharmaceuticals Business Company, which is implementing the project on a 37,000 square-metre site at Khazaen. The agreement was signed by Eng Salim al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen and Saad Moosa al Junaibi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Opal for Biopharmaceuticals Business.

In a statement, Al Thuhli said the project will be the first vaccines plant in Khazaen Economic City with output targeted at local and international markets. (With inputs from ONA)

Galfar wins RO 75 million Yiti Sustainable City contract

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Leading Omani construction firm Galfar Engineering & Contracting says it has been awarded a contract valued at around RO 75 million for the implementation of part of the prestigious The Sustainable City – Yiti project.

The client is the Sustainable Development & Investment Company SAOC, a joint venture between Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) and Diamond Developers. Galfar’s contract covers the construction of Plaza, Commercial, Residential and Office Buildings as part of the Yiti venture, it said.

“This project will further



enhance Galfar’s order book and enhance its market share in integrated tourism projects in the Sultanate of Oman,” said the company in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Wednesday.

Unveiled recently, The Sustainable City – Yiti’ will be developed at a cost of around \$1 billion. Slated for completion by 2025, the project will feature 1657 eco-friendly and energy-efficient residential units including 300 villas.

Also envisages are a four-star neighbourhood hotel with 197 rooms, a five-star resort with 170 rooms and a range of restaurants, leisure facilities, 132 luxury serviced apartments, offering sophisticated services and various tourism experiences.

Maisarah appoints new Sharia Supervisory Board

MUSCAT: Maisarah Islamic Banking Services — BankDhofar's Sharia-compliant window — has appointed a new Sharia Supervisory Board (SSB) during the Annual General Meeting held on March 22, 2022.

The announcement was followed by an inaugural meeting of the new board comprising of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ali al Shihri as Chairman, Shaikh Azzan bin Nasser al Amri as Deputy Chairman, Dr Abdulrub bin Salim al Yafei, Dr Amin Fateh and Shaikh Hilal bin Hassan al Lawati as members of the board.

During the meeting, the new board members, jointly with Maisarah's management and



Sharia teams, emphasised on the importance of maintaining highest Sharia standards throughout the design to the delivery of all Maisarah's products, services and financial solutions.

The meeting also reviewed Maisarah's offerings since the inception of its operations in 2013 and discussed Maisarah's business development and updates throughout 2021.

The board members expressed their satisfaction towards the internal Sharia review and compliance system applied by Maisarah and hailed its commitment to comply with Islamic banking guidelines.

Showing an impressive growth since the launch of its operations in 2013, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services has demonstrated a high degree of product innovation with an extensive range of Sharia-compliant financial solutions that cater to the needs of its retail and corporate customers in different parts of Oman.

As part of its future growth plan, Maisarah will continue to distinguish itself by focusing on outstanding service quality, developing and launching new innovative products, and investing in technology to provide the best customer experience through its expanding network of branches, ATM and CDM facilities.

Meethaq Islamic banking launches special offers for Ramadhan

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision, Meethaq Islamic banking from Bank Muscat has launched a number of exclusive financing offers on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan. The offers will be available from April 1 to June 30, 2022 and applicable on a wide variety of Meethaq financing options including Home Finance, Auto Finance, Personal Goods Finance, Education Finance, Marriage Finance, Travel Finance and Takeover Finance.

Customers can take advantage of an attractive profit rate of only 4.99 per cent per annum. Customers who apply for any of the products will benefit from quick processing and minimal documentation.

Meethaq customers are eligible for up to 80 per cent financing for home or auto financing while 100 per cent financing is available for Travel, Marriage, Education and Personal Goods Finance.



Applications may be submitted at any of Meethaq's 24 state-of-the-art branches across the Sultanate of Oman.

Sami Bait Rashid (pictured), Assistant General Manager – Meethaq Personal Banking, expressed his best wishes to Meethaq customers for the holy month of Ramadhan. He said: "Meethaq is always delighted to listen to its customers and offer them various services and facilities which are aligned to their needs and global trends, thereby helping them realise their dreams. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for their deep confidence and belief

in Meethaq's innovative and customer-centric services and facilities and look forward to serving them better, everyday."

In line with its commitment to offer a world-class Islamic banking experience to customers across the country, Meethaq has established the largest Islamic network in Oman consisting of 12 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 12 branches across other governorates. Meethaq also has a dedicated network of over 40 ATMs and CDMs and provides free access to more than 740 plus ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country for customers to conduct their banking transactions with ease.

Meethaq Islamic Banking, which has been recognised as the Best Islamic Bank in Oman by Islamic Finance News in 2019, has adopted the best global practices in Islamic banking and finance to combine a robust model, which protects customers and complements the Islamic banking industry.

Bank Nizwa inaugurates new branch in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali

MUSCAT: In an endeavour to bring its services closer to its customers, Bank Nizwa has remained steadfast in continuously expanding its branch network to cover all strategic and remote locations across the country. In line with the same, the bank recently inaugurated its Jaalan Bani Bu Ali branch. The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Said bin Mohammed al Saadi, Shura member representing Wilayat Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa said, "This is Bank Nizwa's first branch in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and we are eager to start serving the local community in the region. The new branch comes as a realisation of the bank's ambitious strategy that is aimed at establishing its presence throughout the Sultanate of Oman so as to extend its innovative, Sharia-compliant financing solutions to various segments of society. As part of Bank Nizwa's long-term vision, we seek to consistently expand



our reach to better serve our customers and make the bank's services and products more easily accessible and readily available.

The opening of the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali branch is a reflection of our continuous efforts in furthering our expansion plans, forming stronger connections with our growing customer base and creating awareness about the benefits of Islamic finance."

The full-fledged branch, strategically located to provide convenient access for all, offers the distinct Bank Nizwa environment that is geared at meeting the customers' every banking and financial need by offering a comprehensive suite of products and services.

Striking the right balance between incorporating the latest technologies and maintaining a personal touch, the branch will focus on efficient, effective and hassle-free processing of services while delivering the exceptional level of customer service the bank has always taken great pride in.

Toyota Fortuner now even more exciting with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The Toyota Fortuner is now even more exciting to own with exclusive benefits. The benefits include 1 year insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance from RO 250 up to RO 300. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply.) The campaign is valid up to May 19, 2022. Visit the showroom for exact details.

The powerful Fortuner is equipped with Petrol Engines that include a 2.7 Litre Four Cylinder Engine producing 164 HP & 25.0 Kg-m of Torque. For even more exciting experiences, the 4.0 Litre V6 Engine churns-out 235 HP along with 38.3 Kg-m of Torque. The 6-speed Automatic Transmission, available as a standard option, provides thrilling acceleration.

Rugged and adroit, the Fortuner also is known for its



high standards on the inside. Premium Leather Seats, Leather and Wood finished Steering Wheel with Paddle Shifts, Cool Glove Box, Cruise Control and a whole bunch of other goodies augment its interior ambience.

Toyota Fortuner has a powerful Air-conditioner. Other innovative touches include a Navigation System. The Rear View Camera ensures peace of mind when Reverse Parking. The 6-speaker Audio System enhances its harmonious ambience. And to

add to the convenience, there is a Power Back Door System which adds to the sheer convenience.

The Fortuner is equipped with Comprehensive Safety Systems to protect its occupants. These include Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) that prevents the tyres from locking during braking. The Fortuner is equipped with SRS Driver Airbag, SRS Front Passenger Airbag, Side Airbag, Curtain Airbag and SRS Knee Airbag (driver only). In terms of seatbelts, a three-point Emergency

Ahlibank wins top Omani brand in banking



MUSCAT: ahlibank won the coveted "Top Omani Brand in Banking" Award at the "Top Omani Brands" felicitation ceremony, organised by 'Alam Al-Iktisaad', Oman's premier Arabic business magazine from United Media Services, at the Al Bustan Palace – A Ritz-Carlton Hotel, recently.

The award marks a new chapter in ahlibank's history, which has seen it grow exponentially with a rightful position of being one of the fastest growing banks in the country.

Zaliya al Balushi, Deputy General Manager Large Corporate and Mid Market, ahlibank, said, "This is a momentous occasion for team ahlibank. It is a reflection of our collaborative effort to shape the bank's fortunes and bolster its growth to augment Oman's Vision 2040.

This Award is a proof of our ongoing endeavour to establish a strategic balance between our growth goals and our commitment to be responsive to our society. Our customer-centric approach to business has proven to be a winner on all spheres of our activities, and we will keep developing and implementing innovative products and services to cater to the ever-changing needs of our customers."



CMA holds anti-money laundering programme



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 6

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) organised an Advanced Anti Money Laundering and Combating Financing Terrorism Programme in collaboration with the International Compliance Association (ICA).

The first course of the programme, which concluded recently, was organised for compliance officers of the regulated entities in the capital market sector via Zoom teleconferencing.

The programme, which is part of the CMA's endeavours to enhance the anti-money laundering and terror-financing efforts, comprised five workshops. The 27 participants obtained a professional certification at the end of the programme. The second course will be conducted for compliance officers of insurance companies and brokers in September 2022.

Muscat Governorate officials explore partnership prospects with Madayn

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, accompanied by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Deputy Governor of Muscat and Shaikh Ibrahim bin Yahya al Rawahi, Wali of Al Seeb, visited the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) to explore partnership prospects between public bodies and highlight the complementary roles played by these bodies to achieve development, attract investments and support SMEs and enhance their contribution to the national economy.

During the visit, Hilal al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, discussed cooperation prospects in areas related to the development of industrial cities in Muscat Governorate.

Al Hasani emphasised that Madayn aims at creating world-class business cities while retaining the Omani identity to contribute



to comprehensive and sustainable economic and social development.

Madayn officials elaborated on the vision of Madayn in enhancing the Sultanate's position as a leading regional centre of manufacturing, ICT, innovation and entrepreneurship excellence, and its mission in attracting industrial investments and providing continued support, through regionally and globally competitive strategies, good infrastructure, value adding services and easy governmental processes.

The officials also briefed on the

investment opportunities available in Madayn Investment Complexes in Sur, Samayil, Suhar and Al Buraimi Industrial Cities.

The officials then highlighted on the objectives of the newly formed Industrial Innovation Academy, which aims at promoting a diversified and sustainable economy based on technology, knowledge and innovation.

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, then visited Al Rusayl Industrial City to get familiarised

with the completed and ongoing projects implemented by Madayn.

Al Busaidy also visited Nafith@Madayn control room, which presents an integrated system aimed at managing and facilitating the entry and exit of vehicles to/from the current and future industrial cities of Madayn.

Nafith@Madayn project embodies a key pillar of the infrastructure development strategy of the industrial cities to keep pace with the technology trends and provide value-adding services.

Climate-related financial disclosures



JAMES RAV
DIRECTOR, CROWE OMAN

One of the most significant and perhaps most understated risks that an organisation face today is the risk relating to climate change. Large-scale and catastrophic nature of climate risk affects almost all businesses. The risk-return profile of an organisation exposed to climate risk requires clear understanding, management and disclosure of the financial impact of such risk.

A recent study estimated the value at risk, as a result of climate change, to the global stock of manageable assets as ranging from \$4 trillion to \$40 trillion. The study highlights that "much of the impact on future assets will come through weaker growth and lower asset returns across the board".

Currently, however, investors, lenders, and insurers do not have a clear understanding of how companies will survive or endure or even flourish as the environment changes, regulations evolve, new technologies emerge, and customer behaviour shifts.

Without reliable climate-related financial information, the markets cannot price climate-related risks and opportunities correctly and may potentially face a rocky transition to a low-carbon economy, with sudden value shifts and destabilising costs if industries must rapidly adjust to the new reality.

Given such concerns and the potential impact, the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors asked the Financial



Oman's action plan for combating the effects of climate change is set out in the National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change

Stability Board (FSB) to review how the financial can take account of climate-related issues.

Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures

In response, the FSB established an industry-led task force: Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures. Drawing from the experience and expertise of its members, the Task Force developed four widely adoptable recommendations on climate-related financial disclosures that are applicable to organisations across sectors and jurisdictions.

The Task Force recommends that preparers of climate-related financial disclosures provide such information in their mainstream annual financial filings which have become a mandatory obligation in some G20 jurisdictions.

Core Elements of Climate-related Financial Disclosures

Recommendation of the Task Force is structured around four core elements of how organisations operate: governance, strategy, risk management and metrics and targets.

The four overarching recommendations are supported by disclosures that build out the

framework with information that will help investors and others understand how reporting organisations assess climate-related risks and opportunities.

In addition, sector-wise guidance to support all organisations in developing climate-related financial disclosures consistent with the recommendations are also available.

An organisation's disclosure of how its strategies might change to address potential climate-related risks and opportunities is a key step to better understanding the potential implications of climate change on the organisation.

One of the key recommendations of the Task Force focuses on the resilience of an organisation's strategy, taking into consideration different climate-related scenarios, including a 20 Celsius or lower scenario. (A 20 C scenario lays out an energy system deployment pathway and an emission system trajectory consistent with limiting the global average temperature increase 20 C above the pre-industrial average).

An organisation's disclosure of how its strategies might change to address potential climate-related risks and opportunities is a key step to better understanding the potential implications of climate change on the organisation.

Climate-Related Opportunities

Efforts to mitigate and adopt to climate change also produce opportunities for organisations,

like resource efficiency, cost-savings, adoption of low-emission energy sources, development of new products and services, access to new markets, and building resilience along the supply chain.

Climate-related opportunities may vary depending on the region, market, and industry in which an organisation operates. Many governments also provide grants and tax credits to organisations adopting such practices.

Government initiatives in Oman

Oman is a signatory to the Paris Agreement on climate action plan that took place in 2020. Oman's action plan for combating the effects of climate change is set out in the National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change, which aims to determine the impact of climate change on sustainable development, encompassing agriculture, livestock, fisheries, water resources, coastal areas, infrastructure, industries, biodiversity, human health and welfare.

In the Sultanate of Oman, as various sectors of the national economy align themselves with the strategic objectives of Oman's Vision 2040, a stronger commitment to a greener economy based on sustainable practices is now becoming evident.

Conclusion

Recognising that climate-related financial reporting is still evolving, the Task Force's recommendations provide a foundation to improve investors and other's ability to appropriately assess and price climate-related risks and opportunities. These recommendations aim to be ambitious, but also practical for near-term adoption.

The Task Force expects to advance the quality of mainstream financial disclosures related to the potential effects of climate change on organisations today and in the future and to increase investor engagement with boards and senior management on climate-related issues.

Veolia reinforces presence in the ME



Antoine Frérot, Veolia
Chairman and Chief
Executive Officer



Azad Kibarian, Veolia
Director of the Italy, Africa
and Middle East zone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 6

Active in the Middle-East for more than forty years, Veolia, a leading integrated player of the environmental service sector, brings its activity on a new level through the merger with Suez businesses, finalised earlier this year.

With the combination of the strengths and competencies of both companies, the new Veolia will bring innovation, investments and enhanced resources to scale up the existing ecological transformation solutions while inventing the remaining ones.

In water and waste sectors, the addition of Suez's activities and forces will enable Veolia to become the reference in hazardous waste treatment and to reinforce its position in the water management industry. This will give the company a greater leverage to tackle major environmental challenges in the region, especially in the Sultanate of Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

"The creation of a global champion of ecological transformation is a game changer for the environmental services sector.

Veolia's aim is to act as a unique enabler of the ecological transformation solutions and a reliable partner for public and private customers to respond to the environmental emergency,"

commented Antoine Frérot, Veolia Chairman and CEO.

"In the current challenging context worldwide, Veolia's teams are more than ever mobilised around our primary mission of providing environmental and energy solutions to meet the vital needs of populations in a responsible manner and to continue building a sustainable future."

"Like me, thousands of colleagues have joined Veolia to contribute to the inspiring ambition of becoming the world champion of ecological transformation," said Azad Kibarian, Veolia Director of the Italy, Africa and Middle East zone.

"This is a historic moment and with more talents, more countries and more skills, Veolia Middle-East will be stronger to satisfy the ever-increasing demands of our customers, turn the tide and meet the challenges of climate change, pollution and resource scarcity."

To drive ecological transformation in the Near East and the Middle-East, Veolia will intensify its action in fields where the Group can bring significant value-added through its extensive expertise, like for example in hazardous waste treatment, energy efficiency, water reuse and plastics recycling. It also wants to go further in essential service activities which are Water, Waste, Sanitation and Electricity.

Positive culture: A competitive advantage



HH SAYYID DR ADHAM AL SAID

Tejarah Talks

BUSINESS STORIES ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER

We met up with His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Founder, The Firm and Tejarah Talks moderator to discuss work-life balance, empowering employees, values, mental well-being and more.

Why aren't more workplace cultures extraordinary?

To create an extraordinary workplace culture, organisations need to have a unique ethos. But such an ethos is not created by simply setting visions, missions or values.

It is the DNA of the organisation, why it exists and what its purpose is. If organisations fail to cultivate such an ethos, it is unlikely to foster an extraordinary culture. It is fair to assume that many organisations believe that brandishing 'values' will achieve the desired workplace culture. However, SMEs have proven time-and-time again, that it is not the values alone that matter, but what you do within the organisation that delivers the desired impact.

Do corporate policies around work-family life and mental well-being really have a positive impact on a company's bottom line?

There are many schools of thought about work-family life balance. Some experts argue it is not just the number of working hours that matter, but the ability to disconnect from work.

Certain industries have much to gain from such an approach while others still find it difficult to grasp. Interestingly, in a study published in Organization Science it was found that managers could not tell the difference between employees who worked 80 hours a week and those who just pretended to.

Despite the lack of one-size fits all approach to work-life balance, mental well-being has become a priority for many companies around the world. Work burnout, higher than normal turnover and

mass resignations are strong signals of imbalances within the work culture — imbalances that are not being addressed.

Locally, there is little talk about why work-life balance and mental well-being are important. Moreover, the pandemic has proven that many businesses are not prepared to manage these issues head on — often seen as additional costs rather than human capital investments.

Every investment has its rewards, productivity improvements are one of those returns.

Whether you are an entrepreneur starting a new venture or a leader at an established business, how can you best ensure your organisation stays true to its culture?

It is easy to be distracted by firefighting in any business. This behaviour is acute when crisis hits. However, management needs to

realise culture is key to any business looking to navigate challenging times. Staying true to the values that drive your company is the way forward. How do we stay true to those values?

Leaders need to remind employees and themselves of those values. Reinforcing the culture through practice and actions, justifying decisions and their consequences will support the corporate culture.

As a result of the pandemic, do you think there is new-found trust, empowerment and collaboration in the workplace?

The pandemic has clearly produced a mix of outcomes. Some organisations have managed to support employees through the worst times and continue to do so. They have helped empower employees ensuring they remain

committed to the company. In other instances, businesses have lost talent because they failed to adapt to employee needs. They chose to prioritise business outcomes as they struggled through the pandemic.

Organisations that harnessed technologies and adopted a more compassionate and understanding approach were more likely to produce positive outcomes for the business. Those that failed to follow suit have missed the opportunity to enhance the workplace culture as well as the potential positive outcomes.

Is a positive culture the most important competitive advantage a company can have?

For any company, no matter the size, a positive culture is critical to gaining competitive advantage. Toxic work cultures lead to a frustrated and unhappy

workforce that is less engaged and less productive. Companies need to understand that the one competitive advantage they can leverage on a daily basis and cannot be copied by competitors is company culture.

As I mentioned earlier, your culture is unique to your organisation, it is the one thing that helps shape your organisation's brand identity, improve employee retention, attract talent, motivate staff and ensure success. Indeed, perhaps now is a good time to step back and reflect on how we are working and managing people and ask whether what we are doing is productive and efficient.

Why not allow staff to work when and where they please, as long as they contribute. If we do this we will probably find people more productive, less stressed and most importantly, happier.



LOCALLY, THERE IS LITTLE TALK ABOUT WHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND MENTAL WELL-BEING ARE IMPORTANT. MOREOVER, THE PANDEMIC HAS PROVEN THAT MANY BUSINESSES ARE NOT PREPARED TO MANAGE THESE ISSUES HEAD ON – OFTEN SEEN AS ADDITIONAL COSTS RATHER THAN HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENTS.

Ukraine should be rebuilt without Russian money

Natural justice would seem to dictate that Russia be asked to pay reparations for the massive damage inflicted on its neighbour. Political and practical reasons make that impossible, and even undesirable. It's hard to put a number on the ultimate cost of the destruction. Ukrainian government estimates range from \$110 billion, based on destroyed infrastructure, to \$500 billion, if potential losses like missed foreign investment are added to the physical tally. A rough estimate leads to a number somewhere in the middle, based on the current state of things. Economists reckon Ukraine's ratio of invested capital to economic output is around 5. That means its capital stock is around \$1 trillion, based on the IMF's pre-war estimates of this year's GDP at \$204 billion. If 20% of the economy's potential is destroyed, reconstruction will thus cost \$200 billion. And the figure rises with each week of the war. It already dwarfs the \$135 billion present-day value

of the US-led Marshall Plan that helped rebuild Europe after World War Two. It also amounts to about 12% of Russia's 2021 GDP. Only a truce — for now distant — can lay the foundations for long-term stability. International bodies such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank will then assume central fundraising and organising roles, supported by national governments and the European Union. Private investors will follow in the official sector's wake. Barring a shock regime change, Russia is unlikely to agree to pay for the damage it has inflicted. In any case, its money will not be welcome. As with West Germany in the late 1940s, one of the central ambitions of reconstruction will be to anchor Ukraine more firmly in Europe, with which it already has a free trade agreement. If only to assuage public opinion, Western leaders will still want to hold President Vladimir Putin accountable. That's one of the many reasons why sanctions are here to stay. — Reuters

Avoiding extravagance and waste



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI

Despite the verbal and published appeals urging people to curb waste and extravagance in eating and drinking, especially in the blessed month of Ramadhan, the reality is different in many Arab and Islamic countries. The conditions that nations live in today are very different from that of the past two decades. Many countries suffer from poverty, unemployment, poor economic and living conditions. This requires us to rethink our eating and drinking habits so as to avoid throwing surplus food in the trash, especially in this holy month. These issues have already been reiterated by many scholars about the need to stay away from the manifestations of extravagance and waste in these societies, although Islam has not deprived us of the good things of sustenance. There are many Quranic verses that urge us to do this, including the Almighty's

saying: "O children of Adam, take your adornment at every mosque, and eat and drink, and do not be extravagant, for He does not love the extravagant." In such manifestations, everyone is responsible for how he acquires money. He is also responsible for avoiding extravagance and wastefulness in the use of vital public utilities that serve people, such as water and electricity, as animals and birds benefit from them as well, and this means not blaspheming the blessings that God has granted us, and not throwing them in the garbage while many poor people suffer for lack of money and food. The squanderers are the brothers of the devils, and Satan was ungrateful to his Lord, as this harms people in their bodies, their religion, and their worldly affairs. We also see this type of waste that takes place during feasts, marriages, religious and social occasions, as evident from the amount of food and drink that are eventually thrown out

with the rubbish. Very little is distributed to the needy and to charitable organisations. We should rationalise our eating, drinking and spending keeping in mind that how many people elsewhere around the world meet their requirements. They do not purchase any commodities or products that they don't need, but limit their purchases to only food, fruits and vegetables in limited quantities based on their requirements. We don't need to follow the culture of spending but rationalisation of consumption. We also have to be aware of these issues in such circumstances that Islamic countries and the world are going through in the midst of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis that is causing great challenges in the supply of grain, cooking oils, meat and other staples from these countries. With most Arab and Islamic countries depending a lot on food imports, these disruptions can harm the food security that we are working to achieve.

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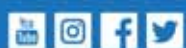
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#Living_with_COVID19

This skilled sailor is advocating sustainable fishing and protection of marine life

Even at a young age, Sultan al Balushi was always passionate about the sea and whatever adventures can be done in it. He enjoyed swimming and diving and much more exploring life under-water. After successfully fulfilling his dream of becoming a skilled sailor, he embarked on another journey — one that protects the environment and marine life... **P20**

Rare Michelangelo drawing could fetch 30 million euros in Paris sale

A DRAWING BY Michelangelo, discovered in 2019, will be offered for sale next month by Christie's and could fetch 30 million euros (\$33 million), the British auction house

said on Tuesday.

The drawing, one of the few works of the Renaissance Italian artist in private hands, was sold in 1907 in Paris and billed as a work of

the school of Michelangelo. It was largely forgotten until 2019, when a Christie's specialist recognised it as one of Michelangelo's own.

The drawing is thought to be one of the artist's early works, from around the end of the 15th century. It reproduces a shivering man depicted in a fresco, "Baptism of the Neophytes", by Masaccio. Two other people stand near him in the drawing.

"This drawing I think is one of the most exciting discoveries made in the field of Old Masters drawings in a long time", said Stijn Alsteens, Christie's international head of the department for Old Master drawings.

"It shows Michelangelo doing two things at the same time, looking back at artists that preceded him, in this particular case Masaccio, as well as looking forward to his own



work and the revolutionary aspect of it — in particular the depiction of the human body which becomes such an important part both in the sculptures, I think of the David in Florence, or the many, many fig-

ures he painted in the Sistine Chapel", Alsteens added.

The work had been designated a French national treasure, which prevented it from being exported, but the French government recently removed the designation, allowing the drawing to be offered to collectors anywhere in

the world, Christie's said. The drawing is scheduled to be exhibited in Hong Kong and New York before it is auctioned in Paris on May 18. — **Reuters**

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

So leave them to blunder and play, until they meet their Day which they are promised. The Day when they will emerge from the tombs in a rush, as though they were hurrying towards a target.

(al Ma'arij)

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A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said:

"There is no servant who conceals the faults of another servant in this worldly life, except that Allah will conceal his faults on the Day of Resurrection".

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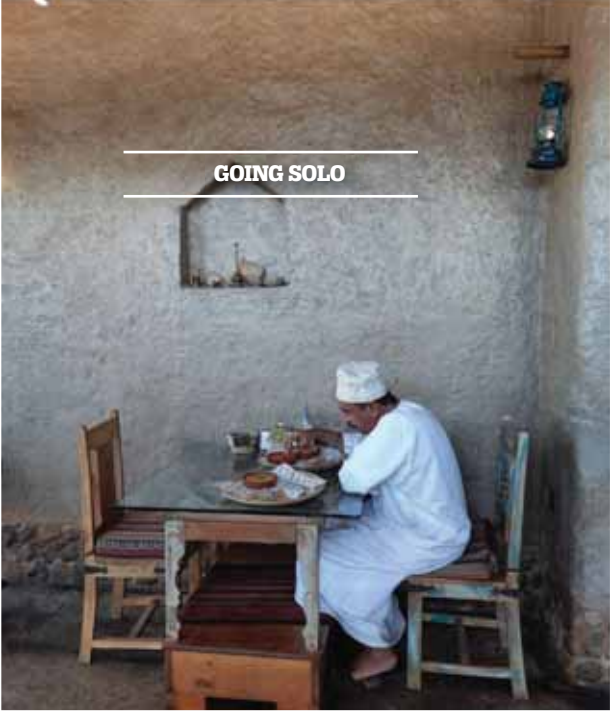
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Elvis to appear at Cannes Film Festival



THE NEW ELVIS Presley biopic by Australian director Baz Luhrmann will get its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in May, the organisers confirmed on Tuesday.

Tom Hanks, who plays the rock'n'roll legend's manager, Colonel Tom Parker, will be among the stars attending the premiere, which comes ahead of the worldwide release of "Elvis" between June 22 and 24. Relative unknown Austin Butler has the lead role in the latest spectacle from Luhrmann.

The Australian writer-director is the only person to open the Cannes Film Festival twice -- with "Moulin Rouge!" in 2001 and "Gatsby" in 2013.

"Elvis" could not open the festival this year due to a new rule about opening night films being released worldwide on the same day.

It joins Tom Cruise blockbuster "Top Gun: Maverick" in the line-up for this year's festival, which is being held on May 17-23.

The full line-up is due to be unveiled later this month. Luhrmann's breakout moment was also at Cannes, when his debut feature "Strictly Ballroom" caused a sensation in the Un Certain Regard section of the festival in 1992. — **AFP**

Capture your favourite Ramadhan moments with a great phone for low-light



SPENDING TIME with loved ones is always fun, but even more so in Ramadhan. In fact, everything is a lot more exciting in Ramadhan with all the delicious iftars, evening hangouts and late-night chit-chats. That's also why this month is filled with a lot of opportunities for all kinds of pictures and videos to make these memories last forever.

Selfies with friends and family, close-ups of delicious iftar tables, etc. But if you want to shoot great snaps and videos, not just okay ones, it takes some creativity and a good camera. Well, if you have the newly launched HUAWEI nova 9 SE, you already have a fantastic tool. Balancing both form and function, the HUAWEI nova 9 SE boasts a High-Res AI Quad Camera system, 66W fast charging, and a FullView Display in a sleek and slim design. Here are some tips that you can use to snap some incredible pictures of iftars and Suhoors with this brilliant smartphone.

Most of the photo-worthy events in Ramadhan happen after nightfall, which in turn means less light. Luckily, this phone is equipped with a 1/1.52-inch large sensor with excellent resolution and light sensitivity. This results in exquisite picture quality and better low-light performance. Besides the wide-angle camera, there are also the ultra-wide-angle and macro cameras if you want to change up the feel of your pictures. Ultra-wide-angle is what you need to fit all the guests in one frame. Try the macro camera if you want to take pictures of the sweets and dishes in more interesting ways. It can be real fun!

TRAVEL TALES

Italy takes to battlements to save its dying hamlets



The streets are silent and cats hunt in abandoned houses, but the view from the battlements of Calascio's castle is spectacular — good enough perhaps to save this dying Italian hamlet.

Local officials have put restoring the ruins and attracting tourists at the heart of their bid to revive the village, which has won 20 million euros (\$22 million) in EU post-pandemic funds.

Surrounded by Abruzzo's snow capped peaks, Calascio is one of 21 dying or deserted villages awarded an equal share of a 420 million euro pot by the Italian government.

Critics question how equipped the tiny councils are to spend such vast sums of money — which translates to almost 154,000 euros per person in Calascio.

The nationwide project has soured relations in several regions between winning villages and those that have lost out, and prompted warnings over potential fraud and waste.

But Calascio's mayor Paolo Baldi, a former mountain guide originally from Rome, is undaunted.

"We want to bring the hamlet back to life", said Baldi, who did up one of its ruined houses in 1993 and moved in with his young family.

New life

Once a bustling and wealthy wool centre, Calascio shrunk from over 2,000 residents at the start of the 1900s to just 130 now, almost all of them elderly. In the winter months, only 70 or so people remain.

Just three children have been born here in 12 years. It has no grocer's shops, school or doctor's surgery.

What the hamlet does have is Rocca Calascio, an ancient

castle which draws 100,000 tourists a year.

Baldi plans to spend a big chunk of the funds — just over 4.6 million euros — on restoring part of the ruins, which were damaged in a deadly earthquake in 2009.

It is hoped archaeological digs will determine when the castle — originally a watch-tower — was built, and reveal more about a neighbouring church and graveyard, where bones come to the surface after storms.

Some funds will also go to creating jobs and attracting more tourists, with just under 7.5 million euros earmarked for a "scattered" hotel in the village's empty houses and nearly one million euros for a museum.

Locals say they hope young families will move in to the area and perhaps open their own businesses.

"Do you know what the biggest event was in Calascio this year? It was the birth of a baby", tobaccoist Walter Zara told AFP.

Big winner

Italy is the biggest beneficiary of the EU's 800-billion-euro plan to boost the bloc after the pandemic, allocated almost 200 billion euros in grants and loans.

The funds for Calascio are part of a programme to increase tourism in under-valued areas, notably in the poorer south, and ease pressure on hotspots like Venice.

Villages across Italy competed, with winners including Pietrabbondante in Molise, which boasts a sixth-century amphitheatre.

"Italy's real wealth today lies precisely in these small centres", Mayor Baldi says, adding that countless hilltop hamlets across the country are in a state of serious

decline but could be "a driving force for the economy".

Shepherds and maggot cheese

Here, that driving force includes a sheep farming school. The plan is to teach youngsters the ancient art of pastoralism, where shepherds and their flocks spend the warmer months on the move.

Funds will also go to increasing cheese production. The region's pride is Marчетto, a traditional sheep's cheese made using live maggots, which soften it with their digestive acids.

It was staple for herders who used to gather with their flocks outside the 16th-century Santa Maria della Pietà church, perched just along the ridge from the castle.

Bleating livestock permitting, mass at the so-called "Shepherds' Church" was followed through a little side window.

Fermented cheese and religion may not be enough. Domenico Ciccone, 78, who began shepherding at just 10 years old, said he was not convinced it was a job that would attract many youngsters.

Ciccone's son and wife pitch in with the milking, but without a new generation of pastoralists to help over the coming summer, he has been forced to sell much of his flock.

"It's a tough job, you've got to like it. There's no taking time off for a party, or a Sunday, (or) if it's stormy".

He also questions whether training new shepherds will help reverse the population decline, quipping that "a 20-year-old who looks after sheep all day long isn't going to have any luck with women!" — **AFP**

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

The Night-dwellers!

ON MOST NIGHTS, your routine would include turning off the light and going under your blanket. For a little while, you may hear cars on the street or your partner snoring next to you but in just a few minutes, it will turn into a quiet night as you fall deep into your peaceful slumber.

While some of us have such privilege, there are people who turn their night into day. Some blame sleeping disorders but several of them may want to go to sleep like a regular person but because of work, they have to be in the office working under the cover of darkness and go home when the sun is fully out on the horizon.

Ideal sleep hours vary from person to person, but most people naturally follow a similar circadian rhythm and wake up during the day. Messing with this internal clock can wreak havoc on your health. For example, disturbances in a person's circadian rhythm are associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, digestive disorders and cancer. Not to mention that whoever prefers to be nocturnal in his life – if I may say so – is thus separated from social relations. It might be pleasing for some time to have a different sleeping pattern altogether but there will come a point that they may actually regret missing some key important moments usually done in the daytime.

Some may argue they don't actually miss a lot at all. Night dwellers may say that they will still be able to catch

up with friends thanks to the availability of social media or their phones that allow them to communicate with whoever they want at any given time.

But it makes us wonder. Are there really people who don't need social interaction? Aren't people who have different timings than us living a life of seclusion?

We are all aware of how the Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we think about individual psychological needs. It has never been more clear that people can work well on completely different schedules! So here I think the workplace can play a big role in determining whether introverts and nocturnal peoples feel pressure to be open.

In the end, many people realise the importance of social connection and interaction, but we don't have to be completely sure that connection means the same thing to everyone, or that there is only one way to live a fulfilling life. Most people may not think of defending the nocturnal people under the same banner or in the same spirit, but – if you agree with me – some introverts or the night-ly people go about their lives enjoying the calm and solitude. They even challenge the basic equation of psychology which says that all human beings need social contact!

Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer.

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This skilled sailor is advocating sustainable fishing and protection of marine life

By Arwa Al Hashimi

The new generation of Omanis is becoming more self-aware and this self-awareness also extends to becoming more conscious about the environment and sustainable living in order to preserve the planet.

Sultan al Balushi has grown up in the wonderful coastal city of Al Musannah and with direct access to the wide sea, he grew attached to the water. He is one of the fine examples of how young Omanis are giving back to the environment and are becoming ambassadors for saving the planet.

Even at a young age, Sultan was always passionate about the sea and whatever adventures can be done on it. He enjoyed swimming and diving and much more exploring life underwater. By the age of 16, he was already sailing with Oman Sail which opened his eyes to what he would like his career to be when he grew up which is to become a sailing instructor.

Sultan put in the work. He showed eagerness into learning what it takes to be a sailor. He learned early on that he has to both be smart and competitive and that in order to get to where he wanted, he has to develop a lot of his skills. He started creating connections, meeting and learning from other established sailors both locally and abroad. This connection would

prove to be very helpful as it allowed him to have access to education usually one will not find exclusively in Oman.

Sultan's commitment to becoming 'a somebody' in the sailing world was inspired by his yearning to share his knowledge with young people like him who didn't have access to proper sailing education. A boy from a coastal village in Al Musannah? Who would have the patience to lend out training and support?

Sultan's career journey would take him to becoming a sailing and windsurfing instructor and with dedication and prod by his eagerness to acquire as much knowledge as possible he eventually reach his goal of becoming a national windsurfing coach.

Sultan's work as a coach was a realisation of a dream and when he finally earned the chance, he became one of the icons many young people looked up to. After fulfilling one dream, another opened and this is where Sultan's journey would lead him to become an unofficial ambassador for the environment.

Through social media, he attracted a large following who were touched by his passion and his deep connection with nature and the environment. Sultan is a prolific content creator taking not just photos but actually spinning out vlogs, posts and reels and sharing them on whatever social media he can put his hands on.



With his army of followers, he wanted to do his part by spreading knowledge and raising awareness regarding how to preserve the planet and be kinder to the creatures that are part of it.

Sultan shared that creating enter-

taining content is not an easy task but because it was ingrained in his daily lifestyle, it became somehow manageable.

He said that what he shares on social media is all-natural and realistic and his love for what he does can

be felt in each of his videos.

As of today, Sultan is one of the vocal content creators who advocate for the environment. He checks out different projects and helps promote those that preserve the environment especially marine life.

He is an avid supporter of sustainable fishing and join other educators in promoting the cause of leaving enough fish in the ocean, and protecting the habitats of marine life, especially the threatened species.

Sultan said that by safeguarding the oceans, people who depend on fishing can maintain their livelihoods. By adopting sustainable fishing methods, humans can ensure that fishing can continue indefinitely and the fish population can remain productive and healthy.

"Sustainable fishing is the key to keeping marine life safe. When we all adhere to this idea, then we can guarantee that there will be marine life for the future generation to enjoy," he said.

Sultan also calls on Omani fishermen to adhere to the fishing rules implemented in the country by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. He said that working towards the preservation of marine species is not just the job of one person or group but rather a collective effort of which success can only happen if it's taken seriously.

You can follow Sultan on his Instagram: @sultansailor