

An unbroken thread of art on show

The Venice Biennale 2022 is a perfect platform which will help increase the visibility of the Sultanate of Oman's blossoming art scene by showcasing the creativity of Omani artists' ability to lead, innovate and create when they are given the space or opportunity to do so. And the artwork derives inspiration from the country's people, rich history, heritage and culture.

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SUR EARN
THIRD TICKET
TO OMANEL
LEAGUE



P13

KEY MILESTONE
COMPLETED IN
NORTH-SOUTH
PROJECT



P20

CREATING A
COLOUR OF THE
YEAR FOR ALL TIME
AND SPACE



MUSCAT

354 INFILTRATORS HELD IN 4 MONTHS

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) rounded up 354 drug smugglers and infiltrators between January and April of this year. ROP carried out more than 39 raids in different governorates as part of its national efforts to protect the country from drug smugglers and infiltrators. ROP said it found a strong link between illegal entry to the country and drug smuggling as the police raids resulted in the seizure of various narcotic pills and tens of kilogrammes of crystal meth as well as large quantities of hashish, morphine, heroin, opium and khat.

DETAILS ON P5

NEW INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with various government and private sector entities, will today unveil a total of 18 investment opportunities in the tourism and waste management sectors. The unveiling will take place under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in the presence of government dignitaries, ambassadors, chairpersons of private sector companies, business persons and investors. The goal is to attract foreign direct investment into the Sultanate of Oman.

DETAILS ON P13



22

Ramadhan
1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr
04:19 AM

dhuhr
12:10 PM

asr
03:37 PM

maghrib
06:37 PM

isha
07:51 PM

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LOYALISTS TURN ON LANKA
PM AS PRESSURE GROWS

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APPLYING THE COVID
BLUEPRINT TO CHOLERA

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PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN IN VENICE

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has launched a promotional campaign coinciding with Oman's participation in the 59th edition of the Venice Art Biennale being held from April 23 to November 27. The campaign aims at promoting the Sultanate of Oman as a tourist destination in the Italian market and attract visitors to the exhibition using public transport buses at Venice Marco Polo Airport (VCE), in front of Venice Santa Lucia Train Station, at Scalzi Bridge, inside water buses and other landmarks and luxury place of the city.

DETAILS ON P2

France braces for Le Pen-Macron election showdown

PARIS: France on Saturday prepared to choose between centrist President Emmanuel Macron and far-right challenger Marine Le Pen to rule the country for the next five years after a bitterly contested and polarising election campaign.

Macron is the favourite to win re-election in the run-off ballot on Sunday, and there are indications he bolstered his advantage with a combative performance in the one-off election debate against a somewhat defensive Le Pen this week. But the president and his allies have insisted over the last week that nothing is in the bag, with a strong turnout crucial to avoid a shock in France comparable to the 2016 polls



A voter collects name slips as he votes in the second round of the French Elections at the French Consulate in Miami, Florida, on Sunday. — AFP

that led to Brexit in Britain and Donald Trump's election in the United States.

Polls in mainland France will open at 06:00 GMT on Sunday and

close 12 hours later, immediately followed by projections that usually predict the result with a degree of accuracy.

But voters in French overseas territories that span the globe and are home to almost three million people have started voting earlier.

The first vote in the election was cast by a 90-year-old man in the tiny island territory of Saint Pierre and Miquelon off the northern coast of Canada.

Polls subsequently opened in France's islands in the Caribbean and the South American territory of French Guiana and voting later starts in territories in the Pacific and then Indian Ocean before it gets under way on the mainland.

SEE ALSO P8

Heavy rains bring down temperatures

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

Some parts of the Sultanate of Oman, especially Al Rustaq, received heavy rains on Saturday, while there has been cloud formation over Al Hajar Mountains and the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman.

There is a possibility of rain and thunderstorms, accompanied by active downward winds due to the cumulonimbus clouds formed over parts of the governorates of South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah and Muscat, said Oman Meteorology on Saturday. The rains have brought down temperatures in many parts of the country.

Temperatures in Muscat are likely to be around in the mid-30s today.

It was a cloudy day in Muscat on Saturday, and the weather traits could continue for Sunday and Monday.

The reason behind overcast skies, explained the weather expert from the Met Office, is because of the local cloud development occurring over Al Hajar Mountains which influences the weather around the area bringing in summer rains in the afternoons.

"The impact of the local cloud development is around Al Hajar range, so the influence is being experienced in the south of Muscat. The influence is seen across Al Amerat, Bausher, Al Hamriyah and parts of Ruwi which are nearer to mountains", he pointed out, while explaining why is it cloudy in Muscat Governorate.

Otherwise, mainly clear skies are expected over most of the governorates with high clouds



Picture: @WeatherOman

advection and a chance of convective clouds development and isolated rain occasionally accompanied by thundershowers over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas towards afternoon on Sunday.

There are chances of late night to early morning low-level clouds or fog patches over parts of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates and the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman.

Along the Arabian Sea coast, winds will be southwesterly moderate to fresh, while over the Sea of Oman coast, winds will be easterly to northeasterly and light to moderate, and over the rest of the governorates, it is expected to be south to southeasterly and light to moderate.

TURN TO P2

'Grill Zone' project for open-air barbecue in Amerat

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyp](#)

To facilitate a location conducive to street vendors, the Muscat Municipality has said it will unveil a 'Grill Zone' project for open-air barbecue in Al Amerat.

"The project is part of the plans for integrated service sites where mobile food vendors can gather at a single place", said Muscat Municipality in a recent statement.

Work on the barbecue spot in Al Amerat Heights 2 began in February 2022 as part of efforts by

Muscat Municipality to improve the quality of urban services and the aesthetic appearance of the city. It is expected to open to the public by the third quarter of this year.

"The spot will also significantly protect residential areas from harmful grilling fumes and facilitate health control, food inspections and help people looking to enjoy an open-air barbecue", the statement said.

According to the statement, the site will have chairs and tables, rubbish containers, light poles and



accommodation for 20 mobile vending carts to facilitate the work environment of street vendors.

In January 2019, the Muscat Municipality banned grilling or

barbecuing on the grass at parks and other public spaces in the capital city. It warned that violators of the new municipal regulations would be fined.

Through an order No 31/2019, the civic body prohibited grilling or lighting an open fire in parks, public beaches and green areas except for places designated for such purposes.

"Those who break this municipal order will have to pay an administrative fine of RO 100 and must remove the items", the order said.

Although grilling and barbecuing in various forms have over two millennia of recorded human history, health advisers suggest that smoke produced by grilling contains carcinogens and other pollutants that damage health.

This smoke can be inhaled directly from the grill and enter the body through the lungs. Smoke from the grill also contributes to local air pollution.

"Carcinogens can be generated by grilling certain foods, especially high-fat meats", says a report.



FROM P1



Rains bring down temperatures

The sea state is expected to be moderate along the Arabian Sea coast with a maximum wave height of 1.5 metres and slight over the rest of the coast with maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

Visibility may reduce during fog formation and rain, warned

the Met Office.

The maximum temperature was recorded in Sur and Fahud at 41 degrees Celsius and with a low of 29 and 27 degrees Celsius. The coolest places were Sadiq and Jabal Shams, with a maximum of 23 degrees Celsius and a low of 16 degrees Celsius.

“Mainly clear skies over most of the governorates with high clouds advection and the chance of convective clouds development and isolated rain occasionally thundershowers over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas towards the afternoon”, the general bulletin said.

Tourism campaign launched in Venice



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has launched a promotional campaign coinciding with Oman’s participation in the 59th edition of the Venice Arte Biennale being held from April 23 to November 27.

The campaign aims at promoting the Sultanate of Oman as a tourist destination in the Italian market and attracting visitors to the exhibition using public transport buses at Venice Marco Polo Airport (VCE), in front of Venice Santa Lucia Train Station, at Scalzi Bridge, inside water buses and other landmarks and luxury place of the city.

This campaign seeks to promote the Sultanate of Oman as a unique tourist destination that attracts European tourists in general and encourages Italian tourists in particular to explore the beauty of Oman through images reflecting Oman’s heritage, tourism and natural attractions.

Asma al Hajri, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and



Prior to the pandemic, Italian tourists were among the 726,000 visitors who visited the country in 2019 from Europe, alongside those from Germany, the UK and France

ASMA AL HAJRI
Director-General of Tourism
Promotion at the Ministry of
Heritage and Tourism

Tourism, said, “The Sultanate of Oman seeks to attract as many tourists as possible to the country as it is a safe destination for tourists, besides offering avenues for beach stays, adventure and

diving.”

She added, “Prior to the pandemic, Italian tourists were among the 726,000 visitors who visited the country in 2019 from Europe, alongside those from Germany, the UK and France.”

Earlier speaking to the Observer, Al Hajri said, “Travel industry is a resilient industry and consumers are looking into experiences when travelling abroad. The Sultanate of Oman is now open and ready to welcome visitors all around the globe, thanks to our government which has relaxed the travel restrictions.”

Al Hajri said that 2019 is the year of benchmark, and the ministry is hoping to go back to the same numbers. Eventually, our target goal is to increase between 30 per cent to 50 per cent in the coming year. “It is possible as the ministry has reopened representative offices in key source markets such as the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Nordic countries and India and with the help of our national carrier Oman Air to increase the air capacity in those markets.”



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2) Mechanical Technician	Duqm	008/22
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4) Board Operator	Duqm	010/22
5) Field Operator	Duqm	011/22
6) Electronic Document Management System Administrator	Muscat	012/22

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Interested candidates are requested to review the full job description and apply on our website www.marafiq.om Careers section within 10 days from the date of this advertisement.

Note: applicants not meeting Marafiq’s requirements will not be considered/contacted.



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Omani passport allows visa-free travel to 80 countries

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman’s passport has been ranked 65th most powerful globally by Henley Passport Index. The Sultanate’s passport holders can carry to 80 countries without a visa. In the GCC, the UAE is ranked 15th (170 visa-free countries), Qatar (55), Kuwait (56), and Bahrain (63). According to Henley Passport Index, the top-ranking passports are from Japan, Singapore, Germany, South Korea (192), Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain (189), Austria, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden (188), France, Ireland, Portugal, United Kingdom (187), Belgium, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, United States (186), Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Greece, Malta (185), Hungary (183), Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia (182) and Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia (181). Henley Passport Index is based on the exclusive data from the International Air Transport Authority (IATA), which includes 199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations.



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers to the following tenders:

No	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 2022/002	Digital Printing Services	Free of Charge
2	SIPC 2022/003	Translation & Copywriting Services	
3	SIPC 2022/004	Photography & Videography Services	
4	SIPC 2022/005	Graphic Design Services	
5	SIPC 2022/006	Off-set Printing Services	
6	SIPC 2022/007	Event Management Services	

- The above-mentioned tender is Free of Charge
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00am on Sunday, 24/4/2022 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 12/5/2022.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Tenderers to send the following documents:

- A request for the electronic tender documents
- The firm’s commercial registration documents

All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc_procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 2: Tenderers will receive the electronic Tender Document by e-mail.

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
- All SMEs are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:
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AN UNBROKEN THREAD OF ART ON SHOW

SAMUEL KUTTY

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The Venice Biennale 2022 is a perfect platform which will help increase the visibility of the Sultanate of Oman's blossoming art scene by showcasing the creativity of Omani artists' ability to lead, innovate, and create when they are given the space or opportunity to do so.

And the artwork derives inspiration from the country's people, rich history, heritage and culture. Oman's first-ever national pavilion at the international art exhibition La Biennale di Venezia pushes the country's once relatively quiet art scene and stands out for its diversity of artistic talent.

The exhibition, titled 'Destined Imaginaries', brings together five Omani artists across three generations. His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, inaugurated the National Pavilion at the 59th International Biennale of Arts in Italy on Thursday.

At the iconic art exhibition, the five Omani artists Anwar Sonya, Hassan Meer, Budoor al Riyami, Radhika Khimji and Raiya al Rawahi present abstract habitats of future relics largely inspired by their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and offer a snapshot of the country's vibrant creative landscape.

"The pavilion of the Sultanate of Oman stands out for its diversity of artistic talent", says a review of the Omani exhibition by Wallpaper, a lifestyle publication by the Future Publishing Limited Quay House in London.

Beyond showcasing the talent and creativity of its five artists, 'Destined Imaginaries', is an initiative proposed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, is a demonstration of soft power, and



a symbol of Oman's eagerness to engage with the world's key cultural players.

A statement from Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, the pavilion's commissioner, and Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture in Oman, emphasises the pavilion's goals 'to position Oman on the international cultural map'.

It also aims to raise awareness of the country's cultural identity at a global level, and to show our commitment to supporting Oman's cultural development into the future.

There are already plans to take 'Destined Imaginaries' on tour in

Each of the five artists chosen to represent Oman at the Venice Biennale 2022 has made significant and distinct contributions to their communities, activating the country's contemporary art movement over the past 50 years and inspiring a new generation

various parts of Oman after the Venice Biennale, so the people of Oman can witness the fruits of this cultural investment.

According to the pavilion's curator, art historian Dr Aisha Stoby, each of the five artists chosen to represent the Sultanate of Oman have made significant and distinct contributions to

their communities, activating the country's contemporary art movement over the past 50 years and inspiring a new generation.

"We believe that their participation in Venice, and the following touring programme in Oman - with opportunities for our young generation to experience the wider world of contemporary art

in Venice - will play an important role in Oman's development and the future of its contemporary art," Stoby was quoted as saying by GQ, a fashion and lifestyle magazine.

There are already plans for future Biennales, including the Architecture Biennale in 2023, which have emerged as a result of the planning of this pavilion.

"This inaugural pavilion is a clear declaration of cultural intent and prowess, and a promise that there is much more to come", Stoby said.

These five artists provide an unbroken thread of art spanning 50 years of Omani art. The oldest of the participating artists, the

septuagenarian Anwar Sonya is revered as the father of Omani art, and is best known for richly coloured paintings that convey the evolution of rural life in his country.

It comes, says the review in Wallpaper, "as a slight surprise that his contribution to 'Destined Imaginaries' is not a painting, but rather a filmed performance, based on a previously unrealised proposal by conceptual artist Raiya al Rawahi, who sadly passed away from cancer in 2017, aged only 30".

ART AND TECHNOLOGY

Titled Speed of Art, Sonya's and Al Rawahi's collaborative piece meditates on the relationship between art and technology, imagining a future in which artists are being put out of their jobs by artificial intelligence.

The film plays inside what appears to be an abandoned airplane fuselage, with Sonya reciting an impassioned soliloquy about the importance of artistic creation in response to prompts from Al Rawahi.

Hassan Meer presents the latest instalment of his ongoing project Reflection from Memories, which explores Omani life between the 1960s and 1970s. This was an era of modernisation and social change, accelerated by the discovery of oil in the Sultanate of Oman.

While Meer's artwork is rooted in a rapidly modernising capital Muscat, and particularly the commercial centre of Muttrah, fellow artist Budoor al Riyami draws her inspiration from Oman's unique mountainous landscapes.

Concluding the exhibition is a site-specific work by Radhika Khimji, incorporating textiles, sculptures and walls, all based on the Al Hoota Caves, a two-million-year-old cave system in the Governorate of Dakhiliyah.

A photographer committed to environment



YAHYA AL SALMANI

Photography as a fine art has inspired many youths to explore the natural and heritage features of the Sultanate of Oman. From the point of view of the current generation, photography helps one to document common and rare species of wildlife in their natural habitats, whether it be mountainous, desert or marine.

Omani photographers are keen on documenting life and publish them via their personal accounts on social media, so that the audiences can interact with them directly.

Yousef bin Mubarak al Ghadani is an example for the Omani youths who have taken up the hobby in right earnest. "My beginnings in photography were very modest, as I used the mobile phone camera to take pictures of children and common natural places I used to visit," said Al Ghadani.

"But after I started working in the environment field as an observer of wildlife in the Wilayat of Qurayat, I decided to develop my photography skills. Therefore, I practised photography after watching dozens of specific lessons on 'YouTube' channels", he added.

The nature of his work as an observer of the elements of wildlife



since 2013 gave Al Ghadani the first impetus to enter the world of photography, as his work in Ras Al Shajar Natural Reserve in the Wilayat of Qurayat was a great opportunity to learn more about a large number of wildlife species, especially wild animals and birds.

Ras Al Shajar Natural Reserve, set up in 1982, is located between the wilayats of Qurayat and Sur and covers an area of 93.7 square km. This reserve is characterised by the abundance of Al Samar, Al Sarh and Salam trees, hosting dozens of wildlife species. Rich in many natural, animal, plant and geological resources, the reserve also includes large numbers of Arabian deer, Arabian ibex and

Photography for Yousef al Ghadani is not just a hobby or entertainment, but he sees it as a national duty and opportunity to introduce to the world the elements of Oman's nature and its civilisational and cultural heritage

various types of birds.

"During my work as an observer, I took my professional SLR camera with me to take pictures of all the animals and birds that caught my attention during my work trips, and those pictures were admired by officials and colleagues in the environment sector", Al Ghadani told the Observer.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Photography for Yousef al Ghadani is not just a hobby or entertainment, but he sees it as a national duty and opportunity to introduce to the world the elements of Oman's nature and its civilisational and cultural heritage. "All pictures carry very accurate

content, meaning and details, and my choice to document nature and its features is a work that helps me to be an important part in supporting various awareness programmes in the environmental sector, as one picture is worth a thousand words, and the use of photographs has dispensed with a lengthy explanation and helps us deliver our awareness message about the necessity of protecting nature", he added.

"After I was able to take pictures, I started making montage of short films using mobile phone programs. With these photos and films, I try to help those who follow these photos to reach many eco-tourism sites in Oman", he clarified.

The camera for Al Ghadani is his 'third eye' through which he sees scenes that others cannot see, and he tries to draw in his mind what this or that shot will lead to. It also takes care of choosing the appropriate angle and determining the degree of good lighting during photography.

"I still practise photography as a hobby, and I aspire to reach the level of professionalism, and I hope to organise my own photo exhibitions during the next stage", Al Ghadani added.

PHOTOS: YOUSEF AL GHADANI

RECALLING THE DAYS OF YORE

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

Ramadhan, the holy month of fasting, emphasises the values of empathy and generosity. It is also a time when special connections and memories are made that remain forever. Social media bloggers and influencers Nabeela Farshori, Adela Eileen and Afshan Jabeen recall their childhood memories of Ramadhan.

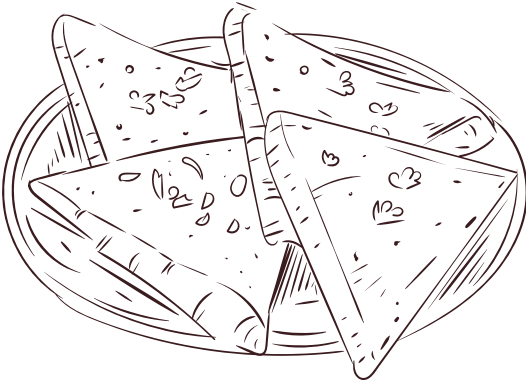
Nabeela Farshori (@itsnabfarshor) remembers her very first roza or fast at the age of 9. She recalls waking up in the wee hours to the hustle bustle from her terrace in Hyderabad. The scene which still surprises her is white chaandni (long bed sheets) on the floor with Red Dastarkhwan (Sufra) decorated with lights and delicious food from all the corners of India. Her friends Meghana, Akshay Lohit, Tasneem Neha and Shonty all made the day memorable.

Nabeela says Ramadhan for her is the time where you come closer to Allah and make sure to give those who need your help, through love, financial help or duas.

She recalls during her school days after Fajar Nabeel she came back and informed her mother that she was fasting. Surprised at her instant decision, her excited mother asked her to pray to Zuhr and retire for the day. While she slept, her mum had informed all her friends in the neighbourhood to prepare a dish to celebrate Sheeba's roza (her pet family name).



NABEELA FARSHORI



The neighbours feasted on Theplas (Gujarati dish), fresh idlis and some Bohre iftar dishes. There were also some delicious Bengali sweets and Sindhi papadums. Not to be missed were Dahi bhallas with Chana chaat and to wrap it up with a big jug of Rasna. She along with her brothers used to help her mother in preparing lavish suhoor feast and iftar daily.

A passionate epicurean Adela Eileen (foodfanatic_adela.eileen) who grew up in Saudi Arabia, recalls Ramadhan as her favourite month which she used to wait eagerly as it meant favourite food and guests. "As we grew a little older, we would wait by the door to receive and exchange iftars with the neighbourhood children. The most memorable part were the iftar parties which were true moments of happiness and sharing", she adds.

From her rush hour visits to the supermarket to buy cantaloupe watermelon and fresh fruits with her mother she recalls how the six kids would sit together on a table for iftar and the idea of her father being with them every evening, which would not be possible due to his busy schedules, being one of the best memories.

A lavish spread included sambosa, fresh oranges, lemon, parsley, cantaloupe which she recalls even now. "Our favourite iftar snack were cheese

sandwiches, macaroni, crepes and occasionally chicken breast along with lots of fruits and dairy products."

For Afshan Jabeen (@afshaan_foodblog), childhood Ramadhan story brings back innumerable memories of beautiful iftars and suhoor. She recalls how the entire Hyderabad 'Mohalla' or locality gathers at a spot for moon sighting.

Sehriwala, a man with an old plate in his hand playing tambourine to wake up the neighbourhood before dawn for suhoor was the alarm for the community those days.

Afshan who indulges in food photography notes that iftars were the simplest those days with some fruits and pakoras and not to forget 'Rasna' the most favourite Indian drink. Sharing the iftar with neighbours was the norm when any fancy dishes like Haleem or dahi vada or kheer were prepared. Her dad would slice all the available fruits and arrange a platter which Afshan and her siblings used to distribute to mosques.

She also mentions small stalls in the area which used to sell dahi vada, Haleem and pakoras and how excited it was to get to it.

A full time blogger and an influencer, cooking for Afshan is a passion, where she shares her recipes, kitchen hacks and tips. The Sultanate of Oman has been her second home and enjoys the peaceful Ramadhan here making sure to break the fast in a mosque or at the beach every Friday.



AFSHAN JABEEN



ADELA EILEEN



Ministry discusses issues facing businesses in Al Dhahirah



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Aimed at overcoming all obstacles that may hinder the implementation of various plans, Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, recently paid a visit to the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

During the visit, Al Hosni met with the officials and employees of the directorate-general of the ministry, who briefed him on the progress of work.

He directed the officials to facilitate the procedures that would overcome all difficulties that may affect the workflow, taking into account that the governorate enjoys a commercial boom and a strategic location.

During the meeting, Al Hosni focused on several basic points that would advance the work and maximise its quality.

It is the policy of the Ministry of Labour to improve conditions in the governorates and put them at the forefront of concerns. This visit is part of adhering to this wise policy adopted by the ministry.

Business owners also briefed Al Hosni about the problems they face. During his conversation with business owners, Al Hosni

affirmed that the ministry seeks to devote to the noble goals aimed at overcoming all the challenges that business owners may face.

On the sidelines of the visit, Al Hosni discussed with the Social Dialogue Committee the challenges the private sector face in this governorate. The Social Dialogue Committee referred to all current issues; the top of which is the job nationalisation, production enhancement, and ways to deal with crises such as the pandemic.

The officials commended Al Hosni's visit, which is an indicator to exert more effort and an encouragement to raise the level of productivity.

It is noteworthy that recent exemptions directed by His Majesty gave a great boost to the private sector to advance and strengthen its tools for a bright future.

A number of business owners praised the response from officials at the ministry to all their issues, pointing out that such meetings are very fruitful.

Nabhan al Battashi, Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFOTU), said, "The Social Dialogue Committee was set up to deal with labour market-related issues."



Over 350 infiltrators and drug smugglers nabbed in 4 months

SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) rounded up 354 drug smugglers and infiltrators between January and April of this year. ROP carried out more than 39 raids in different governorates as part of its national efforts to protect the country from drug smugglers and infiltrators.

ROP said it found a strong link between illegal entry to the country and drug smuggling as the police raids resulted in the seizure of various narcotic pills and tens of kilogrammes

of crystal meth as well as large quantities of hashish, morphine, heroin, opium and khat.

ROP said that infiltrators and smugglers use several methods of smuggling, most of which are carried out via the sea while other operations showed the involvement of smugglers with international drug cartels that send drugs by sea in addition to various other methods.

The operations targeting drug smugglers were carried out jointly by the Directorate-General for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, the Coast Guard Police, the Special

Infiltrators and smugglers use several methods of smuggling, most of which are carried out via the sea while other operations showed the involvement of smugglers with international drug cartels that send drugs by sea

ROP

Tasks Police and the police commands in the governorates where the operations took place. The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) also pitched in to the police operations by providing aerial support.

The raids against infiltrators and drug smugglers were centred in the governorates of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah and Muscat while most of the operations targeting illegal entry via the sea were carried out in Dhofar Governorate and the shores of the Arabian Sea where smuggling of khat and other types of chewing tobacco is rife.

جامعة الشرقية
A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

Tender Announcement

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) is a private higher education institution located in Ibra, north of A'Sharqiyah Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, about 150 km from Muscat. It was established in 2009 by Ministerial Decision (78/2009) issued by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Tender details:

ASU's Tender Committee has the pleasure to invite the companies to submit their proposals for the following tender:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit Date	Bids Submission Deadline	Document fees
ASU/02/2022	Soft Services for A'Sharqiyah University	28/04/2022	11/05/2022 10:00am	25/05/2022	100 OMR

- The participated companies of this tender should be of Grade 1 and above.
- The specialized companies of the above assignment can obtain the tender document from Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra, during the working days from 8:00 am to 02:00 pm.
- Bids have to be submitted in closed sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to (Tender Committee, A'Sharqiyah University - Ibra), bearing the tender subject with its reference number with no indication to the name of bidders.
- The submitting of the main envelope should contain the following:
 - Separate sealed envelope contains technical proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains commercial proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains tender bond.
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bid. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
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Ramadhan, a time to glow oneself

KABEER YOUSUF
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Ramadhan is the time to glow as one is more focused towards spiritual and mental wellbeing, meditation and doing charity to fellow beings and the end results will be a holistic glow in the person's appearance, says Vandana Luthra, owner of one the world's largest beauty and skin care products range and services.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of her recent Oman tour, she said it's feeling good to be in physical, mental and spiritual wellness and Ramadhan is the month of achieving all these.

"Ramadhan is a month that gives you spiritual wellness as well as mental and physical feel good moments. It's achieving the zenith of the best of everything and people through fasting, are achieving exactly the same," she said on the sidelines of her non-invasive body contouring treatment in Oman.

According to her, no food is bad and it's us who make it good or bad. The additives, the extra ingredients and all the additional stuff that we add to make a food of one's choice make it either better or harmful.



"It is better to avoid sugar, salt and oil in all your diets and it is highly applicable during the holy month. Fasting or non-fasting, make sure your body is hydrated and drink at least 12 to 14 glasses of water every day," she shared some of the tips to stay glowing.

Oman has 66 per cent of obesity or overweight and it is growing steadily. She feels Ramadhan is the right time to stay fit eating anything of our choice but doing work out post Iftar.

"One should make sure that the extra calorie that he gained by eating the same is burned out by physical exercises," she shared the secret recipe.

Her brand, VLCC, launched in 1989, is a leading player in the wellness and beauty domain across 311 locations in 144 cities and 12 countries across Asia and East Africa.

Real estate transactions total value at RO 587m in Q1

YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Real estate transactions worth RO 216 million were conducted in January, while amounts of RO 164 million and RO 206 million were registered in February and March, respectively. The value of real estate transactions amounted to RO 587 million in the first quarter of this year compared to RO 690 million the corresponding period last year, a fall of 14.9 per cent, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The monthly statistics released by NCSI showed that the total fee collected from real estate transactions conducted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning during the first quarter was RO 16.2 million compared to RO 21.3 million for the corresponding period last year, a 23.7-per cent decrease. The value of real estate selling registered RO 299.1 million down from RO 315.7 million registered last year. The total value of mortgage contracts dropped to RO 284.5 from RO 367.6.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning issued 60,251 title deeds during the first quarter of this year down from 74,450 title deeds issued during the same period of the previous year, a 19.1-per cent decrease.

The ministry granted 1,639 residential land plots in all the governorates compared to 1,006 last year, a 62.9-per cent increase. Of these, 387 were distributed in Dhofar Governorate, 250 land plots in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, 209 land plots in Muscat Governorate, 189 in Al Buraimi, 158 in South Al Batinah, 131 in North Al Batinah, 106 in North Al Sharqiyah, 67 in South Al Sharqiyah, 53 in Al Dhahirah, 85 in Musandam and 4 land plots in Al Wusta Governorate.



At least 5 dead in Russian strike on Odessa

KYIV: A Russian strike killed at least five people, including a baby, and wounded 18 others in Ukraine's Black Sea city of Odessa on Saturday, Kyiv said, warning the toll would likely rise.

"Five Ukrainians killed and 18 wounded. And those are only the ones that we were able to find. It is likely that the death toll will be heavy," the head of Ukraine's presidential office Andriy Yermak said on Telegram. "A three-month-old baby was among those killed."

Earlier on Saturday, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said: "The only aim of Russian missile strikes on Odessa is terror."

Ukraine's air force said its defence systems intercepted two Russian TU-95 missiles that it said were fired from the Caspian Sea.

But it said four other missiles hit the city, including civilian infrastructure.

"Unfortunately, two missiles hit a military facility and two

hit residential buildings," the air force's southern command said on Facebook.

Odessa, a largely Russian-speaking city and cultural hub, has been targeted previously by Moscow's forces which were rebuffed by Ukraine.

Meanwhile, 'fierce battles' raged in eastern Ukraine on Saturday all but killing hopes of an Easter truce as officials said they would make a fresh attempt to evacuate civilians from the war-torn city of Mariupol.

The war enters its third month on Sunday with civilians continuing to pay a heavy price amid the ongoing fighting.

Authorities in two eastern Ukrainian regions -- Kharkiv and Lugansk -- said fighting with Russian forces raged on Saturday.

The governor of the eastern Kharkiv region, Oleg Sinegubov, said on Telegram that Ukrainian forces retook three villages near



Nadia Kovalenko reacts in Bucha, northwestern of Kyiv, as she holds a photograph of her 45-year-old daughter Inna, who was found dead on March 19. — AFP

The war enters its third month on Sunday with civilians continuing to pay a heavy price amid the ongoing fighting

the Russian border after "fierce battles". Sinegubov added that Russian forces had also attacked residential infrastructure, killing two people.

In nearby Lugansk, governor Sergiy Gaiday said shelling was "round the clock".

He called on people near the front to "evacuate if you have the chance", saying volunteers were helping people leave the area.

Nearly 5.2 million Ukrainians have fled the country of 37 million since Russia's attacked in late February, the UN refugee agency said

on Saturday.

The fighting in the east came a day after a senior Russian military officer said "the second phase of the special operation" had begun, with the aim of controlling a huge, strategic part of Ukrainian territory.

"One of the tasks of the Russian army is to establish full control over the Donbas and southern Ukraine," Major General Rustam Minnekaev said on Friday.

Russian forces, which withdrew from around Kyiv and the north of Ukraine after being frustrated in their attempts to take the capital, already occupy much of the eastern Donbas region and the south.

Minnekaev said their focus was now to "provide a land corridor to Crimea," which Russia annexed in 2014, and towards a breakaway pro-Russian region of Moldova, Transnistria, where the general claimed Russian-speaking people were "being oppressed". — AFP

Gaza crossing shut after new rocket attacks

TEL AVIV: Israel said it will close its only crossing from the Gaza Strip for workers on Sunday in response to overnight rocket fire, stopping short of conducting retaliatory strikes in an apparent bid to ease tensions.

The rocket attacks on Friday night and Saturday morning followed days of clashes at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al Aqsa mosque compound and a month of deadly violence. The unrest — which comes as the Jewish festival of Passover overlaps with Ramadhan — has sparked international fears of a wider conflict, one year after similar violence led to an 11-day war between Israel and Gaza-based activists.

"Following the rockets fired toward Israeli territory from the

Gaza Strip last night, it was decided that crossings into Israel for Gazan merchants and workers through the Erez Crossing will not be permitted this upcoming Sunday," said COGAT, a unit of the Israeli defence ministry responsible for Palestinian civil affairs.

Two rockets were fired from Gaza at southern Israel on Friday night, one of them hitting the Jewish state and the other falling short and striking near a residential building in northern Gaza, Palestinian and Israeli sources said.

A third rocket was fired at Israel on Saturday morning, the army said, with no air raid sirens activated for any of the launches.

— AFP



A police officer stands guard at the Palestinian Authority side of the Erez Crossing in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. — AFP

Loyalists turn on Sri Lanka prime minister as protest pressure grows

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's beleaguered prime minister came under increased pressure to step down on Saturday, as staunch allies broke ranks and backed street protests calling for resignations over a worsening economic crisis.

Media minister Nalaka Godahewa announced his support for the thousands outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office who are demanding he and other members of his family relinquish power.

Sri Lanka is suffering its most painful economic downturn since independence in 1948, with months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and other essentials.

The crisis has sparked nationwide protests, with angry demonstrators camped outside Rajapaksa's office for more than two weeks.

Under pressure, the president dropped two of his brothers -- Chamal and Basil -- and nephew Namal from the cabinet this month, but protesters rejected the changes as cosmetic.

Godahewa, previously a staunch Rajapaksa loyalist, said the president should sack his elder brother, Prime Minister Mahinda



Black and white flags are tied up at the fence of the president's office by protesters in Colombo demanding President Rajapaksa's resignation. — AFP

Rajapaksa — the political head of the family — and allow an all-party interim government to take over.

He said the government had lost its credibility after the police killing of a protester on Tuesday. Godahewa said he had offered his resignation but President Rajapaksa had not accepted it.

"We need to restore political stability to successfully meet the economic crisis," Godahewa said

in a statement on his Facebook page.

"The entire cabinet, including the prime minister, should resign and (there should be) an interim cabinet that can win the confidence of all."

Several other senior ruling party members, including Dulas Alahapperuma, a former media minister and cabinet spokesman, have asked the premier to step down.

"I urge the president to appoint a smaller cabinet with a genuine consensus representing all parties in parliament for one year maximum," Alahapperuma said on Saturday. But the prime minister rejected their demands, insisting a majority of ruling party lawmakers still supported him.

"A majority of MPs want me to go," Mahinda told Neth FM radio.

— AFP

TOKYO

Search on for sightseeing boat after distress call

Rescuers in Japan were searching for a sightseeing boat carrying 26 people after it sent a distress signal warning it was sinking, the coastguard and local media said. The "Kazu 1" was sailing in the cold and rough waters off the northern tip of Japan's Hokkaido prefecture when it sent a signal to the coastguard saying it was taking on water and sinking, national broadcaster NHK said.

A local coastguard official confirmed that rescuers had "set up a task force to tackle



the incident" and look for the missing, but declined to confirm any other details of the reported accident. As of 9:30 pm, some eight hours after the initial distress call, officials said the search was ongoing.

NAIROBI

Kenya to hold state funeral for ex-president

Kenya will hold a state funeral next week for former president Mwai Kibaki, who led the East African nation for more than a decade, Interior Minister Fred Matiangi said. Kibaki, who died aged 90, served as the country's third president from December 2002 to April 2013, taking over from the authoritarian rule of Daniel arap Moi. "The former head of state will be given a state funeral with the highest honours because of the distinct service he rendered to our country,"



Matiangi said.

Kibaki, whose political career dated back to the birth of independent Kenya, will be buried next Saturday at his home in Othaya in the Nyeri highlands, he said.

BUENOS AIRES

Ex-Ecuadorian president granted political asylum

Former Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa has been granted political asylum in Belgium, according to a statement released by his lawyer.

The statement was released in response to an extradition request by the National Court of Ecuador on Friday. Correa, who was president of Ecuador from 2007 to 2017, was tried in absentia for corruption two years ago and sentenced to eight years jail time.

The court found that Correa



had known about bribes paid to politicians and civil servants by building companies and was indirectly responsible for a network of corruption.

Inside Azovstal plant, Ukrainian sergeant prays for rescue

MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

Staff Sgt Leonid Kuznetsov of the Ukrainian National Guard is running out of time. He and his comrades holding out in the Azovstal steel factory in Mariupol have only light weapons — machine guns, pistols — to defend themselves against Russian tanks, jets and artillery.

They are holed up in a small, reinforced-cement bunker with peeling blue paint on the walls and about 2 metres of earth over their heads.

Even if the shelling that has been their constant companion for weeks comes to end with Vladimir Putin's order to end the attack on the factory, the Russian president's decision to blockade the last bastion of Ukrainian resistance “so that no fly can escape” could be a death sentence.

“I’m alive and healthy for now, but the situation is very difficult,” said Kuznetsov, who is 25. “We’re at the end of our food and water. We have about 1,000 civilians at the factory. I can’t say how many soldiers we have. There are many, many wounded and not enough medicine. The smallest injury can be fatal; there are not even simple bandages.”

The Russian military’s destruction of Mariupol will be recorded in history as one of the singular calamities of Putin’s disastrous war in Ukraine. A vivacious seaside town of about half a million people has been turned to a charred and pockmarked hellscape, the bodies of soldiers, civilians and their pets littering the once leafy avenues.

Last week, Russia’s defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, announced to Putin that the ruined city was now fully under Russian control, save for the besieged steel plant. There are few buildings left standing and most of the city’s residents, those who have not been killed in weeks of nearly incessant shelling, have fled.

The zone of Ukrainian control in Mariupol has narrowed to suffocating bunkers under the steel plant like the one where Kuznetsov and his fellow soldiers remain, running out of everything, including reserves of hope.

“We’re hoping for help,” he said. “If we don’t get it, we won’t make it out of this factory. We will die here with weapons in our hands defending Ukraine.”

Kuznetsov communicated with a reporter by text using the chat app Telegram, and sent a short video of himself sitting in the bunker with a few fellow soldiers nearby. He has an Internet connection thanks to Starlink, the satellite Internet provider created by Elon Musk.

Kuznetsov chose to join the military after college because he thought that was what a man was supposed to do, his wife, Maria Kuznetsova, said in an interview. “It’s his character,” she said. “He thinks that a man must serve to



A Ukrainian family arrives in Zaporizhzhia after fleeing Russian-occupied Mariupol in Eastern Ukraine.

protect his family.”

Kuznetsova, 23, said she met her future husband when they were students at Mariupol State University. They married a few years later and now have a year-old son named David. Kuznetsov served for three years, then retired in December and filed an application to become a police officer.

Then, on February 24, the war broke out.

Kuznetsova said she repeatedly begged her husband not to rejoin the military, and initially thought she had talked him out of it.

“It’s difficult to let your beloved man go,” she said. “But every day he talked about it, and then quickly gathered up his things and went.”

Kuznetsov said he was posted to different regions in the city before eventually being assigned to the Azovstal steel plant. For weeks it served as both a military base and a refuge for the families of soldiers and steel workers, as Ukrainian defenders in other parts of the city were killed or forced to retreat.

With no one else left to fight, Russian forces turned their entire might against the factory in recent days, pummeling it day and night with air strikes, artillery and rockets.

Kuznetsov said more than 500 people were suffering

from various injuries and there were many, many dead. A number of people sheltering inside have been killed by cave-ins caused by the shelling, he said.

He estimated that he and his fellow soldiers could hold out for another day, perhaps two.

“I ask the whole world to do everything possible to stop the military aggression against independent Ukraine,” he said. “Punish everyone who is responsible for the military action on our territory.”

Kuznetsov accused the Ukrainian government of abandoning the troops left in the factory complex, though rescuing them would require resources Ukraine can ill afford to spare as its army tries to withstand a new Russian offensive in the east.

Surrender to the Russian forces, Kuznetsov said, was also out of the question. “It’s a big risk. They could just shoot him.”

Kuznetsov was able to evacuate with their son on March 20 and is now living in the relative safety of western Ukraine.

When last they spoke, on Wednesday, she said he had made it clear that the situation was dire. “He has no way out,” she said. “He hopes that everything will turn out all right, but he told me to be prepared for any outcome.”

Bookstores are keeping this tiny Spanish village alive

RAPHAEL MINDER

Standing on a hilltop in northwestern Spain, Uruña overlooks a vast and windswept landscape of sunflower and barley fields, as well as a famous winery. The walls of some shops are built directly into the 12th-century ramparts of the village.

Despite its rugged beauty, Uruña, like many villages in the Spanish countryside, has struggled over recent decades with an aging and dwindling population that has left it stagnant at about only 100 full-time residents. There is no butcher and no baker; both retired in the past few months. The local school has just nine students.

But for the past decade or so, one business has been thriving in Uruña: books. There are 11 stores that sell books, including nine dedicated bookshops.

“I was born in a village that didn’t have a bookstore and where people certainly cared a lot more about farming their land and their animals than about books,” said Francisco Rodríguez, the 53-year-old mayor of Uruña. “This change is a bit strange, but it’s a source of pride for a tiny place to have become a cultural centre, which now also certainly makes us different and special compared to the other villages around us.”

The attempt to turn Uruña into a literary hub dates to 2007, when provincial authorities invested about €3 million, or about \$3.3 million, to help restore and convert village buildings into bookstores and to construct an exhibition and conference centre. They offered a symbolic rental fee of €10 per month to people interested in running a bookstore.

The plan was to keep Uruña alive with book tourism, modeling it after other rural literary hubs across Europe — notably, Montmorillon in France and Hay-on-Wye in Britain. Hay has long hosted one of the continent’s most

famous literary festivals.

Spain has one of Europe’s biggest book-publishing markets, feeding a network of about 3,000 independent bookstores — and double that number if stationery shops and other places that sell books are counted. But about 40 per cent of bookstores have less than €90,000 in annual revenue, which amounts to operating “a subsistence business,” according to Álvaro Manso, spokesperson for CEGAL, an association that represents Spain’s independent bookstores.

“The trend is one in which size matters and more of the very small bookstores will disappear” as they have in other countries where book sectors have consolidated, Manso said. To help smaller businesses compete, Spain’s culture ministry this month allocated €9 million in subsidies for the book sector to modernise and digitalise.

The survival of that huge nationwide network of bookstores in Spain, where readership levels are not particularly high, is “one of the great paradoxes of this country, but I think we’re living in a kind of book bubble,” said Victor López-Bachiller, who owns a bookstore in Uruña.

Because the rent is low, López-Bachiller said, he can stay afloat financially by selling an array of second-hand books, everything from Spanish-language classics, like “Pedro Páramo” — after which his store is named — to comics like Tintin. His shop also displays about 50 models of old typewriters said to have been used by writers such as Jack Kerouac, J R R Tolkien, Karen Blixen and Patricia Highsmith.

López-Bachiller, 47, is among the some 100 residents of the village, most of them pensioners.

Tamara Crespo, a journalist, and her husband, Fidel Raso, a photographer, bought a house in Uruña in 2001,



Spain has one of Europe’s biggest book-publishing markets, feeding a network of about 3,000 independent bookstores – and double that number if stationery shops and other places that sell books are counted

before the effort to turn the area into a literary hub. They also run a bookstore there now.

“I feel that being here is not just about wanting to have a rent-free bookstore, but also embracing a certain way of life and building up a community,” said Crespo, whose store focuses on photojournalism.

One of her few complaints is that some other bookstore owners open up only sporadically, mainly on weekends when they know that there will be more visitors, even though the investment project stipulates that their shops should open at least four days a week.

She also noted that the village population had continued to fall slightly over the past two decades, even as Uruña turned into a magnet for book lovers.

Rodríguez, the mayor, acknowledged that becoming a tourism destination was no guarantee that more full-time residents would move in and keep the village alive. The recent retirements of the shopkeepers were more proof of that.

“It’s very unfortunate, but we simply couldn’t find anybody from the younger generation here willing to take over as our new butcher,” he said. The morning’s bread and meat are now delivered from a neighbouring town.

The unfavourable demographics of rural Spain — a phenomenon now known as ‘La España vacía,’ or ‘empty Spain’ — will present a continuing survival challenge, the mayor predicted.

Nonetheless, the bookstore initiative has borne fruit.

Uruña was selected for the subsidies because of its scenic location and picturesque buildings — and because of its relatively easy-to-reach location. It is off a highway in northwestern Spain and just over two hours’ drive from Madrid and about 30 miles from the medieval city of Valladolid.

Do you remember me?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

When you meet a person after a long time and you see that they may not have recognised you, you may ask if they remembered you, sometimes you would have to give them a cue or two before they say yes. They remember you but this is not the case with people who have Alzheimer's disease who would struggle to remember names even of those close and dear to them.

Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia which is a group of conditions that usually affect people over the age of 65 but it has been reported among younger people as well.

People who have Alzheimer's experience difficulties in remembering things, using language to express their thoughts and feelings and making decisions about their daily life. One of the challenges in detecting Alzheimer's is that the symptoms often start slowly and worsen gradually.

In the early stages of Alzheimer's the person would look quite healthy to those around him, he would be able to shower, get dressed and manage his daily routine to some degree. The symptoms usually start with memory loss so the person would misplace his items frequently and fail to trace where he kept them.

Some people forget words used in a normal conversation so they would pause and try to remember the word that describes the thing they wanted to talk about, others start getting lost in familiar places or struggle with using basic devices like a remote control or a new smartphone.

Sometimes the person experiencing these symptoms would prefer to deny them rather than seeking medical opinion, either due to fear that the doctor would confirm their worries or because of the shame and stigma

PEOPLE WITH ALZHEIMER'S EXPERIENCE MULTIPLE PROBLEMS WITH THEIR MEMORY, SPEECH AND EMOTIONS. THIS DEVASTATING DISEASE AFFECTS NOT JUST THE PERSON BUT THOSE CARING FOR HIM

associated with memory loss. Sometimes the family joins in this denial by trying to explain such symptoms by being old and not needing to remember.

But Alzheimer's and other similar conditions cause more than memory loss. This devastating disease eventually transforms the person to someone new with unpleasant behavioural changes. Sometimes the person becomes irritable for no reason accusing those around him (including his

own family) of stealing from him or wanting to harm him and refuse to eat food offered at home or involve the police about the event he imagined.

Sometimes hatred would be directed towards a particular family member which causes disharmony in the whole family. As the disease progresses, the person becomes more dependent on others in maintaining basic daily needs such as showering, eating and preparing food. Eventually the person loses the ability to move and ends up in bed all the time needing to be fed and cleaned which is often done by a family member.

Caring for a person who has Alzheimer's can be both emotionally and physically draining which is why some caregivers develop anxiety, depression and early grief. This is why it is important that all family members contribute to the caring tasks. However, in the Arab

culture caring for a person with Alzheimer's is often viewed as the duty of his wife who sometimes suffers in silence even when she has sons and daughters who can help.

Sometimes the person with Alzheimer's experiences sleeping problems so they would sleep during the day and stay up the whole night which forces the wife to stay up to look after him making sure he would not harm himself or attempt to leave the house.

At times the person would be physically or verbally abusive towards his wife and children which can be very traumatising especially as it takes all the good memory of a caring and loving husband and father he once was.

Alzheimer's is a horrible condition that steals the person and all the happy memories he once had. Let's all work together to improve awareness about it and support the person and his caregivers.

The push to remake Japan's cherry blossom season

HIROSHI HIYAMA

Japan's famed cherry blossom season blankets the country in the delicate white flowers of the prized and popular "somei-yoshino" tree, delighting residents and visitors alike. But some want change.

The season produces a nationwide frenzy, as forecasters compete to declare when full bloom will arrive, and Japanese unfurl picnic blankets for sometimes raucous flower-viewing parties — at least in pre-pandemic times.

The blooms of the ubiquitous somei-yoshino strain, which accounts for more than 90 per cent of the cherry trees planted in Japan, last only around a week and tend to emerge simultaneously in a given region because the trees are clones of a single specimen. And while the tree has become synonymous with blossom season, it is a growing headache for city planners because the strain is prone to disease and tends to grow too large to be well managed in urban settings.

"It's all about planting the right flora in the right place," says Hideaki Tanaka, an expert on sakura — Japanese for cherry blossoms — who is trying to popularise other strains.

"There are all kinds of sakura, not just somei-yoshino. I want to help recreate the old times when people enjoyed a wide variety," added Tanaka, 63.

He runs a farm in Yuki, in eastern Japan's Ibaraki prefecture, with around 1,000 sample trees of 400 cherry varieties. His goal is to convince local officials across Japan to consider alternatives with petals in all shades of pink, or even rare green.

As Tanaka sits on the grass among his trees, nail-sized petals of pale pink flutter down in the gentle breeze, while elsewhere other flowers are still coming into bloom.

It's a scene more like the cherry blossom seasons Japanese enjoyed several centuries ago, with a range of blooms arriving at different times.

His farm is operated by the Flower Association of Japan, which gives cherry saplings to communities that want to create scenic spots to draw tourists and please residents.

The farm has distributed about three million saplings, including somei-yoshino, but it is now promoting the "jindai-akebono" variety which is more resistant to infection and grows smaller, making it easier to prune. Its flowers bloom around four days earlier than somei-yoshino's and are a stronger pink colour. But convincing Japan to turn its back on the somei-yoshino strain may not be easy. — AFP



ALISSA RUBIN

The writer is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist

As the French go to the polls, uncertainty is the only sure bet

For at least the last three French elections, voters in the town of Louviers, about 60 miles northwest of Paris, have cast their ballots for the candidate who ultimately won the presidency. So who are they going to vote for Sunday, in the country's closest race in memory?

"I haven't decided. It's gnawing at me," said Charlene Hedoux, 30, a cleaning woman who was sitting at a bus stop this past week in central Louviers, which has a soaring Gothic church and bustling cafes. "I have children. I didn't before. When one sees how these last few days have been going, it's not very reassuring."

And that was before the terrorist attack on Thursday that left a police officer dead in central Paris and added yet another combustible element to an already volatile race.

The election on Sunday is one of the most consequential in recent times — not just for France, but for Europe — and one of the most unpredictable, too.

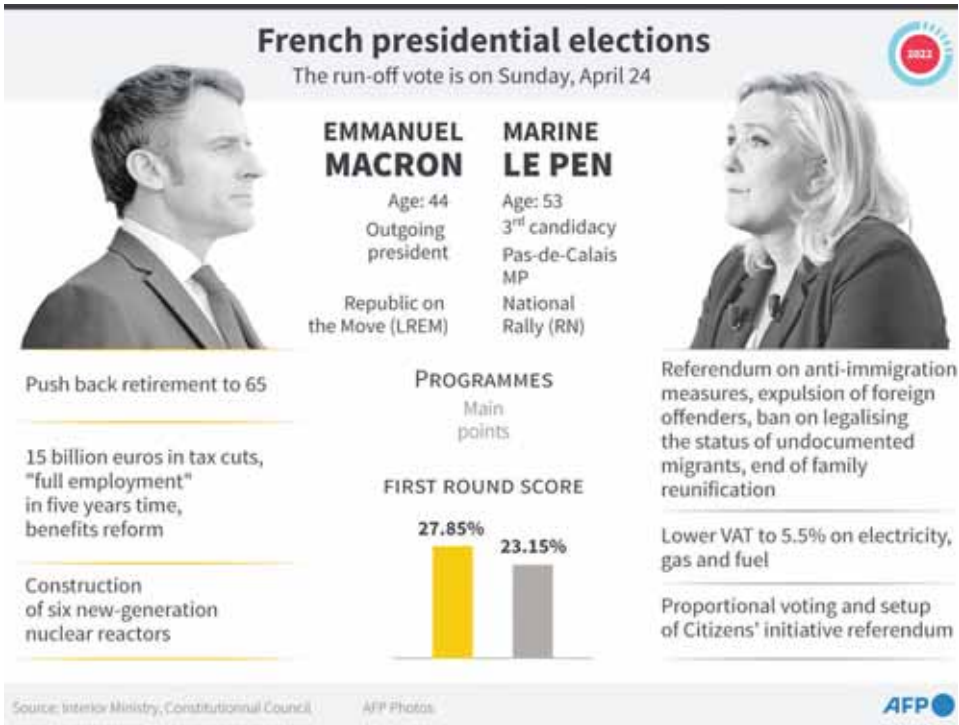
Even at this late stage, a remarkable 28 per cent or so of voters remained undecided. The four leading candidates span the extremes of the political spectrum and are locked in a virtual dead heat.

The potential outcomes are just as broad. Depending on who wins, France could seek to leave the European Union and recast security alliances with a tilt towards Russia. Some would have France take harsher stands, immigration and domestic security.

Alternately, France may elect a president who wants to shrink the ranks of civil servants, eliminate some job protections and reduce France's generous welfare state, making the country more competitive in the global economy but risking a popular backlash. Yet another possibility: a winner who aspires to sharply increase taxes on the rich and nationalise banks.

The two candidates who receive the most votes on Sunday will compete in a runoff on May 7.

"There's never been a campaign where the uncertainty was so uncertain," said Edouard Lecerf, global director for political and opinion research for Kantar Public, a public opinion research firm. "The mistrust of politicians is stronger than it



has ever been."

That mistrust appears to have caused many voters to veer away from traditional politicians in search of someone they feel is more principled, prompting even candidates who are insiders to claim they are "outsiders."

DEPENDING ON WHO WINS, FRANCE COULD SEEK TO LEAVE THE EU AND RECAST SECURITY ALLIANCES WITH A TILT TOWARDS RUSSIA

A majority of French voters have traditionally supported parties with established ideologies, either mainstream left or right. But traditional left-right allegiances are breaking down all over — in Europe, as they appear to have in the United States — as polarisation grows.

Globalisation is a stark dividing line, with candidates on both the extreme left and right crusading against it, and more centrist candidates embracing it.

Voters are looking to get away from politics as usual. That appears to have helped one of the leading candidates, Em-

manuel Macron, a former economy minister who has formed a new party with a platform that combines pro-business, pro-EU and pro-social welfare elements — a novelty in contemporary France.

With allegiances to existing parties diminishing, some French voters find themselves torn between candidates who are diametrically opposed.

A good example was Pierre Haux, a teacher at a technical school, who went to a rally last week in Lille of the mainstream conservative candidate, François Fillon, who is under the cloud of a nepotism scandal that has led to claims of embezzlement. Haux said he was also weighing voting for the far-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, but worried that he was "a one-man show."

The fluidity of the race has allowed each of the leading candidates to claim to be on the verge of victory. At least three of the top four candidates have been in the lead at some point, making it almost impossible to say who the front-runner is.

What has been most striking is how voters' concerns keep shifting, from day to day and even hour to hour, almost as if they had been infected with the impatience of adolescents. That phenomenon is just one of several that pollsters said had made the race so unpredictable.

— New York Times

S Africa’s floods shine spotlight on housing crisis



LINDA GIVETASH

The writer is a freelance journalist based in Johannesburg, South Africa. She specialises in telling complex and emotional stories about human rights, health and climate change

Thulisile Ntobela, once lived in an apartment, but when her rent went up 25 per cent, the unemployed mother of five could no longer afford and moved out. She found a piece of vacant land in Durban and put up a shack.

That was five years ago and much cheaper than paying rent, which had gone up to 200 rand (\$12.80).

“That’s why we moved here, we don’t pay the rent. You just build your house and you stay”, she said.

Hers was among the 87 homes — shacks made of corrugated iron — that vanished in seconds when the

ground, over-saturated with flood water — crumbled at the informal settlement of eNkanini, on a hilltop residential area of central Durban.

“I was so scared at that time. I was holding my baby. People were screaming”, recalled the 31-year-old, carrying her youngest, an eight-month-old boy.

No one was injured because they had already taken shelter at a neighbour’s home when the floor began to tremble.

Once covered in trees, the settlement of eNkanini formed in 2016 is now dotted with hundreds of shacks, some painted in bright colours.

“We don’t have homes. This is our home”, said Mzwandile Hlatshwayo, 25, a leader in the community.

Nearly 13 per cent of South Africa’ 59 million people live in shacks, locally referred to as informal settlements, according to 2019 government statistics.

Hlatshwayo is from a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal but moved to the eastern province’s biggest city Durban in search of work. He would live in government housing,

but none is available in the city.

“I came here looking for a job. There is no jobs in rural areas”, he said.

The problem of landlessness goes back to the apartheid era that segregated black Africans and people of colour, preventing them from owning land, said Sbu Zikode, head of the land and housing activism organisation Abahlali baseMjondolo (shack dwellers). Stripped of land ownership, poor blacks moved to sub-par neighbourhoods.

But nearly three decades since the apartheid system was abolished, land distribution and economic inequity remain unresolved. In 1995, the housing backlog was estimated by a UN report to be 1.5 million units.

Despite more than three million government houses being constructed since then, the shortfall has ballooned to 3.7 million homes, according to the Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa.

“It’s not by our choice that we have no land, we have no homes”, Zikode said.

People have also flocked to urban centres in search of jobs and better healthcare and education. Infrastructure in municipalities like Durban haven’t kept up with the influx, Zikode said. Informal settlements have mushroomed on vacant land as a result. But communities on more valuable land face eviction, Zikode said, which often turns into violent encounters.

“It is this reason people will occupy land that is not safe. They will occupy land that is along riverbanks, they will occupy land that is along floodplains.”

The less desirable locations on floodplains have now also brought deadly consequences.

Rescuers searching for the missing have said poor infrastructure with no consideration of the terrain put the houses at greater risk. Many of those still standing in eNkanini are teetering half a metre from the edge of cliffs, vulnerable to future storms.

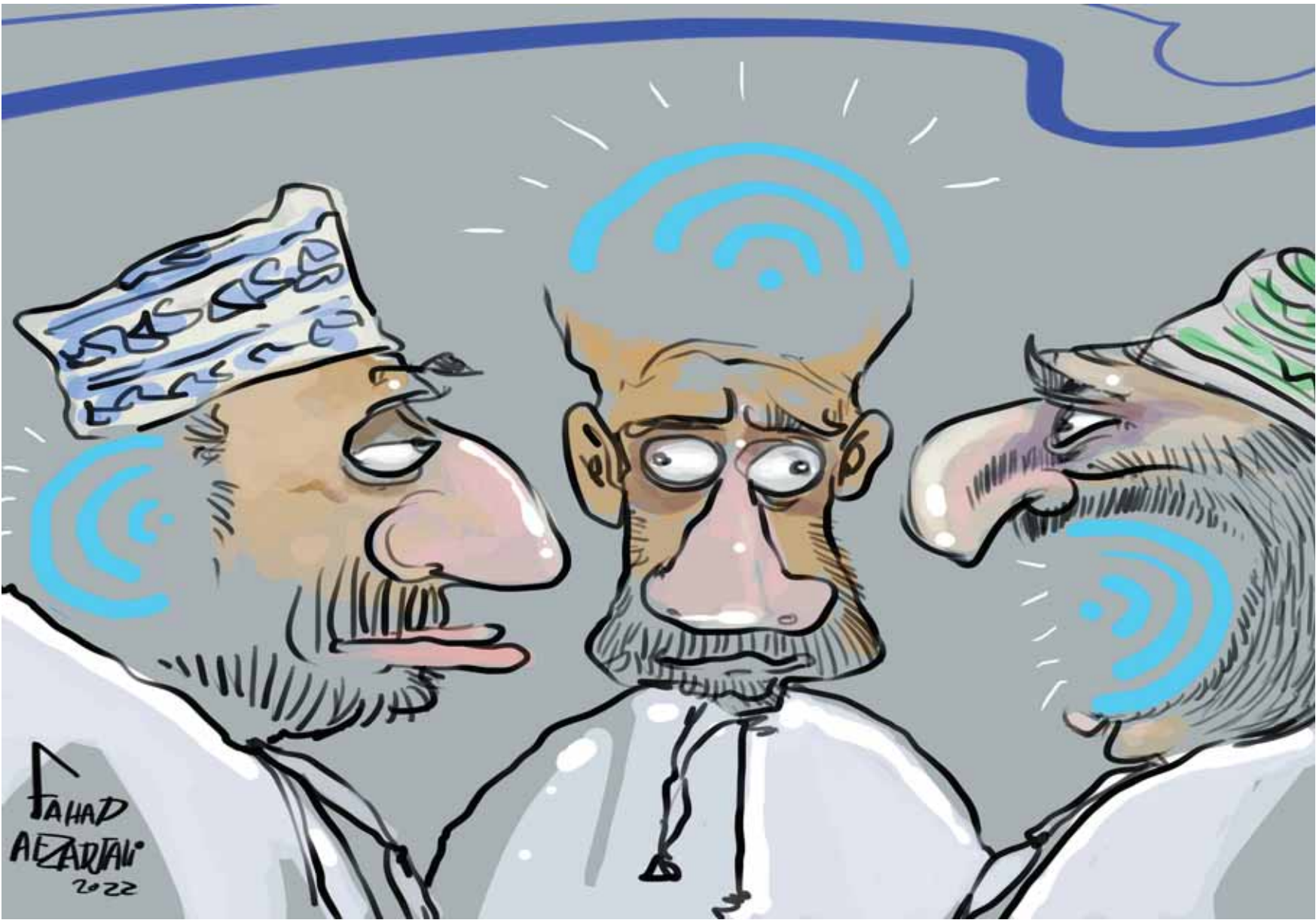
Pipes were exposed, wires downed and unpaved footpaths up to houses near the top of the hill are treacherously slick with sand and debris.

Government housing officials said this week they were beginning to clear land in the nearby Ndwedwe town to erect temporary housing for the victims of the flood, which claimed 435 lives.

Longer-term solutions are still being investigated. Out of the tragedy, Zikode believes it’s an opportunity for government to finally address landlessness and poverty.

“The country and the world is watching as to how we are going to be dealing with the current disaster”, he said.

“Surely the government is now forced to act and provide alternative land.” — AFP



Applying the Covid blueprint to cholera

FIRDAUSI QADRI AND MD TAUFIQUEL ISLAM

Since Covid-19 engulfed the world two years ago, “unprecedented” has become something of a buzzword. But while the coronavirus has posed unique challenges at a time of deep global interconnectedness, pandemics are nothing new. The Covid-19 pandemic is not even the only one we are currently experiencing. In much of the developing world, cholera outbreaks are proliferating.

Whereas the Sars-CoV-2 virus is “novel”, cholera — a water-borne diarrhoeal disease caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae* — is ancient, as is its history of widespread devastation. The current cholera pandemic is the world’s seventh since the early nineteenth century.

Despite their apparent differences, Covid-19 and cholera have much in common. Both are at least partly controllable by vaccination and both spread most easily in crowded, unsanitary environments. Ensuring adequate shelter and strengthening water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices and infrastructure are therefore vital to limit transmission.

These commonalities explain why measures to limit Covid-19, such as decreased travel and increased vigilance regarding personal hygiene, brought about a decline in cholera cases. But as the world’s governments roll back pandemic restrictions, cholera is returning with a vengeance. At the end of 2021, there were 16 active cholera outbreaks around the world.

Yet the response to Covid-19 still holds valuable lessons for bolstering the fight against cholera — beginning with the importance of research to combat disease outbreaks. The emergence of Sars-CoV-2 triggered a massive and largely coordinated global research push, which enabled evidence-based decision-making at all levels of prevention and control. Initiatives like the World Health Organization’s Global Research Roadmap for Covid-19 helped guide this effort, ensuring that resources were channeled to the areas where knowledge and innovation were most needed.

Research is no less important in the fight against cholera. That is why, last year, the Global Task Force on Cholera Control launched the

Cholera Roadmap Research Agenda. Representing the collective vision of 177 global cholera experts and other stakeholders, the agenda identifies the highest-priority research questions. Getting the answers is essential to achieving the goals set out in the GTFCC’s Ending Cholera by 2030 global roadmap.

Many of the questions could just as easily be found in a Covid-19 research agenda. For example, what is the fastest, most cost-effective way to deliver a limited supply of vaccines? How can we enhance the uptake and sustainability of response measures to prevent the disease from reaching epidemic — or pandemic-level proportions? How do we engage meaningfully with at-risk communities in designing and implementing interventions? Which disease surveillance systems are the most effective, and when and where should they be deployed?

The questions may be the same, but the effort devoted to answering them has been very different. With Covid-19, strong political will and massive investment enabled researchers to produce answers quickly. Though cholera has been around much longer, solutions remain elusive. A key reason is that, whereas Covid-19 ravaged developed and developing countries alike, cholera was eradicated from the Global North more than 150 years ago. It is much harder to mobilise resources to tackle a disease affecting the world’s poorest and most marginalised people.

With just a fraction of the commitment underpinning the fight against Covid-19, lifesaving progress could be made in cholera research. Epidemiological surveillance would enable the mapping of transmission patterns. New and innovative diagnostic tests could increase the

speed, efficiency and quality of detecting and confirming cases. And new or improved vaccines would strengthen the connection between emergency response and long-term control and prevention.

Optimising the timing and dosage of vaccines is essential, as is learning how to engage communities to ensure that the needs of marginalised populations are addressed. Transforming treatment for vulnerable communities requires studying the impact of antibiotics on cholera transmission and understanding what enables — and blocks — integration of cholera treatment into case management by community health workers.

Equipped with this knowledge, countries and health partners would be better positioned to choose the most effective tools and approaches as they pursue their National Cholera Plans. This, in turn, would make it easier to attract additional funding, which would drive further progress.

We have learned so much during the Covid-19 pandemic. We have listened to our public-health officials and taken steps to limit the spread of the virus: Wearing face masks, practicing social distancing, quarantining, getting vaccinated and washing our hands more regularly. We must leverage this increased awareness and momentum to make further public-health gains, not just in our own communities, but worldwide.

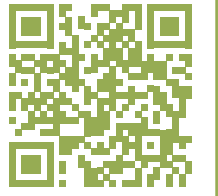
That means taking aim at other, much older scourges. We have the tools we need to defeat cholera, but we must still do the research that is required to identify how, when, and where to use them. Only then can we protect the world’s most vulnerable populations from this all-too-precedented disease.

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Sur earn third ticket to Omantel League

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Sur club earned the third ticket to the 2022-23 Omantel League as they defeated Al Khabourah 1-0 in the play-off late on Friday.

At the Seeb Stadium, Sur's Al Asim al Harthi scored the most important goal in the 105th minute during first extra-half. He converted the penalty to deliver a thrilling win for his team and seal a place in the top-tier league next season.

The regulation time ended in a goalless draw.

Coach Salim Sultan's men got



an advantage as Al Khabourah's player Saif al Dhabari received a red card in the first extra-half.

Salim Sultan hailed Sur's progress to Omantel League. "The squad showed top performance

during the whole league matches including the play-off game against Al Khabourah. Promotion to the top-tier league was our top aim since the beginning of the season and we are very proud with

accomplishing this target," he said after the match.

The national coach affirmed that presence of Al Oruba and Sur to Omantel League will add further technical value to the

league's performance. "It was great occasion as both teams Al Oruba and Sur advanced to Omantel League and their attendance in the top-tier league will bring further competitions to the rest of teams

besides the awaiting derby between both teams," he concluded.

Al Bashayer and Al Oruba clubs had confirmed their promotion to Omantel League after topping their respective groups.

Sur club joined them as third promoted club.

On the other hand, three clubs from Omantel League will drop into first division league next season. The relegation zone currently featured many teams including Saham, Bahla, Nizwa, Al Ittihad and Muscat.

In the forthcoming rounds, the identity of the nearest teams for relegation will be unveiled.

Oman to send 130-strong team for GCC Games in Kuwait

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) on Monday will unveil the details of the Sultanate of Oman's participation in the third GCC Games to be held in Kuwait from May 13 to 31.

The OCC will hold a meeting at the Oman Olympic Academy with members of Oman delegation participating in the tournament, in the presence of Taha bin Suleiman al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, and the managers of the participating sports teams.

The meeting also highlights the procedures that will be followed in Kuwait, the technical details of the competitions, their schedule and places of residence, the requirements for the games before travelling to Kuwait, procedures upon arrival and during the stay.

In the Games, strict health protocol will be followed to prevent Covid-19.

The OOC has completed all procedures related to participation, as Oman will participate with a delegation of more than 130 participants representing 10 sports, namely shooting, athletics for men, athletics for women, futsal, padel, electronic games, volleyball, swimming, basketball (3x3) for women, and karate.

The official delegation of Oman includes Khalid bin Muhammad al Zubair, OOC Chairman and head of the delegation, Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, Dr Mansoor al Toqi, board member, Ali al Busafi, Chef de Mission, Bader Awlad Thani, Chef de Mission

assistant, Saeed bin Ali al Hosani, administrator, Asaad bin Mubarak al Hasani, representing the Omani Athletes Committee, Majid bin Mohammed al Wardi, a physiotherapist, Khalil bin Khalfan al Busaidi, a physiotherapist, and the media personnel include Fahd bin Salim al Zuhaimi, Khalid bin Mohammed al Jaldani and Faisal bin Abdul Hamid al Balushi.

OMAN CAMPAIGN

Oman national women's athletics team competitions will start on May 13, with the list of three players and two coaches. Oman athletics team competitions for men will start on May 16 to May 18 at Ahmed Al Rashdan Track and Field. The list includes 13 players, and 9 technical and



administrative staff.

As for futsal (men), the list includes 14 players and 6 technical and administrative staff. The competitions will start on May 14 and continue until May 22 at Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah Hall. The Oman shooting team includes 14 players and 10 technical and administrative

staff, in addition to two referees. The competitions will start from May 15-19 at the Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Olympic Shooting Ranges Complex.

Oman swimming team includes 6 athletes, 4 technical and administrative staff, and one referee. The competitions will be held at the Sheikh Nasser Al Mohammed Aquarium Complex during the period from May 17-20.

For Oman team for electronic games, the competitions will start on May 19 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, and the delegation list includes 3 players and 2 technical and administrative staff.

The volleyball competitions will be held at the Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah Complex from May 20-26, and the Oman team

includes 12 players, 5 technical and administrative staff, and one referee.

The padel national team includes 8 players and 3 technical and administrative staff, and the competitions will be held from May 23-28 at Yarmouk Sports Club.

Oman women's basketball team includes 4 players, 2 technical and administrative staff, and one referee. The competitions will be held during the period from May 28-29 at the Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah Complex.

Karate competitions will be held in the Al Nasr Sports Club hall from May 29-31. The Oman team includes 6 players, 3 technical and administrative staff, and one referee.

Shaheen XI, Lamha Signs enter quarters



MUSCAT: Shaheen XI and Lamha Signs entered the quarterfinals of the Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) Ramadhan cricket tournament on Friday night.

In the first match, Ravi XI posted 80 runs for 8 wickets in 8 overs. Fayyaz 33 (14 b, 6x4, 4x1) and Bilal 19 runs in 6 balls with 3 sixers were the main scorers. Rizwan bowled superbly of Shaheen X1 and got 3 vital wickets for 16 runs.

In reply, Shaheen X1 reached the target for the loss of 5 wickets with Nabeel (23) and Sohail (17) main scorers. Rizwan was declared as the man of the match.

In the second match, batting first Lamha Signs posed 118 in 8 overs against MRP XI. Khalid hit 66 runs in 18 balls with 10 sixes to entertain the big Friday crowd. Tauseef got 2 wickets for MRP.

MRP chasing a big total could manage only 84 for 7 wickets. Muzamil scored 41 runs (6x6). Aleem of Lamha Signs took 3 wickets for 14 runs, while Waqar got 2 wickets.

Khalid of Lamha Signs was declared the man of the match.

On Thursday, Orient XI and Asfandiyar XI moved to next round.

Orient XI easily beat PSM by 58 runs.

Sent into bat, Orient batters smashed some week bowling from PSM. They hammered 105 runs in 8 overs with Asif scoring 40 runs in 21 balls (6x3,) along with Irfan, who too scored a quick-fire 38 runs in 25 balls (6x4, 4x2). Zaigham Sheikh got 1-22 for PSM.

In reply, PSM scored 58-4 in 8 overs. Only Abdul Qayum scored 25 runs (16 balls, 6x1, 4x3).

Asif Khan was the man of the match.

In another match, Mash Eagles won the toss and decided to bowl against fancied Asfandiyar XI.

Nadim 41 not out (6x3, 4x4) and Arif 26 not out (6x3 , 4x1) hammered the bowling and took the score to 105.

Mash Eagles started brightly to chase the total through Rizwan (29) and Zaheer (15) but the efforts were not enough for them to win the match. Saqib got 2-14 for Asfandiyar. Nadeem was declared the man of the match.

Pran Oman CT, Ayan and Al Fatah in quarters

MUSCAT: The Pran Oman C T, Ayan International and Al Fatah 11 qualified to quarterfinals of the Pran Frooto Ramadhan tennex ball cricket tournament 2022, organised by Al Hail Cricket Team.

In the weekend, the tournament saw some exciting games in day five of tournament where Muscat Rockers won the toss and elected to field first. Pran Oman scored 44 for 8 overs.

In reply, Muscat Rockers lost by 5 runs after scoring 39-6 in 8 overs. Nazmul from Pran Oman CT was declared the man of match.

The second match played was between Ayan CT and Landmark Group. Sent into bat by the Landmark captain Vineeth, Ayan CT scored 45-4 in 8 overs. Shafeeq scored 17 runs in 17 balls and Ijaz scored 12 runs. In reply, Landmark Group scored 18 runs for 9 wickets in 8 overs. The Ayan CT won the match by 27 runs and qualified to the next round. Ayan CT's Waqas declared the man of the match.

In the last match, batting first against MCC, Al Fatah XI scored 64-7. In reply, MCC scored 46-9 in 8 overs and lost the match by 18 runs. Matti was declared the man of match for his 36 runs (17 balls, 6x4).

SK Firoz Ahamed, Marketing & Business Development



Manager of PRAN Foods Oman presided as the chief guest and gave man of the match gifts to the players who performed well during the matches.

He said that the Pran management are delighted to work with such wonderful Omani organisers. "The tournament is organised in a professional way, there is live scoring coverage for all the matches. It is easy for cricket followers to view scores from anywhere. I met with a couple of participating team players, they are happy and demanding to have such an event during the year, not only in Ramadhan. We hope to have the Pran Frooto Tennex cricket league soon in future," Firoz said.

The organisers thanked the main sponsors PRAN Foods Oman, for their valuable support.

Buttler smashes 116 in Rajasthan win as Delhi tempers boil over

MUMBAI: Jos Buttler hit 116 as Rajasthan Royals defeated Delhi Capitals by 15 runs in a stormy IPL match on Friday which saw tempers boil over in the final over.

England's Buttler hit nine fours and nine sixes in his 65-ball innings to set Delhi a steep 223-run winning target. It was his third century of this IPL.

The match saw a heated exchange among the on-field umpires and Rishabh Pant's Delhi over a full toss in the last over of the run chase.

Delhi needed 36 to win and Rovman Powell hit three sixes off the first three deliveries from fellow West Indian Obed McCoy.

McCoy's fourth delivery was a high full toss around Powell's waist, which Pant and Delhi thought should have been called a no ball.

Pant even sent a team official onto the field to argue his case.

"Everyone was frustrated because it was not even close, so I thought it was a no ball. Everyone in the ground saw that," the Delhi skipper said after the match.

"Obviously it wasn't right, but what happened with us was also not right. It was just the heat of the moment."

Powell hit 36 off 15 balls with five sixes but fell to McCoy's last delivery of the match.

Earlier Buttler and opening partner Devdutt Padikkal (54 off 35 balls) gave Rajasthan a dream start as the team made 222-2.

Padikkal fell to Indian left-arm rookie pacer Khaleel Ahmed and Buttler's scalp was claimed by Bangladesh's Mustafizur Rahman.

Rajasthan skipper Sanju Samson too played an impressive



cameo with 46 off 19 balls with three sixes and five fours, as his team went top of 10-team league.

Left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav was the most expensive bowler, giving away 40 runs in his

three wicketless overs.

Pant was the top scorer for Delhi and hit two sixes and four boundaries in his 44 off 24 balls.

Delhi openers, David Warner (28 off 14) and Prithvi Shaw (37

off 27) tried to make a match of the chase but the middle-order couldn't maintain the tempo once both openers fell.

Rajasthan spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin bowled eight overs between them and took three wickets — including opener Shaw, Sarfaraz Khan (1) and Axar Patel (1) — for only 60 runs.

Rookie pacer Prasidh Krishna bowled tight lines and only gave away 22 runs in his four overs for the key wickets of Warner, Pant and Lalit Yadav, who scored 37 off 24 balls. — AFP

Brief scores: Rajasthan Royals 222-2 (Jos Buttler 116, Devdutt Padikkal 54; Mustafizur Rahman 1-43) beat Delhi Capitals 207-8 (Rishabh Pant 44, Lalit Yadav 37; Prasidh Krishna 3-22) by 15 runs.

Mohsin al Bahrani elected first chairman of Al Amerat club

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani was elected as first chairman of Al Amerat club during the foundation general assembly meeting which took place on Saturday at the meeting hall of the Oman Women's Association. Al Bahrani was the only candidate in fray for this post.

It was a historic day for the Wilayat of Al Amerat as they selected on Saturday their historic first board directors of Al Amerat club. Al Amerat is among most populated city in Muscat Governorate besides Muscat, Seeb, Bausher, Qurayat and Muttrah.

The youth of Al Amerat will be looking for a busy schedule of sporting activities during the coming period as it is one of top populated cities and featured many top sporting events during the previous period.

Many members attended the foundation general assembly meeting besides representatives from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Al Amerat Wali office.

Ahmed bin Marhoon al Hadi was elected as the secretary-general, while Said bin Darweesh al Balushi became the treasurer. Both



were elected unopposed.

Eng Saif bin Mohammed al Barwani won the vice-chairman post after close contest with Mohammed bin Ramadhan al Balushi, representative of Wilayat of Al Amerat at Majlis Ashshura, and Mumtaz bin Faqir al Balushi, former board member

of Oman swimming and volleyball associations.

The five board members elected include Fawaz al Wahaibi, Rashid al Balushi, Ayooob al Hasani, Abdullah al Rahbi and Omar al Shibli. Salim al Hadi did not succeed as he had the less number of votes among the six members.

The elected board of directors of Al Amerat club will have their first board meeting soon to define the priorities of the club for the next period. Also, it is expected the board will announce the sub-committees of sports, cultural and youth activities in the club.

In January, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, unveiled the Council of Ministers' approval to announce sports and culture clubs in some wilayats including Al Amerat club from Muscat Governorate. The decision was within the context of the Royal attention accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to sports and culture clubs — given their role in honing the skills and talents of youth and serving as podiums for cultural, sports and youth activities.

OCT Ruwi crowned all-Omani tourney champions



MUSCAT: OCT Ruwi cruised to a 115-run victory over OCT Al Hail 'A' in the All-Omani Tournament final, held at the Oman Cricket Academy on April 21.

With 5 wins in 5 matches, OCT Ruwi were the competition's most dominant force. Their opponents on the night came out on the right side of a net run-rate tussle to advance from a group of 3 teams and went on to defeat OCT Muscat to book their place in the final.

Put to bat first, OCT Ruwi's top order clicked into gear once more. Mohammed al Balushi and Wasim Ismail Mohamed al Balushi forged a 79-run opening stand before the latter was dismissed in the 9th over.

However, there was no respite in sight for OCT Al Hail 'A' as newcomer Shuaib Ismail al Balushi combined with Mohammed for a



destructive 97-run partnership that effectively sealed the contest in the first innings.

The skipper's dazzling, unbeaten 81-run knock took OCT Ruwi to a mammoth 206-4 after 20 overs.

Mohammed finished on a well-made 64.

In response, OCT Al Hail 'A'

could only manage 91-9 in their 20. Abdul Jalil al Balushi led the scoring with 22 runs while Abdul Ghani al Balushi, Faris Said al Zadjali and Hisham Shafi Hisham chipped in with double-figure totals.

Ali Akbar Mohammed al Balushi and Zubair Ali Akabr al Balushi starred for OCT Ruwi

with the ball. They combined for 7 wickets, with individual figures of 4-8 and 3-5.

Simultaneously on Turf 2, OCT Seeb challenged OCT Muscat for third spot in what was a much more competitive encounter.

Batting first after winning the toss and led by a 61-run knock

from their captain Abbas al Balushi, OCT Seeb made their way to 135 all out in 19.1 overs. OCT Muscat's Shaed Ali al Balushi and Akbar Qader Baksh claimed 3 scalps each.

The run chase went right down to the wire, with OCT Muscat clinching victory off the very last ball. Contributions from Munthir al Balushi (35), Rashad al Balushi (33) and Majid Hussein Doshambah al Balushi (28) set the foundation upon which Waheed al Balushi and Sadiq al Balushi applied the finishing touches.

In the awards distribution ceremony held post final, Pankaj Khimji, Chairman Oman Cricket and Duleep Mendis, Head Coach and Chief Development Officer Oman Cricket, handed out the competition's Best Batsman and Best Bowler awards to Majid

Hussein Doshambah al Balushi of OCT Muscat and Zubair Ali Akabr al Balushi of OCT Ruwi respectively. The former finished as the tournament leading run-getter with 239 in 5 outings while the latter topped the wicket-taking charts with 15 wickets in same matches.

Mohammed al Balushi and Shuaib Ismail al Balushi, both of OCT Ruwi, took home the Player of the Tournament and Player of the Final awards respectively.

BRIEF SCORES: OCT Ruwi 206-4 in 20 overs (Shuaib Ismail al Balushi 81 (40b, 7x4, 5x6), Mohammed al Balushi 64 (45b, 2x4, 5x6); Nadhir Ghulam 1-37) beat OCT Al Hail 'A' 91-9 in 20 overs (Abdul Jalil al Balushi 22 (21b, 3x4, 1x6); Ali Akbar Mohammed al Balushi 4-8, Zubair Ali Akabr al Balushi 3-5) by 115 runs.

OCT Seeb 135 all out in 19.1 overs (Abbas al Balushi 61 (46b, 9x4); Shaed Ali al Balushi 3-17, Akbar Qader Baksh 3-19) lost to OCT Muscat 139-4 in 20 overs (Munthir al Balushi 35 (36b, 3x4); Amir Attallah al Balushi 1-25) by 6 wickets.

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World’s first green energy certification to boost Oman’s global positioning

Major recognition: OPAZ lauds award of first-ever certification for ACME Group’s Duqm green hydrogen project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has applauded ACME, a leading company in the renewable energy sector, on the receipt of the first-ever international certificate accredited for commercial production of green hydrogen and ammonia in the world.

ACME was awarded this certificate for its project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) — one of the zones supervised by OPAZ.

The company received this certificate from TÜV Rheinland, the leading international provider of inspection services which also specialises in independent certification services in the renewable energy sector.

The evaluation process, conducted by the German inspection company for ACME’s green hydrogen project in Duqm, proved that the project meets all the standards set to be globally certified.

The process included reviewing the various specified production



methods, transportation methods and the different hydrogen applications in the project, said OPAZ in a statement.

This international certification for commercial production of green hydrogen and ammonia allows the potential customers of this promising industry to ensure that the ammonia and hydrogen of these plants have been produced from renewable energy resources such as wind and sunlight.

This, further, attracts various international companies to invest in the renewable energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman and SEZAD in particular. It also promotes the government’s efforts to boost the Sultanate of Oman’s position on the global map in the field of green hydrogen production and export

as the first country in the world to be awarded this international certificate.

This acknowledgment will as well contribute to the shift to alternative energy and diversifying sources of income in accordance with Oman Vision 2040.

Commenting on this international certificate, Eng Yahya bin Khamis al Zadjali, Head of Operations - SEZAD, said, “We are pleased that ACME has received this certificate, emphasising the promising future of renewable energy sector in SEZAD, which enjoys a strategic location close to the resources of global energy.

In addition, the Zone is furnished with a package of infrastructure including ports

and roads, which will facilitate the export of this energy to various countries around the world.”

Manoj Upadhyay, Chairman of ACME Company, stated: “We are happy to receive the world’s first Green Hydrogen Certification from TÜV Rhineland for our commercial-scale Green Hydrogen and Ammonia project in Duqm, Sultanate of Oman. This is a major milestone for our project in Duqm. The Green Hydrogen Certification will pave the way for defining the criteria and process for the green certification.”

Jalal bin Abdulkarim al Lawati of OPAZ remarked: “ACME’s certificate marks a great achievement for renewable energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman and will contribute to localising

“This is a major milestone for our project in Duqm. The Green Hydrogen Certification will pave the way for defining the criteria and process for the green certification.”

MANOJ UPADHYAH
Chairman, ACME

this industry for which OPAZ has allocated about 200 sq km in Duqm. OPAZ also continues to study many other investments applications in this sector in other free zones such as Suhar, Salalah and Al Mazunah, in addition to Duqm.”

ACME, one of the largest companies in the alternative energy sector in India, recently announced a joint venture with the Norwegian company Scatec to support the green hydrogen project in Duqm. ACME also signed last August a land reservation agreement with OPAZ at Duqm. The project is expected to produce 100,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually in the first phase.

18 investment opportunities to be unveiled today



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with various government and private sector entities, will unveil on Sunday, April 24, 2022 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, a total of 18 investment opportunities in the tourism and waste management sectors.

The unveiling will take place under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in the presence of government dignitaries, ambassadors, chairpersons of private sector companies, business persons and investors.

Also taking part in the event are officials of Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAS), the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran), the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah) and the Jabal Bausher Heights Real Estate Development Company.

The goal is to attract foreign direct investment into the Sultanate of Oman, support economic diversification, drive GDP growth and enhance investment.

Key milestone completed in North-South Interconnector Project

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), member of Nama Group, celebrated over the weekend the completion and commissioning of the first node of the landmark North-South Interconnection project (Rabt) which, upon completion, will link the grids of north and south Oman via Duqm.

The internal grid of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) will be integrated into this unified grid as well.

A 400/132kV grid station at Nihada in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, representing the first node in the first phase of the Rabt project, was commissioned ahead of contractual schedule on April 20, 2022, OETC said in a post.

This was accomplished “despite various challenges and delays faced by the project team during both waves of Covid-19”, it noted.

The node, construction at a cost of RO 17 million, covers 400



kV and 132 kV installations, 400 kV GIS, 400/132 kV 500MVA transformers, 400 kV overhead lines, 132kV GIS and all auxiliary equipment, the state-owned transmission company said.

“This project will strengthen the national network and will cater to power at 132 kV levels to

Upon completion, the ‘Rabt’ project will lead to the creation of a unified National Electricity Grid, which is due for completion by 2026 at a total cost of RO 372 million.

(support) the PDO System as well. Big thanks to all who made this project a success,” the company added.

Upon completion, the ‘Rabt’ project will lead to the creation

of a unified National Electricity Grid, which is due for completion by 2026 at a total cost of RO 372 million.

In October 2020, OETC signed agreements totalling RO 183 million for the implementation of Phase 1 of the interconnection project.

It covers the construction of around 660km of 400kV overhead transmission lines that will eventually connect the Main Interconnected System (MIS) with the isolated networks of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) in Duqm.

This phase, slated for launch in 2023, also result in the inclusion of Haima and Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate into the future national grid.

Additionally, it will help strengthen electricity supply to PDO areas, currently served by a 132kV network, as well as reduce the energy company’s dependence on gas-fired power generation for its electricity needs.

A further 502km of 400kV transmission lines will be constructed as part of Phase 2 of the North South Interconnected project. Running south from the Duqm grid all the way to Dhofar, this final section is on track for completion in 2026.

Bank Nizwa wins awards in Islamic banking and sustainable finance

MUSCAT: A leading Islamic bank that has led transformational change in the sector by spearheading innovative initiatives and playing a key role in advocating Sharia-compliant financing in the country, Bank Nizwa has cemented its position as the preferred Islamic banking partner.

Attesting to its pioneering role, the bank recently won two awards on the same day. While the Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 hosted by 'Alam Al-Iktisaad' magazine honoured Bank Nizwa with the title of the 'Top Omani Brand in Islamic Finance', the bank's leadership role in Sustainable Islamic Finance also earned it recognition at the Oman Forum 2022.

The two prestigious events were held at the Majan Ballroom in Al Bustan Palace — A Ritz Carlton Hotel on March 30, 2022. The Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 took place in the evening under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said, whereas Oman Forum 2022 was



conducted in the morning under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation with Petroleum Development Oman acting as the Strategic Partner. It also welcomed Her Excellency Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation as chief guest and keynote speaker.

On behalf of the bank, the Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 received by Sayyidah Wisam bint al Said, Head of Corporate Communication and Marketing at

bank Nizwa, while 'leadership role in Sustainable Islamic Finance' Awards received by Khalid al Barwani, DGM Wholesale Banking.

Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa said, "We are indeed delighted to have received two prestigious awards on the same day. Bank Nizwa's continuous efforts towards enhancing its product portfolio, embracing digital excellence and providing a premium banking experience to customers through segmented focus have helped it to keep pace

with the evolving demands of the Islamic banking sector.

In addition, one of the most significant milestones has been the introduction of sustainable finance to our portfolio. Our efforts towards promoting sustainability through Sharia-compliant financing have been duly recognised in the community, and for that, we are honoured these two prestigious awards.

As a bank that is dedicated to the long-term socio-economic growth of the country, we will continue our relentless efforts towards accelerating the growth of Islamic finance in the region and setting new benchmarks along our journey." The Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 applauded Bank Nizwa's outstanding contribution to the Islamic finance industry. While innovation has been intrinsic to the bank's progress, Bank Nizwa has also paid keen attention to re-engineering its processes, developing its personnel, and leveraging its market knowledge to launch new business models.

Tethys Oil in Oman produces 317,947 oil barrels in March

MUSCAT: Tethys Oil's share of the production, before government take, from Blocks 3&4 onshore the Sultanate of Oman, in March 2022 amounted to 317,947 barrels of oil, corresponding to 10,256 barrels of oil per day.

The Official Selling Price (OSP) for Oman Export Blend Crude Oil for the month of March 2022 was \$83.62 per barrel. The OSP, as published by Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, is the benchmark price for Tethys Oil's monthly oil sales excluding trading and quality adjustments.

Tethys Oil, through its wholly owned subsidiary Tethys Oil Block 3 & 4 Ltd, has a 30 per cent interest in Blocks 3&4. Partners are Mitsui E&P Middle East with 20 per cent and the operator CC Energy Development (Oman branch) holding



the remaining 50 per cent. Tethys Oil is a Swedish oil company with focus on onshore areas with known oil discoveries.

The company's core area is the Sultanate of Oman, where it holds interests in Blocks 3&4, Block 49, Block 56 and Block 58.

Tethys Oil has net working interest 2P reserves of 26.2 million barrels of oil (mmbo) and net working interest 2C Contingent Resources of 15.6 mmbo and had an average oil production of 11,136 barrels per day from Blocks 3&4 during 2021.

OOMCO launches annual At'a charity campaign for Ramadhan

MUSCAT: Celebrating the holy month of Ramadhan by giving back to the community, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has launched its annual At'a charity campaign.

In its fifth year running, the campaign seeks to serve those in need with a range of different charitable and sustainable initiatives.

Among its activities this year, the fuel marketing company has pledged support to Ihsaan Association by donating seven fuel cards for the association's ambulances, which offer a special service transporting elderly patient and those with chronic diseases between their homes and hospitals.

Furthermore, OOMCO is giving away 1,000 iftar boxes from its Ahlain stores in an initiative called 'Iftar on the Road'. It is also supporting 50 low-income families with fuel cards, donating care packages to the Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Childhood, and giving special gifts to children suffering from



cancer.

"Since inception, Oman Oil Marketing Company has always committed itself to promoting socio-economic development in the community. Having been a core part of our CSR programme since 2018, At'a aims to promote the spirit of giving and encourage others to do the same. We're pleased to be partnering with some of Oman's most esteemed charities and making sure our support is directed towards the families and community members that need it most", said Khamis bin Nasser al Shuaibi, General Manager of Shared

Services at OOMCO.

OOMCO's CSR strategy includes various campaigns and projects that run all through the year and are focused on promoting In-Country Value.

Scholarships, SME support, raising vehicle safety awareness and delivering education on renewable energy are just some of them. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the company has also been active in its support with donations, as well as utilising its service station screens to air information and instructive videos from the Ministry of Health.

Toyota Camry now with exclusive biggest excitement benefits

MUSCAT: Own a Toyota Camry and benefit with service from 2 years/20,000 kms to 3 years/30,000 kms service (whichever is earlier) and 1 year insurance (Or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 250-RO 275).

The campaign is valid until May 19, 2022. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

The stylish and popular Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options, including a new 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 243 nm of torque and is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift Multi-mode automatic transmission; a 3.5-litre V6 engine with D-4S fuel injection system that produces 298 hp and 356 nm of torque and is mated to an eight-speed multi-



mode automatic transmission; and an electrified hybrid system, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors. The combined power of the two power sources is 208 hp. It is also paired with an Electrically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission, delivering heightened driving pleasure. The Toyota Camry introduces a level of refinement that exceeds expectations.

Thanks to Toyota New Global Architecture, (TNGA), Camry offer a comfortable

and stable ride with superior handling characteristics. A new front fascia incorporates a more defined lower-intake area, with grille bars extending dynamically to the sides creating a refined look that is enhanced by chrome-plated ornamentation for a premium feel.

The sportier grades wear a noticeably different body style than the premium grades, with a bold redesigned lower fascia shape featuring a powerfully expressive gloss black mesh grille and larger side vents.

Sayyarati auto finance offer comes with multiple benefits

MUSCAT: As part of its vision to serve customers better, everyday, Bank Muscat launched a highly competitive Sayyarati Auto Finance offer on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan and in line with the bank's commitment to constantly develop and launch new products and provide added value and benefits to its customers.

The launch of the Sayyarati offer has seen an excellent response from customers all over Oman, and the bank has reminded all those who wish to buy their dream car to take advantage of the special rates which are available only till May 31, 2022.

The offer is of great help for both

customers and auto dealerships across Oman as the holy month usually witnesses the maximum automotive sales in the Sultanate of Oman.

The exclusive Sayyarati offer includes a special discounted rate that starts at just 3.5 per cent for both new and used cars.

The highly competitive rates are available for a period up to 10 years along with free third-party insurance for used car financing. The new Sayyarati offer will be available for Omani nationals working in government and semi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies.

Expatriate residents working



in government and semi-government organisations as well as Tier 1 companies can also make use of the offer to purchase a car of their choice. The feature-rich auto finance can

be obtained within the shortest possible time from Sayyarati Centres and Bank Muscat branches located across Oman.

The monthly loan instalments for Sayyarati finance are

automatically deducted from the customer's account once the mandate to do so is provided to the bank by the customer.

For the added convenience of customers during the holy month of Ramadhan, the bank's Sayyarati centres at Wattayah and Salalah will be open in the evenings too from 8 pm-11 pm on all weekdays (and 8 pm-11 pm only on Saturday).

Loans up to RO 60,000 are available for Omanis — for both new and used cars. The holy month witnesses a lot of interest from customers to buy cars and benefit from the different offers available during Ramadhan.

Bank Muscat is also very keen to enhance cooperation and partnership with different car agencies to offer the best services possible.

With some of the world's best and safest vehicles available for purchase in the Sultanate of Oman, the bank continues to do its part in making attractive auto finance easily available for people in Oman.

To check eligibility, please go to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx>. Please go to <https://bm.click/SayyaratiEN> for more details about the bank's Sayyarati Auto Finance.

EU sees way to pay for Russian gas without breaching sanctions

BRUSSELS: EU companies may be able to work around Russia's demand to receive gas payments in roubles without breaching sanctions if they pay in euros or dollars which are then converted into the Russian currency, the European Commission said.

The companies would also need to seek additional conditions on the transactions, such as a statement that they consider their contractual obligations complete once they have deposited the non-Russian currencies.

Moscow has warned Europe it risks having gas supplies cut unless it pays in roubles. In March it issued a decree proposing that energy buyers open accounts at Gazprombank to make payments in euros or dollars, which would then be converted to roubles.

The Commission said earlier this month that the decree risked breaching EU sanctions since it would put the effective completion of the purchase into the hands of the Russian authorities. — **Reuters**

MoU signed for launch of nano-diamond coatings production line in Oman

Innovative solution: First coating line established within facility of United Engineering Services in Rusayl Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Well-known Oman-based international tech firm United Engineering Services LLC (UES) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Muscat-based Azd Technologies LLC (AZD) to launch the first nano-diamond coating production line in the Sultanate of Oman.

For the past 12 months, AZD and UES have been working towards a first-of-its-kind nano-diamond coating production line in the GCC by applying customised industrial-grade nano-diamond technology, which increases the lifespan of metal components used in industrial applications substantially.

Tariq al Barwani, CEO of UES, said, "The vision behind UES was to provide the Sultanate



of Oman with a truly global leader in engineering and manufacturing solutions, which is in line with the country's Vision 2040. When approached by Azd Technologies, UES fully welcomed the concept and the requirement for such a high-end coating application within Oman.

Azd's concept complements our goals towards knowledge and technologies transfer and creating real In-Country Value within the local market. The first coating line has been established within our facility in Rusayl Industrial City to support this new technology in Oman."

According to Reid Larson, Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Azd Technologies, "Our first area of concentration is the application of nano-diamond coatings on various components related to Down Hole Well and Surface Equipment for the Oil and Gas industry since these components are a major contribution in oil production.

Increasing lifespan and reducing downtime using Azd Technologies and UES Engineering capabilities we will be able to provide the industry with a final product that outperforms the existing coatings available and maximise

The vision behind UES was to provide the Sultanate of Oman with a truly global leader in engineering and manufacturing solutions, which is in line with the country's Vision 2040.

TARIQ AL BARWANI
CEO, UES

In-Country Values."

AZD Nano-Diamonds Technology is protected by over 20 global patents and is in use by numerous companies across different industries worldwide. Nano-diamonds have many of the characteristics of actual diamonds, namely extreme hardness and high thermal conductivity.

This means that coated components are better suited to high-wear environments, have low friction coefficients,

and perform better in high-temperature applications. These attributes are crucial in allowing United Engineering Services to supply its customers with industry-leading components.

"Today, any high wear-resistant metal components must be sent outside of the Sultanate of Oman to be strengthened.

By having a nano-diamond coating Production and Process line in Oman, the local market will be able to lead in a rapidly growing sector and significantly contribute towards ICV and job creation", said HH Sayyid Azzan bin Kais Tarik al Said, Co-founder, and CEO of Azd Technologies.

Because the AZD Nano-Diamond coating is safe for humans to work with, and does not damage aquatic life, it has been approved for use by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Unlike traditional coating methods, the nano-diamond coating contains no harmful chemicals and is environmentally safe. With safety and performance in mind, UES will be able to offer a unique set of products to its well-established customer base.

ONEIC partners with Energy Dome to offer Long Duration Energy Storage



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Well-known Omani contractor ONEIC has announced a partnership with Energy Dome of Italy to offer the latter's proprietary Long Duration Energy Storage solutions to the Omani market.

Milan-based Energy Dome has developed breakthrough technology that, for the first time, makes Long Duration Energy Storage an economically viable proposition. Its product, the CO2 Battery, relies on proven components and well understood processes making utility scale wind and solar fully dispatchable, says MSX-listed ONEIC.

Energy Dome has developed the CO2 Battery, a thermodynamic process that efficiently and cost effectively stores electrical energy, on a utility scale, with a duration sweet

spot ranging from 4 to 24 hours.

Whilst the CO2 Battery is a novel process, it relies on off-the-shelf components, has no performance degradation during its 25-year design life and has a highly competitive round-trip efficiency (>75 per cent) with no degradation over time.

Nawaf al Balushi, COO of ONEIC commented: "In Oman, the peak demand is growing by around 6-7.5 per cent annually. According to Oman Vision 2040, the contribution of renewable energy should reach 20 per cent and 35-39 per cent of total consumption in the years 2030 and 2040 respectively.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) has ambitious plans for green hydrogen projects. To unleash the overall economic benefits and maximise the power efficiency from such projects, energy storage facilities will be necessary."

Claudio Spadacini, founder and CEO of Energy Dome, stated: "If just 5 per cent of the Middle East desert was used to generate solar power, it could meet all of the 25TWh annual electricity demand of the entire world. The key enabler to make this happen is Long Duration Energy Storage and we are very happy to enter into an agreement with ONEIC of Oman to provide just that.

Our CO2 Battery, combined with the installation capabilities of ONEIC, will set a new standard for low cost, efficient energy storage, making solar PV fully dispatchable. We are grateful for ONEIC having selected our technology as their energy storage platform."

ONEIC and Energy Dome are targeting a rapid uptake the CO2 battery projects in the region with the first CO2 Battery project slated for financial close later this year.

MSX closes the week lower

MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week lower by 0.09 per cent. The Financial Index closed lower by 0.48 per cent while the Industrial Index ended lower by 0.68 per cent. The Services Index ended higher by 0.38 per cent. The MSX Shariah Index closed lower by 0.13 per cent.

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) is preparing to authorise the use of 'short selling' for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman — one of a raft of initiatives aimed at attracting new market makers as well as boosting liquidity in the nation's capital market.

Commonly practised in bourses around the world, but hitherto barred in the Sultanate of Oman, short selling is an investment or trading strategy that speculates on the decline in a stock or other security's price.

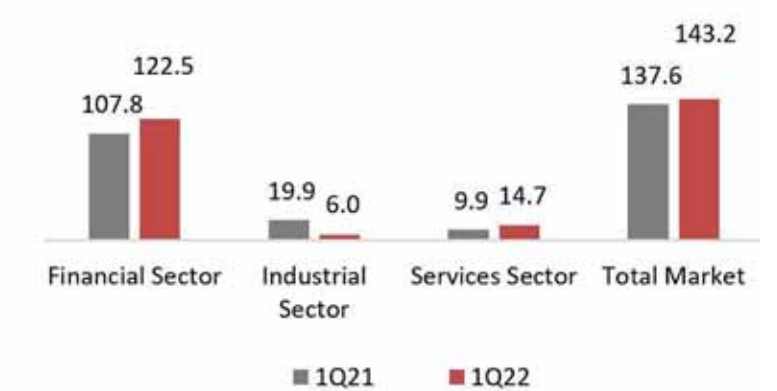
Typically, investors sell stocks they have borrowed from a lender on the expectation the price will drop.

The hope is to rebuy and replace the stocks they borrowed at a lower price. The difference between the price they sell the stock at, and the price they buy back the stock at, is the profit, say experts.

Locally, the earnings season ended, even though Omantel is yet to report its initials for first quarter of 2022.

The combined net profits of MSX-listed companies grew by about 4 per cent YoY during first quarter of 2022 to about RO 143m. On sector-wise basis, the Financial Sector showed a YoY growth of about 14 per cent while the Services Sector posted a 50 per cent YoY growth in combined net profits of the companies compared to first quarter of 2022 and supported the combined net profits of the stock market.

MSX -Combined Net Profit for 1Q22



Source: MSX, U Capital Research note: Omantel is excluded

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) is preparing to authorise the use of 'short selling' for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman — one of a raft of initiatives aimed at attracting new market makers as well as boosting liquidity in the nation's capital market.

The Industrial sector, however, saw a drop of 70 per cent YoY in its combined net profits, largely due to a significant drop in Food & Beverage sub-sector (-76 per cent YoY) and the Electrical & Mechanical sub-sector (-69 per cent YoY), while the Cement and Engineering & Construction sub-sectors turned to combined losses for the quarter.

The largest improvement in combined net profits within the Financial Sector was witnessed by the Investment & Brokerage sub-sector (+86 per cent YoY or RO 6.9m).

The banking and leasing sub-sectors saw continued recovery in their combined net profits on the back of lower provision expenses this year as compared

to last year, further supported by rise in operating income of most banks.

The insurance sub-sector, however, continues to be plagued by pandemic-related issues.

The combined net profit of the insurance sector fell 4 per cent YoY.

The Energy sub-sector posted an increase in combined net profit of RO 2.1m, or 72 per cent YoY while the Tourism & Hospitality sub-sector also posted an increase in its combined net profit worth RO 1.68m or 145 per cent YoY.

The Food & Beverage Industry posted a decline of RO 7.3m in their combined net profits in first quarter of 2022 as compared to first quarter of 2021.

This is primarily due to YoY net profit declines of Oman Flour Mills, Salalah Mills and Dhofar Poultry, likely on elevated global wheat prices, which are up about 63 per cent since end-Dec'21.

Most of the sub-sectors have witnessed recovery on quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) basis during first quarter of 2022, except for a few from the Industrial Sector. Overall, the combined net profit of MSX-listed companies is up over two-fold on QoQ basis.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

European banks’ buyback boom faces bad-debt risks

European bank investors started 2022 expecting a new era of bumper payouts. Their hopes may be scuppered as the Ukraine war has raised the chances of a recession. Big lenders, like Barclays and BNP Paribas, may have to focus on rebuilding buffers against loan defaults, which are slimmer than before the pandemic, especially since governments have less room to support the economy.

Granted, there are bright spots. Money-market prices imply the European Central Bank will lift interest rates above zero this year, while the Bank of England has already hiked three times. That boosts banks’ revenue.

The average net interest margin for the 10 biggest UK and euro zone banks will rise to 1.56% this year and 1.62% next, compared with 1.52% in 2021.

Bank of America analysts in February estimated that European lenders would hand almost 90 billion euros to investors through dividends and share buybacks this year and a further 70 billion euros in 2023, compared with pre-pandemic levels of roughly 60 billion euros.

That may now be a stretch. Rising energy prices and continued supply-chain blockages are crimping growth: the International Monetary Fund on Tuesday cut its 2022 euro zone GDP growth forecast to 2.8%, from 3.9% in January.

Banks have relatively slim bad-debt reserves to guard against such a scenario. The 10 biggest European and UK lenders by assets collectively held 115 billion euros of provisions for credit losses at the end of 2021, equivalent to 1.7% of their combined loans. That compares with 2% in 2020 and 1.8% in 2019.

Banks may have to top up those protective buffers if the economy takes a dive, eating into profits. All the more so since governments and central banks have less scope to step in with fiscal stimulus or rate cuts, respectively.

Public debt has soared in the last couple of years and inflation is at its highest in decades in many major developed economies. Banks are undoubtedly in a better position now than in early 2020.

— Reuters

The average net interest margin for the 10 biggest UK and euro zone banks will rise to 1.56% this year and 1.62% next, compared with 1.52% in 2021.



GOLDEN HARVEST

An Iraqi farmer winnows wheat during harvest in Iraq’s southern Dhi Qar province. — AFP

A new wave of fintech in Oman



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The writer is a member of the International Press Association

IT SEEMS LIKE THROUGHOUT THE GCC THERE IS A NEW WAVE OF FINTECH INNOVATION BOTH FROM REGULATORY PERSPECTIVE, AS WELL AS IN TECH DEVELOPMENT.

While I was in Dubai last month, attending a number of blockchain and fintech events, I met my friend Mohammed al Tamam, the Co-Founder and CCO of the Omani fintech Mamun.

Once back home, we continue the conversation that started in UAE. I was fascinated by what I considered Mohammed’s greatest achievement: signing up a client for financial services integration outside of Oman, in Saudi Arabia.

It seems like throughout the GCC there is a new wave of fintech innovation both from regulatory perspective, as well as in tech development. During my time in Oman, between 2012 and 2016, the interoperability of financial services was close to zero.

No banks were offering API integrations, and talking about fintech was like imagining the future. I am pleased to learn from Mohammed that the future has arrived in Oman.

“I won’t say that there has been a huge change over the last 6 years, but I think that from 2019 until today, is where we are seeing a big mental shift in the banking sector.”

Said Mohammed al Tamam “Some of the banks that we used to talk to a year and half ago for example, have completely u-turned in the way they see financial technology. Those who never supported it, now they champion it.”

This is something that I have also observed in other geographies. Once innovation becomes the talk of the day, then progresses are tracked very quickly, one after another.

“I think that the central bank of Oman is really pushing for change and transformation” continued Mohammed “that has started internally first, and now are beginning to open up to ideas such as open banking and empowering the consumers.”

Open banking is the scenario when businesses can integrate financial services within their ecosystems without leaving their platforms. For example, when purchasing an item from a marketplace, we find our Internet banking interface in the shopping cart at the checkout.

“If you look at the chain of the events in terms of fintech licensing, starting from 2019, you see that Oman is headed in the right direction. For example, the Regulatory Sandbox for startups, and the

Payment Services Provider license with all the cascade frameworks. It is just a beginning, but indeed significant.”

Commented Mohammed, “But if we compare to other GCC countries such as Saudi Arabia, we see that there is still space to grow. Over there, they have licences for Account Information Services, Bank Account Aggregators, Micro Lending, Open Banking Services etc. Oman is going through this transformation now.”

Mohammed has also described to me the tech framework that is being created to connect the GCC.

His company Mamun is playing an important role in bridging the last mile of operations for other GCC tech providers that wish to connect with the Omani banking system.

Lastly, he shared with me how the Human Resources scene has changed in the post pandemic era: “Oman and the GCC used to be a dream destination for talents in the Middle East and South Asia. Tech engineers and computer scientists were thrilled at the idea of moving here to work.

But things have changed a lot. Now we find developers that are willing to earn less, as long as they can work from the comfort of their homes.”

A perfect storm for developing countries



NGAIRE WOODS

The author is dean of the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford.

Through no fault of their own, developing countries face a perfect storm of famine, political upheaval and debt crises. Russia’s war on Ukraine and the Western-led sanctions it triggered are partly to blame, as are Covid-19 lockdowns in advanced economies, which deprived poor countries of vital tourism and export revenue.

Millions of lives are now at risk, but mitigation is possible. It should start at this month’s spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Policy makers have much to address — starting with spiralling food prices. The Russia-Ukraine war, involving countries that between them supply 29 per cent of the world’s wheat, has contributed to a 67 per cent increase in wheat prices since the beginning of this year.

Export bans imposed by other

wheat producers are also fuelling price increases, as is a fertiliser shortage because of reduced supplies from Belarus and Russia.

Unsurprisingly, famine is spreading. The first countries to be hit are those that were in desperate straits prior to Russia’s invasion.

UN World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley recently issued a stark warning: “If you think we’ve got hell on earth now, you just get ready. If we neglect northern Africa, northern Africa’s coming to Europe. If we neglect the Middle East, [the] Middle East is coming to Europe.”

Rising food prices and hunger will make riots and political upheaval more likely. Even before the war in Ukraine began, people had been plunged into crisis.

In March, large-scale protests erupted in countries including Cameroon, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Spain.

Governments that can take preventive action are already

doing so. Egypt, for example, which imports around 80 per cent of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine, recently introduced a price cap to counter the soaring price of unsubsidised bread (the government already subsidises bread for most of the population).

The government also announced an economic aid package totalling 130 million Egyptian pounds (\$7 million). These measures were made possible by assistance from the IMF and Saudi Arabia. But many countries have yet to receive such help.

Failure to cooperate is driving famine and conflict. Astonishingly, global stocks of rice, wheat and maize — the world’s three major staples — are apparently at historic highs.

Even stocks of wheat, the commodity most affected by the Ukraine war, are “well above levels during the 2007-08 food-price crisis”, while estimates suggest that about three-quarters of Russian

and Ukrainian wheat exports had already been delivered before the invasion.

A serious debt crisis is also developing as many low-income countries, stretched to their limit by Covid-19, are hit by higher food and fuel prices, lower tourism revenues, reduced access to international capital markets, trade and supply-chain disruptions, depressed remittances and a historic surge in refugee flows.

Developing-country debt has soared to a 50-year high, at about 250 percent of government revenues. About 60 per cent of countries that were eligible for the pandemic-related G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative are experiencing or are at high risk of debt distress.

Moreover, slower global growth and rising inflation, together with tighter financial conditions in richer countries, are spurring capital outflows from developing economies, forcing them to

devalue their currencies and increase interest rates. As World Bank President David Malpass recently noted, “never have so many countries experienced a recession at once.”

Malpass added that advanced economies’ stimulus policies have helped to make matters worse by fueling price rises and increasing inequality around the world.

Finding a genuinely global solution to these problems is now vital. In past debt crises, rich countries have used the IMF and World Bank to push the adjustment burden onto developing economies, arguing that they must undertake reforms before receiving assistance.

But the most potent forces buffeting indebted low-income economies today are global and beyond their control — and IMF and World Bank member countries must pool resources and cooperate to address them.

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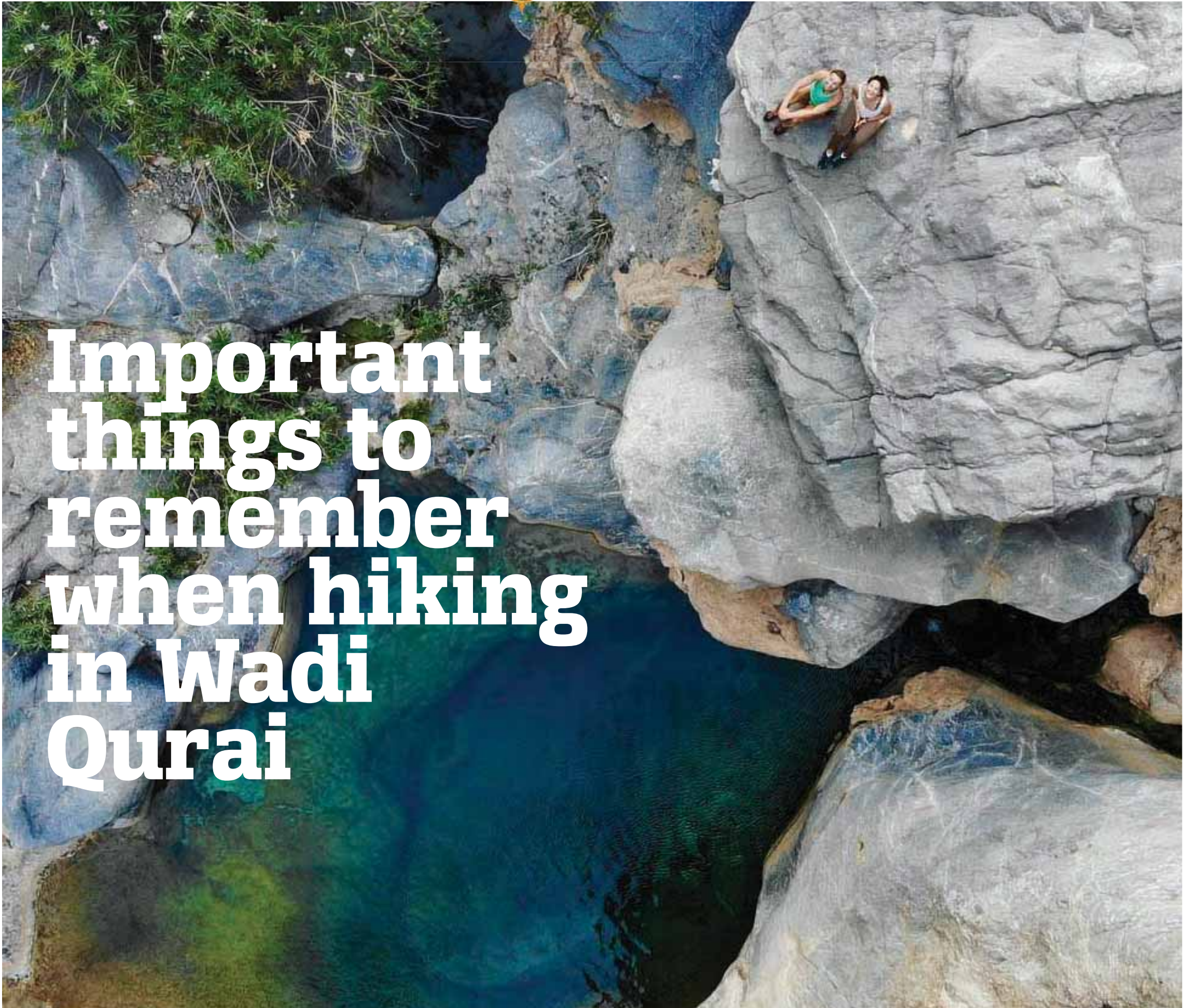
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Important things to remember when hiking in Wadi Qurai

By Yeru Ebuon
Instagram: @yru_here

It's hard to miss the goats. They'd been there as long as the falaj network was built to provide convenient water to the villages nearby. They come in tribes with their kids usually trailing far behind doing their best to keep up with the adults.

They stare at every visitor for a few minutes trying to determine whether they're friendly. In the end, their assessment is always that all newcomers are a threat so any effort to get close to them is met with panic. And then they run away, expertly navigating the rocky terrain that surrounds Wadi Qurai and then fading into the bushes.

The falaj system of Wadi Qurai is famous amongst hikers all over the Sultanate of Oman. It is scenic with minor challenges to help amateur hikers get acquainted with the beauty of trekking.

Located about two hours from Muscat hidden in one of the corners of Samayil, Wadi Qurai has maintained its old-world charm and here, the locals are insistent that the impeccable state of nature is preserved.

"We have several rules we want people to abide by when they visit. Number one of those is no swimming in the falaj as these

waters are used by the villagers for different purposes — some for cooking and managing their farms and homes," shared Mohammed who we've met while he was tending his goats.

Mohammed shared that although the villagers don't complain, it is their wish that visitors keep their noise down. "It's very quiet here and people are very conscious about their privacy," he shared.

Our trek was only comprised of three people — a quick getaway organised by Ahmed al Jaabri of Oman Outdoor Adventure as he felt like he needed his weekend breather.

"Many of the people I brought to Wadi Qurai are impressed by the location. It has one of the most amazing falaj network snaking its way into the wadi. The villagers also managed to create this water bridge so that the water can flow directly into the village," he explained while we were on our way traversing the road leading to Nizwa.

Unlike other wadis, Wadi Qurai is smaller but it is packed with a lot of scenes and small pools all made beautiful by thriving lichen and moss.

Just as Ahmed described it, the small water bridge which helps people cross to the other side of the wadi as well has been one of the most photographed features of the wadi. It was a testament to the creativity and ingenuity of the dwellers in the area.



Wadi Qurai is also dotted with different trees adding a refreshing green to the surrounding.

"There are many sources of water hidden in the whole of Wadi Qurai. One guy said that there are a total of 19 of these water sources. Although this is yet to be verified, it's quite interesting hunting them down and I know a few people who'd like to see all of these water sources," Ahmed shared.

"Anyone can visit Wadi Qurai anytime



during the day. It's a quick trip and I've seen children doing this trek. The risks are very minimal and on difficulty level, the trek is definitely just a one. The whole trek can be completed in 20-30 minutes and this already includes several stops for photography among other things," Ahmed shared.

"I think it's the biggest pool that is a fitting finale for the whole trek. Measuring about 20 metres by 10 metres and about 3 metres deep, its emerald water filled with

small fishes makes the trip worth it. The area surrounding the natural pool is a good spot to lounge around as the canyon provides a good cover from the sun," he added.

"For me, however, the best time of the day to visit is in the early morning.

You can do the trek and then on your way back, you can take a detour to Fanja souq and grab some Omani or Yemeni food at one of the restaurants on the way. That's usually how we end a good day trek," he said.

"It's my first time to do the Wadi Qurai trek. It really is an easy trek and what I love about it is that you don't have to worry about bringing with you a lot of things cause the whole stretch is just about 30 minutes long. The view and the serenity of the place are worth a day trip." Jaja Teng, one of the regular trekkers of the group shared.

"We have some problems of people not paying attention to signboard warnings so some villagers took it upon themselves to remind the people of what not to do," Mohammed shared.

"While we love to share the beauty of this place to our visitors, livelihoods are dependent upon this falaj so we take utmost care of the surrounding. I hope they always take their garbage with them when they go," Mohammed said.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

We have warned you of a near punishment — the Day when a person will observe what his hands have produced, and the faithless will say, "O, I wish I were dust".

Al Naba'



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QUESTION:
A traveller gets sick while on his way, the doctor advised him to stop his Ramadhan fasting as it may affect his health? What is he supposed to do?

ANSWER:
Better to break. However, he should make up for the missed days.

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

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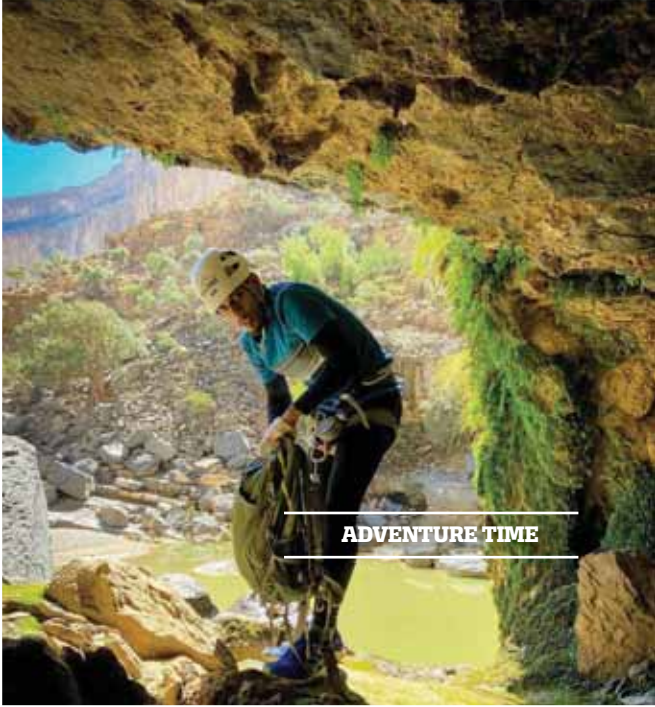


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AROUND THE WORLD

LITERATURE

Tiny Bronte book, unseen for a century, goes on sale in New York



A MINIAURE BOOK of poems written by a 13-year-old Charlotte Bronte was unveiled in New York on Thursday after more than a century hidden away. Smaller than a playing card, the 15-page manuscript dated 1829 is a collection of ten unpublished poems.

Titled "A Book of Ryhmes (sic) by Charlotte Bronte, Sold by Nobody, and Printed by Herself," the volume is hand-stitched in its original brown paper covers. It is the last of more than two dozen miniature works created by the "Jane Eyre" novelist known to remain in private hands.

The book hasn't been seen in public since November 1916, when it sold at auction in New York City for \$520.

Now it is up for sale at the New York International Antiquarian Book Fair, with an asking price of \$1.25 million. The fair opened on Thursday and runs until Sunday.

The existence of the handwritten "A Book of Ryhmes" has long been known to scholars, having been mentioned in Elizabeth Gaskell's 1857 biography of Bronte.

But the poems themselves, whose titles include "The Beauty of Nature," "Songs of an Exile" and "On Seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel" have never been published.

Raised in relative isolation in the moorland village of Haworth in Yorkshire, England, Bronte and her younger sisters Emily and Anne entertained themselves by weaving intricate stories set in a sophisticated imaginary world.

Their imaginations spawned novels hailed as classics of English literature, including Charlotte's "Jane Eyre," Emily's "Wuthering Heights" and Anne's "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall."

Like many female writers of the time, they originally published their works under male pseudonyms.

At the start of "A Book of Rhymes," or "Ryhmes" as Bronte spelled it, she writes: "The following are attempts at rhyming of an inferior nature it must be acknowledged but they are nevertheless my best."

She also refers to the imaginary world that the Bronte sisters created along with their brother Branwell.

"This book is written by myself but I pretend that the Marquis of Duro & Lord Charles Wellesley in the Young Men's World have written one like it," she wrote.

The miniature volumes remained in the family until the 1890s, when they began to be sold to collectors in Britain and America.

More than 100 years later they continue to garner great interest.

In November 2019, a Charlotte Bronte miniature manuscript, an issue of her "Young Men's Magazine," sold for 780,000 euros (\$850,000).

In December last year, a group of British libraries and museums purchased a collection of books and manuscripts, including seven of Charlotte's miniatures for £15 million (\$19.5 million).

New York-based James Cummins Bookseller is selling "A Book of Ryhmes" in partnership with London rare books firm Maggs Bros.

They are doing so on behalf of an anonymous seller "who wishes to make certain of the work's future preservation," they said in a press release. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

'Speaking to the soul': Kyiv orchestra starts European tour



AHEAD OF THEIR first concert since the start of Russia's invasion, members of the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra voice hope that their music will heal troubled souls and help boost Ukrainian culture.

Some of the orchestra's musicians fled the country to the sound of Russian bombs, others remained in Ukraine but had to leave their homes and have been playing only to their families or in bomb shelters.

The concert at the Warsaw Philharmonic on Thursday will start a European tour for the orchestra.

"Our concerts are truly a cultural mission," Oleksii Pshenychnikov, a 22-year-old second violin in the orchestra, told AFP during a break in the rehearsals.

"In Ukraine, we say there is a 'cultural front', meaning it is not escaping from the war, it is another aspect of the war," Pshenychnikov said.

The men in the orchestra have been granted special dispensation from Ukrainian authorities to leave the country as martial law is in place in Ukraine and fighting age men are not normally allowed to leave.

The exemption only lasts until the end of the tour and its Italian conductor Luigi Gaggero said he hoped other venues will come forward to offer to host the orchestra "maybe until the end of the war".

Gaggero, who had himself been due to travel to Ukraine on the day the conflict began, said the process of rehearsing together had been invigorating for musicians forced to spend long weeks apart.

"They do not just feel nostalgia for a job, they feel nostalgia



for the very reason of their existence, which is music. It is like the air they breathe and they can finally breathe again," he said.

Several of the musicians are travelling with their whole families and loved ones left behind are on everyone's minds as the conflict intensifies in southern and eastern parts of the country.

'TRANSMITTING OUR PAIN'

The rehearsals are accompanied by therapy sessions.

Participants were sceptical about the idea at first, but organisers said more and more are taking part.

"Music, particularly being able to practise my violin, has helped me to get away from the terrible reality," said Elizaveta Zaitseva, 25.

"Now I can live again in my own world, the one I am used to, the world of music," said Zaitseva, who studies in Nuremberg in Germany.

Thursday's concert will include the works of Ukrainian composers Maxim Berezovsky, Myroslav Skoryk and Boris Lyatoshynsky as well as a piece by Polish composer Henryk Wieniawski.

"It is unfortunately because of the war but our culture has a big opportunity" to make lesser-known composers known in the West, Zaitseva said.

"Europe will become much richer if it discovers the richness of Ukrainian culture."

Speaking at the Warsaw Philharmonic, where the walls are decorated with stark images of the ruins of post-war Warsaw, Zaitseva said she hoped that the music she plays could "access people's souls".

"Through music and art we are speaking to the soul, we are transmitting our pain and our wishes, our hopes into people's hearts through music," she said. — **AFP**

CHANGING WORLD

Small bees better at coping with warming, bumblebees struggle: Study



CLIMATE CHANGE could lead to more small-bodied bees but fewer bumblebees, according to research published on Wednesday, warning of potential "cascading" effects on plant pollination and across whole ecosystems.

Scientists in the United States trapped and studied more than 20,000 bees over eight years in an area of the Rocky Mountains to find out how different types of bees reacted to changing climatic conditions.

The authors said that while environmental conditions varied from year to year, the sub-alpine region from which they took samples is "particularly vulnerable to climate change", with generally warming spring temperatures and earlier snow melt.

They found that comb-building cavity nesters and larger bodied bees declined in abundance as temperatures increased, while smaller, soil-nesting bees increased.

"Our research suggests that climate-induced changes in temperature, snowpack and summer precipitation may drastically reshape bee communities," the authors said.

BUMBLEBEES 'MORE THREATENED'

Researchers said the findings suggest a reduction of bigger bees, including in the families of bumblebee, leafcutters and mason bees, with higher temperatures.

Declines were particularly marked for bumblebees, which the researchers said suggests "this group is more threatened under climate warming than other bees in our system".

That tallies with other studies showing that bumblebees, the dominant polli-

nators in many ecosystems, have a lower heat tolerance than other bees and move to cooler regions at higher altitudes as temperatures warm.

Researchers said their findings suggest both bumblebees' body size and nest behaviour could also make them more vulnerable in a warming world.

In general, the authors said climate-driven changes to pollinator communities "could have cascading effects on pollination and ecosystem functioning".

For example, they said losing bigger bees, which tend to fly further for food, may mean a reduction in longer-distance pollination.

The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, was specifically focused on mountainous areas, but the researchers said other research across the US showed declines in larger bees in response to environmental changes.

They did however say in their findings that drier conditions favoured bees with specialist diets may not be applicable to other ecosystems, where climate change is expected to bring more rainfall.

Insects are the world's top pollinators — 75 per cent of 115 top global food crops depend on animal pollination, including cocoa, coffee, almonds and cherries, according to the UN.

In a landmark 2019 report, scientists concluded that nearly half of all insect species worldwide are in decline and a third could disappear altogether by century's end.

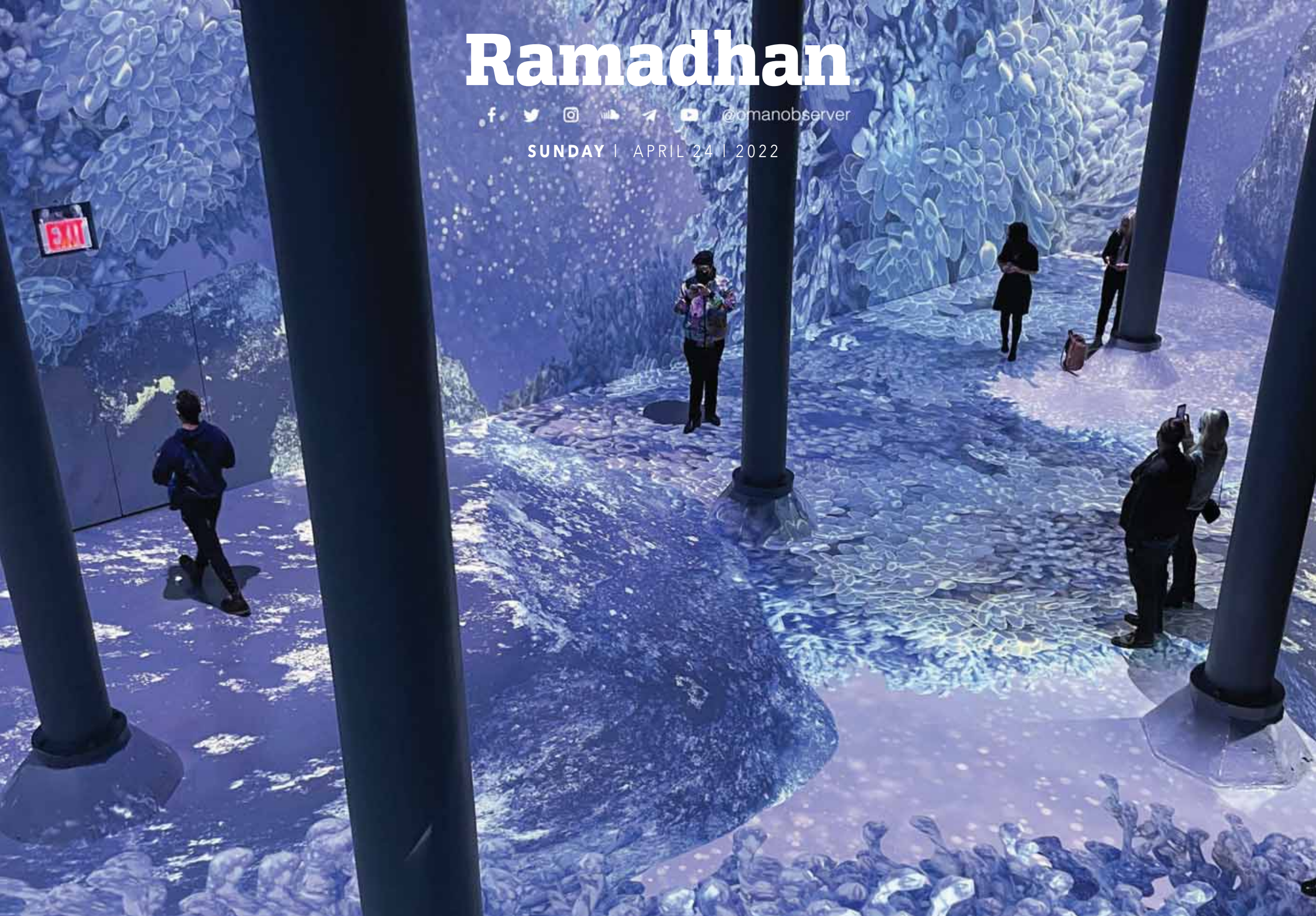
One in six species of bees have gone regionally extinct somewhere in the world.

The main drivers of extinction are thought to be habitat loss and pesticide use. — **AFP**

Ramadhan

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SUNDAY | APRIL 24 | 2022



Creating a Colour of the Year for All Time and Space

THE EVENTS OF the past couple of years have led most of us to spend much more time online. So it makes sense that Pantone Color Institute's pick for its 2022 colour of the year — an intense purple called Very Peri — is inspired in part by the metaverse.

"This is not a forecast. This is really about what's happening," said Laurie Pressman, vice-president of Pantone, which markets a colour-matching system that allows, say, a designer in Italy conversing with a client in Argentina to speak about exactly the same shade of yellow. Each December, the company singles out what it says it believes will be the next year's dominant hue, based on developments in fashion, interiors and new technologies. And the latest tech, Pressman said by telephone, has big implications for the future of colour that go beyond mere trends.

Video gaming, for example, is having a notable effect on colour, she said, with people more frequently entering into a virtual space, "creating avatars and wanting to dress themselves in that way, or creating collections possibly from a palette that could not necessarily be replicated in the real world." (There is a limit to the pigments that can be safely produced without toxins and consistently reproduced in the physical realm, she said. Not so online, where the options are endless.)

Appropriately, Very Peri is the first Pantone colour of the year that was not plucked from an existing catalog of thousands of hues, but instead was developed from scratch.



The new colour promotes looking at the world "through different eyes" and inspiring "unexpected solutions to what we call daring minds," Leatrice Eiseman, Pantone's executive director, said in a phone interview.

To demonstrate the potential of digital colour, Pantone collaborated with Polygon1993, a Paris-based multidisciplinary artist, to give away nine non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, digital artworks inspired by Very Peri. Microsoft has adopted the hue for laptop, phone, and tablet screens and its Teams wallpa-

per.

"Could there be a palette that's only for digital?" Pressman asked. "I don't know; we're exploring a role."

While some companies are already using Very Peri on furniture and home appliances, the periwinkle tone is having a polarising effect on interior designers and other style watchers.

Ghislaine Viñas, a New York-based interior designer known for her bold use of colour, flagged the elements of red in the hue as strong and the blue as positive. "It's that gender-

neutral colour we all need right now," she said by email.

In Paris, designer India Mahdavi, also known for being adventurous with colour, described Very Peri in an email as being "the ultimate celestial colour, the colour of the sky between dusk and dawn." She suggested using it on a ceiling or a velvet sofa — "a sofa you could sink in, the same way you sink into your sleep."

But New York-based interior designer Brock Forsblom warned by phone that too much of the colour could give off a "My Little Pony" alternate uni-

verse" vibe, or "Princess Jasmine out for a hot night" attitude. And Georgia Wilkinson, studio coordinator of Creed Design Associates in Leicester, England, criticised the colour's "brash and cartoonlike quality." Her emailed verdict: "I certainly couldn't live with it painted on my wall — and wouldn't dream of subjecting a client to it."

Paris-based trend forecaster Li Edelkoort said by email that "Very Peri seemed like a perilous colour during a time frame in need of warm palettes for the home, which included terra cotta, brown and beige." Edelkoort, a Dutch-born design educator and activist who founded the consultancy Trend Union in 1986, scorned what she saw as Pantone's "pushing a shade of purplish blue down people's throats with no relation to the way we are living and evolving. Humans want to be embraced by their environments in troubled times, which doesn't allow for an invented, non-cool blue hue."

Responding to Edelkoort's comments, Eiseman said that Pantone's intent was not to compel the appreciation of any hue but "to highlight the relationship between trends in colour and what we see taking place across all areas of global design."

No colour can be universally appealing, she said, and she advised those who felt wary of Very Peri to consider making it an exclamation point on a single wall or a piece of furniture. She, however, has a bedroom painted entirely in the shade, she said, including the ceiling. — NYT