

Brooklyn shooting injures 16

A rush-hour shooting in the Brooklyn subway in New York injured at least 16 people and triggered scenes of chaos on Tuesday, as wounded and panicked passengers fled a smoke-filled train onto the platform. Ambulances lined the street outside the 36th Street subway station, where a New York police spokeswoman said officers responded to a 911 call of a person shot at 8:27 am. The incident sparked a massive police response, with the suspect still at large several hours later. **DETAILS ON P7**



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AHMAD AL HARTHY LAUNCHES EUROPEAN LE MANS CAMPAIGN



P13

MAHA ENERGY TO DRILL SIX WELLS IN OMAN'S BLOCK 70



P20

'SECRETS SEAS' EXPLORES OMAN'S UNDERWATER TREASURES



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICE AT \$97.77 A BARREL

Oman oil price for June delivery on Tuesday reached \$97.77, comprising a rise by 35 cents from the price on Monday, which was \$97.42. The average price of Oman oil for April delivery has stabilised at \$91.96, thus \$8.34 per barrel higher than March delivery. Meanwhile, oil steadied, with Brent crude back just over \$100 a barrel, after a tumble that erased most of the commodity's gains sparked by Russia's war in Ukraine.

MARITIME LABOUR CONVENTION RATIFIED

The Sultanate of Oman submitted the document of ratification of the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 as amended by the International Labour Organization and based on the Royal Decree approving the accession. The Sultanate of Oman is the first Gulf country to ratify this agreement. The agreement holds significance as Covid-19 infections caused hundreds of thousands of seafarers to be effectively stranded at sea because they were unable to disembark from ships, including repatriating at the end of their tours of duty.

DETAILS ON P2

11 RAMADHAN 1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr 04:31 AM	Dhuhr 12:13 PM	Asr 03:40 PM
Maghrib 06:32 PM	Isha 07:44 PM	

INSIDE



PHILIPPINE VOLUNTEERS IN DOOR-TO-DOOR BLITZ

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IMF NEEDS TO MITIGATE CLIMATE TRANSITION RISK

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HONOURABLE LADY SUPPORTS FAK-KURBA INITIATIVE



Based on her social responsibility in supporting humanitarian initiatives and her belief in the role of charitable action undertaken by civil society institutions, Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, has issued directives to provide financial backing to the "Fak-Kurba" or "Ending Financial Crisis" initiative through Ahd Foundation. Championed by Oman Lawyers Association, the initiative contributed to the release of a number of eligible detainees, who were charged with financial claims in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. – **ONA**

SEE ALSO P2

Sri Lanka defaults on entire \$51 bn debt

COLOMBO: Crisis-stricken Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$51 billion external debt on Tuesday, calling the move a "last resort" after running out of foreign exchange to import desperately needed goods.

The island nation is grappling with its worst economic downturn since independence, with regular blackouts and acute shortages of food and fuel.

Sri Lanka's finance ministry said in a statement that creditors, including foreign governments, were free to capitalise any interest payments due to them from Tuesday or opt for payback in Sri Lankan rupees.

"The government is taking the emergency measure only as a last resort in order to prevent further deterioration of the republic's financial position",



Sri Lankans take part in a rally against the economic crisis in Colombo on Tuesday. – **AFP**

the statement said. It added that the immediate debt default was to ensure "fair and equitable treatment of all creditors" ahead of an International Monetary Fund assisted recovery programme for the South Asian nation. **SEE ALSO P6**

Aim to cut premature deaths by 25 per cent

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

The Sultanate of Oman is taking several initiatives and services which have been developed at a governmental level in the country, including a multi-sectoral plan for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, which aims to reduce premature deaths related to non-communicable diseases by 25 per cent by 2025, in addition to the development of national monitoring framework for prevention, and the NCDs surveillance and control.

DIALOGUE
This was stated by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, while participating

We are now in the process of establishing multi-sectoral strategies focusing on the major risk factors of non-communicable diseases in women, men and children

DR AHMED AL SAEEDI
Minister of Health

virtually in the International Strategic Dialogue Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

on Tuesday in Ghana.

A high-level delegation took part in the meeting including Prime Minister of Norway, the Director-General of World Health Organization, in addition to 194 Heads of State and governments of WHO member states.

"We are now in the process of establishing multi-sectoral strategies focusing on the major risk factors of non-communicable diseases in women, men and children", Dr Al Saeedi added.

The event served as a great opportunity for heads of state and governments to discuss strategic leadership role in the prevention and control of NCDs, as well as establishing an international group focused on Prevention and Control of NCDs (NCD Presidential Group). **TURN TO P2**

Quarter of a billion face extreme poverty in 2022: Oxfam

LONDON: Fallout from the Ukraine conflict, growing inequality and Covid could force more than a quarter of a billion people into extreme poverty this year, Oxfam forecast on Tuesday.

The British-based charity issued the warning in a report published before next week's annual meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

"New Oxfam estimates show that 263 million more people could

be pushed into extreme poverty in 2022, due to the combined impact of Covid-19, inequality and food and energy price inflation — accelerated by the war in Ukraine", Oxfam said.

"Poorer countries face looming debt crises and the purchasing power of wages is depressed, while corporate profits soar and billionaire wealth reaches unprecedented levels."

The World Bank had previously



estimated that 198 million people faced extreme poverty — defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day — due to the Covid pandemic. Another 65 million people are at risk due to fallout from Russian war on Ukraine — including soaring energy and food prices.

The total number of people in extreme poverty worldwide could reach 860 million.

"G20 leaders, the IMF and World Bank, together with all

leaders, must act", it declared.

"They must protect people from the crisis' harsh impacts."

The organisation urged debt cancellation and more aid for the world's poorest nations, while calling for higher taxation on the wealthy.

"It's clear that a herculean response is needed to tackle the catastrophe facing humanity", said Katy Chakraborty, the charity's head of policy.

— **AFP**



Gesture to support society through initiatives via Ahd Foundation

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, has shown Royal gesture to support the Fak Kurba initiative that helps release people imprisoned for minor financial offences.

The Royal gesture is to support society through the civil society initiatives via Ahd Foundation.

The support to the Oman Lawyers Association is expected to bring in relief to many more families whose breadwinners are stranded in some financial issues, according to Dr Mohammed

al Zadjali, Chairman of Oman Lawyers Association (OLA).

“We received the Royal support to the Fak Kurba initiative by the Oman Lawyers Association that aims to release detainees who meet the conditions of the initiative in financial cases in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman,” said Dr Mohammed al Zadjali.

His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti, has hailed the move calling it a ‘true humanitarian’ initiative.

“Fak Kurba is an Islamic humanitarian initiative that will fetch rewards to the donors in this world and the hereafter,” His Eminence added.

He called upon the society members to participate in the initiative and contribute to relieving those in hardship, as Allah the Almighty will double their rewards in this world and the hereafter.

The initiative, currently in its 9th edition, has secured the release of 749 prisoners of different nationalities.

Last year’s number makes the total number of people released from financial claims 3,934 over the past eight years.

The major financial offence against them was majorly dishonour of cheques. They were released as part of Fak Kurba’s 8th edition, launched on April 1, 2021, until May 31, 2021 during

His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti, has hailed the move calling it a ‘true humanitarian’ initiative

the holy month of Ramadhan.

The maximum amount set as ceiling for the release of an individual is RO 2,000 and their offence include civil, commercial, legal or labour, financial claims, and the Association has been coordinating with 39 courts in various governorates of the country.

CRITERIA

To avail of the support, one needs to follow certain conditions. The beneficiary must be in jail or about to be jailed, not a previous beneficiary, and the amount in question should be related to a civil, commercial, Sharia or labour case, with a maximum of RO 2,000.

The priority will be given to those who have less claims, bearing in mind that the Directorate-General makes the selection of cases that meet the conditions of Execution Affairs in the Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary Council. Therefore, requests shall not be directly addressed

to the initiative but through the Directorate-General.

As many as 100 male and female lawyers are part of this mega release campaign that had won the second place in the Sultan Qaboos Voluntary Work Awards, as it aims to highlight the role of lawyers in volunteer work and activate their participation in social responsibility, thanks to the community solidarity and humanity.

The public can help and support this initiative by donating to its online platform to help secure the release of people currently inside the jails.

One can log on to: <http://fakkrba.om> to make donations.



Aim to cut premature deaths by 25 per cent

FROM P1

The dialogue raised the profile of the NCD agenda within the SDGs in Ghana, internationally, and bring together national and international actors and partners to exchange knowledge and ideas with key stakeholders from the public and private sectors, the academic and business world, and international development experts. The academic and business world, and international development experts on what would it take globally for low- and middle-income countries to achieve SDG 3 on health.

Moreover, the event also highlighted political visibility of heads of state and governments who are providing a strategic leadership role in the prevention

and control of NCDs on a global level.

Notably, in September 2020, the United Nations General Assembly called upon member states to further strengthen efforts to address NCDs as part of universal health coverage (UHC), recognising that people living with NCDs are at a higher risk of developing severe Covid-19 symptoms and are among the most impacted by the pandemic.

NCDs remain the largest, most internationally underfunded public health issue globally, where most lives could be saved or improved. Hence, addressing NCDs must be an integral part of the immediate response to Covid-19 and of the recovery at national levels, as well as part of the strategies to build back better.

Charity work reviewed



MUSCAT: Her Highness Sayyidah Meyyan bint Shihab al Said on Tuesday visited Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Childhood to review charitable activities undertaken by the association. She listened to a briefing about a fundraising campaign that aims at collecting money for the construction of Al Rahma Charitable Centre in the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

Thousands of seafarers to benefit from ratification of Convention



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman submitted the document of ratification of the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 as amended by the International Labour Organization and based on the Royal Decree approving the accession. The Sultanate of Oman is the first Gulf country to ratify this agreement.

The agreement holds significance as Covid-19 infections caused hundreds of thousands of seafarers to be effectively stranded at sea because they were unable to disembark from ships, including repatriating at the end of their tours of duty, thus putting the safety and future of shipping at risk.

Nasser bin Salem al Hadrami, Director of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Labour, said that the Maritime Labour Convention is an international labour agreement issued by the International Labour Organization and is widely known as the ‘Seafarers’ Rights Charter’ and was adopted by representatives of governments, employers and workers at an international labour conference.

The agreement aims to achieve decent work for seafarers, secure economic interests, and ensure fair competition among owners of high-quality vessels. The agreement establishes international minimum standards for living and working onboard ships for seafarers in addition to providing decent work and strengthening the protection of working conditions for them.

Guy Ryder, the ILO Director-



General, described the development as a milestone. He said Oman, a longstanding maritime nation, has shown the way forward for other countries in the region. “Oman becomes the first member of the Gulf Cooperation Council to join the global efforts to ensure decent work for seafarers and fair competition for shipowners,” he added.

Idris Abdul Rahman al Khanjari, the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UN in Geneva, formally submitted the ratification documents on March 29.

Al Khanjari underscored the country’s commitment to safeguarding the labour rights of those who work on the high seas. “Joining the MLC, 2006, is a clear confirmation of the Sultanate of Oman’s longstanding tradition as a prominent maritime nation in the region. This ratification

reaffirms the commitment of my country to uphold the provisions of the Convention to achieve decent work for seafarers,” he said.

The MLC brought together many existing labour standards that no longer reflected contemporary working and living conditions, had low ratification levels, or had inadequate enforcement and compliance systems. Combining them into one Convention makes it easier for countries to regulate and enforce consistent industry norms and standards worldwide, according to the ILO.

The MLC was adopted in February 2006 and entered into force on 20 August, 2013. Since then, it has become a worldwide reference for the maritime industry and a pillar of international maritime rules and regulations. The heads of two organisations that represent

seafarers and ship-owners, respectively, have also welcomed this latest ratification.

“As the first Gulf State to adopt the MLC, Oman extends the safeguards of this Convention not only to its own seafarers, but also to those who call into its ports and navigate through its strategically important waters,” said Stephen Cotton General Secretary of the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF).

Guy Platten, Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), said that it is now more vital than ever for more governments to ratify the Convention. “Reaching 100 signatories is an important milestone. As we saw throughout the pandemic and the crew change crisis, governments who have ratified the Convention must stand by their words and take action to protect seafarers’ rights,” he said.



Move to equip fishermen with modern technology

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

Fishing in the Wilayat of Barka may boost with the government’s initiative to equip fishermen with modern fishing technologies.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources came out with the idea of equipping the fishermen with modern tools of fishing in cooperation with the private sector. An agreement to this effect has also been signed.

The agreement comes within the framework of cooperation between the ministry and the private sector and the interest in employing artisanal fishing techniques to keep pace with development and double fish production. The support includes machines for hauling boats, fishing nets and other modern machines and devices.

The ministry was keen to develop artisanal fishing to raise efficiency and support the fishing sector, which is one of the important programmes in the Sultanate of Oman.

It serves artisanal fishermen and workers in the fishing sector by providing them with modern fishing equipment and assistive devices in fishing operations that work to reduce effort and time.

It’s important to provide support to deserving artisanal fishermen who meet the conditions of the fish support programmes of



the ministry. It aims to increase production and relieve the burden resulting from traditional fishing methods in pulling fishing nets and boats that require effort and

time. Providing support to the Omani fishermen aims at enabling them to continue in the profession in the coastal governorates of the

Sultanate of Oman. There are 2,133 registered fishermen and 970 fishing boats in the Wilayat of Barka. The fish production from artisanal fishing

reached 7,647 tonnes in 2020, with a production value of RO 8 million. The initiative also aims to raise production, marketing, quality fishing and improve the standard of

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has come out with the idea of equipping the fishermen with modern tools of fishing in cooperation with the private sector

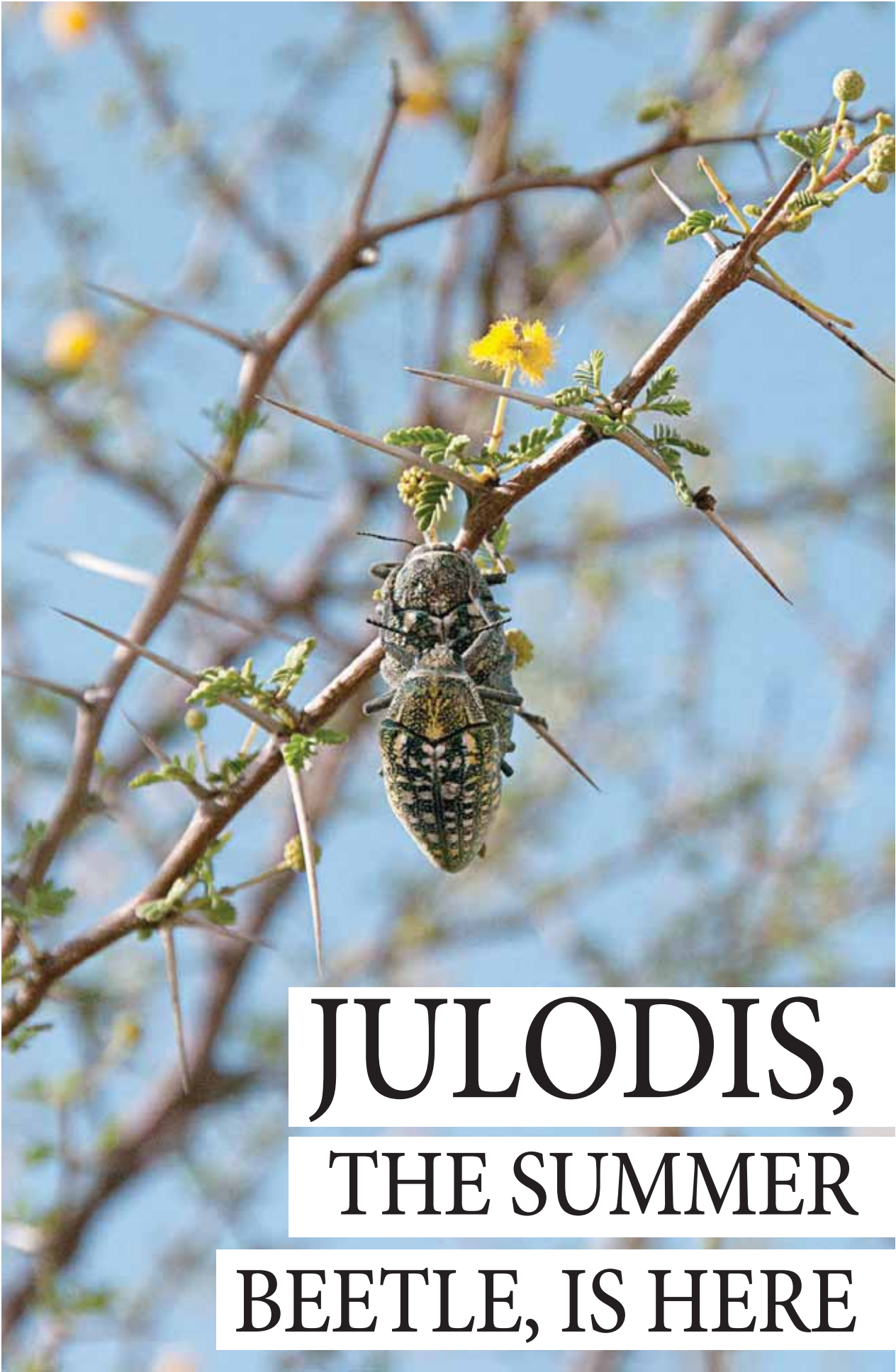
living of the community members in the coastal areas. It acts to encourage the younger generation to work in the fishing profession and use the latest equipment.

Notably, the fisheries sector is one of the important economic sectors in the Sultanate of Oman due to its potential and exploitable resources.

The sector has witnessed continuous growth over the past years. The importance of the fisheries sector is not limited to the economic aspect, but also includes the social and cultural elements, as it is considered one of the most important sectors in providing job opportunities.

The government’s efforts are focused on supporting and motivating the national workforce to preserve and continue in the profession of parents and grandparents.

BEETLES FEED ON PLANTS, FUNGI AND INVERTEBRATES, GNAWING ON LIVING AND DEAD TREES FROM THE INSIDE. ALSO, SOME OF ITS SPECIES ARE PREDATORY, FEEDING ON DEVOURING SOME VERMIN AND ON YOUNG BIRDS AND MAMMALS



JULODIS, THE SUMMER BEETLE, IS HERE

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA ALSALMANI

With the onset of the summer, metallic beetles (Julodis) begin to appear. It can be easily seen on the branches and trunks of trees and plants. It quickly draws attention with the sound of a continuous ‘Zeez’. This beetle variety, distinguished by its bright colours, is also called a “wood carpenter”. According to scientific studies, these beetles are classified as one of the largest groups of beetles, and insect studies confirm that they “include 15,000 known species in 450 genera”.

These beetles are well-known by their cylindrical or oval shape, and their exterior looks shiny, mainly when sunlight is reflected on the back of their oval body. Whoever observes the movements of this insect finds it less mobile, as it sometimes spends long hours without moving. This unique insect is characterised by its strong focus, especially when the process of laying larvae begins on the roots and branches of trees.

Several studies indicate that “this insect rarely attacks green branches and trunks, and often prefers dead branches. At the same time, it is considered dangerous to the extent that it can destroy trees and their fruits and cause great economic damage. The beetles practise a method of “bite” to defend themselves if they sense danger and try as much as possible to avoid any attack that may occur by some birds or animals that feed on the flowers and leaves of trees.

The observers of this

insect find that it secretes sticky fluids on trees that destroy its branches for a long time. “No classification has been established for the species of beetles present in the Sultanate of Oman so far, although it is clear that they are abundant in agricultural and desert environments,” an environmentalist told the Observer.

Beetles are considered in the order of insects, their species reach 400,000, and even today, new species are discovered and known from time to time. Beetles live in most environments, fields to forests and deserts, but it is noted that they have not been recorded in the Polar regions or the sea zones.

Beetles feed on plants, fungi and invertebrates, gnawing on living and dead trees from the inside. Also, some of its species are predatory, feeding on devouring vermin and on young birds and mammals. Some species are considered domestic and agricultural pests that gnaw furniture from the inside and destroy crops and stored materials. Scientific studies on insects indicate the use of the wings of these beetles in the manufacture of ornaments and decorations in some Asian countries, including India, Thailand and Japan.

Omanis call these beetles’ Funzouz’. This species is known among the social levels because it is possible to see it, especially during the summer season. Nature specialists consider “some beetles useful, such as, ground beetles. They feed on insects, larvae and harmful vermin, and thus play an important role in achieving ecological balance”.



BEATING FATIGUE

DEHYDRATION

FAST TO AVOID

BREAKING

PLenty OF FLUIDS AFTER

DRINK

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

M

uslims are keen to fast in Ramadhan because it is one of the five obligations of Islam. Some sick people, however, fail to follow the norms of this obligation. Among many other complications during fasting, the most frequent is fainting.

Those fasting in Ramadhan suffer from a feeling of exhaustion and fatigue, especially with the advent of the holy month in the summer. Many have low blood pressure due to lack of some nutrients, lack of sleep and dehydration, which in turn leads to fainting.

Low blood pressure is one of the most important causes of fainting, as a slow heartbeat causes the brain not to supply enough blood, which negatively affects the maintenance of blood pressure.

Patients who suffer from chronic disorders of the vasomotor reflex are exposed to a state of fainting, as well as patients with diabetes who suffer from an increase or decrease in blood sugar.

Also, people who suffer from diseases in the heart valve, coronary artery, vascular issues in the brain and anaemia, tend to faint. Similarly, stomach cramps due to long hours of fasting obstruct enough blood supply, negatively affecting blood pressure maintenance. So one has to be careful during Ramadhan if he is fasting.

PRONE TO FAINTING

Diabetes patients are the most prone to fainting due to severe hypoglycemia for various reasons, such as an overdose of insulin at Suhoor or extreme physical exertion during the fasting period. When symptoms of hypoglycemia occur, such as severe sweating and dizziness, some food must be taken immediately.

It is recommended to drink a glass of juice to prevent fainting. If a complete loss of consciousness occurs, the patient is referred to the nearest hospital.

Before Suhoor, a person with diabetes should consult the attending physician because insulin doses may decrease during fasting. A newly discovered diabetic shouldn't fast until the

appropriate doses are determined for treatment.

Ghuzlan al Balushi, a certified nurse from the American Institute of Health and Safety, said: "Some fasting people may suffer from fainting, considering that the direct reason for this is the lack of fluids that a person drinks from the beginning of breakfast until the time of Suhoor, or that a person drinks large amounts of drinks. The fluids in Suhoor get rid of the body because it does no benefit to them."

Symptoms that tell you that you are about to experience faint are blurry vision and dizziness, feeling hot and sweating, pallor and upset stomach.

PLENty OF FLUIDS

Fasting people should follow certain tips to avoid fainting during Ramadhan. A fasting person with low blood pressure is advised to use long-acting blood pressure medications after consulting a doctor, drink plenty of fluids after breaking fast to avoid dehydration, eat foods that contain potassium, iodine and magnesium, as these elements are found in fish, and reduce meat intake, to eat more fruits at breaking fast, such as apples, bananas, grapes, as the body compensates for the water it lost in fasting, eat fresh vegetables, replace lemon juice with salt when cooking food, avoid prolonged exposure to the sun while fasting, paying attention to eating the Suhoor meal, because neglecting it leads to a drop in the level of sugar in the blood, which leads to a decrease in blood pressure, drink water and fluids in sufficient quantities from iftar to Suhoor, finally, get enough sleep, because an increase or decrease in the number of hours of sleep negatively affects blood pressure.

Ramadhan comes as the month of fasting as a change in the general diet of most people. People tend to single out it with delicious food and drinks or start avoiding them as time passes. This becomes counterproductive in many cases due to excess or underestimation in eating.

We have a lack of health awareness during this holy month, so it is necessary to pay attention and follow health instructions to avoid fainting during the fasting period.



Focus on rights of workers

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

In implementation of the Royal directives aiming at the necessity for officials to visit the governorates and to remove all obstacles that may hinder the implementation of plans, the labour under-secretary visited various industries in Suhar.

During his visit, Shaikh Nasser bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Labour for Labour, reviewed industrial work and the opening of an industrial union branch. He also monitored the conditions of workers and benefits from the initiative for those whose services have been terminated.

Al Hosni was briefed on the work of the directorate and its challenges and the most important proposals that could facilitate the work of the directorate and its flexibility in light of the government's directions in decentralisation to reach the noble goals.

He listened to all aspects that hinder the work of the directorate and its goals and seeks to regulate the labour market in the governorate, and in particular in Suhar, as it is the city with number of industries due to its strategic location.

He stressed that the ministry supports all ideas to promote industrial sector and to ensure the support for national workforce in the sector. The aim is to ensure a



safe, sustainable and supported environment for the staff and this is supported by the initiatives

launched by the companies. Al Hosni noted the need to establish awareness campaigns to

promote work culture. He listened to the viewpoints of business owners and the obstacles in their way of developing their business, as well as the difficulties faced by them and how to solve them.

Al Hosni also visited Sohar Aluminium Company, where he inspected the progress of work and had an interaction with the employees. He visited the industrial union branch in Suhar, which will be the main axis in building the relationship between the workers in the private sector, which in turn preserves their rights and works on their behalf.

■ IFTAR ON THE BEACH



An Omani family gathers to break their fast on the beach in Muscat on Tuesday. – AFP

RAFO commander honours personnel of Adam Air Base



ADAM: Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), honoured a number of personnel of Adam Air Base with certificates of excellence in recognition of their distinguished service at Adam Air Base, on Tuesday.

RAFO commander congratulated the excelling personnel on their well-deserved honour urging them to keep up

their excellent performance and wishing them more success in the future.

On the sidelines of the honouring celebration, the chief guest gave away medals of long-service and good conduct to a number of officers, commissioned officers and personnel of Adam Air Base in recognition of their sincere efforts and perseverance in carrying out their sacred duties.



Wadis, hiking trails cleaned as part of Sewa Utsav

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

In an attempt to raise awareness about climate change and environment protection, Indian community members joined hands for cleaning wadis/hiking trails across three different cities in the Sultanate of Oman recently as part of Community Service Fortnight, Sewa Utsav. The members from Indian Social Club (ISC), Adventure Oman and other Indian nationals joined hands to advocate for a clean and green Oman.

The beaches and hiking trails



at Bander Al Khairan near Muscat were cleaned and approximately 200 kg of trash was collected

and properly disposed of by the enthusiastic participants. Ambassador Amit Narang



commended the efforts by the Indian community, and hoped that such activities will go a long way

in instilling sensitivity towards conservation of environment. The wadi/hiking trail activities

were also organised in Suhar and Salalah. ISC members in Suhar cleaned a wadi and collected plastic and other trash. The ISC members in Salalah went on a hike and collected trash on the way, thus engaging the community and raising awareness on conservation of environment. The activities educated the participants towards re-cycling and adopting a sustainable lifestyle as well as not littering public places. This was another collective initiative of the Indian community to contribute towards cleaner and greener Oman.



Crisis-hit Sri Lanka defaults on foreign debt

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka announced a default on its \$51 billion foreign debt on Tuesday as the island nation grapples with its worst economic crisis in memory and escalating protests demanding the government's resignation.

Acute food and fuel shortages, as well as long daily electricity blackouts, have brought widespread suffering to the country's 22 million people in its most painful downturn since independence in 1948.

The government has struggled to service foreign loans and Tuesday's decision comes ahead of negotiations for an International Monetary Fund bailout aimed at preventing a more catastrophic hard default that would see Sri Lanka completely repudiate its debts.

"We have lost the ability to repay foreign debt," Sri Lanka's Central Bank governor Nandalal Weerasinghe told reporters in Colombo.

"This is a pre-emptive negotiated default. We have announced (it) to



We have lost the ability to repay foreign debt

NANDALAL WEERASINGHE

Sri Lanka's Central Bank chief

the creditors."

Officials say the move will free up foreign currency to finance desperately needed food, fuel and medicine imports after months of scarce supplies.

Just under half of Sri Lanka's debt is market borrowings through international sovereign bonds, including one worth \$1 billion that was maturing on July 25.

China is Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender and owns about 10 per cent of the island's foreign debt, followed by Japan and India.

The government has borrowed heavily from Beijing since 2005 for infrastructure projects, many of



Motorbikes and three-wheeler vehicles queue at a Ceylon Petroleum Corporation fuel station in Colombo. — AFP

which became white elephants.

Sri Lanka also leased its strategic Hambantota port to a Chinese company in 2017 after it became

unable to service the \$1.4 billion debt from Beijing used to build it.

This sparked concerns from Western countries and India that

the strategically located South Asian nation was falling victim to a debt trap.

Chinese foreign ministry

spokesman Zhao Lijian said Tuesday's default would not stop Beijing from lending support to Sri Lanka's beleaguered economy.

"China has always done its best in providing assistance to Sri Lanka's economic and social development. We will continue to do so in the future," he said.

Sri Lanka's snowballing economic crisis began to be felt after the coronavirus pandemic torpedoed vital revenue from tourism and remittances.

The government imposed a wide import ban to conserve dwindling foreign currency reserves and use them to service the debts it has now defaulted on. But the resulting shortages have stoked public anger. At least eight people have died while waiting in fuel queues since March 20, with two of the deaths reported on Monday.

"It's been depressing to be so frightened of the future and where it's going," protester Vasi Samudra Devi said at an anti-government rally in Colombo on Monday.

— AFP

UK's Johnson, Sunak fined over 'Partygate'

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Finance Minister Rishi Sunak are to be fined for breaching Covid-19 lockdown laws in what has become known as the "Partygate" scandal, prompting calls on Tuesday for their resignation.

"The prime minister and chancellor of the exchequer have today received notification that the Metropolitan Police intend to issue them with fixed penalty notices," a Downing Street spokeswoman said on Tuesday.

The announcement came after London's Metropolitan Police said they had issued more than 50 fines over the parties, without disclosing the number or identities of those being fined.



Rishi Sunak and Boris Johnson

The leader of the opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, swiftly called for the two most

senior members of the government to resign.

"Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have broken the law and repeatedly lied to the British public," Starmer tweeted.

"They must both resign. The Conservatives are totally unfit to govern. Britain deserves better."

The political storm following the revelations of a swathe of lockdown-busting parties in and around Downing Street now threatens to engulf Johnson once more.

He was left fighting for his political survival earlier this year after a number of lawmakers from his ruling Conservative Party withdrew their support for his leadership. — AFP

■ STAYING SAFE AGAINST VIRUS



A health worker wearing personal protective equipment conducts a swab test for the Covid-19 coronavirus in a compound during a Covid-19 lockdown in Pudong district in Shanghai. — AFP

Volunteers in door-to-door blitz for top Marcos Jr rival

MANILA: Clutching pink flyers and face masks, diehard supporters of Philippine presidential hopeful Leni Robredo are going door to door across the archipelago nation in an against-the-odds bid to win over voters.

Nearly two million volunteers are involved in a grassroots movement for Robredo, the incumbent vice-president, as she battles to close the gap with frontrunner Ferdinand Marcos Junior before the May 9 polls.

Voter surveys show the son of the country's former dictator heading towards a landslide victory, the endgame of a decades-long, well-funded effort to return the powerful clan to the presidential palace they fled 36 years ago.

But there are signs Robredo's pink-coloured campaign is finding traction, with huge rally turnouts, endorsements from pop stars and Catholic priests, and a bump in a recent poll raising hopes among her fervent fans.

"I'm really craving for change, for decency in the highest position," said Rocelle Mendoza, 29, who uses her own money to print Robredo T-shirts and aprons that she gives away at markets in the capital Manila.

"We are aware that we have to climb a mountain. And I think it's also why we're no longer hesitating to spend."

Some analysts have likened the feverish support for Robredo to the people-driven movement for



A volunteer for opposition presidential candidate and current vice-president, Leni Robredo, helping a delivery worker put a banner of Robredo on a tricycle during a house-to-house campaign in Las Pinas, suburban Manila. — AFP

former president Corazon Aquino in the 1986 snap election campaign that led to the ousting of Ferdinand

Marcos Senior.

Robredo, a widow and former congresswoman, made a last-

minute decision to enter the presidential race in October after Marcos Jr declared his candidacy.

That set up a rematch with her rival in the 2016 vice-presidential contest that she narrowly won.

A volunteer-driven campaign mushroomed across the country, putting the mild-mannered Robredo in second place in the polls.

But the chances of beating Marcos Jr again appear slim.

Relentless attacks from President Rodrigo Duterte and a nasty misinformation campaign on social media have undermined Robredo's popularity and eroded her support among local officials, who are key to garnering votes.

The latest poll by Pulse Asia

Research shows her gaining ground, but Marcos Jr still leads by 32 percentage points. "It remains a relatively tall mountain for Robredo to climb and is still Marcos's race to lose," said Eurasia Group analyst Peter Mumford.

Marcos Jr has been bolstered by an alliance with first daughter and vice-presidential favourite Sara Duterte, the backing of powerful political clans, and a massive social media campaign portraying his family in a positive light.

But Robredo's loyal followers are undeterred, dipping into their own pockets to support the former lawyer for farmers and battered women in an election they see as critical for the country's future.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Dust storm covers Iraq for second time in a week

A dust storm blanketed Iraq again on Tuesday, sending people to hospital with breathing difficulties and leading airports to suspend flights.

It follows a similar storm that blew over the country late last week and left dozens hospitalised with respiratory problems.

The latest weather event cast an orange hue over the capital Baghdad, where it severely restricted visibility and coated buildings and cars in dust.

Pedestrians wore disposable



masks to avoid inhaling the particles, journalists said.

"People have been hospitalised with breathing difficulties, but most cases are minor," health ministry spokesman Saif al Badr said. — AFP

NASIRIYAH

7 dead from Congo fever in Iraq

Seven people have died from the Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever since the start of last year after coming into contact with livestock in southern Iraq, health authorities said. "Over the past year and the first months of this year, we have counted seven deaths and an eighth person who is seriously ill in the province of Dhi Qar," said regional public health director Hussein Ryad.

Dhi Qar is a rural southern province known for rearing cattle, sheep and goats, all of which are



potential carriers of the Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, also known as Congo fever. All the victims worked in the livestock sector, Ryad said, adding that the most recent death was at the start of this year. — AFP

KATHMANDU

Greek climber dies after scaling Himalayan peak

A Greek climber died on Nepal's rugged Mount Dhaulagiri, expedition organisers said, in the first recorded fatality of this year's busy Himalayan spring climbing season.

Antonios Sykaris's death came a day after a triumphant Instagram message announcing he had made it to the top of the world's seventh-highest peak.

The 59-year-old had fallen ill while descending, mountain guide Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks said. "He died at an



altitude of 7,400 metres. We are speaking with his family," Sherpa said. Sykaris was an experienced climber who had summited five other mountains higher than 8,000 metres, according to his website. — AFP



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In brief

■ RABAT



MARITIME TRAFFIC BETWEEN MOROCCO, SPAIN RESUMES

Maritime traffic between Spain and Morocco is set to resume following the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Rabat's transport ministry said. Embroiled in a dispute with Spain over the territory of Western Sahara, Morocco upheld the blockade between some of the largest ports on the Mediterranean for over two years.

The busy, but short, 14-kilometre route across the Strait of Gibraltar had originally been shut in March 2020 when Morocco severed transport links with Europe over the pandemic.

The maritime borders reopened last summer — but connections between Tangiers and Spain's Algeciras and Tarifa ports have remained cut.

■ BROOKLYN



16 INJURED IN BROOKLYN SUBWAY SHOOTING

At least 16 people were injured during a rush-hour shooting at a subway station in the New York borough of Brooklyn, where authorities said “several undetonated devices” were recovered amid chaotic scenes. Ambulances lined the street outside the 36th Street subway station, where a New York police spokeswoman said officers responded to a 911 call of a person shot at 8:27 am.

Unverified video footage posted on Instagram appeared to show passengers tending to bloodied victims lying on a smoke-filled station platform.

■ GENEVA



WFP WARNS OF FAMINE IN SOMALIA

Somalia is facing famine, with 6 million people set to need food support in the near future, a representative for the World Food Programme (WFP) said from the north-west African country via video link on Tuesday.

Speaking to a UN briefing, Lara Fossi pointed to continuing drought past the usual start of the rainy season.

The number of people needing food aid had doubled since the start of the year, she said.

The WFP did not have sufficient funds to help all of them, as the donations needed for its Somali operation were covered only to 4 per cent, she said.

French campaign brawl heats up



France's President Emmanuel Macron and French far-right party presidential candidate Marine Le Pen addressing the media . — AFP

PARIS: The French presidential fight shifted into higher gear on Tuesday as Emmanuel Macron defended his sudden willingness to soften a pensions overhaul he has pushed for years, drawing accusations of a “ploy” to lure left-leaning voters from his far-right rival Marine Le Pen.

Both candidates pressed their on-the-ground campaigns, with Macron holding a long walkabout in Mulhouse, eastern France, where the president was beaten out by far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon in the first round of voting last Sunday.

Several residents assailed the centrist incumbent on pensions after he indicated the retirement age might be pushed back from 62 to only 64 -- instead of 65 as long promised.

“Yesterday I clarified things, if we need to be open to adapting this, I’m open to it,” Macron told journalists after a heated exchange with healthcare and other workers.

“It’s normal that I should be ready to listen!”

Since sweeping to power in 2017, the former investment banker has said an overhaul is necessary to keep the pay-as-you-go system afloat. But a series of massive strikes and then the Covid-19 pandemic forced him to put the plan on

ice in 2020.

But just last week his team had insisted that a retirement age of 65 was non-negotiable.

Le Pen pounced on the shift as a cynical bid to woo the left-wing voters analysts say Macron needs in a tight run-off on April 24.

She has promised a “social justice” campaign that would leave the retirement age at 62 — and even lower it to 60 for people who began working before the age of 20.

“The French are very smart. Everyone knows this is a ploy by Emmanuel Macron to try to win over, or at least mollify, left-wing voters,” Le Pen told France Inter radio. “The reality is, retirement at 65 is his obsession. It’s all he has ever talked about,” she said.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, Macron picked up a weighty right-wing endorsement from former president Nicolas Sarkozy, who broke months of campaign silence to say he would vote for Macron in the April 24 run-off.

“We must abandon our partisan habits... Fidelity to right-wing republican values and our governing culture must lead us to answer Emmanuel Macron’s call for unity,” Sarkozy, who remains popular among many conservative voters, posted on his Facebook page.

— AFP

Russian troops closes in on Mariupol

UKRAINE OFFENSIVE

KRAMATORSK: Russian troops aimed to take control of the city of Mariupol on Tuesday, part of an anticipated massive onslaught across eastern Ukraine, as defending forces tried desperately to hold them back.

Russia is believed to be trying to connect occupied Crimea with Moscow-backed separatist territories Donetsk and Lugansk in Donbas, and has laid siege to the strategically located city, once home to more than 400,000 people.

“It is likely that in the future the enemy will try to take control of the city of Mariupol, capture Popasna and launch an offensive in the direction of Kurakhove in order to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk region,” the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine said on Facebook.

The Russian defence ministry said the army had thwarted an attempt to break the siege with “air strikes and artillery fire” at a factory in a northern district of the city. But the Ukrainian army insisted that “the defence of Mariupol continues”.

“The connection with the units of the defence forces that heroically hold the city is stable and maintained,” the Land Forces of Ukraine wrote on Telegram.

In his nightly address, President Volodymyr Zelensky made another plea to his allies for more weapons to boost the defence of the city.

“We are not getting as much as we need to end this war sooner. To completely destroy the enemy on our land... in particular, to unblock Mariupol,” he said.

He made a similar appeal for military assistance to South Korea’s National Assembly earlier in the day, telling lawmakers Russia had “completely destroyed Mariupol and burned it to ashes” killing “at least tens of thousands of people”.



An unexploded tail section of a 300mm rocket which appear to contain cluster bombs launched from a BM-30 Smerch multiple rocket launcher embedded in the ground after shelling in Lugansk region. — AFP

Late on Monday, Britain said it was trying to verify reports that Russia had also used chemical weapons in the city.

Western officials have previously expressed concerns that as the conflict drags into its seventh week, Russia could resort to such extreme measures.

Ukrainian lawmaker Ivanna Klymush said Russia had used an “unknown substance” and that people were suffering from respiratory failure.

But deputy defence minister Ganna Maliar said the purported chemical attack was more likely phosphorous munitions.

“Officials conclusions will be made later,” she told Ukrainian television.

Eduard Basurin, a senior official in the separatist area of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, has spoken of the possibility of such arms being used in Mariupol but insisted on Tuesday that “no chemical weapons have been used” in the city.

Elsewhere in the east, heavy bombardment continued as

civilians were urged to flee ahead of an expected Russian troop surge in the region.

Russian forces are reinforcing around the Donbas region, notably near the town of Izyum, but have not yet launched a full offensive, Pentagon officials said on Monday.

They reported a Russian convoy had been observed heading for Izyum, an hour’s drive north of Kramatorsk, saying it appeared to be a mix of personnel-carriers, armoured vehicles and possible artillery.

President Vladimir Putin insisted that Russia’s own security was at stake in Donbas, after talks at the Russian spaceport in Vostochny with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

“What we are doing is helping people -- rescuing them on the one hand and on the other taking measures to assure Russia’s security,” he said, according to Russian news agencies.

Ukraine’s defence ministry said it believed a major assault would happen soon. — AFP

At least 45 dead in S Africa floods, mudslides

DURBAN: At least 45 people have died in floods and mudslides after rainstorms struck the South African port city of Durban and surrounding KwaZulu-Natal province, the authorities said on Tuesday.

“The latest reports indicate that over 45 people have lost their lives as a result of the heavy rains, this number could possibly increase as more reports come in,” the province’s Department of Cooperative Governance announced in a statement.

Days of pounding rain flooded several areas and shut dozens of roads across the southeastern city, while landslips caused train services across KwaZulu-Natal to be suspended.

Video footage shared by private emergency and rescue workers and paramedics showed flooded city highways, submerged cars and collapsed houses.

The disaster management department in KwaZulu-Natal province, of which Durban is the largest city, urged people to stay at home and ordered those resid-



A view of a crack in the road following heavy rains and winds in Durban. — AFP

ing in low-lying areas to move to higher ground.

More than 2,000 houses and 4,000 “informal” homes, or shacks, have been damaged, provincial premier Sihle Zikala told

journalists in a briefing broadcast live on television.

Rescue operations, aided by the military, are underway to evacuate people trapped in affected areas, the provincial Department

of Cooperative Governance said. Those trapped include teachers and students at a Durban secondary school, it said.

Durban mayor Mxolisi Kaunda earlier told reporters that power

stations had been flooded and water supplies disrupted -- and that even graveyards had not been spared the devastation.

One picture posted on Twitter by an anti-theft vehicle-tracking agency showed what looked like a human skull that had been washed to the surface of a cemetery.

Footage on public broadcaster showed several shipping containers strewn on a freeway in the city, one of southern Africa’s regional gateways to the sea. The city had only just recovered from deadly riots last July in which shopping malls were looted and warehouses set on fire, in South Africa’s worst unrest since the end of apartheid.

A local humanitarian agency, Gift of the Givers, said in a statement: “The need of the hour is huge.” It said transport infrastructure had suffered massive damage and some people were trapped beneath collapsed walls.

The country’s rail service PRA-SA said landslips and rubble on the tracks had forced it to suspend all train services in the province. — AFP

How biohacking can increase your company’s performance



MIRIAM KUGEL
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In sports, the theory of ‘Marginal Gains’ proposes that small, yet significant improvements can lead to monumental results.

Sometimes it is referred to as the ‘1 per cent Factor’; getting marginally better in every aspect by 1 per cent to create the ultimate competitive advantage.

The concept of marginal improvements can also exist in the corporate world:

Seemingly small and insignificant improvements applied consistently can change entire cultures, improve employee well-being and engagement and can create significant cost savings or other improvements in the long run for business.

One area where companies can create value through small improvements is by applying researched-based changes to the work areas that are impacting the cognitive sphere of employees with the aim to make them more

productive and happier.

This approach which many large companies deploy is called biohacking.

One way how companies do this is to reduce excessive light, noise, and visual stimuli in their offices and improve indoor oxygen levels where possible to help employees focus on tasks at hand without distractions. These companies also try to reduce sugar or processed food offered on-premise with the aim to avoid spikes in blood sugar which helps increase concentration and reduce inflammatory processes in the body potentially resulting in overall higher well-being and lesser sick days.

Not every job has to be set from 9 till 5. Some employees prefer later starts and later finishes, earlier starts or earlier finishes, depending on other commitments and how they feel that day.

Being restricted to one way of working can produce additional

FIVE TO SIX PEOPLE ARE THE IDEAL NUMBER IN A GROUP THAT MUST ACCOMPLISH A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF WORK

stress, and lead to ‘clock watching’. If employees are freed of these constraints, the focus shifts to outputs and employees feel more compelled to achieve their tasks rather than “finish on time”.

It is important to also encourage employees to stay active and take a break. Long sedentary working hours increase the risk of joint pain and other ailments and can be bad for concentration, learning retention, and focus potentially increasing error rates.

Offering standing desks, high-

quality ergonomic furniture, and encouraging short breaks between meetings for stretching and recharging counteracts the negative effects an office-based job can have.

Productive companies also encourage their employees to work in smaller groups to create more impact when collaborating on projects. Researchers from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania state that five to six people are the ideal number in a group that must accomplish a significant amount of work. The research shows, that when the team number grows bigger than this, the productivity per person starts reducing.

Being deliberate on how your organisation and team use communication tools is equally important to foster higher well-being and productivity. Not all in-person meetings are productive as they require a lot of cognitive power and time commitment of an

employee and can feel disengaging when not everyone is allowed to equally contribute.

Video calls are usually more productive when held in smaller groups and if everyone keeps the camera on as the lack of visual cues can hinder productive relationships from forming or meeting consensus.

Messaging apps and voice notes add flexibility for informal team communication and concise updates, whilst emails can be useful to keep a paper trail or broadcast an important update. Calling on the other hand can be ideal for shorter 1:1 alignment and for fostering relationships with remote workers and distributed colleagues.

Applying a number of these small incremental changes consistently to your organisation will not only create happier and healthier employees but also lead to better company results through marginal gains.

Syrians aid Ukrainians in ties forged by war

LYNNE AL NAHHAS

Syrians are mobilising to support Ukrainians, sharing hard-earned knowledge gleaned from years of war involving Russian forces, such as surviving shelling, helping refugees and responding to chemical attacks.

With both Ukrainians and Syrians seeking accountability for the ravages inflicted by Russian forces in their countries, they feel a unique bond is growing between them.

“From our experiences in Syria, we might be among those most able of understanding the pain of the people of Ukraine,” said Raed al Saleh, head of the Syria Civil Defence force, known as the White Helmets. “Syrians have lived the shelling, killing and displacement brought on them by Russian forces.

“The time and place have changed, but the victim is the same — civilians — and the killer is the same — the Russian regime,” he said.

During the fighting in Syria, which has claimed over 500,000 lives, the White Helmets have worked as first responders, rescuing thousands from under the rubble of homes shelled by Russian and regime forces in Syria.

The fate of Ukraine’s besieged southeastern port of Mariupol, the scene of some of Moscow’s fiercest assaults, has drawn comparisons with the eastern districts of Syria’s northwestern city of Aleppo.

The former rebel stronghold was levelled by air strikes in 2016, during a months-long siege.

“Look at the city of Mariupol. This is exactly what we’ve seen in the city of Aleppo in Syria,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told an international forum last month.

He wanted to convey a message that “Russia was always a bad actor, Aleppo is proof of that and now it is our turn to suffer,” Emile Hokayem, analyst at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, said. This shared suffering has prompted a series of initiatives.

A coalition of groups has launched the Syria Ukraine Network (SUN) that has helped Syrian doctors travel to Ukraine, said coordinator Olga Lautman, a Ukrainian living in Washington.

“We will be coordinating (with) Syrian experts on war crimes documentation and chemical attacks,” Lautman said.

It came from “the desire of Syrians to use their expertise to help”, she said, describing the “bond” forming between the two peoples.

In northwestern Idlib, one of the last remaining rebel areas in Syria, doctors at the Academy of Health Sciences are training Ukrainian doctors and nurses online, its president Abdullah Abdulaziz Alhaji said. — **AFP**

Facing disastrous floods, they turned to mangrove trees for protection



SUHASINI RAJ

The writer is the India reporter of NYT since 2014

The women adjusted their binoculars around their necks, secured their bright green saris and climbed onto a motorboat to begin their weekly patrol in the Sundarbans, one of the largest deltas in the world and an urgent case study on the effects of climate change.

As sea levels rise, eroding embankments and pushing water closer to their doorsteps, the residents of the hundreds of villages in the Sundarbans — an immense network of rivers, tidal flats, small islands and vast mangrove forests straddling India and Bangladesh — have found their lives and livelihoods at risk.

In the absence of much government support, women like Aparna Dhara, with help from a nonprofit environmental conservation organisation, have devised their own solution: planting hundreds of thousands of additional mangrove trees to bolster their role as protective barriers.

“Our land and livelihoods have been battered many times over by raging cyclones and unpredictable, heavy rains,” said Dhara, 30, as she and the other women in the boat discussed where they needed to plant more trees.

“The rhythm of our lives is dependent on the ebb and flow of the water around us, making the mangroves our lifelines.”

Their mission has a devastating backstory.

After Cyclone Aila slammed into the region in 2009, causing floods and mudslides, nearly 200 people lost their lives.

The storm exposed the increasing dangers posed by climate change to the millions of people living in the low-lying Sundarbans, thousands of square miles of wetland jutting into the Bay of Bengal.

Amid the rising waters, crocodiles have begun entering villages. Erratic monsoon seasons have replaced more predictable ones. And higher salinity in the water has killed off fish “as if the entire area had been crushed under the

thumb,” said Ajanta Dey, a Kolkata-based conservationist.

The harm has been disproportionately felt by the most marginalised in the Sundarbans, whose population on India’s side of the border is about 4.5 million. Many live in areas reached only after day-long boat trips.

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN MANGROVE FORESTS TO BE AN EXCELLENT WAY TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ESPECIALLY THE STORM SURGE ACCOMPANYING CYCLONES

A few years ago, as Dey went around documenting the post-cyclone wreckage, women like Dhara approached her and pointed to areas where their homes had once stood. Dey suggested planting more mangroves between existing embankments and open water.

By 2015, over 15,000 women had signed up for the mission, according

to Dey, programme director at Nature Environment and Wildlife Society.

While all are welcome to participate, many men from the Sundarbans migrate to cities for work, meaning it is the villages’ women who are often leading the climate change fight.

The women, drawing on their deep knowledge of the Sundarbans, make hand-drawn maps of areas where mangroves can be planted. They nurture seeds into saplings and then, in baskets or on boats, transport the young trees and dig in the mud flats to plant them. Later, they track their growth on a mobile app.

In Dhara’s village, Lakshmipur, the number of acres covered with mangroves has grown to 2,224 from 343 in the last decade. In areas that had been barren-looking mud flats just a few years ago, cranes, gulls and herons abound in the flat rounded leaves of the mangrove trees.

Mangroves, found only in tropical and subtropical climates, are distinctive for their ability to survive in brackish water. Research has shown mangrove forests to be an excellent way to mitigate the effects of climate change, especially the storm surge accompanying cyclones, by reducing the height and speed of waves.

— *The New York Times*



Members of the Lakshmishree Self Help Group, an environmental protection detail made up of women at a nursery where mangrove saplings grow in Lakshmipur, India.

It is nice to be back to school



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

Like in most parts of the world, all the schools in the Sultanate of Oman have opened after a hiatus of almost two years. The decision was welcomed by parents, though some with scepticism, as they were happy with the prospect of their children returning to outdoor life and classroom environment.

At the school, children appeared to be excited and blissful talking to each other even though they were enveloped by preventive measures with strict adherence to the Covid-19 protocol. Getting back to school was extremely emotional for all of them!

No doubt, face-to-face interaction creates a stronger bond and that is what the children started experiencing once again. After all, the classroom provides for an equalising environment among all those who study in it!

The closure of schools was a decision taken towards the end of March 2020 when we were navigating a sea of ignorance about the coronavirus pandemic. As schools remained closed, countries started figuring out about action plans, and various modes of remote learning appeared nearly everywhere.

The sudden and unexpected shift away from the classroom to the adoption of online learning has put educationists, parents and children in a dilemma about imparting education from primary to high school.

Although thousands of children were not able to get access to the new hybrid model of education, it changed the mode of teaching and learning despite contentions that the move was unplanned and rapid with insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation.

NOW FOR PARENTS, GETTING THEIR CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL WAS A KIND OF RELIEF AS IT MEANT THAT THEY CAN NOW KEEP TRACK OF THEIR CHILDREN'S SCREEN TIME AND USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

While online learning offered unprecedented opportunities for children who would otherwise have had limited access to education during the pandemic, for educators, it presented a new paradigm in which dynamic courses could be developed.

No denying the fact that the online classes helped learn new software and apps but, after a while, they became quite monotonous.

No doubt, online learning has a lot of strength with its ability to maintain the most impactful elements of in-person programmes. It helps both teachers and students learn new software and apps even though they become quite monotonous in a period of time.

At the same time, look at its weakness as is in the case of the privileged and underprivileged.

An online class could never have replicated the school milieu even if it enabled learning of a new kind. Even though blackboard teaching can be addressed through the proxy of an online screen, there is no replacing practical learning enabled through school.

We have learned the hard way that education, at its core, is about human interaction. Can we ignore the smile on the faces of our children when they meet their friends and teachers on the campus? Schools, no doubt, provide a space for social interaction. After all, face-to-face interaction creates a stronger bond!

This was evident on the faces of children and teachers when I met them in a school last week when they started attending in-person classes. It is summed up in the words of a student, "It is nice to be back to school after so many months. We are thrilled to meet our classmates and teachers".

Now for parents, getting their children back to school was a kind of relief as it meant that they can now keep track of their children's screen time and usage of social media. Now with classes in school, they can regulate the time spent on mobile phones and the Internet.

Even as the hybrid model of learning may gradually pave the way for education, the most appropriate space to learn is schools and that children can never grow out of it, how lucrative the tech world may become!



The IMF needs to mitigate climate transition risk

KEVIN P GALLAGHER, XIAOBEI HE, IRENE MONASTEROLO

The latest scientific assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes it abundantly clear that the costs of inaction on global warming are rising rapidly and will disproportionately fall on poorer countries that bear no responsibility for causing the problem. But what is often overlooked is that climate action itself may also have unintended negative effects in the developing world.

Scholars and central bankers usually refer to two types of climate-related financial risk: "Physical risks" and "transition risks." Whereas physical risk is a result of increases in emissions concentration, transition risks can emerge from technological shocks and from the introduction of climate policies and regulations in key economies.

Between 1850 and 1990, the United States and Europe accounted for 75 per cent of cumulative carbon dioxide emissions. Today, they contribute about 50 per cent, whereas China, India, and other emerging economies account for a growing share. Given this history, the US and Europe must act boldly to address the climate problem, charting a path for the world's fast-growing emitters to follow.

Together, the US, the European Union, China and India account for more than 55 per cent of world GDP. As the leading drivers of global production and consumption patterns, their actions tend to "spill over" to other countries. Thus, suddenly introducing policies and regulations designed to phase out fossil fuels in one of these major economies could strand not only physical assets (like oil rigs) but also workers and communities. Many other countries around the world could then face fiscal and financial instability.

Ambitious climate policies to replace fossil fuels with clean energy sources will benefit all only if they reduce these "transition spillover risks." That will require coordination among countries and significant investments in resilience, adaptation and adjustment support for workers and entrepreneurs in the legacy fossil-fuel industries.

Transition spillover risks can occur whenever climate action in one country inflicts a negative shock on the balance of payments and public debt of a commercial partner that exports fossil fuels or high-carbon goods. Although spillovers are recognised in the Paris climate agreement, there has been only limited research on this form of climate risk and how best to mitigate it, leaving a significant blind spot in the pursuit of a

just transition.

Fortunately, new research from the Task Force on Climate, Development and the International Monetary Fund, of which we are members, seeks to fill this knowledge gap. In the task force's first technical paper, we examine the implications of the EU's proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). In the upper bound of our estimates, we find that it would adversely affect exports and welfare in many developing countries.

For example, with the broadest implementation of the CBAM, Mozambique's economy could shrink by 2.5 per cent, Russia's by 0.6 per cent, and India's, Egypt's, and Turkey's by almost

with strong trade links to the Chinese economy. The authors conclude that a Chinese coal phaseout, by curtailing demand for Indonesian coal, would adversely affect Indonesia's balance of payments, fiscal position and public debt, owing to the stranding of assets in the mining sector, which plays a key role in the domestic economy.

These findings are not an excuse for climate inaction. But they do underscore the need for more international coordination. Climate-change mitigation and adaptation must be pursued in a manner that is consistent with maintaining financial stability, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and fostering equity within and across national borders.

As the only global, rules-based, multilateral institution charged with maintaining financial stability, the IMF should take the lead on managing transition spillover risks. As part of its global and bilateral surveillance functions, it should help member states identify the sources of short- and longer-term risks. And the IMF should work in tandem with the World Bank and other development-finance institutions to help countries mobilise the external and domestic resources needed to decarbonise their economies while also maintaining fiscal and financial stability.

Even then, though, some countries will inevitably suffer unintended consequences. In those cases, the IMF should avoid attaching onerous conditionalities to its financing programmes, as such provisions have been shown to worsen poverty and inequality and hamper long-run growth.

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THE POTENTIAL OF COUNTRIES' CLIMATE POLICIES TO DAMAGE OTHER COUNTRIES' ECONOMIES HAS NOT RECEIVED AS MUCH ATTENTION AS IT DESERVES

0.3 per cent each. Thus, income and welfare inequality between rich and poor economies could worsen, further eroding some low-income countries' capacity to decarbonise.

Another study examines how carbon pricing in China (consistent with the scenarios offered by the Network for Greening the Financial System) would affect Indonesia, an emerging market



Activists from the Extinction Rebellion (XR) climate change protest group, demonstrate at the Lloyds of London's head office in London on Tuesday as part of a series of actions aiming to stop the fossil fuel economy. – AFP

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Ahmad launches European Le Mans campaign

MUSCAT: Experienced GT3 motor racing champion Ahmad al Harthy has officially confirmed a brand new challenge for his main 2022 motorsport season, a move into GTE competition in the prestigious European Le Mans Series with Oman Racing.

Al Harthy, a double Pro-Am Champion in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup, is to take on the GTE class of the European Le Mans Series along with British driver Sam De Haan — whom the Omani partnered in February’s ALMS — and star Aston Martin factory driver Marco Sorensen.

Notably, Al Harthy enjoys fantastic continuity in terms of his partners for the ELMS with the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS all providing their key support for the full six event season.

“I am incredibly excited to be taking on this fantastic new challenge in GTE in the European

Le Mans Series and, of course, so very proud to be representing Oman on such a prestigious stage”, said Al Harthy, “We have a fantastic team in Oman Racing and I’m absolutely delighted to be teaming with Sam and Marco for this new chapter, I really am looking forward to racing alongside them both.

“The Aston Martin GTE is a new challenge for me, but testing so far has gone well and working with a driver as successful as Marco and the guys at TF Sport — who know the car — means we’re taking a lot of positivity forward into the ELMS season.”

He added: “I’m delighted to have the ongoing support of my incredible sponsors, it’s wonderful to have OQ returning as a key strategic partner alongside the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, MHD-ITICS. Hopefully we can all enjoy a successful season and be in the fight for podiums, race wins and the championship at the end of the

2022 European Le Mans Series Calendar

Official Testing - Paul Ricard, France - April 11,12

Rd1: 4hrs of Le Castellet, France - April 16, 17

Rd2: 4hrs of Imola, Italy - May 14, 15

Rd3: 4hrs of Monza, Italy - July 2,3

Rd4: 4hrs of Barcelona, Spain - August 27, 28

Rd5: 4hrs of Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - September 24, 25

Rd6: 4hrs of Portimao, Portugal - October 15, 16

Al Harthy to step from GT3 to GTE competition with Oman Racing

Line-up of Al Harthy, De Haan, Sorensen to race Aston Martin GTE

season.”

Following a two-day officially timed test at Circuit Paul Ricard in France, which concludes on Tuesday, the opening four-hour race of the 2022 European Le Mans Series will take place on April 17, at the Le Castellet track.

The championship will then

visit legendary circuits Imola and Monza, both in Italy of course, Barcelona in Spain and Belgium’s Spa-Francorchamps, before reaching a conclusion on October 16 at Portimao in Portugal.

Oman Racing’s stunning black and silver No 69 Aston Martin GTE will be prepared and engineered by

long-time partner team TF Sport which has been instrumental in the many successes enjoyed by Al Harthy over recent seasons.

The GTE specification car has significant differences to the Vantage GT3 which Al Harthy most recently raced in the Asian Le Mans. Featuring a larger rear wing, much bigger rear diffuser and aerodynamic changes to the front splitter and side skirts of the car, it also has a number of changes under the skin which all go toward making GTE cars several seconds a lap faster than the GT3.

Platinum graded Danish driver Sorensen needs no introduction in the world of endurance racing, the Aston Martin factory driver having twice previously won the LMGTE Pro Championship in the FIA World Endurance Championship. British racer De Haan, who is graded Silver, is experienced in GTWCE and the British GT Championship, winning the Pro-Am title in British GT in 2019.

OQ TIE-UP TO CONTINUE

As part of his official 2022 European Le Mans Series announcement, Al Harthy is also elated to confirm the continuation of his partnership with a globally integrated energy company, OQ, the Omani company which first became associated with the multiple champion driver last year.

OQ is a globally integrated energy company with roots in Oman, operating in 17 countries around the world and covering the entire value chain from exploration and production to marketing and distribution of end-user products. OQ’s fuels and chemicals are sold in over 60 countries worldwide, making the company a prominent player in the energy sector.

Round one of the European Le Mans Series at Circuit Paul Ricard in France on April 17, which begins at 13.00 local time, will be streamed live online here: <https://live.europeanlemansseries.com/en/>

OAA to host digital rally, drift and karting this week



MUSCAT: The Oman Automobile Association will be holding three separate events at their facilities starting this Wednesday, from Digital Motorsports to Freestyle Drift to the Rotax Max Challenge.

The events will take place in their respective courses at the Muscat Speedway Karting track, the Muscat Drift Arena and the Digital Centre.

The WRC 10 Digital Rally will start the action on April 13 and 14, while a freestyle drift event will be organised on April 15 and Rotax Max Challenge will be staged on April 16.

Free practice in Digital Motorsports is available for contestants everyday at the digital centre except on days for the gaming qualifications and finals.

EVENTS SCHEDULE

WRC 10 Digital Rally: April 13-14

Freestyle Drift: April 15

Rotax Max Challenge: April 16

The freestyle drift competition is expected to be one of the best ever, with more drivers taking part by showcasing their drifting skills on the track.

Freestyle Drift Race Director, Ali al Balushi said: “It’s all about the adrenaline rush that comes from drifting at tight corners with the increasing noise of the car exhausts, the turbo and the engines.

“Of course safety comes first, and all drivers should keep that in mind at all times. We always take extra precautions from our

side with checking the cars but the drivers too should do their part by the simple task of putting on the seatbelt.”

Drivers in the Rotax Max Challenge join in to compete and have fun, setting further goals to improve their racing skills.

Muscat Speedway Manager, Sanad al Rawahi said: “Those who love speed, overtaking and competitive battles, this is the right event for them to showcase their driving skills.”

All events will take place at 8 pm and end by 12.30 am with an award ceremony for the drivers.

Visit the OAA main office for tickets and registration. Ramadhan working hours are from Sunday to Thursday, from 9 am to 1.30 pm.



Williamson hits fifty as Hyderabad down Gujarat

MUMBAI: Kane Williamson's attacking half-century and an unbeaten 34 by Nicholas Pooran helped Sunrisers Hyderabad hand newcomers Gujarat Titans their first loss in this season's IPL on Monday.

Chasing 163 for victory, Hyderabad were propelled to victory by a 64-run opening stand between Williamson (57) and Abhishek Sharma (42) and reached their target with five balls and eight wickets to spare in Mumbai.

Williamson fell to his opposite number Hardik Pandya in the 17th over but the left-handed Pooran kept up the charge in his 18-ball blitz as the West Indies batter completed the Indian

Premier League win with a six.

Hardik's unbeaten 50 went in vain after he steered his side to 162-7 but Gujarat — one of two new franchises in the expanded 10-team IPL — went down to their first loss in four matches.

"Batting wise, I think we were 7-10 runs short and would've made a difference in the end," said Hardik.

"Bowling wise, we had a good start but had two bad overs. I think they bowled well (in the last 5 overs). Our motto has been the same which is to learn from the mistakes."

Williamson escaped when an lbw shout that was not reviewed and replays suggested the ball would have hit the stumps. The

New Zealand skipper was on two.

The star opener raised his fifty with a six off Lockie Ferguson before he mistimed a hit to long-on.

Hyderabad bowlers kept the opposition batters in check for the first 10 overs despite a few hits from Hardik.

Umran Malik kept the speed guns busy and clocked the fastest delivery of the IPL so far at 153.3 kph (95 mph) as he began his spell by hitting the helmet grill of Hardik but the batter counter attacked by two boundaries.

Malik, an up and coming quick from the Indian-administered Kashmir, finished off his first over with the wicket of Matthew Wade, trapped lbw for 19.

Hardik put on crucial partnerships including a 40-run stand with David Miller and then he and Abhinav Manohar got 50 brisk runs for the fifth wicket.

Manohar smashed a quickfire 35 after being dropped thrice in a poor effort in the field by the Hyderabad players.

Hardik completed his fifty off the penultimate ball of the innings and pace bowler T Natarajan finished with the wicket of Rashid Khan to return figures of 2-34.

— AFP

Brief scores: Sunrisers Hyderabad 168-2 (Kane Williamson 57, Nicholas Pooran 34*; Hardik Pandya 1-27) beat Gujarat Titans 162-7 (Hardik Pandya 50*, Abhinav Manohar 35; T Natarajan 2-34) by 8 wickets.

OCT Ruwi cruise past OCT Seeb to seal spot in final

MUSCAT: OCT Ruwi maintained their spotless record in the all-Omani tournament with a 9-wicket victory over OCT Seeb in the semifinal at the Oman Cricket Academy on Monday.

After electing to bat first, OCT Seeb's opening pair of Issa al Balushi and Othman al Zadjali looked in fine nick for the first 5 overs. The former led the scoring for his side with a run-a-ball 22. Their dismissals in the space of 6 balls came as a body blow, but the one that dropped OCT Seeb to the canvas was Ali Akbar Mohammed al Balushi's three-wicket over.

Younis Ab, Mahmood Sufyan and Samir Othman were all sent packing, triggering a collapse that saw none of the following batters, bar Sami Mahmood, reach double figures.

From 62-2, OCT Seeb proceeded to be cleaned out for 97 with an over to spare.

Alongside Ali Akbar, Mohammed al Balushi and Nawed Abdulmajeed al Balushi picked up 3 wickets each for OCT Ruwi.

In response, OCT Ruwi chased the target down in 12.5 overs. Mohammed al Balushi continued his brilliant form in the tournament with an unbeaten 36. Fellow opener Wasim Ismail Mohamed al Balushi blitzed his way to a 11-ball 23, but his haste to wrap proceedings up quickly led to his demise in the fourth over.

Newcomer Zubair Ali Akbar al Balushi was much more composed and his 66-run partnership with Mohammed sealed a richly deserved win for OCT Ruwi. Zubair hit 34.

OCT Ruwi now await the second finalist and will contest

them for the crown on April 21.

OCT Seeb on the other hand are one of the teams vying for third place, with their match also scheduled on the same day.

Simultaneously on Turf 2, OCT Al Mabela registered their first win in the Eliminator against OCT Al Amerat.

Batting first after winning the toss, OCT Al Mabela lost wickets at regular intervals, but Shareef al Balushi's brilliant 41-run knock served to anchor their innings. Asaad al Balushi contributed an invaluable 26 runs to the cause and Zafarullah al Balushi and Asif al Balushi chipped in with scores 15 and 13 respectively to take OCT Al Mabela to a creditable 126-9 in 20 overs.

Rafeeq Mohammed Siyad al Balushi claimed 3-25 for OCT Al Amerat.

OCT Al Amerat's run-chase never really got going. Anaya Allah top-scored with 17 runs as they fell 52 runs short, folding for 74 in 17.3 overs.

Nabeel Mohd Boota was the pick of OCT Al Mabela's bowling unit. His spell produced 3 wickets and 14 runs. Both Shareef al Balushi and Saeed al Balushi claimed 2 apiece. Their side now face OCT Al Hail 'B' in a fight for fifth place on April 12.

BRIEF SCORES
OCT Seeb 97 all out in 19 overs (Issa al Balushi 22 (22b, 2x4); Mohammed al Balushi 3-8, Nawed Abdulmajeed al Balushi 3-15, Ali Akbar Mohammed al Balushi 3-18) lost to OCT Ruwi 102-1 in 12.5 overs (Mohammed al Balushi 36 (30b, 2x4, 2x6), Zubair Ali Akbar al Balushi 34 (36b, 2x4, 2x6); Younis Ab 1-9) by 9 wickets.
OCT Al Mabela 126-9 in 20 overs (Shareef al Balushi 41 (39b, 3x4); Rafeeq Mohammed Siyad al Balushi 3-25) beat OCT Al Amerat 74 all out in 17.3 overs (Anaya Allah 17 (15b, 1x4, 1x6); Nabeel Mohd Boota 3-14) by 52 runs.



U19 coach David Mansilla

Oman U-19 team set for Asian Cup Qualifiers

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Oman national under-19 football team began the second part of the domestic camp in Muscat on Monday in preparation for the AFC U20 Asian Cup Qualifiers in September.

The warm-up gathering of the team was under watchful eyes of the newly appointed head coach for U-19 team, David Mansilla. This is the second camp for the Spanish coach who took charge in February.

The first short domestic camp took place during March 30 until April 1.

The initial sessions focused on improving the physical and



technical performance of the players. Also, the coaching staff are working to boost the fitness of the players.

The camp will conclude on April 15. More internal camps will be followed with possibility

of an external camp after the Eid holidays.

Spanish coach David Mansilla and his assistant coaching staff attended the final match of the 2021-22 U-19 league. Nizwa club were crowned the champi-

ons of the league after defeating Dhofar 4-3 in penalty shoot-out. The regulation time ended at 1-1 draw on April 1. The head coach of U-19 national team opted five players in the squad from Dhofar while three players from Nizwa.

Jaalan club lifted the shield of the the 2021-22 U-17 league as they beat Al Ittihad 2-1 in the concluding match on March 31.

U-19 SQUAD
Said al Ghanbusi, Mamoon al Oraimi (Al Oruba), Naji al Hasani (Jaalan), Khalfan al Rudaini, Abdulaziz al Khaldi, Mubarak al Khaldi (Saham), Mohammed al Oufi, Ayman al Nabhani, Abdullah al Affi (Nizwa), Salim al Shama-khi (Al Suwaiq), Said al Adawi (Al Rustaq), Al Muhanad al Habsi (Al Mudhaibi), Mulham al Hadhrami, Osama al Mahruqi, Osama al Rawahi (Seeb), Ahed al Mashakhyi, Saif al Makhmari, Mazin al Harrasi (Muscat), Abdul Majeed al Balushi, Ali al Balushi (Oman club), Al Moat-asim al Sameen, Sultan al Marzooqi, Qusai Adil, Abdullatif al Mamari, Ahmed al Shanfari (Dhofar) and Mohammed AbdulHakeem (Al Nasr).

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Banking credit climbs 3.5% to RO 27.9 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks (collectively known as Other Depository Corporations – ODCs) rose 3.5 per cent to RO 27.9 billion at the end of February 2022. It included RO 23.5 billion in credit to the private sector, which was up 1.6 per cent (Y-o-Y).

According to a review of banking and financial sector developments by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), the non-financial corporate sector received the highest share of the total private sector credit, over 46.6 per cent, followed by the household sector (45.1 per cent).

Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y growth of 4.2 per cent to reach RO 25.8 billion at the end of February 2022. Total private sector deposits increased by 2.2 per cent to RO 17.4 billion.

In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, household deposits accounted for a 50.9 per cent share, followed by non-financial corporations at 32.4 per cent, financial corporations at 14.2 per



cent and the other sectors at 2.5 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 2.2 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-February 2022. Credit to the private sector increased by 0.9 per cent to reach RO 19.2 billion while their overall investments in securities went up by 22.3 per cent to RO 5.3 billion as of end-February 2022.

Investment in Government Development Bonds increased

by 20.4 per cent compared to the same period last year to RO 2.2 billion while their investments in foreign securities declined by 30.4 per cent to RO 0.802 billion at the end of February 2022.

Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 2.2 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 21.3 billion at end-February 2022. Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 11.0 per cent at RO 4.9 billion, whereas deposits of public enterprises declined by 1.9 per

cent to RO 1.4 billion.

Private sector deposits, which accounted for 68.4 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, decreased by 0.01 per cent as of February 2022 to reach RO 14.6 billion.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.9 billion at the end of February 2022, recording a growth of 10.2 per cent over the previous year.

Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 14.8 per cent to RO 4.5 billion.

The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased by 10.7 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis to RO 5.9 billion and constituted about 15.3 per cent of the banking system's assets as of end-February 2022.

Among the indicators of monetary aggregates, broad money supply M2 at the end of February 2022 increased by 2.2 per cent to reach RO 20.3 billion.

This increase was the outcome of a 0.96 per cent expansion in narrow money (M1) and 2.7 per cent increase in quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits).

During the same period under discussion, currency with public witnessed a decline by 4.2 per cent, while demand deposit increased by 8.4 per cent.

The weighted average interest rate on RO deposits witnessed a marginal decrease from 2.011 per cent at end February 2021 to 1.964 per cent at end- February 2022, while the weighted average RO lending rate decreased from 5.451 per cent to 5.450 per cent over the same period.

Meanwhile, the overnight Rial Omani domestic inter-bank lending rate fell significantly to 0.430 per cent in February 2022 from 0.547 per cent a year ago, reflecting transmission of policy rate cuts by the CBO in line with the rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

The average Repo rate for liquidity injection by the CBO as of end-February 2022 remained at 0.5 per cent, the same as last year.

Meanwhile, the nominal GDP, per preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), showed an increase of 16.1 per cent during the fourth quarter of 2021 over the same period of 2020.

The expansion was driven by an increase in the output of the hydrocarbon sector by 38.5 per cent and non-hydrocarbon sector by 8.4 per cent.

The price of Omani crude averaged \$76.7 per barrel during Jan-Feb 2022, which was higher by 63.5 per cent than the Jan-Feb 2021 average. Daily oil production averaged 1,032.7 thousand barrels during Jan-Feb 2022, which was higher by 8.2 per cent over the previous year.

Maha Energy preparing to drill six wells in Oman's Block 70

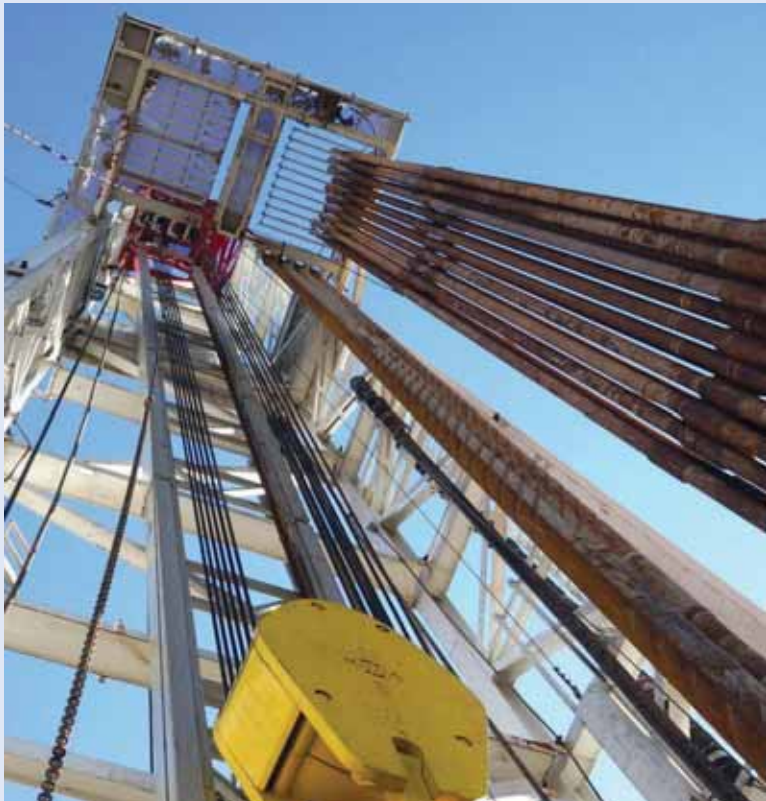
CONRAD PRABHU
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Swedish-based international upstream energy firm Maha Energy says it is preparing to drill the first of six wells targeting a promising heavy oilfield named 'Mafraq' in its Block 70 licence in central Oman.

According to Maha Energy CEO Jonas Lindvall (pictured), the proposed well-drilling programme is scheduled to begin during the second quarter of this year, which will mark the start of test production from the Block.

"A drilling rig has been selected and the drilling of six wells is scheduled to begin on the Mafraq field during the second quarter of 2022. Two appraisal wells will be drilled first to acquire important information such as the oil water contact, crude oil properties and cores of the producing interval.

Additionally, four horizontal wells will be drilled and placed on extended well test production to evaluate water encroachment in the fractured limestone reservoir," Lindvall



stated in the company's newly published 2021 Annual Reporter.

Block 70, a relatively tiny onshore concession covering an area of 639 sq km, was awarded to Maha Energy as part of an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) signed with the Omani government in September 2020.

Originally part of the prolific

Block 6 licence of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), which accounts for a dominant share of the country's crude oil production, Block 70 is best known for its shallow and undeveloped Mafraq heavy oilfield.

Various studies put the black oil potential of the field at between 185 – 510 million barrels of original oil in place.



Adding to its cost-competitive appeal is its potential to produce in normal conditions, without the need for capital-intensive thermal-based enhanced oil recovery (EOR) methods typically prescribed for heavy oil production in general.

Significantly, Block 70 – the company's first licence in the Sultanate of Oman – will help shore up Maha Energy's future reserves potential, according to the CEO.

"The Mafraq field accounts for almost half our future oil volumes and if we can prove up the Oil Water Contact to where strong indications suggest it is, we are poised to deliver significant volumes of oil from Oman," he said.

Besides the Sultanate of Oman, Maha Energy also has a presence in Brazil, Canada, USA and Sweden.

Oil rises on Chinese demand, Opec warning

LONDON: Oil prices climbed on Tuesday as Shanghai's relaxation of some Covid-19 restrictions eased concerns about Chinese demand and as Opec warned it would be impossible to replace potential supply losses from Russia.

Brent crude futures rose by \$5.51, or 5.6 per cent, to \$103.99 a barrel by 1343 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate was up \$5.12, or 5.4 per cent, at \$99.41. Both contracts lost about 4 per cent on Monday.

Earlier, Opec told the European Union that current and future sanctions on Russia could create one of the worst ever oil supply shocks and it would be impossible to replace those volumes, and signalled it would not pump more.

European Union officials held talks in Vienna with representatives of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries amid calls for the group to increase output and as the EU considers potential sanctions on Russian oil.

"We could potentially see the loss of more than 7 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian oil and other liquids exports, resulting from current and future sanctions or other voluntary actions," Opec Secretary General Mohammad



A man fixes the logo of Opec in Vienna, Austria. – Reuters

Barkindo said, according to a copy of his speech seen by media.

"Considering the current demand outlook, it would be nearly impossible to replace a loss in volumes of this magnitude." The European Union reiterated its call in the meeting for oil-producing countries to look at whether they can increase deliveries to help cool soaring oil prices, a European Commission official said.

EU representatives also pointed out that Opec has a responsibility to ensure balanced oil markets, the official said. Opec has resisted calls by the United States and the International Energy Agency to pump more crude to cool prices, which reached a 14-year peak last month after Washington and Brussels imposed sanctions on Moscow following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — Reuters

Sohar Islamic, Madayn sign retail, wholesale banking solutions pact

MUSCAT: Contributing and promoting the national agenda of diversification as well as generating in country value (ICV), Sohar Islamic - Sohar International's Islamic Banking Window has signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Madayn - the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates, to open new service centres at Madayn branches and offer a suite of retail and wholesale banking solutions.

The Memorandum was signed recently at Madayn's Head Office in Knowledge Oasis Muscat, by Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer of Sohar International and Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, Chief Executive Officer of Madayn, in the presence of executives from both the organisations.

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing ceremony, Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer of Sohar International said, "This agreement underlines our vision to be a world-leading Omani services company that helps customers, community



and people to prosper and grow. It further establishes our expertise in diligently meeting the requirements of major government and non-government organisations.

Therefore, we are on a path to develop a collaborative ecosystem of world-class products, services and financial advisory that are aimed at providing an enriched partners and customer experience.

Such inclusive partnerships with major entities from the government sector will not only bolster our presence in

the industry, but also mark our contribution to fuelling marquee national projects. As part of the memorandum, we will support Madayn by evaluating projects and providing guidelines to highlight bankability features."

As per the agreement, the Bank will provide services that fulfil Madayn's financial requirements through Wholesale Banking Solutions, including financial advisory services that evaluate projects from bankability point of view.

This service will be over and above its portfolio of

deposits and accounts targeting employees who are seeking Shariah-compliant products and services. Under its retail banking solutions, Sohar Islamic will also provide Madayn employees a set of finance facilities, with fully Shariah-compliant products - including auto, home and personal finance - that will make it easy and convenient for them to finance their needs.

The offerings also consist of exclusive products and services that cater to the requirements of the various segments to fulfil their specific needs.

"Having established world class business cities that resonate with Oman's values, identity, and ethics, Madayn continues to play a significant role in attracting foreign investments to the country and stimulating the private sector to achieve sustainable economic and social development. The new partnership with Sohar Islamic will fuel its larger objective of providing integrated services that meet the requirements of local businesses," said Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani.

BankDhofar named top Omani brand

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has recently received the "Top Omani Brands - Banking Category" Award from AIWA Magazine. The award recognises BankDhofar as one of the solid financial institutions in the Sultanate of Oman that has been providing a convenient banking experience.

The award was presented by AIWA magazine, at a prestigious award distribution ceremony. The winning brands were selected as per a survey done by Alam Al Iktisaad in partnership with the Arabian Research Bureau. BankDhofar is one of the brands that enjoyed the highest brand recall among the customers.

Over the previous years, BankDhofar has exerted efforts to adopt latest technologies and to improve the customers' experience, thus gaining trust among its customers and was categorised as the Most Trusted Brands for two years in a row 2020 & 2021.

Since its inception, BankDhofar has grown to be one of the largest banks in Oman. The Bank has set the foundation and infrastructure for further digitisation. The Bank caters to customers' convenience while conducting banking services. Through its digital banking



channels, BankDhofar provides around the clock convenient banking experience, where customers may easily conduct their banking transactions whether through the multi-award winning mobile banking app, Internet banking service, ATM & CDM network...etc. BankDhofar believes that customers are the core for its success and operational growth.

Thus, the Bank constantly endeavours to promote positive communication and retain a sustainable relationship with its customers. Through its Customer Engagement Hub, BankDhofar provides significant benefits to customers by offering services around the clock, including holidays.

In addition to the digital channels, BankDhofar provides top-notch services through its branch networks.

Kia's all-new Sportage now in Oman

MUSCAT: Reliable International Automotive, the dealers for Kia in Oman, recently launched the all-new Sportage in Oman. The all-new Sportage is an SUV that has been carefully constructed to inspire customers with its striking interior and exterior design.

The 2023 Kia Sportage is ringing in a new era for one of the brand's most sought-after models, with a comprehensive redesign that is unquestionably dramatic.

The fifth-generation model challenges design norms and moves the Sportage identity to the next level, while paying homage to its rich heritage.

The all-new Sportage is now available with Kia's most exciting campaign. Own a Sportage, this Ramadhan and get a chance to scratch and win 2 Kia at one time.

Additional scratch & win prizes include, Win your purchased Kia back, Win all-new Sportage, Win up to 20 per cent on display price, Win periodic service up to 100,000 kms and VAT is on us. The campaign is valid until May 1, 2022. (Conditions apply. Please



visit Kia showroom for details.)

"Reinventing the Sportage provided our tremendously talented design teams the opportunity to curate something completely different; to take inspiration from our brand relaunch to inspire customers through contemporary and pioneering SUV design.

With the all-new Sportage, we wanted to take more than just one step forward, instead we moved it on to a different level in the SUV class," commented Karim Habib, Senior Vice-President of Head of Global Design Centre.

"As Kia's flagship SUV, the all-new Sportage is as practical as it is compelling, offering copious amounts of space and a modern suite of hi-tech features that cater to the interests and demands of seasoned drivers and passengers," said Yaser Shabsogh, Chief Operating Officer of Middle East and Africa, Kia Corporation.

The all-new Sportage's exterior epitomises contrast with its bold, impactful lines and assertive presence, balanced with innovation and instinctive characteristics suitable for any road, anywhere.

Using Bank Muscat's mBanking app for Zakat, Sadaqah and Eidiyah enhances customer experience

MUSCAT: In line with its vision "To serve you better, everyday" and commitment to customer-centric services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, has reminded its customers about the large number of innovative and enhanced features available on its digital banking channels, especially Mobile and Internet banking.

These include a single click facility charity contributions like Zakat and Sadaqah and also for Eidiya (Eid gift) transfers.

Customers can download the latest version of the Bank Muscat Mobile Banking app from Apple App Store, Google Play or Huawei AppGallery. These features will be particularly useful for bank customers to share the joy of the Holy Month of Ramadhan and Eid Al Fitr.

Speaking on the occasion,



Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili (pictured), Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are delighted to provide innovative and enhanced digital banking services through mBanking and Internet Banking.

The bank always adopts a strategy and culture of innovation to enhance the experience of its customers. Our valued customers can especially use the highly-secure mBanking

app for Zakat, Sadaqah and Eidiyah to enjoy a customer centric banking experience.

Customers can transfer Zakat and Sadaqah easily through the app. All transactions are made in Omani Rials and the amount will be debited from the account chosen by the customer.

It must be noted that the customer will receive SMS notifications for the amounts transferred to each beneficiary, and the process of making donations is highly intuitive thanks to the state-of-the-art technology used in the Mobile Banking application.

Personal Banking customers can also use the Mobile Banking app to make Eidiya transfers to as many as 10 beneficiary accounts at a single time. To use the feature, a customer simply needs to click on "Transfer > Eid Gift" after logging in.

Alizz Islamic Bank continues to give back during Ramadhan

MUSCAT: For the ninth consecutive year, Alizz Islamic Bank continued its humanitarian role towards the community by celebrating the holy month of Ramadhan via distributing food packages for low-income families in various governorates and wilayats across the Sultanate.

Implementing the principle of social solidarity, this initiative is part of the bank's CSR strategy to conduct various initiatives that enhance its partnership with society beyond Islamic banking.

A large number of Alizz Islamic

Bank branch managers and staff volunteered in distributing packages for the low-income families in the governorates of Muscat, North and South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Dhofar and Al Sharqiyah North, ensuring that the packages are distributed to those in need.

To support these families to prepare for the month of Ramadhan, the bank distributed 800 food packages filled with essential foods including but not limited to rice, wheat, oil, milk, sugar etc.



The secondary goal of this initiative is to encourage employee

volunteerism and raise the awareness about the benefits of

giving back to society such as strengthening employee morale, creating a more positive and productive work environment, and promoting helping those in need.

Such initiatives reflect the bank's CSR commitment and its efforts to encourage various businesses across the Sultanate of Oman to contribute to supporting the low-income families, particularly during the month of Ramadhan.

Murtadha Jawad, AGM - Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Alizz Islamic Bank, said "At Alizz Islamic Bank

we are committed to supporting the growth and welfare of the communities in which we live and operate in, as we believe that the growth of individuals and businesses relies on the prosperity of these communities.

Our flagship CSR initiative the Iftar Say'im aims to promote the spirit of solidarity and cooperation within the bank's employees and the community by providing necessities to low-income families. It is our responsibility as a bank to give back to society and we are proud to do so."



CMA hosts meeting on Smart GCC Investor Award



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) organised an introductory meeting on the Smart GCC Investor Award in collaboration with the Directorate-General of Education, Governorate of Muscat. The meeting, which targeted the teachers of plastic arts in the Governorate, comes in the framework of the GCC investment awareness programme supervised by the GCC capital market commissions.

The meeting included introductory presentation on the capital market and its importance in the economy presented by Huda bint Rashid al Maamariyah, Director of Internal Audit Department at the CMA on the role of the sector in boosting the economic development in the country.

Huda bint Salim al Aisaeyah, member of the executive committee of the GCC investment awareness programme 'Mulim', presented a paper on the GCC Smart Investor Award which included an explanation on the initiative launched by GCC awareness programme with the aim of encouraging the citizens and residents to produce creative content enriching the awareness content in the financial culture to enhance sound financial practices.

The award aims to encourage citizens and resident in the GCC states to participate with creative ideas in three categories i.e. video, painting and photography in subjects related to financial planning, saving, investment and investor protection.

Interested contestants can participation via the website: www.mulimgcc.org

Oman now 100th country to ratify Maritime Labour Convention

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

The Sultanate of Oman has become the 100th country to ratify a 2006 treaty that protects the rights, pay and conditions of seafarers — a milestone that was commemorated on Monday by a ceremony at the headquarters of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva.

The ratification means more than 96 per cent of the world's gross shipping tonnage is now covered by the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), which also applies to most countries that supply workers for the sector. Guy Ryder, the Director-General of the International Labour Organisation, described the development as a milestone.

He said: "Oman, a long-standing maritime nation, has shown the way forward for other countries in the region. Indeed, Oman becomes the first member of the Gulf Cooperation Council to join the global efforts to ensure decent work for seafarers and fair competition for shipowners."

On March 29, the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations in Geneva, Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, formally submitted the ratification documents. Speaking at the ceremony, Al Khanjari underscored his country's commitment to



(Image for illustration only)

safeguarding the labour rights of those who work on the high seas.

"Joining the MLC, 2006, is a clear confirmation of the Sultanate of Oman's long-standing tradition as a prominent maritime nation in the region.

This ratification reaffirms the commitment of my country to uphold the provisions of the Convention to achieve decent work for seafarers," he said.

The Maritime Labour Convention brought together a large number of existing labour standards that no longer reflected contemporary working and living conditions, had low ratification levels, or inadequate enforcement and compliance systems. Combining them into one

Convention makes it easier for countries to regulate and enforce consistent industry norms and standards worldwide, according to the ILO.

The MLC was adopted in February 2006 and entered into force on August 20, 2013. Since then, it has become a worldwide reference for the maritime industry and a pillar of international maritime rules and regulations.

The heads of two organisations that represent seafarers and shipowners, respectively, have also welcomed this latest ratification.

"As the first Gulf State to adopt the MLC, Oman extends the safeguards of this Convention not

only to its own seafarers, but also to those who call into its ports and navigate through its strategically important waters," said Stephen Cotton General Secretary of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). The Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), Guy Platten, stated it is now more vital than ever for more Governments to ratify the Convention.

"Reaching 100 signatories is an important milestone. As we saw throughout the pandemic and the crew change crisis, governments who have ratified the Convention must stand by their words and take action to protect seafarers' rights," he said.

Pact signed for construction of Maysan Square in Duqm

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Maysan Properties SAOC has signed with Khimji Ramdas on Sunday related to the first phase construction of Maysan Square project in Duqm. Signed by Sadiq Jaffer Sulaiman, CEO of Maysan Properties and Hritik Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas, the agreement was for the construction work at Maysan Square in Duqm.

Sadiq Jaffer Sulaiman, CEO, Maysan Properties, said that there is a demand for quality office spaces in the region, which is expected to see a population growth of around 200,000 over



the years.

Sadiq Sulaiman added, "Duqm is quietly emerging as one of the fastest growing economic hubs in the region. The response has been impressive from investors despite

the pressures of the pandemic that prevailed for most of the past year. We aim to deliver and create an iconic business district."

Maysan Square is strategically located in the centre of Duqm, 10

minutes away from the port and 15 minutes from Duqm Airport.

"Khimji Ramdas is pleased to associate with Maysan Properties on one of its renowned projects (Maysan Square). We believe that Maysan Square plays an important part in Duqm's importance as a vital business, logistics and industrial hub in the Sultanate & the region," Hritik Khimji, Khimji Ramdas Director said.

Abdul Fattah Joudi, CEO, Lines and Vision, the architectural and engineering consulting firm for Maysan Square, added: "Our aim isn't only to keep up with the changing trends in the industry, but also aspire to influence them and contribute to

the advancement of architecture in the region. Maysan Square - Duqm is certainly one of our prestigious projects in the region."

The project's first phase consists of an office complex with three wings and is comprise of 258 units that are divided between offices and retail spaces. All units are available to all nationalities for purchase with the benefit of having a residency visa and operating on a tax-free zone.

The complex will be built on the built-up area 25,500 m2 over a construction period of 24 months. The project will include 20 buildings constructed across five phases within Oman's first Lifestyle Business District.

Britain economic growth slows

LONDON: Britain's economic growth slowed in February 2022 amid declines in the production of cars, computers and chemicals. Gross domestic product (GDP) increased just 0.1% from a month earlier, down from the 0.8% growth reported in January 2022, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) said yesterday.

The output of productive industries, including manufacturing, mining and power generation, dropped 0.6% in the month. Construction fell 0.1%. Those declines largely offset an increase in service industries, driven by an 8.6% jump in accommodation and food services. — **ONA**

Mazoon Electricity invests RO 80m in network enhancement

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

In accordance with its project plans for 2022, Mazoon Electricity, (member of Nama Group) is constructing a number of primary substations with related 33 kV and 11 kV feeders to expand its power network, enhance network performance and ensure service sustainability for customers across governorates within its coverage area.

The projects are currently under way in the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, North Al Sharqiyah, South Al Sharqiyah and South Al Batinah, as well as the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq in North Al Batinah. Over the past months, Mazoon Electricity has completed and

operated some strategic projects in the field of electricity distribution at a total cost of RO 28 million.

Among the projects completed are the 33 kV portion in Wadi Bani Awf grid station in Al Rustaq and another primary substation in Al Suwaiq. In addition, operations were commissioned for primary substations in Fanja, Masrun in Ibra and Sayma, Humaydah, Afyah in Al Dakhiliyah.

Moreover, operations were commissioned for transformer stations in Ras Al Hadd in Sur, Jibreen in Bahla, Hayy Al Turath in Nizwa, Ezz station in Manah and Wadi Al Tayeen and for related lines to the aforementioned substations.

The company is currently working to complete other vital



projects, the most important of which are the primary stations in Al Bashaer in Al Rustaq and Tharmad in Al Suwaiq with capacity (3 x 20 MVA) and stations in Nizwa with capacity (2 x 20 MVA), Hayy Asim in Barka with capacity (2 x 20 MVA), Seih Al Nama in Al Mudhaibi

with capacity (2 x 20 MVA), Adam, Birkat Al Mouz and Samayil industrial stations in Al Dakhiliyah and three stations in South Al Sharqiyah covering a number of wilayats including Sur, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

The value of the investment in

these projects is RO 34 million.

To implement the company's projects that have been approved by Authority for Public Services Regulatory, the company awarded a number of tenders at an estimated value of RO 11 million.

They include construction of primary stations in Niyabat, Sinaw in North Al Sharqiyah and Nizwa, stations each in Hayy Asim in Barka and Wadi Al Maawil in South Al Batinah, along with the related feeder and distribution lines. The projects will be implemented from April 2022 onwards.

Commenting on the company's investments, Eng Mohammed bin Rashid al Quri, Senior Project Manager at Mazoon Electricity Company, said, "In addition

to these projects which aim to enhance the electricity network in the aforementioned governorates, work is underway to invest in low voltage (LV) network extension projects to supply the customers as well as reinforcement of the existing LV network and developing this network to comply high level HSE and stability standards with annual investments worth more than RO 40 million."

Additionally, the company is introducing and developing electronic systems to operate and monitor the performance of the power network and ensure service continuity. The company's total investment in the project plan to the end of the year reached RO 80 million.

Shanghai crisis puts tech giants on eggshells

Financial elites are confronting a once-unthinkable problem in modern China's wealthiest city: widespread food shortages. Officials in Shanghai have called on Meituan and other food delivery apps to help feed the city's 26 million residents under strict Covid-19 lockdowns . It's a chance for the companies to win political brownie points and new users amid regulatory crackdowns.

A "zero tolerance" Covid policy is pushing the financial centre home to regional bases of Tesla, Apple and other multinationals to the brink. For nearly two weeks, most of the population has been confined to their homes with no end in sight.

A "zero tolerance" Covid policy is pushing the financial centre home to regional bases of Tesla, Apple and other multinationals to the brink.

Reports of healthcare workers beating a corgi to death, a woman committing suicide after being accused of paying too little to a delivery worker and other tragedies are fuelling public outrage.

The country's e-commerce giants are responding. Executives from the \$123 billion Meituan, Alibaba and JD.com have made rare appearances alongside government officials in press conferences to detail what they are doing to ease distribution and last-mile delivery bottlenecks. Meituan has deployed self-driving trucks, recruited staff from other regions and rolled out a new emergency medical feature on its app.

Financial returns look slim, however. It's unlikely the apps can capitalise on surging demand: draconian restrictions have drastically reduced the number of couriers in China's most populous city. Meituan and peers are operating at an estimated 10 per cent to 20 per cent of normal capacity, an industry executive said.

Moreover, the costs of arranging hotels and daily Covid tests for drivers, securing special permits for trucks and clearing other administrative hurdles will add up. Last year, the operating margin at Meituan's food delivery business was just 6.4 per cent.

Meituan boss Wang Xing and peers have good reason to get politicians onside. They are already under regulatory pressure to cap fees and improve labour conditions. But performing a public service is fraught with risks too. If a company is seen as profiting too much, not doing enough or overstepping its remit, it will attract public and official backlash.

China's technology giants are walking on eggshells. — Reuters



FRUIT TRADE
People trade watermelons at a fruit market in Lahore, Pakistan. — AFP

Is competition always good?



DIANE COYLE

The writer is a Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge.

THROUGH COMPETITION, BUSINESSES SPUR EACH OTHER TO INCREASE SALES BY SERVING CUSTOMERS BETTER, WHETHER BY CUTTING PRICES, IMPROVING SERVICE, OR OFFERING INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS.

Ask any economist whether competition is always a good thing, and the answer will be a resounding yes. After all, competition powers what the late William Baumol termed the "innovation machine" of the modern market economy.

Through competition, businesses spur each other to increase sales by serving customers better, whether by cutting prices, improving service, or offering innovative products. Innovation has driven extraordinary improvements in health and quality of life over the past two centuries.

And the world will need further creativity to solve pressing challenges such as providing low-carbon energy and transport or developing new vaccines and medicines to tackle the next pandemic or wave of anti-microbial resistance.

Competition is not the only driver of innovation, of course: publicly funded research and government regulation also are essential.

But the contest among businesses is how brilliant ideas serving society are diffused at scale. There is ample evidence that strong competition is associated with higher productivity. Less encouragingly, studies also suggest that competition has diminished over time in the United States and other advanced economies.

Yet, among the wider public, "competition" has recently become

something of a derogatory term, with some commentators claiming that it has enabled the emergence of dominant players in the digital domain and sectors ranging from food to finance.

Adverse consequences include a loss of individual privacy resulting from digital surveillance and rising prices for over-processed foods. To an economist, this criticism sounds paradoxical: If a market is dominated by a single firm or a small handful of companies, then by definition it is not competitive. So, what explains the newfound aversion to competition among some non-economists?

One likely explanation is that many people take the word "competition" to be a synonym for "business," and regard pro-competition statements as indicating a market-oriented ideological stance. This interpretation runs through Competition Overdose, a recent book by the legal scholars Ariel Ezrachi of the University of Oxford and Maurice Stucke of the University of Tennessee.

For Ezrachi and Stucke, "competition" means a race to the bottom in terms of safety or quality standards, or price gouging, in the interests of increasing corporate profits. Such an interpretation has some validity. I recently attended a conference hosted by a right-wing think tank at which a free-market Conservative politician began his speech by saying, "Much as my free-market instincts want me to turn a blind eye to

monopolies..." Telling this tale makes my economist colleagues roar with laughter, but it reflects a common disconnect between economics and everyday language.

UK Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries also has the pro-business interpretation of competition in mind when she argues that her controversial proposal to privatise the public-service broadcaster Channel 4 will strengthen its ability to compete against global streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime.

In fact, Channel 4 – which is publicly owned but commercially funded – is already competing against them very effectively and is profitable.

For Dorries, competition means boosting another large private-sector media firm that might buy Channel 4, such as Disney. But such a tie-up would reduce competition in supplier markets, such as television advertising and independent production.

Privatising Channel 4 is another example of policymakers favouring big global businesses, enabling them to become even more dominant under the rubric of "competition." Perhaps economists have simply done a bad job explaining what they mean by competition. But part of the reason for the gap in understanding is highlighted by the proposal to sell Channel 4.

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Increasing number of firms exiting Russia



ANDY JALIL
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The author is our correspondent based in the UK.

Professional staff in companies based in Moscow continue to relocate following Russia's attack on Ukraine. With bankers moving out of the capital, as mentioned in this column last week, lawyers are also on the move.

Global law firm Linklaters is relocating some of its Russia-based lawyers to London and Dubai, according to persons familiar with the matter.

These cities were chosen because of their "swift and easy short-term solutions" for accommodation, visa and office options for the staff. However, they are not the only locations the staff are being located to.

The relocation effort follows a similar move by consulting giant McKinsey, which pulled its Russia-based staff out of the

country and relocated them to Almaty, Kazakhstan. Rival Boston Consulting Group is also mulling sending staff to Azerbaijan.

Linklaters became the first major legal firm to confirm last month that it would leave Russia, closing down its Moscow office because of the Ukraine war. Other law firms – including Allen & Overy and Clifford Chase – have since followed suit as governments rolled out increasingly strict sanctions against Russia and pressure mounted on firms with Russian clients.

The Magic Circle firm, which operated through its Russia affiliate Linklaters CIS, had described itself on its website as "one of the largest and most successful international law firms in Russia".

In its statement last month, the firm said: "We will continue supporting our people there in the

process, doing all we can to help them transfer to new roles within Linklaters or otherwise.

It added that it would "wind down existing work in accordance with our legal and professional obligations", and said it would "continue to assist international clients in dealing with the implications of the current crisis and in unwinding their Russian business interests".

Their statement last month said: "We will not act for individuals or entities that are controlled by, or under the influence of, the Russian state or connected with the current Russian regime, wherever they are in the world." The world's largest law firm, Dentons, also decided to split from its Russian offices.

Their global chief executive, Elliott Portnoy, said: "This is a difficult decision that we have taken in full consultation with

our colleagues in Russia in order to continue meeting our legal and ethical obligations."

He added: "We have enjoyed more than 30 years of collaboration and friendship with our colleagues in Russia who bear no responsibility for this crisis nor for the circumstances that have led to this decision. Our hope is that at a future time, we will be able to come back together when it is lawful and practically possible to do so."

The decision means Dentons' Russian offices will act as an independent firm. It is one of the last major law firms to announce its exit, after DLA Piper confirmed earlier it was pulling out of the country. Denton had previously continued to market its Russia offices to clients.

Earlier on March 14, its Russia M&A head appeared on a client

webinar on sanctions alongside lawyers from across its global network.

"We look forward to a day when we will be able to reunite with our esteemed colleagues with whom we have successfully served clients from all over the world", said Dentons chair Joe Andrew.

Managing partner of Dentons in Russia, Alexei Zakharko, said: "Our team will continue to operate as an independent law firm and we are committed to continue providing first-class support to our clients during these difficult times and beyond."

Dentons has more than 250 staff in Russia, built up over more than three decades in the country. Other law firms that announced they are leaving Russia in recent days include CMS, Hogan Lovells, White & Case and Debevoise & Plimpton.

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Beyond the sea turtles: 'Secret Seas' explores Oman's underwater treasures

'Secret Seas' is a hefty 250-pages hardcover book that included around 300 underwater photographs "covering some 160 individual species" all found in Oman. Published in 2021 by award-winning film-maker and underwater photographer Paul Flandinette and marine scientist Michael Claereboudt, it is a colourful celebration of Oman's spectacular marine life and raises awareness about the world's battle against our ocean's degradation... **P20**

Russian art show in Paris hits near record 1.25 million visitors

AN EXHIBITION OF masterpieces owned by a Russian art collector has attracted a near-record number of visitors in Paris, but the war in Ukraine may make it the last of its kind for a while.

The "Morozov Collection", which includes works by Van

Gogh, Cezanne, Matisse and Monet, clocked up 1.25 million visitors at the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris, the centre said on Monday.

The collection was put together by Russian collector Ivan Morozov in the late 19th and early 20th century, and had



never before been seen as a whole outside Russia.

The number of visitors to the Paris show fell just shy of the French record of 1.3 million set by the same museum in 2016 with the Shchukin Collection,

which also featured treasures sent over from Russia.

"It is an exceptional figure given the obvious impact of the health crisis and the absence of foreign visitors, especially Asian visitors", the museum said in a

statement.

Two portraits will not be returned, however, as a result of the war in Ukraine and a seizure related to sanctions against allies of President Vladimir Putin, the French culture ministry said on Saturday.

One is a self-portrait by Russian artist Pyotr Konchalovsky owned by sanctioned Russian oligarch Petr Aven.

The other, by Russian painter Valentin Serov, belongs to the Fine Arts museum in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro, which has asked for it to remain in France until the situation improves.

The show ran at the Louis Vuitton Foundation from September 22 to April 3, having been extended from its initial end-date on February 22. — **AFP**

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in row. They will not speak, unless it be one permitted by the Most Merciful, and he will say what is right.

(Al Naba')

FATWA



**HIS EMINENCE
SHAIKH AHMED
BIN HAMAD AL KHALILI
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN**

QUESTION:

A person didn't fast during Ramadhan for almost 10 years without any reason, what should he do?

ANSWER:

He must compensate for those missed 10 years and make amends by fasting for two consecutive months or by feeding 60 people.

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Ubayy ibn Ka'b, may Allah be pleased with him, reported the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said:

"Do not curse the wind. If you see what you dislike thereof, then say: 'O Allah, we ask You for the good of this wind, the good of what it contains, and the good of what it is ordered to do. We seek refuge with You from the evil of this wind, the evil of what it contains, and the evil of what it is ordered to do'."

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Around the World

ENTERTAINMENT

Hugh Laurie brings Agatha Christie murder-mystery to TV



BRITISH ACTOR Hugh Laurie, best known for playing an eccentric doctor in the TV series "House", has brought his favorite Agatha Christie novel to the screen with his new TV show "Why Didn't They Ask?". Evans?".

The three-part mini-series was written, produced and directed by Laurie, who also stars in a supporting role.

"I would say that novels have been my passion for a long time," Laurie, 62, said on the eve of the show's debut.

"The more I thought about it, the more I thought of trying to get what I thought was a sort of comic adventure sense on screen."

Christie's "Why didn't he ask Evans?" First published in the United Kingdom in 1934.

The novel, and the TV show, centres around the sociable Bobby Jones (Will Poulter), who finds a dying man near the cliffs of the Welsh seashore. Before he dies, the stranger is only able to pronounce the cryptic question of the title. Accompanied by his childhood friend, Lady Francis "Frankie" Derwent (Lucy Boynton), Bobby sets out to find out what happened to the man and provide the answer to his last question.

Laurie said of her source material, "It has a fast, almost American-style style that I think she (Christie) was going for."

"I realised that it was a very precious thing to try and preserve and maybe go and explore some places, a little more. But I'm trying to stay as faithful to the spirit of the thing as I could."

"Why Didn't They Ask Evans," which also stars Emma Thompson, Jim Broadbent and Paul Whitehouse, will begin streaming on Tuesday on Britbox. — Reuters

CULTURE

Ghana artist is melting its glass waste into wonders



MICHAEL TETTEH, Ghana's only professional glassblower, clenched his teeth as he gripped a red-hot ball of molten glass, his burned and blistered hands bare against the steaming stack of wet newspaper he used to protect them.

The 44-year-old toiled in the heat of scrap-metal kilns burning at nearly 1,500 Celsius (2,700 Fahrenheit), pregnant with melted windowpanes, TV screens and soda bottles he would soon transform into elaborate vases swirling with psychedelic colour. Some become red vases with streaks of black, other green pitchers and some clear, everyday bottles.

"Glass... is my passion, my heart," he said. "It's like life. It takes you on a journey from one [stage] to another."

Tetteh's strict use of recycled materials, which he collects from scrap yards and landfills in the capital Accra, is part of a stated mission to reduce Ghana's glass waste and what he considers wasteful imports.

He envisions a Ghana free of foreign glass, having channelled its glass bead-making tradition into a modern, multi-faceted industry.

Ghana imports around \$300 million in glass and ceramic products each year, according to the Observatory for Economic Complexity. More than 80 per cent of that comes from China, the world's top glass exporter.

While some private companies recycle their glass, Tetteh says the majority of the Ghana's glass waste ends up either in landfills or scattered throughout the nation's streets, posing a safety hazard.

"We don't have a (glass waste) collection process, and we don't want broken glass flowing around like that," he said. "If we use recycled (materials), we can make money."

Hailing from the town of Odumase-Krobo, the epicentre of Ghana's traditional glass bead culture, Tetteh discovered glassblowing in 2012 after spending several months in France and the Netherlands learning the craft with other Ghanaian bead-makers.

He was alone in his desire to continue upon returning home, and set a goal to establish a proper hot shop in Odumase-Krobo.

Undeterred by lack of finance, he built furnaces

from scrap-metal and clay using online tutorials. He fine-tuned his abilities watching YouTube videos of famous glass artists like America's Dale Chihuly.

He has since hired several young assistants from

Odumase-Krobo, who he is training and hopes will one day run their own workshops. Their work can be found in boutique shops in Ghana and Ivory Coast, and has appeared in European and American art galleries.

"My heart (wants) to train young Ghanaians, both men and women, so they can learn this job," he said. "We will not have to go to other countries like China to buy what we want for Ghana." — AFP

AWARDS

Four solo artists shortlisted for Britain's Turner Prize



FOUR ARTISTS commended for their solo exhibitions are competing for the UK's Turner Prize for contemporary art this year, Tate Britain, which organises the award, announced on Tuesday.

The 2022 shortlist contrasts with last year's lineup, which for the first time saw five artist collectives vie for the prestigious, but often controversial British visual arts award.

This year's nominees include Heather Phillipson, best known in Britain for her artwork displayed in London's Trafalgar Square of a giant swirl of replica whipped cream, topped with a sculpted cherry, fly and drone.

Titled "The End", it sat for two years from January 2020 on the empty fourth plinth on the world-famous landmark in the centre of the British capital.

Phillipson, who works in video, sculpture and drawing, was nominated for that work and a solo exhibition -- "Rupture No 1: blowtorching the bitten peach" -- at Tate Britain.

The prize's jury "applauded the audacious and sophisticated way Phillipson splices absurdity, tragedy and imagination to probe urgent and complex ideas," the museum said in a statement.

The other contenders include Toronto-born, London-based artist Sin Wai Kin -- formerly known as Victoria Sin, who identifies as non-binary -- in part for a solo show at Hong Kong's Blindspot Gallery.

"Drawing on their own experience existing between binary categories, their work realises fictional narratives to describe lived realities of desire, identification, and consciousness," Tate Britain said.

Ingrid Pollard, who works primarily in photography, but also sculpture, film and sound, was nominated for

her exhibition "Carbon Slowly Turning" in Milton Keynes, central England.

"Pollard's work questions our relationship with the natural world and interrogates ideas such as Britishness, race and sexuality," Tate Britain said.

The jury also selected Veronica Ryan, a Montserrat-born British sculptor, for two UK showcases of her "sculptural objects and installations using containers, compartments and combinations of natural and fabricated forms".

Alex Farquharson, Tate Britain's director and co-chair of the prize jury, said galleries and museums reopening last year after multiple pandemic lockdowns had led to "a terrific 12 months for contemporary British art".

"Art has provided much-needed enjoyment and escape over the past year, but it has also helped to reconnect us with each other and the world around us, as the practices of the four shortlisted artists variously exemplify," he said.

The Turner winner -- to be announced at an award ceremony in Liverpool from October 20, 2022 to March 19, 2023.

Over the years, the prize has courted headlines because of installations including an unmade bed and works made from elephant dung and human hair.

In 2019, the four shortlisted artists sent a plea to judges to award the prize to them all jointly, explaining they had formed a collective to show solidarity at a time of global "political crisis", including Brexit. — AFP

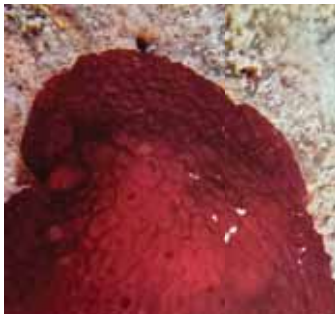
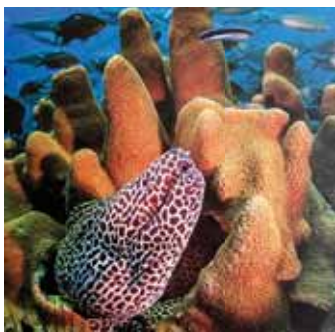
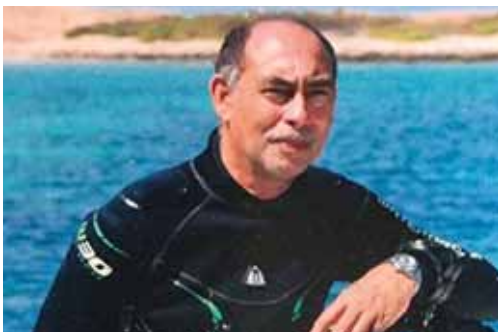
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WEDNESDAY | APRIL 13 | 2022

Beyond the sea turtles: 'Secret Seas' explores Oman's underwater treasures



By Yeru Ebuen
Instagram: @yru_here

Published in 2021 by award-winning film-maker and underwater photographer Paul Flandinette and marine scientist Michel Claereboudt, the book 'Secret Seas' was gifted to me during my recent visit to Mirbat where a massive effort to map out diving spots and ocean activities is currently ongoing to make Mirbat a year-long destination for different adventures.

It is a hefty nearly 300-pages hardcover book that included around 300 underwater photographs 'covering some 160 individual species' all found in Oman.

"We tried as much as possible to identify the species we photographed, but several remain taxonomic mysteries and maybe new species unknown to science. For species identification, we used John E Randall's book 'Coastal fishes of Oman' and other internationally recognised authorities", the authors explained in the latter part of the book.

The authors admitted that it was a large project and required spending hundreds of hours in the water and species identification but while it has all the right support coming from Omran and some of the country's top brands and environmentalists, somehow it

eluded coverage and promotion from the media.

While the book is a colourful celebration of Oman's spectacular marine life, it cannot be missed that one of its primary reasons for creation is to raise awareness about the world's battle with climate change and the continuous degradation of our oceans and marine life.

In her foreword, HH Sayidah Tania al Said, President of the Environment Society of Oman, admitted, "Like much of the world, Oman's marine environment is threatened by a number of factors, the biggest of which include entanglement, suffocation and poisonous ingestion from lost or abandoned fishing gear, plastic pollution, ship strikes, habitat loss and climate change."

She advocated that it is important to educate and inspire present and future generations, those who live in and visit Oman to "act as respectful and committed custodians of our incredible biodiversity" calling the book valuable in its contribution to raising awareness, and knowledge and appreciation of Oman's marine life.

There are plenty of interesting things about underwater life included in the book that I didn't know before. After going through the entirety of the book, I loved how the authors left the readers with the section on "The Oceans: A Tale of Two Futures."

When they said, "The tale of the

oceans is one of two futures. One, as a result of inaction, in which we will see an underwater world ravaged and eventually die from overfishing, increased temperature, pollution and acidification while the other future offers some hope provided we drastically cut our production of greenhouse gases and actively help the oceans recover (or at least hang on)", they are putting up a challenge the answer of which relies on how much we love our oceans.

If you're not familiar with the book, I would personally urge you to find a copy as I think it's worth being added to your collection if you're the type that wants to collect information about Oman or love diving and the seas.

Here are some of the amazing tidbits of knowledge that I got from the book.

OMAN'S CORAL COMMUNITIES ARE UNIQUE

Coral reefs are formed by groups of organisms that build colonies modified by their builders to fit their habitat needs. But what makes Oman's coral communities unique is that "firstly, Oman harbours some of the largest single-species reefs in the world."

The authors named the large beds of "cauliflower coral" or Pocillopora damicornis that's more than 10 metres thick in the South of Daymaniyat Islands and the still-unnamed foliose Montipora

that covers several square metres in Barr Al Hikman, west of Masirah.

They also pointed out that in Dhofar, coral communities in the area are also the second wonder of Oman's reefs are the tropical corals share the bottom of the oceans with large seaweeds normally found nowhere else and are more characteristic of the temperate shores.

THINK OF ANY COLOUR AND A NUDIBRANCH HAS IT

Apparently, they are called the 'jewels of the sea' but due to the lack of imagination of many, they are simply called sea slugs or nudis. Surprisingly, it was eye-opening to learn that there are 3,000 individual species of sea slugs and while generally small, "their diversity of colours, patterns and shapes have no equivalent even among tropical fishes."

Other than discussing in detail how they got the name nudibranch as well as how their colour is a warning sign of toxicity to predators, my personal favourites due to their colour and structure are probably Pleurobranchus peronii or dark burgundy species (that eats soft corals apparently) and the very cute Nembrotha aurea which reminds me of a tropical orchid in some Asian mountains.

EELS ARE AN INTERESTING BUNCH

Honeycomb, phantom, leopard,

moray, yellowmouth, zebra, high fin, snowflake and dragon. Who says eels and its family is boring? Just the names alone are big giveaways that eels can be a fun bunch.

Oman's waters are particularly abundant with moray eels that look aggressive but rarely are. Did you know that morays have a second set of jaws called the pharyngeal? Did you also know that while they may lack scales, they can secrete mucus that protects them from sharp irregularities of the reefs? This whole section on eels reveals a few interesting tidbits about how the species got their name and how you can tell them apart based on their appearances.

NEMO AND THE OTHER COLOURFUL SPECIES

The book also has several pages dedicated to our beloved Nemo, about parrotfishes and how shallow-water fishes come in a different range of colours. The book also delves into sea turtles, rays and sharks, cephalopods (that's squid and cuttlefish for you) as well some important tips and tricks on how to take amazing underwater photography. If you're looking for a book to help better your understanding of marine life and where to find them in Oman, this book is definitely a great addition to your references.