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BENZEMA, MODRIC SINK BRAVE CHELSEA IN EXTRATIME



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ANNUAL INFLATION AT 30-YEAR HIGH IN UK



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SQU STUDENTS TO DOCUMENT VILLAGES IN OMAN



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF JORDAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Abdallah II of Jordan on the success of the surgery he underwent recently. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to King Abdallah II. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant him good health, well-being and long life to continue achieving aspirations of the people of Jordan towards further progress and prosperity under his wise leadership. — ONA

HM CONGRATULATES NEW PAKISTAN PM

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Shehbaz Sharif on being sworn in as the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to Prime Minister Sharif to achieve aspirations of the people of Pakistan towards further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the relations between the two countries further development and welfare. — ONA

12

RAMADHAN 1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:30 AM

DHUHR 12:12 PM

ASR 03:40 PM

MAGHRIB 06:32 PM

ISHA 07:45 PM

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UKRAINE WAR BLOWS UP FRENCH ELECTION

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Majlis Ash’shura to host social development minister

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash’shura will be hosting Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, to deliver her ministry’s statement during the council’s 12th regular meeting to be held on Monday. This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash’shura. He added that the minister of social development’s statement will contain four axes, the first of which deals with the social protection system in accordance to the programme of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan whereas the second axis deals with the services provided to persons with disabilities. The third axis deals with family and social development and the fourth one contains the ministry’s efforts to regulate the civil work and societies and charitable activities. The secretary-general of Majlis Ash’shura said that the council will convene its 11th

regular meeting on Sunday, adding that the session will see the oath taking of the new council member representing the Wilayat of Salalah, who will replace Abdullah bin Hussain al Mashoor Ba Omar who passed away on February 27. The agenda of the eleventh regular meeting includes discussing and approving the draft amendments of some provisions of the Notary Public Law, approving the vision of the Economic and Financial Committee on the draft agreement for linking payment systems between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries. TURN TO P2



A DAZZLING SKY
A dazzling milky-way shining over the Elephant Rock in Dhofar Governorate. PHOTO BY DR SACHIN SINGH

2 die in Bausher-Amerat road accident

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Two people lost their lives in a major accident involving three vehicles which took place on Bausher-Amerat mountain road. One of the vehicles was also engulfed in fire due to the impact of the accident.

Traffic on the road on both sides was affected during the peak hours, with Royal Oman Police (ROP) urging motorists to use the alternative Wadi Adei-Amerat road.

According to eyewitnesses, the old road saw a traffic jam as



motorists tried to stay away from the mountain road.

According to motorists, driving on this road is always challenging as it is very steep, especially on the Bausher side.

Speaking to the Observer,

motorists sought some immediate solutions. One of the most common suggestions put forward by motorists and local citizens includes constructing a tunnel if it is feasible, and constant police patrol on the section.

LABELLING GOODS WITH 0% VAT A MUST

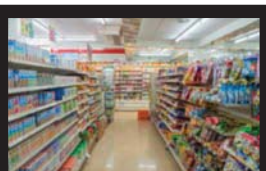
COMPLAINTS REGARDING ABSENCE OF LABELS

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has directed all shopping centres and stores in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman to make a label identifying all goods exempted from value-added tax (VAT).

Judicial officers from CPA carried out inspection campaigns at commercial, industrial and service establishments to ensure the availability of basic commodities, price stability, and the right application of value-added tax.

This came after some complaints by customers regarding the absence of labels identifying goods included and exempted from tax, leading to fallacies that occur in shopping centres and exploitation by some traders due to lack of awareness among customers about the goods included in the tax or not. Prior to the holy month



0% VAT

NUMBER OF GOODS EXEMPTED FROM VAT

513

VAT IN OMAN ON MOST GOODS AND SERVICES BEGAN AS OF APRIL 16, 2021, AT A RATE OF 5 PERCENT

of Ramadhan, the Consumer Protection Authority held a meeting with suppliers in the Governorate of Muscat as part of its preparations to receive the blessed month, intensify supervision and ensure the availability of goods and services that consumers need in addition to emphasising the application of the tax properly.

TURN TO P5

Campaign to fight Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes in Muscat

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

With the re-occurrence of the Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes and registration of dengue fever cases in Muscat, the Directorate-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate has launched a campaign to fight the mosquitoes in collaboration with Muscat Municipality and other authorities concerned.

Field teams were formed

to locate places where these Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes breed. The directorate-general with the cooperation of Muscat Municipality had also published and distributed brochures in the targeted villages in Muscat aimed at educating people and raising awareness on the issue.

Moreover, the Department of Diseases and Surveillance and Control has intensified efforts by conducting visits of experts to the breeding sites in addition to



carrying out inspection of some houses in Seeb, Bausher and Al Amerat in collaboration with the respective municipalities.

Further, a two-day exhibition was held at Muscat Mall under the theme “Be the Change” with the aim of identifying the risks of the Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes and supporting the efforts exerted in this regard by creating a community partnership to get rid of these harmful insects.

To keep track of the accelerated

events of the campaign, Dr Thamra al Ghafrri issued an administrative decision forming a working team in controlling the spread of these mosquitoes in Muscat Governorate. The decision included specialists and officials from the directorate-general, various public directorates of Muscat Municipality, Haya Water and Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah).

TURN TO P2



Majlis Ash'shura to host social development minister

FROM PAGE 1

The meeting will discuss an expressed desire to increase the monthly pensions reimbursed to social security families in light of the opinion of the Services and Social Development Committee. This is in addition to the expressed desire on bringing the commercial registration and affiliation certificates under



Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura.

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and unifying their fees in light of the opinion of the Economic and Financial Committee, an expressed desire regarding the imposition of fees for disconnecting and reconnecting water service in light of the opinion of the Services and Social Development Committee.

■ OCO AND NRAA SIGN AGREEMENT



MUSCAT: Oman Charitable Organization (OCO) and the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) signed an agreement for a document management manual which contains a classification system and timetables for the duration of retention of all types of documents held by OCO. The agreement was signed by Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawani, Chairman of NRAA, and Engineer Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Vice-Chairman of OCO's Board of Directors. – ONA

Campaign to fight Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes in Muscat



FROM PAGE 1

The team is concerned with following up the control of Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes, supervise the implementation of the work at the breeding habitats in cooperation with the authorities concerned regarding the completion of spraying operations and evaluating the epidemiological situation.

The working team mheld a meeting to discuss the epidemiological situation of dengue fever as well follow up and control efforts.

The meeting stressed the importance of sanitation and plans in eliminating the mosquitoes by disposal of solid wastes, clearing all types of watersheds around buildings.

The meeting further underlined the necessity of covering water tanks tightly, removing used tyres, and getting rid of all empty cans, containers and utensils.

Meanwhile, Dr Thamra al Ghafri stressed the role of the community in the success of the campaign, underlying the need for community interaction with the organisers.

The Director of Diseases Surveillance and Control Dr Lamia al Balushi pointed out that the campaign aims to eliminate

‘Know Islam’ to host people from other faiths

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, represented by the Department of Islamic Information and Cultural Exchange at the Iftaa Office, is organising an Iftar for people from other faiths to delve into the beauty of the faith.

“Ta’aruf” which translates as ‘Know Islam’, currently in its 5th edition, will host people who want to know more about the religion, its applicability in the modern world, and its stance in global events at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Friday, April 22 (Ramadhan 20) from 4.30 pm to 9.30 pm under the theme: ‘Custodian on Earth’.

“Ta’aruf, an exclusive event to let the non-Muslims and new Muslims know Islam better, is held under the auspices of the Department of Islamic Information and Cultural Exchange at the ministry and will be a window to those who want to know about Islam with all its true instructions to mankind,” Hamed al Badi, representative of the ministry, told the Observer. Shaikh Ismail Menk, aka Mufti Menk, an acclaimed name among Islamic scholars and one of the most important Islamic scientists in Zimbabwe, addressed the Sultanate of Oman’s audience on virtual platform in the last edition of Ta’aruf last year.

He delivered a discourse on ‘The Quran - A Remedy for Soul, Mind and Body’, in the series of speeches titled ‘Struggle and Healing in the Holy Quran’ at the event organised by the MERA represented by the Department of Islamic Information and Cultural Exchange (Iftaa Office).

CUSTODIAN ON EARTH

TAARUF 5 to introduce Islam

free transportation

Free meals

Oman Convention & Exhibition Center

Friday, 20th Ramadhan 1443

22th April 2022 4:30 - 9:00 pm

To register

<https://www.mara.gov.om/taarufevent.aspx>

Adults only

مطار عمان
Oman Airports



Major projects to give Bausher a facelift

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Major infrastructure development will soon be reshaping the Wilayat of Bausher, as the construction works are gaining steam, according to the master plan designed by Muscat Municipality.

Besides major road projects currently under way, a slew of side protection against slopes and sand dunes is taking shape in the area in Bausher Commercial District.

“Muscat Municipality is currently constructing vital road infrastructure projects in the Wilayat of Bausher, mostly in the commercial district, aiming to offer a safe road network to users and to reduce any potential traffic congestion, and we hope to complete the project early next year”, said a representative from Muscat Municipality.

Additionally, to enhance the mobility of pedestrians, the civic body is creating a walkway in the Jal area in the wilayat, one of the community projects aimed at exploiting local spaces and providing quality facilities that enhance the well-being of individuals.

The Hay al Baydha walkway will also house a sports walkway at a length of 2,200 metres long and 4 metres in width, adjacent to a cycle-way with a total length of 2,200 metres and 2.5 metres in width.

The project will also pave internal streets and create more parking lots along the walkway, helping more fitness freaks to make use and stay fit.

“The walkway, which is currently in the construction stage, will enhance the current transportation system in the neighbourhood, promote people to walk, use bicycles or scooters more”, he added, saying this project will also provide individuals with an opportunity to increase their distance walked every day, to get rid of a sedentary lifestyle and lead a healthy regime.

People will also be able to lead a life in sync with nature as they will get more exposure to nature around and enhance socialising.



Muscat Municipality is currently constructing vital road infrastructure projects in the Wilayat of Bausher, mostly in the commercial district, aiming to offer a safe road network to users and to reduce any potential traffic congestion. The project is expected to be completed early next year

Inbound visitors surge by 400 per cent in February

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

Around 600,000 people left the country until the end of February 2022 compared to 230,000 incoming visitors, according to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NC SI).

The number of inbound visitors during the month of February 2022 increased by 432.4% to 122,000, compared to 23,000 visitors during the same month last year.

The report indicated that visitors from the Gulf topped the list with 45,148 visitors (36.9 per cent), during the month of February followed by Indian nationals (12.7 per cent), the French (4.2 per cent) and the British (4 per cent).

The report mentioned that 305,000 people left the Sultanate of Oman during the month of February, of which Omanis

The NC SI report indicated that visitors from the Gulf topped the list with 45,148 visitors (36.9 per cent), during the month of February followed by Indian nationals (12.7 per cent), the French (4.2 per cent) and the British (4 per cent)

accounted for 61.7 per cent of the total outbound visitors.

The increase in the number of visitors departing from the Sultanate of Oman in February was about 198,000 compared to the same period in 2021, an increase in the number of outbound 149,000 Omanis travellers in February 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

The revenues of 3 to 5 stars hotels were RO 16 million during the month of February 2022, compared to RO 7 million during the same month in 2021, an increase of 135.9 per cent.

The number of guests in these hotels was 162,000 compared to 90,000 guests during the same period in 2021, an increase of 79.1 per cent.

The occupancy rate in these hotels was 52.5 per cent, compared to 39.1 per cent in the same month of 2021, an increase of 34.4 per cent.





A BANG TIME FOR SHOPPING

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samuelkuttyvp

From foodstuffs to garments and electronics to automobiles, businesses are luring customers with discount signs which are filling up store windows across the Sultanate of Oman.

After a gap of two years, the fasting month of Ramadhan, which is a period for prayers, reflection and family get-togethers, is also becoming a bountiful time for shoppers looking for lower prices.

As a result, this period of the year becomes one of the most important marketing occasions for different brands as consumer behaviour changes both online and offline.

Even though the celebration this year is a mixed bag of in-person and digital traditions, people are excited about shopping in-store while also adding items to the cart on their mobiles.

This will be the third socially distanced Ramadhan in the Sultanate of Oman compared to the previous two, although the authorities have restored normalcy across all sectors, with daily Covid-19 cases registering a sharp decline over the past weeks.

Allowing families and friends to celebrate in full force, big and small retailers are enticing customers with discounts on all Ramadhan must-haves.

Retail stores are displaying flashing red sale signs on their windows, offering between 25 per cent and 50 per cent on some commodities, even up to 75 per cent discounts.

Some hypermarket groups have even adopted door-to-door campaigns with leaflets and flashing messages on social media platforms.

“While mostly it is food and grocery items that sell out fast, we also see a surge in the sale of kitchen equipment such as pans and cooking utensils”, said Hemant Shah, a salesman at a leading hypermarket.

However, what worries many people are the prices of some commodities that have seen a rise in the recent weeks following the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has taken all possible measures to ensure that suppliers and retailers do not increase prices of products and commodities that are currently available in the market and have been affected by the increase in oil prices.

Supermarkets and hypermarkets are offering customers Ramadhan specials, such as ‘buy one, get one free’ and bulk discounts on many food and beverage items. Furniture stores are also taking advantage of the high sales period and offering discounts as high as 50 per cent on their items.

Leading retail brand LuLu has launched a “Ramadhan Souq”, a traditional Omani style market, which will have special offerings from dates, honey and other grocery items to household and decoration products, home appliances and furnishings with a wide range of curtains and carpets.

International hypermarket chain Carrefour has also ‘save more’ promotion on a number of select items enabling their customers to celebrate the period. The Group has bulk offers on several essentials.

Hotels and restaurants are also not behind. Many of them have special culinary offerings that include iftar, suhoor, traditional live music and activities amidst a special ambience.

Ramadhan offers are available across many product ranges in the automobile industry with free registration, free insurance, assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle maintenance, etc.

At the same time, consumers are increasingly turning to online channels to stock up on essentials as well as gifts for their family and friends.

According to a report by consultancy RedSeer, consumers in the Middle East and North Africa region are expected to spend about \$6.2 billion on online purchases during the holy month of Ramadhan as their digital activity continues to grow across multiple channels.

Amazon.ae announced last week that customers in the Sultanate of Oman could shop a wide range of items through its International Shopping Experience, with a selection spanning over 30 product categories, including electronics, books, kitchen, fashion, home appliances and more, while enjoying low prices and fast delivery options.

“Available in Arabic and English, the International Shopping experience on Amazon.ae offers a customised user experience for shoppers in Oman, with a selection tailored to them”, it said in a press note.



Labelling goods with 0 per cent VAT a must

FROM PAGE 1

Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the CPA, confirmed, in the meeting, that the authority is working to tighten control to ensure the stability of commodity prices, and fieldwork teams will be distributed in various shops and commercial centres in the Sultanate of Oman to work in an integrated manner in following up and monitoring commodity prices.

Any supplier violating the law will be dealt with in accordance with the legal procedures. He stressed that the consumer must consciously contribute while shopping to facilitate the authority's mission by reporting any violations in the market, in addition to ensuring that the prices of goods fall within the specified VAT rates.

Price control began early before the holy month due to the active commercial

movement that accompanies this period where consumers go for various food commodities.

These inspections aim at ensuring the proper application of tax mechanisms by suppliers in accordance with the VAT Law and its Regulations. The authority has increased work teams in the authority's directorates and departments in various governorates to ensure compliance with the prices of goods and services.

Application of value-added tax in the Sultanate of Oman on most goods and services began as of April 16, 2021, at a rate of 5 per cent, with about 488 goods exempted from tax (0 per cent).

In March this year, His Majesty gave Royal directives to add 25 other food commodities to the list of commodities exempted from value-added tax, bringing the total number of commodities exempted from the tax to 513.

HAMAD AL KALBANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, emphasised the important role of economic diplomacy undertaken by Oman's embassies in various countries.

He added that the role of economic diplomacy has begun to bear fruit whether in attracting investment or facilitating trade exchange between Oman and the brotherly and friendly countries. He noted that the business environment in Oman is helpful and attractive.

This was stated by the Ministry of Economy when he presided over Ramadhan evening organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) to discuss the role of economic diplomacy in attracting investments and promoting the Sultanate of Oman internally. The role undertaken by Oman's diplomatic missions in various countries in boosting foreign investments and augmenting Omani exports by opening more international markets for Omani products.



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, said that the efforts made by the Foreign Ministry are complementary to other entities as are aimed at promoting economic diplomacy

and attracting investment and boosting tourist arrivals.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave his Royal directives to the embassies of the Sultanate of Oman to intensify their efforts in order to place economic diplomacy

as one of the main pillars of the embassies' work. Al Harthy said adding that the Foreign Ministry and the diplomats have become increasingly aware of the economic work and there is a constant follow-up to the outcomes of this work.

UTAS-Ibri ELC conducts 'live experience' of job interviews

STAFF REPORTER
IBRI, APRIL 13

With a view to improving the employability skills of students and enhancing the achievement of Graduate Attributes (GAs) through innovative teaching methodology, the staff at the English Language Centre of UTAS-Ibri have imparted the 'live experience' of job interviews to the students of Public Speaking. The event was supported by the Head of English Language Centre Dr Abdulsalam al Manthari. Heba Qureshi (Lecturer ELC and Coordinator Public Speaking) provided the platform for formal walk-in job interviews to help the Post-Foundation students acquire the skills to face an interview.

Students underwent a great deal of practice in the classrooms before the actual day of walk-in job interviews. They also provided their views during the practice sessions. The other arrangement included setting up the venue, preparing the waiting lounge for the candidates, panel members' arrangement, recording each interview and candidates' opinion before and after the interviews. Panel members were also video interviewed for their views and opinions about the activity. The ELC staff members who participated in the activity included Dr Michelle Mendoza, Khalid al Gharibi, Salim al Shukeli, Maha al Darei, Adeebah al Sawafi, Mokhtar Lafi, Zahra Arab, Rabeea Ibrahim, Dr Amir Abbas, Mobina Kamran, Dr Mamo Alo and Mazahar Engameh.



As analysis of any activity helps in the implementation of ADRI and this analysis is critical for better planning in the next stage. In this regard, the feedback of involved staff and students was also taken via questionnaire.

As per the result of the survey conducted, both students and staff showed high rate of satisfaction 5 on a Likert scale of 1-5. The result also indicates that students want to go through more

practical sessions like this as it helps strengthening their self-confidence, managing pressure, and employability skills and these are the skills set as per the Graduate Attributes (GAs).

Heba requested the panel members to ask any other question which is not on the list of questions if the panel observes a candidate as more competent.

This intended to test the preparation level for extempore

answers and students presented great answers for any surprise questions.

Both days were successfully covered by ETC and a video is under progress to be uploaded on the university website. Students and staff have expressed their views and comments in this video. The Head of ELC, Dr Abdulsalam al Manthari appreciated the efforts and congratulated the staff and students on their hard work and great performance.



Announcement of the tender TND GSI BV /03/2022

GSINIMA (BARKA) LLC have been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of Barka V Desalination Project in Oman, for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price for **Supply, Installation and Commissioning of a Time Lapse Camera for Construction: site area (W)140m x (L)340m**

Commercial Offer shall be sent to : **mohamed.farid@inima.com** within **21st April 2022 1:00 PM**

General Terms and Condition Barka V IWP - RO Desalination Plant are applied.

OMAN AIR (S.A.O.C.)

Muscat International Airport, P.O. Box 58, P.C. 111, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

TENDER NOTICE NO. SCM/2022/4193

Restoration Work (MEP and Civil) at the Old Catering Building near Old Muscat International Airport

Oman Air is looking for a qualified and experienced MEP and civil works contractor to execute the above project. Complete details will be provided to the interested bidders upon payment of RO 500 towards the tender fee.

Interested parties are requested to complete the online vendor registration through the Oman Air website (<http://www.omanair.com>) → Useful links → **E-procurement** or through URL (<https://e-procurement.omanair.com/Pages/LoginPage.aspx>).

Please note that you should complete the online vendor registration to receive the tender documents and submit your proposal online. Alternatively, the bidder may submit the proposal in a sealed envelope to Oman Air Supply Chain Management Office located at Block-300 near the old airport. The last day for submitting proposals is April 24, 2022, before 12:00 pm.

For any query, please send an email to: **Khamis.Albahri@omanair.com** or call **Tel. No.: 24259729**.

www.omanair.com





Sri Lanka begs diaspora to send cash

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka urged its citizens overseas to send home money to help pay for desperately needed food and fuel on Wednesday after announcing a default on its \$51 billion foreign debt.

The island nation is in the grip of its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948, with severe shortages of essential goods and regular blackouts causing widespread hardship.

Authorities are weathering intense public anger and spirited protests demanding the government's resignation ahead of negotiations for an IMF bailout.

Central bank governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said he needed Sri Lankans abroad to "support the country at this crucial juncture by donating much needed foreign exchange".

His appeal came a day after the government announced it was suspending repayments on all external debt, which will free up money to replenish scant supplies of petrol, pharmaceuticals and other necessities.

Weerasinghe said he had set up bank accounts for donations in the United States, Britain and Germany and promised Sri Lankan expatriates the money would be spent where it was most needed.

The bank "assures that such foreign currency transfers will be utilised only for importation of essentials, including food, fuel and medicines", Weerasinghe said in a statement.



Lankans abroad need to support the country at this crucial juncture by donating much needed foreign exchange

NANDALAL WEERASINGHE
Central bank governor

Tuesday's default announcement will save Sri Lanka about \$200 million in interest payments falling due on Monday, he said, adding that the money would be diverted to pay for essential imports. Weerasinghe's appeal has so far been greeted with scepticism from Sri Lankans abroad.

"We don't mind helping, but we can't trust the government with our cash," a Sri Lankan doctor in Australia said, asking for anonymity.

A Sri Lankan software engineer in Canada said he had no confidence that the money would be spent on the needy.

"This could go the same way as the tsunami funds," he said,



Protesters take part in a demonstration against the economic crisis at the entrance of the president's office in Colombo. — AFP

referring to millions of dollars the island received in aid after the December 2004 disaster, which claimed at least 31,000 lives on the island.

Much of the foreign cash donations meant for survivors was rumoured to have ended up in the pockets of politicians, including current Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was forced to return tsunami aid funds credited to his personal account.

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 resentment, with day-long lines forming across the island for petrol and kerosene, the latter used for cooking stoves in poorer households.

At least eight people have died

while waiting in fuel queues since last month.

The country's Sinhalese and Tamil communities are marking their traditional new year this week but the shortages have sabotaged the ritual of making milk rice at an astrologically auspicious time, with both ingredients scarce.

Economists say the crisis has been made worse by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing and ill-advised tax cuts.

Sri Lanka's main opposition

SJB party said on Wednesday that government members responsible for the crisis should face criminal prosecution. Crowds have attempted to storm the homes of government leaders, and security forces have dispersed protesters with tear gas and rubber bullets.

Thousands of people were camped outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's seafront office in the capital Colombo for a fifth straight day of protests on Wednesday calling for him to step down. — AFP

Egypt bus crash kills 10 including foreigners

CAIRO: Four French and one Belgian were among 10 people killed in a bus crash on Wednesday in Egypt, whose tourism industry is only just emerging from a decade of political upheaval and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fourteen others — eight French and six Belgians — were taken to hospital with "broken bones, bruises and superficial injuries" but all were in a stable condition, the governor of the southern province of Aswan said.

The other five people killed were all Egyptian.

The Belgian foreign ministry confirmed that one of its citizens died and others were injured. The accident occurred in early morning when the bus collided with a pick-up as it was transporting the tourists on the 300-kilometre road journey



The scene of a bus accident when the vehicle collided with a car between Aswan and Abu Simbel temple down south. — AFP

between Aswan and the famed Abu Simbel temple further south.

A photographer saw what remained of the burnt-out vehicles lying by the roadside. Crashes are relatively common in Egypt, where many roads are in disrepair and traffic regulations frequently ignored. — AFP

Boost to organic farming in Indian villages

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Organic farming is bringing significant changes in the lives of farmers in remote villages in India. Some are successful through their entrepreneurial skills, while many others benefit from the support extended by the government and non-government organisations.

Nav Chetna Agro Centre (NCAC) is one such organisation helping the farmers grow organic fruits and vegetables and making them self-reliant financially. The not-for-profit organisation takes care of their marketing, advisory and other basic requirements to make them successful organic farmers.

According to media reports, due to NCAC initiatives, some 1,500 farmers have turned into organic farmers in Mirzapur district of the Indian state of Uttar



Pradesh. They are self-employed, adding value to the state by being part of the chain that is able to sell agriculture products in other Indian cities. In addition, some of their products are being exported to some GCC countries where fruits and vegetables are in great demand.

Kanak Lata from Vittalpur is one such example. She got basic training from NCAC and now grows two popular varieties of tomato — Durg and Aryaman —

which are a hit among local and foreign buyers. She is expecting a profit of INR 2.5 lakh per month through her organic products.

Kanak admitted she got valuable assistance from NCAC, an associate venture of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). She overcame few initial challenges and adopted the scientific approach to farming, and in no time, started getting seven quintals of agriculture products every day

from her farmland. Now she not only feeds the local market, but she has customers in the UK and Sultanate of Oman.

There are many others like Kanak who benefitted from NCAC. People like Radha Devi, Vikas, Chanda Devi and Ramesh are among 1,500 beneficiaries of the NCAC. They are full-time farmers and inspiration for many others in the area to take to farming activities seriously.

Nav Chetna Agro Centre is the brainchild of two brothers, Mukesh Pandey and Chandra Mauli, who left well-paying jobs in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and business in Varanasi, respectively in pursuit of doing something for their village and state.

Today, the NCAC gives the farmers essential tips, helps them get the necessary equipment, and markets their products.

YANGON

Myanmar boycotts water festival to protest junta

Myanmar marked its normally boisterous new year water festival with silence and boycotts, as fighting between the military and opponents of the coup raged across the country. The nation has been in turmoil since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government last year, sparking huge protests and a bloody crackdown.

The Thingyan water festival is typically marked by jubilant pandemonium as crowds engage in large-scale street



water fights. But thoroughfares in central Yangon were quiet on Wednesday, with no sign of the usually disruptive festivities, correspondents said. One small group did indulge, splashing each other within the shelter of a sandbagged security post. — AFP

ABUYOG

Toll from Philippines landslides rises to 80

The death toll from landslides and floods in the Philippines rose to 80 with scores missing and feared dead, officials said, as rescuers dug up more bodies with bare hands and backhoes in crushed villages. Most of the deaths from tropical storm Megi — the strongest to hit the archipelago this year — were in the central province of Leyte, where a series of landslides devastated communities.

Twenty-six people died and around 150 were missing in the



coastal village of Pilar, which is part of Abuyog municipality, after a torrent of mud and earth pushed houses into the sea and buried most of the settlement, authorities said. "I have to be honest, we are no longer expecting survivors". — AFP

JAKARTA

Indonesia truck careens into cliff, killing 16

At least 16 people were killed and more than a dozen others injured when a truck descending a remote mountain in Indonesia's West Papua province crashed into a cliff, police said. The truck, carrying 28 passengers and the driver, was heading down a road in the Arfak mountains to the provincial capital Manokwari at roughly 2 am local time when the driver lost control and crashed, police said.

"We suspect the brakes failed, the truck lost its grip and



the driver lost control," Andre Manuputty, the deputy head of West Papua's traffic unit, told local TV station Metro TV. When search and rescue teams arrived at the scene two hours after they first received reports of the crash. — AFP



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In brief

■ LONDON



COURT JAILS IS FOLLOWER FOR LIFE OVER MP MURDER

A British judge on Wednesday sentenced IS group follower Ali Harbi Ali to a whole-life prison term for murdering lawmaker David Amess in a knife attack last year. “This is a murder that struck at the heart of democracy”, judge Nigel Sweeney said as he handed down his sentence at London’s Old Bailey courthouse, noting the 26-year-old defendant had shown “no remorse or shame”. Sweeney added he had no doubt it was an “exceptional case” that merited the sentence, which comes two days after a London jury unanimously found Ali guilty of the ferocious knife attack last October.

■ ABIDJAN



IVORY COAST PM QUITTS, NEW GOVT NEXT WEEK

Ivory Coast’s prime minister resigned ahead of a new “streamlined” government that will take shape next week, President Alassane Ouattara announced. Speaking at premier Patrick Achi’s final cabinet meeting, Ouattara said he had accepted the government’s resignation and would “from next week appoint a new prime minister who will come to me to propose a streamlined government.” “I have decided to reduce the number of government ministers in order to strengthen government effectiveness bearing in mind the current world economic situation”, he said.

■ ABUJA



5 SOLDIERS KILLED IN NORTH BENIN AMBUSH

At least five soldiers were killed in an ambush by gunmen in northern Benin, a senior security source and a parks conservation group involved in the area said. Benin’s military has been targeted several times in attacks in the north where troops are deployed to help contain threats from militants who operate across the border in Burkina Faso. An army convoy travelling to a military post located in Pendjari National Park, on the border with Burkina Faso, was ambushed on Monday, a senior security source in Benin said when contacted from neighbouring Nigeria. The attackers first fired on the convoy before one of their vehicles hit an improvised explosive device (IED) placed on the road, the source said.

ICC says Ukraine a ‘crime scene’

BUCHA: The International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor visited the town of Bucha on Wednesday — the scene of hundreds of civilian killings which Ukraine has blamed on Russian forces who occupied it for several weeks.

“Ukraine is a crime scene. We’re here because we have reasonable grounds to believe that crimes within the jurisdiction of the court are being committed”, Karim Khan told reporters

“We have to pierce the fog of war to get to the truth. That requires independent, impartial investigation”, he said.

Khan said an ICC forensic team was set to work “so that we can really make sure we separate truth from fiction”.

“We have to keep an open mind and we have to follow the evidence”, he said.

“The law needs to be mobilised and sent into battle to protect civilians”.

Russia has denied responsibility for the deaths and President Vladimir Putin has dismissed reports of Russian soldiers shooting civilians as “fake”.

Meanwhile, Russia has firmly rejected US accusations of genocide in Ukraine. “We categorically disagree with them”, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov commented after remarks by US President Joe Biden.



GENOCIDE
Biden for first time accuses Putin’s forces of committing genocide in Ukraine

MARIUPOL
Russia’s defence ministry says more than a thousand Ukrainian soldiers have surrendered in the strategic port city

CHEMICAL WEAPONS
US says it has “credible information” that Russia “may use... chemical agents” in Mariupol

CORRIDORS
Ukraine says it is halting all humanitarian corridors, accusing Russia of violating agreements to allow people to flee

LEADERS VISIT
Polish and Baltic presidents head to Kyiv by train to show support for Zelensky

Sources: AFP bureaus

AFP Photos



“We consider attempts to twist the situation in this way unacceptable”, Peskov said, according to the Interfax news agency. “Even more, as we have already said, it is hardly acceptable for the president of the United States of America.”

Biden on Tuesday accused Russia’s President Vladimir Putin of genocide in the face of atrocities in Ukraine. “Yes, I called it genocide. It has become clearer and clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being — being able to be — Ukrainian”, Biden said.

Russia has denied responsibility for the deaths and President Putin has dismissed reports of Russian soldiers shooting civilians

A week and a half ago, pictures of the bodies of hundreds of civilians in the Ukrainian town of Bucha on the outskirts of Kiev caused horror around the world.

A rocket attack on refugees at the Kramatorsk railway station also shocked the world. Kiev blames Russian soldiers for the crime and speaks of genocide. Moscow denies any responsibility for the attack.

Meanwhile, the Polish and Baltic presidents visited the Ukrainian town of Borodyanka not far from Kyiv, with Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda saying it was “permeated with pain and suffering”.

“It is hard to believe that such war atrocities could be perpetrated in 21st-century Europe, but that is

the reality. This is a war we must win”, Nauseda said in a statement. “The place is permeated with pain and suffering. Civilian Ukrainians were murdered and tortured here, and residential homes and other civilian infrastructure were bombed.”

Poland had announced earlier that Nauseda and his fellow heads of state — Polish President Andrzej Duda, Estonia’s

Alar Karis and Latvia’s Egils Levits — had met in the Polish city of Rzeszow near the Ukraine border before boarding a train for Kyiv. — AFP

Toll hits 259 in South Africa’s deadliest floods on record



A general view of a damaged structure after a mudslide destroyed the floor near Durban. — AFP

DURBAN: Devastating floods killed 259 in the South African city of Durban and surrounding areas, a senior government official said on Wednesday, after hillsides were washed away, homes collapsed and more people were still feared missing. The heaviest rains in 60 years pummelled Durban’s municipality, known as eThekweni. According to a tally, the storm is the deadliest on record in South Africa.

“At the moment the confirmed figures of people that have perished during this disaster is 259, across the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province”, Nonala Ndlovu, spokeswoman for the provincial disaster management department said. President Cyril Ramaphosa has described the floods as a “catastrophe” and a “calamity”.

“Bridges have collapsed. Roads have collapsed. People have died... this is a catastrophe of enormous proportions”, he said, addressing a

local community after inspecting the damage from the floods that have claimed 259 lives.

The search for missing persons is still going on, said Ramaphosa, promising to “spare nothing” in dealing with the disaster.

“This disaster is part of climate change. We no longer can postpone what we need to do... to deal with climate change.

“It is here, and our disaster management capability needs to be at a higher level”, said the president. Earlier the provincial health chief Nomagugu Simelane-Zulu had expressed their “biggest worry” about the huge toll telling eNCA television that “mortuaries are under a bit of pressure, however we are coping”.

The United Methodist Church in the township of Clermont was reduced to a pile of rubble. Four children from a local family died when a wall collapsed on them.

Other homes hung precarious-

ly to the hillside, miraculously still intact after much of the ground underneath them washed away in mudslides.

The storm forced sub-Saharan Africa’s most important port to halt operations, as a main access road suffered heavy damage.

Shipping containers were tossed about, washed into mountains of metal. Sections of other roads were washed away, leaving behind gashes in the earth bigger than large trucks.

“We see such tragedies hitting other countries like Mozambique, Zimbabwe, but now we are the affected ones”, Ramaphosa said as he met with grieving families near the ruins of the church. South Africa’s neighbours suffer such natural disasters from tropical storms almost every year, but Africa’s most industrialised country is largely shielded from the storms that form over the Indian Ocean. — AFP

Police intensify manhunt for NY subway shooter

NEW YORK: Nervous New York commuters crowded on to the subway on Wednesday morning, as police on the streets above intensified their hunt for a fugitive gunman who shot 10 people in a train car the day before.

New York Mayor Eric Adams called on residents to be “vigilant” but said there was no evidence the shooter had an accomplice, adding: “It appears he was acting alone.”

“We’re running full service on all of our lines after NYPD completed its investigation”, the New York City transit authority announced — with the “business as usual” message underscored by an announcement of signal delays a short time later.

Tuesday’s incident in Brooklyn — in which no one was killed — was not being investigated as an act of terrorism, and none of the injuries were considered life threatening.

Police have identified a “person of interest” in the attack, which also wounded 13 others

as they scrambled to get out of the station or suffered smoke inhalation, offering a \$50,000 reward for any information.

The suspected gunman put on a gas mask just as the train was arriving at the station, then opened two smoke canisters and began shooting, police said.

“All you see is like a smoke, black smoke bomb going off, and then... people bum rushing to the back”, one of the gunshot victims, Hourari Benkada, told CNN, referring to a charge by passengers towards the door at the end of the car.

Benkada said he had boarded the first car at 59th Street and sat next to the gunman — but with his headphones on he did not notice anything until smoke began filling the car.

He said he did not understand that there were shots at first, and that he was trying to comfort a pregnant woman next to him.

“I got pushed and that’s when I got shot in the back of my knee”, he said.

— AFP



Emergency personnel cross near a subway station in New York City. — AFP

Why hybrid classes need to be made permanent



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

As students gingerly go back to school across the world, the consequences of a two-year gap in traditional, face-to-face education will surely be evident. Bereft of social contact and classroom imposed routine, learning is bound to become a challenge as teachers come up with new ways of retaining student engagement.

During the pandemic, schools had to instantly produce a whole new way of sharing information, design tests and allow discussions online.

Now that students are returning to the classroom, it looks like the lessons and habits learnt over the last two years will be laid aside and we will carry on as if the intervening two years have never happened.

This would be the wrong course

to take. Online learning, for all its limitations of digital participation, limited feedback and erratic network, created new ways of learning which will continue to be crucial in the years to come.

Research has shown that online learning suits specific learning styles. Introverts, visual and non-verbal learners all benefit from settings which do not require real time interactions. In addition, online learning also incorporates the skills of time management, independent learning as well as self-motivation.

The global perspective which digital, online learning provided has been unprecedented. The opportunity that students got to interact with peers from different parts of the world and

EDUCATIONISTS MUST MAXIMISE THE LESSONS OF ONLINE LEARNING AND CONTINUE THE SYSTEM IN A MORE HYBRID SYSTEM

collaborate on projects is a much needed element in education which should not be wished away.

This is not to say that the traditional classroom does not have an important role. Undoubtedly, nothing can substitute physical interactions between students and teachers. A fixed routine, conversations and collaborations

in class as well as opportunities to discuss in real time add to the quality of learning.

However, it is not inconceivable that there may be other situations in which classes need to go back online. Natural disasters, weather disruptions, increased pollution, snow days or heat days could make it necessary to move classes to an online platform, without disrupting the flow of the class. That it is possible to do so seamlessly is the important lesson from the pandemic. Schools can maintain a hybrid element in learning by inserting extra practice work for students, having discussions online, and perhaps offering videos to be discussed in class the next time.

The pandemic taught us the importance of equity in society.

Moving forward in education, it is important that all children and young adults be equipped to deal with tomorrow's world in as skilled a way as possible. That such skills include the ability to negotiate within a digital community is a given. Children need to learn the skills that online learning provides independent work, comfort with technology and critical thinking.

Students returning to face-to-face classes are nervous and excited, uncertain of how they will bridge the gap that two years have made. But educationists must maximise the lessons of online learning and continue the system in a more hybrid system. This will ensure that the next time there is some kind of emergency, we will not be caught by surprise.

Work scheme gives refugees in Britain a fresh start

VERONIQUE DUPONT
Eritrean asylum-seeker Hanna Araya sells freshly baked bread during the lunchtime rush at a London market — as he waits to see if he can remain in the UK.

For six months, the 19-year-old has volunteered for Breadwinners, a charity offering asylum-seekers and refugees work experience and paid employment on their market stalls across London and in nearby Brighton. “It’s really (been) a big impact for me, because it’s been challenging to get here and to get the first job in the UK,” Araya said of the opportunity provided by Breadwinners, whose slogan reads “Fresh Bread, Fresh Start”.

“So now I get confidence, I would love to work in the future, maybe to be a nurse or radiologist,” she said from the stall in Greenwich, south London.

In Britain, an asylum-seeker who is allowed to remain permanently in the country obtains “refugee” status, in turn enabling them to gain paid work. At the end of September, Britain had nearly 84,000 outstanding cases for refugee status, up 41 per cent year-on-year, the latest official data showed.

Founded in 2016, Breadwinners has helped 208 refugees, the vast majority of whom have gone on to university or to find paid employment. Over the past decade, UK sandwich chain Pret A Manger has hired refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Sri Lanka and Yemen.

“There are so many things refugees can bring to a company, from hard work... to infectious smiles,” said Alice Sloman, a manager at Breadwinners. The war in Ukraine has resulted in millions of new refugees seeking sanctuary elsewhere in Europe.

Only around 12,000 Ukrainians have arrived in the UK since the start of the war owing to a slow administrative process compared with other countries.

“At the moment we haven’t employed any Ukrainian refugees but we welcome everyone to join our programme, regardless of which country they were born in,” said Sloman. “We would love to have Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers join our team.”

Some major UK employers have publicly said they are willing to take on Ukrainians fleeing their country, including food-to-clothing retailer Marks and Spencer, supermarket Aldi, mobile phone group Vodafone and accountants PwC.

Bread & Roses, an NGO helping women refugees become florists, said it had noticed a difference in how the West had welcomed Ukrainians compared with other nationalities fleeing their homes — including from Syria — and has called for equal treatment. — AFP

An angry public wants Sri Lanka’s President Rajapaksa to go



Emily Schmall

The writer is the NYT South Asia correspondent based in New Delhi

As Sri Lankans waited hours in line for fuel, sweated through the springtime heat during daily power cuts, and watched the value of their incomes erode, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa blamed forces beyond his control.

“This crisis was not created by me,” he said in an address last month, urging the nation to “have faith” in his actions.

Tens of thousands of protesters are now swarming the streets of the capital, Colombo, and clashing with security forces outside the ruling family’s official residences. They are running low on essential goods and patience — and demanding that the president step down.

Sri Lanka was supposed to be a postwar success story, a fast-developing economy committed to healing after decades of conflict. Instead, it is the latest democratic nation backsliding into authoritarianism, under the misguided policies of a ruler who critics say is more focused on protecting his family’s political dynasty than the country’s fledgling institutions and economy.

To ensure his family’s political future, Rajapaksa, 72, has undermined the criminal justice system, jailed dissenters and quashed the opposition. He has drastically expanded his presidential powers, stocking the government with his relatives, fellow military men and right-wing monks aligned with his law-and-order mindset.

It has left the country ill-equipped to deal with a growing economic and debt crisis. Its coffers are all but drained after the island nation was closed to tourists for much of the coronavirus pandemic and after a series of policy missteps. On Tuesday, the government said it was suspending payments on its international debt, a signal that economic conditions could get worse.

Now, Sri Lanka is trying to conserve cash for emergency supplies of fuel and other basic goods. The fertile country that produces some of the world’s most sought-after tea is facing widespread food insecurity. And protesters are filling the streets of Colombo, many of them young professionals who had

taken for granted that they would have steady electricity and Internet service, access to imported coffee and cars, as well as a promising future.

Shathurshan Jayantharaj’s fleet of delivery trucks came to a halt when diesel supplies dwindled. Jayantharaj, 25, has been protesting in Colombo nearly every day against what he sees as the incompetence of the Rajapaksa-dominated government.

THE FERTILE COUNTRY THAT PRODUCES SOME OF THE WORLD’S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER TEA IS FACING WIDESPREAD FOOD INSECURITY

“We might have achieved a lot, but we are losing it all right now,” he said. “This family does not know what it is doing, and they’re taking us all down with them.”

Campaigning for office in 2019, Rajapaksa promised to restore safety and solvency to a country still reeling after more than 250 people were killed in a series of suicide bombings on Easter Sunday that year. His wartime

record gave him credibility.

As defence secretary when his brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, was president, he and his family were hailed for ending the country’s civil war in 2009 and for creating an economy that became a model for other nations seeking to rebuild. He benefited from the public outrage over evidence that the government at the time had ignored warnings about the terrorist attacks.

Rajapaksa won in a landslide election.

The atmosphere in Sri Lanka almost immediately shifted. The lead detective for the Criminal Investigations Department, or CID, which had been spearheading investigations into the Rajapaksas, fled to Switzerland. Prominent journalists, diplomats and other security officials rushed to leave.

Their fears were not unwarranted. Rajapaksa has expanded the use of an anti-terror law that the European Union and United Nations say has led to “consistent and well-founded allegations” of human rights abuses to jail hundreds of people.

Rajapaksa has also centralised power in the president’s office, giving himself the ability to appoint and dismiss ministers, preside over formerly independent commissions and set economic policy with few checks and balances. — **The New York Times**



Oranges for sale at the Pettah market in Colombo.

Covid-19 is still around, take precautions



Ali Al Matani
alimatani2@gmail.com

Successive warnings are being issued by the authorities concerned in the country to remain alert and cautious and do not ditch any precautionary measures mandatory during the Coronavirus pandemic or Covid-19. This is because they love the people of the country, its citizens, residents and

visitors and do not want them to put their health and lives in danger. The safety and security as well as health is always primary concern and interest of human being. Therefore, it is necessary to respect and abide by the precautions related to the pandemic and is also needed to adhere to procedures and protocols of social distancing, wearing a mask and taking other measures. This is because these steps have been advised as an ultimate strategy to remain safe and healthy.

These measures can help avoid implications of the Coronavirus which has already exhausted the entire humanity in an unprecedented manner in the modern history. It has exposed gaps in social and economic systems everywhere in the world without any exception. The Coronavirus or Covid-19 has tried humanity in a manner which no pandemic did ever before. It is very difficult at this moment to estimate the value of the losses incurred by this pandemic.

The guidelines and instructions which have been issued during this testing time should be followed. The cases are being reported everyday. Still people affected by this virus and are admitted to hospitals. Covid-19 has yet not gone from the world. We are still praying as was taught in the Holy Quran: “Our

Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us.” During this holy month of Ramadhan, we are also praying that this pain and misery is lifted from us.

But when we are praying, we cannot ignore the responsibilities on our shoulders. We should not cause more burden on the health system of any country where we live, including the Sultanate of Oman. This is an

exceptional time and the system everywhere in the world is already overburdened. We have not seen such an affliction over last half a century.

When we appreciate that the everyone was very cooperative and continued to follow health measures and abide by protocols made to avoid the spread of the pandemic, we should also accept that at certain point we ignored some of these measures. If certain measures have been relaxed, it does not mean that Covid-19 has gone. This is the reason why authorities concerned are continuing their drive to vaccinate people or give them booster doses. There is no relaxation in tests and examinations of samples. All this is going on in our interest without any respite. We should realise that if we would try to swim against the tide, we will drown. What is required from each of us is not difficult than the efforts others are making to protect us day and night.

We should do an honest introspection of our day-to-day practices even in this testing time. We will find that there is strange contradiction between what we speak and do and within our practices. If we follow preventive measures at some place, we ignore it somewhere else. This fails the entire strategy to avoid the pandemic.

The Supreme Committee which was formed to guide the country during this testing time is continuously doing its work to save us from further trouble. The ministries of Health, Awqaf and Religious Affairs as well as the Royal Oman Police have never taken any rest from this emergency duties which they are doing since the outbreak of this pandemic. If we ignore any of their guidelines and protocols even during prayers in mosques, we not only put ourselves in trouble, but risk other’s lives.

We know that due to the experience we had during last two years, awareness level has increased in the society. Therefore, there is no justification for any mistake during fasting and feasting. We must prove that the Covid-19 has made us a responsible and sensible society.

THE GUIDELINES AND INSTRUCTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN ISSUED DURING THIS TESTING TIME SHOULD BE FOLLOWED. THE CASES ARE BEING REPORTED EVERYDAY. STILL PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THIS VIRUS AND ARE ADMITTED TO HOSPITALS



FAHAD 2022
ALMATANI

Ukraine war blows up the French election



Daniel Cohen

The writer is President of the Board of Directors of the Paris School of Economics, is the author, most recently, of ‘The Inglorious Years: The Collapse of the Industrial Order and the Rise of Digital Society’

Vladimir Putin’s war on Ukraine has had a powerful impact on the French presidential campaign. Before the Russian war, there were three Putin supporters among the leading candidates: The far left’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the far-right contenders Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour.

While Le Pen has proudly staged photo ops with Putin (in 2017), approved of his annexation of Crimea, and presided over a party that received loans from Russian banks, Zemmour has expressed his admiration for Putin, whom he has described as a “patriot.” And Mélenchon, for his part, has long advocated a French exit from Nato, reflecting his anti-Americanism and affinity for the Latin American left of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez. All three candidates confidently insisted that Putin would not go for a war on Ukraine.

Though Putin took all three candidates by surprise, Zemmour has been the only one to pay a political price so far. Le Pen immediately denounced the war and reoriented her campaign to focus on pocketbook issues like the sudden surge in energy prices. Mélenchon’s response has been more muddled: While saluting Ukrainians’ heroism, he balks at sending them weapons. As with Le Pen, his campaign is primarily focused on domestic social issues and he has been avoiding discussion of the war whenever possible.

By contrast, Zemmour’s entire campaign has been about shunning immigrants, which has made adapting to the onset of war difficult. He has expressed reservations about welcoming Ukrainian refugees, and with nothing specific to say about rising energy prices, his candidacy has come to seem increasingly irrelevant. He is now polling far behind Le Pen, whom he had previously hoped to challenge for pre-eminence on the far right. In the campaign’s final stretch, the three leading contenders are the incumbent, President Emmanuel Macron, with around 27 per cent, followed by Le Pen and Mélenchon, with around 23 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively.

Among the clearest effects of the war is that the candidate of the traditional, Republican right, Valérie Pécresse, has effectively fallen out of the running. In addition to mismanaging her campaign, her candidacy has been hit hard by a shift in support towards Macron, who has not just reaped the political benefits of the Ukrainian war but has also co-opted some of Pécresse’s policy proposals.

Pécresse has responded angrily to her change in fortune, accusing Macron of “counterfeiting” her programme. But the

problem for the Republican right is not just that Macron is peeling away some of Pécresse’s supporters. It is that he has systematically adopted its core positions, including retirement at 65, work requirements for welfare beneficiaries, and a reduction in the inheritance tax. This amounts to a full-scale takeover of the French centre-right. If Macron is re-elected, he will preside over a formidable big-tent party, and the Republicans will be left with crumbs, squeezed between a resurgent far-right and a governing party that is intent on devouring them.

Macron’s goal is clear. He does not want to suffer the same fate as Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, whose seven-year presidency left no trace in French political life. Like Charles de Gaulle following his return to

electorate, and a united front comprising the remainder of conservative voters. Together with Macron, this latter bloc could govern France for quite a long time, echoing the legacy of Gaullism and its multiple reincarnations after De Gaulle’s death.

Assuming that the far right seizes the opportunity, it could recompose itself and become a powerful bloc capable of taking power one day. Just as De Gaulle forced the socialist and communist left under François Mitterrand, Macron’s play for traditional conservatives could produce a consolidation of forces to his right. The far right need only position itself as the only alternative to the new Gaullist power.

As for the left, it seems hard-pressed to challenge this reality. Whatever its moral authority on ecological or social-justice issues, the left is playing a zero-sum game from a weak position, commanding the support of around 25 per cent of the electorate. Nor has the war in Ukraine helped. The left is divided over the response and the role of Europe, France and Nato in it. The Green candidate, Yannick Jadot, and the socialist candidate, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, have accused Mélenchon of supporting autocrats, though with little effect on his relative popularity.

Behind the Ukraine dividing line, there are two clashing views about how to reconstitute the French left. The first is to match the radicalism on the far-right, whose rise seems to reflect the demands of an electorate that feels betrayed by the mainstream. The second asserts that the left has become repellent to most of society precisely because it has lost its moderate elements.

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SINCE RUSSIA’S WAR ON UKRAINE, THE CONTEST FOR THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY HAS NARROWED TO A RACE BETWEEN JUST TWO CANDIDATES: PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON AND THE FAR-RIGHT LEADER MARINE LE PEN

power in 1958, Macron wants to rebuild the right from the ground up.

The calculation is simple. All told, the French right commands some 75 per cent of the electorate — including supporters of Macron’s own party, La République en Marche. Within this broad cohort, there is room for two big forces: The far-right, which accounts for 30-35 per cent of the



This combination of file pictures shows the leader of French far-right party RN and candidate for the French presidential elections Marine Le Pen and French President Emmanuel Macron. — AFP



Villarreal's Nigerian midfielder Samuel Chukwueze celebrates scoring the equaliser during the Uefa Champions League quarterfinal, second leg match against Bayern Munich in Munich, southern Germany. – AFP

VILLARREAL STUN BAYERN MUNICH TO REACH CL SEMIS

MUNICH, Germany: Villarreal dumped Bayern Munich out of the Champions League on Tuesday, Samuel Chukwueze's 88th-minute strike at the Allianz Arena giving the Spaniards a 1-1 draw in the second leg of their quarterfinal tie that took them through 2-1 on aggregate.

Robert Lewandowski had put Bayern ahead on the night to level the tie on aggregate after Villarreal's 1-0 first-leg win, and extra time loomed until Chukwueze struck.

Unai Emery's Villarreal continued their remarkable European run, having also surprised Juventus in the last 16 with a 3-0 win in Turin.

"We suffered against Juventus, we suffered against Bayern, but we are now in the semifinals," said Villarreal captain Raul Albiol, 36, the man-of-the-match in Munich.

"Now we can dream of going even further."

Villarreal are into the semifinals for the first time since 2006.

They will play either Liverpool or Benfica in the last four. The English side take a 3-1 lead into Wednesday's second leg at Anfield.

The result means Bayern Munich exit the Champions League in the quarterfinals for the second year running.

"It is extremely bitter that we concede a goal despite this performance," said Bayern forward Thomas Mueller.

"We pressed, pressed, pressed and there was no way we were going to concede a goal."

Villarreal soaked up everything Bayern threw at their defence, aside from Lewandowski's strike early in the second half.

It was a heart-breaking night for Bayern, who dominated for most of the match before Chukwueze scored just four minutes after coming on.

Bayern started with urgency, but the Villarreal defence was alert to every threat.

Home coach Julian Nagelsmann changed formation, opting for a three-man defence instead of a back four.



Villarreal's Spanish defender Raul Albiol celebrates after the match.



Bayern Munich's German midfielder Jamal Musiala (R) gets a shot off past Villarreal's Spanish defender Raul Albiol (C) and Villarreal's French midfielder Etienne Capoue. – AFP

VILLARREAL PINNED BACK IN FIRST HALF

Villarreal were pinned in their own half for most of the first half as Benjamin Pavard, Dayot Upamecano and Lucas Hernandez dictated play from the back.

Yet for all their domination of possession, a header by Jamal Musiala straight at Villarreal goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli was Bayern's only clear chance of a goalless first half.

Lewandowski, who was largely well marshalled, earned the first booking of the game.

The Villarreal back four worked tirelessly throughout, but left-back Pervis Estupinan had a particularly busy first half as Leroy Sane constantly probed down the flank.

Bayern finally broke the deadlock in the 52nd minute.

A loose pass out of defence only got as far as Kingsley Coman, who moved the ball to Mueller.

The Germany star slipped the ball into the path of Lewandowski, who managed to get his shot past two defenders and the diving Rulli.

The Poland striker let out a primal scream to celebrate his 13th goal in 10 Champions League games this season.

Bayern kept up the pressure as Mueller went close with a diving header and was left with his head in his hands, as was Coman when he fired over soon after.

Nagelsmann sent on some fresh legs in a bid to get a decisive second goal inside

the 90 minutes by bringing on Serge Gnabry and Alphonso Davies.

However, Villarreal stunned the home crowd when Gerard Moreno broke down the left. He put in a low cross which Chukwueze sent spinning over Neuer to send the Spaniards through.

— AFP

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS (aet denotes after extra time): Quarterfinals, second legs

In Munich, Germany

Bayern Munich (GER) 1 (Lewandowski 52) Villarreal (ESP) 1 (Chukwueze 88) Villarreal win 2-1 on aggregate

In Madrid

Real Madrid (ESP) 2 (Rodrygo 80, Benzema 96) Chelsea (ENG) 3 (Mount 15, Ruediger 51, Werner 75) aet Real Madrid win 5-4 on aggregate



Real Madrid's Croatian midfielder Luka Modric (R) vies with Chelsea's German forward Timo Werner at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. – AFP

Benzema, Modric sink brave Chelsea in extra time

MADRID: Luka Modric turned the tie and Karim Benzema settled it as Real Madrid held off a sensational fightback from Chelsea on Tuesday to win an enthralling Champions League quarterfinal 5-4 on aggregate.

Chelsea wiped out Madrid's 3-1 lead from the first leg in stunning fashion at the Santiago Bernabeu as Mason Mount, Antonio Rudiger and Timo Werner put Europe's reigning champions on the brink of an incredible victory.

But the 36-year-old Modric intervened with another moment of genius to add to the very best of his glittering career, a sumptuous pass with the outside of his right foot setting up Rodrygo to volley in and sending a nerve-shredding contest into extra time.

After scoring a hat-trick at Stamford Bridge, Benzema then stepped forward to claim the winner, the Frenchman capitalising on a Rudiger slip to head in, a 3-2 defeat enough to see Madrid into the semifinals.

"You can never think anything is lost at the Bernabeu," said Carlo Ancelotti afterwards. "I can't explain it but there is a magic in this stadium that helps you."

At the final whistle, Modric and Benzema dropped to the floor, their combined 70 years of age belying another two vintage contributions that have dragged Real Madrid in sight of a 14th European Cup. They will face either Manchester City or rivals Atletico Madrid in the last four.

After being thrashed by Brentford and then outplayed by Madrid in the first leg last week, Chelsea came in rejuvenated after putting six past Southampton in the Premier League

last weekend. "We were unlucky, that's why we're disappointed," said Thomas Tuchel said. "We got beaten by pure individual quality and our own mistakes. We deserved to go through."

Mount's goal in the 15th minute set the tone, Madrid immediately consumed by tension and Chelsea given early hope. Mateo Kovacic had been key in the build-up but it was Ruben Loftus-Cheek's quick pass into Werner that caught Madrid cold, the German steering the ball with his knee into the path of Mount, who advanced and fired past Thibaut Courtois.

For 20 minutes, Chelsea were dictating, Madrid pegged back.

Reece James was doing a fine job restricting Vinicius Junior, blocking Madrid's escape route.

CHELSEA TAKE COMMAND

Benzema, Modric and Toni Kroos tried to wrestle back control but Chelsea's authority was even more pronounced early in the second half and within minutes they had a second, Rudiger rising high at the back post to head in from a corner.

With their lead gone, Madrid briefly exerted, the crowd coming into the contest. But Chelsea were celebrating a third when Marcos Alonso pivoted round Dani Carvajal's sliding tackle and slammed into the top corner.

Madrid looked beaten, the stadium dead, but the referee was waiting. VAR spotted Alonso had controlled with his hand and when the decision was reversed, the Bernabeu erupted. With 28 minutes left, the tie was back in the balance. Madrid had renewed impetus and almost scored, Benzema's looping header at the back post dropping onto the crossbar. — AFP

Benzema claimed the winner, the Frenchman capitalising on a Rudiger slip to head in, a 3-2 defeat enough to see Madrid into the semifinals



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema celebrates after scoring.

OCT Al Hail ‘A’ down OCT Muscat to seal spot in final



MUSCAT: In the second semifinal of the All-Omani tournament, OCT Al Hail ‘A’ defeated OCT Muscat by 4 wickets at the Oman Cricket Academy on Tuesday. They will challenge OCT Ruwi for a place at the competition’s summit on April 21.

After electing to bat first, Majid bin Hussein bin Doshambah al Balushi continued his hot streak by leading OCT Muscat’s scoring chart for the fourth successive time. He finished on a 54-ball 48.

However, after fellow opener Muzaffar Shiralkar’s departure for 22 runs, none of the other batsmen were able to find their rhythm. With boundaries drying up, OCT Muscat slumped to 3 run-outs as well to post 107-6.

OCT Al Hail ‘A’ were collectively brilliant on the field. Waleed bin Rahim al Balushi picked 2-13 in his 4 overs.

In response, Waleed bin Rahim al Balushi and Faris bin Said al Zadjali erected a 48-run third-wicket stand to take OCT Al Hail ‘A’ halfway home.

Both their dismissals, along with the one of Abdulghani al Balushi came in the space of 6 balls, but Abduljalil al Balushi stood tall and delivered with an

unbeaten 35-run knock to seal the win for his side with 2 overs to spare.

Mohamed bin Aslam al Balushi took three wickets.

OCT Muscat will now contest OCT Seeb for third place on April 21.

In the day’s other game, OCT Al Mabela recorded a 63-run win over OCT Al Hail ‘B’ to ensure a fifth place finish.

Zafarullah al Balushi (48) and Nabeel Mohd Boota (42) were main contributors as OCT Al Mabela posted 160-5.

Adil Ishaq and Waleed Abdulmajid picked up 2 wickets each for OCT al Hail ‘B’, who responded by getting cleaned out for 97. For OCT Al Mabela, Faris al Balushi’s 2-over spell yielded 3 runs and as many wickets.

BRIEF SCORES:
OCT Muscat 107-6 in 20 overs (Majid bin Hussein bin Doshambah al Balushi 48 (54b, 1x4); Waheed bin Rahim al Balushi 2-13) lost to Al Hail ‘A’ 109-6 in 18 overs (Abduljalil al Balushi 35 (24b, 4x4, 1x6); Mohammed bin Aslam al Balushi 3-25) by 4 wickets.
OCT Al Mabela 160-5 in 20 overs (Zafarullah al Balushi 48 (39b, 4x4), Nabeel Mohd Boota 42 (28b, 4x4, 1x6); Waleed Abdulmajid 2-25) beat OCT Al Hail ‘B’ 97 all out in 19.4 overs (Shohaib Ghulam 22 (20b, 4x4); Faris al Balushi 3-3) by 63 runs.

Jatinder powers Oman to victory against PNG

DUBAI: Oman clinched a 7-wicket win over Papua New Guinea in the ICC Men’s CWC League 2, at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Tuesday night.

Batting first after winning the toss, PNG stitched together multiple partnerships around the 30 and 40 run mark but lost set batsmen at crucial moments — a factor that hampered their innings progression massively.

Charles Amini led the scoring with a 77-ball 59. Lega Siaka, Riley Hekure and skipper Assad Vala chipped in with tallies of 30, 26 and 21 respectively to take their side to a first innings total of 224-9.

Bilal Khan starred for Oman with the ball once more. He finished the game with figures of 3-39. Fayyaz Butt and Nestor Dhamba picked up 2 wickets each while Kaleemullah and Khawar Ali claimed 1 apiece.

In response, Oman found themselves in a spot of bother early on. Kashyap Prajapati and Shoaib Khan were both back in the dugout by the third over. Ayaan Khan looked in great nick for the remainder of the powerplay, but he too was dismissed in the 12th over with the scoreboard reading 53-3.

However, thanks to Jatinder Singh’s brilliance and Khawar Ali’s grit, no further wickets were lost and Oman sealed the win with 5.5 overs to spare. The pair erected a 174-run stand to close out the game — a stark contrast to PNG’s efforts from earlier in the day where the batsmen struggled to convert starts into match-defining knocks.

Jatinder’s flawless 118 runs became Oman’s highest-ever individual score in an ODI. He collected the majority of those by running between the wickets, keeping PNG’s fielders under pressure at all times.



Khawar provided the perfect foil for Jatinder to showcase his magic and ended on a well-made 57 himself.

Semo Kamea was the only one with more than 1 wicket to his name in the second innings.

Speaking after the match, captain Khawar Ali said, “It was our first game after a loss so it was a really good win for us as a team. We analysed the mistakes that we made in the first game and worked on it. In the second innings, after 2-3 quick wickets we were under pressure. My target at that point

was just to stay at the wicket and give Jatinder the strike. His batting was outstanding today.”

Referencing his day’s work,

TEAMS	M	W	L	T	N/R	PT	NRR
1 OMA	30	18	10	1	1	38	0.107
2 UAE	18	10	6	1	1	22	0.220
3 SCOT	14	9	3	0	2	20	0.460
4 NAM	14	7	7	0	0	14	0.096
5 USA	16	7	9	0	0	14	-0.229
6 NEPAL	12	6	6	0	0	12	0.113
7 PNG	18	1	17	0	0	2	-0.709

Player of the Match Jatinder said, “Once I was in, my eyes were wide open. I was timing the ball well. I decided not to think too far. Just stay in the present, watch the ball and go ahead. I was getting my singles right too, so I didn’t have to go looking for some extraordinary shots.”

BRIEF SCORES
Papua New Guinea 224-9 in 50 overs (Charles Amini 59 (77b, 4x4); Bilal Khan 3-39) lost to Oman 227-3 in 44.1 overs (Jatinder Singh 118 (116b, 13x4) Khawar Ali 57 (99b, 3x4, 1x6); Semo Kamea 2-36) by 7 wickets.

Australia appoint McDonald as cricket coach

SYDNEY: Australia’s top cricket body appointed Andrew McDonald as national coach on Wednesday, two months after the shock departure of Justin Langer.

McDonald, 40, secured a four-year contract after winning praise for his performance as interim coach since Langer’s abrupt resignation on February 5 shook the cricket world.

He takes on one of the highest-profile jobs in Australia, where cricket is an essential part of the country’s identity and the team’s exploits grip much of the nation.

“It’s an exciting opportunity, exciting role, and I am really happy, happy and grateful”, McDonald told reporters after being confirmed in the job by Cricket Australia.

McDonald returned last week from the side’s successful Pakistan tour where they won the Test series and the sole Twenty20.

Langer left after failing to win the public support of key players including captain Pat Cummins, despite guiding Australia to a 4-0 Ashes victory over archrivals England and a maiden T20 World



Australian coach Andrew McDonald after a press conference in Melbourne. — AFP

Cup title.

Langer was also credited with overhauling a toxic Australian cricketing culture that led to the 2018 “Sandpaper-gate” ball-tampering scandal.

In the run-up to Langer’s departure, disgruntled players had complained anonymously to Australian media about his intense coaching style.

‘FANTASTIC JOB’

By contrast, limited-overs

captain Aaron Finch had praised former Test all-rounder McDonald’s “calm approach”.

“He never seems to get flustered by any situation or result — it’s all about the process and making sure your preparation and attention to detail is 100 per cent”, Finch told reporters shortly after McDonald took over in the interim role.

Cricket Australia said McDonald will be head coach in all formats but some white-ball

series may be led by an assistant to alleviate the “significant workload ahead”.

“I think he will do a fantastic job”, former Australia Test captain Michael Clarke said on Tuesday on the eve of McDonald’s widely anticipated appointment.

He warned, however, that Australia would be under pressure to perform with McDonald, who had been an assistant to Langer since 2019.

“To me, it looks like this is exactly what the players want, which puts extra pressure on them if they don’t perform”, Clarke said in an interview with Sky Sports Radio.

McDonald, who has red hair and was inevitably nicknamed Ronnie, played four Tests for Australia with his biggest knock a 68 against South Africa.

A right-arm fast-medium bowler and a handy right-handed batter, he also played for Victoria and South Australia before turning to coaching, starting as head coach with English county side Leicestershire in 2014.

— AFP

Al Hail CT to hold Danube cricket final on Sunday



MUSCAT: Al Hail Cricket Team announced that the final of Danube Ramadan tennex ball cricket tournament 2022 will be played on April 17. A total of 28 teams participated in the tournament while some of the well-known and good teams like Lions 11, Desert Warriors, Kala Cosco, Mash Eagles, Mash Eagles, Qurum Stars, Night Kings 11 and HCC qualified to the quarterfinals.

In the first quarterfinal, Kala Cosco defeated Mash Eagles team by 38 runs and qualified to semifinal. On April 15, the first semifinal will be played between Lions 11 and Desert Warriors. Qurum Stars take on Muscat Zalmi in the second semifinal.

The final match will follow the prize distribution with Sheik Irfan from Danube as the chief guest. The organisers are expected to present winners and runners-up trophies along with several prizes for individual performances.

The tournament is sponsored by Al Danube, a top building materials company in Oman and supported by Al Mudhish Company, Oman Oasis Company, Ayan International LLC, Cricket Cottage and Baab Al Hail Trading.

Djokovic ‘runs out of gas’ in Monte Carlo defeat

MONTE CARLO, Principality of Monaco: Novak Djokovic said he “ran out of gas” as he lost his opening match at the Monte Carlo Masters on Tuesday in just his second tournament of the year following his refusal to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

The world number one went down 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1 to 46th-ranked Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the second round after dropping his serve nine times in a rusty performance.

“I was hanging on the ropes the entire match. I was really chasing the result constantly,” said Djokovic, whose only other appearance in 2022 was in Dubai in February where he played just three matches. “I didn’t like the way I felt physically in the third (set). I just ran out of gas completely.

“Just couldn’t really stay in the rally with him. If you can’t stay in the rally, not feeling your legs on the clay, it’s mission impossible.”

Djokovic admitted his absence from most events had been “difficult, mentally and emotionally” but said he was “moving on” ahead of his return at a tournament he won in 2013 and 2015. Davidovich Fokina had lost both previous meetings to Djokovic in straight sets, in Rome and at the Tokyo Olympics last season, but he raced into a 4-1 lead and took the first set.



Spain’s Alejandro Davidovich Fokina plays a return to Serbia’s Novak Djokovic during the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series tournament in Monaco. — AFP

The Spaniard surged 3-0 ahead in the second only for Djokovic to win five of the next six games and serve for the set at 5-4.

He failed to do so at the first attempt but recovered in the tie-break to force a decider.

Davidovich Fokina broke to start the third set as Djokovic double faulted, and there was no way back this time for the top seed and 20-time Grand Slam champion.

Davidovich Fokina will play David Goffin or Dan Evans for a place in the last eight.

Defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas eased into the last 16 with a 6-3, 6-0 victory over Fabio Fognini, who won the title in 2019. Taylor Fritz, the only player to beat Rafael Nadal this year en route to the trophy at Indian Wells last month, overcame home wildcard Lucas Catarina 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/5), 6-4. — AFP

Dube, Uthappa inspire IPL holders Chennai to first victory

MUMBAI: Shivam Dube and Robin Uthappa smashed 17 sixes between them to help holders Chennai Super Kings register their first win of the Indian Premier League season against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Tuesday.

Dube struck an unbeaten 95 and Uthappa hit 88 as the pair built a third-wicket partnership of 165 to drive Chennai to 216-4 against RCB in Mumbai.

Chennai, led by new skipper Ravindra Jadeja, then kept Bangalore to 193-9 to win by 23 runs after a threatening 34 off 14 from Dinesh Karthik.

Four-time winners CSK bounced back from their opening four losses.

Jadeja said there was no pressure on him after the initial setbacks.

“Our owners and management don’t put pressure on me. As a captain I still pick the seniors’ brain. Of course, Mahi (Dhoni) bhai is there,” Jadeja said.

“I am still learning and each game I’ll try to get better. We have plenty of experience in the dressing room. It comes into play. We don’t panic early and try to keep calm and back ourselves.”

The 36-year-old Uthappa was dismissed after a 50-ball blitz laced with nine hits over the fence, as he fell to Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga who also got



Jadeja for nought with his next ball.

Dube missed out on a century, but smashed two more sixes in the final over from Josh Hazlewood to steer Bangalore to the highest total of this season’s tournament.

Chennai reached 60-2 in 10 overs before Uthappa and Dube, who was named man of the match for his 46-ball knock, tore into the opposition attack to plunder 156 runs from the next 10.

“I back my game and hit the ball that’s in the zone. My confidence is up,” said Dube, who is just 11 runs behind this season’s leading batter Jos Buttler (218) of Rajasthan Royals. “I have tried to lift my game to the next level from how I play in domestic cricket.”

Bangalore suffered early losses in their chase as Sri Lankan

spinner Maheesh Theekshana removed both openers, including skipper Faf du Plessis for eight.

Former captain Virat Kohli fell for one and Jadeja bowled Glenn Maxwell with his left-arm spin after the Australian batter made 26 off 11 deliveries. Bangalore slipped to 50-4.

Shahbaz Ahmed (41) and Suyash Prabhudessai (34) attempted to hit back in a partnership of 60 but Theekshana bowled both batters to finish with figures of 4-33. Jadeja took three wickets and caught Karthik off Dwayne Bravo to end Bangalore’s hopes.

BRIEF SCORES: Chennai Super Kings 216-4 (Shivam Dube 95*, Robin Uthappa 88, Wanindu Hasaranga 2-35) beat Royal Challengers Bangalore 193-9 (Shahbaz Ahmed 41, Dinesh Karthik 34; Maheesh Theekshana 4-33) by 23 runs

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Al Batinah Coastal Road Project to unlock economic, tourism growth

New enabler: Tender planned this year for implementation of incomplete stretches of carriageway

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Informational Technology (MoTCIT) hosted a key forum on Wednesday to outline its strategy for the unlocking the full potential of the Al Batinah Coastal Road project in driving economic, tourism and social growth along the North and South Al Batinah coasts.

The forum was attended by officials representing a number of government stakeholder institutions, Municipal Councils, local shaikhs and walis of wilayats in the two governorates. It was held within the framework of the Ministry's efforts to engage with local communities and stakeholders in the successful delivery of key projects implemented by the Ministry.

The forum was an opportunity for Ministry officials to provide an update on the Al Batinah

Coastal Road project, the current status of its operational use, and impediments and challenges in its smooth implementation.

The objective, officials explained, is to enable the speedy issuance of a tender for the design and implementation of the incomplete parts of the project.

Officials underlined the Ministry's strategy to ensure that the project contributes to tourist, economic and community objectives, stimulate the growth

of commercial activities linked to the Barka and Al Suwaiq ports and enhances connectivity with the Al Batinah Expressway and

the Khazaen Economic Zone. It was announced that the Ministry plans to launch this year a tender for the design and implementation of the first part of Phase 1 of the Al Batinah Coastal Road project, which starts from Al Naseem Intersection in the Wilayat of Barka to the Tharmad Intersection in the Wilayat of Al Musannah.

Besides implementing a 15-km length of the carriageway, the tender also calls for completing the paving of a 6 km link road connecting the coastal road with the Suwaiq Port.

The workshop was attended by Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Informational Technology for Transport; Issa bin Hamad al Azri, Governor of South Al Batinah; Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar bin Al Malik al Shehi, Governor of North Al Batinah; Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Muttawa, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning; and Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism.

(With inputs from ONA)

MSX announces linkage with Euroclear's global network

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) announced on Wednesday the official linking of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) with Euroclear, a major international clearinghouse.

It follows the signing of an agreement between the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD), a subsidiary of MSX, and Euroclear, one of the world's largest providers of domestic and cross-border settlement and related services for bond, equity, ETF and mutual fund transactions.

The agreement aims to facilitate the procedures of international investors who have accounts with Euroclear in all local government and private sukuk and bonds listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange that are compatible with the requirements of the Eurobond issuance.

It will also enable investors registered with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company to invest in all markets. Global financial services linked to the Euroclear network worldwide can be accessed through the Euroclear account without the need to open new accounts for them in those markets.

This step contributes to expanding the scope of international access to the Muscat Stock Exchange, attracting additional capital, and working to enhance the diversity of the investor base in the stock exchange and increase its efficiency, said Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi (pictured), CEO of the Capital Market Authority.

He added that the agreement is part of ongoing efforts to enhance and develop the capital market in the Sultanate of Oman and enhance connectivity with the global financial markets, with a desire to attract more foreign capital and encourage the dual listing of local and those Omani securities issued and listed on external financial markets.

The linkage will enable external investors to own the securities listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Oman's property sector rebounds in 2021, but values and rents remain depressed

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Sultanate of Oman's real estate sector, billed as an important enabler of economic development, witnessed a strong recovery in 2021 following a period of "pandemic-induced sluggishness" during the previous year, according to a key market report.

Oman REIT, the country's first publicly listed Real Estate Investment Trust Fund, noted in the Chairman's Report for fiscal 2021 that the total value of traded property in the Sultanate of Oman grew 4.3 per cent to RO 2.56 billion last year, up from RO 2.46 billion in 2020.

Oman REIT Fund Chairman Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani said the uptrend signalled the "sector's resilience amid easing pandemic restrictions".

At the same time, the number of real estate transactions jumped 27 per cent to 106K in 2021, up from 83K in 2020, the Chairman

noted, citing figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Despite the healthy recovery in the sector, the value of trades still remains below pre-pandemic trends, the report

pointed out.

Against an average of RO 246 million worth of properties traded every month during the 12-month period preceding the onset of the pandemic, the average slumped to RO 189

million per month during the pandemic, representing a decline of 23 per cent.

However, in 2021, the average value of property transactions rebounded to RO 229 million a month.

In trend with the sharp growth in property transactions, mortgage activity too has surged, according to Oman REIT's Annual Report.

The traded value of mortgage contracts totalled RO 1.34 billion, although below pre-pandemic levels.

Still, the number of executed mortgage contracts climbed 21 per cent to 18,082 contracts in 2021, up from 14,868 a year earlier.

But property values and rents, most notably for the residential property sector, remained depressed despite the sharp rise in the volume of transactions. They remained well below the last peak witnessed in the second quarter of 2014, the report said.

"A combination of factors, including new stock additions in the last five years has contributed to this trend. The average value of mortgage transactions declined by 24 per cent year-on-year between 2020 and 2021," the Chairman added.

Oxy Oman sponsors inaugural Oman Pavilion at Venice Biennale

MUSCAT: Oxy Oman representatives recently attended the ceremony honouring the Sultanate of Oman's first participation in the upcoming Venice Biennale, where Oxy Oman is serving as the Strategic Sponsor. The Oman Pavilion at Venice Biennale is organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The event was held at the Avani Hotel Muscat under the auspices of Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth for Culture. Stephen Kelly, President and General Manager of Oxy Oman, attended the event, along with other senior representatives of the company.

The Venice Biennale is an international arts festival which hosts artists from countries around the world for an exhibition throughout the city. This year, the exhibition will host Oman's first



pavilion space, which will display notable artwork by Omani artists.

The festival will be held from May 2022 until November 2022 and is expected to be attended by thousands of local and

international visitors.

"Oxy champions Oman's culture and heritage as a key social responsibility pillar and we're immensely proud to contribute our support towards

the Sultanate's first appearance at the Venice Biennale. We look forward to the unveiling of Oman's pavilion with celebrated Omani artists and hope that it promotes Oman's art history and cultural mark for a global audience at Venice," said Kelly.

Oxy Oman has been a key sponsor of many initiatives and projects over the past years, under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth, including Camel Races, the Oxy Sports Days programme and the Youth Centre.

This sponsorship falls under Oxy Oman's umbrella of strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders and is part of Oxy Oman's endeavour and long-term commitment to support programmes that enhance economic growth and sustainable development and that yield positive impacts in the neighbouring communities.

Recharge and win this Ramadhan with Ooredoo

MUSCAT: Getting into the spirit of this special month, Ooredoo is giving its customers the chance to win exciting prizes on all recharges.

Especially for Ramadhan, Hala customers recharging through the app can get either up to 1 GB of data, or up to 60 minutes of on-net calls, to use between 12 am and 6 am.

The validity increases along with the recharge amount, so the more you recharge the longer you can chat, browse, watch and share! With unique services for every kind of user, Ooredoo's Hala SIM is absolutely free.

All customers have to do is select their plan of choice and enjoy data with voice, data only, or straightforward credit, from as little as RO2. Combining amazing connectivity and a great customer experience, it's yet another way Ooredoo is enriching customers' digital lives. To be in with a chance of a free gift, Hala customers just need to log into the app and recharge.



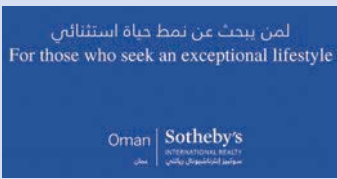
Sotheby's International Realty now in Oman

MUSCAT: Sotheby's International Realty, the international luxury real estate brokerage firm, now in Oman, represents both sellers and buyers of luxury real estate through a global network of expert sales associates.

Built on decades of tradition and dedicated to innovating the luxury real estate industry, Sotheby's International Realty offers transformative experiences through a global network of exceptional agents.

The brand, present in 79 countries and territories around the globe, includes 25,000 sales associates and had a record-breaking 2021 with \$204 Billion in annual sales.

The brand's presence in Oman gives the Omani and regional real estate market exclusive access to international affiliate listings around the globe and puts years of expertise in luxury real estate at the service of



buyers in Oman.

As for sellers looking to list their property, Oman Sotheby's International Realty offers them global exposure and access to exclusive highly qualified global clientele. In addition to guidance and expert advice from the best agents in the field, the firm offers extraordinary marketing and exposure to properties through top analytical tools and its award-winning website in – 14 languages/dialects – attracting more visitors than any other luxury real estate website.

In addition, Oman Sotheby's International Realty is the exclusive sales agency to The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat, a luxurious beachfront address like no other.

Bank Muscat hosts Najahi customer meetings to enhance partnership

MUSCAT: In line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday', and commitment to supporting and developing the Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSME) sector, Bank Muscat's Retail Enterprises Unit (Najahi) recently hosted 2 Iftars for Najahi customers in the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah and North Al Batinah.

The event provided opportunities for bank officials to exchange greetings with MSME customers on the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadhan as well as to get feedback and suggestions from them regarding the bank's products and services for the sector.

Speaking on the occasion Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati (pictured), Deputy General Manager – Customer Segments, said: "We take this opportunity to welcome and thank all our Najahi customers who have gathered here to celebrate Iftar with us on this blessed occasion. Events like these provide the bank with a great opportunity to meet our valued customers and get their feedback and suggestions on



the various financial and non-financial products and services provided by Bank Muscat.

This will help us to further fine-tune our products and services and ensure enhanced customer satisfaction.

The bank is also happy to update its customers about its plans and strategy for the future as it seeks to further support the sector, especially Micro and Small enterprises in their growth and development to becoming bigger players in the Sultanate of Oman's economy. We look forward to similar meetings with our customers in other governorates too in the near future."

The bank has always been

an enabler of opportunities for budding entrepreneurs so as to bring about sustainable development.

Recently, Najahi organised a seminar on successful marketing by Ahmed al Mutawa, CEO of Mubader Company and a business consultant to the MSME sector in line with the bank's customer-centric vision and also its commitment to promoting the MSME sector through both financial and non-financial services.

The seminar covered a range of important topics such as starting and marketing successful businesses, the latest marketing tools and the best businesses to market. It must be noted that the non-financial support offered by Bank Muscat's Najahi include training sessions and mentoring programmes, which help young Omani entrepreneurs to guide their business through some of the most critical phases of growth and development.

Bank Muscat set up the Najahi (Retail Enterprises) unit in 2014 as part of a major initiative to support the MSME sector.

Nexen Tire unveils 80th anniversary emblem



MUSCAT: Nexen Tire, a leading global tire manufacturer, recently unveiled a commemorative 80th anniversary emblem to observe the company's eight decades in the tyre manufacturing sector.

The new commemorative emblem incorporates Nexen Tire's legacy and history, symbolising the importance of the company's long-term commitment to its consumers.

The overall design of the emblem resembles a moving tire, demonstrating Nexen Tire's initiatives of meeting the different mobility needs of its consumers. Nexen Tire will celebrate its formal 80th anniversary on May 1, 2022, which will mark the company's incorporation.

Founded in 1942, Nexen Tire has played a pivotal role in the tire manufacturing business.

Eight decades later, the company is still a cutting-edge brand known for its quality, innovative products and manufacturing competitiveness.

"I'm honoured to introduce this commemorative emblem and kick off our 80th anniversary celebration," stated Travis Kang, Global CEO of Nexen Tire.

"I am truly proud of what we have accomplished. The significance of this milestone demonstrates that our clients and workers value our efforts. I've also had the good fortune to work with a remarkable group of colleagues that have been making great strides toward ensuring the company's success."

NBO offers customers seamless digital payments

MUSCAT: Continuing to deliver best-in-class digital solutions, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) has equipped its customers with more ways than ever to manage their payments, wherever and whenever they need to make a transaction.

Whether shopping, paying bills or transferring money abroad, the bank offers a variety of user-friendly options, from payments by QR code to mobile wallets, mobile apps to the newly introduced multi-purpose banking kiosks. Meanwhile, NBO seeks ever more innovative ways to enhance Oman's payments sector, while catering to the growing demands for a speedy, seamless,



and secure banking experience.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO said, "In a world where convenience, time savings and instant access reign paramount, digital is rapidly becoming the preferred option for payments.

As we continue to transform and grow our business, our constantly enhanced digital capabilities tap into leading technologies, while offering the latest security features to ensure every transaction is convenient, inclusive and altogether more enjoyable."

NBO's latest digital payment solutions include the constantly-enhanced mobile app, instant

payment transfer, the pay+ mobile wallet, the multi-purpose kiosk, opening an account digitally, and the new Merchant app, which enables instant mobile-to-mobile business payments.

The bank has been recognised with a string of awards including 'Excellence in Digital Transformation' from Oman Economic Review, 'Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2021' from International Business Magazine, 'Most Innovative Digital Bank Oman 2021' at the Global Business Outlook Awards 2021, and 'Best Digital Bank Oman 2021' and 'Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2021' at the World Business Outlook Awards.



MSX announces linkage with Euroclear's global network

FROM PAGE 13

This is through their accounts with Euroclear without the need to open accounts directly with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, thereby offering convenience and time savings as well.

Al Salmi noted that the agreement will contribute, in the initial stages, the development and revitalisation of the Omani debt instruments market, which represents one of the objectives of the strategy approved by the Capital Market Authority.

Cooperation with Euroclear during this initial phase is expected to enable full access to international investors who have accounts with Euroclear, allowing them to invest and trade in all securities listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, not just debt instruments.

Mohammed Abdulhadi, Acting General Manager of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, said this cooperation will enable MCD to be the focal point for Euroclear transactions in the Sultanate of Oman. Bernard Ferran, General Manager of Euroclear Bank Operations in Europe, Middle East and Africa, said the opening of a Euroclear account in the Sultanate of Oman will enhance and raise the efficiency of cross-border transactions and settlements of securities.

(With inputs from ONA)

Muscat Food Bank helps fight waste, channels surplus food to the needy

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, APRIL 13

A one-of-a-kind food bank initiative launched by a group of leading Omani dignitaries and officials is helping channel surplus cooked food to less privileged sections of the community.

The charitable project is the brainchild of Eng Ibrahim al Hosni who has since enlisted the support of government and private sector luminaries in actively rolling out the initiative.

The food bank is an idea started by Engineer Ibrahim al Hosni years ago after drawing attention to the amounts of food wasted in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as a problem globally recently. "It's a non-profit organisation, based in Al Athaiba (Muscat), specialising in preserving surplus food and distributing it to those who find it difficult to secure food", said Eng Al Hosni, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Food Bank.

"The idea started six years ago, but we got a licence just last year and were able officially set up the food bank under the honorary presidency of His Highness Fatik bin Fahr al Said."

Speaking to *Observer*, he said the initiative got off the ground just a week before the holy month of Ramadhan.



"We have teams of 16 volunteers and five cars equipped with all the necessary equipment to operate a modern food store, which can be used to preserve the food that we are collecting from different sources. Our team

is well-trained, especially in the field of food hygiene, to preserve and deliver the food in safe and hygiene conditions", he stated.

Since the start of the holy month, more than 800 meals have been collected from various sources and distributed to those in need, according to the official. The Food Bank itself has over 7,500 people registered as beneficiaries, he noted.

Importantly, several corporate bigwigs have pledged support for the food bank. The list includes

Al Kalbani Group, Habib Group, Al Rajhi Group, Dar Fatima Al Khairi and Shaikh Salim al Mashani.

Also providing advisory and professional support are leading figures from the food and business sector, including Eng Saleh al Shanfari, CEO of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), Shaikh Mohammed al Harthy, Executive Vice-President of Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), Khalid al Shuaibi, Adviser at the

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Mohammed al Kindi, Deputy Governor of Muscat.

Playing an important role in the success of the initiative if the Ministry of Social Development which, through the provision of crucial guidance and the necessary approvals, has enabled the successful start of the Food Bank project, he noted.

Importantly, the Food Bank initiative will go a long way in mitigating the food waste phenomenon in the Sultanate of Oman. A study in 2016 estimated the amount of food to be worth around RO 56 million annually.

According to a UN study published in 2020, around 95 kg of food is wasted by an individual on average every year

In a recent Twitter post, Eng Zakaria al Balushi, Regional Director of Operations at be'ah, noted: "The total waste in the Sultanate of Oman during the month of Ramadhan in 2018 was more than 133,000 tonnes, rising to more than 140,000 tonnes in 2019.

In 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic and the associated lockdowns, food waste dipped to 133,000 tonnes during the holy month. It rose again after the lifting of restrictions to more than 154,000 tonnes during 2021."

Khazaen Dry Port launches new logistics service

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 13

Khazaen Dry Port launched the partial shipment solutions service through various commercial ports and land ports in the Sultanate of Oman.

Juma bin Ibrahim al Maskari, Chief Executive Officer of Khazaen Dry Port, said that the provision



of partial shipment solutions will enable various industries, as well

as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to ship goods at minimum

cost.

This service will contribute to the competitiveness of Oman and enhance its position in the global trade map, he noted.

Khazaen Dry Port, which began its operations in 2021 as the first such inland port in the Sultanate of Oman, is operated by Asyad, the country's logistics sector flagship.

(With inputs from ONA)

Utico inks deal to supply potable water from new Al Ghubra project

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 13

Leading privately-owned utility firm Utico has signed a Water Purchase Agreement (WPA) with the Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) following its success in securing a contract to develop an independent desalination project at Al Ghubra in the Muscat Governorate.

UAE-based Utico, which counts Oman Investment Authority (OIA) as among a diverse portfolio of investors, said the Al Ghubra project will supply 20,000 cubic metres/day potable water to OWWSC at the lowest water tariff ever in the Sultanate of Oman.

"The winning of the Al Ghubra desalination project in Muscat is a milestone for Utico and a clear evidence of the company's ability to achieve sustainable returns for its shareholders, in addition



to achieving efficiencies in long-term government concessions," said Hussain al Lawati, CEO (pictured), Global, Utico.

He added that the company will deploy innovative, strategic and sustainable production practices in the development of the Oman project in an environment-friendly manner with the use of

green electricity.

Utico will develop the Al Ghubra project at a highly efficient and affordable economic scale with optimal use of renewable energy. The company said it is also aligning with Omani government's long-term strategy by supporting Oman's Vision 2040 through investments into



diversified base of projects in the utilities sectors including IWPs, ISTPs, sustainable IPPs as well as related infrastructure projects.

"Winning the Al Ghubra project emphasises Utico's growth and expansion strategy across the region and beyond the UAE. Over the years, Utico has been able to create a niche for itself in the utility sector as a full-spectrum entity with an end-to-end industry perspective and services spanning from production to transmission and distribution with a customer-centric focus," added Ali Al Darwish, CEO - Utico.

UK annual inflation strikes 30-year high



A customer shops for food items inside a Tesco store in London. – AFP

LONDON: Britain's annual inflation rate soared to the highest level in three decades last month as energy prices rocket, official data showed on Wednesday, worsening a cost-of-living crisis. Inflation surged to 7.0 per cent in March from 6.2 per cent in February, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

"Broad-based price rises saw annual inflation increase sharply again in March," said ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner. "Amongst the largest increases were petrol costs." Prices of restaurant meals and hotel rooms also rose steeply last month after falling a year earlier during a pandemic lockdown in the UK.

Costs are surging worldwide as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns and on fallout from the war in Ukraine. US inflation rose by a huge 8.5

per cent over the 12 months to March, the biggest jump in four decades, official data showed on Tuesday.

Sharp price rises across the board are forcing central banks around the world to hike interest rates, curbing economic growth recovery.

European Central Bank governors meet on Thursday to ponder record-high inflation in the eurozone and fresh economic uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine, with policymakers signalling a willingness to take action sooner rather than later.

The US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England have already announced their first rate hikes to combat price pressures, leaving the ECB looking out of step.

The Bank of England has predicted that UK annual inflation could reach double figures by the end of the year.

— AFP

EU bank dumpster divers still have rich pickings

Betting on basket cases in the European banking sector has worked reasonably well over the past two years. That may explain why a big investor, probably Capital Group, just sold almost 1.8 billion euros of shares in German lenders Deutsche Bank and Commerzbank. France's Société Générale and Italy's UniCredit may now offer similar rewards for brave dumpster divers.

It's a symbolic knock for the Frankfurt-based lenders. Deutsche, for example, hailed Capital's interest as a "clear vote of confidence in our strategic transformation" in October 2020, when the fund upped its stake.

And Chief Executive Christian Sewing is still a long way from hitting his target of a 10 per cent return on tangible equity (ROTE) in 2025. Yet it may make sense for Capital to bank a profit at a time of rising economic uncertainty.

Shares in Deutsche and Commerz were up by 35 per cent and 25 per cent since February 2020.

The question is whether other bargains can be found elsewhere. SocGen, worth 19 billion euros and 21 billion euro UniCredit seem like the best candidates.

They trade at 33 per cent and 36 per cent of tangible book value respectively, according to Refinitiv data – a discount to Deutsche's 41 per cent.

And both are projected to make a ROTE of just 7 per cent in 2023, underperforming the 8 per cent and 10 per cent returns analysts expect from rivals BNP Paribas and Intesa Sanpaolo respectively, suggesting room for improvement.

The complication is that those two banks are not on the same radical belt-tightening journey that Deutsche and Commerz have been on in recent years.

UniCredit's CEO Andrea Orcel has a respectable 55 per cent cost-income ratio but is planning on reinvesting much of its planned 1.5 billion euros of cuts in the coming years to juice the top line.

Yet the Ukraine war may dent banks' growth hopes, bringing expenses back into focus. The dumpster divers of tomorrow may have to give their targets a nudge. — Reuters

The Ukraine war may dent banks' growth hopes, bringing expenses back into focus. The dumpster divers of tomorrow may have to give their targets a nudge.



GERMANY TO OPEN INDUSTRIAL HARBOURS

A German flag waves from the back of a ship in front of port facilities of the DOW company, a global leader in the chemical business, at the industrial harbour of Stade. Germany lacks the infrastructure to absorb huge new supplies, with no liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals along its coast where tankers can dock. Approval documents for a LNG terminal planned to open in 2026 at the industrial harbour of Stade will be submitted shortly. There are currently 37 LNG terminals across Europe, 26 of which are located in EU member states.

— AFP

Thriving trade and industrial sector



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

At the recent annual meeting of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, held in the presence of the Minister and his official colleagues, many questions were raised related to foreign trade, national products, domestic market trends, and export and import values.

Officials shared details about projects, programmes, initiatives and proposals related to these sectors that they are working to develop in order to enhance and raise their added value and boost their GDP contribution.

No doubt, there are several steps taken by the Ministry to empower the private sector and motivate it to play its desired role in promoting economic growth, facilitating trade with other countries and strengthening Omani exports and re-exports in the coming years.

The Director of Communications and Information at the Ministry indicated that the contribution of manufacturing industries to the GDP increased by 40.8 per cent, which is a sizeable contribution from this important sector.

She also indicated that there is an increase in non-oil exports by 91.2 per

cent. The statistics also show that the rate of reduction of fees for some of the Ministry's services amounted to 96 per cent, while the volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the countries of the world recorded an increase of 41.7 per cent.

The Ministry is preparing plans to open up new target markets for Omani products by participating in specialised international exhibitions and focusing on foreign investment issues.

By eliciting feedback from investors, it is also trying to evaluate the quality of services provided by the Ministry and thereby understand the challenges face by the investors.

This includes data on their satisfaction with fees, ease of use of platforms, speed of completing transactions through the Ministry's portal and other issues – all aimed at improving these services.

Significantly, the Ministry was able to raise the added-value of the industrial sector by more than 40 per cent in the past year compared to other economic sectors, despite the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic had disrupted trade and commerce around the world.

This is a sizeable achievement, which must be sustained in the coming years

through incentives, facilities and the empowerment that all stakeholders playing a major role in supporting the contribution of the industrial sector.

The concerned authorities are working to open up new opportunities through joint councils and committees with Arab and foreign countries to raise the value of Omani exports and facilitate exports into new markets.

Today, there are 1,800 economic activities registered at the Ministry for those wishing to register via the "Invest Easy" service. At the same time, other concerned authorities are keen to direct small tenders valued at less than RO 10,000 to entrepreneurs and small enterprises so that they can continue their work.

A combination of geopolitical conditions and other factors is contributing to an increase in the price of raw materials and commodities imported from some overseas countries, partly due to higher shipping, insurance and handling prices in international ports.

Regardless, the Ministry is assured that there are other markets that will continue to supply the Sultanate of Oman with the required food communities necessary to secure the country's food needs.

A cure for Europe's addiction to Russian energy



NIELS FUGLSANG

The author is a Danish member of the European Parliament and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats.

THE EU IS THE SINGLE LARGEST CUSTOMER FOR RUSSIA'S NATURAL GAS AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS.

Russia's shocking attack on Ukraine has awakened the European Union to the urgent need to reduce its reliance on Russian fossil fuels. But, as the EU attempts to escape the Russian energy yoke, it must not overlook the critical importance of energy efficiency.

The EU is the single largest customer for Russia's natural gas and petroleum products. Russia accounts for around 40 per cent of the EU's gas imports and about a quarter of its oil imports, but only now has it become starkly apparent just how vulnerable this has left us.

That is why, soon after the attack, the EU announced plans to cut its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons by two-thirds this year and end its reliance entirely "well before" 2030.

Greater energy efficiency – achieved through such basic investments as double-pane windows, modern thermostats, and building insulation – could go a long way toward enabling the EU

to achieve these goals.

According to the European Commission, when energy efficiency is increased by just 1 per cent, gas imports decline by 2.6 per cent. In other words, Europe can take a major geopolitical and environmental step forward simply by wasting less energy.

In the past, the efficiency imperative has often been overshadowed in EU energy-policy discussions by the goal of increasing the share of renewable sources such as wind, solar and hydro in the energy mix. But these objectives are two sides of the same coin.

Fortunately, the EU's broad package of draft climate legislation – which aims to reduce the bloc's greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 55 per cent compared to 1990 levels by 2030, up from the 40 per cent target currently agreed – recognises this complementarity.

Beyond measures to boost the use of renewables, the "Fit for 55" package includes a proposal to increase the EU's energy-efficiency

target for 2030 from 32.5 per cent of final consumption to 36 per cent.

To give the effort more teeth, the Commission wants to make its targets legally binding.

While the package was put forward by the European Commission last July, Russia's war in Ukraine has made its implementation all the more important. But the European Parliament and EU governments must also go further, agreeing to an even more ambitious target. As the European Parliament member responsible for steering the draft energy-efficiency law through the assembly in the coming months, I will push for a binding EU energy-efficiency target of 43 per cent of final consumption by 2030.

I also recommend introducing binding national targets to underpin the EU-wide goal, and adjusting interim national milestones in 2025 and 2027, to ensure that the trajectory to 2030 remains credible.

Moreover, we should broaden

an obligation to retrofit 3 per cent of public buildings annually to include social housing. And we must strengthen provisions to improve energy efficiency in low-income households.

Greater efficiency would help to shield households from energy-price increases – such as those that began last year in Europe as a result of a gas-market squeeze – and keep heating bills affordable.

Member states' governments may well balk at the prospect of the EU introducing more stringent – and binding – requirements for national energy savings. After all, in 2018, when the current energy-efficiency target for 2030 was agreed, member states insisted that it be non-binding. But it is worth noting that member states combined are not on track to meet even this goal.

The EU can no longer afford to neglect energy efficiency. Aside from advancing Europe's geopolitical and climate goals, greater efficiency would bring significant economic and social

benefits.

Efficiency-boosting building renovations promise to create many skilled jobs and stimulate economic activity in cities and elsewhere. Thanks to the unprecedented funds the EU raised to overcome the pandemic-induced slump in 2020, member countries are in a strong position to kick-start a Europe-wide renovation wave.

In light of the wide-ranging benefits of boosting energy efficiency, national leaders must show greater political commitment to the EU framework. National sensitivities about the freedom to act have long impeded EU-wide ambition.

But, in addressing major crises, from the Covid-19 pandemic to the Ukraine war, the EU has dispensed with other, even bigger, political taboos. Given this recent history, scaling up the EU's draft energy-efficiency legislation should be as politically feasible as it is strategically sensible.

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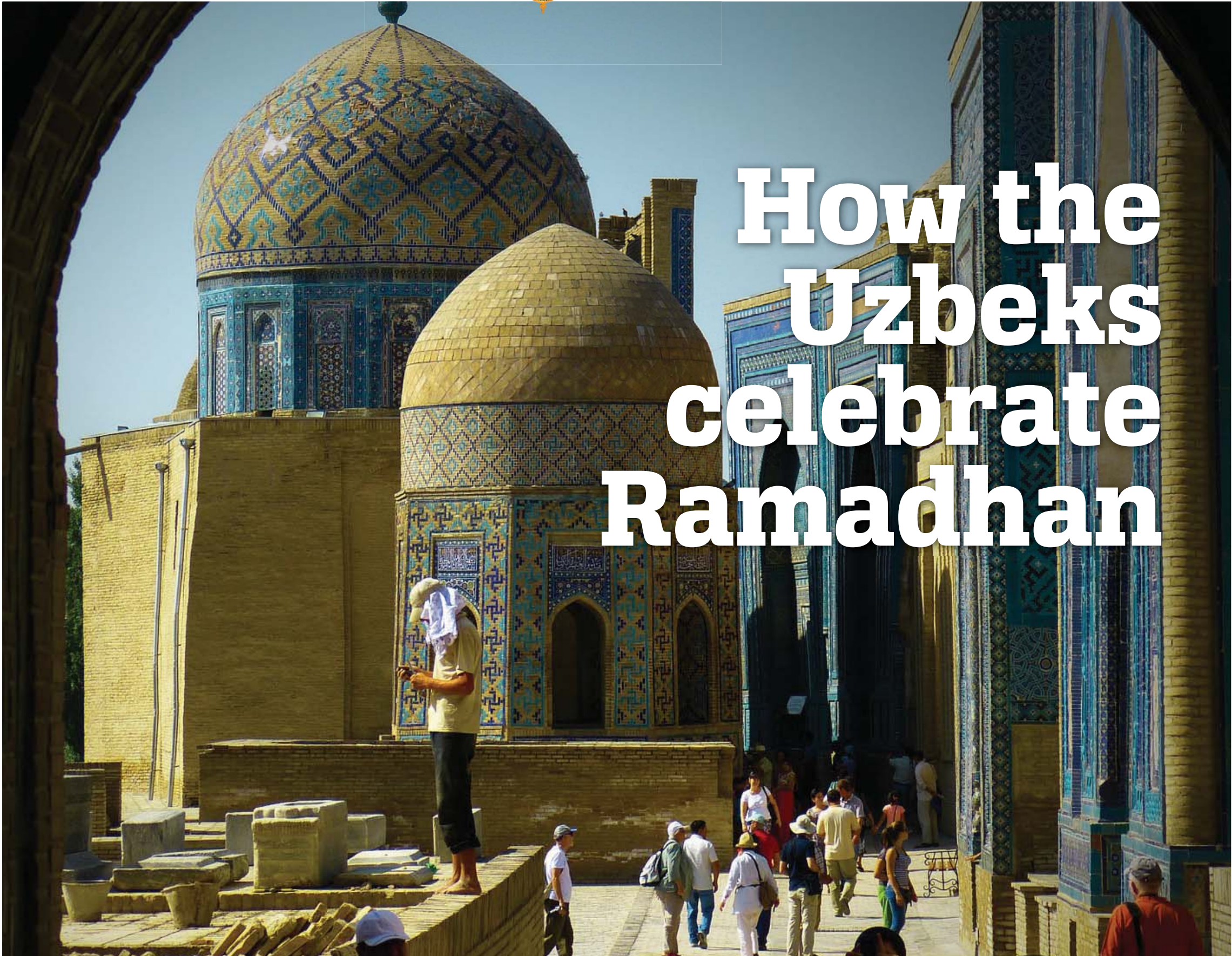
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#Living_with_COVID19





By Kabeer Yousuf

While Ramadhan binds Muslims all over the world with an intangible chord of love and care, each country has its own rituals, etiquettes and styles of doing the rituals making it different yet still connected with the rest of the world.

In Ramadhan, some rituals remain constant regardless of the location. All Muslims start the day by fasting, breaking the fast upon sundown, socialising in the evening and then begin the fast the next day with morning prayers and end it with evening prayers.

In Uzbekistan, a Central Asian nation country and former Soviet republic which is known for its mosques, mausoleums and other sites linked to the Silk Road, Muslims celebrate the revelation of the Holy book Quran to Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

All capable Muslims are expected to observe daily fasting and devote a particular focus to prayer, purification and charitable acts and Muslims aren't the only ones who experience Ramadhan, instead, non-Muslims, too, are welcome to join as well.

7 FACETS OF RAMADHAN IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan is considered to be the ancient trade route between China and the Mediterranean and many places including Samarkand, a major city on the route, contain a landmark of Islamic architecture. The Registan, a plaza bordered by 3 ornate, mosaic-covered religious schools dating to the 15th Century boasts of having a rich

Islamic tradition.

1. MAGNIFICENT HISTORICAL MOSQUES AND TARAWEEH PRAYERS

Uzbekistan is well-known for centuries-old, beautiful mosques, towering minarets with cupolas and madrasas with blue and golden frescos that are rich with history and culture. Bukhara's old town-houses have plenty of well-preserved examples of historical mosques, including the 12th century Kalan Minaret and Po-i-Kalyan Mosque. In Tashkent, the Hazrati Imam Mosque and the 16th century Barak Khan Madrasah are brilliant examples of Islamic architecture from the past and the present. The 18th century Juma Mosque inside the walled town of Khiva, Ichan Qal'a, is still in its original state and contains more than 200 carved wooden columns. In Samarkand, the Bibi-Khanym Mosque of Timurids period stands tall as one of the Islamic world's most magnificent mosques.

2. DELICIOUS HALAL CUISINE FOR IFTAR AND SUHOOR MEALS

"In Uzbek culture, nothing says 'welcome' better than food and drink and during Ramadhan, one will get a warmer welcome", says Umarov, Uzbek diplomat in the Sultanate of Oman.

Most Uzbek families prepare iftar in their homes, some public places and mosques offer food for free to break the fast during the month.

Nishalda is a traditional Uzbek dessert that one can't get at any other time of the year so this is another reason why Ramadhan is a great time to visit. Uzbeks'

next favourite staple of iftar and suhoor meals is obviously Patir bread. Although around 100 types of bread are baked throughout the country, Uzbeks mostly prefer patir, which is prepared with milk and butter and cooked in a clay tandoor oven, for special days, weddings and Ramadhan. Men traditionally cook Plov, the national dish of Uzbekistan.

3. BIRTHPLACE OF GREAT ISLAMIC IMAMS, SCHOLARS AND SCIENTISTS

Discover how Islamic civilisation has influenced world culture, specifically in the fields of science, architecture and mathematics. The land of Uzbekistan, known in Arabic sources as Ma-wara-an-nahr, has been a cradle of science and Islamic learning throughout history. Religious scholars who originated from Uzbekistan, such as al-Bukhari and al-Tirmidhi, played a leading role in the development of hadith, al-Maturidi and an-Nasafi were major figures in Islamic theology, while scholars such as Zamakhshari and Samarkandi contributed to the progress of Quranic sciences. Abu Ali Ibn Sina, al-Khwarezmi, Abu Nasr



Farabi and Ulugh Beg were leading scientists who worked and gained recognition in the region in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, physics, metaphysics and philosophy. Some of the discoveries made are still used and appreciated by scholars and contemporary academics.

Monuments and museums commemorating these discoveries are aplenty which are doors to discovering Uzbekistan's past, and to wonder at how much it changed the world!

4. EXPERIENCE THE BREATHTAKING NATURE OF UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan is famous for its architecture and Islamic history - but don't think that means there isn't anything to see or do in nature! Away from the Silk Road cities, Uzbekistan has a diverse landscape:

Grassy highlands, arid deserts, rivers, forests and mountains making it a destination of choice for trekkers and hikers.

5. BAZAARS AND SHOPPING GALORE

"One will discover unique, beautiful and unusual items while travelling, and in Uzbekistan, they are aplenty. From paintings to pottery and carpets to dry fruits, it's full of enticing things that one would want to buy", adds Umarov. The silk fabric of Ikat is an Uzbek speciality and can be found at most bazaars in all imaginable colours. If you are an Ikat lover, a visit to Margilan Silk factory will be a highlight of your time in Uzbekistan. Bukhara carpets have become a global brand, dating back to the early middle ages. Even in the time of the Great Silk Road, people around the world could not remain indifferent when the caravan spread Bukhara carpets on the shelves of Baghdad or Venice. Soft, pleasant nap, unusual pattern with all shades of red is a masterpiece bought up instantly.

6. FRIENDLY AND WELCOMING LOCALS

Uzbekistan is one of the happiest countries on earth as the UN report says and among the 5 safest countries in the world. Hospitality is a big part of Central Asian culture, and it makes travellers want to visit Uzbekistan even more. During Ramadhan, iftar is a time to reconnect with friends and families and every night, there are different people to meet, different homes to visit, and different restaurants to break fast at. Don't be surprised if a local invites you to break fast with them even if you've just met them - that's the beautiful spirit of Ramadhan.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

Say, "O disbelievers. I do not worship what you worship. Nor do you worship what I worship. Nor do I serve what you serve. Nor do you serve what I serve. You have your way, and I have my way.

(al Kafirun)



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

FATWA

QUESTION:

Does the external use of ointment break the fast?

ANSWER:

Indeed, the external use does not affect fasting. Just like bathing during days of Ramadhan is acceptable, in the same context, using external ointments is permissible.

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Sahl b. Sa'd (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger as saying:

In Paradise there is a gate which is called Rayyan through which only the people who fast would enter on the Day of Resurrection. None else would enter along with them. It would be proclaimed: Where are the people who fast that they should be admitted into it? And when the last of them would enter, it would be closed and no one would enter it.

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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Church of the Holy Sepulchre's ancient altar rediscovered, researchers say



PRESSED AGAINST a wall in a back corridor of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a stone slab bore testimony only to the graffiti etched on it by multitudes of pilgrims through the ages.

But the 2.5m by 1.5m stone turned out to be far more precious when its other side was exposed during recent renovations at the church, the traditional site of Jesus's crucifixion and burial.

Researchers believe the elaborate looping ornaments they found on the long-hidden part of the slab indicate it was once the decorated front of a medieval high altar that took pride of place centuries ago in one of Christianity's holiest sites.

"You cannot see it now, but originally it was inlaid with pieces of precious marble, pieces of glass, pieces of small, finely made marble", said Amit Re'em, Jerusalem regional archaeologist for the Israel Antiquities Authority.

"It was shining and this was a really amazing artefact", said Re'em, who conducted the research with Ilya Berkovich of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

They identified the unique decoration method as "Cosmatesque", which combines Classical, Byzantine and early Islamic art in which finely cut tiles of colourful marble are used to fill in circular engravings on the stone.

"It stood at the apex, at the sanctuary of the Church (of the Holy Sepulchre)", Re'em said.

"All the eyes of the believers, of the pilgrims, (went) to this object. And right above it and around it, all the high priests, the priests and the monks of the church did all the liturgy, the main liturgy of the church, on the table, right here on the table of this altar", he said.

Similarly decorated altars have been found inside churches in Rome dating to the 12th and 13th centuries, the researchers said.

They believe the relic in Jerusalem corresponds with past archaeological findings and with pilgrims' accounts of the consecration of the church by the Crusaders and the forming of its main altar in 1149.

The altar was used by the Catholic clergy to celebrate mass until the Crusaders left Jerusalem, Re'em said. Afterwards it was used by the Greek Orthodox church until it was damaged in a fire in 1808, cast aside and forgotten until the recent renovations, he said.

Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantinia, the chief secretary of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, welcomed such research at the church.

"Works from people of art, people of archaeology, contribute to us, contribute to the belief of the church, to the conviction of the church, that this is the place... on which Jesus Christ was crucified... buried and from which he came to resurrection", he told Reuters.

The researchers' findings are due to be published by the end of the year by Israel's Exploration Society. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Film industry guns for fresh start at Cannes



THE CANNES FILM Festival will hope to relaunch the industry's hopes with another star-packed line-up to be announced on Thursday.

After a slow return to cinema-going after the Covid-19 pandemic, the film business will be hoping for a boost on the French Riviera when the 75th edition of the world's leading cinema festival returns from May 17 to 28.

Tom Cruise is already confirmed for the festival promoting the world premiere of "Top Gun: Maverick", the sequel to his 1986 blockbuster. Also attending is Tom Hanks, who co-stars in "Elvis" as the rock'n'roll star's manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

The latter is the latest spectacle from Australian director Baz Luhrmann, who has previously lit up Cannes with "Moulin Rouge" and "Gatsby".

The rest of the line-up will be announced on Thursday, including the 20-odd films competing for the top prize Palme d'Or.

The selection committee, who have been working their way through more than 2,000 entries in recent weeks, have a tough act to follow after last year's vintage edition.

Coming after the festival was cancelled by the pandemic in 2020, it launched several films that went on to global success, especially "Drive My Car".

After picking up three awards at Cannes, it went on to win this year's Oscar for best international feature film — and was the first Japanese film to be nominated in the best picture category.

BIG-NAME SPECULATION

Last year's jury — led by US director Spike Lee — gave the Palme d'Or to Julia Ducournau's body-horror "Titane" — ensuring the festival maintained its reputation for boosting bold and edgy film-making alongside starry entertainment.

The organisers have left it late to announce who will chair the jury this year, but Penelope Cruz and Marion Cotillard are among the favourites according to industry insiders.

Film experts have also been picking through the release schedules for ideas on who might be in competition.

Many are hoping to see the return of David Cronenberg, whose upcoming sci-fi/horror cross-over stars Viggo Mortensen, Kristen Stewart and Lea Seydoux.

Also hotly tipped is Australian George Miller, the man behind "Mad Max", who takes a new direction with "Three Thousand Years of Longing" about a djinn (played by Idris Elba) offering three wishes to Tilda Swinton.

Another possibility is Terrence Malick, who won previously for "Tree of Life" starring Brad Pitt. His new film follows the life of Jesus Christ and stars Mark Rylance as Satan.

Though women have been getting more of a presence on the festival circuit, they remain poorly represented.

One possible contender in competition at Cannes might be US director Kelly Reichardt, with her new film, "Showing Up". Her lo-fi hit "First Cow"

was on many critics' end-of-year lists in 2021.

SHADOW OF WAR

As with everything in the arts at the moment, the Russian war on Ukraine hangs over the selection.

Possible names include exiled Russian film-maker Kantemir Balagov, 30, whose film "Beaneple" won the directing award of the Un Certain Regard section in 2019.

Or there may be the return of Kirill Serebrennikov, who was unable to attend Cannes last year for his Palme nominee "Petrov's Flu", after being banned from travelling due to a controversial court case.

One possible Ukrainian entry is a film about the Allied destruction of German cities at the end of World War II by director Sergei Loznitsa.

Meanwhile, festival director Thierry Fremaux has been pushing for a change to the rule that bars streaming platforms from competing at Cannes.

But French cinema distributors, who have a seat on the festival board, continue to block the move even as big-name directors such as Martin Scorsese and Jane Campion have turned to Netflix and other streamers for financial support.

In the short-term, that means that the much-anticipated Marilyn Monroe biopic, "Blonde", starring Ana de Armas, a Netflix film, cannot compete for Palme, although fans are still hoping it will get a premiere on the Cote d'Azur.

— AFP

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

What is life after all if not a dream?

FRIENDSHIP is a form of love. It's different from the love of parents or brothers, as is the case for a wife and children, but it certainly remains a form of love.

As such, the older we get the more we need our friends and it becomes clear that it's hard to keep them forever. Do you know why?

Because I think life gives and takes, separates and draws closer. Life has so many strange paradoxes that we can't find an explanation for no matter how hard we try!

Just as we gain friends, we also experience losing some. In fact, this is a kind of universal experience for everyone as humans are social beings. We experience this at different points in our lives, whether it's the kid we grew up with or the ones we met at school or even at work.

The most painful loss however is not that you've fallen apart and just stopped talking. This situation somehow can still be fixed if the friendship really is that important. But when you lose a close friend to death, you suddenly feel that your happiness account balance may be frozen.

Perhaps when the news of the loss arrives, it seems unreal at first and you suddenly feel severe numbness in your limbs, as you think it is a dream and everything will be fine, but when you come back to your senses the situation becomes more painful.

You think that the next day he will call you, or you will hear the good news about his health. It's actually very difficult when you go to pick up the phone to call them to tell them about your day and then when you start calling their number, you remember that they are no longer alive.

This kind of loss makes you feel helpless and as it passes without you properly addressing it, the situation gets worse because your mind tells you to accept this, but your heart condemns it.

In a way, sadness here is different for everyone. It manifests differently in different people and no one's experience of grief is the same. People often experience grief reactions in waves — if I may say so —, that come and go and oftentimes, the grief is most intense shortly after losing someone. But some people don't feel sad right away. They may feel shocked or disbelief. In fact, it may take time to realize that the person is gone.

Whatever it is, we weep for the departed even though they have moved to another life and are waiting for a second life. For those who remain, there is also a stark realization that we are moving in that direction whether we like it or not.

We grieve for our dearly departed for two reasons. It's not just because we will miss the good times or their advice or their mere presence. But other than losing them, we also grieve for ourselves because they left us alone.

It's not everyday we find someone who gets us, who is our person, who understands us before we can even say a word.

In the end, when you lose a loved one or a friend, the blackness dwells in our soul. We wake up every morning wondering why the universe continues to move and why the sun keeps rising. But this is life. It doesn't stop for anyone, not especially the dead.

To those who've gone, sleep well my friend. You and I, we are both waiting for the day that we wake up from life. For just like one of those tunes, what is life, after all, but just a dream?

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

Ramadhan

Local Scene

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THURSDAY | APRIL 14 | 2022



SQU students embark on journey of documenting Oman archaeological villages

By Arwa Al Hashimi

Interest in the home and village-bThe Sultanate of Oman is famous for having a diverse urban and architectural heritage that extends over many different historical eras. Oman villages are considered some of the most important components of its time-honoured heritage. Even today, some of these villages are still built using the knowledge of their ancestors and Omanis still embrace and are proud of their history and identity.

printed in a book that was first published in 2021.

The project included several goals, the foremost of which was preserving the most important villages which were eventually added to the extinction list. The ministry has counted about 990 villages most of which are about to become extinct because of their fragile building materials and also because they were abandoned a long time ago. Thus, the ministry decided on documenting all the villages that are documentable. Each of the villages has its own historical and architectural value that makes them worthy of all

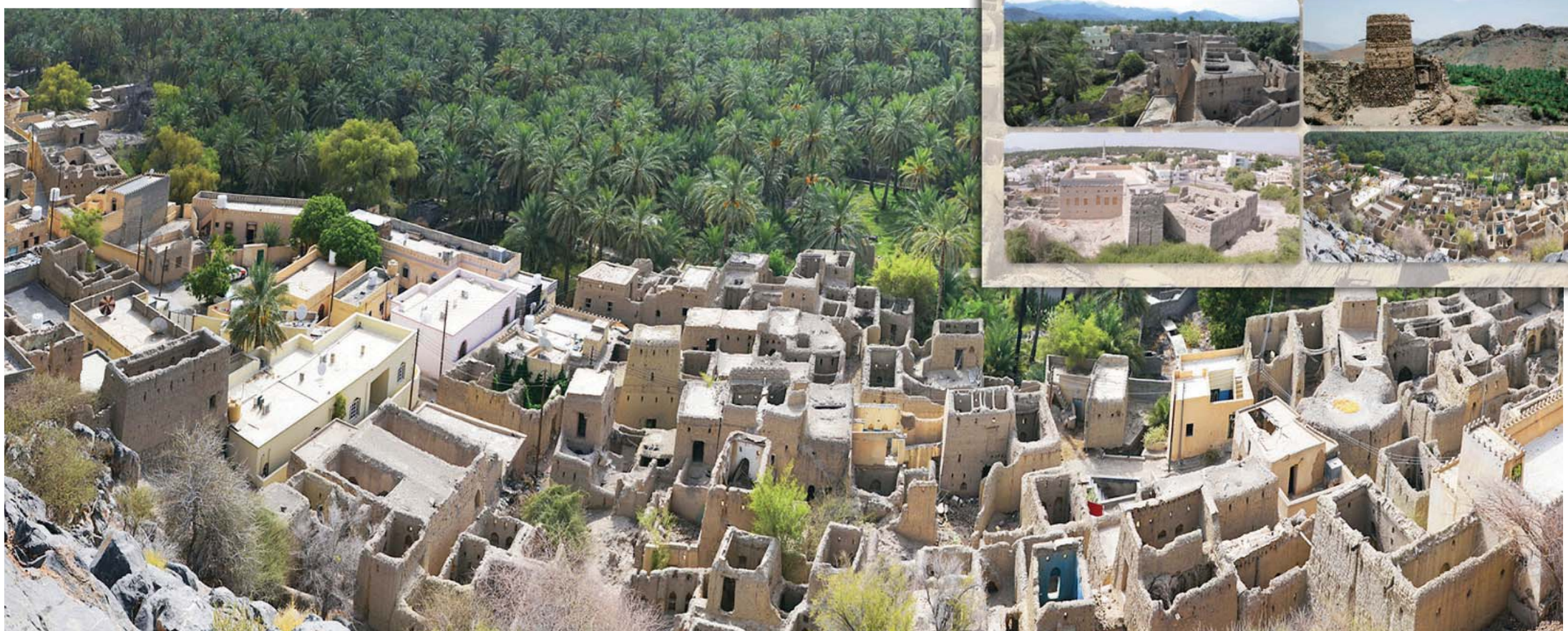
project as its general supervisor along with colleagues from the department and a large number of students who participated as research assistants. They were devoted to the diligent Omani youth who were passionate about what they were doing," said Naima Bin Kari, Assistant Professor in the Department of Civil and Architectural Engineering at SQU and an Expert at the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

This project has created job opportunities for Omanis in the field of conservative and restoration of

the Wilayat of Samayil. The documentation process included the completion of studies and the preparation of plans for the management of some villages in different wilayats such as: Qasra (Wilayat of

into account the international laws and standards approved by the Unesco World Heritage Committee.

In addition to drawings, pictures and documentary texts of the buildings and landmarks of the studied



Taking special interest in the home and village-building history of Oman, a group of students from Sultan Qaboos University, College of Engineering embarked on an initiative of documenting the most historically important Omani villages that are threatened by time and degradation. Fully funded by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the group began their documentation process in 2014 with the results

the work done to be shown to different people interested in the field of architectural heritage.

In a different light, this project has given the students a distinctive practical experience that would make them ready for the job market as fresh graduates and expand their skills in the field of documentation and management of Omani heritage buildings.

"I was in charge of managing the

heritage buildings that have never been held by Omanis formerly.

After documenting ten villages previously, in cooperation with Nottingham Trent University and the British University of Liverpool, the Ministry launched a new volume that includes engineering and photographic documentation and ethnographic studies of four additional villages in the Al Batinah Governorate and the Sayja village in

Al Rustaq, Sayja (Wilayat of Samayil), Hujrat Musallamat (Wadi Al Maawil), Al Khabt and Hisn Abs (Wilayat of Al Khabourah).

The 550-pages volume includes a large number of photographs and plans, as well as vertical projections of 3D drawings of the various buildings and landmarks documented in the mentioned villages. Most interestingly, the studies included in the book have been completed by taking

villages, the book also contains detailed plans for the rehabilitation and management of the buildings. An added feather on the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism cap as well as that of Sultan Qaboos University, the books can be used as a reference for future developments or rehabilitations of these villages providing the much-needed insight into the architectural, historical and social details.

