

P12

GERMANY TO FACE SPAIN AT WORLD CUP AS DRAW PAIRS IRAN AND USA



P13

OMAN PLANS FORAY INTO 'GREEN STEEL' PRODUCTION



P20

CONQUERING CAVES AND PEAKS AND MAKING A BUSINESS OUT OF IT



MUSCAT

OTC CELEBRATES GRADUATION

Oman Tourism College (OTC) celebrated the graduation of batches 2020, 2021 and 2022, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre recently. The event was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and saw 371 graduates from Diploma and Bachelor's students in the specialisations of Tourism Management, Hospitality, Tourism Marketing, Event Management and Business Management. **DETAILS ON P2**

IBRI ROCKSLIDE: ALL BODIES RECOVERED

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) announced the end of search operations at the Ibri mountain collapse site in a quarry that killed 14, in Al Dhahirah Governorate on March 27. The authority further said the bodies of all the missing people as a result of the rockslide were found and hence, the operations at the site have come to an end. **DETAILS ON P3**



1

RAMADHAN 1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR

04:41 AM

DHUHR

12:15 PM

ASR

03:43 PM

MAGHRIB

06:28 PM

ISHA

07:39 PM

INSIDE



SRI LANKA DECLARES 36-HOUR NATIONWIDE LOCKDOWN

P6



WAR IN UKRAINE COMPOUNDS HUNGER IN EAST AFRICA

P8

HM GREETES PEOPLE



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has addressed a message of greetings to Omani people, residents in Oman and the Islamic nation on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan. The Diwan of Royal Court issued a statement to this effect which reads as follows: “Upon the advent of the holy month of Ramadhan 1443 AH and, as Muslims all over the globe revel

over the blissful onset of the month-expressing gratitude to the Almighty Allah for making them witness to the new month, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has addressed a message of greetings and congratulations to Omani citizens, residents in the Sultanate of Oman and the whole Islamic nation on the advent of the holy month.

TURN TO P2

Biden hails Oman’s role in Yemen ceasefire

MUSCAT: US President Joe Biden expressed his gratitude for the leadership role of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in bringing ceasefire to fruition before the holy month of Ramadhan. In a statement, the US president said, “The initiative, much awaited by Yemeni people, entails a halt to all military activities by any party inside Yemen and across its borders, the entry of fuel ships into Hudaydah Port, and the renewal of commercial flights to and from Saana to agreed destinations. These are important steps, but they are not enough. The ceasefire must be adhered to, and as I have said before, it is imperative that we end this war after 7 years of conflict.” The statement added: “Negotiators must undertake the hard and necessary work to reach political compromises that can bring about an enduring future of peace for all the people of Yemen.” For his part, Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for Yemen, said the aim of the truce is to give Yemenis a necessary break



Yemenis shop at a supermarket in Sanaa ahead of Ramadhan. — AFP

from violence, relief from the humanitarian suffering and most importantly hope that an end to this conflict is possible, affirming that during these two months, he plans to intensify his work with the parties with the aim to reach a

permanent ceasefire. The Sultanate of Oman, through the Foreign Ministry, has welcomed the declaration of a two-month ceasefire in Yemen by Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-

General for Yemen. In a statement issued on Saturday, Foreign Ministry commended the positive outcome of the talks held by the UN special envoy during his recent visit to Muscat. The Sultanate of Oman affirmed the continuation of its efforts with the UN and stakeholder parties to end the war in Yemen and reach a comprehensive political settlement. Yemen's warring parties are set to lay down their weapons for the first nationwide truce since 2016 on Saturday with all eyes on whether the UN-brokered ceasefire will hold. The Ansar Allah and Saudi-led coalition have both agreed to observe the two-month truce, which is to take effect at 1600 GMT on the first day of Ramadhan. Yemen's intractable war has killed hundreds of thousands directly or indirectly and displaced millions, triggering the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations. — ONA **SEE ALSO P6**

3

SEGMENTS OF RAMADHAN

First 10 days are for 'Mercy of Allah' (Rahmah); the next 10 days imply 'Forgiveness of Allah' (Maghfirah); and the last 10 days are for 'Safety from the Hellfire' (Nijat)."

4

FASTING IN ISLAM?

Fasting implies abstaining not just from eating, drinking, smoking and refraining from sex from dawn to sunset, but cleansing one's mind from anger, revenge, jealousy and sinful behaviour such as lying, cursing, false speech and the like.

5

IS FASTING COMPULSORY?

Fasting is mandatory for all adult believers of sound mind and physical health. Those travelling, aged, pregnant, diabetic, chronically ill, menstruating or breastfeeding are exempted from fasting. Any child endeavouring to complete as many fasts as possible as practice for later life is allowed to do so with their parents' permission."

6

STRUCTURE

The food eaten before sunrise is known as Suhoor, and the one eaten after sunset is known as Iftar. The rewards of all good deeds are increased during the month of Ramadhan, whether it is praying salat or giving charity.

7

HOW HUMAN UNITY IS ENFORCED THROUGH FASTING

Islam always emphasises 'giving and caring' and doing Zakat, a mode of giving and helping others during the month. People gather for 'Iftar and Suhoor' that reinstate camaraderie among people from different backgrounds but united with one purpose: To fast and gain Allah Almighty's blessings.

2

VALUES OF RAMADHAN

Self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice and empathy

1

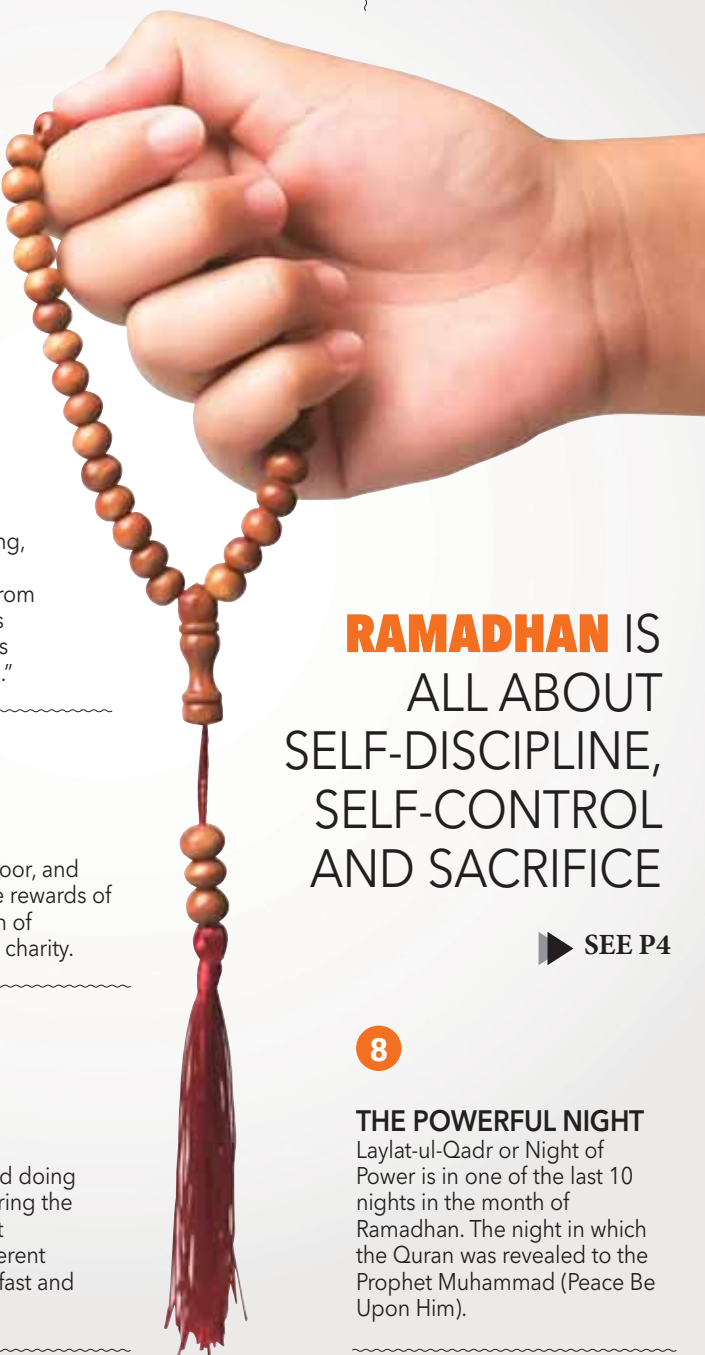
WHAT'S RAMADHAN?

'Ramadhan' is derived from the Arabic base word "ramida" which means scorching heat.

8

THE POWERFUL NIGHT

Laylat-ul-Qadr or Night of Power is in one of the last 10 nights in the month of Ramadhan. The night in which the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).



RAMADHAN IS ALL ABOUT SELF-DISCIPLINE, SELF-CONTROL AND SACRIFICE

SEE P4

Russia retreats in northern Ukraine

KYIV: Ukraine on Saturday said Russian forces were making a “rapid retreat” from northern areas around the capital Kyiv and the city of Chernigiv as the Red Cross prepared for a fresh evacuation effort from the besieged southern port of Mariupol. Russian forces now appear to be focusing attacks in the east and south, a day after thousands of people from Mariupol and surrounding Russian-held areas escaped in a convoy of buses and cars. He said that, while Russian forces appeared to be pulling back from Kyiv and Chernigiv, their aim was to “control a vast stretch of occupied territory and set up there in a powerful way”. — AFP



His Majesty exchanges greetings with leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Saturday exchanged greetings through phone calls he received on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan with King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain; Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar; President Dr Bashar al Assad, of the Syrian Arab Republic; and President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the leaders wishing them good health, happiness and long life, praying for the return of the occasion while their peoples achieved their aspirations for more progress and prosperity wishing all Muslims blessing and bounties. The leaders expressed their sincere greetings to His Majesty wishing him good health, happiness and long life to achieve all aspirations of more progress, prosperity and welfare for the Omani people under His Majesty's wise leadership.

FROM P1

HM greets people

His Majesty the Sultan prayed to the Almighty Allah to shower abundant blessings of Ramadhan on all Muslims and to bring back this occasion at a time when all are enjoying good health, happiness and peace. While according close attention to the safety of citizens and residents, His Majesty the Sultan has underscored the significance of all individuals and establishments' maintaining compliance to precautionary measures to tackle coronavirus pandemic, notably by adhering to relevant instructions issued by the authorities concerned. May the Almighty Allah bestow His plentiful bounties on His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a treasured source of pride and inspiration to this nation, its citizens and residents."

— ONA

Shoppers throng malls and retail stores for last-minute purchases



SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttyp

With only a few hours left for the holy month of Ramadhan to begin, all the shopping malls in Muscat witnessed a hive of activities as consumers thronged them for the last-minute purchase of necessities.

People of different nationalities were busy loading up their trolleys with food items, including fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and dried fruits, dates, juices, rice, pudding etc.

While Muhamed Gafoor and his family from India were busy ensuring they had all the items on their list, many others are still talking about Ramadhan in the

last two years when the Covid-19 pandemic upended it.

Gafoor said he was grateful to the Almighty and the authorities in Oman that life returned to normal like how it was before the pandemic.

"After two years of confinement during the holy month, we are blessed to have our loved ones together to celebrate Ramadhan this year. We will make it big, albeit under precautions," he said.

The authorities in the Sultanate of Oman have eased Covid-19 restrictions for Ramadhan this year, with the opening of all commercial establishments and allowing worshippers to return to mosques, albeit with a few restrictions, including social

distancing and wearing of masks.

Various ministries and Royal Oman Police have already announced working hours during the holy month.

"All are trying to make the month more special. We always make something sweet when we end our fast, so I need to buy those ingredients," said Zaira Bebum at a hypermarket in Ruwi.

But Hamed Hussein was relieved that traders and other customers were adopting standard operating procedures such as wearing face masks. However, many were reluctant to maintain physical distance at the counters.

Hamed al Wahaibi in Ruwi said he had already stocked up on all those required days before. Still,

he said, a few more items were left to be bought that he would buy late in the night.

"The market is lively with the presence of shoppers, compared to two years ago. I hope this festive feel will continue throughout Ramadhan," he said.

For Egyptian teacher Mohamed Mahboub, like all believers, Ramadhan is truly a special time because it brings all of the family together.

"It is important for many reasons, especially from religious and social viewpoints. So we have to fill up our home with enough food. You make sure you spend that time together that you might not otherwise have throughout the year.

Most shops will remain open until midnight during the holy month to allow shoppers to buy their necessities.

At all the malls and retail outlets, shoppers can also pick up attractive bargains and deals, including discounts, in some cases above 50 per cent on certain items, that are being offered as part of the Ramadhan campaign.

"We have lots of offers throughout the store during Ramadhan. We have locked the prices of several products across almost all categories and have a large number of very special offers in fruit and vegetables, meat, grocery and home," said Ashruff Kunnath, sales manager at a hypermarket.

OTC celebrates graduation of 371 students

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 2

Oman Tourism College (OTC) celebrated the graduation of batches 2020, 2021 and 2022, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre recently. The event was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and saw 371 graduates from Diploma and Bachelor's students in the specialisations of Tourism Management, Hospitality, Tourism Marketing, Event Management and Business Management.

Commenting on the ceremony, Salim al Mahrouqi said, "The Sultanate of Oman has a promising plan to develop the tourism sector as one of the most important sectors supporting Oman Vision 2040, especially in terms of diversifying sources of income. OTC plays a very important role in providing this sector with the required national



talents across various disciplines. Today, we are proud to witness the graduation of these three batches that constitute a valuable addition to the qualified and trained national workforce at the highest level. OTC distinguishes itself by its approach of integrating both,

theory and practice, enabling its students to enter the work environment with a high level of preparedness, meeting the market's current needs."

Qais al Hosni, Acting Dean of OTC, said, "The knowledge and skills gained during the period

of study at the college will be the best means of support for them to overcome the challenges that await in their working life. However, I am confident that you will be more than capable of the responsibility and look forward to your contributions towards

strengthening the local tourism sector, on which the government is reliant on to build a more prosperous national economy."

"This graduation is a very important occasion for us at OTC, where we celebrate today two events that are the result of year-long

efforts, both by students and faculty and administrative staff. Today, we see the result of our hard work and dedication over the past years in the form of a group of young people filled with enthusiasm and determination and are prepared to play the role entrusted to them in developing the tourism industry. This is to ensure that this sector will be one of the key contributors to the national GDP. The second occasion is the college's commemoration of its 20th anniversary since its establishment, as it became the leading educational institution in the Sultanate of Oman to provide tourism education," Al Hosni added.

The graduates of the three batches were distributed according to their specialisations, with 226 graduates majoring in Tourism Management and Hospitality, 71 graduates majoring in Tourism Marketing, 64 majoring in Event Management and 10 graduates majoring in Business Management.



Ibri rockslide: All bodies recovered

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) announced the end of search operations at the Ibri mountain collapse site in a quarry that killed 14, in Al Dhahirah Governorate on March 27.

The authority further said the bodies of all the missing people as a result of the rockslide were found and hence, the operations at the site have come to an end.

"We have found all missing people under the huge rubble after the mountain collapsed in the quarry that killed 14 people in all," a CDAA spokesperson said.

The week-long operations and rescue search were conducted with the participation of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the engineering services at the Ministry of Defence and other relevant authorities, dealing with a rockslide accident in a quarry in the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

He further said that because of the size of the collapse, the difficult terrain of the place and the number of people trapped

under the rubble of rocks, the authority directed the National Search and Rescue Team to search for other people and establish an advanced operations centre at the site to manage the aftermath of the accident.

In the context of the National Committee for Emergency Management's (NCEM) keenness to provide human and material capabilities to urgently rescue people, the NCEM met under the chairmanship of Lt Gen Hassan bin Mohsin bin Salim al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Chairman of the NCEM, and in the presence of a number of members of the committee to follow-up on searches.

After strenuous efforts that lasted for a week, and the use of advanced equipment and mechanisms, tracing dogs, thermal cameras and other means, the teams were able to retrieve the bodies.

The CDAA extended its sincere condolences and sympathy to the bereaved families of the deceased as a result of the rockslide and the speedy recovery of those injured in the accident.

New building for prosthetics and orthotics at Khoula Hospital

MUSCAT: A new building for the Prosthetics and Orthotics Department has been opened at Khoula Hospital. The building, built on an area of 780 square metres, was funded by Sohar Aluminum Company, OQ Group, and Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO).

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, the Ministry of Health's Under-Secretary for Health Affairs.

The department serves more than 7,000 patients annually from different governorates. The building includes a full range of the latest medical devices in the fields of orthopaedic treatments, as well as the manufacturing of prosthetic limbs. Further, it includes clinics and workspaces for the modification of prosthetic limbs, examination and training rooms, and limb-fitting areas for



males and females.

Dr Mazin al Khabouri, Director-General of Khoula Hospital, expressed his gratitude to the three companies in addition to the other institutions that contributed in equipping the building.

VISITING HOURS

Meanwhile, Khoula Hospital has announced visiting times for inpatients during the month of Ramadhan.

The visiting times for inpatients in the wards and the maternity ward are from 8 am to 10 pm,

when everyone is allowed to visit.

The visiting times for the intensive care unit and the burn unit are from 9 am to 10 pm, where only four people are allowed to visit the intensive care patient per day, and only first-degree relatives are allowed to visit burn patients.

Spraying against date palm weevil from tomorrow



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources will initiate a spraying campaign to combat date palm weevil, on April 5.

The first phase of aerial spraying will be carried out in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate during April 5-9 on an estimated area of 4,610 acres. The campaign will be carried out in Muscat Governorate on April 12, South Al Batinah Governorate (April 13-14) and North Al Batinah

Governorate (April 15).

The second phase of the campaign will begin in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate during April 5-9 covering on an area of 5,441 acres, followed by Al Dhahirah Governorate during April 10-11 and on an area of 2,015 acres and then Al Buraimi Governorate on April 12 covering an area of 8,064 acres and concludes in Musandam Governorate on April 13 on an area of 850 acres. — ONA

Oman and San Marino explore cooperation

MUSCAT: Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, received here on Thursday Federico Pedini Amati, Minister of Tourism in the Republic of San Marino, who is currently on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries in the field of tourism. They also touched on consolidating partnership opportunities and exchanging expertise. The two sides also discussed the suggestion of inking a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the tourism field.

— ONA

5,063 firms registered through Invest Easy

MUSCAT: More than 5,063 companies were registered through the electronic portal "Invest Easy" in 2021, an increase of 112.6 per cent compared to the year 2020, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said in a statement.



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers to the following tenders:

No	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee RO
1	SIPC 2022/036	Travel Management Services	262.500
2	SIPC2022/037	Annual IT Security Service for SOHAR Port and Freezone	26.250
3	SIPC2022/038	Annual Maintenance and Support Services for CCTV and Access Control Systems in SOHAR Port and Freezone	26.250
4	SIPC 2022/041	Fender's Load Monitoring Sensors	26.250
5	SIPC 2022/042	Supply and installation of "Light on Demand Control System" on the streetlights in SIP & SFZ areas	262.500

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00am Sunday, 3/04/2022 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 14/04/2022.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRUXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:

- A request for the electronic tender documents
- Scanned bank transfer
- The firm's commercial registration documents
- All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents. The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, marked "Technical and Commercial" addressed to:
SOHAR Port and Freezone
Bid Opening Committee
Tender Reference No.
Tender Name:

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons.
- All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents.
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

It all starts here
+968 2683 2700 | info@soharportandfreezone.com



Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
(Accredited College of the University of Bedfordshire, UK)

REQUIRED

Majan University College (MUC) is the first private higher education institution (HEI) to be established in Oman. It is one of the largest private sector HEIs and it provides a range of UK degrees which are taught in English. It is the **FIRST** higher education institution to achieve its institutional accreditation by the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA).

MUC's Faculty of Information Technology seeks applicants for the Academic Year 2022-2023, who are able to contribute in the areas of:

ESSENTIAL

- Wireless Networking
- Internetworking
- Data Visualisation Techniques
- Oil and Gas Business Processes
- Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition
- Industrial Data Networks
- Wireless Sensor Networks in Oil & Gas Industry
- Enterprise Information Management

DESIRABLE

- A Master's Degree in Computer Science, Information Technology, Software Engineering or equivalent
- A minimum three years of experience is essential; a PhD is preferred.
- (Omani candidates with less experience will be considered for the position).
- Successful candidates will be expected to teach courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level, conduct research, supervise student projects/ research and engage in academic and administrative work at college level, and with relevant external parties.

The application form must be downloaded from the website and sent within 2 weeks along with a complete CV and a passport size photograph to
infotech@majancollege.edu.om



Among the three segments of the holy month, the first 10 days are for ‘Mercy of Allah’ (Rahmah); the next 10 days imply ‘Forgiveness of Allah’ (Maghfirah); and the last 10 days are for ‘Safety from the Hellfire’ (Nijat)

THIS MONTH IS ALL ABOUT SELF-DISCIPLINE, SELF-CONTROL AND SACRIFICE

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The first day of the holy month of Ramadhan began on Sunday. “The first day of Ramadhan would be Sunday, April 3 as the moon was not sighted on Friday”, Abdullah al Ghafri of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MERA), said.

According to Islamic scholar Sahih al Bukhari, when the month of Ramadhan starts, the gates of paradise are opened, the gates of hell are closed and the devils are chained.

The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said, “And may a man upon whom Ramadhan enters and the passes, before he is forgiven, be humiliated.”

Shaikh Mufti Menk, Abdullah al Ghafri, Hatim Abdussalam and Qari Mohammed Yousuf answered some of the queries and are below:

WHAT’S RAMADHAN?

‘Ramadhan’ is derived from the Arabic base word “ramida” which means “scorching heat” and fasting was made obligatory on all adult Muslims in the Second Year of Hijri (from the year of Migration from Mecca to Madina of Muslims). Ramadhan is the most pious month in the history of Islam. On the first night of Ramadhan, a caller calls out: “O seeker of good, come forward and “O seeker of evil, stop.”

VALUES OF RAMADHAN

Muslims believe that Ramadhan teaches them how to practise

self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice and empathy for those who are less fortunate, thus encouraging acts of generosity and compulsory charity (zakat). Muslims also believe fasting helps instill compassion for the poor and hungry.

SEGMENTS OF RAMADHAN

The thirty days and nights of the month of Ramadhan are divided into three, according to Qari Mohammed Yousuf. “Among the three segments of the holy month, the first 10 days are for ‘Mercy of Allah’ (Rahmah); the next 10 days imply ‘Forgiveness of Allah’ (Maghfirah); and the last 10 days are for ‘Safety from the Hellfire’ (Nijat).”

WHAT’S FASTING IN ISLAM?

Fasting implies abstaining not just from eating and drinking, smoking and refraining from sex from dawn to sunset, but cleansing one’s mind from anger, revenge, jealousy and sinful behaviour such as lying, cursing, false speech and the like.

IS FASTING COMPULSORY?

Fasting is mandatory for all adult believers of sound mind and physical health. “However, there are some exemptions to this rule”, says Hatim Abdulsalam, a religious scholar. “Those travelling, aged, pregnant, diabetic, chronically ill, menstruating or breastfeeding are exempted from fasting.

However, any child endeavouring to complete as many fasts as possible as practice for later life is allowed to do so with their parents’ permission.”

STRUCTURE

The food eaten before sunrise is known as Suhoor, and the one eaten after sunset is known as Iftar. During these times, believers spend generously to make food available for the whole community, especially the poor ones. The rewards of all good deeds are increased during the month of Ramadhan, whether it is praying salat or giving charity.

HOW HUMAN UNITY IS ENFORCED THROUGH FASTING

Islam always emphasises ‘giving and caring’ and doing Zakat, a mode of giving and helping others during the month.

People gather for ‘Iftar and Suhoor’ that reinstate camaraderie among people from different backgrounds but united with one purpose: To fast and gain Allah Almighty’s blessings.

THE POWERFUL NIGHT

There’s a very auspicious night in the holy month, which is also known as the most powerful night. Laylat-ul-Qadr or Night of Power is in one of the last 10 nights in the month of Ramadhan and is full of blessings and is one of the most coveted nights of the Islamic Year. It takes place in the last ten days of Ramadhan and was the night in which the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). It is also believed to be the night in which Allah shows great mercy to His creation and the night in which one’s fate is decreed.





Seven-day Mega Blood Donation Drive begins

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The ‘Mega Blood Donation Drive’ organised by the Indian Embassy in association with the Ministry of Health began on Saturday under the auspices of the Muscat Municipality President, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi.

Coinciding with the holy month of Ramadhan, the embassy began the initiative with the participation of the Indian community, in association with the Indian Social Club to celebrate 75 years of India’s independence with community service - Sewa Utsav.

“Sewa Utsav or the community service is the Indian community’s resolve to join hands with Omani friends, brothers and sisters to give back love and affection they

receive from people of Oman,” said the Ambassador of India, Amit Narang.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Muscat Municipality President, termed it an important initiative because there has been a significant decline in blood donation worldwide since March 2020.

“Initiatives such as these raise the awareness level. Blood donation saves lives, but it is also good for the donor. An initiative like this also keeps the society well connected.”

He added, “Worldwide blood donation saw a drop of 10 per cent, but in Oman, with thoughtful campaigns, we have fortunately witnessed an increase of 7 per cent.”

The first stage of this unique celebration was the blood

donation drive that took place on Saturday at the Indian Embassy as well as in Suhar, Sur and Salalah. The blood donation campaign will go on for seven days.

“What we are aiming 1,000 units of blood. We are working with the Ministry of Health, and in doing so, we can contribute to Oman Blood Bank and, through them, the health system of Oman,” the ambassador noted.

For safety, there is a condition that the potential donors should not have travelled outside Oman in the last four months. People with diabetes have to ensure that their sugar level is well controlled for at least three months and should not be using insulin injections. The medical team will also check the haemoglobin level and blood pressure before receiving blood.



Exhibition showcases resources for students with disabilities

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuing Learning, in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Private Schools and the Educational Departments of the governorates of Muscat, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah, and the International Schools Office, organised the first exhibition of educational material “For You We Create” for the people with disabilities.

The exhibition comes on the occasion of the celebration of the World Autism Day, which falls on April 2 each year.

It was held under the auspices of Majid al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in the presence of Dr Fathia al Saadi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuing Learning, and specialists in special education for people with disabilities from the Ministry’s General Office and from the governorates.

The exhibition included fifteen



The exhibition aims to highlight the role and importance of educational materials in the educational process and shed light on the services provided by the Ministry of Education to students with disabilities

corners of joint educational materials between public, private and international schools in the field of people with disabilities, representing models, panels, and educational and electronic bags for the categories of “learning difficulties, intellectual disability, hearing impairment, and autism spectrum disorder”.

The exhibition aimed to highlight the role and importance of educational materials in the educational process, and to shed light on the services provided by the Ministry of Education in the field of people with disabilities.

Knowledge Oman honours member with community leadership award

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman, the award winning knowledge-sharing platform in the Sultanate of Oman, has honoured Dr Baby Sam Samuel with the community leadership award for his contribution to the development of the Knowledge Oman initiative. The award was presented to Dr Sam by the founder of the platform, Tariq bin Hilal al Barwani, in the presence of the President, Balqees al Hassani, at the recent team gathering function that highlights and celebrates Knowledge Oman contribution to the society.

“We are honoured to recognise and award Dr Sam for his excellent contribution to the platform and ultimately the society as a whole. Dr Sam has indeed played a significant role in Knowledge Oman’s success since he joined the team 10 years ago as a volunteer member, serving multiple roles up to recently running as its



Dr Sam receiving award

vice-chairman. Dr Sam is an energetic and passionate social entrepreneur who never fails to deliver excellent results,” said Tariq al Barwani, founder of Knowledge Oman.

Dr Sam joined Knowledge Oman in 2012 as a volunteer member where he was engaged with a pool of volunteers to learn about the platform and contribute activities towards

the betterment of the society. Dr Sam was promoted different ranks until recently in 2020 as its vice-chairman, supporting with the growth and development of the organisation. Dr Samuel is an Executive Leader with more than 22 years of senior management experience across several sectors. He has served as the Director and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Indian

Schools in Oman, in addition to engaging as an advisory/ board roles with several higher educational institutions and social impact organisations.

“Knowledge Oman has offered me the opportunity to have ground level understanding of the educational needs of communities and offered me a different perspective about living with purpose. I am fortunate to be part of this society impacting platform,” said Dr Baby Sam.

Established in April 2008, Knowledge Oman has managed to successfully bring together a diverse team of local and expatriate male and female living under one roof to support the vision of His Majesty of creating a knowledge-based society, attracting 700 volunteers that initiated 74 projects that received 80,000 registrations and has partnered with 35 local and international organisations that impacted over 130,000 people.

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender collection	Last Date For Tender Submission
2022/2	Request for Proposal (RFP) for Supply, Installation, Testing, Commissioning, Support & Maintenance for Security Appliances, Switch & Datacenter Migration	25 Omani Rials	7/4/2022	12/5/2022

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board can participate and collect the specifications and conditions of the tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om

The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website and attach an electronic copy of the temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate with a value of (1%) of the value of the tender submitted and valid for (90) days from the last date of submission of bids. It has to be addressed to HE Chairman of the Tender Committee of the Ministry of Economy.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@ita.gov.om
 + 96824166670

FASTING MONTH BEGINS



A street vendor of fresh produce displays a pineapple as Tunisians shop at a market on the first day of Ramadhan in Ariana, near the capital. – AFP

Lanka declares nationwide lockdown

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka declared a 36-hour nationwide curfew on Saturday and deployed troops backed with sweeping new powers under a state of emergency to quell protests against the president, his relatives and even his most trusted shaman.

The lockdown will go into effect at dusk on Saturday and be lifted on Monday morning, police said -- a period that covers planned mass anti-government protests against worsening shortages of fuel, food and medicines.

The order came a day after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa invoked a state of emergency following a violent attempt to storm his house, saying it was for the "protection of public order".

The ire of a mob in the near-bankrupt country was directed on Saturday at a woman identified as a soothsayer frequently consulted by Rajapaksa in the northern town of Anuradhapura.

Rights activist and former opposition legislator Hirunika Premachandra led dozens of women to storm seer Gnana Akka's shrine and residence, but armed police stopped them.

"Why are police protecting a shaman?" she asked a senior officer who physically blocked her march, as seen on a Facebook live video, verified as authentic. "Thief, thief, Gota thief," the crowds chanted after armed secu-



A pedestrian walks past Special Task Force (STF) personnel standing on guard along a street in Colombo. – AFP

rity personnel stopped them.

"Think of the country and let us pass," another woman activist pleaded.

"#GoHomeRajapaksas" and "#GotaGoHome" have been trending for days on Twitter and Facebook in the country, which is battling severe shortages of essentials, sharp price rises and crippling power cuts in its most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

The coronavirus pandemic has torpedoed tourism and remittances, both vital to the economy,

The state of emergency could be a new blow to hopes of a tourism revival as insurance rates usually rise

and authorities have imposed a broad import ban in an attempt to save foreign currency.

Many economists also say the crisis has been exacerbated by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing, and ill-advised tax cuts.

The curfew and state of emergency in the country of 22 million came as social media posts called for protests on Sunday.

"Do not be deterred by tear gas, very soon they will run out of dollars to re-stock," said one post encouraging people to demonstrate even if police attempt to break up gatherings.

In normal times, Sri Lanka's military can only play a supporting role to police, but the state of emergency gives them authority to act alone, including to detain civilians.

US Ambassador Julie Chung warned: "Sri Lankans have a right to protest peacefully — essential for democratic expression."

"I am watching the situation closely, and hope the coming days bring restraint from all sides, as well as much needed economic stability and relief for those suffering," she tweeted.

Former colonial power Britain's envoy expressed similar concerns, while the EU mission said it "strongly urges Sri Lankan authorities to safeguard democratic rights of all citizens, including right to free assembly and dissent, which has to be peaceful".

Travel trade specialists say the state of emergency could be a new blow to hopes of a tourism revival as insurance rates usually rise when a country declares a security emergency. — AFP

Two-month truce begins in Yemen

SANAA: Yemen's warring parties are set to lay down their weapons for the first nationwide truce since 2016 on Saturday with all eyes on whether the UN-brokered ceasefire will hold.

The Ansar Allah fighters and coalition have both agreed to observe the two-month truce, which is to take effect at 1600 GMT on the first day of Ramadhan.

Yemen's intractable war has killed hundreds of thousands directly or indirectly and displaced millions, triggering the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations.

Previous ceasefires have been ineffective. A national truce ahead of peace talks in April 2016 was violated almost immediately, as were other ceasefires that year. A 2018 agreement to cease hostilities around Hodeida port, a lifeline for Yemen, was also largely ignored.

Both the Ansar Allah fighters and Saudi Arabia have welcomed the latest initiative, which follows a surge in attacks but also increasing diplomacy including ongoing talks -- snubbed by the fighters -- in Riyadh.

"This time I am optimistic. This truce is unlike all the previous ones" Asmaa Zayed, a college student who also works as a cashier in Hodeida, said. "The fact it comes with Ramadhan gives us a lot of hope. This war started when I was 15 years old and turned all my dreams into nightmares."

Under the agreement, all

ground, air and sea military operations in Yemen and across its borders would stop, UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg said in his announcement.

Fuel ships would be allowed into Hodeida port and commercial flights could resume to certain regional destinations from the airport in the Ansar Allah-held capital Sanaa -- both key demands of the insurgents before they consider peace talks.

The two sides have also agreed to meet to open roads in Ta'ez and other governorates, Grundberg said, adding the truce could be renewed with their consent.

"All Yemeni women, men and children that have suffered immensely through over seven years of war expect nothing less than an end to this war," said the Swedish diplomat.

With fighting in Yemen at a stalemate, the Ansar Allah fighters launched a series of drone and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia and coalition partner the UAE this year, often targeting oil facilities. The coalition has responded with air strikes.

Last week, on the war's seventh anniversary and a day after an attack on an oil plant within sight of the Formula One Grand Prix in the Saudi city of Jeddah, the Ansar Allah announced a three-day unilateral ceasefire.

The coalition then announced its own truce from Wednesday, ahead of discussions with international partners in Riyadh.

The fighters declined to attend the talks in an "enemy" country. — AFP



Forces loyal to Yemen's Ansar Alla fighters take part in a military parade marking the seventh anniversary of the coalition's intervention in their country, in Sanaa. – AFP

SHORT TAKES

HERAT

Bomb blasts kill 5 in western Afghan city

At least five people were killed and 20 more wounded when two bombs exploded in quick succession in the western Afghan city of Herat.

The incident happened in the evening when a group of young men and children had gathered to play at a ground where the bombs were planted.

"Five people have been killed and 20 others have been wounded," Sabit Harwi, spokesman for the intelligence office in Herat, said. Harwi said

the local police defused two other bombs found in the area.

He said the entire area had been demined recently to remove all unexploded ordnances left from the war.

VALLETTA

Pope says visit to Kyiv still 'on the table'

Pope Francis said he was still considering a visit to Ukraine's capital of Kyiv following invitations from the mayor and the president. Aboard the papal plane en route to Malta for an official two-day visit, Francis was asked by a reporter whether a visit to the city was still possible. "Yes, it's on the table", replied the 85-year-old.

In a March 8 letter to the Pope written in English, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said Francis' presence in the capital "is key

for saving lives and paving the path to peace in our city, country and beyond." "We appeal to you, as a spiritual leader, to show your compassion, to stand with the Ukrainian people by jointly spreading the call for peace".

SEVILLE

New Spain oppn chief vows dialogue

Spain's new opposition leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo pledged to turn the page on confrontational politics and foster inclusive dialogue in his first speech after being overwhelmingly elected head of the Popular Party.

A calm, experienced moderate with a pragmatic outlook, he said he would fight to return the right-wing party to power and warned he would not be a pushover. "Moderation is not about being lukewarm and dialogue is not submission," he said after being

elected leader with 98.3 per cent of the votes at a two-day party congress in Seville.

The party is hoping the 60-year-old will be able to translate his regional success to a national level.

Can controlling vehicles make streets safer, more climate friendly?

TANYA MOHN

In April 2017, a man drove a stolen truck into a crowded shopping district in central Stockholm and crashed it into a department store, killing four people and injuring 15 others.

The terrorist attack prompted the Swedish government to investigate how digital technology could be used to prevent these kinds of incidents. It began a four-year research programme to test one type, geofencing, in urban environments.

Geofencing is a virtual tool in which software uses GPS or similar technology to trigger a preprogrammed or real-time action in vehicles to control their movements within a geographical area. It can regulate a vehicle's speed within the zone, determine whether the vehicle belongs there and automatically switch hybrid vehicles to electric driving mode.

Johannes Berg, senior adviser for digitalisation at the Swedish Transport Administration, said the technology can improve traffic safety and lower emissions. It also has the potential to adjust speed based on road and weather conditions, and to ensure compliance with regulations, like stopping a vehicle if a driver doesn't have a permit to enter a geofenced area, he added.

In simple uses — like when a map with restrictions is downloaded to a vehicle before the start of a trip to reduce speed automatically when it enters a low-speed zone — vehicles do not need to be connected to an outside source, Berg said.

But in more advanced applications — real-time use, for example — vehicles must be connected. Rules and regulations are in a tech cloud and could be changed based on the actual position of the vehicles, he said.

"The cloud service can access the engine of the vehicle using the telematics connection of the vehicle", Berg said.

Sweden, which began a series of geofencing trials in 2019, has long been an innovator in vehicle-related safety. In the 1990s, it introduced Vision Zero, an approach to safety that takes human error into account. The goal is to eliminate all traffic deaths and serious injuries by creating multiple layers of protection; if one fails, others will create a safety net.

Sweden now has one of the lowest crash death rates in the world, and many cities globally have implemented the approach. Earlier this year the US Department of Transportation officially adopted the strategy to address a dramatic spike in the US death toll.

In Stockholm, geofencing pilot programmes have focused on commercial traffic in the city centre, assessing such things as whether deliveries to businesses could occur at lower speeds at night when streets typically have fewer people.

"Switching to electric drive, in combination with lower speed, can make night-time truck deliveries almost silent", Berg said. "Increasing night deliveries could lessen congestion during daytime rush hours and create a more even traffic flow around the clock", improving an area's quality of life.

In another trial, sensors added to pavements monitor pedestrian flow, which have been able to trigger speed reduction in pilot vehicles.



Gothenburg, Sweden, is testing geofencing for public transport.

destrian flow, which have been able to trigger speed reduction in pilot vehicles.

"The trucks are actually decreasing their speed automatically", Berg said.

Gothenburg has taken a lead in testing geofencing on public transportation. Since 2015, the city, collaborating with ElectriCity, a regional private-public partnership, including the Volvo Group, has been evaluating the technology on two bus routes.

The assessment focused on busy areas like shopping streets and intersections. The city now has the capability to adjust geofenced zones based on real-time conditions, with bus operators getting information about the changes automatically.

During the trial, which was recently completed, buses operated at safe and fuel-efficient speeds in electric drive mode in designated areas.

"We see geofencing as a tool to create a safer city with better air quality and less noise", said Malin Stoldt, a Project Manager for Gothenburg's Urban Transport Administration.

Other pilot projects, some ongoing, include enhancing traffic safety around schools and creating smart urban traffic zones to protect cyclists. Geofence technology that prioritises public transport vehicles at complex intersections is already in use for everyday traffic in Gothenburg.

Geofencing can also contribute to city spaces being used more dynamically, Stoldt said.

"Areas can easily be changed and used for different purposes depending on the time of the day or the season", she said. The trials have been well received, Stoldt said. At least one more bus line plans to incorporate the technology. Operators also approve of geofencing, she said, not only for safety reasons "but also the wear of the vehicles."

Rodrigue Al Fahel, lead coordinator for the Swedish national geofencing programme, said geofencing technology has been developing for a while and is being used to target messages to mobile phones based on the phone's location; manage commercial fleets; set maximum speeds and control parking of e-scooters; and to enhance some advanced driver-assistance systems, like intelligent speed assistance (ISA), which will be mandatory in all new vehicles in the European Union beginning in July.

The pilot programme, in its final year, has yielded enough promising results that the Swedish government is considering legislation amending traffic and other rules so municipalities are able to use geofencing for traffic management, said Berg, of the Swedish Transport Administration.

New uses of technology can bring up privacy issues. But one reason the Swedish programme focused on professional drivers rather than private ones, Berg said, is "we believe it is different when the vehicle is a tool provided by the employer", comparing it to employers' ability to regulate company computers.

Albright knew how to push the envelope

HILLARY CLINTON

Late one night in 1995, in a cramped airplane cabin high over the Pacific, Madeleine Albright put down a draft of a speech I was set to deliver in Beijing at the upcoming United Nations conference on women, fixed me with the firm stare that had made fearless dictators shudder, and asked what I was really trying to accomplish with this address.

"I want to push the envelope as far as I can", I replied. "Then do it", she said. She proceeded to tell me how I could sharpen the speech's argument that women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights.

That was Madeleine, always cutting right to the heart of the matter with clarity and courage. She pushed the envelope her entire life. She did it on behalf of women and girls, shattering the glass ceiling of diplomacy as the first woman to serve as secretary of state and calling out atrocities against women all over the world. She did it for the country that took her in as a child fleeing tyranny in Europe, championing the United States as an indispensable nation and the leader of the free world. She never stopped pushing the envelope for freedom and democracy, including cajoling sometimes sceptical generals and diplomats to see human rights as a national security imperative.

For Bill and me and her many friends all over the world, Madeleine's passing is a painful personal loss. She was irreplaceable: Wickedly funny, stylish and always game for adventure and fun. I'll never forget how excited she was to

walk me through the streets of her native Prague and show me the yellow house where she lived as a girl. We couldn't stop laughing when an unexpected rainstorm blew our umbrellas inside out, and couldn't stop smiling when the captivating playwright and dissident turned president Václav Havel charmed us over dinner. Madeleine was 10 years ahead of me at Wellesley, and for decades we used to address and sign our notes to each other "Dear '59" and "Love, '69."

Madeleine's death is also a great loss for our country and for the cause of democracy at a time when it is under serious and sustained threat around the world and here at home. Now more than ever, we could use Madeleine's vital voice, her clear eyed view of a dangerous world and her unstinting faith in both the unique power of the American idea and the universal appeal of freedom and democracy. We can honour her memory by heeding her wisdom.

In the 1990s, when my husband named Madeleine UN ambassador and then secretary of state, she went toe-to-toe with the blood-soaked Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic. She helped marshal American power and the Nato alliance to end the brutal war in Bosnia and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. She saw the chronically underestimated Russian president Vladimir Putin for what he is: a vicious autocrat intent on reclaiming Russia's lost empire and a committed foe of democracy everywhere.

In a prescient column in "The Times" published February 23, she warned that an attack of Ukraine would be "a historic error" that would leave Russia "diplomatically isolated, economically crippled and strategically vulnerable in the face



Madeleine pushed the envelope her entire life. She did it on behalf of women and girls, shattering the glass ceiling of diplomacy as the first woman to serve as secretary of state and calling out atrocities against women all over the world

of a stronger, more united Western alliance." As happened so often, the man with the guns was wrong and Madeleine was right.

She was a woman of action, especially when facing injustice. Madeleine understood that American power is the only thing standing between the rules-based global order and the rule of the sword. That did not mean she was ever quick or casual about the use of force, even for the right cause. Madeleine was a diplomat's diplomat, ready to talk to even the most odious adversary to advance the prospects of peace. In 2000, she was the first secretary of state to travel to North Korea, where she spent 12 hours negotiating with the dictator Kim Jong-Il. But, as she often said, her crucial historical frame of reference was Munich, not Vietnam, so she had a deep appreciation for the risks of inaction. Today, with a rising tide of authoritarianism threatening democracy not just in Ukraine but all over the world, that is a lesson worth remembering.

As secretary of state, Madeleine helped my husband welcome Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into Nato after the end of the Cold War. Years later, I asked her to head up an international commission for the Obama administration to redefine Nato's mission for the 21st century. Having experienced Europe's historic traumas firsthand, she understood that the security provided by Nato was the key to keeping the continent free, peaceful and undivided. She saw it as a political alliance, not just a military pact, cementing democracy in countries that had only recently freed themselves from authoritarianism.

An international day for doctors



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

March 30th marks the International Doctors Day to celebrate the contribution of doctors from all medical fields to the health and well-being of people around the world. This was originally focused on marking contributors to improvement in the medical field, but in my opinion all doctors should be acknowledged for their dedication since their first years in medical school.

I say this from personal experience that dates back to September 1987 when I first set foot at the College of Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) full of dreams and ambitions yet the journey was far from being painted with happy colours. Like any other profession, hard

work is an important part of the deal yet while studying medicine the inner self of each doctor is touched by what they see and the people they meet. As people come to clinics and hospitals they don't just bring their symptom,s but they also bring their fears, their hopes and sometimes denial that the young doctors observe and learn from and sometimes make them reflect on life and the whole concept of existence.

The sad part is that many doctors don't get training on how to deal with their emotions and learn to look after their own well-being. I remember clearly the first patient I met when I started training in the hospital, it was a 12-year-old boy with problems in his heart, fluids

WORLD DOCTORS DAY IS SET TO APPRECIATE THE CONTRIBUTION OF DOCTORS IN IMPROVING HEALTHCARE AROUND THE WORLD

would accumulate around his heart and he became breathless, the doctors would remove these fluids but more would be produced.

I remember feeling helpless when his condition got worse and was admitted to intensive care. I used to visit him daily and I cried when he died a few days later. I know I was not supposed to get emotionally attached to patients but I was not told whom to talk to about it so I kept quiet.

Studying medicine is very competitive and studying and setting for exams never stops even after graduating from medical school. These exams are important in ensuring that doctors are experienced so not to put people's lives at risk but exams are also an important source of stress.

Doctors who don't pass exams often experience self-doubt and a feeling of being a failure which would lead some of them to develop mental health problems.

Due to stigma and fear on the impact on their future many doctors chose not to seek professional help which leads to further worsening in their health and eventually some would leave the medical field.

At the start of Covid-19

pandemic everyone experienced stress and worries but healthcare professionals, including doctors developed most of the stress and burnout since they became among the frontline workers with little equipment, vaccines or guidelines.

Many doctors and nurses lost their lives while on the line of duty. Others experienced social isolation from their friends and loved ones for fear of spreading the infections while others had to work extra hours to cover for shortages in doctors who got infected with Covid.

In my opinion, World Doctors Day should be dedicated to appreciating doctors from all fields and all grades. Not all of us have to be superheroes.

Hobby pilots build Ukraine's drone fleet

JOE STENSON

At a secret location in the Ukraine city of Lviv, the windows taped up to ward off unwanted attention, underground hobbyists improvise deadly drones bound for the front line of the war against Russia.

On a cluttered table the x-shaped frame of one drone stands among bundles of plastic propellers and sachets of minuscule screws.

Soon it will take flight with its payload: a wine bottle-sized anti-tank grenade designed to plunge on Russian armour.

Two other drones are already affixed with quad propellers, their squat bodies gaping with miniature bomb bays to rain explosives on Russian infantry challenging Ukrainian defenders to the north and east.

One more — the shape of a stealth bomber, the size of a bird of prey — will conduct reconnaissance missions for artillery squads, spotting targets and marking them for incoming fire.

Since Russia attacked, the Nebesna Kara ("Punishment from Above") collective has made around 40 such specialist drones for the Ukrainian military.

Before February 24, its six members were friends in the drone racing community.

"Unfortunately everything changed," said Alex, a member who declined to share his full name for security reasons.

Analysts say Ukrainian forces have been outmanned and outgunned in the war with Russia. But their dogged defence has thrived through local knowledge, hit-and-run tactics and technological sabotage.

In the early days of the war it was feared the capital Kyiv would fall to a 65-kilometre long Russian armoured column approaching from the north. It has been reported that mobile teams armed with drones played a key role in parrying that attack by marking targets for air strikes, forcing the convoy to disperse.

"This is a technique for reconnaissance and adjusting artillery fire," said Nebesna Kara member Dmitriy, who declined to be further identified.

"Now there's a great demand for such subversive equipment," he said.

The collective — which also has 10 "advising members" and draws on the knowledge of 877 enthusiasts via online chat — receives orders from military specialists in conflict hotspots.

Their flying Frankenstein's creations are put together from over-the-counter kits, 3D printed parts and components ordered from a Chinese online retailer.

To one end of the room the parts are strewn across a workbench — circuit boards dotted with microchips, threads of electric wiring, bulbous electric motors. — AFP

War in Ukraine compounds hunger in East Africa



Abdi Latif Dahir

The writer is the East Africa correspondent for The New York Times

NAIROBI: First came the drought, drying up rivers and claiming the lives of two of Ruqiya Hussein Ahmed's children as her family fled the barren countryside in southwest Somalia.

Then came the war in Ukraine, pushing food prices so high that even after making it to the outskirts of the capital, Mogadishu, she is struggling to keep her two other children alive.

"Even here, we have nothing," she said.

Across East Africa, below-average rainfall has created some of the driest conditions in four decades, according to the United Nations, leaving more than 13 million people facing severe hunger. Seasonal harvests have hit their lowest in decades, malnourished children are filling hospitals, and many families are walking long distances to find help.

The devastating drought has blanketed most of Somalia, leaving nearly one-third of the population hungry. In neighbouring Kenya, the drought has left more than 3 million people short of food and killed more than 1.5 million livestock.

And in Ethiopia, where a civil war has impeded aid delivery into the northern Tigray region, food insecurity is more widespread than at any time in the last six years. The first food aid to Tigray in three months arrived on Friday.

Now the war in Ukraine is making the crisis even worse by raising the price of grains, fuel and fertiliser.

Russia and Ukraine are some of the region's top suppliers of agricultural commodities such as wheat, soybeans and barley. At least 14 African countries import half of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization. Eritrea depends on them entirely for its wheat imports.

"The conflict in Ukraine is compounding an already complicated situation in East Africa," said Gabriela Bucher, executive director for the charity organisation Oxfam International. "East Africa is not on the global agenda now, but the region needs the solidarity of the international community, and it needs it now."

The devastating drought and the

war in Ukraine are compounded by a series of crises over the past two years.

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted food supply chains and forced many families to pay higher prices for food staples. The locust infestation in Kenya, the civil war in Ethiopia, extreme flooding in South Sudan, the political crises and growing terrorist attacks in Somalia, and the intensifying ethnic conflict in Sudan have all contributed to the destruction of farms, the depletion of harvests and a worsening food crisis, aid groups say.

THE DEVASTATING DROUGHT AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE ARE COMPOUNDED BY A SERIES OF CRISES OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

The war in Ukraine, which is in its second month, is expected to cause further spikes in food costs across the region. The conflict, depending on how long it lasts, could reduce "the quantity and quality" of staples like wheat, said Sean Granville-Ross, regional director for Africa at Mercy Corps, a non-gov-

ernmental organisation.

"Meeting the basic needs of vulnerable, drought-affected populations will become more expensive and challenging," he said.

That ominous outcome is already evident in many parts of the region.

In Somalia, the price of a 20-litre container of cooking oil has increased to \$55 from \$32, while 25 kilogrammes of beans now go for \$28 instead of \$18, according to data gathered by Mercy Corps.

In Sudan, the price of bread has nearly doubled, and some bakeries have closed because wheat imports have dropped 60 per cent since the beginning of the war, according to El-sadig Elnour, the Sudan country director for the charity organisation Islamic Relief.

Kenya, citing the war in Ukraine, also raised the price of fuel, leading to protests in parts of the country.

When famine hits, children are particularly vulnerable. An estimated 5.5 million children in the region are facing high levels of malnutrition from the drought, according to World Vision, a Christian aid organisation.

"My children died of hunger. They suffered," said Ahmed, whose children, ages 3 and 4, died during her daylong trek from her home in Adde Ali village in the Lower Shabelle region to the outskirts of Mogadishu. "They died under a tree." — The New York Times



People in Somalia who fled drought-stricken areas arrive at a makeshift camp on the outskirts of Mogadishu in February.

The mighty can fall, do Fall and so may we...



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

How are the mighty fallen? It's an old phrase, originally from what was known as the Great Bible to be exact, of 1539, the book of Samuel 1:19, and reads as, "Oh howe are the myghtie ouerthrowen." It was further anglicised in the King James Version of 1611.

It is a phrase often used when reflecting on a life lived, a decline,

or a failure, whether personal or institutional, often today used sarcastically, or within wry humour. It can be heard in contemporary conversation, for example: "How has it come to this, one of the richest countries in the world, with so many people, so much land, so many resources and such a strong military, with a real no-nonsense leader... Now look at them!" Yes, how the mighty have fallen ay?" Robbie Burns wrote, "While Europe's eye is fixed on mighty things, the fate of Empires, and the Fall of Kings. While quacks of State each produce their plan, and children lisp the rights of man... the rights of women merit some attention."

He was advising us to do be mindful of our genuine responsibilities. History though has many examples of those who have found themselves dismantled by their own follies and they have most often been those who regret only that they were tripped up, exposed, or caught, not recognising that the true failure was their own.

Traditionally

though, it has been a phrase more used by the elite, high society and the well-educated, as a solemn signature to an obituary, where it has been not only a lament, but also an elegy, in praise of those who have achieved a measure of greatness.

Walt Whitman, in fact, while writing his 'O Captain, My Captain', in praise of the assassinated Abraham Lincoln, must surely have been tempted to 'borrow' the phrase to end his elegy, as almost every line draws the thought that that which had so much good, done and to do, is gone.

It's a thought I've had these past days, wondering if we cannot fall, and continue to contribute, however, and wherever we do. I guess that sort of wistfulness lends itself to introspection, when it's too late to shore up against a fall, rather than us being able to insulate ourselves against our demise as we go about living a positive life, working in a productive job, or simply being a good person. Being, or doing these things sounds easy I guess, but is in reality effectively managed by few.

We all become complacent. It's in our nature, and it comes unbidden, meaning we don't summon complacency and assumption, but they fill the void left when we stop doing things at 100%. At 99% there is room for, if not an insidious intervention, then certainly one that has the potential for harm. We need to keep working at what we are doing well, to keep doing it well! And yes, I do know that sounds like common sense, but we all do need to hear it from time to time, as maintaining standards is one of the most difficult things we will ever need to do and we must refuse to let others' standards become those which we measure ourselves against.

Speaking of standards, and also going off on a tangent, not mighty maybe, but certainly great, Shane Warne transcended the sport of cricket, and sport, to become an 'A List' celebrity of sorts, and do you know what... very few were critical of him, or felt he never deserved his five-star lifestyle.

I recall watching Warne prepare to bowl against New Zealand in 1993, and with his casual action and demeanour felt he could hardly be termed a threat... yet he took 35 New Zealand wickets in that calendar year, and was on his way to greatness.

His passing is not a 'fall' from greatness, as such, but is certainly a life lived, and lived in such a manner that ensures he will be remembered with affection... overthrown not by his folly, but fate!



IN THE LAP OF NATURE

People gather at a park in the north of Iran's capital Tehran on Saturday to celebrate "Sizdah Bedar" (Nature Day), on the 13th day after the Nowruz Persian new year, during which people picnic outdoors with family and friends. Nowruz marks the new year according to the Persian solar calendar. This year, Sizdah Bedar also coincides with the last day before the start of Ramadhan in Iran. — AFP

The people, united, are not going to get very far



Binyamin Appelbaum

The author is lead writer of NYT

BINYAMIN APPELBAUM

Two years ago, Amazon fired Christian Smalls after he organised fellow workers at a warehouse on Staten Island to protest pandemic working conditions. On Friday, after a campaign the company bitterly opposed, the government announced that those workers had voted to unionise and Smalls, their leader, popped open a bottle of Champagne.

It was a heady moment for the union movement in the United States, a high-profile victory that follows recent votes to organise workers at several Starbucks.

"Do you see what's happening out there?" the AFL-CIO's President, Elizabeth Shuler, asked the crowd this week at a labour convention in Pittsburgh. "Working people are rising up." But it is a false dawn. The number of American workers who are represented by unions drops with almost every passing year. It reached a new low last year. And it will not recover unless and until the federal government changes the rules of the game.

The new Amazon Labour Union — the first union for US workers at Amazon, one of the nation's largest employers — is remarkable, and worthy of celebration, precisely because it is so very difficult to unionise. Both federal protections and the enforcement of those protections are grossly inadequate.

President Joe Biden has been more outspoken in his support for organised labour than any of his predecessors in the White House, but that is actually a sign of the weakness of the union movement, which no longer has the power to make a Democratic president uncomfortable.

The decline of unions is often narrated as a straightforward consequence of the decline of industrial employment. Fewer steelworkers, fewer United Steelworkers.

Another standard talking point is that the government supplanted unions as the primary protector of workers' interests during the mid-20th century, writing into law many of the movement's original goals, like putting a floor on wages and a ceiling on hours worked.

But federal oversight is an imperfect substitute for ensuring that workers can define and defend their own collective interests. Just this week, three Senate Democrats blocked the confirmation of David Weil to lead the Labour Department's wage and hour division, which is supposed to protect workers. Weil held the same job under President Barack Obama and earned a reputation for trying to do it — for example, by seeking to prevent companies from improperly treating workers as contractors. Employers did not want an encore.

"I heard from a lot of business owners", Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona, one of the three Democrats, told Politico by way of justification for his opposition.

Tellingly, the share of workers who would like to be in unions is much higher than the share of unionised workers. The government has cooperated with employers to frustrate that desire. Almost as soon as it had legalised collective bargaining in the 1930s, Congress began to backtrack, constraining American unions more tightly than unions in other democracies.

THE NEW AMAZON LABOUR UNION — THE FIRST UNION FOR US WORKERS AT AMAZON, ONE OF THE NATION'S LARGEST EMPLOYERS — IS REMARKABLE AND WORTHY OF CELEBRATION, PRECISELY BECAUSE IT IS SO VERY DIFFICULT TO UNIONISE.

The government has gradually granted employers wide-ranging powers to frustrate unionisation campaigns through propaganda, via threatened and actual mistreatment of workers and by closing operations if workers vote to unionise. To the extent that some tactics remain illegal, companies rarely suffer anything more than token penalties.

The House passed legislation last year, backed by Biden, that would address some of these abuses, but it died in the Senate. Bolder reforms, such as allowing workers in a given industry to negotiate wages and salaries collectively, rather than requiring individual contracts in each workplace, remain the stuff of campaign speeches.

The workers at JFK8, that Amazon warehouse on Staten Island, overcame

the obstacles.

The campaign was fuelled by anger about working conditions and a sense that they were not reaping a fair share of Amazon's success. It also was personal. After Smalls was fired for raising concerns about workers' safety during the early months of the Covid pandemic, a top Amazon executive described him as "not smart or articulate." Some of his former colleagues figured that was roughly how the company felt about them, too.

During the unionisation campaign, Amazon insisted that the police arrest Smalls and two current workers who brought food to the warehouse. Before the vote, the union projected the words "They arrested your co-workers" on one of the outside walls.

The circumstances were extraordinary, which is what it takes to win under the current rules. A parallel organising campaign at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama mounted by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union appears headed for defeat.

The victory is still incomplete. The vote establishes the union as the official representative of the JFK8 workers. But companies often refuse to negotiate. An analysis of union votes in 2007 found that among the roughly 900 groups of workers who voted to engage in collective bargaining, fewer than half obtained a first contract within the following year. Three years later, almost a third still had not obtained that first contract.

Amazon said on Friday that it might seek to have the vote thrown out. "We believe having a direct relationship with the company is best for our employees", it said. Its employees have reached a different conclusion, and not out of ignorance of the company's case. They were required to sit through meetings where they were told what was good for them.

— The New York Times



Christian Smalls speaks following the April 1, 2022, vote for the unionisation of the Amazon Staten Island warehouse in New York. — AFP

spot

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Ruud sets up Miami title clash with Alcaraz

MIAMI: Carlos Alcaraz is one win away from creating Miami Open history after defeating defending champion Hubert Hurkacz in straight sets to book a final date on Sunday with Norway's Casper Ruud.

The 18-year-old Spanish sensation brought the crowd at Hard Rock Stadium to their feet for the second night in succession following his dramatic quarterfinal win over Miomir Kecmanovic on Thursday night as he saw off 10th-ranked Hurkacz of Poland 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/2) to reach his first ATP Masters final.

If he triumphs this weekend, Alcaraz, who made the last four in Indian Wells earlier this month, will become the youngest champion in the tournament's 37-year history.

Only two men have won titles at this level at a younger age - Michael Chang (1990, Toronto) and Rafael Nadal (2005, Monte Carlo) were both 18 on their first triumphs.

Alcaraz turns 19 next month.

Hurkacz, who has the doubles final on Saturday to help soften the blow of this painful defeat, fought until the end, but the quality of Alcaraz's groundstrokes and movement was ultimately the difference.

Hurkacz served superbly to force a second set tie-break as the



slow conditions suited both players but especially Alcaraz, who learned his trade on Spanish clay courts like his world famous compatriot and boyhood idol, Nadal.

On this evidence, Ruud will have his work cut out to stop the dynamic world number 16 in his tracks.

"He has played well here and was the defending champion but I played a really good game from my side", said a delighted Alcaraz during a courtside interview after completing the win in just over two hours.

"This will be my first big final on a hard court but I have confidence and I am going to enjoy it."

NORWEGIAN FIRST

World number eight Ruud, meanwhile, is the first Norwegian to reach an ATP Masters 1000 final and surely one of the only top men's tennis players to have an Instagram account devoted solely to his golfing skills.

Ruud's clash with the 2021 ATP Next Gen champion will be the biggest match of his career.

Dealing with pressure situations,

though, is par for the course, especially when you have played 18 holes with 21-time Grand Slam champion Nadal -- a keen golfer.

"I enjoy watching both sports and I try to watch a lot of golf especially here in the States", Ruud told AFP.

"I've played Rafa a couple of times over the last two years. He's a very good golfer. He beat me and is a very tough competitor.

"Honestly, it was a bit tough when we played because he doesn't say much because he's so focused. Normally you're laughing a little

bit and joking around, but with him it's no joke."

Ruud's father, Christian, was Norway's most successful player until he was surpassed by Casper, reaching 39th in the world.

His first Masters 1000 final comes after three semi-final defeats at the level.

He overpowered Cerundolo, making his first appearance at the elite Masters level, 6-4, 6-1.

Cerundolo, cheered on by an enthusiastic group of Argentina fans in the stands at Hard Rock Stadium, was outscored by Ruud

He has played well here and was the defending champion but I played a really good game from my side. This will be my first big final on a hard court but I have confidence and I am going to enjoy it.

CARLOS ALCARAZ
Spanish player

in the first set and a break to make it 3-1 in the second signalled the beginning of the end for the world number 103.

"I didn't expect that if I ever made a Masters 1000 final, it would be here in Miami but I'll take it", said Ruud, who sealed the win with an ace.

For Cerundolo, defeat hurt but the progress made by the 23 year-old in south Florida is undeniable.

"I'm so proud of what I have done", he said. "It's been amazing."

— AFP

Al Dhahirah Tour cycling event held in tourist spots

IBRI: Al Dhahirah Cycling Team organised the second Al Dhahirah Tour cycling around the tourist attractions in Ibri, Dhank and Yanqul for 168 kilometres.

Around 48 cyclists from different regions took part in the event.

The participants expressed their satisfaction with the event which allowed them to visit many tourist attractions including Al Mamour Castle, Al Munaikh Castle and Bait Al Marah Castle.

The cyclists were welcomed by the Deputy Wali of Ibri, President of Dhank Club, President of Yanqul Club and Ministry of Tourism guides.

The Ministry of Tourism took part in the event by opening castles during the day and providing a glimpse of the history of each castle and their unique characteristics.

This event aims to spread awareness on the importance of exercise and exploring tourist attractions.





Oman Cricket announces start of All-Omani T20 Tournament

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket has announced the start of the All-Omani T20 tournament, which will be the final event of the 2021-22 cricket season.

It will be held from April 4 to April 13, 2022 at the Oman Cricket Academy, with the start time for all matches being 8 pm. 7 teams will compete, namely Oct Ruwi, Oct Muscat, Oct Al Mabela, Oct Al Amerat, Oct Al Hail 'A', Oct Al Hail 'B' and Oct Seeb. The teams have been split in groups of 2, with 4 teams in Group 'A' and 3 in Group 'B'. A round-robin format will be employed for the league stage before moving to the knockouts on April 10.

Speaking on the eve of the tournament, Chief Development Officer of Oman Cricket Duleep Mendis said, "It gives me great joy to announce the start of this all-Omani competition. One of our aims at Oman Cricket has always been to build on the successful staging of the T20 World Cup in the Sultanate of Oman last year and further cultivate an active interest towards the game of cricket, in the nation's local residents. In addition, I believe that grassroots cricket is the foundation that holds up the game as a whole in any country. We have already taken multiple steps in ensuring its

robust health in Oman and this event is another milestone on that same road. I thank all the players and teams that signed up and wish them the very best of luck".

Spectators are welcome to watch the games live at the Oman Cricket Academy. Proof of double vaccination against Covid-19 must be displayed on entry.

The groups for the tournament are as follows:

Group A - Oct Ruwi, Oct Muscat, Oct Al Mabela, Oct Al Hail 'B' Group B - Oct Al Amerat, Oct Seeb, Oct Al Hail 'A'

The fixtures are as follows:

April 4 - OCT Ruwi v Oct Muscat (Turf 1) OCT Al Mabela v Oct Al Hail 'B' (Turf 2)

April 5 - OCT Al Amerat v Oct Al Hail 'A' (Turf 1) OCT Al Hail 'B' v Oct Muscat (Turf 2)

April 6 - OCT Al Mabela v Oct Muscat (Turf 1) OCT Seeb v Oct Al Amerat (Turf 2)

April 8 - OCT Al Hail 'A' v Oct Seeb (Turf 1) OCT Ruwi v Oct Al Mabela (Turf 2)

April 9 - OCT Al Hail 'B' v Oct Ruwi (Turf 1)

April 10 - Semifinal 1 (Turf 1) Eliminator (Turf 2)

April 11 - Semifinal 2 (Turf 1) 5th place play-off (Turf 2)

April 13 - Final (Turf 1) 3rd place play-off (Turf 2)

'Russell Muscle' leads Kolkata to victory over Punjab

MUMBAI: Umesh Yadav's 4-23 and Andre Russell's unbeaten 70 off 31 balls steered Kolkata Knight Riders to a six-wicket over Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League on Friday.

Punjab were limited to 137 before Russell's power hitting -- with eight sixes and two fours -- turned the game after Kolkata looked in trouble after losing early wickets.

Punjab removed both Kolkata openers -- Ajinkya Rahane, for 12 off 11 balls, and Venkatesh Iyer, for 3 off 7 balls -- in defence of their below-par score.

Indian leg-spinner Rahul Chahar bowled a double-wicket maiden in the seventh over of the match to reduce Kolkata to 51-4.

He took the wickets of Shreyas Iyer, 26 off 15 balls, and Nitish Rana, a two-ball duck, to raise Punjab's hopes.

Chahar ended his four overs with two wickets for 13 runs as Punjab's most impressive bowler in the game.

But Russell and Sam Billings, who scored an unbeaten 24 off 23 balls, ended all hopes with their match-turning partnership.

"Simply outstanding hitting - it was Russell muscle, for serious," winning captain Shreyas Iyer said after the match.

West Indian all-rounder Odean Smith was the most expensive Punjab bowler and took one wicket for 39 runs in his two overs.

Smith was hit for four sixes and a boundary in one chase-defining over.

Earlier, player-of-the-match Yadav gave a great start to his team after taking Punjab captain Mayank Agarwal's wicket for one in the game's first over.

Punjab batters found it hard to handle Yadav's pace and accurate lines.

Liam Livingstone, 19 off 16 balls, Harpreet Brar, 14 off 18 balls and Rahul Chahar, who scored a two-ball zero, were Yadav's other three scalps.

Punjab lost wickets throughout their innings and couldn't stitch a partnership on a batting-friendly pitch.

Yadav was ably assisted by New Zealand veteran Tim Southee, who took two wickets for 36 runs in his four overs.

Kolkata spinners Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine



bowled tight lines and only gave 37 runs for a wicket in eight overs between them.

Sri Lankan hitter Bhanuka Rajapaksha and South African pacer Kagiso Rabada top-scored

for Punjab with 31 off 9 balls and 16-ball 25. Hard-hitting Smith remained unbeaten on nine off 12 balls as Agarwal's side were bowled out in the 19th over.

"We didn't bat well enough,"

Agarwal said after his team's loss.

"We showed some real fight with the ball initially but then Russell came in and got going. Credit to him for that," he added.

— AFP

Harmer marks SA return with four-wicket Test haul



South Africa's Simon Harmer (C) celebrates with team-mates after the dismissal of Bangladesh's Shadman Islam. — AFP

DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA: Off-spinner Simon Harmer ended an absence of more than six years by taking four wickets and putting South Africa in charge on the second day of the first Test against Bangladesh at Kingsmead on Friday.

Bangladesh were 98 for four at the close in reply to South Africa's 367 all out. Harmer took four for 42 in 20 overs.

Harmer, 32, had not played in a Test match since November 2015. He signed a Kolpak contract with English county Essex in 2017, making him ineligible to play for South Africa before the system came to an end in 2020.

Now classified as an overseas player for the county and again

becoming available for his country, Harmer took 491 first-class wickets during his time away from international cricket.

Harmer made the first breakthrough in the last over before tea when he bowled Shadman Islam for nine with the third ball of his second over.

He ended a 55-run stand between Mahmudul Hasan and Najmul Hossain by bowling Najmul for 38 with a superb delivery which drifted in and spun past the bat.

Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque fell without scoring in Harmer's next over, caught off bat and pad by a diving Keegan Petersen at silly point.

The experienced Mushfiqur

Rahim was Harmer's fourth wicket, gloving a ball down the leg side to wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne.

Mahmudal, playing in his third Test, survived until the close, scoring 44 not out.

Temba Bavuma top-scored for South Africa with 93, while fast bowler Khaled Ahmed took four for 92 for Bangladesh.

Khaled had taken only one wicket — that of Pakistan captain Babar Azam — in his previous three Test matches.

Bavuma's long wait for a second Test century continued. He made 102 not out against England in Cape Town in January 2016 in his seventh Test match.

— AFP



A picture shows a general view of the stage during the draw for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre. – AFP

DOHA: Germany and Spain will clash at this year's World Cup after Friday's glitzy draw ceremony in Doha placed the two former winners in the same group, while bitter political rivals the United States and Iran were also drawn together.

Four-time winners Germany were in Pot Two, making them the obvious team to avoid for the top seeds in the Qatari capital. They were knocked out at the group stage in Russia in 2018.

Germany and 2010 world champions Spain are joined by Japan in Group E, which will be completed by the winner of an intercontinental play-off in June between Costa Rica and New Zealand.

Spain won 6-0 when the teams last met in November 2020, but Germany have improved since Hansi Flick replaced Joachim Loew as coach.

"It was obviously the hardest draw from the second pot, especially now that they have changed coach," said Spain coach Luis Enrique of facing Germany.

"Let's just enjoy it for now and try to be optimistic"

"We're confident, we're going to have a good tournament," said Germany goalkeeper and captain Manuel Neuer.

Iran and the United States — who have had no formal diplomatic relations since 1980 — last met at the 1998 World Cup in France when the Iranians won the politically-charged game 2-1 in Lyon.

"Football transcends a lot of the political stuff and we are able to remain friends on the pitch," insisted USA coach Gregg Berhalter.

England are also in Group B and will face Iran in their opening game.

Gareth Southgate's side might also come up against neighbours Wales or Scotland, although

GERMANY TO FACE SPAIN AT WORLD CUP AS DRAW PAIRS IRAN AND USA



Coaches pose in front of the World Cup trophy during the draw for the 2022 World Cup. – AFP

World Cup 2022: competition format

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Qatar	England	Argentina	France	Spain	Belgium	Brazil	Portugal
Ecuador	Iran	Saudi Arabia	Int. playoff 1*	Canada	Canada	Serbia	Ghana
Senegal	United States	Mexico	Denmark	Morocco	Morocco	Switz.	Uruguay
Netherlands	UEFA playoff**	Poland	Tunisia	Japan	Croatia	Cameroon	South Korea
Teams not to qualify: "Three intercontinental play-offs" *From UEFA playoffs							
Monday Nov. 21	Monday Nov. 21	Tuesday Nov. 22	Tuesday Nov. 22	Wednesday Nov. 23	Wednesday Nov. 23	Thursday Nov. 24	Thursday Nov. 24
Qatar - Ecuador	England - Iran	Argentina - Saudi Arabia	France - Playoff 1	Spain - Playoff 2	Belgium - Canada	Brazil - Serbia	Portugal - Ghana
Monday Nov. 21	Monday Nov. 21	Tuesday Nov. 22	Tuesday Nov. 22	Wednesday Nov. 23	Wednesday Nov. 23	Thursday Nov. 24	Thursday Nov. 24
Senegal - Netherlands	United States - UEFA playoff	Mexico - Poland	Denmark - Tunisia	Germany - Japan	Morocco - Croatia	Switzerland - Cameroon	Uruguay - South Korea
Friday Nov. 25	Friday Nov. 25	Saturday Nov. 26	Saturday Nov. 26	Sunday Nov. 27	Sunday Nov. 27	Monday Nov. 28	Monday Nov. 28
Qatar - Senegal	England - United States	Argentina - Mexico	France - Denmark	Spain - Germany	Belgium - Morocco	Brazil - Switzerland	Portugal - Uruguay
Friday Nov. 25	Friday Nov. 25	Saturday Nov. 26	Saturday Nov. 26	Sunday Nov. 27	Sunday Nov. 27	Monday Nov. 28	Monday Nov. 28
Netherlands - Ecuador	UEFA playoff - Iran	Poland - Saudi Arabia	Tunisia - Playoff 1	Japan - Playoff 2	Croatia - Canada	Cameroon - Serbia	South Korea - Ghana
Tuesday Nov. 29	Tuesday Nov. 29	Wednesday Nov. 30	Wednesday Nov. 30	Thursday Dec. 1	Thursday Dec. 1	Friday Dec. 2	Friday Dec. 2
Netherlands - Qatar	UEFA playoff - England	Poland - Argentina	Tunisia - France	Japan - Spain	Croatia - Belgium	Cameroon - Brazil	South Korea - Portugal
Tuesday Nov. 29	Tuesday Nov. 29	Wednesday Nov. 30	Wednesday Nov. 30	Thursday Dec. 1	Thursday Dec. 1	Friday Dec. 2	Friday Dec. 2
Ecuador - Senegal	Iran - United States	Saudi Arabia - Mexico	Playoff 1 - Denmark	Playoff 2 - Germany	Canada - Morocco	Serbia - Switzerland	Ghana - Uruguay

LAST 16

Dec. 3 - Doha

1st gr. A - 2nd gr. B

Dec. 3 - Al Rayyan

1st gr. C - 2nd gr. D

Dec. 5 - Al Wakrah

1st gr. E - 2nd gr. F

Dec. 5 - Doha

1st gr. G - 3rd gr. H

Dec. 4 - Al Khor

1st gr. B - 2nd gr. A

Dec. 4 - Doha

1st gr. D - 2nd gr. C

Dec. 6 - Al Rayyan

1st gr. F - 2nd gr. E

Dec. 6 - Lusail

1st gr. H - 2nd gr. G

Dec. 9 - Lusail

Dec. 9 - Al Rayyan

Dec. 10 - Al Khor

Dec. 10 - Doha

Dec. 13 - Lusail

Dec. 14 - Al Khor

Dec. 18 - Lusail

3rd place playoff

Dec. 17 - Doha

Source: FIFA

AFP



Brazil's coach Tite arrives to attend the draw for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre. – AFP

Four-time winners Germany were in Pot Two, making them the obvious team to avoid for the top seeds in the Qatari capital. They were knocked out at the group stage in Russia in 2018

Ukraine could also take the last spot in the European play-offs, to be decided in June.

In a break with recent tradition, hosts Qatar will not feature in the tournament's opening match on November 21. That honour will go to Senegal's Group A match with the Netherlands at 1:00 pm (1000 GMT). The Qataris, in their first ever match at a World Cup finals, face Ecuador that evening.

Reigning champions France will meet familiar foes Denmark and Tunisia in Group D, which will be completed by the winners of an intercontinental play-off — either Australia, Peru or the United Arab Emirates.

France and England would be on a collision course to meet in the quarterfinals if they top their groups.

Record five-time winners Brazil will play Serbia and Switzerland — two teams they already met in their group four years ago -- as well as Cameroon in a tough-looking Group G.

Two-time champions Argentina drew Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Robert Lewandowski's Poland in Group C.

LAST CHANCE FOR MESSI AND RONALDO?

It might be Lionel Messi's last chance to win a World Cup as he turns 35 in June.

The same goes for Cristiano Ronaldo, who will be approaching 38 when Portugal come up against Ghana, Uruguay and South Korea in Group H.

Croatia, runners-up in 2018, were drawn with Belgium and Morocco in Group E, which is completed by a Canada side back at the World Cup after 36 years.

This will be the first World Cup held in November and December, the move from the usual June and July slot necessary because of the extreme heat in Qatar at that time of year.



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Oman plans foray into ‘green steel’ production

Landmark decarbonisation:
German green energy firm
Hydrogen Rise announces
partnership with Sohar Port
and Freezone to support low-
carbon based steel production
at Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A German firm specialising in hydrogen fuel technologies has embarked on a strategy to support the production of ‘green steel’ for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman.

The landmark initiative, slated for to be operationalised as early as by 2024, has the potential to position the Sultanate of Oman among the world’s pioneering manufacturers of green steel — essentially steel produced with a low-carbon footprint.

Munich-headquartered Hydrogen Rise AG has unveiled plans to trial the production of green steel at the Sohar Port complex of Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel (JSIS) using green hydrogen as a low-carbon energy alternative to fossil fuels. The initiative, planned initially as a modest-scale venture, is proposed to be ramped up in the future, according to a key executive.

“I am proud to announce that Hydrogen Rise, Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel and Sohar Port and Freezone have agreed on



Following a techno-economic feasibility study, the first phase will include a bankable starting size of 35MW electrolysis with a possible step by step scaling path to 350MW

OLAV CARLSEN
Co-Founder and CFO
Hydrogen Rise AG

evaluating a landmark trial of green hydrogen in the production of environment-friendly steel”, said Olav Carlsen, Co-Founder and CFO – Hydrogen Rise AG.

“Following a techno-economic feasibility study, the first phase will include a bankable starting size of 35MW electrolysis with a possible step by step scaling path to 350MW”, he added in a post on LinkedIn over the weekend.

Hydrogen Rise, which has a well-established presence in the



View of Jindal Shadeed’s complex at Sohar Port.

Sultanate of Oman, will “develop, build and operate the green hydrogen facility” at Sohar to supply Jindal Shadeed with its energy requirements, Carlsen stated.

“Jindal can become an early pioneer in utilising these innovative decarbonisation technologies to save natural gas, reduce the complex’s carbon footprint and become a major player in the fast developing global market for green steel”, he further noted, adding: “I am very excited to work with Jindal Shadeed and Sohar Port and Freezone to start the evaluation of this project, that could be up and operating by mid-2024.”

The move marks the first, concrete initiative to harness zero-carbon green hydrogen to decarbonise heavy industries in the Sultanate of Oman. Globally, the iron and steel industry accounts for around 8 per cent of total emissions of

CO2 – the planet-warming gas. It ranks only second to the power generation sector as the biggest industrial producer of greenhouse gases.

In 2020, the German firm set up Hydrogen Rise LLC in the

Sultanate of Oman with the goal of creating joint ventures with Omani private investors to plan, develop, build and operate green hydrogen production plants in the country.

Earlier, in partnership with the

German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech), Hydrogen Rise set up the Oman Hydrogen Centre to support learning and R&D. Significantly, the proposed partnership with Jindal Shadeed, the largest privately-owned integrated steel producer in the GCC, augurs well for its ambitions to become a low-carbon manufacturer of steel.

Launched in 2010 with an investment of around \$1.1 billion, the plant has a current annual steel production capacity of 2.4 million tonnes. The Sohar Port complex includes a 1.8 MTPA gas-based Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) Plant which produces Hot Briquetted Iron (HBI) and Hot DRI (HDRI), and a 1.4 MTPA Rebar Rolling Mill with ‘state-of-the-art technology.

S&P raises Oman’s credit rating to BB-, with stable outlook

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

Leading international credit rating agency Standard & Poor’s (S&P) has raised the credit rating for the Sultanate of Oman from ‘B+’ to ‘BB-’ with a stable outlook. The upgrade – the first since 2015 – has been attributed to the country’s improved fiscal indicators and lower public debt risk.

S&P also cited measures adopted by the Omani government as part of the Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan, and the combination of buoyant international oil prices and improved oil output, for the upgrade. According to the report published by S&P on Friday, the Sultanate of Oman is anticipated to achieve a fiscal surplus equivalent to 5.7 per cent of GDP this year, as opposed to a fiscal deficit estimated at 4.6 per cent of GDP in 2021.

Also notable is the



government’s medium-term plan to reduce the country’s dependence on oil revenues, alongside measures to curb public spending and improve efficiency – initiatives that are projected to contribution to a significant reduction of public debt to about 49.6 per cent of GDP at the end of 2022, down from current level of about 65.1 per cent.

Real GDP is also projected to grow by about 3.9 per cent in 2022, the S&P report noted, adding that the government’s liquid assets remain strong and are estimated at 47 per cent of GDP in 2022.

S&P further noted that it expects the non-oil sector to be the main driver of growth over the next three years with average growth projected at 2.2 per cent annually in 2023-2025, compared to 1.8 per cent in 2022.

The Sultanate of Oman’s credit rating could rise further in the coming period if economic growth and financial conditions improve markedly, or if foreign exchange reserves or foreign assets rise, which in turn would help to bolster the country’s fiscal situation, the agency said.

(With inputs from ONA)

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تمويل السيارات

بمعدل ربح تنافسي يبدأ من ٤,٩٥٪

التمويل الشخصي

بمعدل ربح تنافسي يبدأ من ٤,٩٥٪

للإستهلاك وللخدمات

٢,٥٪ استرداد نقدي

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Bank Muscat holds marketing seminar for Najahi customers

MUSCAT: The micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) sector has been playing an important role in the creation of jobs and driving global economic growth and development. Hence, the sector has received keen support from Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, in line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’.

The bank has supported thousands of enterprises with banking facilities over the years, and its Retail Enterprises (Najahi) unit in particular, offers both financial and non-financial support to entrepreneurs as part of the bank’s drive to promote sustainability.

Recently, Najahi organised a seminar on successful marketing by Ahmed al Mutawa, CEO of Mubader Company and a business consultant to the MSME sector where he talked about starting and marketing successful businesses, the latest marketing tools and the best businesses you can market. It was attended by Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi, Chief Banking Officer, Bank Muscat and other senior officials at the bank.

Addressing the seminar and thanking the entrepreneurs for their enthusiastic participation, Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati, Deputy General Manager – Customer Segments, said: “The Government of Oman provides a lot of encouragement and opportunities to the MSME sector. As the leading financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat, which is celebrating the 40th anniversary of its launch in 2022, has also been keenly supporting the sector with a number of initiatives. 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. The bank has always been an enabler of opportunities for budding entrepreneurs so as to bring about sustainable development and financial inclusion in our society. I would also like to thank our MSME customers for their confidence in Bank Muscat and for working hard to ensure the development and progress of Oman.”

Bank Muscat set up the Najahi (Retail Enterprises) unit in 2014 as part of a major initiative to support the MSME sector. Over the years, Najahi has been growing from strength to strength in expanding the various products and services to MSMEs.

Today, the beneficiaries of Najahi’s products

include businesses operating in retail, trading, services, manufacturing and processing, construction, hospitality, travel and tourism, mining and agricultural sectors.

The Najahi products suite includes the value-added Najahi Current Account, POS Terminal, Credit & Debit Card, Internet Banking and Collateral-free Financing. Najahi has received much praise from its customers for the various services and facilities provided since its inception as it has enabled customers to develop and expand their projects, in line with the development goals of economic diversification, job creation and increasing GDP.

For more information about Najahi, please visit the nearest branch, call 24790000 or visit <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/najahi/Pages/default.aspx>.



United Securities wins two prestigious awards

MUSCAT: Leading financial investment advisory and securities business, United Securities has won two prestigious accolades at the Oman Sustainability Week Awards that was presided over by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; and the Top Omani Brand Awards, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said.

United Securities was recognised as a ‘Top Omani Brand’ in the Investments category and also bestowed with the ‘Oman Sustainability Week Award’ for Leadership in Financial Investments at glitterati awards ceremonies organised at the Al Bustan Palace - A Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

The Top Omani Brand and Sustainability awards provide recognition and celebrate the achievements of Oman’s leading business entities, shining the

spotlight on those that build smarter, more effective and more efficient brands and solutions.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Awards ceremony, Mustafa Ahmed Salman, CEO of United Securities mentioned: “Our victory at both award ceremonies indicate that we are on the right track. We are delighted to have won them as they are a recognition of our leadership in the financial investment advisory and securities domain. I am very proud of the US team for continuously upholding our commitment to the highest standard of work! It is our tradition of service excellence, sustainability and investment expertise at a regional and international level that continues to keep us in a strong position to play a pivotal role not only in our customers’ growth, but at the forefront of the country’s development as a global investment and trading hub.”

Malabar Gold & Diamonds presents Studs & Drops Festival

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 280 outlets spread across 10 countries, announced the ‘Studs & Drops Festival’, showcasing an extensive collection of earrings in Gold, Diamonds and Precious Gems, giving their customers a unique chance to view and own a diverse collection of earrings from over 20 countries. The festival will run until April 17, 2022.

Women often use earrings to complement their outfits and accentuate their style, preferring to always own an extensive collection. The jewellery chain presents a marvellous range of earrings for today’s woman, considering the different roles



she plays, be it at work, home, celebrating special occasions or adding sparkle to just another ordinary moment in life.

This exclusive festival offers a stunning collection of earrings in Gold, Diamonds, and precious gems designed and handcrafted by skilled artisans from around the world.

The customer gets to choose from hundreds of designs that are suitable to use as office wear, casual wear, party wear or bridal wear along with other international designs at affordable prices.

Eshraqa donates equipment to Bidiya Health Centre

MUSCAT: Acknowledging the importance of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to drive socio-economic progress and as part of its continued commitment to community service, Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas’ Social Development Arm, recently donated a variety of medical equipment to Bidiya Health Centre.

The donation included nine specialised medical equipment catering to different units of the hospital like the paediatric ward, X-Ray and ophthalmology. In addition, it also included mobile carts and medical examination assessment tools, which would prove beneficial in improving the efficiency of the Health Centre.

The inaugural event held on March 16, 2022, under the auspices of Mahmood bin Abdullah al Saeedi, Wali of Bidiya, in the presence of a



number of key officials from the Ministry of Health and directors of various departments.

Representing Eshraqa at the event was Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group and Mahmoud al Saqri, Social Responsibility Manager - Eshraqa at Khimji Ramdas. The ceremony commenced with a speech by Mohammed al Naziri, Supervisor of Administrative and Financial Services for Healthcare Services in Bidiya. In his speech, Al

Naziri commended the initiative and appreciated Eshraqa’s ongoing efforts in supporting the healthcare sector through meaningful donations that meet the varying needs of patients at the Health Centre. This initiative further attests to Eshraqa’s unfaltering commitment to effectively engage with the community, enhance Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and contribute to the development of healthcare services in Bidiya.

Commenting on the initiative,

Mahmood al Saeedi, Wali of Bidiya said, “Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas’ Social Development Arm, has always played a pivotal role in initiating a number of community welfare drives which have had a positive, long-term impact on the local community. Eshraqa has led by example, and we applaud their continuous efforts geared at enhancing the lives of people.”

“At Eshraqa Khimji Ramdas, we continuously conceptualise innovative ways to better serve the society. At the same time, we also lay a keen focus on enhancing the quality of our social activities. Through initiatives like these we want to uphold our duties as responsible corporate citizens and help fulfil the national socio-economic objectives of our esteemed government,” Mahmood al Saqri, Social Responsibility Manager – Eshraqa stated.

Lulu announces 3-draw winners of Shop and Win promotion

MUSCAT: Lulu has announced a set of winners of the 1st, 2nd & 3rd draw of the Shop and Win Promotion which offers RO 100,000 worth of cash prizes. The first-of-its-kind promotion, which coincides with pre-Ramadhan shopping, kicked off on March 10 and will continue till May 7, 2022.

To be part of the promotion, customers have to spend RO 10 at any Lulu stores to register for the e-Raffle draws. The promotion will give 281 customers the opportunity to win amazing cash prizes. There will be a Grand Prize of RO 10,000 cash as well as Weekly Cash Prizes

of RO 5,000, RO 750, RO 500, RO 200 and RO 100.

The winners of the first three draws were selected through the e-Raffle draw held on the March 18, 25 and 30 at Bausher, Darsait & Wadi Lawami outlets respectively.

While 105 winners were declared in these three draws, Hanan al Barwani, Mohamed Ismaeel al Dosawqi and Dipin E V won a cash prize of RO 5,000 each and Yousef al Farsi, Mohit Balani and Marvin Lupa took home RO 750 each. 9 winners each won RO 500, 30 winners won RO 200 and 60 others won RO100 each.



Speaking about the promotion, Shabeer K A, Regional Director - Lulu Hypermarkets Oman stated: “I congratulate the winners of the three draws of our Shop and Win Promotion. It’s really heartening to see the warm response to the promotion so far. We have organised this promotion in time for Ramadhan and the Eid to offer customers a more rewarding experience while shopping at Lulu. We hope our shoppers make use of all the offers and deals available this Ramadhan and Eid purchases too.”

Shabeer remarked “There are five more draws left for our

customers to try their luck during this period. This will be the perfect time for customers to take home some valuable cash prizes too,” he added.

The Shop & Win promotion has set the tone for the festivities and has received a warm response from customers. There has been an increased footfall during the promotional period, which shows the excitement building up among customers. In an effort to enhance the experience, Lulu has also lined up several other offers to make shopping a memorable and fun-filled experience during Ramadhan.



Iraq oil exports
\$11.07 bn in
March, highest
for 50 years



An Iraqi worker prepares to operate valves in Nihran Bin Omar field north of Basra, 550 km southeast of Baghdad. — AFP

BAGHDAD: Iraq exported \$11.07 billion of oil last month, the highest level for half a century, as crude prices soared amid shortfall fears following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the oil ministry said.

The second largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), Iraq exported "100,563,999 barrels for revenues of \$11.07 billion, the highest revenue since 1972", the ministry said.

The figures published late on Friday are preliminary data but final data "generally does not vary" much, a ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In February, oil revenues reached an eight-year high of \$8.5 billion, with daily exports of 3.3 million barrels of oil. Oil exports account for more than 90 per cent of Iraq's income.

Crude prices spiked over fears of a major supply shortfall after Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 24. Russia is the world's second biggest exporter of oil after Saudi Arabia.

On Thursday, the Opec group of oil producing countries and its Russia-led allies agreed on another modest oil output increase, ignoring Western pressure to significantly boost production as the Ukraine conflict has rocked prices.

The 13 members of the Saudi-led Opec and 10 countries spearheaded by Russia (collectively known as Opec+) backed an increase of 432,000 barrels per day in May, marginally higher than in previous months. The United States has urged Opec+ to boost production as high energy prices have contributed to soaring inflation across the world, which has threatened to severely derail the recovery from the Covid pandemic. — AFP

Oman becomes 100th ILO Member State to ratify Maritime Labour Convention

Seafarer rights: First Gulf state to ratify key maritime labour convention.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

The International Labour Organisation (ILO), a specialised agency of the United Nations, has announced that it has received the instrument of ratification of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006) by the Sultanate of Oman, which became the 100th Member State of the ILO to have ratified the Convention.

Significantly, the Sultanate of Oman is the first Gulf country to commit to this landmark instrument, the ILO said in a press statement. "The strategic geographical location of Oman has enabled it to become a business and logistics hub for maritime traffic for Europe, Asia and Africa. The ratification of the MLC, 2006 by Oman is expected to enhance the protection of working and living conditions of seafarers not only in the country but also in the region," it stated.



Last October, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree 62/2021 ratifying Oman's joining the Maritime Labour Convention 2006.

The MLC, 2006 is a comprehensive international employment Convention, adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in February 2006. It contains seafarers' rights to decent conditions of work

while creating conditions of fair competition for shipowners.

According to the ILO, an official ceremony with the Government of Oman, the ILO Director-General and the Secretaries - General of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) will be held on April 11 to mark the 100th ratification of the MLC,

2006.

In 2019, the International Labour Office launched a global campaign, in cooperation with ICS and ITF, aimed at reaching 100 ratifications of the Convention to celebrate the Centenary of the ILO.

Referring to the success of the campaign, the ITF Seafarers' and Inland Navigation Section Coordinator welcomed the 100

ratifications milestone. "This achievement must remind all of us that only through continuous dialogue between stakeholders, effective implementation and updating, the MLC, 2006 will remain relevant and increase its appeal for further ratifications," the official added.

According to the Director of Employment Affairs of ICS, the MLC, 2006 provides a globalised approach to workplace standards for seafarers to ensure better implementation and enforcement.

"If universally applied, the Convention will provide a level playing field across the world. This 100th ratification demonstrates the commitment of countries to decent working and living standards on board and comes at a time during the Covid-19 pandemic when everyone must work together to ensure that seafarers rights are honoured.

The ICS continues to encourage further ratifications to ensure commitment on a global basis for a safe and pleasant working environment for all," the official stated. The MLC, 2006 will enter into force for the Sultanate of Oman on March 29, 2023, one year after its ratification.

MSX30 INDEX CLOSES THE WEEK LOWER

MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week lower by 1.77 per cent. All indexes ended the week lower. The financial Index closed lower by 1.23 per cent. Service index and industrial index ended lower by 0.55 per cent and 0.66 per cent respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed lower by 2.61 per cent.

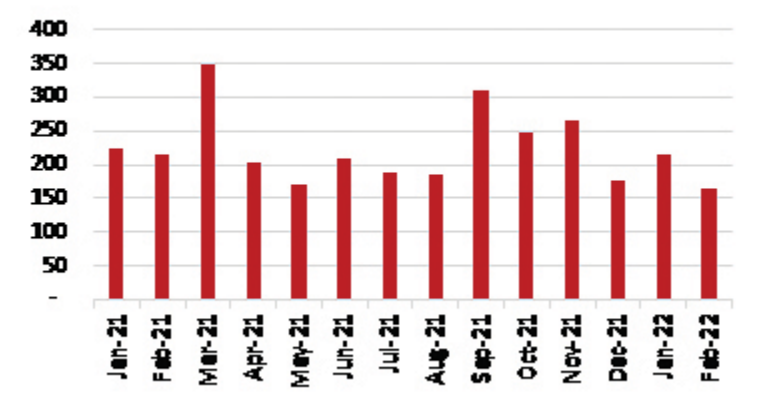
NBOB's AGM approved issuance of \$300m (or RO equivalent) worth of Tier 1 Perpetual Securities, to be executed over the next 5 years.

This issuance may be listed on MSX (if in RO) or a regional or an international bourse.

NBO's CET1 ratio is relatively on the lower side as compared to its larger peers, while its Tier 1 Ratio is the lowest within the sector (weakened on a 6 per cent YoY expansion in risk-weighted assets (RWAs) during FY21).

It would strengthen the bank's balance sheet as well as its capital adequacy if it is able to raise this

Traded Value of Property in Oman (OMR mn)



\$300m.

The bank had previously recalled its Tier 1 Perpetual Bonds issued in November 2015 during May 2021, while at the same time, it had issued \$300m worth of Tier 1 Perpetual bonds in April 2021, thereby preserving its Tier 1 capital at end-FY21 as compared to end-FY20.

Bank Dhofar board of directors has resolved to cancel the brokerage licence, due to

the low profit from this activity and the bank is in the process of taking the necessary action to cancel the service. Noting that the bank incurs various costs related to the brokerage unit, as the percentage of spending in this activity exceeds the profit from Brokerage.

The Bank undertakes that the requirements related to cancelling the licence will be met and will settle any obligations

that may appear in the future. The date of cancelling the activity will be disclosed after taking all necessary measures according to the guidelines of the Capital Market Authority.

Al Mouj Muscat has entered into a new partnership with ahlibank that provides finance on ready-to-move-in homes as well as those under construction at Oman's premium lifestyle destination with the special arrangement marked today by an official signing ceremony.

Ahlibank is a leading financial institution and Al Mouj Muscat is signing the new financing framework agreement with the bank to help property buyers obtain the financing they need to secure their dream home in Al Mouj Muscat.

Value of traded property in Oman went down by 23 per cent in February 2022 to RO 164.7m compared to RO 2,165m in February 2021. Traded value of

mortgage contracts MoM went up by 6 per cent to RO 85m compared to RO 80m in same period.

Traded value of sale contracts declined by 41 per cent to RO 79m compared to RO 134m YTD. Number of properties issued in February also declined by 18 per cent to 16,832 compared to 20,613 in January 2022.

In a sharp bounce back from the Covid-19 pandemic that had hit global trade hard in 2020, Oman's non-oil exports shot up by more than 91 per cent in 2021, after economies reopened and global demand recovered from the recession.

Total non-oil exports surged by 91.2 per cent to RO 5.792 bn in the full year 2021 from RO 3.032 bn recorded in the previous year, driven by increased demand from key markets in the region and around the world, according to data released by the NCSC.

(Courtesy: U-Capital)

Steep oil price increase may result in higher airfares

HAMMAM AL BADI
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

With oil prices in their triple digits, international airlines will have little choice but to pass on some of this higher cost burden on to their customers in the form of steeper ticket fares, a top airline executive has warned.

Maen Razouqi, Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Airways, acknowledged that higher fuel prices will financially impact airline operations. "The cost of jet fuel is around 15 per cent of our total operating cost, so any fluctuation up and



down definitely has an impact on airline operations," he said, while wondering if steep fuel price costs would be part of a long term trend.

Razouqi made the observations during interactions with the Observer on the sidelines of the Arab Aviation Summit, which

was held in Ras Al Khaimah recently, on the theme, 'Roadmap to Recovery'.

Asked if airlines, and Kuwait

Airways in particular, would increase airfares in response to higher jet fuel costs, the CEO stated: "We have to be competitive and for us to be competitive, we have a full team that manages our revenue and yield management.

They are the specialists; they have the tools, and we will fulfil the customer's requirement as much as we can. We will also position Kuwait Airways to be a competitive airline in the region."

Razouqi, nevertheless, voiced hope that oil prices — currently hovering at well over \$100 per barrel — are reined in by the collective efforts of the Opec+

alliance of leading producers.

The outlook for the airline industry and air travel in general is "very positive," he stated. Asked about the likelihood that new outbreaks of the pandemic will not sabotage the recovery under way in the airline and travel sector, the CEO added: "I think we are all decided that we are in the post-pandemic stage, and this year is going to be the transition stage."

He explained that safety precautions will still be a feature of airline and passenger safety during this phase, stressing that the health and well-being of passengers will be an utmost priority of carriers.

Strong US jobs are blessing and curse for Fed

Too much of a good thing can be bad for the US Federal Reserve. The unemployment rate for Americans fell to 3.6 per cent in March, near pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, dining out is back and even travel is returning to normal. It all gives the central bank room to raise interest rates to fight inflation. But continued robust hiring may make price pressures worse.

The United States is closing in on full employment. That's where the Fed thought the economy was before Covid-19 hit, with a jobless rate of 3.5 per cent in February 2020.

Last month, employers added a decent 431,000 jobs, while other upward revisions put average monthly gains for the first quarter at 562,000 positions, the Labour Department said.

The return towards pre-pandemic normality — even in a period coinciding with Russia's disruptive invasion of Ukraine — makes the Fed's job easier.

Central bank boss Jerome Powell has recently taken on a more hawkish tone, highlighting that the labour market is strong enough to hike rates by 0.5 percentage points at future meetings if warranted by inflation. In March, rate-setters increased the cost of borrowing by half that amount.

Still, hiring patterns suggest imbalances remain. In February, job vacancies were still near record levels at 11.3 million while there were on average 60 unemployed persons for each 100 of those positions, compared to 80 in February 2020. The pace at which people quit their jobs remained high at 4.4 million, with retail, hotels and restaurants continuing to see the biggest exodus.

The fight for scarce workers could put more pressure on prices. Hourly wages increased 5.6 per cent over the year to March, against pre-pandemic bumps in the 3 per cent range.

Full employment would be welcomed by the Fed after the labour market pains induced by the pandemic. Up to a point, so would higher wages, especially for lower-paid workers. But blowing past that would risk overheating an economy already grappling with inflation. — Reuters

Full employment would be welcomed by the Fed after the labour market pains induced by the pandemic.



RAMADHAN BUSINESS

People shop for Ramadan lanterns at a market in the central Sayyida Zeinab district of Egypt's capital Cairo, amidst preparations ahead of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan. — AFP

How to succeed in the food industry



STEFANO VIRGILLI stefano@virgilli.com

The writer is a member of the International Press Association

THE TYPE OF CUISINE, INTERLINKED WITH THE HUMAN RESOURCES PROBLEM CONSTITUTED THE "NAIL IN THE COFFIN".

This is the second part of a column dedicated to the food and beverage industry. In the first part we talked about why most restaurants fail within the first year of business.

And to corroborate such an idea, I mentioned the story of Mansoor, who was unfortunately plagued with some of the common challenges that many restaurant owners face before and while operating their businesses.

The first attempt at "entering the game" was unsuccessful for Mansoor because of a multitude of reasons, but we could comfortably say that the type of cuisine, interlinked with the human resources problem constituted the "nail in the coffin".

Location was also a challenge, as Mansoor picked a place that was indeed relatively central, but the closest parking area was more than a short walk away.

Clients surely did not like the time required — especially in the heat of the summer — to reach their destination.

Fortunately, Mansoor did not abandon his dream, but based on the failure of his first attempt, he managed to turn things

around. Today him and his family manage a successful Omani restaurant, and his clients love the food.

However, Mansoor had to apply a few changes to his strategy. First of all, he had to change location.

After signing the first 12 months lease in the inconvenient area I described earlier, he decided to aim for a place with a very convenient adjacent parking lot. That made a world of difference, as clients are now just a few steps away from their cars to the doorstep of the restaurant.

By doing so, he is also saving some money on the rental, because the new location is not as central as it used to be.

The other major change required, as I have already mentioned, is the type of cuisine. Venturing into foreign palates was his bet with the previous restaurant.

But his decision was made with what he liked in mind, not what the general population might have appreciated.

Moreover, the more exotic is the cuisine proposed, the harder it necessarily gets when it comes to finding a qualified chef.

Lastly, what really made the trick with Mansoor's second restaurant, is that the

family is heavily involved now. He told me that no one at the restaurant has the time to sit down.

Because they own the restaurant, his son — who was also helping him towards the end of the previous venture — as well as his wife, and his two daughters — although only part-time — are all committed to make the experience perfect for the clients.

In fact, when the Omani chef is not available, Mansoor's wife is perfectly capable to replace him and deliver the same quality of food. This is priceless, as the restaurant faces virtually no downtime.

Mansoor — according to what he told me — is a perfectionist. So he demanded that the chef standardised all recipes, and optimised the cost of food to 40 per cent of the selling price. Those working in the industry might know that 35 per cent is more of a common benchmark.

However, Mansoor allows for higher costs for the ingredients, and absorbs the extra 5 per cent by working in the restaurant himself with his family, thus reducing the manpower costs. My sincere congratulations to Mansoor for the way he learned from failure.

Will China hit its 2022 GDP growth target?



SHANG-JIN WEI

The author, a former chief economist at the Asian Development Bank, is Professor of Finance and Economics at Columbia Business School and Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs

In early March, Premier Li Keqiang announced that China is targeting GDP growth of "about 5.5 per cent" this year. That would be ambitious even without Russia's war against Ukraine and the attendant increases in global energy and food prices.

Back in January, for example, the International Monetary Fund forecast that the Chinese economy would grow by only 4.8 per cent in 2022. And in 2019, the last full year before the Covid-19 pandemic, GDP increased by just under 6 per cent.

By my calculation, the decline in China's working-age population is reducing the economy's potential growth rate by roughly 0.2 percentage points a year.

So, if all other factors were like those prevailing in 2019, China's GDP could potentially grow in 2022 by about 5.4 per cent. But today, both the Ukraine war and an expected series of interest-rate increases by the US Federal Reserve this year have made the external environment much less

favourable to growth.

The OECD estimates that the recent spike in energy and food prices triggered by the conflict will reduce global GDP growth by more than one percentage point.

Given that China is a big importer of oil, gas, wheat, and other commodities, its growth could slow by a similar amount.

Rate hikes by the Fed — the first of which came on March 16 — will likely further depress emerging-market growth. This will occur through a combination of reduced export demand in high-income countries, capital-flow reversals away from developing countries, and possible foreign-currency debt crises.

China can mitigate these risks to some extent. For example, by not participating in the Western-led sanctions against Russia, China may be able to purchase gas, petroleum, and other products from Russia at pre-war prices.

China may also be able to withstand higher US interest rates better than many other developing countries for three reasons.

Because China's capital controls

partly insulate its monetary policy, the domestic interest rate need not mechanically follow that of the United States.

As China's foreign-currency debt is small relative to both its GDP and its foreign-exchange reserves, the likelihood of a foreign-currency debt crisis is remote.

And with much of the foreign capital in China consisting of foreign direct investment (think General Motors or DuPont, for example), a reversal of capital flows is less of a concern than it is for countries that rely more on international bank lending or bond financing.

But it will be difficult for China to offset these two negative external factors completely. After all, lower growth and higher uncertainty in other parts of the world will translate into reduced demand for Chinese exports, implying a net negative impact on growth.

Several domestic factors also add to the downward pressure on China's growth in 2022. A spate of regulations in the past year and a half concerning antitrust, privacy

protection, online education, and greenhouse-gas emissions have suppressed production in some sectors and dampened overall investor sentiment.

Leverage restrictions have created a small recession in the real-estate sector, which has spilled over to related industries such as steel, cement, home electronics, and furniture.

Many of the new regulations can be justified on economic grounds and have counterparts in advanced economies. But the way they have been devised and implemented has contributed to a sense of unpredictability, not only in the sectors directly affected, but also in the economy as a whole.

Heightened uncertainty has discouraged both innovation and investment by firms and consumption by households, pulling down growth in the last quarter of 2021 and the first three months of 2022.

China's "zero-Covid" public-health strategy also has fuelled uncertainty by requiring periodic and often unpredictable partial lockdowns that disrupt production

and livelihoods.

That strategy probably could be justified in 2020-21 in terms of the number of lives it saved. But the social cost-benefit calculation for the same approach looks much less favourable in 2022, given the greatly diminished rates of serious Covid-19 infections and mortality for fully vaccinated people and the increasing effectiveness and availability of oral pills and other treatments.

In addition, when the pandemic disrupted production in other countries in 2020-21, Chinese firms ramped up output to cover supply shortages.

But as new coronavirus variants become less deadly and more transmissible, and as most other countries shift this year to "living with the virus," China's zero-Covid strategy could result in a much greater loss of domestic output and income.

The Chinese authorities now appear to be adjusting their regulatory approach and reasserting their support for private-sector firms.

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#Living_with_COVID19



Being alone with Allah in Ramadhan

By Mazoun al Ghailani
Instagram: @mazoun_alghailani

Life distracts us, or we may be distracted by the crowdedness of family or professional obligations. We forget our souls that are exhausted from fatigue, and each of us has fatigue according to his/her journey in this life. The spiritual energy doubles in Ramadhan which gives us a chance to renew our souls. The most important is to strengthen our emotional and spiritual sides by being closer to Allah.

The counsellor Mohammed Saleh Alduhaim will help us simplify the concept of being alone with Allah in Ramadhan with all peace and tranquillity.

In his spiritual truth, a person longs for the emotional solitude in which he receives Allah's light and feels calm.

"The emotional seclusion is a subjective experience that aims to do two things: first, purification of the soul, which begins with resting the body and ridding it of stress. As well as the spiritual sports with Azkar and silence which is reflected in the psychological strength, where the soul expands instead of shrinking due to physical and intellectual exhaustion," he said.

He added "The second point lies in the luminous reception where the one who is devoted to Allah, the lights of Allah descend upon him with gentleness and stillness, and surround him by Allah mercy. Allah said in the Holy Quran (33:43): "He it is Who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of Darkness into Light: And He is Full of Mercy To the Believers."

The first essence of worshipping Allah is heartfelt recognition of the divine greatness and based on that basis, people are differing in what makes their hearts oriented and connected to the divine greatness.

Referring to the Quranic verses and Prophet's guidance, the beauty of being alone is reflected in dhikr and silence. The dhikr varies between reading the Quran, glorifying Allah and praising.

"Silence has a beautiful effect on seclusion, where the intended silence is an inner emotional silence sensing the divine greatness, Quranic verses, names and lordship actions. Thus, it is clear that by silence we do not mean merely silence that is permeated with thoughts and obsessions. The sign of spiritual silence is that it accompanies relaxation, and it occurs in its beautiful taste of worship, the place of worship and rituals," he shared.



Some people are burdened in their solitude with Allah, so they exaggerate in performing acts of worship, which lacks the spiritual value that elevates them in their seclusion. Allah denied us burden ourselves, saying in the Holy Quran (2:286): "On no soul does Allah

place a burden greater than it can bear."

"The one who puts pressure on himself and shoves the ease in heavy programming led to boredom or discontinuation, and the strange thing is that these people eventually become known to themselves! while what a person wants is to know his Lord," he said.

"Therefore, they should remember the divine majesty and beauty and they can multiply: Glory and praise in the majestic and aesthetic names of Allah. Meditate the aesthetic divine actions such as creation, sustenance, giving and grace, blessing, kindness, deliverance, tenderness and closeness. Many blessings and peace be upon my master, the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him, Allah has made him mercy. Getting used to smiling and being happy. Practising gentle physical exercises that give the body flexibility and gentleness," He said.

One of the etiquettes of being alone with Allah is glorification. Glorifying to Allah opens the hearts to supreme secrets. Whenever the persons find in his heart longing for greatness, this is a blessed conquest that has become clear to him, so he should bear witness to that, a great blessing.

All times are beautiful to be alone

with Allah in Ramadhan, but the night-time is clearer and stronger. We find in the Holy Quran (73:2): "Stand (to prayer) by night, but not all night".

"The beginning of the night is the key, and the middle of the night is the warmth and the end of the night is the ascension of the Self," Alduhaim shared.

He pointed out "We have to correct some concepts about the self, as it is prevalent among some of the educated that the soul is evil and weak. The correct view is that Allah is the creator of this soul, and he is beautiful and loves beauty, he created us in the best alignment, straightening the soul, and instilling it with goodness."

There is a difference between the one who deals with himself as weak or inferior, and those who deal with himself as a sweetheart who desires kindness and closeness, the former will show him the skills of difficulty and cruelty. While the second will deal with spiritual skills, as he sees that Allah is an effective Guide.

He loves the believers and is kind to them. So, it appears to this person nice things that he did not make it, but Allah guided him to it, and he follows it. And finally, whoever defines himself with love will find joy, longing and an amazing flow from it" he added.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

The Compassionate has taught the Quran. He created man. And taught him clear expression.

(al Rahman, 1-4)

FATWA



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If one cannot fast, can he/she ask another person to fast on their behalf?

ANSWER:

If one cannot fast, he/she should feed a needy person for each day he/she lost, but fasting on behalf of someone else is not correct from the legality of fasting.

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A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira
(Allah be pleased with him)
reported:

When any one of you gets up in the morning in the state of fasting, he should neither use obscene language nor do any act of ignorance. And if anyone slanders him or quarrels with him, he should say: "I am fasting, I am fasting."

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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Ed Sheeran, Camila Cabello perform at fundraising concert for Ukraine



CHART-TOPPERS Ed Sheeran and Camila Cabello were among music stars who took to the stage on Tuesday night at a televised concert aiming to raise funds for a Ukrainian humanitarian appeal.

The line-up for the two-hour “Concert for Ukraine” in Birmingham also featured Ukrainian singer Jamala, who won the 2016 Eurovision Song Contest, music veteran Nile Rodgers & Chic as well as groups Snow Patrol and Manic Street Preachers.

“It’s such an important cause, I’m so honoured to be here,” said Sheeran during his segment. He then performed with Cabello, who also sang a version of Coldplay’s “Fix You”.

“We are all praying tonight for the peace and the safety of the people in the Ukraine,” Cabello said.

A poignant moment in the evening was a performance by young virtuoso violinist Illia Bondarenko who played the Ukrainian folk song “Verbovaya Doschechka” from a basement shelter in Kyiv along with 94 violinists from around the world.

Singers Emeli Sandé and Gregory Porter, violinist Nicola Benedetti as well as the gospel Kingdom Choir also performed.

Unable to attend in person, singer Billie Eilish and her brother Finneas sent their support in a video message.

“We still wanted to offer all of our love and support to everyone performing and most importantly to express the support and solidarity with the millions of people who have been forced to flee their homes and leave everything behind,” said Eilish.

The show, broadcast on ITV and STV channels during which viewers could make donations, also featured films showing relief efforts in Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion more than a month ago. Moscow has called its actions a “special operation”.

Organisers said the concert had raised £12.2 million (\$16 million) which will be donated to the Disasters Emergency Committee - an umbrella of British charities - for the humanitarian appeal in Ukraine.--**Reuters**

CULTURE

Museum of Natural History's New Science Center Takes Shape



WHEN THE American Museum of Natural History first announced plans for a major expansion devoted to science, the museum president, Ellen V. Futter, talked about the “gap in the public understanding of science at the same time when many of the most important issues have science as their foundation.”

Now, in a world that has been transformed by the mounting dangers of climate change and the coronavirus pandemic, that concern has become ever more pressing, Futter said, and it has informed the construction of the museum’s \$431 million Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education and Innovation, the finer details of which were unveiled Monday, along with a new opening date of next winter.

“It’s only become more intensified and urgent in a post-truth world where we also have acute threats to human health in the form of the pandemic and to the environment,” Futter said. “At the same time, we have a crisis in science literacy and education in this country and we have denial of science.”

“This is a building for our time,” Futter said of the

230,000-square-foot structure that is visibly taking shape along Columbus Avenue near West 79th Street. She added that it “speaks to some of the greatest issues before us as a society, as a natural world.”

During a recent hard-hat tour of the six-story structure featuring an undulating stone and glass exterior, architect Jeanne Gang said the building is “about connections.” Architecturally, for example, Milford pink granite was used for the Central Park West entrance, designed by John Russell Pope, in the 1930s. The same stone, from a nearby quarry, is being used for the west facade of the new project.

The project also emphasizes links between the museum’s various themes and activities — from exhibition to education; from children to scholars; from dinosaurs and whales to insects and butterflies.

The building also seeks to improve the museum’s physical circulation, creating about 30 new connections within 10 existing buildings so visitors can flow more easily from one area to another. “We’ve been plagued with dead ends for years,” Futter said.

“They are gone.”

Whereas the museum has always projected a kind of imposing, inscrutable majesty, its new building is consciously more porous, with welcoming floor-to-ceiling classroom windows that allow people “to look in and look out,” Futter said, adding, “This is an invitation.”

The center’s transparency also extends a hand to the museum’s neighbors, some of whom were unhappy with the project’s initial incursion into the adjacent Theodore Roosevelt Park (the footprint was scaled back in response). A legal challenge brought by a community group against the Gilder Center was dismissed by the New York state Supreme Court Appellate Division in 2019. A new landscape design of the park by Reed Hilderbrand adds seating and new plantings.

An expanded library also aims to engage more of the public with a new scholars’ reading room, an exhibition alcove and learning “zones” — as well as sweeping western views. This centering of the library situates “the scholarly side of the institution right at the front,” Futter said.--**NYT**

RECIPE

Qatayef Asafiri



By Reem Kassiss

QATAYEF ARE synonymous with Ramadan. It is during this month that bakeries start making the pastry for these stuffed pancakes, and the lines spill into the street as people wait their turn to buy them. Golden underneath and speckled with bubbles on top, qatayef are cooked only on one side. The large ones are normally stuffed with nuts or cheese and folded over, then fried or baked, and drenched in sugar syrup. The small ones, called qatayef asafiri (or little bird qatayef), are stuffed with a creamy filling, only half closed, then dipped in pistachio and drizzled with thick, faintly floral sugar syrup. The batter is very simple; the key is to make sure it is the right consistency, like that of heavy cream.

Yield: About 30 pieces
Total time: 45 minutes

FOR THE SYRUP:
1/2 cup/100 grams granulated sugar
A squeeze of fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon orange blossom water or rose water, or a combination

FOR THE BATTER:
1 cup/125 grams all-purpose flour
1/4 cup/40 grams fine semolina flour
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoon instant or quick-rise yeast
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon ground mahlab (optional, see Tip below)
1/4 teaspoon orange blossom water or rose water (optional)

FOR THE FILLING:
1 cup/8 ounces mascarpone
1/2 cup/120 grams heavy cream
3 tablespoons confectioners’ sugar
1 teaspoon orange blossom water or rose water, or a combination
1/4 cup/about 1 ounce finely ground unroasted, unsalted pistachios, preferably Turkish, for finishing

1. Prepare the syrup: In a small saucepan, combine the sugar, lemon juice and 1/4 cup water. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Lower heat and simmer until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Set aside to cool completely, then stir in 1/2 teaspoon orange blossom water and 1/2 teaspoon rose water.

2. Make the batter: Add 1 1/4 cups plus 2 tablespoons water to a blender or food processor. Add

all the batter ingredients and process until smooth. The batter should be quite loose, similar to heavy cream in consistency. Set aside to rest for 15 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, prepare the filling: Place the mascarpone, heavy cream, confectioners’ sugar, 1/2 teaspoon orange blossom water and 1/2 teaspoon rose water in a small bowl. Use a handheld electric mixer to whip into stiff peaks. Refrigerate until ready to use.

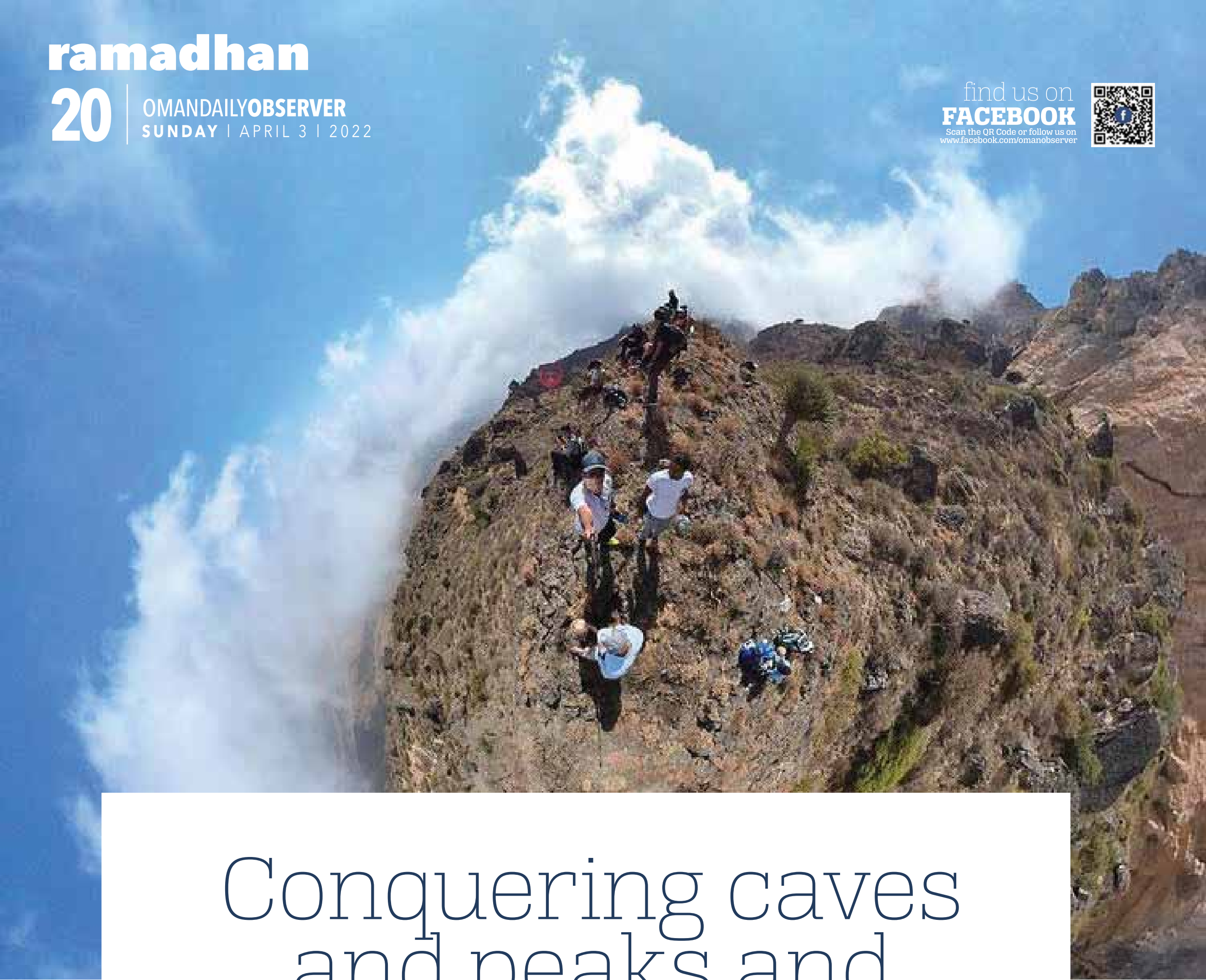
4. Cook the qatayef: Place a medium nonstick skillet or griddle over medium heat until hot. Mix the batter to ensure it is smooth, then pour separate 1-tablespoon portions of batter into the pan, fitting about 4 circles. Cook qatayef until the entire surface is covered in small bubbles and the center loses its sheen, about 30 to 45 seconds. (You might be able to cook off more at a time once you’ve determined the right temperature and consistency of the batter.) If the bubbles are large and sparse, then your batter is too thick; stir 1 tablespoon of water into the batter to thin. Qatayef cook only on one side; the base should be uniformly golden and the top covered in small bubbles. If the disks brown too quickly — or unevenly — underneath before the batter loses its sheen on top, lower the heat slightly.

5. Transfer each cooked qatayef to a large tray lined with a dish towel and cover with another dish towel while you cook the remaining batter.

6. Fill the qatayef: Fold each into a half-moon, bubble side on the inside, and pinch to seal the edges together halfway. Using a teaspoon or a piping bag, fill the opening with the cream, then dip the exposed cream filling into the ground pistachios.

7. Arrange the filled qatayef on a serving platter. These can be covered in plastic wrap and refrigerated for several hours until ready to serve. To serve, drizzle the cooled syrup over the qatayef and offer guests more syrup to add to their individual plates, if they choose.

Tip: Mahlab, the kernel found inside the pit of a cherry, adds a floral and nutty aroma to sweets and gives Arabic cheese its distinct flavor. It is available whole or ground from Middle Eastern grocery stores, but goes rancid quickly, so buy it whole and grind it as needed, storing the rest in the freezer until needed. — **NYT**



Conquering caves and peaks and making a business out of it

By Baraah al Mujaini

Oman landscapes have always been a source of inspiration for adventurers. One of those outdoor enthusiasts is Ahmed al Ghawas, an Omani adventurer, who, in the span of a few years, had been the pioneer in promoting adventures that involve conquering peaks.

This passion for climbing and investigating new unique locations has grown rapidly, therefore Ahmed has taken his passion seriously. As Ahmed started to post his adventures via different social media platforms, he soon realised their significance in actively promoting tourism in Oman.

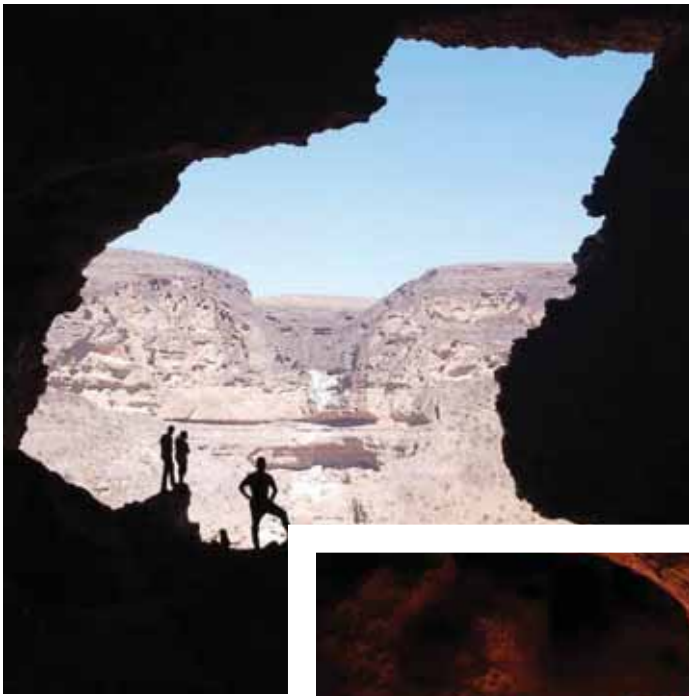
"Whenever we visit places and upload them on social media, we always get inquiries about those places," Ahmed said.

This would eventually prompt Ahmed to pursue his passion and experience by launching his own adventures-organising business.

"This step has its crucial impact on making connections with others, locally, regionally, and internationally," he shared.

"I am always keen to capture and encapsulate the different Omani landscapes that are characterised by its magical terrain, which cannot be found elsewhere easily," Ahmed pointed out.

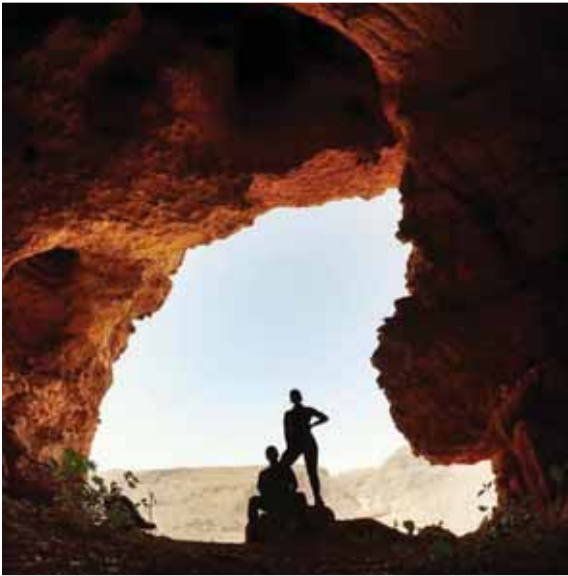
Ahmed's destinations orientation is towards waterfalls, caves, mountains, and wadis (valleys) since they are appealing to others, especially foreigners. Each adventure played a critical role in shaping Ahmed's personality and sharpening his character, "in every adventure I go through I



discover new aspects in my personality", Ahmed said.

Ahmed's biggest challenge that somehow hinders his journey as an adventurer was his family and friends' concerns.

"They are always worried about the high potential of risks I am exposed to, which has been a hinder to my passion towards adventures and experiences", Ahmed said. His aspiration is to widen his reputation as an Omani adventurer and to promote the adventure-tourism in Oman. As well as attract new customers from all around the world.



Ensuring security is a crucial demand Ahmed is always keen about when preparing for any new adventure, as he is susceptible to any dangerous situations. By checking all the equipment needed in, tracking the latest meteorological news, preparing



the first-aid kit and providing rescuing equipment; all of which are essential necessities for a safe adventure Ahmed is always committed to doing. Ahmed indicated that Oman is a well-recommended country for adventurers to experience an unforgettable authentic activity and to enjoy the embracement of the mesmerising sceneries. The wide range of destinations creates myriad choices for adventurers to choose what's appropriate for them. Oman's nature has been always a favourite spot for tourists as it has all kinds of adventurous destinations; these factors play a major role in attracting tourists, generally, and adventurers, specifically.

If you are interested in adventurous experiences visit Ahmed's business account on Instagram: [Salalah_explore](#)