

P10

LECLERC
BLOWS AWAY
RIVALS IN
AUSTRALIAN GP



P15

OIL MARKET
SINKS ON
CHINA DEMAND
FEARS



P20

5 THINGS TO
LOVE ABOUT AL
HAMRA'S BAIT
AL SAFAH



MUSCAT

PACT TO DEVELOP VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Sohar Aluminium company signed a cooperation programme to develop various vocational colleges and the Vocational College for Marine Sciences in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah. This cooperation comes within the framework of expanding strategic partnership with the private sector. It is also part of Sohar Aluminium's corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects.

DETAILS ON P2

NEW LINKS BOOST SUHAR AIRPORT

SalamAir has introduced two new direct routes, which include linking the port city Suhar with Jeddah for the first time. The Oman-based budget airline is also planning to start direct flights from Suhar to Kozhikode and the announcement is expected soon, a statement said. According to Civil Aviation Authority, five airlines are operating from Suhar Airport and discussions are under way with Oman Air and SalamAir to start international operations from the airport.

DETAILS ON P2

10

RAMADHAN
1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr
04:32 AM

Dhuhr
12:13 PM

Asr
03:40 PM

Maghrib
06:32 PM

Isha
07:44 PM

INSIDE



IRAN QUESTIONS US WILL TO REACH NUCLEAR DEAL

P6



DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS GOES NORTH

P8

'SHABAB OMAN II' EMBARKS ON EUROPEAN TOUR



The Royal Navy of Oman's vessel 'Shabab Oman II' set sail from the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base heading to the European continent in her sixth international voyage titled 'Oman, Land of Peace', on Monday. A formal farewell ceremony was held on Monday morning under the auspices of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, at the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base.

DETAILS ON P3

Macron, Le Pen begin sprint to poll run-off

PARIS: Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen have advanced to the second round of the French presidential election in two weeks' time, a final vote count on Monday confirmed, ushering in a rematch of their 2017 contest.

Macron, the 44-year-old centrist incumbent, took 27.84 per cent of the vote while his far-right nationalist rival came in second with 23.15 per cent. This is the third time Le Pen, 53, has run for the presidency.

With the next phase of the race starting, Macron travelled to meet citizens at campaign stops in France's industrial north. "I am willing to do anything to convince people", Macron said on Monday during a visit to the struggling small town of Denain, where many had voted for his right-wing opponent. Le Pen, meanwhile, was discussing



Marine Le Pen

strategy with her team in Paris. Polls are predicting that Macron has an edge in what will be a close run-off on April 24.

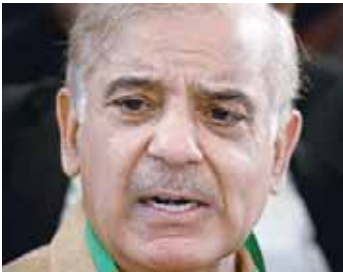
The mobilisation of voters outside their own camp will be of decisive importance until then. In addition, both are preparing for a highly anticipated television debate next week.

SEE P7

Sharif elected new Pakistan PM

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan lawmakers on Monday elected Shehbaz Sharif as the country's new prime minister following the weekend removal of Imran Khan, who resigned his national assembly seat — along with most of his party members — ahead of the vote.

Khan was dismissed on Sunday after losing a no-confidence vote, paving the way for an unlikely alliance that faces the same issues which



bedevilled the cricket star-turned-politician — a weak economy, rising militancy and soured relations with the West.

SEE ALSO P6

Oman set to be a global investment destination

7% JUMP IN FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on Monday announced a series of initiatives in the commercial, industrial and investment sectors, including those related to competition protection and anti-monopoly.

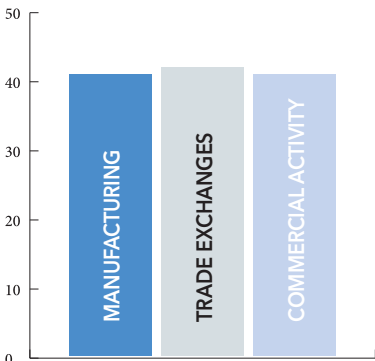
This was revealed at the annual media meeting in the presence of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry, Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion and Mohsin bin Khamis al Balushi, Adviser to the ministry.

PROMOTION INITIATIVE

The ministry unveiled the Global Promotion Initiative, aimed at promoting the Sultanate of Oman as the best global destination for investment and increasing the global market share of non-oil products of Omani origin.

It said that there are many incentives and advantages for investors to invest in the Sultanate of Oman, which include a high-level infrastructure and an interconnected logistical network, simple regulatory

A BIG JUMP



40.8% jump in the contribution of the manufacturing sector

41.7% increase in trade exchanges

40.69% of the commercial activity in Muscat

frameworks, free trade agreements with many countries, in addition to allowing foreign ownership of companies.

The ministry revealed a 40.8 per cent jump in the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the GDP and a 41.7 per cent increase in trade exchanges.

Al Yousuf said that the Sultanate of Oman is ready for various investments with the completion of the infrastructure which stimulates economic growth. The foreign direct investment grew seven per cent, while the number of new commercial registrations went up by 44.

The government aims to launch the electronic contract documentation service for the first time. Muscat accounted for 40.69 per cent of the commercial activity followed by Dhofar.

Al Yousuf said several incentives have been launched to boost the economic activity, including the economic stimulus plan, development programme for various governorates, and reduction in fee for work permits among others.

The 17 initiatives of the ministry during the last year were 100 per cent implemented, and some of them have been carried over to the current year.

SEE ALSO P13

Residency visas net RO 106m investments

Investments garnered through the Investment Residency Visa programme launched by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion amounted to over RO 106 million till date, according to Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion. Speaking at the media forum on Monday, she noted that a total of 270 investor residence cards have so far been issued to investors of a number of nationalities.





OMAN OBSERVER

FIRST DEDICATED ENGLISH NEWS APP IN OMAN

www.omanobserver.om

f t i l n y

DOWNLOAD TODAY

Download on the App Store



GET IT ON Google Play





Suhar Airport to get boost with more flights

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

SalamAir has introduced two new direct routes, which also include linking the port city Suhar with Jeddah for the first time.

The Oman-based budget airline is also planning to start direct flights from Suhar to Kozhikode and the announcement is expected soon, a recent statement said.

It may be noted that the number of passengers through Salalah Airport increased by 134 per cent to reach 906,727 at the end of last year, while Suhar and Duqm airports witnessed an increase in passenger traffic by the end of 2021 by 54 per cent and 95 per cent, respectively.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority, five airlines are operating from Suhar Airport and discussions are under way with Oman Air and SalamAir to start international operations from there.



Three airlines operate to Shiraz in Iran from the port city. “As home to one of the largest ports in the region, Suhar Airport offers big scope for cargo and freight services in the future, apart from business travellers,” a source at Oman Airports told the Observer. Suhar Airport was opened

on November 18, 2014, before the completion of the passenger terminal building and Oman Air operated an inaugural flight to mark the official opening.

International flights from Suhar Airport commenced in 2017, with Air Arabia service to Sharjah.

According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, “The North Al Batinah will be one of the main centres for international trade and will play a major role due to industries, availability of minerals, and agriculture. The governorate will have a population of 1.3 million,

of which 550,00 will be in Suhar, with a workforce of 650,000 with Omanis constituting 34 per cent of them.”

The airline has also announced a flight between Salalah to Kozhikode, apart from the resumption of two seasonal flights Salalah to Jeddah and Salalah to

Medina.

On the expansion of routes to India, Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, said, “Our aim is always to provide our customers with greater connectivity and convenience, and the addition of these routes will cater to the expatriate population, business travellers, and tourists. Our strategic cooperation with Oman Air enables us to serve the Indian market and augment demand and traffic volume, thus fulfilling the Oman Vision 2040.”

“The number of flights between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia will be increased to boost the movement of tourists and trade between the two countries,” sources at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) told the Observer recently.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Monday granted approval for the Iranian Pars Air to operate two weekly flights from Shiraz to Muscat International Airport, starting on May 4, 2022.

■ SOCIAL WORK DAY OBSERVED



The Directorate-General of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, held a virtual celebration to mark World Social Work Day internationally celebrated this year under the theme ‘Co-building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind’. — ONA

Pact to develop vocational colleges

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Sohar Aluminium company on Monday signed a cooperation programme to develop various vocational colleges and the Vocational College for Marine Sciences in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah.

The programme was signed by Dr Muna bint Salim al Jardaniyah, Under-Secretary for Vocational Training and Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium company.

This cooperation comes within the framework of expanding strategic partnership with the private sector. It is also part of Sohar Aluminium’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects.



A comprehensive plan was outlined to develop the vocational colleges in specific initiatives which are set up within a timeframe that allows for the accommodation of more

students. The programmes offered by those colleges will also be enhanced to keep pace with the rapid developments taking place in the field of vocational training. — ONA

MoHT invites proposals to develop Al Hazm Castle

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism announced that it started receiving applications to compete for the development, management, and operation of Al Hazm Castle in Rustaq, one of the most luxurious Omani fortresses. The castle was constructed in the Yaariba era, during the reign of Imam Sultan bin Saif al Yarubi.

The ministry stipulated that the work proposal should include some points, including site study from tourist and economic point of view, preparing and defining appropriate activities according

to a comprehensive plan for the site, determining the needs and uses and appropriate application of components of the fortress and the main attractions, restoring and diversifying the use of buildings and rooms of outstanding historical importance, documenting and displaying the historical dimension of Rustaq in general, and the fortress in particular. It also includes highlighting the architectural wealth of the fortress, marketing it commercially for cultural and heritage tourism, identifying guided tours in the fortress, neighbourhood and souq area, and holding workshops and short courses to transfer knowledge to

young generations.

In addition, the ministry stressed that the proposal should include the preparation and organisation of seminars, exhibitions and cultural artistic events to attract the contributions of researchers and academics, introduction of various activities to revive the fortress, involvement of the local community in various cultural and social events, and shedding light on the tourism value and economic feasibility of the fortress, with the need to suggest strategic ways to ensure the continuity of the project.

The ministry mentioned some proposals to revive the build-

ings inside the fortress, such as a permanent museum that tells the history of Rustaq, an Omani traditional house museum, an Omani architecture exhibition, a research centre for Omani architecture, and a traditional crafts centre. The competing companies can also submit other suggestions regarding the organisation of events and activities, the ministry said, noting that the last day to receive the documents for the competing companies is Thursday, May 12, 2022 at the headquarters of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Al Khuwair, Muscat.

In all its aspects, the tourism sector is among the promising

sectors that the Sultanate of Oman focuses on in the 2040 plan. Its strategic direction is to build a solid base for economic diversification by paying attention to the non-oil economic sectors in the GDP.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism seeks to develop the sector in cooperation with the relevant authorities and local communities, work to increase its investments, and promote the Sultanate of Oman as a tourist destination by employing comparative advantages.

It aims to increase the sector’s contribution to the gross domestic product within the framework of

the policy of diversifying sources of national income and contributing to creating Job opportunities while preserving the natural, social and cultural environment and enriching the community by adhering to the principles of sustainable development for the tourism sector.

According to the Omani Tourism Strategy (2016-2040), the Sultanate of Oman is projected to become one of the most important tourist destinations in 2040, attracting more than 11 million international and local tourists, which, in turn, leads to an increase in tourism’s contribution to the GDP at a rate of 6 to 10 per cent.



During her sixth international voyage, Shabab Oman II will visit 30 ports in 18 countries and will take part in the Kiel Sailing Festival.

SHABAB OMAN II EMBARKS ON EUROPEAN TOUR

MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman's vessel Shabab Oman II set sail from the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base heading to the European continent in her sixth international voyage titled Oman, Land of Peace, on Monday.

A formal farewell ceremony was held on Monday morning under the auspices of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, at the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base.

The ship carries with her ancient Omani history and bright present-time accomplishments and embodies Oman's everlasting approach of extending bridges of peace, love and fraternity among nations.

The ceremony began with the military salute to the chief guest who inspected the front row of the guard of honour. Then, the captain of the ship invited the chief guest and the attendees to board the ship where the chief guest met

THE SHIP CARRIES WITH HER
ANCIENT OMANI HISTORY
AND BRIGHT PRESENT-
TIME ACCOMPLISHMENTS
AND EMBODIES OMAN'S
EVERLASTING APPROACH
OF EXTENDING BRIDGES OF
PEACE, LOVE AND FRATERNITY
AMONG NATIONS

with the ship's crew and listened to a briefing about the ship, her voyage and the national objectives set for the voyage.

The chief guest and the attendees were briefed on the ship's facilities, sections and equipment which enable the ship to efficiently carry out her mission.



The ceremony was attended by senior officials, commanders and senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other military and security services, ambassadors of friendly countries and a crowd of invitees.

Shabab Oman II's global voyage will see her sailing over 15,000

nautical miles back and forth in six months and 12 days.

During her sixth international voyage, Shabab Oman II will visit 30 ports in 18 countries and will take part in the Kiel Sailing Festival which will take place in the Federal Republic of Germany. The ship will also take part in the Tall

Ships Races in Denmark, Belgium and Netherlands in addition to a number of international festivals and celebrations.

Apart from the crew, the ship is carrying 35 trainees from the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides who will undergo a training programme.

The ship seeks to extend bonds of friendship and brotherhood between the Sultanate of Oman and world countries by introducing the genuine Omani culture and heritage at her global stopovers as well as introducing Oman's glorious maritime history and the ancient Omani sea legacy and the progress the Sultanate of Oman is making under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

Speaking at the ceremony, the chief guest Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, said: "I have been

honoured this morning by joining the Royal Navy of Oman's celebration of the departure of Shabab Oman II to the European continent.

This is an opportune chance to voice due commendation to the ship's current and previous voyages and her significant role in highlighting Oman's glorious maritime history and enlightening the world about the path of the blessed and renewed renaissance that is taking place in all sectors in Oman under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

Shabab Oman also deserves praise for her role in highlighting the Omani civilisation and tourism and spreading the message of peace and harmony among peoples. We pray for the success of Shabab Oman II in her new international voyage and we hope that the ship will meet with success in delivering this message."



RAMADHAN IS A GREAT REMINDER THAT 'OTHERS' SUFFERINGS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT AS 'OURS', AS HUNGER AND THIRST THAT 'THEY', AND 'WE', EQUALLY FEEL

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Ramadhan is a month with many positive overtones. The most important being the feeling of ensuring the difference in the lives of those who deserve compassion and care.

It is easy to ignore others' needs and own luxuries, but very difficult not to feel the hunger of others by being hungry. Here lies the basis of Ramadhan, which teaches everyone to feel for the community.

It is a month of culmination of values, practices and perspectives and a resolution to address the shared values in a meaningful way. It is unique to see the whole community practising the same culture together for a month, thus making a difference in the lives of many others who otherwise would have been left unattended, uncared and unheard.

Sara bint Ahmed bin Farid al Aulaqi, the founder of Cure8Art, is passionate about solving social issues and making a difference in the lives of those stuck up in the beginning, middle or fag end of their life due to some issue or the other. She feels that a vibrant society can resolve many small issues which otherwise would have become big due to the long wait.

COMPASSION

"We can become partners in progress by taking up some issues and resolving them and what could be the better time than Ramadhan to take a resolution to do something good for others who deserve the most", says Sara while explaining her idea of an inclusive effort to address social issues.

She is working on the idea, which is likely to take shape after Ramadhan. "Let the actions be louder than the words and wait till it rolls out", she says.

Many others like Sara are passionate about humanity and its role in society. They are working on many levels to address the social suffering, taking the idea from the holy month of Ramadhan.

Ramadhan is a great reminder that 'others' sufferings are equally important as 'ours', as hunger and thirst that 'they' and 'we' equally feel.

Ramadhan calls for open-minded compassion, a sense of core community values and service — all put together.

The practice of fasting together derives from the idea of the unity of thoughts and compassion towards the needy.

Ramadhan's principle of self-restraint is also guided by the policy of welfare of all. The tools that help develop restraint are fasting, prayer, the study of the holy book and actions that lead to justice and harmony in the community.

AND

CARE





Despite ban, begging thrives during Ramadhan

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Despite being declared as a violation of the law, the act of begging has started swelling since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadhan.

Apart from an unusual number of their presence in front of mosques, hospitals and shopping malls, the beggars are also making use of a door-to-door walk.

Despite warnings and appeals by the authorities including the Royal Oman Police, the number of beggars increases during the holy month as they look

to exploit the goodwill of the general public.

According to Article 297 of the new Omani Penal Code, begging is illegal and those who are caught in the act will face imprisonment for no less than one month and not more than a year, with fines ranging from RO 50 to RO 100.

“The rule applies to those begging in public places such as roads, shops and mosques, or private establishments such as peoples’ homes and companies”, it states.

Every year, this time of the season, intensive campaigns are made by the Royal Oman Police

in association with the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Labour and the Public Prosecution, in which special teams are formed throughout the country to monitor beggars.

According to one of the officials who was in charge of the campaigns in 2018 and 2019 said that even children and women even above the age of 60 were caught while asking for handouts.

“Except a few nationals, most of them were expatriates and illegal immigrants from a few Arab and South Asian countries,” he said.

According to the official, the reasons for begging and

“The best way to curb begging is by warning those who end up giving alms. If you stop giving, there will be no one around begging. There should also be laws that would go against those who give alms”

AMINA AL BALUSHI
A social worker

the increase in such instances around Ramadhan were due to the failure of some members of society to report beggars, which would motivate them to continue with their illicit goals.

“The best way to curb begging is by warning those who end up giving alms. If you stop giving, there will be no one around begging. There should also be laws that would go against those who give alms”, said Amina al Balushi, a social worker with the Ministry of Health.

Ramadhan is a time for charity; giving to the less fortunate will be greatly appreciated. It doesn’t have to be money, but perhaps

food for iftar. Providing free iftar meals is a common practice across the Sultanate of Oman.

“There are some people who take advantage of the holy month as it is the time when the believers become more considerate and do charity. But it is a fact that begging goes up during Ramadhan as people are more tolerant towards such activities”, said Nasser al Wahaibi, a retired health official in Ruwi.

Although there have not been reported cases so far this year of online begging through emails, WhatsApp and other social media platforms, these are other forms of begging.

Eminent doctor and novelist passes away

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

Dr Abdulaziz al Farsi, senior consultant and head of adult oncology at the Royal Hospital, passed away on Sunday after a long battle with illness.

Born in Shinas in 1976, Al Farsi was also an established novelist since 1998.

He won a number of awards for short stories in the Sultanate of Oman and other Gulf states.

He published his first novel



“Earth Weeps, Saturn Laughs in 2007, which was on the list of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (Booker) in its first edition.

In 2008, he published jointly with Suleiman al Maamari two books on culture — Close to the Sun (Conversations in the Omani Culture) and Not Far From the Moon (Conversations in the Omani Story).

Another joint novel with Suleiman al Maamari titled ‘A Dog’s Death Certificate’ was published in 2017.

Oman Post, Asyad Express offer affordable PO boxes



MUSCAT: Oman Post and Asyad Express, a member of Asyad Group, is launching a special promotion for the holy month of Ramadhan on individual and corporate postal box services whereby new subscribers will benefit from a 20% discount on their PO Box’s annual fees.

The promotion, valid throughout the holy month (April 10 to May 3), offers new subscribers reduced annual fees of RO 16 for individuals and RO 48 for corporate clients (VAT not included) when subscribing to the PO Box service. This offer is available online and in all Oman Post & Asyad Express branches, in addition to selected touch-points in ONEIC (Tasdeed) and OIFC (Khedma) locations, and our new SMEs partners - One Way Travel Agency in Nizwa and King Land for Business in Muscat.

“Oman Post and Asyad Express celebrates the season with its customers by offering them

great promotions and value for the services offered,” commented Ibrahim al Jahwari, Senior Manager Products Development at Oman Post & Asyad Express.

“The purpose of this promotion is to bring essential postal services closer to a wider customer base and support businesses and SMEs by offering them postal addresses at lower prices. The offer is also valid for new individual clients who wish to benefit from PO Box services to receive mail quickly and securely.”

Essential to business, PO boxes bring a wide range of benefits to both enterprises and individuals as they ensure faster and more efficient mail delivery to a permanent address for households and organisations. Oman Post is not only promoting this postal service by offering it at affordable annual rates, but also by providing support features to customers such as SMS notification, 24/7 receipt.

HOUSING UNITS IN AMERAT



More than 30 housing units are being built for citizens in the Wilayat of Al Amerat in the Governorate of Muscat at a cost of RO 1,456,000. – ONA

Iftar made easy for blue-collar workers

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

They know not the beauty of iftar with their dear and near ones, nor do they know ceremonial festivities of fast-breaking below the Ramadhan lantern along with friends and relatives. They hardly know about the fat iftars thrown by the hotels on behalf of the corporates.

They are the blue-collar workers and the men engaged in manual labour who work in shifts digging and asphaltting the roads, tunnels, bridges and other construction works covering their iftar time.

With the social iftars suspended due to preventive measures, they solely look forward to those who bring them the dates and laban to break their fast.

“We do not have the time to go to our camps to break fast, and hence we keep something when start for work in the morning. But with those good Samaritans distributing food at iftar time, we break our fast properly,” said a labourer engaged in the construction in Al Khuwair.

By and large, these are men of various ethnic backgrounds, diverse cultural origins, wearing different attires, taking part in the nation-building process and waiting to share their first meal of the day from a single platter while helping each other with drinking



water, dates and other delicacies of breaking fast.

They stand in perfect unison for prayers in rows reiterating the vow to stay away from food and drinks and all material pleasures in life during the day and enhance humanity at the iftar venues.

They are in unanimity to committing themselves to Allah Almighty, and this is quite a common scene these days as the holy month of Ramadhan is entering the second ten days of its course.

With the Covid-19 protocol still in existence, these workers

from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and many other countries are seen collecting boxes with dates, laban, water, and fruits just a few minutes before the evening prayer.

“Since the beginning of the holy month, we have been catering to hundreds of passersby every day with essentials for iftar, and the response has been tremendous. More than the CSR and loyalty-building programmes, providing iftar to the blue-collar workers right in time of breaking fast is really divine,” said Aneesh, BDM of leading money exchange, the

volunteers of which were seen distributing foods to labourers engaged in public construction work in Al Khuwair.

The travellers’ iftar kits are distributed at the signals and places where the traffic is low. The men behind this are some good Samaritans.

These kits are helpful for the people on the move and workers who find it difficult to reach home in time to break fast.

Due to the mosque’s location, several moving people break their fast halfway to their destination every day.



Iran questions US will to reach N-talks deal

TEHRAN: Tehran on Monday questioned Washington’s will in reaching an agreement to restore the 2015 nuclear agreement, with key sticking points unresolved after talks halted last month.

Iran has been engaged for a year in negotiations with France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China directly, and the United States indirectly to revive the deal, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Negotiations in the Austrian capital Vienna aim to return the United States to the nuclear deal, including through the lifting of sanctions on Iran, and to ensure Tehran’s full compliance with its commitments.

“We really don’t know if we’ll get a deal or not, because the United States hasn’t shown the necessary will to reach an agreement,” Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

“What remains are the decisions of Washington,” he added.

Earlier this month, Khatibzadeh’s counterpart in the State Department Ned Price said it was Tehran that was not giving way to make a deal possible, but that Washington still believed there was “opportunity to overcome our remaining differences.”

The 2015 agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to guarantee that Tehran could



Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh speaks to media during a press conference in Tehran. – AFP

not develop a nuclear weapon — something it has always denied wanting to do.

But the US unilateral withdrawal from the accord in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and the reimposition of biting economic sanctions under a “maximum pressure” campaign prompted Iran to begin rolling

back on its own commitments.

“All components of maximum pressure must be removed,” Khatibzadeh said.

“Unfortunately, the US is trying to maintain some of the elements of maximum pressure,” he added.

The talks have been paused since March 11 after Russia demanded guarantees that Western sanctions

The agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its N-programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon

imposed following its February 24 war with Ukraine would not damage its trade with Iran.

Days later, Moscow said it had received the necessary guarantees.

The negotiations had progressed most of the way toward reviving the deal, with different parties pointing to the “final phase”, but pending issues are still unresolved.

“More than one issue is remaining between us and the United States,” Khatibzadeh added.

Among the key sticking points is Tehran’s demand to delist the Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of Iran’s military, from a US terror list.

Last month, US negotiator Rob Malley said the Guards would remain “sanctioned by American law” even in the event of an agreement.

“What is important to us is the certain benefit of the Iranian people from the lifting of the sanctions,” Khatibzadeh said.

— AFP

Sri Lanka nearly out of medicines, doctors warn



People queue to buy LPG cylinders in Colombo. – AFP

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s doctors warned on Sunday they were nearly out of life-saving medicines and said the island nation’s economic crisis threatened a worse death toll than the coronavirus pandemic.

Weeks of power blackouts and severe shortages of food, fuel and pharmaceuticals have brought widespread misery to Sri Lanka, which is suffering its worst downturn since independence in 1948.

The Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) said that all hospitals in the country no longer had access to imported medical tools and vital drugs.

Several facilities have already suspended routine surgeries since last month because they were dangerously low on anaesthetics, but the SLMA

said that even emergency procedures may not be possible very soon.

“We are made to make very difficult choices. We have to decide who gets treatment and who will not,” the group said on Sunday, after releasing a letter they had sent President Gotabaya Rajapaksa days earlier to warn him of the situation.

“If supplies are not restored within days, the casualties will be far worse than from the pandemic.”

Mounting public anger over the crisis has seen large protests calling for Rajapaksa’s resignation.

Thousands of people braved heavy rains to keep up a demonstration outside the leader’s seafront office in the capital Colombo for a second day.

— AFP

Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan’s new prime minister

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s parliament on Monday elected opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif as the new prime minister after Imran Khan was removed in a confidence motion at the weekend.

Shehbaz, younger brother three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif, secured 174 votes in the 342-member National Assembly.

Not a single vote was tallied for his opponent, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, as Khan’s party boycotted the election minutes before the decision.

A 70-year-old cancer survivor, Shehbaz has been in politics since 1988 and has served as the chief minister of the country’s most populous and politically significant central province of Punjab.

The voting to elect the new prime minister was held after the

parliament voted out Khan through an opposition-led no-confidence motion. Khan’s party on Monday announced it was resigning en masse from the parliament, in a move poised to further aggravate the ongoing political turmoil in the South Asian nuclear power

Meanwhile, Sharif, leader of the centrist Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) was the only candidate after Khan loyalist Shah Mahmood Qureshi, the former foreign minister, withdrew his candidacy and resigned his seat.

“It’s a victory of righteousness, and evil has been defeated,” Sharif said to cheers from lawmakers.

Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party had 155 lawmakers in the 342-seat chamber before the mass resignations, and Sharif was elected with 174 votes. His first



A PML-N supporter holds a party flag with an image of Shehbaz Sharif outside the parliament house building in Islamabad. – AFP

task will be to form a cabinet that will also draw heavily from the centre-left Pakistan Peoples Party

(PPP), as well as find space for the smaller conservative Jamiat-ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) group.

The PPP and PML-N are dynastic parties that have dominated Pakistani politics for

decades but their relations are sure to fray in the lead-up to the next election, which must be held by October 2023. They need to tackle soaring inflation, a feeble rupee and crippling debt, while militancy is also on the rise — with Pakistan’s Taliban emboldened by the return to power last year of the group in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Shehbaz Sharif is the younger brother of disgraced three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif and Pakistan media are already speculating the latter may soon return from exile in Britain.

The elder Sharif was dismissed in 2017 and later jailed for 10 years by an accountability court on graft charges after revelations from the Panama Papers, but was released to seek medical treatment abroad.

— AFP

SANAA

UN envoy makes first trip to Yemen after truce

UN special envoy Hans Grundberg started his first visit to Yemen’s Ansar Allah-held capital following an April 2 ceasefire that the country’s warring parties have accused each other of violating. The Swedish diplomat was scheduled to meet Ansar Allah officials during his first Sanaa visit since taking office in September.

“He is looking forward to engaging with Ansar Allah leadership on implementing and strengthening the truce and



discussing the way forward,” Grundberg’s office said in a tweet announcing his arrival. The Ansar Allah fighters took control of Sanaa in 2014, prompting a coalition’s military intervention the following year

— AFP

JAKARTA

Indonesia police fire tear gas at protesters

Indonesian police deployed tear gas and water cannon against thousands of students protesting against extending the presidential term limit, after rumours swirled for weeks about a potential change to the country’s constitution. The Southeast Asian country’s next election is in 2024 and President Joko Widodo would not be eligible to run as Indonesia places a two-term limit on its leader.

But senior ministers and several political parties last



month suggested the election should be delayed and the constitution amended to allow presidents to serve more than two terms. Monday saw about 2,000 university students gather in front of the House of Representatives building.

MANILA

24 killed in landslides from Philippines storm

At least 24 people were killed in landslides and floods caused by the first tropical storm to hit the Philippines this year, police said. Rescuers recovered 20 bodies in Baybay City in Leyte province, 599 kilometres south-east of Manila, where dozens of houses were buried in landslides, said Lieutenant Colonel Joemen Collado, the city’s police chief.

Other victims were swept away by the raging floodwaters, Collado said. Three other people were reported killed in floods



and landslides in the southern provinces of Davao Oriental and Davao De Oro, the national disaster agency said. 17,892 people were forced to flee their homes in 17 provinces affected by Megi, while more than 1,100 passengers were stranded. — dpa



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

TUESDAY | APRIL 12 | 2022

7

In brief

■ MEXICO CITY



MEXICANS BACK LÓPEZ IN RECALL REFERENDUM

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has survived a referendum on his impeachment, with almost 92 per cent of voters backing the left-wing nationalist, the electoral commission announced. Just 6 per cent voted for Obrador's removal from power. However, the turnout of just over 17 per cent fell far short of the required quorum of 40 per cent, meaning that the result is not binding.

"I'm staying and will continue the transformation of our country", Obrador said in a video message. His term lasts until 2024. — dpa

■ LAGOS



NIGERIA'S VP TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT IN 2023

Nigerian Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo declared he would run for the nation's top job next year when incumbent Muhammadu Buhari is scheduled to step down. He becomes the latest figure from the two main parties to join the race to lead Africa's most populous country and biggest economy. First elected as Buhari's deputy in 2015, Osinbajo made the announcement after months of speculation on whether he planned to succeed his boss.

In a statement, the 65-year-old senior lawyer and former university teacher said his years of stewardship under Buhari had made him the best man for the job. "Which is why I am today, with utmost humility, formally declaring my intention to run for the office of the President.

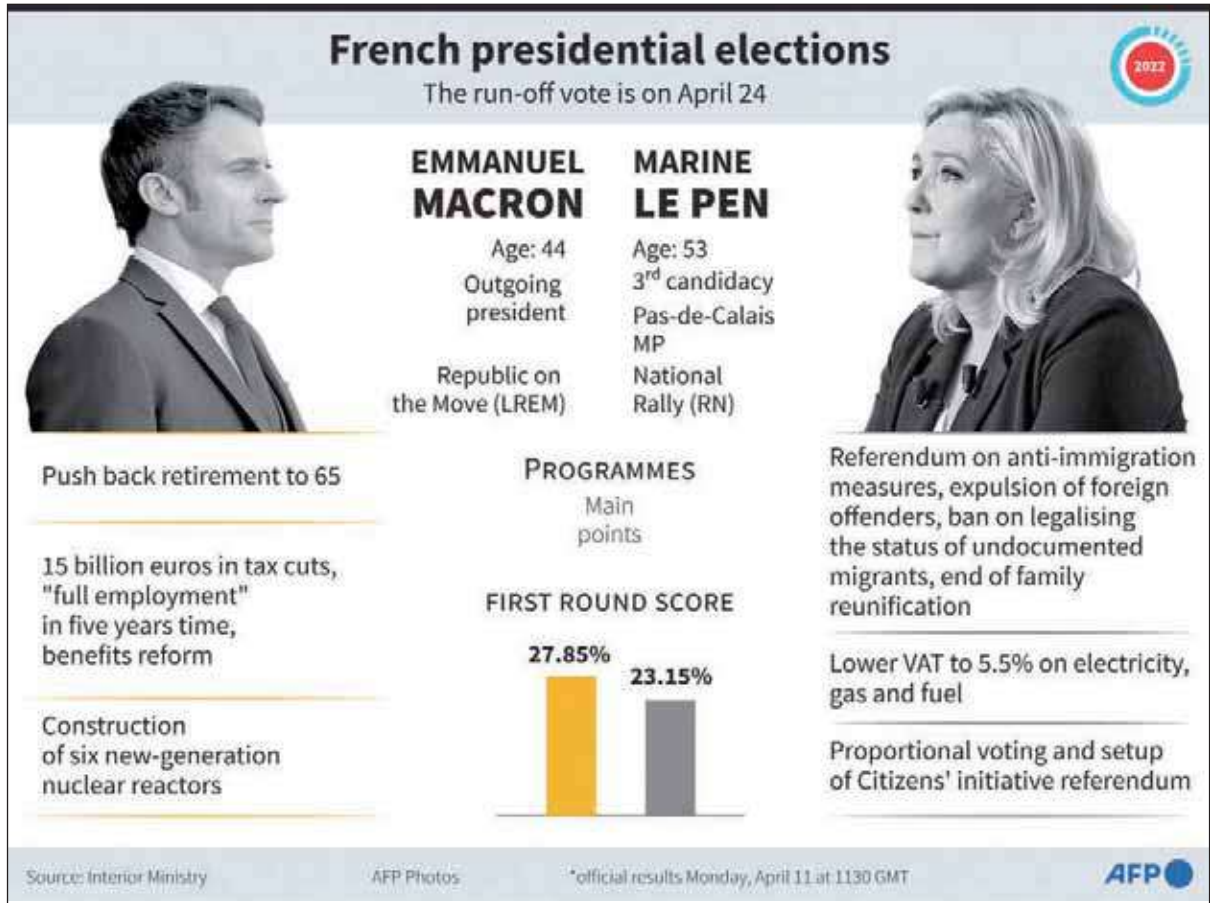
■ LONDON



ALI FOUND GUILTY OF MURDERING UK MP

A London jury on Monday unanimously found Ali Harbi Ali guilty of murdering UK lawmaker David Amess (pictured) in a knife attack in October last year. "It cannot have been easy to listen to the evidence you have listened to", judge Nigel Sweeney told jurors, saying he would sentence Ali, 26, on Wednesday.

The IS follower had told the trial that he had no regrets about murdering father-of-five Amess after he voted in parliament for air strikes in Syria. The court at London's Old Bailey heard that Ali stabbed Amess more than 20 times with a foot-long carving knife in Leigh-on-Sea, southeast England. — AFP



France's Macron steps up campaign against Le Pen

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron embarked on Monday on a final fortnight of campaigning against his far-right rival Marine Le Pen for a French presidential run-off shaping up to be a much closer fight than their contest five years ago.

Macron came out on top in Sunday's first round of voting with 27.85 per cent, with Le Pen second at 23.15 per cent. As the top two finishers, they advance to a second round on April 24.

Far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melancon came close, after a late surge gave him a score of just under 22 per cent.

The Macron-Le Pen duel is a replay of the 2017 election final from which Macron emerged victorious with 66 per cent. This time however, polls suggest it will be a closer contest.

Making an aggressive start to the next phase of the campaign, Macron spent hours meeting voters in Denain, a former steel town in northern France where he finished third on Sunday behind Le Pen and Melancon.

"I'm not going to pretend nothing happened, I have heard the message from those who voted for the extremes, including those who voted for Mrs Le Pen," Macron told a scrum of journalists

The Macron-Le Pen duel is a replay of the 2017 election final from which Macron emerged victorious. This time however, polls suggest it will be a closer contest

who followed him.

"I realise that people will vote for me to stop her, but I want to convince people. So I may possibly round out my project" with more social welfare measures, he said.

Le Pen met with her campaign team on Monday before resuming her months-long grassroots efforts in small towns and rural France later in the week, starting with a visit to a grain farm southeast of Paris.

"A sad repetition," left-leaning daily Liberation called the new Macron-Le Pen duel on Monday, adding: "This time it's really scary."

Polls gauging second-round voting intentions mostly point to around 53 per cent for Macron and 47 per cent for Le Pen.

One poll, however, by the Ifop-Fiducial group suggested Macron could have only a razor-thin win with 51 per cent versus 49 per cent.

While her opponents accuse her of being divisive and racist, Le Pen has sought to project a more moderate image in this campaign and has focused on voters' daily worries over inflation.

"The second round is the hardest one," Macron's Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told RTL radio. "Everything begins again with a new campaign."

Both candidates will now scramble to woo voters of their defeated first-round rivals.

"We're going to have to win over the French people who didn't vote for Emmanuel Macron in the first round," government spokesman Gabriel Attal told the France Inter broadcaster on Monday.

In an early boost for the president, Communist Party candidate Fabien Roussel, Socialist Anne Hidalgo, Yannick Jadot of the Greens and right-wing Republicans candidate Valerie Pécresse said they would vote for him to prevent the far-right leader coming to power.

Melancon told his supporters not to give a "single vote" to Le Pen, but he stopped short of backing Macron directly.

"If Macron wants to convince our voters, he's going have to work for it," said Melancon's campaign director, Manuel Bompard. — AFP

German minister quits over family vacation after floods

FRANKFURT: Germany's family minister resigned on Monday after coming under pressure for taking a summer vacation last year, shortly after the region where she was environment minister at the time suffered deadly flooding.

Anne Spiegel said she had decided to step down "because of political pressure". "I am doing this to avert damage to the office, which is facing great political challenges", she said in a statement.

The 41-year-old took on the family portfolio in December when her ecologist Green party joined a new coalition government led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the Social Democrats. Spiegel's departure comes after an emotional statement on Sunday in which she apologised for taking a four-week vacation to France with her family, 10 days after the western regions of Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia were hit by catastrophic floods that killed over 180 people.

Spiegel was the environment minister for Rhineland-Palatinate state. The vacation only recently came to light in media reports.

A tearful Spiegel had sought to defend the trip by saying her husband had suffered a stroke in 2019 and needed to avoid stress, while the pandemic and her own workload juggling numerous regional roles had weighed heavily on their four young children.

"I decided I had to be there for my family", she said on Sunday.

Spiegel added that she had worked tirelessly in the days before the vacation to help the affected areas, and that she remained reachable



Anne Spiegel

during her holiday.

Spiegel acknowledged however that she did not take part in cabinet meetings during the vacation, despite what she had said previously.

Opposition politicians had led calls for Spiegel to go, with the leader of the centre-right CDU party, Friedrich Merz, accusing Spiegel of caring more about her "vacation and her own image than the fate of people in the Ahr region".

Chancellor Scholz said he had "great respect" for Spiegel's decision to resign and that he had been "moved" by her personal statement.

North Rhine-Westphalia environment minister Ursula Heinen-Esser resigned last week following revelations she celebrated her husband's birthday in Mallorca just days after the floods.

The two departures come against a backdrop of public discontent with Germany's handling of the floods.

As well as being the deadliest in the country's modern history, the deluges destroyed roads, bridges and thousands of homes and businesses. The mammoth reconstruction task is still ongoing. — AFP

Ukrainian forces ready for 'last battle' in Mariupol

KYIV: Ukrainian forces are preparing for a "last battle" to control the southern port of Mariupol, besieged by Russians since the attack, marines in the city said on Monday.

"Today will probably be the last battle, as the ammunition is running out," the 36th marine brigade of the Ukrainian armed forces said on Facebook.

"It's death for some of us and captivity for the rest," it added, saying it had been "pushed back" and "surrounded" by the Russian army.

It said it had been defending the port for 47 days and "did everything possible and impossible" to retain control of the city.

Russian forces have said that fighting has recently centred around the city's Azovstal iron and steel works and in the port.

The marines said that is where "the enemy gradually pushed us

EU SEEKS UNITY AMID CALLS FOR FRESH SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA



Residents look at a destroyed Russian tank outskirts of Buzova village, west of Kyiv. — AFP

back" and "surrounded us with fire and is now trying to destroy us".

Around half of its men are

wounded, the brigade said.

"The mountain of wounded makes up almost half of the

brigade. Those whose limbs are not torn off return to battle.

"The infantry was all killed

and the shooting battles are now conducted by artillerymen, anti-aircraft gunners, radio operators, drivers and cooks. Even the orchestra."

The marines also complained of a lack of support from Ukraine's military leadership: "No one wants to communicate with us anymore because we've been written off."

But the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces Valeriy Zaluzhnyi wrote on Facebook that "the connection with the units of the defence forces that heroically hold the city is stable and maintained".

The Ukrainian army is doing everything to "win and save the lives of personnel and civilians in all directions", he added. Mariupol has seen the most intense fighting since the Kremlin launched its attack on Ukraine, with the city being virtually razed to the ground. — AFP

We are afraid of the very thing that will liberate us



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

When was the last time you really wanted something yet you were too afraid to reach out and grab it? Perhaps it was asking someone you like out on a date, requesting a promotion from your boss or voicing how you really feel.

It happens to the best of us where we let opportunity after opportunity slide by because we don't want to "put ourselves out there" through fear of rejection, failure, being misunderstood and at worse being laughed at.

As children, this was not the case. Children are the epitome of no barriers, honest communication, forthright connection and all the wonderful attributes that we as adults, on some level, aspire to regain.

Children are fully liberated, with no boundaries, no limitations;

they do and say as they please. As adults we have developed fears of not wanting to say something nor do something because of past embarrassing experiences.

We want to shy away from ever having to feel that way again and because we don't want to relive the traumatic incidents, we stop ourselves in our tracks. Over time, sadly, our survival mechanism has been hardwired to learn to be affected by the opinion and reaction of others. This automatically hinders our desire, persistence and determination to reach out.

Somewhere throughout our childhood, we were made to believe we could not do certain things because we were told we weren't big enough, thin enough, fast enough, "fill in the blank" enough, and those insecurities blossomed into feelings

OUR SURVIVAL MECHANISM HAS BEEN HARDWIRED TO LEARN TO BE AFFECTED BY THE OPINION AND REACTION OF OTHERS

of unworthiness and self-doubt which stopped us from trying again, from pushing ourselves to attempt something new.

As we enter adulthood, the "innocence" that children possess starts blending with many factors such as hormones, peer pressure, parents' attitudes and the child's own perceptions of reality, which all twist the way we view the world. We are also affected by the way we understand and experience mistakes. When we are able to view those mistakes as an excellent feedforward system for the future,

everything becomes easier to manage especially when we own the self-awareness to not be so hard on ourselves.

The key to being totally free is the feeling of being able to do what you want like nobody is watching, even if they are watching! "The truth will set you free" is the old adage which can also be interpreted as your truth will set you free. Doing things that your soul really wants is truly liberating. Yet, why don't we simply reach out for it? We want to wait for the "perfect time" to get things right. However, there will never be that perfect time. Now, is the right time.

The very thing we are so scared to reach out for is the very thing that will free us from the judging and shaming of the inner critic. The more we don't do it, the further the belief of unworthiness gets

reinforced, so it pushes us to cower down even deeper to remain safe.

However, the more we try, the muscle of unbeatable, undefeatable resiliency gets reinforced. Instead of becoming prisoner to our own sabotaging behaviour and strategies that make us believe familiar scenarios are better than the unknown, we embrace them and become unconfined to face our fears with all of its uncertainties.

We are afraid of the very thing that will liberate us. That is such a powerful, bold statement.

Remember true liberation is feeling unrestrained, no limits, completely open with childlike wonder and most importantly, not being affected by what others think.

If only we consistently lived by this rule, we would be on the top of our game always, all days.

Yemenis fear impact of Ukraine war

ABDELKARIM AL MARANI

The wheat fields of northern Yemen stretch into the distance but they aren't enough to nourish a country where millions go hungry.

Already teetering on the edge of famine, Yemen fears a shortage of the staple food ingredient because of a different war — in Ukraine, which is one of the world's major suppliers of the grain.

In a bustling Sanaa bakery, Mohammed al Jalal and his staff sell small loaves of bread to customers carrying them away in red plastic bags. "Flour is available on the market but we worry about shortages because of the war between Russia and Ukraine," Jalal said.

In Al Jawf province, which borders Saudi Arabia, farmers are hard at work to harvest their crops before grinding the wheat and shipping it mainly to the capital, Sanaa.

Most of Yemen's roughly 30 million people will not be tasting this home-grown product, because the country depends almost entirely on food imports, with nearly a third of wheat supplies coming from Ukraine, according to the United Nations.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, people are struggling to secure even the most basic staples in view of soaring food and fuel prices triggered by Russia's February attack on Ukraine.

Jalal said authorities in Yemen "should support farmers so they can grow more wheat in our country".

After more than seven years of civil war, Yemen was already suffering what the United Nations called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

More than 17 million people in Yemen face high levels of food insecurity, UN-backed assessments showed in March, and the total is likely to increase. Famine conditions already afflict more than 30,000 Yemenis, UN agencies said.

Ali al Kabous, an importer and trader of wheat, fears that, "If the war between Russia and Ukraine continues, the price of wheat will increase here."

Food prices in Yemen have already doubled since last year and the country's years of fighting have led to an economic collapse.

As his staff unload dozens of white sacks filled with flour, Kabous points to a related concern. As global oil prices rise, so will transport costs, and "that will be an enormous burden on the people".

According to the Yemen Data Project, an independent tracker, the coalition has also carried out more than 25,000 air raids on Yemen since it intervened.

"Because of the enemy blockade but also the war in Ukraine, we should ensure food security from within the country," Ali al Khaled, spokesman for the fighter-controlled agency in charge of cereal production. — AFP

A reinvented Marine Le Pen threatens to upend French elections

NORIMITSU ONISHI AND
CONSTANT MÊHEUT

Marine Le Pen, the far-right leader making her third attempt to become president of France, already had the backing of voters who came to listen to her recently in Stiring-Wendel, a former coal-mining town struggling to reinvent itself.

But after a 40-minute speech focusing on the rising cost of living, Le Pen succeeded in doing what even few of her supporters would have predicted just months ago: impressing them. Voters trickling out of an auditorium into the cold evening said she had become "less extreme," more "mature" and "self-assured" — even "presidential."

"She has softened. She is more composed, calmer, more serene," said Yohan Brun, 19, a student who grew up in Stiring-Wendel and had come to listen to Le Pen because "she cares more about the French people than the other candidates."

Polls are predicting that this election will be a rematch of the previous one, pitting Le Pen against President Emmanuel Macron in a second-round showdown. But that does not mean that precisely the same Le Pen is running.

Le Pen has revamped her image since the last election five years ago. She has pragmatically abandoned certain ideas that had alienated mainstream voters. She has held on to others that certify her far-right credentials. And she has shifted emphasis towards pocketbook issues.

But as important, she has self-consciously sanded the rough edges off her persona in an effort to make herself appear more presidential and voter-friendly.

The makeover is part of a long and deliberate strategy by Le Pen to 'undemonise' herself and her party, and ultimately gain the French presidency. While the effort remains unconvincing to many who consider her a wolf in sheep's clothing, it has nonetheless succeeded in giving her a last-minute surge in the polls before Sunday's election that is worrying Macron's camp.

"Marine Le Pen appears more sympathetic than Emmanuel Macron," said Pierre Person, a national lawmaker of the president's party, adding that he was worried that she could win.

Le Pen had learned how to talk directly to working-class French people by showcasing a simple life not that different from the lives led by her own supporters, said Jean-Yves Camus, director of the Observatory of

MARINE LE PEN HAS HELD ON TO OTHERS THAT CERTIFY HER FAR-RIGHT CREDENTIALS AND SHE HAS SHIFTED EMPHASIS TOWARDS POCKETBOOK ISSUES

Radical Politics and an expert on Le Pen's party, National Rally.

"The question is whether she sounds fake or real," Camus said. "And to me, she sounds real." She has convinced some voters, too.

"Many people are afraid when they are told they will leave Europe," said Kurt Mehlinger, a former miner who attended the rally with his wife, Christiane Mehlinger, referring to Le Pen's past proposals to quit the eurozone, which she dropped a few

years ago. "We're more comfortable with her current platform."

The perception of Le Pen has no doubt been helped by the contrast with Éric Zemmour, a television pundit and rival in the race, who managed to outflank her on the far-right, where previously few had thought there was much room left for a politician seeking to enter the mainstream.

He has even acted as a lightning rod for the far-right past praise of President Vladimir Putin of Russia, allowing Le Pen to reposition herself by appearing firm against Russia's invasion of Ukraine and sympathetic towards refugees fleeing the war.

That juxtaposition has left Le Pen appearing as the more presentable and acceptable far-right candidate, though it is not clear that much actually separates them.

Le Pen has dropped her opposition to dual citizenship, a long-standing core position of the far-right. But she still wants to make it harder to become French and to reserve social services for the French. She wants to cut taxes for the French by cutting services to immigrants. She wants to make it illegal for Muslims to wear headscarves or other face coverings in public, even though she recently took a selfie with a teenager who was wearing one.

"She's looking to widen her electoral base while keeping the core of her programme," Camus said.

— *The New York Times*



A campaign bus for Marine Le Pen, the far-right presidential candidate, in Stiring-Wendel, France.

French Greens face crisis after failed presidential bid



ADAMPLOWRIGHT

The writer is a journalist based in Paris, France and writes for AFP

France’s Green party were facing a financial and political crisis on Monday after a deeply disappointing presidential election saw their candidate finish sixth and struggle to put climate change on the national agenda. Yannick Jadot from the Europe

Ecology-The Greens party (EELV) was eliminated in Sunday’s first round with a score of around 4.6 per cent, following a campaign that never gathered momentum.

Under French campaign financing rules, only candidates who score above 5 per cent have their expenses reimbursed by the state, leaving the Greens with a huge hole in their accounts.

“The situation is critical and the fact that we came below the bar of five per cent puts us in a very, very difficult situation,” national secretary Julien Bayou told France Inter radio on Monday.

He appealed for donations from those who backed the party, as well as others “who would have liked to vote for Yannick Jadot and perhaps voted for another candidate.”

“We need this support to be able to continue to ensure the ecology movement lives on,” Bayou added.

UNDER FRENCH CAMPAIGN FINANCING RULES, ONLY CANDIDATES WHO SCORE ABOVE 5 PER CENT HAVE THEIR EXPENSES REIMBURSED BY THE STATE, LEAVING THE GREENS WITH A HUGE HOLE IN THEIR ACCOUNTS

President Emmanuel Macron finished top in Sunday’s vote on around 27.6 per cent followed by far-right leader Marine Le Pen on 23.4 per cent, with the pair set to contest a run-off vote scheduled for April 24.

EELV was not the only party appealing for financial help on Monday, with the once-mighty right-wing Republicans

also facing a 7.0-million-euro (\$7.6 million) hole in their finances after their candidate, Valerie Pécresse, scored just under 5.0 per cent on Sunday.

The performance from Jadot, a former Greenpeace executive, spelled bitter disappointment for his party which was hoping to build on successes in local elections last year which saw them sweep major cities from Lyon to Bordeaux.

Germany’s historically more powerful Green party entered government after elections last year and controls several ministries and key posts in the cabinet, including the foreign minister role.

Jadot scored slightly better than the last ecologist candidate to stand — Eva Joly with 2.3 per cent in 2012 — but less well than Noël Mamère in 2002 who secured 5.25 per cent despite the stakes for the planet being much higher in 2022. In a concession speech on Sunday night, Jadot said his programme sought to respond to the challenges posed by climate change, as well as growing economic inequalities in France.

“It’s an understatement to say that these vital challenges — vital for our country, vital for us and our children — were largely ignored in a campaign that was confiscated,” he said.

The Covid-19 pandemic overshadowed the start of campaigning before Russia’s war on Ukraine changed the dynamic completely, making foreign policy and the rocketing cost of living key issues for voters.

Jadot was also eclipsed by hard-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who put a big emphasis on the environment during his campaign and finished third, only narrowly missing out on a place in the run-off.

Remi Lefebvre, a French political scientist at the University of Lille in Northeast France, said before the vote that the Greens had been “the enormous disappointment of this campaign.”

— AFP



Development economics goes north



DANI RODRIK

The writer is a Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard University’s John F Kennedy School of Government, is President of the International Economic Association

At the heart of development economics lies the idea of “productive dualism.” The economists who founded the field of development economics, such as the Nobel laureate Caribbean economist W Arthur Lewis, noted that poor countries’ economies are split between a narrow “modern” sector that uses advanced technologies and a much larger “traditional” sector characterised by extremely low productivity.

Dualism was long held to be the defining feature of developing countries, in contrast to developed countries, where frontier technologies and high productivity were assumed to prevail across the entire economy. This marked development economics as a distinct branch of the discipline, separate from conventional neoclassical economics.

Development policy, in turn, traditionally focused on overcoming the disparities in incomes, education, health and life chances more broadly. Its task was to overcome productive dualism through new institutional arrangements that would alter how markets work and expand access to productive opportunities.

While this distinction may have made some sense in the 1950s and 1960s, it no longer appears to be very relevant. For one thing, the methods used to study developed and developing countries have essentially merged: development economics today is essentially the application of standard frameworks of public finance, labour economics, industrial economics, or macroeconomics to low-income settings. But perhaps more importantly (and interestingly), productive dualism has become a critical and visible feature of advanced economies as well, requiring remedies that come straight out of the development policy toolbox.

In his 2017 book *The Vanishing Middle Class*, the MIT economic historian Peter Temin pointed out that the Lewis model of a dual economy had become increasingly relevant to conditions in the United States. A combination of forces – de-industrialisation, globalisation, new technologies that favoured professionals and capitalists and declining protections for labour – have indeed produced a widening gap between the winners and those who are left behind. Convergence between poor and rich parts of the economy was arrested, educational attainment increasingly polarised labour markets and regional disparities widened.

In Europe, the increase in inequality was not as marked, owing to a stronger welfare state, but the same forces operated there, too. The gaps between leaders and laggards among firms and regions grew and the middle class shrank.

As a result, policymakers in advanced economies are now grappling with the same questions that have long preoccupied developing economies: how to attract investment, create jobs, increase skills,

spur entrepreneurship and enhance access to credit and technology – in short, how to close the gap with the more advanced, more productive parts of the national economy.

The starting points may be different, but the problems of a region where good jobs have disappeared look distressingly familiar to a development economist: Scarce productive employment, mushrooming social problems such as crime and substance abuse, and low trust in the government among various social groups and the business community. The obstacles that racial or ethnic minorities, recent immigrants, or low-educated workers must surmount in such settings are the bread-and-butter of development economics.

WHEN ECONOMISTS TALK ABOUT GLOBAL CONVERGENCE, WHAT THEY USUALLY HAVE IN MIND IS THAT DEVELOPING ECONOMIES GROW MORE RAPIDLY THAN ADVANCED ECONOMIES AND THE INCOMES OF THE WORLD’S POOR RISE TO LEVELS IN RICHER ECONOMIES

To be sure, left-behind localities in advanced economies may have access to vastly greater financial resources. In the US, state and local governments spend tens of thousands of dollars, not very effectively, on tax incentives and other subsidies to attract large firms. But their officials typically operate under structural and bureaucratic constraints that would be familiar to their counterparts in poor nations. As one experienced US practitioner recently put it at a meeting held at Harvard University, “we are at the centre of everything, but control nothing.” They also face similar limits on the available remedies. Industrialisation has

been the traditional vehicle for overcoming dualism; as workers are absorbed into more productive manufacturing activities, wages rise and the economy’s overall productivity increases. But, in both developing and advanced economies, manufacturing has lost its ability to create many jobs, owing to automation and other labour-saving innovations. Manufacturing employment has shrunk (as a share of total employment) even in countries that have maintained strong industrial sectors, such as South Korea or Germany.

In high- and low-income countries alike, then, economic development will have to rely in the future much more on services and on small and medium-size enterprises. Both types of economies will need a new breed of coordinated policies aimed at the supply and demand sides of labour markets, combining skill training programmes with support for firms. Good jobs require good firms, and vice versa.

National policy frameworks will need to support these local productivist experiments with resources and enabling macroeconomic policies. In particular, that means reconsidering national innovation policies that blithely encourage technological changes that are biased in favour of capital and highly educated professionals. Taking a fresh look at the direction of innovation and incentivising technologies that augment rather than replace prevailing workforce skills, would help greatly in addressing the labour-market challenges that rich and poor countries face.

When economists talk about global convergence, what they usually have in mind is that developing economies grow more rapidly than advanced economies, and the incomes of the world’s poor rise to levels in richer economies. The irony nowadays is that we are experiencing downward rather than upward convergence. Developed countries’ problems increasingly resemble the problems found in poor countries. The models and frameworks used to study developing economies are increasingly relevant to the problems confronting rich countries. © Project Syndicate, 2021



Containers are seen at the Yangshan Deep-Water Port in Shanghai, China. – Reuters file photo

Sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



MELBOURNE: Charles Leclerc has long been touted as a Formula One world champion in the making and the Ferrari driver has emerged as the man to beat this season after a dominant victory in Melbourne.

The 24-year-old from Monaco blew away his rivals at Sunday's Australian Grand Prix at a revamped Albert Park, starting from pole and taking the chequered flag by more than 20 seconds from Red Bull's Sergio Perez.

The 2022 campaign is just three races old, but the pace and reliability of Leclerc's Ferrari — coupled with Max Verstappen's problems at Red Bull and Lewis Hamilton's travails at Mercedes — have seen him emerge as early favourite to win a maiden drivers' title.

Leclerc and Ferrari will have extra motivation, but also pressure, to ram home their advantage in the next race on April 24 because it takes place at Imola in front of their passionate home fans.

Leclerc sits 34 points clear in the standings after his runaway triumph, which came after victory in the season-opener at Bahrain and second place in Saudi Arabia, behind world champion Verstappen.

"Obviously we only had the third race so it's difficult to think about the championship", Leclerc stressed in the immediate aftermath of victory.

But he conceded: "To be honest, we've got a very strong car, a very reliable car too.

"I hope it continues like this and if it does, then we probably have chances for the championship, which obviously makes me smile after the last two years that have



been difficult for the team and obviously for myself.

"It's great to be back in this position."

The level-headed Leclerc has for years been regarded as a potential F1 world champion.

Having won the GP3 and Formula 2 championships, he stepped up to F1 in 2018 and a year later won his first race for Ferrari.

Leclerc's second victory came at

the Italian Grand Prix in 2019, the team's first victory on home soil since Fernando Alonso in 2010, prompting scenes of jubilation among the Ferrari faithful.

In 2020 and 2021 Ferrari failed to record a single victory on any track, but now seem capable of sustaining a serious title challenge for the first time in more than 15 years.

"The mindset is a bit different compared to the last two years

because now I know that underneath me I've got a car that is capable of winning", said Leclerc.

His weekend masterclass saw him qualify on pole, set the fastest lap and lead every lap of the race.

"I don't really have to overdo things or to do something extremely special and spectacular to actually get one or two positions because I know that it's in the car", he said.

"I just have to do the job."

MELBOURNE MASTERCLASS

LECLERC BLOWS AWAY RIVALS IN AUSTRALIAN GP

FORMULA 1

3. Australian Grand Prix

Albert Park circuit, Melbourne

April 10

1 Charles Leclerc (MON) 1:27:46.548

2 Sergio Perez (MEX) at 20.524

3 George Russell (GBR) at 25.593

4 Lewis Hamilton (GBR) at 28.543

5 Lando Norris (GBR) at 53.303

Driver standings

Leclerc (MON) 71

Russell (GBR) 37

Sainz (ESP) 33

Perez (MEX) 30

Hamilton (GBR) 28

Teams

Ferrari 104

Mercedes 65

Red Bull 55

McLaren 24

Source: formula1.com

RED BULL 'SO FAR BEHIND'
Leclerc's upbeat assessment was in stark contrast to his title rival and fellow 24-year-old, Verstappen.

The Dutchman and team-mate Perez were both forced to retire in Bahrain as the defence of Verstappen's title got off to the worst possible start.

After victory in Jeddah, Verstappen's car again broke down in Melbourne when he looked destined for second.

"We are so far behind (Ferrari). We need to finish races", Verstappen fumed, calling it "unacceptable".

Verstappen finds himself sixth in the drivers' standings and already 46 points behind Leclerc.

The standings have an unfamiliar look with Mercedes' George Russell in second and

Carlos Sainz in the other Ferrari third.

Verstappen is at least in good company. Seven-time world champion Hamilton, the man he controversially beat to the world crown last season, is fifth and struggling in a Mercedes that has severe problems with bouncing at high speeds.

Worryingly for Verstappen and Red Bull, as well as reliability problems, they also cannot match Ferrari's pace.

"We are in this as a team and we will bounce back", said Red Bull team principal Christian Horner.

"It's a long season ahead and we have the basis of a quick and competitive car, but we need to get on top of these issues quickly and we will keep pushing." —AFP

Oman volleyball team gears up for GCC Games

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

Oman volleyball team is gearing up to take part in the third GCC Games which will be held in Kuwait during May 20 to 26. The team, coached by the national experienced coach Jamal al Maamari, began an internal camp in Suhar on Wednesday which will continue during the holy month of Ramadhan.

The coaching staff of the national team focused in the initial days on the physical sides of the players after an absence of the training sessions since start of this year. During the later warm-up sessions, coach Jamal trained the players to implement different technical and tactical moves. The local preparatory camp will be followed by an external camp after Eid break and

The coaching staff of the national team focused in the initial days on the physical sides of the players after an absence of the training sessions since start of this year

ahead of travelling to Kuwait. Last October, the Sultanate of Oman's volleyball team had an external camp in UAE for the forthcoming assignments. During this camp, the team had played many friendly games against the UAE team. Later, the team travelled for another overseas camp to Tunisia and met different Tunisian teams. The series of local and external camps shaped the players readiness and assisted to

raise up their technical skills. Head coach Jamal al Maamari opted 15 players for the domestic camp in Suhar and the probables for the squad included: Hilal al Maqbali, Saud al Maamari, Mahmood al Saadi, Ismail al Hadi, Mohammed al Maqbali, Yousuf al Shukali, Falah al Jaradi, Ahmed al Toobi, Khalid al Maqbali, Younis al Amri, Khamis al Jabri, Abdullah al Maqbali, Adam al Jalboobi, Abdullah al Shibli and Majid al Shibli.

Oman will commence their campaign at the GCC Games in Kuwait with a match against Qatar in the opener on May 20. In the following game, they will take on the hosts Kuwait and then they will meet Bahrain on May 24. Later, they will face the UAE team and then conclude their group matches against Saudi Arabia on May 26.



SA spinners wrap up crushing win over Bangladesh

GQEBERHA, South Africa: South African captain Dean Elgar hailed the performance of a below-strength team after they completed a crushing 332-run win on the fourth day of the second Test against Bangladesh at St George's Park on Monday.

Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque, meanwhile, bemoaned the failure of his players to perform with both bat and ball.

Keshav Maharaj and Simon Harmer bowled South Africa to victory for the second week in a row. Bangladesh were bowled out for 80, losing their remaining seven wickets inside an hour.

Left-arm spinner Maharaj took seven for 40 and off-spinner Harmer claimed three for 34.

It was the second successive match in which the two spinners bowled unchanged through the fourth innings. It was also Maharaj's second seven-wicket haul in successive matches after he took seven for 32 in South Africa's 220-run win in the first Test in Durban.

Maharaj, who top-scored with 84 in South Africa's first innings, was named player of the match and player of the series.

South Africa shrugged off the loss of five leading players, including their full first-choice fast bowling line-up, to the Indian Premier League.

"People say were playing the



South Africa's Keshav Maharaj poses with his trophies after receiving the player of the match and player of the series awards in Gqeberha. — AFP

series with a weakened squad but I don't see it as that," Elgar said at the post-match presentation.

"I see that as giving guys opportunities at this level, testing their skills and seeing where they are as an international cricketer."

Elgar praised Maharaj and

Harmer, who took advantage of spin-friendly conditions in both Tests. "What a combination that is," he said. "It's great to see two guys experienced in their careers going about their business at the highest level."

Elgar said the performance of

SCOREBOARD	
South Africa, first innings, 453	
Bangladesh, first innings, 217	
South Africa, second innings, 176-6 dec	
Bangladesh, second innings	
Tamim Iqbal c Mulder b Harmer	13
Mahmudul Hasan c Mulder b Maharaj	0
Najmul Hossain lbw Maharaj	7
Mominul Haque c Rickelton b Maharaj	5
Mushfiqur Rahim c Elgar b Maharaj	1
Liton Das st Verreynne b Maharaj	27
Yasir Ali c Williams b Harmer	0
Mehidy Hasan c Verreynne b Maharaj	20
Tajjul Islam lbw Harmer	0
Khaled Ahmed lbw Maharaj	0
Ebadot Hossain not out	0
Extras (b6, nb1)	7
Total (23.3 overs)	80
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-11, 3-27, 4-33, 5-36, 6-44, 7-69, 8-80, 9-80	
Bowling: Maharaj 12-3-40-7, Harmer 11-3-34-3	

some of the younger players was a highlight of the series. "They are putting their hands up and putting pressure on the guys who aren't here," he said.

Elgar said South Africa had enjoyed a successful summer with five wins in seven Tests but he was mindful that major challenges lay ahead with away series against England and Australia coming up.

He said the IPL players were not guaranteed their places. "I think the guys who have played right now have made a massive statement."

Mominul said Bangladesh had failed to perform as a team. "When we play well, we play as a team. We didn't make any partnerships with the batting and the bowling." — AFP



Royals top IPL table with narrow win

MUMBAI: Rajasthan Royals prevailed in a last-over thriller to edge out Lucknow Super Giants by three runs and top the Indian Premier League table on Sunday.

West Indies big-hitter Shimron Hetmyer hit an unbeaten 59 off 36 balls and lifted Royals from 67-4 to 165-6 in the second match of the day in Mumbai. The innings was marked by the tactical decision of Ravichandran Ashwin to retire out with 10 balls left.

Fast bowler Trent Boult and leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal then rattled the opposition batting to restrict Lucknow, one of the two new franchises in the expanded 10-team IPL, to 162-8.

Marcus Stoinis hit an unbeaten 38 off 17 balls to give the Royals a scare but IPL debutant Kuldeep Sen kept his nerve and defended 15 off the final over.

The left-handed Hetmyer shared a key 68-run fifth-wicket stand with Ashwin after the Royals were invited to bat first.

"Experience he has, really great cricketing sense he has. Has been doing great job for us," Royals skipper Sanju Samson said of Hetmyer, who was picked up by the team for \$1.13 million in the auction.

Royals, who won the inaugural IPL edition in 2008 under late Australian great Shane Warne, stand tall in the expanded 10-team IPL with three wins in four matches.

Hetmyer made the most of a dropped catch by Krunal Pandya on 14 and later changed gears and hit two sixes and a four against West Indies team-mate and Lucknow fast bowler Jason Holder.

ASHWIN 'RETIRES OUT'
Ashwin surprised the opposi-

tion with an IPL first of 'retired out' on 28 off 23 balls, departing after 18.2 overs of the Royals innings to allow Riyan Parag join Hetmyer.

Hetmyer smashed four more sixes in the final two overs and Parag also got a hit over the fence in his four-ball stay.

Lucknow were then rattled by a lethal opening burst by New Zealand left-arm quick Boult who bowled skipper KL Rahul for nought on the first ball of the reply and then, after bowling a wide, trapped Krishnappa Gowtham lbw for nought. Holder fell to Prasidh Krishna with Lucknow on 14-3 and later 74-5.

Quinton de Kock made 39 before falling to Chahal, who reached 150 IPL wickets in the match, who also took down Krunal Pandya, for 22, two balls later.

Samson called Chahal, who was named man of the match for his 4-41, "the greatest leg-spinner India has ever seen at present".

Stoinis attempted to turn the game on its head. He hit four sixes but the asking rate and Sen's nerves in the 20th over proved too big a barrier for Lucknow.

In the first match of the day, David Warner (61) and Prithvi Shaw (51) hit attacking half-centuries to set up a convincing 44-run win for Delhi Capitals against Kolkata Knight Riders.

— AFP

BRIEF SCORES
Rajasthan Royals 165-6 (Shimron Hetmyer 59*, Devdutt Padikkal 29; Krishnappa Gowtham 2-30) beat Lucknow Super Giants 162-8 (Quinton de Kock 39, Marcus Stoinis 38*, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-41) by 3 runs.
Delhi Capitals 215-5 (David Warner 61, Prithvi Shaw 51; Sunil Narine 2-21) beat Kolkata Knight Riders 171 all out (Shreyas Iyer 54, Nitish Rana 30; Kuldeep Yadav 4-35) by 44 runs.

Scotland edge past Oman in UAE tri-series

MUSCAT: Scotland beat Oman by 4 runs at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday.

The match was Oman's first of 4 in the double round-robin tri-series played as part of the ICC Men's CWC League 2.

Batting first after winning the toss, all of Kyle Coetzer, Matthew Cross, Calum Macleod and Richie Berrington got starts, but none of them were able to convert them into substantial scores. Cross's tally of 33 was the highest among the 4.

George Munsey built a 51-run partnership with Berrington to bring stability to the Scottish in-



nings. Munsey remained unfazed by the regular loss of wickets at the other end and made his way to a superb 74-ball 62.

Scotland were bowled out for 215 with 2 balls to spare.

With the ball, Fayyaz Butt was the most impressive with figures of 3-48. Bilal Khan and Kaleemullah picked up 2 wickets apiece.

In response, Oman started well with Jatinder Singh making a fifty.

Kashyap Prajapati, Shoaib Khan and Khawar Ali missed out, but Zeeshan Maqsood and Ayaan Khan erected a 65-run stand in the late-middle overs to keep the run-chase on track. It was the

former's run-out, 4 runs shy of a deserved 50, that brought Scotland back into the tie.

Adrian Neill, in just his third-ever ODI, sent Sandeep Goud and Naseem Khushi packing as part of his brilliant late-innings spell.

Ultimately, with 6 runs needed off the final 6 balls and just 1 wicket left in the bank, Adrian Neill and Hamza Tahir combined to dismiss Ayaan for a magnificent 72-ball 68.

BRIEF SCORES:
Scotland 215 all out in 49.4 overs (George Munsey 62 (74b, 6x4); Fayyaz Butt 3-48) beat Oman 211 all out in 49.4 overs (Ayaan Khan 68 (72b, 6x4, 1x6), Jatinder Singh 53 (71b, 7x4); Adrian Neill 3-32) by 4 runs.

Easy wins for OCT Muscat and OCT Al Hail 'A'

MUSCAT: On Day 5 of the All-Omani tournament, OCT Muscat clinched a 59-run victory over OCT Al Mabela on Turf 1 of the Oman Cricket Academy.

Coming out to bat after winning the toss, OCT Muscat's top-order stamped their authority on the contest once more. Majid Hussein Doshambah al Balushi continued his rich vein of form in the tournament by leading his side's scoring chart for a third successive time. He remained unbeaten on 64 runs.

Keeping him company for the duration of a 99-run opening partnership was Muzaffar Shiralkar, who made an explosive 45-ball 62.

Rashad al Balushi chipped in with a valuable 29-run cameo in the final six overs to help OCT Muscat to an excellent score of 167-1.

In response, OCT Al Mabela were skittled for 108 with 8 balls to spare. None of their batsmen were able to build partnerships of note and bring the asking rate under control.

Nabeel Mohd Boota and Saeed al Balushi were the only ones to cross the 20-run mark.

Rashad al Balushi was far more instrumental to OCT Muscat's success in the second phase of play. His 2.4 overs produced 4 wickets at the expense of 14 runs. Munthir al Balushi and Shaed Ali al Balushi claimed 2 apiece.

Having lost all 3 of their matches, OCT Al Mabela closed out their campaign with a last-placed finish in Group 'A'.

OCT Muscat on the other hand currently hold second spot, just behind OCT Ruwi who yet have 1 game to play.

In keeping with the theme



of the day, Turf 2 also saw the side batting first make their way to a 160 plus total, with their opponents falling well short of that mark in the second innings.

Put to bat first, OCT Al Hail 'A' posted 162-5 at the end of

20 overs. Waleed Rahim al Balushi took centre stage with a magnificent, unbeaten 68-run knock. By locking down one end of the wicket, he enabled the other batters to play around him - a strategy that reaped rich rewards

for his side.

Faris Said al Zadjali, Suhaib Abdul Ghani al Balushi and Abdul Jalil al Balushi were the beneficiaries and went on to register scores of 31, 24 and 13 respectively.

Younis Ab was the pick of OCT Seeb's bowlers and finished with figures of 1-16 in 3 overs.

In the second innings OCT Seeb started well, with openers Othman al Zidjali and Younis Ab erecting a 44-run stand in 5.4 overs.

However, their departure in the space of 5 deliveries derailed the run-chase completely. OCT Seeb continued to lose wickets in pairs and fell 45 runs short in the end.

Samir Othman was their top-scorer with 27 runs.

All of Suhaib Abdul Ghani al Balushi, Abdul Ghani al Balushi and Hisham Shafi Hisham picked

up 2 wickets each for OCT Al Hail 'A'.

With the three sides in Group 'B' locked on 2 points from their 2 games, OCT Al Hail 'A' came out on the right side of the ensuing net run rate tussle to finish top. OCT Seeb claimed second spot, leaving OCT Al Amerat rooted to the foot of the table.

BRIEF SCORES:
OCT Muscat 167-1 in 20 overs (Majid Hussein Doshambah al Balushi 64 (59b, 2x4, 1x6), Muzaffar Shiralkar 62 (45b, 7x4, 2x6); Muhammed Nadim 1-37) beat OCT Al Mabela 108 all out in 18.4 overs (Nabeel Mohd Boota 24 (13b, 1x4, 2x6); Rashad al Balushi 4-14) by 59 runs
OCT Al Hail 'A' 162-5 in 20 overs (Waleed Rahim al Balushi 68 (56b, 3x4, 1x6), Faris Said al Zadjali 31 (18b, 6x4); Mohammed Othman 1-11) beat OCT Seeb 117-9 in 20 overs (Samir Othman 27 (23b, 1x4, 1x6); Suhaib Abdul Ghani al Balushi 2-20) by 45 runs.

Naima named OBA women’s team coach

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) has signed Iranian coach Naima El Sadat to lead the women’s team during the next stage.

The signing of the contract came in the presence of Dr Ali bin Salam al Yarubi, OBA Vice-Chairman, and Rabie bin Saeed Awlad Thani, OBA Secretary-General.

Naima, a former coach of Qatar, has a good experience in coaching. She will supervise the women’s basketball team until the end of next May, and this includes preparing for the team’s participation in the triple basketball championship in Kuwait in the third GCC Games.

Naima expressed her happiness to work with the OBA, explaining that she began working in the association as a specialist, confirming her readiness to lead the team during the next stage.

“We had developed an appropriate plan to develop women’s basketball in the Sultanate of Oman to participate in the Gulf Games in Kuwait,” she said.

The Iran coach said the tri-basketball is the easiest game in the Sultanate of Oman compared to five-a-side basketball, which



requires more players in addition to more preparation period.

“At this moment, the time is insufficient to prepare for a five-a-side basketball event, given that the tournament will be held in less than two months from now.”

“We will give our best in the GCC tournament. We will prepare well to give challenge to other teams,” Naima added.

The women’s team is currently training on a daily basis at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

After the end of Ramadan, there will be a closed camp in which some teams will be hosted to play friendly matches with the tri-basket teams before travelling to Kuwait.

Oman are likely to play preparation matches with Iran and Turkey, in addition to some local teams.

SCHEFFLER WINS FIRST MAJOR

AUGUSTA, UNITED STATES: Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler captured his first major title on Sunday by winning the Masters in dominating fashion, holding firm down the stretch to seize the green jacket after Tiger Woods completed his comeback from severe leg injuries.

Scheffler fired a final-round one-under-par 71 to finish 72 holes on 10-under 278 and defeat four-time major winner Rory McIlroy by three strokes with Australian Cameron Smith and Ireland’s Shane Lowry sharing third on 283. “It was a long day, a tough day for me,” Scheffler said. “I just tried to keep my head down and execute my shots.”

Scheffler, who only won his first PGA title in February, holed a spectacular chip-in birdie from 87 feet at the par-4 third to blunt an early charge by Smith, last month’s Players Championship winner.

“It was not a shot I expected to see go in but it got things off and rolling for me,” Scheffler said.

He also birdied the 14th and sank a 14-foot birdie putt at the par-5 15th to signal there would be no collapse to open a door for McIlroy, chasing an Augusta National win to complete a career Grand Slam. Scheffler endured an agonising double bogey at the 18th hole, needing three putts from inside five feet before finally sinking the putt to secure his breakthrough major triumph. “I didn’t want to

break my concentration,” Scheffler said. “The minute I did was on 18 green when I finally got on there and I had a five-shot lead and was like, ‘All right, now I can enjoy this.’ And you saw the results of that.”

The 25-year-old American took a \$2.7 million top prize from a \$15 million purse and joined 1991 Masters champion Ian Woosnam as the only players to win majors in their debut events as world number one.

NO 1 CLUB

Scheffler is only the fifth player to win the Masters while atop the rankings, joining Welshman Woosnam and Americans Fred Couples, Dustin Johnson and Woods, whose injury fightback dominated attention all week.

Spectators gave Woods a standing ovation at the 18th green for his astonishing return to golf 14 months after a car crash that left him hospitalised for weeks and unable to walk for months.

“I wasn’t playing my best but to have their support out there, I don’t think words can describe it,” Woods said.

The 15-time major winner fired weekend 78s, his worst Masters rounds, to finish with his highest Augusta National 72-hole score of 301 and in a worst-ever 47th place.

“It has been a tough road and one that I’m very thankful to have the opportunity to be able to grind through,” Woods said. — AFP



رمضان
فيه الخير
ينساب

AS'SIR CONTEST

إذاعة سلطنة عمان

2 Toyota Yaris, 2022
YM, S/D 1.5 Classic

VALUABLE
PRIZES
UP TO RO
35000



For participation
90458
Send to SMS

Presented by
Nada Al Balushi

MCT 13:00

Comes through General Radio & Shabab Radio

@ShababRadioOman

@GeneralRadio

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
4,241.196



CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$ 97.42
Brent Crude \$ 100.51
Light Crude \$ 95.88



Follow us on
omanobserver.om/business



DRIVE THE CAR OF YOUR DREAMS

with Maisarah Auto Finance

Offer is valid till 31 December 2022 and is applicable for new, additional finances. Not valid for takeover of auto finance from other banks.

For more information, please scan the QR code



Competitive profit rates starting from 4.95%



Trust in Privacy

Vision to create investment-enabled environment

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion reviewed, during the annual media meeting on Monday, its executive work plan entitled “Enhanced and Enabled Environment” for 2022, encompassing important projects, programmes, initiatives and targeted investment sectors that contribute to the development of the national economy.

The ministry also announced a package of initiatives for the current year in the commercial, industrial and investment sectors, competition protection, anti-monopoly, and initiatives in the investment promotion sector, metrology standards to enhance the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman, raise business competitiveness by providing the necessary facilities and raise the level of services provided, and empower and stimulate the private sector.

It also outlined strategies to support economic growth, and to work in integration with partners to develop a business environment that supports the knowledge economy, promotes trade, industry, investment, and protects competition. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry



and Investment Promotion, said in his speech that the achievement rate with regard to the delivery of 17 initiatives implemented by the ministry during 2021 was around 100 per cent, despite the many challenges that the national economy and the global economy in general have gone through.

He stressed that the ministry seeks to strengthen the partnership between the public and private sectors, indicating that the private sector, including businessmen and local and foreign investors alike in various sectors, has a major and pivotal role in stimulating economic growth and providing job opportunities.

The ministry also announced a package of initiatives for the current year in the commercial, industrial and investment sectors, competition protection, anti-monopoly, and initiatives in the investment promotion sector, metrology standards to enhance the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman, raise business competitiveness by providing the necessary facilities and raise the level of services provided, and empower and stimulate the private sector.

Partnerships

Al Yousuf called for the establishment of partnerships that contribute to increasing the rates of trade exchange with brotherly and friendly countries and joint investments, stressing that small

and medium enterprises are the backbone of the economy and the private sector.

He indicated that the ministry, in cooperation with various government agencies, launched a number of investment

opportunities in the industrial sector during the past year and early this year, urging the private sector to use these opportunities to develop business, find new partnerships, and gain knowledge and experience in order to support economic diversification sectors.

The Investor Residency programme launched by the ministry last year will be further enhanced during the coming period to help attract quality international investors into the Sultanate of Oman.

He also underlined the importance of Omani national products, noting efforts to promote such products locally

and internationally. To this end, the ministry has put in place initiatives to improve and develop specifications and standards.

Additionally, the ministry seeks to work in integration with its partners to develop a business environment that supports the knowledge economy, enhances trade, industry and investment, and protects competition through stimulating policies and legislation, and integrated services with the smart government system to achieve sustainable development in the Sultanate of Oman, he said.

Further, the government ready to invest in order to complete the infrastructure, road network, ports and airports, the latest of which was the opening of the new road link with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, he said. To enhance the country's investment appeal, an economic stimulus plan has been launched.

It includes tax exemptions for five years from rents in industrial and free zones, in addition to foreign ownership.

The ‘Invest Easy’ portal, he said, serves as a one stop-shop for all investors’ needs, he said. The portal contributed to achieving a growth in the volume of foreign direct investment (FDI) by 7 per cent and an increase in the number of new records by 44 per cent from 2020 to 2021.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Investment Residency Visas net RO 106m in investments

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

Investments garnered through the Investment Residency Visa programme launched

with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) amounted to over RO 106 million to date, according to Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion.

Speaking at the media forum on Monday, she noted that a total of 270 investor residence cards have so far been issued to investors of a number of nationalities. According to Sajda bint Rashid al Ghaithiyah, Director of the Communication and Information Department, use of the Invest Easy portal for various transactions surged 185 per cent in 2021 compared with figures for 2020.

The “Invest in Oman” platform, which showcases information on new investment opportunities, has continued to

perform a commendable role, she said. Information on a total of 72 investment opportunities can

be viewed on this platform, she noted.

Further, with a view to enhance the overall

functionality and appeal of the Invest Easy portal, the ministry plans to enable the facility to handle a wider variety of commercial transactions in the different governorates of the country.

For the first time, the electronic contract documentation service feature offered via the Invest Easy portal will enable the seller and buyer in a transaction to sign contracts electronically from wherever they are based.

The facility comes with a comprehensive guide that explains the procedures, links them with detailed steps and explains the applicable fees.

As many as 184 services offered by the different departments of the ministry can now be accessed via the Invest Easy portal.



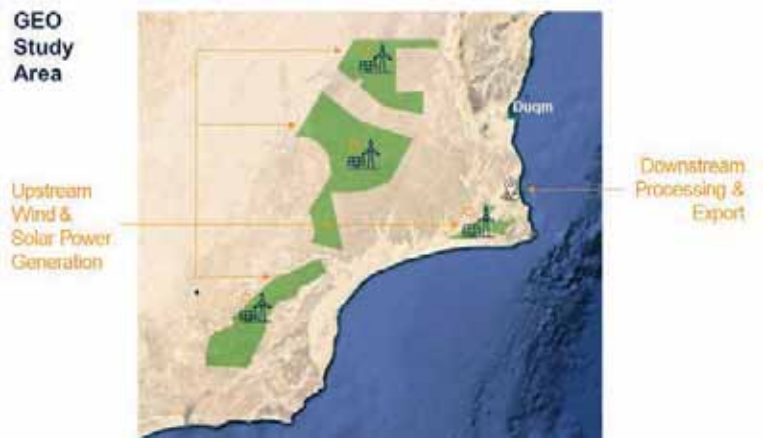
DNV expertise tapped for Green Energy Oman project

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

DNV, leading global testing, certification and technical services specialist, has been roped in to assist in the development of Green Energy Oman (GEO) – the integrated green fuels mega project in the Sultanate of Oman.

An international consortium comprising OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman; InterContinental Energy – the leading dedicated green fuels developer; and EnerTech – a Kuwaiti government backed clean energy investor and developer; is investing in the giant scheme planned in Al Wusta Governorate.

DNV joins a slate of reputable service providers that have been tapped by the consortium to help prepare the ground for the implementation of the project consisting of around 25



gigawatts (GW) of renewable solar and wind capacity that will produce over 1.8 million tons per annum of zero-carbon green hydrogen.

Norway-headquartered DNV has been selected to undertake the ‘Energy Yield Assessment’ for the GEO project.

It entails “refining the output available from the world-class wind and solar resource found across the Al Wusta Governorate,” where the upstream components of the

massive project will be located.

Part of the data for this assessment will come from 140-metre tall meteorological masts that have been installed across the site since 2019, aimed at providing the consortium with a “significant understanding of site issues and opportunities”, the GEO consortium said in a press statement.

Earlier, Australian-based international engineering services firm Worley Group was contracted to undertake

the overall feasibility study for the project. As part of its remit, Worley will further develop the project defined by the consortium, optimise the wind and solar generation, the transfer and transformation of this energy through electrolysis into hydrogen, and ultimately the production, storage and export of ammonia.

Local Omani consultancy firm HMR, a leading provider of environmental, engineering and technology consulting services, has also been awarded a contract to conduct a comprehensive Environment & Social Impact Assessment for the project.

HMR will be leveraging its two decades of experience in the Sultanate of Oman to provide “critical support” to the venture, given that the scale of the project “requires a close focus on local issues and impacts, to ensure that the benefits the project will bring are fully realized,” said the consortium partners.

Maisarah offers 3.45% profit rate on auto finance in Ramadhan

MUSCAT: Continuing the constant efforts to further enrich its customers' experience with tailored financial solutions, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services has unveiled an exclusive Ramadhan offer with attractive profit rates on its auto finance.

Elaborating on the Ramadhan exclusive offer, Mohammed bin Ahmed al Maashani (**pictured**) – Head of Distribution Network at Maisarah – said: “These profit rates start from 3.45 per cent and the offer is valid through May 31, 2022 to allow our customers to make the most of the deal and drive the vehicle of their dreams.”

As per terms and conditions, the offer is subject to salary assignment/ salary transfer to Maisarah, and it applies to employees of approved employers registered with Maisarah.

“We expect to see a high demand on this offer as it comes with competitive rates, simple steps, fast approval and easy documentation,” added Al Maashani, reaffirming BankDhofar's Islamic banking window's commitment to provide specifically designed financial solutions that meet the



specific needs of every individual customer.

Customers can avail these exclusive finance options at any of Maisarah's branches in Athaiba, Al Hail, Salalah, Suhar, Birkat Al Mouz, Muttrah, Al Khuwair, Sur, New Salalah and Araqi. To learn more, visit the nearest Maisarah Islamic Banking Services branch, check out the official page www.maisarah-oman.com or call 24775777 for further inquiries.

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

Lulu announces 4th draw winners of Shop and Win promotion

MUSCAT: Lulu has announced the fourth set of winners of its Shop and Win promotion, giving away RO 100,000 worth of cash prizes. The promotion, which kicked off on 6, 2022 at the Lulu Hypermarket, Barka. The fourth draw saw Shafeeqa bint Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Amriyah win a cash prize of RO 5,000 and Nisar Hassan took home RO 750. Sayyed Mehsam, Aboobacker E and Yousuf al Wahaibi won RO 500 each.

Ten winners won RO200 and twenty others won RO100 each. To be part of the promotion, customers have to spend RO 10 at any Lulu stores and register for the e-Raffle draws. The online shoppers are registered automatically for every shopping worth RO 10. 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.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director - Lulu Hypermarkets Oman stated “I congratulate the fourth set of winners of our Shop and Win promotion. We have launched this promotion to coincide with



Ramadhan and Eid so as to make this season more valuable and enjoyable for our customers. We are glad that it has received a very positive response till date.”

“Lulu has always remained at the forefront for offering meaningful deals and discounts that meet consumer needs. As part of Ramadhan and Eid shopping, Lulu has also launched special deals, promotions and offers both for offline and online shoppers. Customers can also find

Special Ramadhan Family Packs with all the essential grocery items being offered at the lowest prices. Customers can also check out the daily deals in our online shopping apps, which will make shopping more convenient for them,” he added.

Lulu has always set its focus on delivering joy to its customers in every season and for every celebration. The Shop and Win promotion has attracted huge number of customers as it not

only gives them a chance to win cash prizes but also provides them with a quality shopping experience during this Ramadhan and Eid shopping season.

All Lulu malls are designed and tailored to offer a completely satisfying experience to attract hordes of visitors everyday. With 29 stores spread across in Oman, Lulu is certainly the most preferred shopping destination for the multi-ethnic communities of the Sultanate of Oman.

Attractive offers on confidence-inspiring performer Nissan Sunny

MUSCAT: Confirming its commitment of offering customers an unmatched buying experience, Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), is offering a wide range of deals for the patrons of Nissan Sunny.

As part of the special scheme, Nissan Oman is offering free periodic vehicle service package, free insurance, assured gift voucher, free registration and many more on Nissan Sunny.

Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. The offer will be available till May 19, 2022.

A spokesperson for Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, “Nissan Sunny stands out



for its wide range of innovation, reliability and versatility. It is the perfect car for customers looking for a sophisticated driving experience. The car continues to be a popular choice amongst customers in the segment because of its outstanding design, intelligent technology and remarkable performance.”

Customers can avail starting EMI of RO 59 on Nissan Sunny 1.5L and of RO 69 on Nissan Sunny 1.6L. These starting

EMIs are calculated on the price of the base model with 20 per cent down payment for 10 years loan tenure through Bank Muscat. Subject to credit approvals. Conditions apply.

All customers purchasing Nissan Sunny during this scheme period are eligible for free periodic maintenance service package for three years / 60,000 kms (whichever is earlier), limited to six services only. This offer includes only the service intervals of 10,000 kms.

Bank Muscat's Contact Centre enhances customer experience

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision of “Serving you better, everyday”, Bank Muscat offers a large range of services through its Contact Centre, which is an important channel of communication for customers to get in touch with the bank whenever the need arises.

As part of its customer-centric strategy, Bank Muscat operates the largest Contact Centre in the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman, which is manned by a team of competent and highly-trained Omani phone bankers 24/7 throughout the year.

The Contact Centre uses an intuitive Integrated Voice Response (IVR) system to respond to about 64 per cent of the incoming calls, with phone bankers handling more complex queries and providing detailed clarifications to customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Talal bin Abdulhameed al Zadjali (**pictured**), Deputy General Manager – Operations, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat's



Contact Centre is a vital link between our valued customers and the bank and provides various banking services around the clock, seven days a week and with a minimal waiting period.

It is one of the most important Contact Centres in the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector and I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the Contact Centre employees for their dedication and efforts to ensure the continuation of the bank's customer-centric vision.

This is especially important at a time when Contact Centre services and other digital channels

are playing a major role in helping ensure business continuity and provide a convenient and alternate banking channel for all.”

Talal al Zadjali added that the bank would keep on enhancing the role of the centre by attracting qualified and talented Omani cadres, and by continually upgrading it with the latest equipment and advanced technologies in the future too.

This will help Bank Muscat keep pace with all the latest telecommunications developments and further enhance the quality of services provided. The language options available for customers include Arabic, English and Hindi.

It is a matter of great pride that the Contact Centre provides services with minimal waiting time even though it handles as many as 5.45 million calls annually. More than 85 per cent of the calls are answered within 30 seconds and all calls are recorded for Quality and Training purposes.

Sohar International shareholders approve 4% dividend

MUSCAT: Sohar International recently held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) for the shareholders on March 31, 2022. The meeting was presided over by Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board, and attended by Board members, Executive Management team of Sohar International and shareholders.

The shareholders were briefed on the bank's performance in 2021 along with discussions on other

agenda items that covered 15 main items starting with the review and approval of the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended December 31, 2021.

The Annual General Meeting also discussed and approved the distribution of cash dividends to shareholders at the rate of 4 baisas per share. The shareholders also appointed a new Board of seven members. The meeting was held at the Mandolon Hall, Crown Plaza Hotel – Muscat and also was



streamed online via the electronic general meeting platform of the Muscat Clearing and Depository

(MCD).

Commenting on the bank's overall performance, Mohammed

bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, who was reappointed as a director and a Chairman of Sohar International's Board, said: “Year 2021 witnessed Sohar International continue on its growth trajectory, demonstrating institutional strength and resilience as it entered a new phase of excellence paving way for the organisation to reach new heights. We continue to deliver on multiple fronts, contributing to the country's progress, supporting the larger community in which

we operate, creating shareholder value and being an employer of choice.

The financial results for year 2021 are a testament of the compelling value propositions offered by Sohar International and the progress we have been making on our strategic agenda towards realising our vision of becoming a world-leading Omani service company that helps customers, communities and people to prosper and grow.”



Oman a promising market for EV and hydrogen-powered cars

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

As with much of the rest of the world, the Sultanate of Oman is working with a lot of passion to advance renewables as part of a broader effort to mitigate risks stemming from global warming.

Also contributing to this goal are electric cars with the Sultanate of Oman having recently marked the launch of a locally designed and crafted Electric Vehicle (EV) — a development that augurs well for the growth of an EV sector in the country.

According to Jota Yamamoto (pictured), Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman, a stronger uptake of electric cars — and potentially hydrogen-powered cars in the future — will necessitate investments in support infrastructure, notably charging stations for EVs and refueling stations for hydrogen vehicles.

“Electric Vehicles and hydrogen-powered vehicles will depend upon infrastructures in Oman: i.e., to which extent charge/fuel stations, energy production facilities and supplying networks may be ensured in Oman. This requires a comprehensive social approach, thus public-private collaboration is critical. I wish that the newly announced Omani-made EV will further motivate this necessary development of infrastructures”, he said.

Japan, a world-leader



Ambassador Yamamoto.

“Indeed, I can be optimistic, as the total number of registered vehicles has gradually restored since March 2021, and we have somehow overcome pandemic-related difficulties in supply chains and logistics. This may facilitate the return to normality and a further recovery of the entire economy”, he noted.

“At the same time, a sense of caution may still be necessary not because of Covid-19, but because the recent incident has given us new challenges. For car manufacturers keeping global supply and logistical chain, the current circumstances may be volatile, and make their network fragile”, the Ambassador added.

Industry experts point out

in automotive production, is investing majorly in EV and hydrogen-powered transportation solutions.

In remarks to the *Observer*, the Ambassador voiced hope that global supply chain challenges that had severely impacted a number of key economic sectors, including automotive production, would be fully addressed. “I am cautiously optimistic”, said

that many of the world’s leading car manufacturers have had their production lines affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Production had been reduced due to lockdowns and pandemic-related precautions, as well as disruptions in the logistics sector. These logistical disruptions have caused companies around the world and in all sectors to suffer.

A report in the *Financial Times* warns that lingering delays caused by the pandemic will likely continue during 2022. In particular, small companies are struggling to secure space on container ships to maintain the movement of production and sales, while still directing the pressure of cash flow fuelled by the rapid pace of rising freight rates.

Oil market sinks on China demand fears

LONDON: Oil sank on Monday on Chinese demand fears, the recent release of strategic reserves, and dimming hope of a European embargo on Russian supplies in the wake of the Ukraine war.

In afternoon deals, US benchmark oil West Texas Intermediate dived as low as \$95.55 per barrel and Brent hit \$100.51.

“It is above all the bad news from China that is weighing on prices, as the number of Covid cases continues to surge,” said Commerzbank analyst Barbara Lambrecht. “The lockdowns that are slowing oil demand in the world’s second-largest consumer country threaten to persist for even longer.”

Shanghai eased restrictions on some neighbourhoods on Monday after mounting outcry over China’s inflexible Covid-19 rules that locked down 25 million people and sparked fears over energy demand.

Rich countries will meanwhile tap an additional 120 million barrels of oil from emergency reserves in a bid to calm prices that had soared on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the International Energy Agency said last week. The move included Washington’s recent



A gas station attendant pumps fuel into a customer’s car at a gas station in Shanghai. — AFP

announcement of the release of 60 million barrels.

“Oil prices are heading lower as traders continue weighing up the strategic reserves releases and cooling demand in China,” added City Index Fiona Cincotta on Monday.

“The steady drip of ... reserves is going some way to calming supply fears and plugging some of the Russian supply absent from the market.”

Kyiv wants the European Union to agree sanctions on Russian oil and gas in retaliation for Moscow’s attack on Ukraine. Such a move could send prices rebounding higher from current price levels, analysts warn. “Oil is likely to settle around these levels, unless of course the EU decides to ban Russian oil imports,” Cincotta said. “That would be catalyst to send oil prices higher soaring once again.” — **Reuters**

US Fed to raise rates aggressively in coming months



A man rides a bike in front of the Federal Reserve Board building on Constitution Avenue in Washington. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve is expected to deliver two back-to-back half-point interest rate hikes in May and June to tackle runaway inflation, according to economists polled by Reuters who also say the probability of a recession next year is 40%.

With the unemployment rate near a record low, inflation the highest in four decades and a surge in global commodity prices set to persist, most analysts say the Fed needs to move quickly to keep price pressures under control. The latest April 4-8 Reuters poll of more than 100 economists forecast two half-point rate rises this year, the first such move since 1994, taking the federal funds rate to 1.25%-1.50% by the June meeting.

That brings the end-year prediction from a March poll at least three months forward,

and more in line with interest rate futures pricing.

A strong majority, or 85 of 102 economists, forecast 50 basis points in May, and a still-solid majority of 56 said the Fed would follow-up with 50 basis points as well in June. “Given the shift in official commentary and with inflation pressures visible throughout the economy, we believe the Fed will deliver half-point interest rate increases at the May, June and July policy meetings”, said James Knightley, Chief International Economist at ING.

While the central bank is likely to gear down to quarter-point moves in the second half of this year, the federal funds rate is now expected to end 2022 at 2.00%-2.25%, 50 basis points higher than the median forecast in a poll taken last month. — **Reuters**

Vision to create investment-enabled environment

FROM PAGE 13

Multiple initiatives

Giving a sector-wise breakdown of initiatives planned by the ministry, Al Yousuf said the commercial sector will be promoted through six initiatives, the most prominent being the National E-Commerce Plan. As part of this initiative, the ministry will encourage the adoption of international best practices related to e-commerce.

A new regulatory framework is envisioned for e-commerce aimed at protecting the interests of consumers.

The industrial sector features nine initiatives, including one that features the launch of 50 new industrial investment opportunities to help drive economic diversification in the industrial sector. It seeks to pinpoint opportunities within promising industries as proposed by the Industrial Strategy 2040.

The underlying goal is to support the growth of added-value manufacturing activities, create jobs for Omanis, and drive FDI inflows into the country.

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry are jointly pursuing an initiative to enable speedy electronic issuances of the Arab certificate of origin with the aim of facilitating and framing the issuance of certificates of origin electronically by activating the rules of origin in agreements concluded with countries, enabling national products to be exported, and maximising the return from various economic agreements with countries and



economic groups around the world.

In line with investment promotion efforts, a total of six initiatives are planned. The most prominent is the ‘Global Promotion’ initiative, which aims to promote the Sultanate of Oman as the best global destination for investment and increase the global market share of non-oil products of Omani origin. The initiative will contribute to raising the promotion rate to 80 per cent of the plan implemented throughout the world.

Likewise, the digital infrastructure of the Invest in Oman platform will be suitably developed to enable the provision of electronic

services, present investment opportunities available in various sectors, provide information and data related to promoting the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman, and establish a platform that includes Omani products and services to introduce them and ensure their access to global markets.

The standards and metrology sector features seven initiatives, most notably one seeks to develop a compliance system in the Sultanate of Oman. The initiative aims to ensure product safety by creating an appropriate environment for building a quality infrastructure system in the Sultanate of Oman, encouraging foreign investment and ensuring

The industrial sector features nine initiatives, including one that features the launch of 50 new industrial investment opportunities to help drive economic diversification in the industrial sector.

consumer health and safety.

Omani Quality Mark

Similarly, the ministry plans to develop the Omani Quality Mark, which provides assurance of the quality and safety of a product. The initiative calls for the creation of an integrated system to raise the efficiency of facilities producing goods with standard specifications and technical regulations, reduce the number of complaints about traded products, increase local exports and reduce unhealthy products.

The Investment Services Centre includes 9 initiatives, the most prominent of which is the Fast Track programme.

The Centre for the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention has four initiatives. It includes a study of the Status of Competition in the Retail Sector.

Similarly, the National Product Promotion Programme contributes to increasing the volume of sales of Omani products, enhancing consumer awareness, promoting the products of small and medium enterprises, promoting Omani products and services locally and internationally, and giving priority to purchasing the Omani product by government and private agencies.

(With inputs from ONA)

Few cars, lots of customers: Why autos are an inflation risk

JEANNA SMIALIK

Corina Diehl is eager for more sedans and pickup trucks to sell her customers in and around the Pittsburgh area, but as the pandemic enters its third year, cars remain in short supply and the squeeze on inventory shows no sign of abating.

“If I could get 100 Toyotas today, I would sell 100 Toyotas today,” Diehl said. Instead, she said, she’s lucky to have three. “It’s the same with every brand I have.”

Dealerships like Diehl’s are wrestling with inventory shortages — the result of a dearth of computer chips, production disruptions and other supply-chain snarls. That’s not a problem just for car buyers, who are paying more; it’s also a problem for economic policymakers as they try to wrestle the fastest inflation in four decades under control.

Car prices have helped push inflation sharply higher over the past year and economists have been counting on them to level off and even decline in 2022, allowing the rising consumer price index to moderate markedly.

But it is increasingly unclear how much and how quickly car prices will slow their ascent, because of repeated setbacks that threaten to keep the market under pressure. While price increases are showing some early signs of slowing and used-car costs, in particular, are unlikely to climb at the same breakneck pace as last year, continued shortfalls of new vehicles could keep prices elevated — even rising — longer than many economists expected.

“We’ve stumbled into another pattern of a series of unfortunate events,” said Jonathan Smoke, chief economist at Cox Automotive, an industry consulting firm. Shutdowns meant to contain the coronavirus in China, computer chip factory disruptions tied to a recent earthquake in Japan, the after effects of the trucker strike in Canada and the war in Ukraine are adding up to slow production.

Smoke expects new-car prices to keep rising this year — perhaps even at nearly the same pace as last year — and used cars to begin to depreciate again but said the shortage of new cars could spill over to blunt that weakening. And used cars may not fall in price at all if rental companies begin to snap them up as they did in 2021.

“If the supply situation gets worse, it’s still possible that we repeat some of what we had last year,” he said.



Cars are loaded in Kansas City for transport to a dealership in Wichita, Kansas. — The New York Times

Smoke’s predictions — and worries — are more grim than what many economists are penciling into their forecasts.

Alan Detmeister, a senior economist at UBS and former chief of the Federal Reserve Board’s wages and prices section, said he expected a 15 per cent decline in used-car prices by the end of the year, with new-car prices falling 2.5 per cent to 3 per cent.

Those estimates are predicated on an increase in supply.

“This is a huge wild card in the forecast,” Detmeister said. But even if production doesn’t pick up, “it is extremely unlikely that we’ll see the kind of increases we saw last year,” he added, referring to prices.

Automakers are struggling to ramp up production. Russia’s attack on Ukraine has created shortages in electrical components needed for cars, prompting S&P Global Mobility to cut its 2022 and 2023 forecasts for US production. More critically, the chips needed to power everything from dashboards to diagnostics remain in short supply.

Ford Motor and General Motors temporarily shut down some US factories last week because of supply issues and the industry broadly cannot ship as many cars as customers want to buy.

In cars, “production remains below pre-pandemic levels and an expected sharp decline in prices has been repeatedly postponed,” Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, said during a speech last month. He noted that while supply-chain relief in general seemed likely to come over time, the timing and scope were uncertain.

Analysts had been hoping that chip shortages, in particular, would ease up, but “we’ve got at least another year, if not more,” for the supply chain to heal, said Chris Richard, a principal in the supply chain and network operations practice at consulting firm Deloitte.

While smaller electronics producers may be able to find enough semiconductors, he said, cars contain hundreds or even thousands of chips — often different kinds — and many auto companies do not have direct and close relationships with their providers.

Car buying could begin to slow as the Fed raises interest rates, making car loans more expensive, but so far there is little sign that is happening. In fact, demand has been so strong that automakers have been cracking down on dealers that charge above list price, threatening to withhold fresh inventory.

“I don’t see the prices subsiding. You

don’t need them to subside,” said Joseph McCabe at AutoForecast Solutions, an industry analyst, explaining that dealer costs are increasing and companies want to protect their profits. “Prices will go up, and there will be less negotiating space for consumers, because there’s high demand and no availability.”

McCabe does not think that car inventory will ever fully rebound: Dealers and automakers have learned that they make more money by effectively making cars to order and running with learner inventory. If that’s the case, the permanently restrained supply could have implications for the rental and used-car markets.

If car prices keep climbing briskly, it will be hard for inflation overall to moderate as much as economists expect — to around 4 per cent to 4.5 per cent as measured by the consumer price index by the end of the year, according to a Bloomberg survey, down from 7.9 per cent in February.

That’s because prices for services, which make up 60 per cent of the index, are also climbing robustly. They increased 4.8 per cent in the 12 months through February and could remain high or even continue to rise as labour shortages bite.

In cars, production remains below pre-pandemic levels, and an expected sharp decline in prices has been repeatedly postponed. While supply-chain relief in general seemed likely to come over time, the timing and scope were uncertain.

JEROME H. POWELL
CHAIRMAN, US FEDERAL RESERVE

Lockdowns in China block truck shipments, close factories

KEITH BRADSHAW

China’s mounting Covid-19 restrictions are creating further disruptions to global supply chains for consumer electronics, car parts and other goods.

A growing number of Chinese cities are requiring truck drivers to take daily Covid PCR tests before allowing them to cross municipal borders or are quarantining drivers deemed to be at risk of infection. The measures have limited how quickly drivers can move components among factories and goods from plants to ports.

Shanghai and other major Chinese cities have imposed lengthy, stringent lockdowns to try to control Covid outbreaks. Previous interruptions in the supply of goods from Chinese factories to buyers around the world mainly involved the temporary closure of shipping ports, including in Shenzhen in southeastern China in May and June last year and then near Shanghai last summer.

“The problem is not ships; it’s that there’s no cargo coming because there are no trucks,” said Jarrod Ward, the chief East Asia business development officer in the Shanghai office of Yusen Logistics, a large Japanese supply

Many factories have tried to stay open by having workers stay on site instead of going home. Employees have been sleeping on mats on the floor for as long as four weeks in some cities in northeastern China. Companies have been storing goods in nearby warehouses while waiting for normal truck traffic to resume.

chain management company.

The testing of truck drivers has been held up because some cities are doing mass testing of residents. Now, there is an acute shortage of truck drivers in Shanghai and in nearby cities like Kunshan, a centre of electronics production. Many electronics components manufacturers are shutting down in Kunshan.

“The key electronics suppliers to Apple, to Tesla, they’re all based there,” said Julie Gerdeman, CEO of Everstream, a supply chain risk management affiliate of DHL that is based in San Marcos, California.

Many factories have tried to stay open by having workers stay on site instead of going home. Employees have been sleeping on mats on the floor for as long as four weeks in some cities in northeastern China.

Companies have been storing goods in nearby warehouses while waiting for normal truck traffic to resume.

But as lockdowns stretch on in cities like Shanghai, Changchun and Shenyang, factories are starting to run out of materials to assemble. Some are sending their workers home until further notice.

Making car seats, for example, requires different springs, bolts and other materials. Ward said car seat

producers have run out of components. Volkswagen said the company closed a factory outside of Shanghai.

While Shanghai’s cases increase, its main rival in electronics manufacturing, Shenzhen, has emerged from lockdown. That is freeing workers and factories there to resume full-speed production.

Retailers and manufacturers in the West have tried to adapt to previous supply chain difficulties in China by switching from ships to airfreight, but airfreight rates have more than doubled from last year.

The near-total suspension of passenger flights in and out of Shanghai has roughly halved the airfreight capacity there, said Zvi Schreiber, CEO of Freightos, a freight booking platform.

The war in Ukraine is also starting to hurt the availability of Soviet-era Antonov freighters, Schreiber said. These workhorses of the airfreight industry have been kept going in recent years almost entirely by Ukrainian maintenance bases that are now closed.

For companies, any additional disruptions to the global supply chain would come at a particularly fraught moment, on top of rising prices for raw materials and shipping, along with extended delivery times and worker shortages.

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
Choose from a wide range of brands & models
PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت
ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Tally
POWER OF SIMPLICITY

TALLY FOR VAT

For Tally Sales, Services or Customization

Contact: Guruprasad +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@asiasolutions.net
ASIA SOLUTIONS

<https://www.asiasolutions.net>

TallyPrime

OMAN DAILY Observer Classified Section

TUESDAY APRIL 12, 2022 | RAMADHAN 10, 1443 AH

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

SIT VACANT

SALES Executive, male, with valid driving licence, 1-2 years experience in Oil and Gas industry. Contact: 93559800. Email: sangita@dhiyahilal.com

OFFICE Assistant, male, Contact: 93559800. Email: sangita@dhiyahilal.com

SIT. WANTED

21 YEARS of experience in Oman as an Accountant in different industries with 14 years of continuous service in a real estate company. Oman D/L and NOC available. Contact 92583726. Email: georgetvm@live.com

SIT. WANTED

FINANCE graduate, working in one of the finance company's in Oman with more than 15 years of experience is looking for a job. Contact: 99841436

INDIAN male graduate Executive Secretary/ Stenography/ Oman DL and Muscat experience available. Contact 79256679.

PREVIOUS Oman experience in Outdoor Sales & Operations looking for suitable job opportunity. Oman Driving Licence. Expected Salary 850/. 00918281058000 igin.tom@gmail.com

SERVICES

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers**. Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

AUTOCAD/ REVIT ARCH MEP, part/full-time. Contact WhatsApp: 79037728.

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

RENT A CAR

Buttercup Rent A Car
AMAZING OFFERS

- Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
- Rent for one month and get 5 days free.

All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts. ☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/ monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

FOR RENT

FLATS, 2BHK and 1 BHK in Mumtaz ☎99341138/ 90991079.

FLATS, 2BHK in Ghubra near Indian School. ☎99341138/ 90991079.

SITUATION VACANT SALES SECRETARY

Graduate with minimum 4 years of similar working experience, preferably at an executive level, aged around 30 years, thoroughly conversant with excel, word, power point and other packages, hardworking and having pleasant disposition, required by renowned Trading Company. Oman experience preferred.

Apply asap / within 5 days to :
venkat@bigllcoman.com / vimal@bigllcoman.com

M M T CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE

MUSCAT: 95605353, 95605454
BARKA: 95893242, 93743308
SOHAR: 96773031, 95347988
FALAJ: 94002341, 95136067
SALALAH: 94575905, 97858656
DUQU: 97218831, 94002341

ROAD, SEA & AIR TRANSPORT WORLD WIDE

GTC Building, Near Badr Al Sama Hospital, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
E-mail: mmctcargo@yahoo.com
Customer Care: 96773031 / 97695454

Sea Cargo 800 Bz/Kg Express Cargo to Kerala 5 to 7 days*

AL KHOORY EQUIPMENT EST.
P.O.Box 545, P.C. 117, Al Wadi Al Kabir Area, Sultanate of Oman

Official distributor of **Schneider Electric**

Stockist & Wholesaler of Low Voltage Switchgear Products and a One Stop Solution for all Switchgear Products and Assembly

Tel: +968 24832474, +968 79474556
E-mail: alkhooory@omantel.net.om • www.alkhooryoman.com

Quality Comes First

Tower Cranes & Passenger Lifts:

- Sales and Rental Services
- Installation
- Maintenance Service
- Breakdown Service
- Spare Parts Supply
- Hoist & Lowering
- Support Fixation
- Dismantling

Steel Fabrication Works

NEW MANARA TECHNICAL SERVICES LLC
Mobile: +968 9853 1975, 9853 1970
E-mail: info@newmanara.com / newmanaratechnical@gmail.com
Website: www.newmanara.com

VAT REGISTRATION, RETURN FILING, TAX CONSULTANCY
Contact: 9246 9602 / 9723 0025

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

Our Services

- KST Spare Parts
- Car Accessories
- KST Rent a Car

9478 2288

سماء الخضراء للتجارة
SAMA AL KHADRA TRADING

SERVICES:

- PIPING SYSTEMS
- VALVES
- DRAINS
- INTERCEPTORS

Tel: 24501568, 24502479 • Fax: 24503566
Email: sales@samaalkhadra.com
Website: www.samaalkhadratradingco.com

Al Eman Dental Clinic

Fiat 22, Floor 2
Abu Zaki Trading Building
Opp. Al Nahda Hospital
Sultan Qaboos Street

+968 24834113
+968 97454854
+968 98438854

Our Mission: To preserve your teeth and smile for a lifetime

د. نور باركات
أخصائية في الأمراض الجلدية والعلاجات التجميلية

DR. NORA BARAKAT MD, MS
DERMATOLOGY AND AESTHETICS MEDICINE SPECIALIST

CONSULTATION AVAILABLE
SAT TO WED 10AM TO 6PM
THU 9AM TO 2PM

CONTACT US
+968 24451726 - +968 79235354

EMERGENCY NO
+968 94602100

JOB SEEKING

Indian Male. 16 years working experience in senior position in finance and accounts in Oman. Able to work independently upto finalization, banking, tax matters etc...

GSM: 95392251
Mail ID : regi.lukose@gmail.com

SITUATION VACANT
Required for Ras Al Hamra Recreation Centre (PDO Club)

SWIMMING POOL LIFEGUARDS/ATTENDANTS (Male & Female) OMANIS ONLY

Qualification & Skills: Accomplished swimmer with recognized Life Saving and First Aid qualifications and certifications. Must be fluent in written & spoken English.

Experience: 2 years working as Life Guard & Pool Attendant.

Job Responsibilities: Supervise swimming activities, children and other weak swimmers and ensure pool and safety guidelines are followed. Must be willing to work shift duties and on weekends.

Note: A swimming test will be conducted to test the candidates swimming and rescue skills

Please email CV to: **oceanint@omantel.net.om**

SITUATION VACANT - OMAN
A well reputed diversified group in Oman is seeking the following positions for their Interior Fit-out division:

SALES MANAGER
5+ years experience in sales/ business development role in interior fitout & office furniture industry with a proven track record for growing sales.

SALES EXECUTIVE
3+ years experience in project sales of commercial furniture/ interior fitout.

INTERIOR DESIGNER
2+ years experience in designing commercial interiors. Well versed in Autocad, Photoshop & 3 D Max.

ASSISTANT PROJECT MANAGER
3+ years experience in Interior fit-out project execution and preferably with Civil Engineering background. The candidate must be familiar with joinery operations and estimation.

ESTIMATOR
5+ years experience in joinery, woodworks, and interior fit-out. Graduate/ Diploma in Engineering

All applicants must be well-versed in English, proficient in MS office and have good presentation skills. Applicants are requested to send their CVs with color photograph attached to: **recruitments007@gmail.com**

JOB SEEKING

General Manager. 16 Years Oman Experienced. Projects Executed in ROP, MODES, Government and Private Sectors.

Contact No. : 91123511

VIGAS CARGO
WORLD WIDE DOOR TO DOOR

Transportation, Packing & Cargo Services

- ♦ CARGO SERVICES BY AIR & SEA WORLD WIDE
- ♦ DOOR TO DOOR DELIVERY IN INDIA, INDONESIA & UK
- ♦ PROFESSIONAL PACKERS & MOVERS
- ♦ MUSCAT - DUBAI - MUSCAT REGULAR TRANSPORT

H.O. Ruwi
99851366
92495068

Ghubrah : 93571703
Falaj : 93571704
Store : 93571823
Misfa : 98119561
: 93260956

vigas.cargo@yahoo.com

OMAN DAILY Observer

For Advertisements
Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office
Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

Salalah Office
Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omanidaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office
Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suham Office
Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

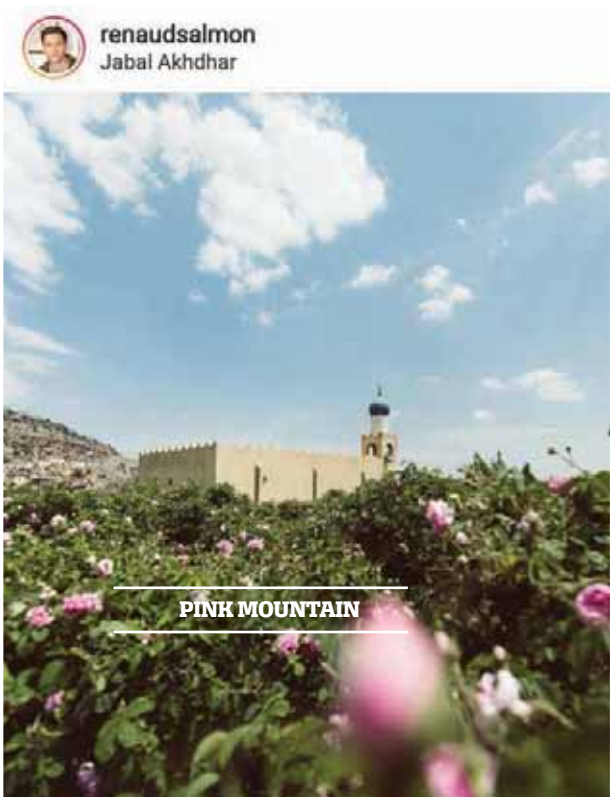
His Majesty Administers Oath to New Minister

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

NEW 50 BANQUET FROM THE MONTH

#Living_with_COVID19

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Brazil's first indigenous fashion show 'a form of resistance'



PROUDLY DONNING majestic feathered head-dresses, models sing an ode to the rain while a make-up artist draws geometric patterns on their faces, arms and thighs in preparation for Brazil's first-ever indigenous fashion show.

"It is a feeling of happiness and pride", 19-year-old model Moan Munduruku told AFP ahead of his turn on the catwalk in Manaus in the Brazilian Amazon.

"We are very eager to show our talent, in sewing, in crafts. To show the world that indigenous people can also succeed" in fashion, he said.

Moan is one of 37 models — women and men — representing 15 indigenous groups of Brazil to take part in the month-long Intercultural Exhibition of Indigenous Fashion in the Brazilian Amazon's largest city.

For the entire month of April, the catwalk is to host the creations of 29 indigenous designers.

"It's a form of resistance, a way to overcome stereotypes", event organiser Reby Ferreira, 27, told AFP.

"Here in Manaus, unfortunately, many people are ashamed or even afraid to recognise that they have indigenous blood. Our goal is for everyone to feel included and to show our culture to everyone through these clothes."

The designers use natural elements in their creations, including the spearlike teeth of the peccary — an Amazonian boar — the red guarana fruit, acai seeds and coconut shells.

The same geometric patterns sported by the models are repeated in the fabrics that envelop them. "My outfit evokes the (coming-of-age) ritual of the 'Ticuna girl'", said Kimpuramana, a 17-year-old model sporting a white dress adorned with black diagonal stripes.

On the runway, a presenter announces the ethnicity of each model and explains the symbolism behind the clothes and accessories they wear.

Saturday's show was hosted at the Rio Negro Palace, an early 20th century building that now serves as a cultural centre.

"I feel privileged to have been able to attend such an event in this place. We are generally excluded from such sites. Today I can see my people telling their story through fashion", said participant Bianca Mura, 24.

As the models walked down the catwalk to appreciative applause, thousands of indigenous Brazilians gathered in the capital Brasilia some 3,500 kilometres (2,175 miles) away, for an annual mass camping event called Terra Livre (Free Land).

The gathering is both a rally for indigenous rights and a protest against the government of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who is in favour of opening indigenous reserves — already hard hit by deforestation — to mining and farming companies. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

The struggle to save Cuban sugar from bitter end



A WHISTLE reverberates through a sugar factory in central Cuba to signal the resumption of milling at mid-day after an hours-long halt when the raw cane ran out.

It is cane harvest time in Cuba — once the world's top sugar exporter but now reliant on imports.

A critical shortage of harvesters and trucks to deliver the cane to factories has hamstrung production even as the government scrambles to revive the once-vibrant industry.

Cuba's 2020-21 harvest yielded 800,000 tonnes of the sweet stuff, according to official figures.

This was just 10 per cent of peak production some three decades ago and the worst outcome in 130 years for an industry that was once Cuba's economic motor and a huge source of national pride.

"This is a war without end", Lazaro Manuel Torres, boss of the Antonio Sanchez mill in Cuba's central Cienfuegos province, told AFP.

"From the moment you wake up, you run into a mountain" of problems, said Torres, watching with obvious relief as a column of white smoke billowed from the chimney after the restart.

JUST 56 MILLS LEFT

Until 1989, Cuba was the world's biggest sugar exporter. The United States was its major client until 1960 — two years before Washington imposed crippling sanctions on the communist island nation.

The Soviet Union, a political ally, then became an important buyer and was given preferential rates.

Sugar was at the heart of Cuba's plans for a prosperous future, with Fidel Castro leading a drive in the 1970s — complete with propaganda photos of him wielding a machete in the sugar plantations — to push the country's output to 10 million tonnes per year.

The goal was never achieved.

The fall of the communist bloc in 1991 marked the beginning of the end for Cuba's sugar industry — exacerbated by sanctions, a steep drop in prices and a lack of investment that saw 100 mills disappear.

Just 56 are left today.

Cuba now needs to import sugar to meet local demand and its export commitments.

"We have been in decline since 2017", Noel Casanas, Vice Director of state-owned sugar producer AZCUBA, told AFP.

"If the situation continues, it is true that (the industry) will disappear."

Sugar is still an important income generator for 50 of Cuba's 169 municipalities, or some 1.2 million of the country's 11.2 million inhabitants, he said.

'PRACTICALLY A CORPSE'

In December, the government approved dozens of measures in a bid to resuscitate sugar.

It doubled the price paid to cane producers, authorised the free hiring and firing of labour, and gave factories more decision-making autonomy in a country where just about everything is state-run.

"I don't think these measures can revive an industry that is already practically a corpse", said economist Emilio

Morales of the Miami-based Havana Consulting Group.

Casanas conceded production faces "limitations of all kinds" — critically a lack of foreign investment due to the strengthening of US sanctions since the presidency of Donald Trump.

Since the cane harvest opened in December, Antonio Sanchez has not managed to exceed 65 per cent of milling capacity, set at 20,000 tonnes for this year's harvest.

The problem has not been a lack of fuel or raw product, this time, but a shortage of harvesters and delivery trucks.

There are not enough spare parts, even tires, for vehicles in Cuba and producers such as Torres cannot afford to buy the limited components that are available.

"If you don't have harvesters, if you do not have trucks, you cannot mill", he lamented.

Sugar producers in Cuba are also hard hit by a lack of fertilisers and pesticides.

For now, the government's measures have managed to slow an exodus of sugar workers, industry bosses told AFP.

"We cannot complain, we are doing quite well — up to 700 pesos (about \$29) a day", said farmer Livan Hernandez.

The average monthly Cuban salary is about \$162.

Casanas said what is needed is foreign investment and expanding the industry into highly lucrative sugar derivatives such as bioethanol.

Sugar "is no longer the locomotive (of the Cuban economy) nor will it be", he said.

But "it continues to be a strategic sector... that must be developed." — AFP

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

Honey flowing from Ibri

The following is an English translation of an excerpt from "A Soldier from Oman: Memory's Nectar" by (ret.) Inspector-General Said bin Rashid Al Kalbani

THE BARGHASH TREE

An important feature of Miskan is the Barghis Tree. "Barghis", as an epithet, has persisted through generations, albeit with no clear understanding as to how the tree was selected and who it was named after. I have been told by the ret. Brig Gen Ibrahim bin Saliyam al Kalbani that he stumbled upon a book in a library in the UK. Its English author asserts that he was in the company of HH Barghash when he visited Miskan. Hospitable as they were, the Miskan people received him with all manner of meat and honey. On his departure, HH Barghash got his robe entangled in the tree, thus it became to be named after him. Nonetheless, we don't know for sure who exactly Barghash was.

This tree is where we learnt the Quran. Nowadays people get-together under the tree, in its shadow, for social occasions such as paying condolences. (A mosque has been built there recently).

HISTORIC OCCASION

Less than four years after late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos ascended the throne, he visited Miskan on his way from Al Khabourah to Ibri. Historic occasion as it was, everybody from the area, the elders, the children and the women, headed by the tribal leaders of Bani Kalban from Miskan, Maqniyaat, Aridh and Najed jubilantly flocked to see HM.

Though away in Britain on work, I was overjoyed. What made me all the more ecstatic was what I heard. When the guard began to take positions in and around the mountains, HM told them, "Relax; it's safe here".

Many people heard him say this, and it was emphasised further to me by the ret. Brig Gen Yusuf bin Khalfan al Busaidy from the Royal Guard, who was in HM's company. He also said that HM had kahwa (l) and conversation under the Barghash tree. Renewing their loyalty to HM, people received the royal words with jubilation. It was such a noble gesture from HM towards the Miskan people, who had wished and waited for the royal visit with eagerness.

HONEY FLOWS IN "YABT"

It would be no news to say that people in our village, like other Omanis, are particularly kind and hospitable. I remember Sayyid (2) Saud bin Harib al Busaidy (May God bless him) visiting Miskan on an official mission when he was the wali (3) of Ibri. He was accompanied by Shaikh (4) Hamad bin Saif al Kalbani, Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Yaqoobi and many others.

Upon finishing his official task, he was warmly welcomed in the then fertile Yabt valley by a number of people from Miskan and the neighbouring valleys. Traditional songs were sung, and a huge amount of meat and honey was served to him. Seeing the abundance of the honey, Shaikh Abdullah al Yaqoobi commented jokingly: "O God, you, the Miskan people, where do you bring so much honey from? From the wells?" There was so much honey that he thought it flowed like water.

The matter of fact is that there were no honey wells. It was but the hospitality of the Miskan people that made honey flow from Yabt and its neighbouring Wadi (5) Kabir. (The whole of the Hajar Mountain was famous for both the quality and the quantity of its honey).

People were generous not only to their guests, but also to their animals. They would dutifully feed them as and when they felt they were hungry or exhausted from long distance. Relieving the animals from the hardship of travel was a moral obligation upon their owners.

To be continued...

1 Traditional Arabic "bitter" coffee (the translator).
2 An Arabic word somewhat equivalent to "His Highness"; it is exclusively used in Oman for the members of ruling family (the translator).
3 An Arabic word equivalent to "governor" (the translator).
4 An Arabic word for the tribe leader or for any man who assumes social importance; it is also used sometimes for an old man as a form of respect (the translator).
5 "Wadi" is the Arabic word for "valley" (the translator).



Ramadhan

Local Scene

f t i y v @omanobserver

TUESDAY | APRIL 12 | 2022



5 Things We Love About Al Hamra's Bait al Safah

By Yeru Ebuén
Instagram: yru_here

The first time we visited Bait Al Safah, we already knew its potential as an amazing stopover to learn about Oman's culture and heritage. Back then, Oman has just started to realise that one of its best assets is its people and their unique way of living. If you're not aware of Bait Al Safah yet, it's one of the first living museums in the country that allows you proper interaction with the locals. It's a sustainably renovated mud house right at the edge of Al Hamra's lush gardens and what is amazing about this attraction is how everything is kept as they were that a visit to its many rooms is like entering a time capsule. It's one of those experiences that you would pay gladly to try because it brings you inside a traditional Omani home where many of its best-kept secrets are unveiled before your very eyes.

We've listed five things we love about the enhanced experiences offered by this remarkable destination.

THE KITCHEN

Everyone who has been in Bait Al Safah knows that the heart of this traditional house is the kitchen. This is one of the most revealing attractions in the house where Omani women demonstrate many of their day-to-day activities. Did you know that coffee is a neighbourhood affair? As per the house curators, the signal is sent through the loud metal grinding as the coffee is broken into powder. Aside from demonstrating how the traditional Omani coffee or kahwa is made, guests are also made to experience and sample the traditional Omani wheat bread. Included in the experience is the demonstration of how the wheat is turned into fine powder. An added bonus is a demonstration of how the moringa oil locally called al shue, used to cure different aches and diseases, is made.

THE MAJLIS

The majlis area is not only where guests are welcomed, it is also a place where important discussions about family and community affairs are discussed. In Bait Al Safah, it is where coffee is served to guests in perhaps, one of the airiest and breeziest parts of the house as there are numerous windows where light and air can come in. Wondering if there had been famous guests who visited the old house? The photos on the walls and the numerous clippings offer an insight not just into the generational changes that swept the area but also about important visits and features that Bait Al Safah had been a part of. Consider this as a living photo album and when you're at this part of the house, make sure to pay attention to details.

THE CHANGING ROOM

Bait Al Safah has over 10 rooms to explore. Located on the first floor, the changing room is where you would find several different garments for men and women

used by the villagers in the olden times. Did you know that traditional dresses for Al Hamra women used to be very bright and colourful and included elaborate embroidery? You can go through nearly a dozen dresses hanging on a makeshift cupboard to better understand how they dress and for which occasion while men's clothing almost has no variation to what is worn today. Other than the changing room, it's also insightful to check on the storage rooms where dates and other crops are stored. Always make sure to look up also as the markings on the ceilings also have their story and significance.

THE ROOF

My personal favourite among all the levels in Bait Al Safah is the rooftop. From the top, you will see how the neighbourhood is planned including where the line of traditional homes end and the lush gardens begin. It also offers an amazing 360-degree view of Al Hamra where you will see the peaks of the

surrounding mountains. The roof also offers an insight as to how light is brought to the lower levels of the house as well as how channels are made so air can ebb and flow and keep the inside relatively cooler.

THE GARDEN

While the garden is no longer exclusively part of Bait Al Safah, it has to be included on the list as, without it, the whole scenery would be totally different. The gardens surrounding Bait Al Safah now include a lot of different activities from horse-drawn carriages to donkey rides and even scooter exploration of the neighbourhood. Across Bait Al Safah is a currency museum that offers a look at a private collection of one of the villagers who lives in the area. A walk through the garden and into the neighbourhood of crumbling houses will allow one to reimagine the village at its peak when every alley is filled with villagers going through their day-to-day life tending after families and farms.