

Oman's Venice Biennale pavilion opens; tourism promotion drive launched



Our Correspondent
Muscat

H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, inaugurated the national pavilion of Oman at the 59th Venice Biennale in Italy - one of the most prestigious art festivals in the world - on Thursday.

Coinciding with the biennale, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) launched a promotion campaign that will continue till November.

Launched with an aim of promoting Oman as a safe tourist destination in the Italian market, the campaign makes use of public transport buses, water taxis as well as major sites like Venice Marco Polo Airport, Santa Lucia railway station and the Ponte degli Scalzi bridge.

Asma al Hajariya, assistant director general of tourism promotion in MHT, informed that Italy is one of the biggest source markets, within Europe, for visitors to Oman. Around 726,000 European travellers visited the sultanate in 2019.



'Money laundering in real estate needs monitoring'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has called for a review of the legislation governing real estate investments and protecting the sector from money laundering crimes.

In OCCI's Ramadan Nights event held last week to discuss money laundering and its repercussions on the real estate sector, Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of OCCI, said that money laundering is a crime that threatens global economies.

The discussion was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said, Chief of Protocol Department, Foreign Ministry.

"The crime of money laundering, which is the transfer of funds derived from the proceeds of crime with the aim of concealing and legitimising its illegal source, is threatening global economies," Saleh said.

"Funds obtained from money laundering represent a purchasing power that is not generated by real economic activity, and therefore it is a source of pressure on domestic prices and leads to inflationary pressures that threaten the future of economic and social development."

According to the OCCI chairman, the real estate sector is used by those involved in money laundering crimes. "This requires awareness of the methods used



OCCI's Ramadan Nights event held last week discussed money laundering and its repercussions on the real estate sector (Supplied photo)



Money laundering is a source of pressure on domestic prices and leads to inflationary pressures that threaten the future of economic and social development

REDHA AL SALEH

by money launderers to enter this vital sector, especially considering many countries grant residency to real estate investors."

Saleh stressed the need of reviewing the legislation governing real estate investments and securing the sector from these crimes. "OCCI plays a major role in addressing this crime through awareness-raising efforts and

emphasising caution and attention in dealings, before concluding foreign partnerships."

On his part, Salim bin Nasser al Busaidi, member of Public Prosecution, said the judicial authority has dealt with four crimes related to money laundering this year and 14 in 2021.

He informed that crimes of this nature decreased in the past two years owing to the COVID-

19 pandemic, the global financial crisis and a noticeable drop in economic movement.

"Oman has a strong anti-money laundering law. The sultanate also has several internal legislations and regulations that regulate the work of financial and non-financial institutions which are obliged to report all suspicions related to the crime of money laundering," said Busaidi.

Hassan bin Khamis al Ruqaishi, chairman of the Real Estate Development and Construction Committee of OCCI, said, "Money laundering in the real estate sector includes converting dirty money into clean money by buying real estate with this money even if it is twice its real price. Often these amounts are paid in cash."

Ruqaishi stressed the need to activate the real estate brokerage system established by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, intensify awareness by the concerned authorities, and create a partnership between real estate brokerage companies and the concerned authorities to curb the phenomenon of money laundering.

7 pacts inked to boost tourism in 3 governorates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is planning to develop several tourism projects in the governorates of Dhofar, Dakhliyah and North Sharqiyah. For this, the ministry signed seven usufruct agreements on Thursday to implement projects on government land affiliated with the ministry.

Under the agreements, a 4-star hotel will come up in the wilayat of Mirbat in Dhofar; a restaurant, a glass walkway, outdoor seating and a children's play area in Jabal Akhdar in Dakhliyah; and five tourist camps in the wilayat of Bidiyah in North Sharqiyah.

The agreements were signed by H E Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and officials of the companies that will develop the tourist amenities.

An MHT official informed that the agreements aim to enhance investment in the tourism sector and diversify sources of income. "The agreements will contribute to serving local communities by providing job opportunities, in addition to providing for the tourism sector's requirements for hotel rooms and tourist facilities."

H E Mahrouqi recently stated that the government aims to attract investments worth RO3bn by 2023 with the focus on developing public beaches in partnership with small and medium enterprises.

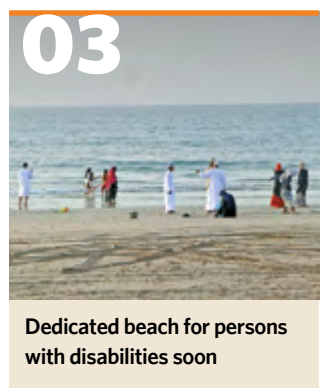


18 investment projects to be announced

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in co-operation with public and private sectors, will launch 18 investment opportunities in the tourism and waste management sectors on Sunday. These opportunities are in partnership with Muscat National Development and Investment Company, Omran Group, be'ah and Jabal Bausher Heights Real Estate Development Company.

The ministry has stated that that various facilities, such as zipline, will be added at tourist sites in Salalah, including in Atin Plain and Wadi Darbat, this winter.

The ministry is currently working on establishing several projects to attract tourists to achieve the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.



Project Hajar wins \$1mn for carbon removal from Elon Musk

London, UK - Project Hajar - a collaboration between UK-based Mission Zero Technologies (MZT) and Oman-based 44.01 - has been recognised among the top 15 teams in the US\$100mn XPRIZE Carbon Removal competition.

Each of the 15 milestone winning teams has been awarded US\$1mn to recognise their efforts to date and support their continued work to scale solutions. The competition is funded by entrepreneur Elon Musk and the Musk Foundation.

Project Hajar connects two complementary technologies to unlock gigatonnes of CO₂ removal in the Al Hajar mountains of Oman. The project, to be fully powered by renewables, com-



bines MZT's proprietary electrochemical direct air capture technology with 44.01's permanent sequestration capabilities via mineralisation in peridotite formations.

Under the project, CO₂ will be efficiently collected from the air and then transferred to peridotite underground - a mineral widely

studied for its CO₂ mineralisation potential and naturally abundant in Oman's geology. 'The natural weathering process is enhanced by the fastest mineral carbonation rates ever demonstrated in the field to deliver verifiable and permanent carbon removal,' stated a press release.

"In the wake of the Intergov-

ernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest assertion that carbon removal is now necessary to achieve our global climate goals, we are thrilled that Project Hajar has been identified by XPRIZE as a solution with the potential to scale and make meaningful impact," said Karan Khimji, co-founder and chief commercial

officer of 44.01. "The prize money will enable us to execute our vision for Project Hajar. The hard work starts now."

The first phase of Project Hajar expects an early-2024 commissioning date for a minimum 1000 tCO₂/year carbon removal operation with dedicated renewables on-site.

6,338 pilgrims to go on Hajj from Oman this year

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) has announced that Oman's quota for this year's Hajj is 6,338 pilgrims, a reduction of 45 per cent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

'The Permanent Hajj Committee met under the chairmanship of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, in which he reviewed the agreements and plans for Hajj affairs with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for this year's season - 1443 AH,' MARA stated.

The committee also discussed the preparations for this Hajj season.

Different food influences light up Mombasa during Ramadan

Shaddad al Musalmy
Muscat

Mombasa, the second largest city in Kenya with the highest Muslim population in the county, is far more vibrant during Ramadan. In a tradition passed on from generations, every day between 4pm and dusk, vendors line up in markets, selling a variety of coastal snacks at affordable prices.

In today's edition of the 'Ramadan around the world' series, we visit Mombasa. Its original Arabic name is Manbasa. In Kiswahili, it was called 'Kisiwa Cha Mvita', meaning 'Island of War' due to the many changes in its ownership. The majority of inhabitants are of Arab origin from Oman and Yemen, and from other Asian countries.

Interestingly, Swahili food has a lot of Arab and Indian influences. "The influence of coastal food is most evident during Ramadan when different food cultures come together. Most households break their fast with dates, water, packed potatoes, falafel and shurba, and then go for Maghrib prayers to return for the main meal," Halimabai Saleh Mohamed, Mombasa resident told *Muscat Daily* from her home.

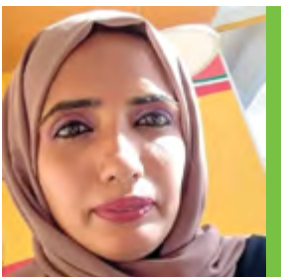
"The main meal consists mostly of mahammi (fried soft sweet bread) and mbaazi (pigeons beans) cooked in coconut milk. This is in addition to coconut fish curry and rice. We also have sweet preparations - like pumpkin, sweet potatoes and plantain - cooked in coconut milk," she added.

In Mombasa, traditional coastal dishes, such as muhogo wa nazi (cassava in coconut), mbaazi ya tuwi ya nazi and mahamri are popular. Each family has a favourite menu. The tradition is to mix salty and sweet preparations to complement each other.



RAMADAN AROUND THE WORLD

KENYA



After Taraweel, many head to the town centre where food vendors display various delicacies, including smoothies, barbecue items, desserts and cold juices. The outdoor location is full of ambiance; everyone looks forward to the food and Eid shopping

HALIMABAI SALEH MOHAMED

After iftar, some families go out for walks - called kushukisha uji - in an old tradition. Fasting all day and feasting in the evening causes discomfort in the stomach. Walks are advised to assist in

"We start preparations for iftar before noon on the main dishes and prepare for the snacks and dessert, if any, later. We go for noon prayers and then

head back to the kitchen an hour before iftar to make snacks, tea and arrange the table for iftar." Halimabai said.

"After iftar, we have a 90-minute break before Isha and Taraweeh

prayers. After Taraweeh, many head to the town centre where food vendors display various delicacies, including smoothies, barbecue items, desserts and cold juices. The outdoor location is full of ambiance and everyone looks forward not only to the food but also for Eid shopping. Shops are open till late night during Ramadan," she added.

Despite major changes in Mombasa, many traditions stay the same year after year passed on for generations. "What is unique in our country during Ramadan is that everyone tries to help the less privileged and orphans. We

also get more involved in good deeds like digging bore wells and building mosques by collecting funds. We also cater to those in need of daily iftar," Halimabai said.

"Another tradition still practised during Ramadan is that of sharing our iftar with friends, family and neighbours."

In the lead up to Ramadan, everyone gets busy getting essentials. People tend to stock up on groceries so they don't have to go shopping during Ramadan, although culturally, markets are always a popular meeting place.

 @shadadm

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah said, "Islam is to worship Allah without associating a partner with Him, to establish prayer, to give charity, to fast in the month of Ramadan, to perform pilgrimage to the House, to enjoin good and forbid evil, and to greet your people with peace. Whoever neglects anything from these has abandoned a part of Islam, and whoever neglects all of these has thrown Islam behind his back."

Abu Umamah reported: The Messenger of Allah said in his farewell sermon, "Fear Allah your Lord, pray your five prayers, fast in your month of Ramadan, give charity from your wealth, and obey those in authority over you. You will enter the Paradise of your Lord."

The hadiths highlighted here throw light on the status of the blessed month, its merits, rewards and special offers, as well as the Prophet's example in Ramadan.

OOMCO gives back through At'a campaign



Muscat - Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has launched its annual At'a charity campaign to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan by giving back to the community.

In its fifth year running, the campaign seeks to serve those in need with a range of different charitable and sustainable initiatives. Among its activities this year, the fuel marketing company has pledged support to Ihsaan Association by donating seven fuel cards for the association's ambulances, which offer a special

service transporting elderly patients and those with chronic diseases from their homes to hospitals.

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

"Since inception, Oman Oil

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

OOMCO's CSR strategy includes various campaigns and projects that run all through the year and are focused on promoting in-country value. Scholarships, SME support, raising vehicle safety awareness, and delivering education on renewable energy are just some of these. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company has also been active in its support with donations, as well as utilising its service station screens to air information and instructive videos from the Ministry of Health.

QUICK IFTAR DISH

Prepare in advance and serve delicious snacks for iftar in minutes. Try this:



Chicken Hariyali Tikka

Ingredients

500g chicken breasts - cut to chunks
2tbsp yoghurt
2tsp ginger-garlic paste
3 green chillies
½ cup coriander leaves
½ cup mint leaves
2tbsp peanuts
2tsp lemon juice
3tsp olive oil
1tsp salt

Method

Grind together the green chillies, coriander, mint, peanuts, lemon juice, ginger-garlic paste and salt. Blend the marinade with the yoghurt and marinate the chicken chunks with this mixture. Keep in refrigerator for 1-2 hours. Just 15 minutes before lift, add the olive oil, mix well, and mount the chicken chunks onto bamboo skewers. Grill in an oven or air-fryer for 10-12 minutes at 180° C. Serve with any dip.



(Muscat Daily)

Dedicated beach for persons with disabilities coming soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development is putting concerted efforts into the betterment and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities through 79 centres spread across the sultanate. In order to provide better outdoor facilities for persons with disabilities, it will soon develop a part of Azaiba beach.

Addressing Majlis A'Shura on Monday, H E Dr Laila Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, said, "The ministry, in cooperation with the private sector, will implement a project to

prepare Azaiba beach for persons with disabilities."

She informed that the National Autism Centre in Muscat and the autism centres in Sur and Salalah will be operational next year. The ministry is also continuing work to complete the maintenance and development of the building of the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in the wilayat of Ibri.

About family and community development, H E Dr Laila said, "The ministry seeks to empower Omani women economically, politically and socially and to enhance their rights

guaranteed by the Basic Law of the State."

She informed that 18 cases of abuse were reported among women in 2021, who were accommodated in the Dar al Wafaq shelter.

The shelter provides care to women and children who have experienced any form of abuse or violence. It also provides temporary shelter, psychosocial support, legal advice and follow-up of these cases in the courts.

"Around 1,650 cases of abuse were reported among children in 2021, of which 49 were accommodated in Dar al Wafaq. The ministry imple-

mented 65 awareness programmes, including training sessions, seminars and educational lectures targeting parents, children and specialists."

H E Dr Laila added that the ministry seeks to enable Omani women's associations to be self-financed and reliant by urging their boards of directors to invest in associations' sites and facilities. She noted that a number of these associations have reached a satisfactory level of financial sustainability.

Addressing Majlis A'Shura, she stated that the number of rehabilitation centres for persons with disabilities now

stands at 79, including 31 government centres, 37 private and 11 civil centres (NGOs).

"The number of persons with disabilities registered in rehabilitation centres until the end of 2021 was 4,879. Of these, 2,986 are in government centres, 1,498 in private centres at the expense of the ministry, and 395 are being taken care by private centres.

"These centres provide rehabilitation services in the fields of special education; physical, occupational and speech therapy; psychological and behavioural rehabilitation; and vocational rehabilitation," H E Dr Laila said.

ROP defuses projectiles found in Dakhliyah



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) successfully defused old projectiles found in a remote mountainous area in Dakhliyah on Thursday.

A statement issued by ROP said, "The explosive ordnance disposal team responded to a report of a citizen in possession of old projectiles which were found in an area used for military exercises in Dakhliyah. The area was secured and the safe handling of suspicious objects was completed by the explosive ordnance

disposal team," it stated.

On April 18, two students died in Nizwa and preliminary investigations indicated that they were tampering with unknown objects, suspected to be very old projectiles lying in a mountainous area, which led to an explosion. Investigations are ongoing to find out the circumstances of the accident.

ROP cautioned all against tampering with suspicious objects, and to report these immediately to the nearest police station or call the Police Operations Centre on 9999.

Initiative to support 100 deaf people in tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to celebrate Arab Deaf Week, observed in the last week of April annually, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) will hold a workshop to support the deaf in the sultanate.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, an official of MHT said, "The ministry, in cooperation with the Omani Committee for Support of the Deaf, will hold a workshop on

A workshop on learning sign language will be held on April 24 and April 25 from 10am to 12 noon

learning sign language. The two-day workshop will be held on April 24 and April 25 from 10am to 12 noon.

"Sign language is a visual lan-

guage that uses hand signs, facial expressions, gestures and body language.

"The workshop targets 100 deaf receptionists in the hotel and tourism sector. There are many sign language experts who will train Omani and non-Omani participants the principles of sign language for free."

The workshop aims to support the deaf and integrate them with members of society and celebrate the Arab Deaf Week.

According to the World Federation of the Deaf, there are more than 70mn deaf people worldwide. More than 80 per cent of them live in developing countries. Collectively, they use more than 300 different sign languages.

Sign languages are fully fledged natural languages, structurally distinct from the spoken languages. There is also an international sign language, which is used by deaf people in international meetings.

627 violations of fishing law reported in March

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 627 violations of fishing law were reported in March 2022, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

"In all, 109 items were seized, including boats, engines, nets and other fishing equipment," a MAFWR official said.

A total of 1,053kg of fish was confiscated in March. Specialists



(Supplied photo)

of the ministry arrested 64 expatriates for violating provisions of

the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources. Besides 412 violations of fishing licence regulations, there were 27 cases of using prohibited fishing methods and possession of unauthorised equipment, 25 violations of fishing in prohibited areas and time, 39 cases of employing unlicensed expatriate workers, 65 instances of non-compliance with placement of registration plates on boats and fishing vessels, and 59 other violations.

Spreading hope in April: Month of testicular cancer awareness

Muscat - The month of April is observed annually as Testicular Cancer Awareness Month around the world. This type of cancer most commonly affects young and middle-aged males, and this month encourages them to get tested.

Various efforts have been undertaken by individuals and organisations in Oman to make people more aware about testicular cancer.

Saud al Junaidy is one such individual who has become a beacon of hope for many. Junaidy was diagnosed with testicular cancer in April 2020, and his journey in combating cancer at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic is inspiring.

He has emerged as a true survivor, having gone from being unaware of the existence of such a type of cancer to successfully completing his treatment. Since then, he has been on a mission to raise awareness through his initiative 'One's Path'.

"During a time when there was a lot of fear and uncertainty among people, I felt that it was vital for me to share my story and spread awareness about testicular cancer," Junaidy said regarding 'One's Path' and the motivation behind starting it.



Saud al Junaidy (right) with Dr Wahid al Kharusi of Oman Cancer Association

It is important to understand that the best way to diagnose testicular cancer at an early stage is to conduct routine self-examinations

SAUD AL JUNAIDY

"One's Path was my way of spreading awareness and encouraging people to take on whatever challenges that came their way."

With overwhelming support for his initiative, Junaidy was able to keep going and felt like he wasn't alone on this journey. 'One's Path' allowed him to interact and connect with others all around the world who were battling testicular cancer and other diseases, too.

The platform has proved to be a great support system for

Junaidy and a number of other men. Addressing topics such as symptoms of testicular cancer, side effects of chemotherapy, personal stories, and significance of self-testing, 'One's Path' is a support and awareness guide for anyone and everyone.

To prevent testicular cancer from spreading to other parts of the body, it is critical to detect the disease at an early stage, which dramatically increases the chances of survival.

"It is important to under-

stand that the best way to diagnose testicular cancer at an early stage is to conduct routine self-examinations. I would recommend performing a self-examination at least once a month," Junaidy advised. Monthly self-examinations only take a few minutes, but are critical in helping men notice any unusual changes that should be discussed with their healthcare provider.

Organisations such as Oman Cancer Association (OCA) have been crucial in assisting those diagnosed with testicular cancer in the country. Junaidy, who is also an active member of OCA, commended the organisation for assisting and supporting him during his treatment and recovery.

Cancer not only affects one's physical health, but it can also have an impact on one's mental status. So, maintaining a positive attitude and surrounding yourself with individuals or groups who motivate you are beneficial.

Testicular cancer remains one of the most treatable cancer types, with over 95 per cent of those diagnosed surviving past five years. As a result, early diagnosis, awareness and treatment are crucial.

(Contributed by Aashna Sanghani)

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX index closes the week marginally lower

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange last week closed marginally lower as the first quarter earnings season came to an end. MSX30 index ended the week lower by 0.09 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Financial index closed lower by 0.48 per cent for the week while Industrial ended lower by 0.68 per cent. Services index, however, closed higher by 0.38 per cent. MSX Shariah index closed lower by 0.13 per cent.

For the listed companies at the MSX, the earnings season for the first quarter of 2022 ended on Thursday, even though Omantel is yet to report its initial financial results for the first quarter. The combined net profits of MSX-listed companies grew by about 4 per cent year-on-year during the first quarter of 2022 to about RO143mn.

Local news

►A government authority has awarded Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC) the contract for operation and maintenance of facilities and services for the sum of RO3.12mn for a period of five years commencing on May 1, 2022.

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

around the world, but hitherto barred in Oman, short selling is an investment or trading strategy that speculates on the decline in a stock or other security's price. Typically, investors sell stocks they have borrowed from a lender on the expectation the price will drop. The hope is to repurchase and replace the stocks they borrowed at a lower price. The difference between the price they sell the stock at, and the price they buy back the stock at, is the profit.

►Maha Energy, a Swedish international upstream oil and gas company, is planning to drill a minimum six exploration wells in Oman's onshore Block 70. The company has awarded the drilling contract to Global Business Services (GBS) in Oman for the well drilling campaign. Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals awarded the exploration and development rights for the concession Block 70 to Maha Energy in October 2020. Maha Energy has signed a letter of award with GBS in Muscat for the drilling of a minimum of six wells on Block 70, according to a statement issued by the company. The letter of award is binding and precedes a drilling contract which is expected to be finalized in the near future. The drilling rig, GBS-1 (formerly OGI-4) is a 1,000hp super single top drive rig, built in 2010 and is currently located in Muscat, Maha Energy said in the statement.

►The Governor's Office of Al Dakhiliyah on Sunday signed



agreements to implement various development and service projects in the governorate to the tune of RO3.5mn. The projects include paving internal roads in the Wilayat of Bahla, establishing indoor vegetable and fruit market in the Wilayat of Nizwa and setting up a reverse line from the desalination plant in the Wilayat of Manah-to-Manah Public Park, among others. The agreements were signed with the companies executing the projects by Shaikh Hilal Said al Hajri, Governor of A'Dakhiliyah.

►The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Blue Waters Company signed two land development (usufruct) agreements to the tune of RO13.4mn. The first agreement is related to tuna dieting, while the second agreement is on finfish farming. The

agreements were signed by Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Sheikh Nasser Sulaiman al Harthy, chairman of Blue Waters' board of directors. Habsi said that the agreements came within the framework of the ministry's efforts in expanding fish farming projects which contribute to increasing local fish products, as well as providing job opportunities for Omani youth. Those projects will also boost the sultanate's gross domestic product (GDP).

►The Central Bank of Oman raised RO77.5mn by way of allotting treasury bills on Tuesday. The treasury bills are for a maturity period of 28 days, from April 20 until May 18. The average accepted price reached RO99.946 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted

price arrived at RO99.940. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.70225 per cent and 0.70263 per cent, respectively.

►The Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash'shura held its 8th regular meeting of the third annual session (2021-2022), on Tuesday. The committee discussed a number of expressed desires including amending the legislations and revising the procedures related to investment. The expressed desire derives its importance from the fact that the business environment in Oman is facing many challenges pertaining to legislation, funding and procedures.

►The World Bank has projected Oman's real GDP to grow by more than 5 per cent in 2022 as the sultanate's economy is on a solid path to recov-

ery amid the easing of pandemic pressures, higher hydrocarbon outputs, and wide-ranging government reforms. Oman's economy, as per the World Bank, is expected to improve gradually and to strengthen in the medium-term, supported by higher oil and gas production and ongoing structural reform. The volume of trade between Oman and Iran touched a record high in the last Iranian fiscal year (ending March 20), the head of the Iran-Oman Joint Economic Committee has announced. Mohsen Zarrabi put the annual trade between the two countries at US\$1.336bn year, showing 53 per cent growth year-on-year. He also stated that Iran's export to Oman rose 63 per cent to US\$716mn in the last fiscal year from US\$438mn the previous year.

GCC and global news

The UAE's non-oil sector contribution to the GDP amounted to 72.3 per cent in 2021, up from 71.3 per cent in 2020, data by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center revealed. The hotels and restaurants, wholesale and retail and health and social services sectors contributed 21.3 per cent, 14.1 per cent and 13.8 percent, respectively, during the reference period. It's noteworthy that the UAE's GDP at constant prices achieved a growth of 3.8 per cent in 2021, exceeding the forecasts of relevant international institutions, which expected the growth of the

country's GDP for the same year to reach 2.1 per cent.

Oil prices climbed to nearly three-week highs on Monday as fears over tight global supply grew, with the deepening crisis in Ukraine raising the prospect of heavier sanctions by the West on top exporter Russia. Brent futures were up US\$1.09, or 1.0 per cent, at US\$112.79 a barrel at 04:45 GMT, after hitting its highest since March 30 of US\$113.80 earlier in the session. US West Texas Intermediate futures rose US\$1.00, or 0.9 per cent, to US\$107.95 a barrel, having gained to as high as US\$108.55, the highest since March 30.

Recommendation

Fears of a sharp economic slowdown in China and higher oil prices weighed on most global stock markets. Oil prices firmed in choppy trade as concerns about supply due to a potential European Union ban on Russian oil came to the fore. The IMF released its World Economic Outlook for 2022, slashing global growth forecast for 2022 to 3.6 peer cent amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict, 0.8 percentage points lower than January 2022 projection.

Regionally, most of GCC financial markets ended the week lower.

Locally, the earnings season wrapped at the start of the week. We advise investors to watch full disclosures for the first quarter of 2022 in order to ascertain company's future plans and outlook.

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Ukrain war poses serious challenges for European economy, warns IMF



Washington, US – The war in Ukraine poses serious economic challenges to European countries and highlights the urgent need to improve energy security, the IMF said Friday.

In a report on the continent's economic outlook, the IMF also stressed the need to manage impact of the flood of refugees created in the wake of the Russian invasion in late February.

The war will take a hit on the broader European economy, which is expected to grow just 1.6 per cent this year, far below the expansion expected in January prior to the attack, according to the analysis from the International Monetary Fund.

The conflict and the Western sanctions on Moscow have driven up food and fuel prices, accelerating inflation globally. Ukraine is a major grain producer and Europe relies on fuel, especially natural gas, from Russia for most of its energy needs.

"The war is a reminder, too, of

how Europe must do more to improve energy security, notably by expanding renewable sources and improving efficiency," Alfred Kammer, head of the IMF's European department, said in a blog.

The Washington-based institution said governments in the region should prepare now for next winter by diversifying their natural gas supplies, replenishing stocks and developing alternative energy sources.

"Some countries have already started implementing energy security measures, including looking for alternative suppliers (Bulgaria, Germany, Italy) and delaying the phase-out of nuclear and coal-based electricity generation plants (Belgium, Italy)," the report noted.

But efforts to expand renewable energy sources and improve efficiency "should be intensified."

Cutting off natural gas imports from Russia "could severely impact activity in the second half of 2022 and the first

half of 2023, as Europe would only be able to secure alternative gas supplies to offset about 60-70 per cent of Russian imports through alternative supply sources and some demand compression," the report cautioned.

The refugee crisis also poses a challenge for the region, and the "ramifications are still uncertain."

About five million people, mostly women and children, have left Ukraine, especially to neighboring countries like Poland which has welcomed the majority of people fleeing the conflict but who will increase demand for services.

European countries must work together to support the countries hosting the refugees, to rebuild Ukraine once the war is over, encourage refugees to return to their country and thus avoid a long-term burden on the budgets of the host nations, the IMF said.

AFP

New Pakistan government says willing to curb fuel subsidies

Washington, US – Pakistan's new finance minister on Friday agreed with IMF recommendations to reduce fuel subsidies and end a business tax amnesty scheme, pledging to pursue structural reforms to boost a crisis-wracked economy.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2019 approved a US\$6bn loan over three years for Pakistan but disbursement has been slowed by concerns about the pace of reforms.

Finance Minister Miftah Ismail, who took office this month after a previous government lost a no-confidence vote, said he had "good discussions" with the IMF on a visit during the Washington-based lender's annual spring meetings.

"They've talked about removing the subsidy on fuel. I agree with them," Ismail, himself a former IMF economist, said at the



Pakistan's Finance Minister Miftah Ismail

Atlantic Council.

"We can't afford to do the subsidies that we're doing. So we're going to have to curtail this," he said.

He said that former prime minister Imran Khan, seeking to avoid ouster, set a "trap" for his successors through heavy subsidies on fuel and electricity, as well as a tax amnesty scheme for businesses – measures that derailed a disbursement from the

IMF loan.

"He gave an amnesty to businesses for setting up factories so that they don't have to pay taxes, or even if they evaded taxes that's ok," Ismail told reporters at an event organized by Pakistan's embassy.

But Ismail added that some targeted subsidies should remain for Pakistan's poorest amid sky-high global prices.

The country's new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has vowed to jumpstart a moribund economy, certain to be a major issue in elections due next year.

Pakistan has repeatedly sought international support and suffers from a chronically weak tax base.

Ismail said that Pakistan, the world's fifth most-populous nation, needed to move to a new economic model by removing obstacles and promoting exports

to the world.

"We have such an elite-benefitting country that almost every subsidy that you can speak of actually goes to the richest people," he said. Ismail said his immediate goal was reining in double-digit inflation – a target complicated by lifting fuel subsidies – and kickstarting job creation.

He denied Pakistan was in danger of defaulting on its debts, with foreign reserves currently standing at US\$10bn, and much of its bilateral debt held with friendly countries China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Sharif has little over a year before he has to call a general election, leaving observers wondering whether ousting Khan will backfire, since his government inherited an economic crisis that will take time to overcome.

AFP

Sri Lanka hit by record inflation

Colombo, Sri Lanka – Crisis-hit Sri Lanka's inflation hit a record high for the sixth consecutive month, official data showed on Friday as the government asked the IMF for an urgent bailout.

The broad-based National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) rose 21.5 per cent year-on-year in March, more than four times the 5.1 per cent inflation of a year earlier. Food inflation in March stood at 29.5 per cent, according to the latest data from the Department of Census and Statistics. The figures are likely to rise further: the state-run oil company has subse-

quently raised the price of diesel, commonly used in public transport, by 64.2 per cent. The worsening economic crisis has led to clashes at nationwide demonstrations calling on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down over mismanagement and corruption. Sri Lanka asked the International Monetary Fund this week for emergency assistance, but was told that the South Asian nation's US\$51bn external debt was "unsustainable" and must be "restructured" before any help.

"When the IMF determines that a country's debt is not sus-

tainable, the country needs to take steps to restore debt sustainability prior to IMF lending," the Fund's country director Masahiro Nozaki said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Approval of an IMF-supported program for Sri Lanka would require adequate assurances that debt sustainability will be restored." The government has announced a default on its foreign debt and said precious foreign exchange will be reserved to finance essential food and medicines. Police clashed with protesters in central Sri Lanka on

Tuesday, killing one of them and wounding nearly 30. At least eight people have also died waiting in long lines for fuel in the past six weeks. The country's foreign exchange shortage has led to a slowing down of imports, including essentials. Shops have rationed the quantity of rice, milk powder, sugar, lentils and tinned fish sold to consumers.

Sri Lanka's economy has collapsed since the onset of the pandemic, with a nosedive in tourism revenue as well as foreign worker remittances.

AFP

Team FC wins Red Bull Neymar Jr's Five qualifiers

After exciting qualifiers and football matches in the unique Red Bull Neymar Jr's Five style, the FC team succeeded in 'outplaying them' all and winning the five-a-side Omani football championship and has qualified for the world finals hosted by Qatar for the first time.

The tournament of speed, excitement, and suspense returned to Oman to give fans of the most popular game in the sultanate and the world the chance to showcase their football skills, with two qualifiers and a final in Muscat and Sohar. The local qualifiers were held in partnership with Red Bull MOBILE, Oman Radio, Fitness Destination, and Radisson Blu Hotel, Sohar.

After amazing matches that reflected the Omani football enthusiasts' distinguished skills, both on an individual and collective level, teams FC and Samba succeeded in making it to the final match of the Oman national final, which was held at Al-Tareef Club Sports Field on April 15. The players of both teams showed remarkable performances in the final match that fanned the flames of the crowd's enthusiasm before FC team came out victorious in the end.

The Oman qualifiers were held over the course of two



stages in Muscat on April 8 and Sohar on April 14, with the best teams qualifying for the national final. Throughout the competitions in Oman this year, dozens of teams consisting of five players competed in matches with no goalkeepers and that last ten minutes or until one team loses all its players. The rule that distinguishes the Red Bull Neymar Jr's Five tournament is that the team that scores a goal gets to choose a player from the other team to eliminate from the match. This made the competitions require speed and urgency

to score at the very beginning, while simultaneously maintaining vigilance at the defence level to avoid yielding a goal and giving the opposing team a clear advantage.

With victory in the Oman national final, the champion team qualified to represent the sultanate alongside last year's champion team in the Red Bull Neymar Jr's Five tournament's 'Super Final' in Qatar, where players will have the opportunity to play with Neymar himself and his team. The Oman champions expressed their enthusiasm at

representing the sultanate in the best way in Qatar, striving to score honourable results, and even trying to win to face Neymar himself!

Under the title "Outplay Them All", the Omani champions will face off against the qualifier winners of more than 40 countries, including Brazil-Neymar's home-land France. In addition to the prizes the winners will receive, the winning team in Doha, in both the male and female categories, will be able to play against the Brazilian footballer himself and his team of choice.

Oman registers first Audi e-tron Sportback buyer

Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has sold the first Audi e-tron Sportback in Oman. The first full-electric model from the brand, the e-tron Sportback, combines the functionality of a spacious SUV with the elegance of a four-door coupe.

Commenting on the first buy, Christian Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors Oman, said, "We are very happy to begin our EV journey in the country and pleased to open the door to electric vehicles. As Oman warms up to electric mobility, we are excited to register a lot of enquiries from customers. We continue to receive many queries about electric cars especially from customers who are environmentally conscious. The curiosity around the electric car bodes well for Audi Oman's future strategy of bringing more electric vehicles to the country."

He added, "Audi e-tron Sportback combines the space and comfort of a typical luxury class automobile with a range suitable for everyday use, catapulting the driver into a new era with the electric all-wheel drive."

The new Audi e-tron Sportback impresses with an athletic sill, large single-frame octagon design with vertical struts in the front and the unmistakable sloping Sportback roofline in the back. In the Audi e-tron Sportback all-electric drive system, front and rear axles each have an



electric motor and a total output of up to 402 hp.

The Audi e-tron Sportback comes with numerous innovative technologies such as the option of virtual exterior mirrors that project images into the vehicle via a small camera. Interior digital technologies such as the Audi virtual cockpit and MMI support enhance functionality. The optional panoramic glass roof ensures a pleasant, light-flooded interior and improved ventilation.

The S line exterior and virtual exterior mirrors help achieve an outstanding drag coefficient value of just 0.25. This is primarily due to the coupé body shape and the associated lower aerodynamic drag behind the car. The high separating edge of the Audi e-tron Sportback minimises swirl

in the air flow in this area, which ultimately also benefits efficiency.

With the range of e-tron charging systems, Audi offers a powerful, intelligent and holistic charging concept. Customers can power up at home with e-tron connect charging system and at an e-tron Charging Service station when on the road. The long range of the Audi e-tron Sportback's high-voltage battery allow owners to cover a substantial distance off a single charge.

Customers can book the Audi e-tron Sportback at Premium Motors showroom located at Al-fardan Heights at Ghala. Premium Motors is spread across three floors and designed in accordance with global standards and corporate identity.

FRIENDi mobile launches new carbon offsetting feature

FRIENDi Mobile launched a carbon offsetting feature on its app on Friday, marking Earth Day 2022. The feature will enable customers to offset the carbon footprint generated from their mobile phone usage through voluntary contributions with every purchase - the first initiative of its kind for any telecom company in the sultanate.

The total proceeds will be donated to the Environment Authority's (EA) '10 million trees' project, which aims to reduce the country's overall carbon footprint.

The initiative urges FRIENDi Mobile customers to contribute 50bz to offset their mobile plan's carbon footprint for a year. The brand will match every donation to make a positive difference to the people and the planet through the EA's '10 million trees' project. Launched in November 2021, the project will contribute towards increasing biodiversity, aim to combat the impact of climate change and boost the absorption of carbon dioxide to preserve the planet.

"Addressing the climate crisis and working towards a greener, healthier future, requires businesses, governments, and individuals to come together and turn ideas into practical solutions. Being the first mobile network operator in Oman, we are proud to be working with Environment Authority for this initiative. We hope that through this feature, our customers find it easier to contribute towards a greener future," said Salma al Maawali, chief executive officer for FRIENDi Oman.

FRIENDi Mobile is a Virgin Mobile Middle East and Africa (VMMEA) brand.

Wizz your way to your favourite destination this Eid

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the ultra-low-fare national airline of the UAE, has announced an exciting promotion with 20 per cent off selected flights from and to Abu Dhabi until the end of August for bookings made between April 18-19. The airline aims to capitalise on the increasing demand for travel during Eid and providing its customers with exciting travel opportunities and experiences over the summer period and beyond.

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi have recently added some marvellous destinations to its ever growing network by launching its new routes to Salalah (Oman), Mattala (Sri Lanka), Amman (Jordan) and Aqaba (Jordan) bringing in a new frontier of air travel. Tickets are already on sale on wizzair.com and the airline's mobile app, available in the Arabic language, with fares starting as low as AED39.

Michael Berlouis, managing director of Wizz Air Abu Dhabi said, "We welcome the Eid holi-



day with an exciting 20 per cent off on our ultra-low fares. Travellers can plan their summer holiday and make this Eid memorable by treating themselves to a well-deserved vacation to one of our attractive destinations. Wizz Air network provides incredible leisure, historic and cultural experiences

with safe and efficient travel awaiting all our customers. With an ever-expanding network, we are committed to providing travel options that are more convenient and affordable for everyone. We look forward to seeing you onboard our aircraft soon."

The removal of PCR test requirements for vaccinated trav-

ellers in Abu Dhabi has made travel simpler again with the easing of restrictions allowing for more spontaneous travel opportunities.

Strategically located within the UAE, the Wizz Air Abu Dhabi network provides ultra-low fare, hassle-free and efficient travel options to

Alexandria (Egypt), Amman (Jordan), Aqaba (Jordan), Athens (Greece), Baku (Azerbaijan), Belgrade (Serbia), Kutaisi (Georgia), Manama (Bahrain), Mattala (Sri Lanka), Muscat (Oman), Salalah (Oman) Sarajevo (Bosnia), Sohag (Egypt), Tirana (Albania) and Yerevan (Armenia) among others.

The airline has a young fleet composed of four brand new state-of-the-art Airbus A321neo aircraft, offering the lowest fuel burn, emissions and noise footprint. Wizz Air Abu Dhabi has the lowest environmental footprint among its competitors in the region, supporting the airline's long-term commitment to sustainability.

For ultimate peace of mind during this uncertain time, passengers can book tickets with confidence, thanks to WIZZ Flex. With WIZZ Flex, passengers can cancel their flight up to three hours before departure without any fee.

Attractive Ramadan promotion offer on charismatic Renault Megane

As part of its exclusive Ramadan promotion, Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has announced an attractive offer on Renault Megane, the vibrant and elegant saloon.

Blending striking good looks and stunning performance, Renault Megane, the chic saloon, has been impressing auto aficionados. Admired for its driving performance, Renault Megane is known for its driving comfort, technology and safety features.

As part of the Renault Oman special scheme, customers who buy Renault Megane can enjoy free registration, free insurance (on selected model), three years/100,000km manufacture warranty, free periodic vehicle service package, AAA/road assistance card and reference programme among others. Social media users who participate in the Ramadan promotional cam-

paign will also be eligible for attractive prizes.

The Renault Ramadan promotion which has already begun will go on till May 19, 2022.

The unique Ramadan offer boasts of a host of advantages for customers purchasing Renault Megane. All customers purchasing Renault Megane from Suhail Bahwan Automobiles will be eligible to participate in the Ramadan campaign scheme. 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.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman said, "The charismatic Renault Megane is a real head-turner. With its sedan body, dynamic lines and generous proportions, it has a style of its own, which is both lively and elegant.



Renault Megane, which is available in 2.0 litres engine configuration along with 1.6 litres variant, is a popular car and much-loved car in Oman. This is a perfect time to own this car."

Free registration

All customers purchasing Renault Megane PH2 during this

scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Free insurance

All customers purchasing Renault Megane PH2, during this scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle insurance (Oman and UAE only).

Free periodic vehicle service package

All customers purchasing Renault Megane PH2 during this scheme period will be eligible for Free Periodic Maintenance Service Package for five Years/100,000km (whichever is earlier). This offer includes only the Service intervals of 10,000km.

Digital promotion

Social Media users who will participate in the Ramadan promotional campaign and other Online Challenges on @renaultoman Instagram will get fuel voucher worth of RO50 (3 nos) and Renault branded Sterilizer cum wireless charger (2 nos).

3 Years/ 100,000km manufacturer warranty

All customers purchasing Renault Megane PH2 during this scheme period will be eligible for three years/ 100,000km mileage warranty (whichever is earlier).

Free AAA assistance card

All customers purchasing Renault vehicles during scheme period will receive Free AAA assistance card for first year only.

Reference programme

Renault will generate references of people looking to buy a car. This reference will be generated from existing Renault customers. The same person cannot refer himself but can refer multiple names. If any of the referred persons buy a Renault car, then the person who referred him will get RO50 gift voucher. This gift voucher can be redeemed during vehicle service at SBA workshop, purchase of consumables from SBA counters, Purchase of parts and accessories from SBA counters. All such gift voucher winners will be declared on an ongoing basis. This gift voucher is non-transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash or exchanged for credit. The gift voucher will be valid for six-months from the date of issue. The voucher needs to be redeemed fully all at once.

Bank Muscat's Sayyarati Auto Finance offers multiple benefits

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

The launch of the Sayyarati offer has seen an excellent response from customers all over Oman, and the bank has reminded all those who wish to buy their dream car to take advantage of the special rates which are available only till May 31, 2022. The offer is of great help for both customers and auto dealerships across Oman as the holy month usually witnesses the maximum automotive sales in the sultanate.

The exclusive Sayyarati offer includes a special discounted rate that starts at just 3.5 per



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

Tier 2 companies. Expatriate residents working in government and semi-government organisations as well as Tier 1 companies can also make use of the offer to purchase a car of their choice.

The feature-rich auto finance can be obtained within the shortest possible time from Sayyarati

Centres and Bank Muscat branches located across Oman. The monthly loan installments for Sayyarati finance are automatically deducted from the customer's account once the mandate to do so is provided to the bank by the customer. For the added convenience of customers during the holy month of

Ramadan, the bank's Sayyarati centres at Wattayah and Salalah will be open in the evenings too from 8pm - 11pm on all weekdays (and 8pm - 11pm only on Saturday). Loans up to RO60,000 are available for Omanis - for both new and used cars.

The holy month witnesses a lot of interest from customers to buy cars and benefit from the different offers available during Ramadan. Bank Muscat is also very keen to enhance cooperation and partnership with different car agencies to offer the best services possible. With some of the world's best and safest vehicles available for purchase in the sultanate, the bank continues to do its part in making attractive auto finance easily available for people in Oman.

To check eligibility, go to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx>.



Bank Nizwa recognised for its contribution to Islamic banking

A leading Islamic bank that has led transformational change in the sector by spearheading innovative initiatives and playing a key role in advocating Sharia'a-compliant financing in the country, Bank Nizwa has cemented its position as the preferred Islamic banking partner. Attesting to its pioneering role, the bank recently won two awards on the same day. While the Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 hosted by *Alam Al-Iktisaad* magazine honoured Bank Nizwa with the title of the 'Top Omani Brand in Islamic Finance', the bank's leadership role in Sustainable Islamic Finance also earned it recognition at the Oman Forum 2022.

The two prestigious events were held at the Majan Ballroom in Al Bustan Palace - A Ritz Carlton Hotel on March 30. The Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 took place in the evening under the auspices of H H Sayyid Fahd bin Fatik al Said, whereas Oman Forum 2022 was conducted in the morning under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation with Petroleum Development Oman acting as the Strategic Partner. It also welcomed H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation as chief guest and keynote speaker.

On behalf of the Bank, the Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 received by Syayidah Wisam Bint al Said, Head of corporate communication and marketing at bank Nizwa, while 'leadership role in Sustainable Islamic Finance' Awards received by Khalid al Barwani, DGM wholesale banking.

Commenting on the awards, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa, said, "We are indeed delighted to have received two prestigious awards on the same day. Bank Nizwa's continuous efforts toward enhancing its prod-

uct portfolio, embracing digital excellence, and providing a premium banking experience to customers through segmented focus have helped it to keep pace with the evolving demands of the Islamic banking sector. In addition, one of the most significant milestones has been the introduction of sustainable finance to our portfolio. Our efforts towards promoting sustainability through Sharia'a-compliant financing have been duly recognised in the community, and for that, we are honoured these two prestigious awards. As a bank that is dedicated to the long-term socioeconomic growth of the country, we will continue our relentless efforts toward accelerating the growth of Islamic finance in the region and setting new benchmarks along our journey."

The Top Omani Brand Awards 2022 applauded Bank Nizwa's outstanding contribution to the Islamic finance industry. While innovation has been intrinsic to the bank's progress, Bank Nizwa has also paid keen attention to re-engineering its processes, developing its personnel, and leveraging its market knowledge to launch new business models. Its efforts towards becoming a digitally driven bank have also helped it to elevate its customer experience while encouraging digitalisation within the community as well.

As a bank that is dedicated to sustainable growth, it also places a great degree of importance on supporting SMEs that are key drivers of economic progress while also focusing on expanding its Sharia-compliant solutions to mid and large corporations that are involved in key national projects.

Keeping abreast with the latest trends in the global banking realm, Bank Nizwa's focus on sustainability is in close alignment with the national goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

GHM welcomes new executive chef at Chedi Muscat

General Hotel Management Ltd (GHM), renowned for internationally-acclaimed luxury resorts and unrivalled lifestyle experiences at exotic destinations, proudly welcomes James Reppuhn as the new Executive Chef of The Chedi Muscat, Oman.

In his new role, the versatile chef will oversee culinary operations and provide strategic counsel to reimagine the global cuisine served at eight distinctive F&B venues, including six restaurants and two lounges.

Born in Chicago, USA, Chef Reppuhn began his professional journey at The Ritz-Carlton following extensive training in Italian, French and Modern American cuisines at the Culinary Institutes of America. He has since spent over a decade in



the kitchens of notable hospitality groups across Asia Pacific, including iconic brands like Aman Hotels & Resorts, Four Seasons Hotels, Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts and JW Marriott.

Through his reputation at Asia's top restaurants, Chef Reppuhn was invited to serve on the International Judges Panel Culinary Competition in Southeast Asia and conferred

with the Chaine Des Rostisseurs De Chine Certificate.

"I feel extremely honoured to join the celebrated culinary team at The Chedi Muscat. Our legacy of exceptional dining experiences inspires me to bring the gourmet indulgence to greater heights," said Chef Reppuhn, who is currently getting familiar with Arabic and Levantine cuisines.

"I'm excited about infusing more Asian flavours, such as Japanese Teppanyaki, Thai, Chinese and sub-Continental otherwise known as Indian cuisines, to the menus while refining the classic flavours that our guests have come to love and appreciate."

"The Chedi Muscat enjoys critical acclaim for our exceptional hospitality excellence in

Oman, and culinary pleasures played a big role in our success," said Thomas Guss, general manager of The Chedi Muscat. "With Reppuhn's impressive experience garnered from some of Asia's best restaurants, we are confident that he will elevate the culinary standards at our resort. We look forward to showcasing Reppuhn's contemporary interpretation of Asian cuisine in our award-winning restaurants."

Chef Reppuhn's addition to the GHM family comes at an exciting time as the group celebrates its pearl anniversary this year. The group recently launched its commemorative 30th anniversary stay experiences, with specially curated dining and wellness offerings to be introduced in the months ahead.

Joyalukkas announces cashback celebrations offer

Joyalukkas is offering their patrons a Cashback Celebrations offer to add to their Akshaya Tritiya and Eid festivities. Customers can now enjoy RO5 gift voucher on purchase of gold jewellery worth RO250 and RO20 gift voucher on purchase of diamonds, polki and pearl

jewellery worth RO250 and multiples thereafter. Moreover, in addition to the exciting cashback offers, customers can now pay just 10 per cent advance and get assured gold rate protection from Joyalukkas. This exclusive offer uplifts the festive spirit enables patrons to

get assured rate protection in case gold rates increase or enjoy lower rates if gold prices drop.

Announcing these offers, John Paul Alukkas, managing director at Joyalukkas Group, said, "Joyalukkas is always delighted to present their cus-

tomers with the finest of experiences. To make shopping exciting and rewarding during the auspicious occasion of Eid and Akshaya Tritiya, we are pleased to offer these exclusive offers to our patrons. Customers can enjoy cashback gift vouchers and assured gold rate

protection during the offer period. I would like to personally invite everyone to visit our best-in-class showrooms and enjoy this limited period offer. You can enjoy the Cashback Celebrations offer across all Joyalukkas showrooms till May 7, 2022."

Here's how talabat Mart is leading quick commerce sector

Since its initial launch, talabat Mart has expanded its operation in the region, offering a selection of more than 5,000 products delivered from over ten stores across Oman. Providing consumers with a highly convenient, yet practical and hassle-free 24/7 experience - talabat Mart has grown into an operation, leveraging on talabat's innovative tech that is designed to enable efficient order preparation and delivery in 30 minutes or less. Did you know that more than a quarter of orders come from fresh produce like fruits, vegetables, dairy, seafood and more? talabat took a look at consumers' ordering habits and found some interesting statistics, check them out below!

Delivering high-quality produce
Produce quality and food safety

teams on-site at each store in Oman, perform strict quality checks before storing food in areas that are appropriately temperature controlled. Once an order is prepared, items are reviewed one final time before being sent for delivery.

Going bananas for... bananas?!

It's always great to see people ordering fruits, and data shows that bananas are the consistent favourite fruit across the region - followed by lemons and mandarins in Oman! Tomatoes reign supreme under the vegetable category on talabat Mart Oman, with onions and potatoes not far behind!

Favouring Mountain Dew above all else

Drinking Mountain Dew is easily one of the best ways to



stay refreshed during the heat, so it's no surprise that Mountain Dew is the most popular item on talabat Mart Oman, along with Pepsi and Laban.

Salty or sweet?

Our region has a sweet tooth - and talabat Mart unveiled that most markets love indulging in sweet over salty snacks, with only one market (looking at you, Bahrain!) opting for the latter.

In addition to offering fresh produce, talabat Mart also carries a number of newly introduced special products which include: Recipe no.7's Gluten Free Cookies, Gluten Free Baklava and Gluten Free Chocolate biscuit. Coconut Cashew Spread and Almond Cashew Spread and finally tMart's Private Label Deli Cheese Range which includes Labneh Ball Zaatar in Oil, Labneh Turkish Style, Haloumi Roll Pack and Feta Cheese with Jalapenos.

The greatest grocery preparation
talabat Mart ensures efficient

and reliable delivery by using store management tech solutions to provide real time visibility throughout the process. This results in customers getting the products they want, when they want, and without the need for any modifications or substitutions to items in their orders. Additionally, optimised inventory management in each of the stores means that talabat Mart offers assorted items specifically catered to the needs of customers located in the same area as the store - ensuring that any and all of their necessities are available, at any given time.

Furthermore, capitalising on talabat's innovative tech, and making sure stores are located in the right place and time to have the greatest impact, enables over 80 pickers across the region to prepare orders in

less than three minutes on average! In-store employees responsible for collecting items or 'pickers' are aware of each product's exact location and optimise their picking route to save time - they know their game.

The greatest delivery in the region in under 30 minutes

With the help of local teams and highly optimised tech, consumers in the region receive their orders in 30 minutes or less, and interestingly, the shortest delivery time regionally has been one minute!

Meeting customer needs

talabat's grocery dedicated product and tech team constantly innovate and test to drive new ways to bring

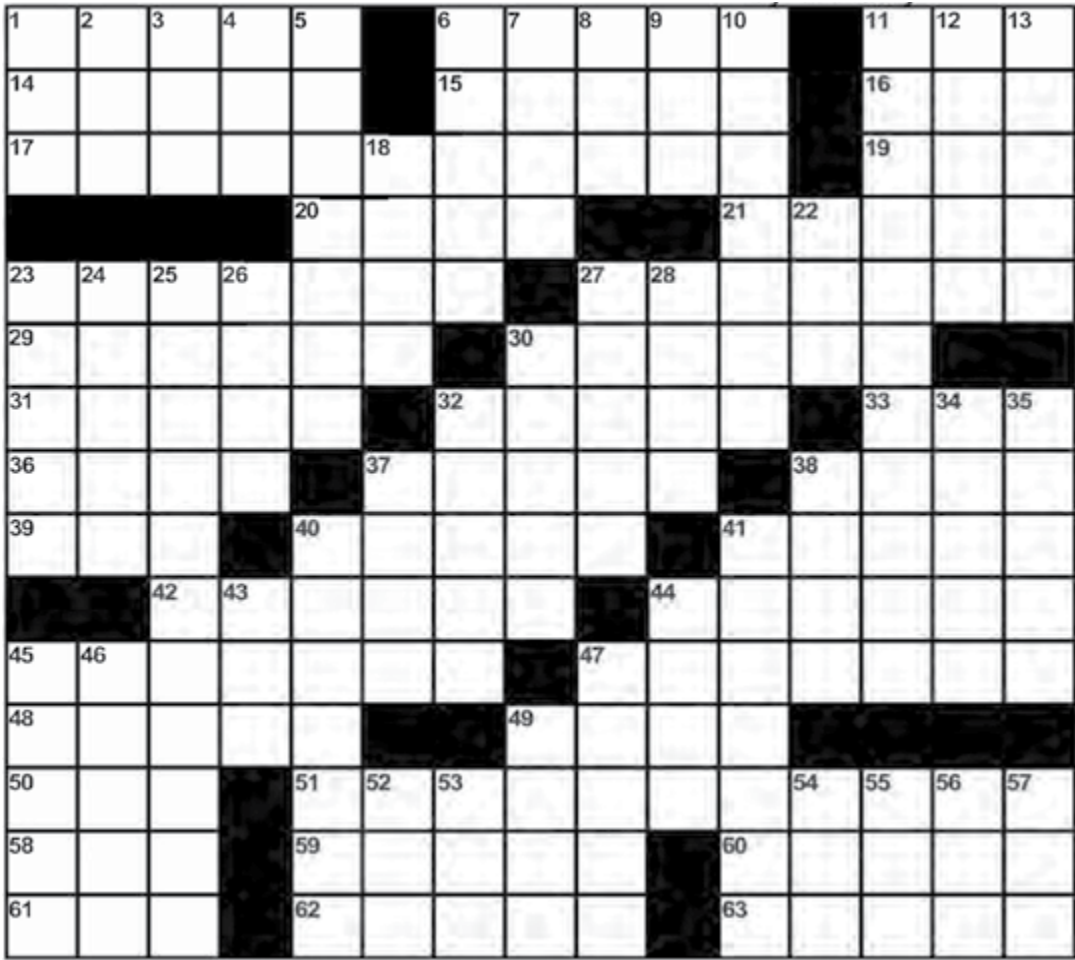
customers more relevance and help them find products faster. talabat uses its technology to better understand how customers shop and works with global household names on insights to learn about how to better serve customers in the region.

Here's to taking the time to ensure good choices

In Oman, consumers take an average of 12 minutes to browse talabat Mart, about the time one would take to listen to a few favourite songs! Leave it to talabat Mart to bring you the #greatestdelivery every day.

Consumers can order their necessities on talabat Mart by downloading talabat through the iOS App Store, Google Playstore and Huawei App Gallery.

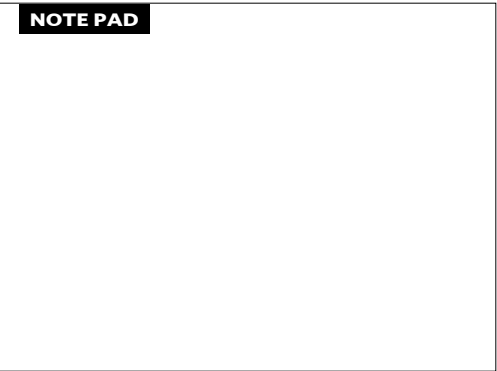
DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

1) It precedes an important delivery
6) Certain construction girder
11) Director’s shout
14) Obviously shocked
15) Woman from uncle?
16) A wee hour
17) They make waves
19) Noshed
20) A Great Lake
21) Kind of campus protest
23) Primary color, to a printer
27) Grinds together, as teeth
29) Calls off, as a mission
30) Puzzle that’s a stumper
31) Absolute bedlam
32) Thing to shift
33) Negative vote
36) Has the_ for (is attracted to)
37) Castle ditches
38) Eye with desire
39) “The Lord of the Rings” creature
40) Performers of plays, collectively
- 41) Edible freshwater fish
42) Raspy
44) “Goodness!”
45) How inferior goods are made
4 7) Snitches
48) Some court hearings
49) Song performed singly
50) Downs counterparts
51) Words after “snap,” “bring” or “call”
58) “Aw” follower
59) Bicker
60) Romance or drama, e.g.
61) Spans of 60 mins.
62) Not just wants
63) _ Domingo
- 10) Underlying theme
11) Things in many closets
12) Loosen, as laces
13) Adults-to-be
18) Partner of crafts
22) “Liberal” attachment
23) _ Man Randy Savage
24) Dislike, and then some
25) Some dairy products
26) Winged god of love
27) Pesky little biters
28) Steals, old-style
30) Fill with happiness
32) Likely to make stern orders
34) “The Cradle of Texas Liberty”
35) Aden’s land
37) A soil fertilizer
38) Face-to-face exam
40) Part of a tape recorder
41) Fits in
43) Relative of 17-Across
44) Editor’s “remove it”
45) Do as the doctor says
46) Abnormally active
47) Lugs
49) Thing behind
- drywall, typically
52) Valuable rock find
53) Display longevity?
54) Oolong, for one

55) Quaint motel
56) Food crumb
57) “The Matrix” moniker



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
There are many ways to connect with someone you want to build a relationship with. Most of your attention has probably gone into looking good and creating sparks, but the truth is there are many different routes that can provide a deeper connection. Today, try to use humour, intellect, or your political philosophy in a new way with this special person. These areas of your life could help everything come together in a more satisfying way.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Don't be surprised if an unexpected veil of bashfulness overcomes you today. You still understand what an amazing person you are, but you just might not be full of the energy required to make your own introductions. Let other people draw you out of your shell today. There is one person you'll encounter today with a naturally warm personality that will intrigue you. Enjoy their curiosity and let them steer the conversation.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Don't look now, but someone who's always been strictly business around you wants to move things into a new realm. Give them a warm response, but just because they want to get closer to you doesn't mean you need to go along with it. Examine your options and remember your high standards. That's part of the reason this person admires you so much, after all. Your professional and social circles are expanding quickly.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
When was the last time you got seriously flirtatious? You know, that subtle flirt that involves cheesy yet charming lines and good, clean compliments? There is nothing wrong with making someone else feel good, especially because it will end up making you feel good too! Make someone's day today. Toss out a compliment to a clerk in a store or send a sweet text to your partner. Remind yourself that life is supposed to be fun!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Relationship roles shift all the time. Someone is always driving the agenda, while the other person is content to just go along with it. But today you can expect a major tectonic shift. A friend or romantic partner is suddenly in a position to wield a lot more power over your life. Whether they use it and how they use it is something you can influence more than you realize. So decide whether or not you want to let them take over the power.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Lately you've been pleasing people without even trying. And the awe will continue. Your quick thinking in a tricky situation will leave others quite impressed today, although you might not completely understand why. In your mind, you did what anyone else would have done in that situation. You won't quite grasp the profundity of your actions for a few more days, but when you do, you'll want to pat yourself on the back.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Equipped with a laser-like clarity today, you'll be well suited to play interpreter to the feuding forces around you. You've got a good grasp of complicated emotional issues and someone else needs you to help them sort it all out. You will easily decipher the issues and get everyone on the same page. By being invaluable, you will put yourself front and center, which will make it easier for you to get the attention of someone very powerful.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Today, there is no such thing as fair. In a negotiation, someone is going to feel like they got the short end of the stick even if they got the longer end. It might be you, or it might be the other person you've been dealing with. If it's them, you should be prepared for them to use emotion to try to get you to change your position. If it's you, be careful that you don't vent your emotions. It could negatively affect your reputation.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Your day could be somewhat dictated by the whims of someone in authority right now. They aren't interested in making your life difficult, fortunately, just in accomplishing their own goals. So don't jump to any conclusions about what will be asked of you. Wait for them to ask for what they need, and be honest about the time frame you'll need to make them happy. If they're being unrealistic, you have to tell them.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Your wallet won't get any fatter if you don't follow through with your goal to save money! Keep scrolling past those beautiful websites full of clothes. It's time to remind yourself about the difference between wanting something and needing something. This applies to your personal life too. Are you demanding too much from the people around you right now? If you want more attention, maybe you should pay more attention.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Letting yourself be emotionally exposed is difficult, but you can do it, and you should. Your bravery has been proven to other people many times over, but have you proven it to yourself? Someone close to you wants to know more about your inner thoughts, and they want the truth. Don't candy-coat your feelings in an effort to make them seem more mainstream. You have to let it all come out without editing a word.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
One thing is for sure today, you aren't going to be bored! But that doesn't necessarily mean that you day will be jam-packed with fun activities or interesting adventures. Right now your brain is in a very receptive phase and will be able to find something to keep itself occupied nicely. Even if you're stuck on a plane all day, you'll be smiling. This is a good day to think through complex ideas and formulate plans for the future.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The Nazca Plate, part of the Earth's lithosphere, lies under which ocean?

- A. Pacific
- B. Indian
- C. Atlantic
- D. Antarctic

02. What is a person who studies objects and matter in the universe outside Earth's atmosphere known as?

- A. Astronomer
- B. Horologist
- C. Hopeful
- D. Horoscoper

03. Which animal appeared in the opening credits of the British TV series "Coronation Street"?

- A. Rabbit
- B. Badger
- C. Hamster
- D. Cat

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

G	B	D	L
E	N	E	I
L	T	A	D
S	I	O	Qu

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

6		4		5	2	7	3
	3						4
		5					
5		7		4	8	6	
3			6				7
		6	9	3		5	8
					9		
	8					6	
6	3	4	1		8		2

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

2	8	6	1	4	3	9	7
4	9	3	5	2	7	1	8
1	7	6	8	9	2	5	4
8	2	5	7	6	9	4	1
7	6	4	1	9	5	8	3
3	1	9	8	4	2	6	5
9	8	1	4	6	3	7	2
5	4	2	9	7	1	6	8
6	3	7	2	8	4	1	9

Ukraine to evacuate civilians from Mariupol

Fresh attempt to evacuate civilians from Mariupol is being made as hopes for weekend truce fades

Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine - Ukraine said it would make a fresh attempt on Saturday to evacuate civilians from Mariupol, the devastated port city largely controlled by Russian forces, as hopes for a weekend truce during Orthodox Easter faded.

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

"Today we will again try to evacuate women, children and the elderly," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on Telegram.

"If everything happens as planned, we will start the evacuation around noon."

The call came a day after a senior Russian military officer said 'the second phase of the special operation' - as Moscow terms its invasion of Ukraine - had begun, with the aim of controlling a huge, strategic part of Ukrainian territory.

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

Russian forces, which with-



Members of Ukraine Red Cross move an internally displaced elderly woman on a stretcher in a bunker at a factory in Severodonetsk, eastern Ukraine, on Friday (AFP)

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

Minnekaev said their focus was now to 'provide a land corridor to Crimea', which Russia annexed in 2014, and towards a breakaway pro-Russian region of Moldova, Transnistria, where the general claimed Russian-speak-

ing people were 'being oppressed'. Ukrainian authorities have vowed to fight on and drive the Russian troops from their land, but they also sought an Easter pause.

"Unfortunately, Russia rejected the proposal to establish an Easter truce," said President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier this week.

In his regular Friday night address, Zelensky said the Russian

Russian forces withdrew from around Kyiv and the north of Ukraine after being frustrated in their attempts to take over the capital

general's comments were a clear articulation of Moscow's goals.

"This only confirms what I have already said multiple times: Russia's invasion of Ukraine was intended only as a beginning," he said.

Ukraine's government, emboldened by an influx of Western weaponry, said its beleaguered forces were still holding out inside a sprawling steelworks in the razed port city of Mariupol.

The Kremlin has claimed the 'liberation' of Mariupol, which is pivotal to its war plans nearly two months after President Vladimir Putin ordered the shock invasion of Russia's Western-leaning neighbour.

Humanitarian appeal

In a phone call to Putin, EU chief Charles Michel appealed for humanitarian access to Mariupol, which has been largely de-

stroyed by weeks of intense Russian bombardment.

"Strongly urged for immediate humanitarian access and safe passage from Mariupol and other besieged cities all the more on the occasion of Orthodox Easter," Michel tweeted.

Putin however accused Kyiv of refusing to allow its troops to surrender in Mariupol.

"All servicemen of the Ukrainian armed forces, militants of the national battalions and foreign mercenaries who laid down their arms are guaranteed life," Putin told Michel, the Kremlin said.

Ukraine says hundreds of its forces and civilians are holed up inside the sprawling Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, and Kyiv has repeatedly called for a ceasefire to allow women, children and the elderly to safely exit the shattered city. Russia's defence ministry earlier said it was ready to observe a humanitarian pause if Kyiv's troops surrendered.

"The enemy's offensive operation in the south hinges on Mariupol. The enemy is trying to focus all its efforts on it," Pavlo Kyrylenko, governor of the eastern region of Donetsk, told AFP.

Near the frontlines in eastern Ukraine, a smattering of residents still held out amid frequent bouts of shelling.

After two months of sustained Russian artillery fire, the hamlet of Lysychansk, located just 14km from Russian ground forces, has largely turned into a ghost town.

Only a small sheltered market in the centre of town is still operating, providing food and other supplies after the town's other market was bombed.

AFP



A man participates in an ongoing anti-government demonstration near the president's office in Colombo on Friday (AFP)

Loyalists turn on Sri Lanka PM as pressure mounts

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

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

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

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

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

Godahewa, previously a staunch Rajapaksa loyalist, said

the president should sack his elder brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa - the head of the family - and allow an all-party interim government to take over.

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

"We need to restore political stability to successfully meet the economic crisis," Godahewa said in a statement on his Facebook page.

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

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

"I urge the president to appoint a smaller cabinet with a genuine consensus representing all parties in parliament for one year maximum," Alahapperuma said on Saturday.

AFP

Pak reports first polio case in 15 months

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan's prime minister said on Saturday he will chair an emergency meeting of a national task force for polio eradication after authorities detected the country's first case of the debilitating neurodegenerative disease in 15 months.

Health officials announced the discovery of the wild polio case on Friday, saying a 15-month-old boy had been paralysed by the virus in the northwestern district of North Waziristan.

"Deeply saddened to share that a 15-month-old boy has been paralysed in North Waziristan," tweeted Shahzad Baig, a coordinator with the National Emergency Operations Centre for Pakistan's polio eradication programme.

"Pakistan confirms a wild #poliovirus case after nearly 15 months," he added.

The country's last case was detected in January 2021, and earlier this year authorities celebrated going 12 months without a single case - the first time that



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will chair an emergency meeting of a national task force for polio eradication (AFP)

had occurred since eradication efforts began.

Pakistan is one of two coun-

tries, alongside neighbouring Afghanistan, where polio remains endemic, although case

numbers have dropped drastically in recent years.

The case in North Waziristan takes the global number of polio cases in 2022 to three, with a case also confirmed in Malawi and another in Afghanistan, according to data from the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI).

The case in Malawi was confirmed in February although the onset of paralysis came in November 2021, according to the GPEI.

Pakistani authorities said they were working on ensuring the virus does not spread further in the South Asian country.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's office said he would preside over the emergency meeting of the polio eradication task force on Monday.

Nigeria officially eradicated wild polio in 2020. Pakistani officials said in February that they were hoping to achieve the same goal in the coming years.

AFP

10 missing in Poland's 2nd mine accident

Warsaw, Poland - Rescuers were making their way underground toward 10 miners who went missing on Saturday after a second coal mine accident in just days in Poland.

The latest tragedy took place at the Zofiowka mine in southern Poland, when a tremor shook the pit at 3:40am (0140 GMT), 900 metres below the surface, sparking a methane leak, its owner JSW, said in a statement. In 2018, five miners were killed when an earthquake struck the same coalmine in the country which relies heavily on the fossil fuel.

After Saturday's jolt, 42 of the 52 miners who were underground at the time managed to make it to the surface, the company said.

AFP

Scientists scour 'Mexico's Galapagos' for quake, volcano clues

Mexico City, Mexico - Could a volcanic eruption off Mexico's coast unleash a tsunami like the one that devastated Tonga? What really causes tectonic plates to shift and trigger earthquakes? Scientists visited a remote archipelago in search of answers.

Located in the Pacific Ocean several hundred kilometers from the Mexican coast, the Revillagigedo Islands are known as 'Mexico's Galapagos' due to their isolation and biodiversity.

One of the archipelago's volcanoes, Barcena, last erupted in 1953, and another Evermann, in 1993. Both remain active today. Located on a mid-ocean ridge, the four islands are uninhabited



Scientists visiting Mexico's remote Revillagigedo Islands on March 11, this year (AFP)

apart from navy personnel, and access is tightly restricted. Getting there takes about 24 hours or more by boat and few civilians visit apart from scuba divers lured by giant manta rays, humpback whales, dolphins and sharks.

Last month, an international team of 10 scientists carried out a week-long mission whose aims included trying to determine if - or more likely when - there will be another volcanic eruption.

"What we're trying to find is how explosive these volcanoes can be and how dangerous," said the group's leader, Douwe van Hinsbergen, a professor at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

AFP

France braces for Le Pen-Macron showdown

Centrist President Emmanuel Macron is the favourite to win re-election in the run-off ballot on Sunday

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

Macron is the favourite to win re-election in the run-off ballot on Sunday, and there are indications he bolstered his advantage with a combative performance in the one-off election debate against a somewhat defensive Le Pen.

But the president and his allies have insisted over the last week that nothing is in the bag, with a strong turnout crucial to avoid a shock in France comparable to the 2016 polls that led to Brexit in Britain and the rise to power of Donald Trump in the United States. A Le Pen victory would also send shockwaves across Europe. Left-wing EU leaders including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have pleaded with France to choose Macron over his rival.

The stakes are huge - Le Pen would become modern France's first far-right leader and first female president. Macron would be the first French president to win re-election in two decades.



Marine Le Pen greets people as she leaves the port city of Berck in northern France on Friday. RIGHT: Emmanuel Macron shakes hands with supporters in Figeac, southern France, on Friday (AFP)



If elected, Macron is expected, in a symbolic gesture, to address supporters on the Champ de Mars in central Paris at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

Polls in mainland France will open at 0600 GMT on Sunday and close 12 hours later, immediately followed by projections that usually predict the result with a degree of accuracy.

But voters in French overseas territories that span the globe will start voting earlier Paris

time, beginning with those in North America and the Caribbean on Saturday, followed by the Pacific and then the Indian Ocean.

‘Woke up with hangover’

Saturday is marked by a campaign blackout, with no campaigning allowed and no more polls published.

Macron and Le Pen threw themselves into a final flurry of

campaigning on Friday, firing off attacks in interviews before last-minute walkabouts and rallies.

Le Pen insisted that opinion polls giving Macron the lead would be proved wrong and took aim at her rival's plan to push back the retirement age to 65 from 62. Macron for his part said Le Pen was trying to mask an authoritarian 'extreme right' platform that stigmatises Muslims with a plan to outlaw headscarves in public.

Analysts say abstention rates could reach 25 to 30 per cent, in particular among left-wing voters unhappy with Macron's pro-business agenda, not least his tax cuts for businesses and the highest earners.

Spring school holidays will also be in full swing across much of the country this weekend, increasing the chances that many voters will not cast ballots. Far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon, who scored a close

third-place finish in the first-round vote on April 10, has refused to allow Macron an easy ride by pointedly refusing to urge his millions of followers to back the president while insisting they must not cast a single vote for Le Pen. Polls have shown Macron with a lead of some 10 percentage points. The highly anticipated TV debate did not change the trend and, if anything, allowed Macron to open more of a gap.

The result is predicted to be closer than in 2017, when the same candidates faced off but Macron carried the day with 66 per cent to 34 per cent.

In a final plea, Macron urged voters not to repeat the mistake of those who opposed Brexit and the election of Trump but decided to stay at home.

"They woke up the next day with a hangover," he told BFMTV. AFP

Kenya's former president Mwai Kibaki dead at 90

Nairobi, Kenya - Former Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki, who led the East African nation for more than a decade, has died, his successor Uhuru Kenyatta announced on Friday. He was 90.

"It is a sad day for us as a country. We have lost a great leader," Kenyatta said in an address on state television.

Kenyan politicians, African leaders, the African Union and former colonial ruler Britain were among those to send their condolences. Kibaki, a veteran politician whose career dated back to the birth of independent Kenya, served as the country's third president from December 2002 to April 2013, taking over from the authoritarian rule of Daniel arap Moi. His rule saw the most violent election in Kenya's history when more than 1,100 people died in bloody ethnic battles after disputed 2007 polls, but he also oversaw the adoption of a new constitution with reforms aimed at preventing such unrest. Kibaki left a legacy of strong growth in the regional economic powerhouse, launching major infrastructure projects and boosting the struggling health and education sectors.

But his rule was also marred by rampant government corruption and his lavish spending on flagship projects contributed to the country's debt mountain.

Kibaki had kept a low profile since leaving office, making few public appearances.

Details about his death have not been officially disclosed. However, his health had fluctuated since a serious car accident in 2002 and he had been in and out of hospital in recent years.

Kenyatta said a state funeral would be held, without giving a date. He also ordered a period of national mourning from Friday until sunset on the day he is buried, with all flags on public buildings to be flown at half-mast.

‘Visionary statesman’

"As a leading figure in Kenya's post-independence history... Kibaki earned the biding respect



Kibaki lifts up Kenya's constitution in Nairobi on August 27, 2010 (AFP)

and affection of the people of this nation," Kenyatta said.

"President Kibaki will be forever remembered as the gentleman of Kenyan politics, a brilliant debater whose eloquence, wit, and charm won the day time-and-time again."

Tributes also came from across Kenya and the African continent, from Burundi to Zambia, as well as regional blocs including the African Union (AU).

"I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of former Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki. My sincere condolences to his family, president Uhuru Kenyatta, the Government and people of the Republic of Kenya," AU Commission chief Moussa Faki Mahamat said on Twitter.

"The region shares in your loss of an iconic leader and visionary statesman," Workneh Gebeyehu, executive secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), said on Twitter.

"Kibaki is one of the freedom fighters of our country, he served this country for many years with diligence, forthrightness, honesty and transparency," said veteran Kenyan leader Raila Odinga, who is making his fifth run for the presidency in August elections.

"We mourn the passing of former President Kibaki, a true statesman who ushered in a new democratic and economic era in Kenyan politics," British High Commissioner to Kenya Jane Marriott said on Twitter. AFP

Gunman found dead after four shot in Washington

Washington, US - A lone shooter who wounded four people in an upscale Washington neighbourhood killed himself before being apprehended, the city's police chief said on Friday evening.

The Connecticut Avenue-Van Ness neighbourhood of the US capital - where multiple schools and embassies are located - was swarmed by law enforcement and locked down after gunfire erupted in the area on Friday afternoon.

Assistant police chief Stuart Emerman said three people had been taken to the hospital - two adults who were in critical but stable condition and a 12-year-old girl with a minor gunshot wound.



Police escort people fleeing the scene of a reported shooting near the 2900 block of Van Ness Street in Northwest, Washington, DC on Friday (AFP)

Another individual with a graze wound to the back was treated at the scene, Emerman added.

"The suspect that we believe is responsible for this is now de-

ceased," Washington Police Chief Robert Contee said at a news conference on Friday night.

He said the suspected shooter took his own life as police officers breached the fifth-floor apart-

ment where he was located and that they found a 'sniper-type set up with a tripod'.

While no motive was yet known, 'obviously his intent was to kill and hurt members of our community', Contee added.

A video shared widely on social media showed lengthy bursts of automatic gunfire toward multiple people who ran for cover, apparently taken from the perspective of the shooter.

"It looks very much to be authentic," Contee said of the video, but clarified that it still needed to be forensically confirmed and it was not known if the video was live-streamed or uploaded afterward.

More than six guns were re-

covered from the fifth-floor apartment, Contee said, apart from 'multiple rounds of ammunition'. Photographs posted later by the police department on Twitter showed three assault-style rifles with scopes laying on a table with a tripod in the background as well as a single handgun. Contee said that police believe the weapons were obtained legally based on preliminary information. The shooting comes a little over a week after a gunman opened fire on a New York City subway, injuring 23.

That suspect was apprehended after a day-long manhunt and has been arraigned on terror-related charges. AFP

‘So much joy’: Brazil holds first carnival since COVID

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Rio de Janeiro's carnival, a glittering, sequin-studded festival of the flesh, exploded back to life on Friday with the first famed samba school parades since COVID-19 hit Brazil.

After two long years of face masks, social-distancing and death, a sparkling sea of dancers, drummers and multi-storey floats reclaimed the 'Sambadrome', the iconic beach city's carnival parade venue, which had been turned into a drive-through vaccination centre at the height of the health crisis.

The all-night parades by the city's top samba schools on Friday and Saturday are the first since February 2020, marking a turning point for hard-hit Brazil, where COVID-19 has claimed more than 660,000 lives - second only to the United States.

"I'm just so happy. I think a lot of people are going to cry... including me," said Ana Vieira, a 48-year-old geography teacher, who was wearing a giant, glistening white costume to parade for the Imperatriz samba school.

"Carnival is life. You can see the happiness on people's faces after two long years staying home and missing it," Vieira, who has been parading for 20 years, told AFP.

The festivities were hit by tragedy, however, when an 11-



Members of the Sao Clemente Samba school perform during the first night of Rio's carnival parade at the Sambadrome Marques de Sapucaí in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Friday (AFP)

year-old girl died after being injured in a float accident during a lower-level samba school parade contest on Wednesday.

‘Couldn't sleep’

The pandemic had left Brazilians full of 'saudades' - Portuguese for 'longing' - for carnival, a free-for-all of dancing, singing and partying at close quarters that is essentially the opposite of social distancing.

"I couldn't sleep last night, I was so excited," said Rita Marcelino, a 62-year-old domestic worker who was dancing up a

storm as she waited to parade - a moment of catharsis after losing her job and 'many' friends and family members to the pandemic. There were concerns carnival would be axed again this year, after Rio authorities canceled it last year and then postponed this edition by two months from the traditional dates - just before the Catholic season of Lent - over fears of the Omicron variant spreading.

But with more than 75 per cent of Brazil's 213mn people now fully vaccinated, the average weekly COVID-19 death toll has

plunged from more than 3,000 a year ago to around 100 - allowing the show to go on.

All participants and the 75,000 attendees expected each night are required to present proof of vaccination.

‘Two years of darkness’

Each samba school in the competition has 60 to 70 minutes to tell a story in music and dance, which is evaluated on nine criteria by the jury. The reigning champions, Viradouro, chose as their theme Rio's epic 1919 carni-

val - the first celebrated after the devastation of another pandemic, the Spanish flu. "No sadness can withstand so much joy," says their samba theme song.

Other schools picked themes charged with social messages, with Brazil facing divisive elections in October expected to pit far-right President Jair Bolsonaro against leftist ex-leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Of the 12 schools, eight chose themes dealing with racism or Afro-Brazilian culture and history, loaded issues in a country where the current president has faced frequent accusations of racism. "Brazil still suffers from racism. Nothing has changed. Slums, hunger, poverty... they have a colour here: black," said Aristoteles Silva, 52, parading as a warrior for samba school Salgueiro, whose theme song was an anti-racist anthem entitled 'Resistance'.

"I'm hoping the election will bring a total change."

Carnival should also provide some needed relief for the pandemic-battered economy.

Beyond the swirl of floats, feathers and barely covered flesh, carnival is big business, moving some four billion reais (US\$800mn) and creating at least 45,000 jobs, according to official figures. AFP

Israel closes crossing to Gazans after overnight rocket attacks

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

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

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

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



Israeli police carry a wounded young Palestinian demonstrator at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound on Friday (AFP)

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

They followed rocket attacks on Wednesday and Thursday, and came as Israeli police clashed with Palestinian protesters at Al-Aqsa mosque, leaving at least one man hospitalised in serious condition.

Israel had retaliated against those attacks with air strikes, but in an apparent desire to prevent further violence, shifted its response this time to the painful

economic measure of closing Erez, implying that further rockets would extend the penalty.

"The re-opening of the crossing will be decided in accordance with a security situational assessment," COGAT added in its statement.

'Incitement'

More than 200 people, mostly Palestinians, have been hurt in clashes in and around Al-Aqsa in the past week.

Palestinians have been outraged by massive Israeli police deployment and repeated visits

by Jews to the holy site.

Early on Friday, the Palestinian Red Crescent said 57 people were wounded after police stormed the compound in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem's Old City when Palestinians began hurling stones towards the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray.

And after midday prayers, some Muslim worshippers chanted 'incitement' and tried to damage a police post, police said, using a drone to spray tear gas from the air, AFP reporters said.

Al-Aqsa is Islam's third-holiest site, and the most sacred site in Judaism where it is known as the Temple Mount.

By long-standing convention, Jews are allowed to visit under certain conditions but are not allowed to pray there. The escalating unrest prompted concern at the United Nations, which on Thursday demanded a probe into the Israeli police actions.

"The use of force by Israeli police resulting in widespread injuries among worshippers and staff in and around the Al-Aqsa mosque compound must be promptly, impartially, independently and transparently investigated," said Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

AFP

Bodyguard of Iran general shot dead

Tehran, Iran - Gunmen killed the bodyguard of a general from Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Saturday in an attack on a checkpoint in the country's restive southeast, state media said.

IRNA news agency said the shooting occurred in Sistan-Baluchistan, a province bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan that is often the scene of attacks or clashes between security forces and armed groups. The slain bodyguard was identified as Mahmoud Absalan, the son of General Parviz Absalan, a commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the region. State television said 'criminals' had opened fire at the checkpoint, located at the entrance to the provincial capital of Zahedan.

IRNA said the security forces arrested those behind the attack.

Poverty-stricken Sistan-Baluchistan is a flashpoint for clashes with smuggling gangs, as well as separatists from the Baluchi minority and extremist militant groups. In January, state media said three Guard members were among nine people killed in a clash with 'armed criminals' in the same region. And in November, IRNA said three members of the security forces were killed in similar circumstances also in Sistan-Baluchistan.

AFP

Iran-Saudi talks resume in Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq - Regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia have resumed key talks in the Iraqi capital Baghdad after negotiations were suspended last month, a senior Iraqi official informed on Saturday.

"Talks resumed last Thursday in Baghdad," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity, and without giving further details.

Iran's Nour news agency confirmed a meeting attended by 'senior officials from the secretariat of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and the head of the Saudi intelligence service'.

Shiite-majority Iran and the Sunni kingdom of Saudi Arabia support rival sides in several conflict zones across the region, including in Yemen, where the Houthi rebels are backed by Tehran, and Riyadh leads a military coalition supporting the government. The talks in Iraq - which



Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (AFP)

borders both Iran and Saudi Arabia - are the fifth round of meetings in the country in the past year between Tehran and Riyadh aimed at restoring ties.

"It is expected that a joint meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries will be held in the near future," Nour said, describing what it called the 'positive atmosphere of the recent meeting, which raised the hopes of a resumption of bilateral relations'.

In March, Iranian media reported that Tehran had suspended participation in talks after Saudi Arabia announced it had executed in just one day a record 81 people convicted of various crimes related to 'terrorism', including men linked to Yemen's Houthi rebels.

But in early March, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said his country and Iran were 'neighbours forever', and that it was 'better for both of us to work it out and to look for ways in which we can coexist'.

The comments were welcomed by Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

"We have different views and approaches on some issues in the region, but the management of differences by the sides can serve the interests of the two nations," Amir-Abdollahian said at the time.

AFP

Mosque blast kills 33 in Afghanistan

Kunduz, Afghanistan - A bomb blast ripped through a mosque during Friday prayers in northern Afghanistan, killing 33 people including children, just a day after the Islamic State group claimed two separate deadly attacks.

Since Taliban fighters seized control of Afghanistan last year after ousting the US-backed government, the number of bombings has fallen but the militant and Sunni IS has continued with attacks against targets they see as heretical. A string of bombings rocked the country this week, with deadly attacks targeting a school and a mosque in Shiite neighbourhoods.

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that children were among the 33 dead in the blast on Friday at a mosque in the northern province of Kunduz.

"We condemn this crime... and express our deepest sympathy



A wounded receives treatment at a hospital in Kunduz on Friday (AFP)

thies to the bereaved," he said, adding 43 more were wounded.

An intelligence official said on condition of anonymity that the explosion was caused by a

bomb, but it was unclear how it was detonated. An AFP correspondent saw large holes blown through the walls of the Mawlawi Sikandar mosque, popular with Sufis in the Imam Sahib district, north of Kunduz city. One side of the mosque was completely destroyed by the explosion.

Militant groups such as IS bear a deep hatred for Sufis who they view as heretics and accuse them of polytheism - the greatest sin in Islam - for seeking the intercession of dead saints.

"The sight at the mosque was horrifying. All those who were worshipping inside the mosque were either injured or killed," Mohammad Esah, a shopkeeper who helped ferry victims to the district hospital, told AFP.

'Shrapnel injuries'

Relatives of victims arrived at the local hospital to look for their loved ones.

"My son is martyred," screamed one man, while a woman accompanied by her four children searched for her husband. A nurse told AFP over the phone that between 30 to 40 people had been admitted for treatment of wounds from the blast. About a dozen ambulances ferried the seriously wounded to the main provincial hospital in Kunduz city.

"The shrapnel injuries on the bodies of the wounded show they were caused by a bomb explosion," a doctor at the provincial hospital told AFP.

Friday's blast was one of the biggest attacks since the Taliban seized power on August 15 last year. The deadliest was just days later when more than 100 Afghan civilians and 13 US servicemen were killed in a suicide attack at Kabul airport as people were trying to flee the country.

AFP

Biden protects US forests but struggles on biggest climate goals

Seattle, US - President Joe Biden marked Earth Day on Friday by ordering protections for ancient forests and pondering a future without his beloved gas-guzzling Corvette sports car, but after 14 months in office his more ambitious climate goals look elusive.

The Democrat has campaigned heavily for environmental protections and US leadership in the response to global warming, but regularly run up against lack of support in Congress.

His executive order, signed in a Seattle park filled with tall trees and spring blossoms, recognized the importance of America's old-growth forests in mitigating climate change - but also their vulnerability in an era of ever more intense wildfires across the western states.

In the order, Biden required officials overseeing federal lands to inventory all mature forests within a year and to identify threats to the trees so that they

can be guarded, especially from fires.

"We have to move quickly and with this executive order on Earth Day we're also showing this moment of maximum threat and urgency can also be a moment of enormous hope," Biden said.

Recalling that much of the primeval forest covering the United States had long been cut down, Biden suggested that Washington underwrite the survival of Brazil's Amazon rainforest - a vast expanse considered vital to regulating global climate, but under ever more aggressive assault from miners, loggers and farmers.

"We should be paying the Brazilians not to cut down their forest," he said.

"You know, our forests are our planet's lungs. They literally are recycling and cycling the CO2 out of the atmosphere."

According to the White



Climate activists stage rally near the White House in Washington, DC, marking Earth Day on Friday (AFP)

House, US forests absorb carbon dioxide equivalent to more than 10 per cent of US annual greenhouse gas emissions, making mature and old-growth woodlands located on federal lands

'critical carbon sinks'.

Setting ambitious goals

Throughout his presidency, Biden has set ambitious environ-

mental goals, starting by quickly reversing his Republican predecessor Donald Trump's move to pull the United States from the Paris climate accords.

However, with a barely func-

tional majority in Congress, Biden has seen major policy initiatives on the environment fail to get off the ground.

Many of Biden's biggest pushes have come through executive orders, which do not require congressional approval, but can be countermanded by the next president.

On Tuesday, the Biden administration said it was restoring safeguards weakened by Trump, including a requirement for assessing climate impacts from infrastructure projects.

This will play a key role in the wave of public works set to unroll across the country under the White House's successfully passed US\$1tn infrastructure spending bill. The bill, aiming to refurbish the country's tattered transport systems and other critical infrastructure, also includes billions of dollars to expand public transport, such as rail. Money is also set aside to

promote solar panels and electric vehicle charging networks.

However, a second spending plan, which included a whopping US\$555bn for clean energy development, failed in the Senate.

That setback cast a deep shadow over the administration's loftiest goals of all - cutting US emissions to net zero by 2050 and powering the electric grid entirely with renewable energy by 2035.

And in addition to near complete opposition to his plans from Congressional Republicans, as well as wavering from several members of his own party, Biden faces the political realities of inflation, exacerbated by Russia's Ukraine war. Western sanctions punishing energy producer Russia for its invasion of Ukraine have helped turn gasoline costs into a major political liability for Democrats in November's midterm congressional elections.

AFP

MATTI'S SIRVIO'S SALO

Hubert Vaz

Matti Sirvio's Art Gallery, in Jawharat al Shatti, has now come alive with his new Salo exhibition – Force Majeure – that takes up a snug spot between his annual Spring and Summer salons.

Exhibiting 21 explicit abstracts in this show, Matti has put up his own select collection that upholds the theme firmly yet each piece screams for individual attention for its sheer elegance in creativity. "I like to give names to each of my works," he says adding that they help define and give a definite personality to each.

On display, you see the likes of First Wave, Home Alone, Quest for Holiness, Desert Bloom, Lost in the Forest, Morning Cloud, Angels Over the Opera, Memories and many more that set your perceptions on a definite path guided by the artist. While some artists prefer to leave the interpretation to the viewer, Matti seems to clear off the thorns and thistles from the viewer's mind and help him/her understand the artist's perspective on clearer terms.

"Force Majeure, the title of the exhibition (which refers to uncertainties that are not in our control - like cancellations of flights, and so on), indicates many changes in life that do not depend on us, big events that do not depend on us, the war in Europe that doesn't depend on us, and the pandemic and all the restrictions around it that doesn't depend on us," Matti said, adding, "Over all, most works fall under this theme while a few are just artistic works with an artistic vision of their own.

The current exhibition includes 21 works but Matti had intended it to be a much smaller collection as the gallery with an artistic vision needs to have fewer works on display, so that each piece has its own space and 'to avoid the danger that the works will start competing with each other', he explained, adding that is also important to provide room for contemplation and interaction with the works on display.

When asked about the fate of the exhibits, if they do not get sold during the show, Matti said artists do not plan anything in advance as they expect all their works to get sold at any given exhibition.

"Artists make no plans, that's why the works (that don't get sold) remain in their homes and studios and they find their way somehow. Often, buyers and art collectors need time and cannot be pushed (into purchasing). If someone want to buy a bigger piece for his living room and would spend around 10-20 years around it, then he needs time to make a decision - it is like choosing your spouse - and that needs to be respected," he asserted.

Matti also suggested that serious buyers need to be invited to art various exhibitions for them to consider purchases while businesses need to get involved in promoting art in their facilities and their events. Artists also need to be supported and sponsored by businesses - very few are currently doing it - and art collectors also need to come forth and open up their homes and showcase how they enjoy art, in order to inspire others. "People are looking for encouragement and ideas on how to place art and such initiatives would be helpful," he said.

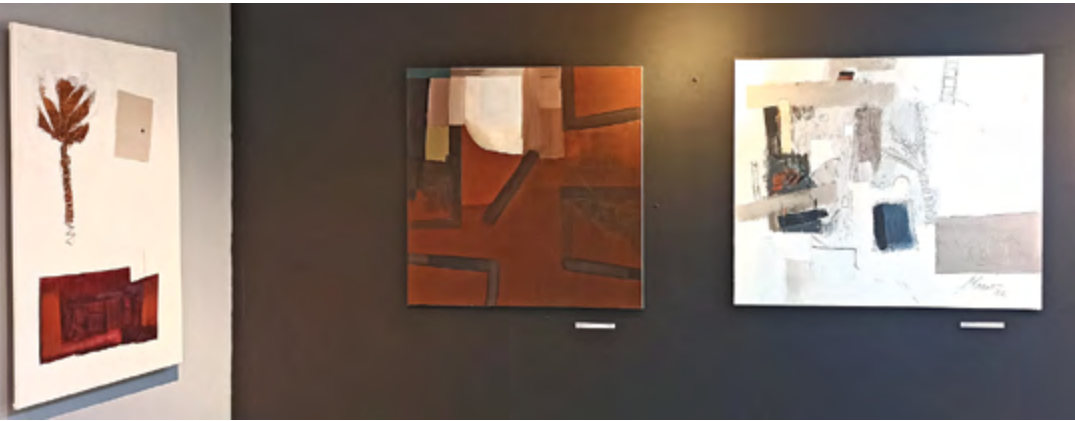
Appreciating the display of Omani art at the Muscat International Airport, Matti hoped that more commercial spaces, especially institutions like hospitals, where people need comforting visuals, would take up installation of art seriously, to use art as therapy in promoting the healing process. He also was of the opinion that hotels need to install original art, rather than prints, to enhance the guest experience.

About his own abstract paintings, he said, most of the works tend to be semi-abstract in nature as they contain certain symbols and elements that the viewer is able to relate to or find recognisable. One of the paintings in this exhibition titled Angels Over the Opera is symbolic of the Royal Opera House Muscat and has a lot of diverse artistic elements in terms of texture and composition, he said adding that it is a very dear and important painting to himself.

The exhibition, which opened last evening, will be on till May 26 before the gallery takes a two-month summer break.

Matti Sirvio's new Salo exhibition – Force Majeure, which opened last evening, will be on till May 26

Force Majeure



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CREATIVE D

Deconstructed ART

Swirling shapes, a spectrum of hues, and an unparalleled visual experience awaits you as you enter the virtual world of creative imagination and abstract allure.

Creative D, a virtual exhibition highlighting art influenced by abstraction, that opened on April 19, will empower you to unleash and rediscover your inner artist. The exhibits on display are varied in treatment yet convey a common core value of meaningful disarray.

Rangrez, the art group of the Indian Social Club, in collaboration with the Embassy of India, has organised this second art exhibition of the year as part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, a 75th anniversary celebration of Indian independence. Creative D is prepared to showcase a unique style of abstract art that has evolved from numerous ways of deconstruction.

Creative D has been conceptualised and curated by Dr Shalini Kumar, a multimedia visual artist and well-known name in Oman's art community. Having exhibited her art in four solo and more than thirty group exhibitions at local and international venues, this unique theme is her endeavour to encourage artists to think 'out of the box' and explore the realm of imaginative and abstract painting.

"The letter 'D' in Creative D stands for the deconstruction of any picture, paper, object, or material using mixed media to create exceptional artworks," Dr. Shailini explains about the theme's significance. She adds, "What makes the artworks in this exhibition distinctive is that the artists have used recycled and waste material like recycled magazine paper, glass pieces, coins, foil, and so on to express their creativity in a more open and unencumbered manner."

Many artists have been motivated by this creative concept to step outside of their comfort zones and create artworks that are beyond their wildest imagination.

"It was a voyage full of joy and creativity as the theme of this exhibition was really unique," said Kumud Sinha, one of the participants, said, recalling her journey. "Behind the Mask' is the title of my artwork, which depicts the various emotions buried behind the human face."

Creative D will showcase the distinct artworks and ingenuity of a plethora of artists from various professional backgrounds, with a total of 26 member artists displaying 31 artworks. Such exhibitions are essential in enabling artists to tell a story through their work and link them to their audience by providing a platform for budding artists to dive deeper into their passion for art.

"Creative D has given me the opportunity to explore the destructive pattern of art. From the beginning, my experience making the art piece titled 'Nightingale' has been quite refreshing," remarked Dr Nagratna Dharmendran, a participant artist whose artwork will be shown in this virtual exhibition.

As a message to artists in Oman, Dr Shalini says, "Pick up your brushes and start painting since the journey of an artist is unstoppable and ever-growing. Art is similar to meditation, and constraining yourself to a single form limits your potential. Explore the world of art and let the colours on your canvas work their magic."

(Contributed by Aashna Sanghani)



RUMAAN
Aneesha Dilip



'NIGHTINGALE'
Dr Nagratna Dharmendran



BEHIND THE MASK
Kumud Sinha

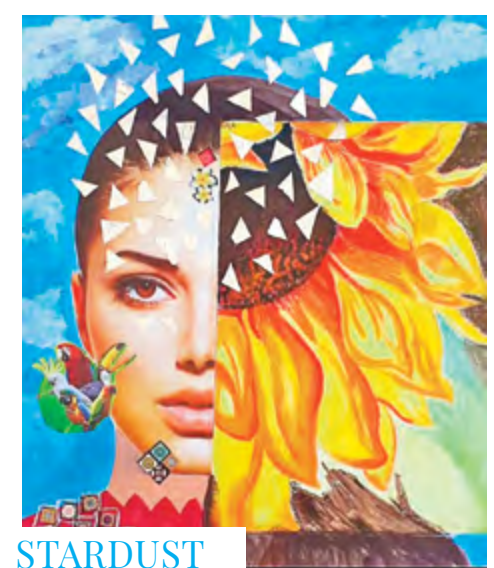
Rangrez presents its second joint exhibition this year, showcasing the works of 26 Indian artists



CURATOR
Dr Shalini Gupta



ASKEW
Shalini Varma



STARDUST
Mini Milind

Oman to send strong contingent for next month’s GCC Games in Kuwait

Muscat - Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will hold a meeting on Monday to discuss Oman's preparations for the third GCC Games, to be held in Kuwait from May 13 to 31. OOC Secretary General Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry and the managers of the participating sports teams will attend the meeting to be held at Oman Olympic Academy (OOA). Details of Oman's participation at the games will be revealed at the meeting, which will

also highlight the guidelines to be followed in Kuwait. Technical details of the competitions, the games schedule and places of residence, travel guidelines and procedures upon arrival and during the stay in Kuwait will also be finalised. A health protocol will be followed to prevent COVID-19 and ensure the safety of athletes as well as administrative and technical staff. Oman will send more than 130 athletes who will be repre-

OOC Secretary General Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry and the managers of the participating sports teams will attend the meeting to be held at Oman Olympic Academy

sent the country in ten disciplines - shooting, athletics for men, athletics for women, futsal, padel, electronic games, volleyball, swimming, basketball (3x3) for women, and karate. OOC Chairman Khalid bin

Muhammad al Zubair will be the head of Oman's official delegation. The other members of the delegation includes OOC Secretary General Al Kishry, Board member Dr Mansoor al Toqi, Chef de Mission Ali al Busafi,

Chef de Mission assistant Bader Awlad Thani, Saeed bin Ali al Hosani (administrator), Asaad bin Mubarak Alhsani (representing Omani Athletes Committee), Majid bin Muhammad al Wardi (physiotherapist), Khalil bin Khalfan al Busaidi (physiotherapist) Fahd bin Salem al Zuhaimi, Khalid bin Muhammad al Jaldani and Faisal bin Abdul Hamid al Balooshi (all media). Oman's women's athletics team, comprising three athletes will start their campaign on May

13 while a 13-member strong men's athletics team will take field on May 16. In futsal (men), Oman will field 14 players who will be joined by six technical and administrative staff. Oman shooting team includes 14 shooters and 10 technical and administrative staff, in addition to two referees. The swimming team includes six swimmers, four technical and administrative staff, and a referee.

In electronic games competitions three players and two technical and administrative staff will represent the country while in volleyball, 12 players, five technical and administrative staff, and one referee will represent the country. In padel, Oman will field eight players and three technical and administrative staff while Four players will represent the country in women's (3x3) basketball. In karate, six competitors will fight to bring glory for Oman.

Khaka stunner helps Arsenal beat United

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal took control of the battle to finish in the Premier League top four with a 3-1 win over Manchester United to all but end the Red Devils' hopes of Champions League football next season. Nuno Tavares, Bukayo Saka and Granit Khaka struck for Mikel Arteta's men to move them three points clear of Tottenham, who face Brentford later on Saturday. Sixth-placed United are six points adrift of the top four and could miss out on European football completely next season. Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 22nd goal of the season on his return to the United side after missing Tuesday's 4-0 thrashing at Liverpool due to the death of his newborn son. However, Ronaldo will regret letting Bruno Fernandes take a second-half penalty with the game finely poised at 2-1 to the Gunners. Interim United boss Ralf Rangnick described his side's display at Anfield as "humiliating" and "embarrassing". United reacted to that defeat by formalising the appointment of Ajax boss Erik ten Hag as the man to take charge at Old Trafford from next season. However, the Dutchman will not have been impressed by another shambolic start from the side he will inherit. Harry Maguire was dropped to the bench after a traumatic week.



Granit Khaka celebrates after scoring Arsenal's third goal against Manchester United on Saturday (AFP)

The England international's house was searched by police after receiving a bomb threat. Maguire has been the target for much of the criticism directed at United this season, but the defence was no better in his absence.

It took just two minutes for the visitors' to be breached as David de Gea's fine save from Saka's initial effort counted for nothing as Tavares swept home the rebound.

There was another show of support for Ronaldo as just as at Anfield in midweek the entire stadium applauded during the seventh minute. On the field, the Portuguese was receiving little help from his

teammates. De Gea stood up well to parry a piledriver from Eddie Nketiah from close range. Seconds later, Nketiah found the net from another one-on-one. A VAR review found the England under-21 international offside, but Saka was fouled by Alex Telles as he played the ball into Nketiah's path. Saka took responsibility to send De Gea the wrong way from the penalty spot to double Arsenal's lead. Ronaldo hit back within two minutes as he swept home Nemanja Matic's cross for his 100th Premier League goal. Arsenal's nerves began to show and United should have been at least level by the time Khaka fired home the final blow. Tavares needlessly handled a corner into the Arsenal box on the hour. Ronaldo stood aside to let Fernandes take the penalty, but his compatriot rolled the ball onto the post. Moments later, Ronaldo had the ball in the net thanks to another smart, instinctive finish but was flagged offside. Ronaldo then played provider for Diogo Dalot's shot to be turned onto the post by Aaron Ramsdale. Arsenal had lost three consecutive games prior to a much-needed 4-2 win at Chelsea in midweek revived their top-four ambitions. AFP



Carlos Alcaraz is the youngest player since Rafael Nadal in 2005 to make the world top 10

Alcaraz reaches Barcelona semis and world top 10

Barcelona, Spain - Carlos Alcaraz defeated top seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in a three-set rollercoaster to reach the Barcelona semi-finals on Friday and become the youngest player since Rafael Nadal in 2005 to make the world top 10. The 18-year-old Spaniard saw off world number five Tsitsipas, who had successfully defended his Monte Carlo Masters title last weekend, 6-4, 5-7, 6-2. On Monday, Alcaraz will become the first teenager to make the top 10 since Andy Murray in 2007 and youngest since compatriot and 21-time major winner Nadal 17 years ago. "Probably my biggest win on clay court. It was unbelievable," said Alcaraz on court. "Unbelievable match, unbelievable atmosphere that I lived

today on court. It was unbelievable everything. It was incredible." Alcaraz's 21st match win of 2022 could have been wrapped up in straight sets when he led 4-1 in the second set. However, he recovered and swept through the decider to set up a semi-final showdown against Australia's Alex De Minaur as he looks to take another step closer to a third title of the year after Rio and the Miami Masters. Friday's victory was his third in three meetings against Greek star Tsitsipas whose mood on Friday was not helped when he was handed two separate point penalties for a mid-set break at 0-3 down in the third set and a time violation. AFP

OCT Ruwi crowned champions

Muscat: OCT Ruwi emerged as the champions of the All-Omani Tournament after storming to a 115-run win over OCT Al Hail 'A' in the final held at the Oman Cricket Academy on Thursday. Put in to bat first, OCT Ruwi made 206 for four in 20 overs thanks mainly to Shuaib Ismail al Balushi's cracking 81 of just 40 balls. Mohammed al Balushi scored 64. In response, OCT al Hail 'A'

could only manage 91 for 9 in their 20. Abdul Jalil al Balushi top-scored with 22 runs while Abdul Ghani al Balushi, Faris Said Al Zadjali and Hisham Shafi Hisham chipped in with double-figure scores. Ali Akbar Mohamed Al Balushi and Zubair Ali Akabr Al Balushi starred for OCT Ruwi with the ball, combining for seven wickets, with individual figures of 4 for 8 and 3 for 5 respectively.

Meanwhile on Turf 2, OCT Seeb challenged OCT Muscat for the spot in what was a much more competitive encounter. Batting first after winning the toss OCT Seeb made 135 all out in 19.1 overs. Captain Abbas al Balushi top-scored with 61. OCT Muscat's Shaed Ali al Balushi and Akbar Qader Baksh claimed three scalps each. The run chase went right down to the wire, with OCT

Muscat clinching victory off the very last ball after fine contributions from Munthir al Balushi (35), Rashad al Balushi (33) and Majid Hussein Doshambah al Balushi (28). In the awards distribution ceremony held post final, Pankaj Khimji, Chairman Oman Cricket and Duleep Mendis, Head Coach and Chief Development Officer Oman Cricket handed out the awards.



OCT Ruwi players display their medals and the winners' trophy

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IPL 2022



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Hyderabad thrash sorry Bangalore as Kohli again out for golden duck



BRIEF SCORES:

Royal Challengers Bangalore 68 all out in 16.1 overs (Glenn Maxwell 12 (11) 2x4, Suyash Prabhudessai 15 (20) 1x4; T Natarajan 3 for 10, Marco Jansen 3 for 25) lost to Sunrisers Hyderabad 72 for 1 in 8 overs (Abhishek Sharma 47 (28) 8x4, 1x6, Kane Williamson 16 (17) 2x4) by 9 wickets

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)



LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

MUMBAI INDIANS

Hardik, bowlers help Gujarat Titans reclaim IPL top spot

Mumbai, India - Hardik Pandya's Gujarat Titans survived a late assault from Kolkata Knight Riders' big-hitter Andre Russell to win by eight runs and return to the top of the IPL table on Saturday.

Pandya, who missed the previous match due to injury, hit 67 - his third successive half-century - to guide Gujarat to 156 for nine after electing to bat first in Mumbai.

Kolkata lost regular wickets to be in trouble at 108-7 when Russell, already on 24 off 13, attempted to single-handedly drive the chase only to be caught in the deep by a good running catch by Lockie Ferguson in the final over. He made 48 off 25.

West Indies quick bowler Alzarri Joseph defended 18 in the final over after getting hit for a six on the first ball by Russell as Kolkata ended on 148-8.

"I thought we were 10-12 runs short. But I back my bowlers," said Hardik.

"The wicket played similar

GT V KKR



Pandya, who hit four fours and two sixes in his 49-ball knock fell to New Zealand pace bowler Tim Southee, who returned figures of 3-24, as the Gujarat batting fell apart.

Russell, who bowled just one

I fancy (us) on defending. And having Rashid and Ferguson changes (the) dynamics

HARDIK PANDYA



throughout the match. I fancy (us) on defending. And having Rashid Khan and Lockie Ferguson changes (the) dynamics."

Fast bowler Mohammed Shami stood out with figures of 4-20 while Rashid Khan took two wickets to get past 100 IPL scalps, controlling the middle

overs with his leg spin.

Rashid was named player of the match for figures of 2-22.

Pandya set up victory with partnerships of 75 with Wriddhiman Saha (25) and 50 with David Miller (27) but the opposition bowlers checked the Gujarat surge.

over, claimed four wickets in the 20th with Gujarat losing seven in the final four for just 23 runs.

But Gujarat's total proved enough for them to topple Rajasthan Royals from the top of the 10-team table with six wins out of seven matches.

AFP

IPL fines Delhi players over no-ball row

New Delhi, India - Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant and assistant coach Pravin Amre were fined their entire match fees Saturday over a furious row with the on-field umpires in their Indian Premier League match against Rajasthan Royals.

Pant and Amre intervened from the dugout during the dispute on Friday evening over a full toss delivery that they believed was a no-ball. Capitals' pacer Shardul Thakur was penalised 50 percent of his match fee.

The trio admitted to the Level 2 offence under Article 2.7 of the IPL Code of Conduct and accepted the sanction, IPL said in a statement on Saturday.

Amre was also banned for one match.

Pant initially asked the batters to walk off before sending Amre into the playing arena to demand a no-ball review from the umpires, who sent him back to the dugout. The match resumed after a long delay and Capitals eventually lost the game by 15 runs.

AFP

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EMI Starting from
OMR **69***

FREE SERVICE
3 YEARS / 60,000 KMS#

**FREE
INSURANCE**
FOR 1ST YEAR ONLY®

**FREE
REGISTRATION**
FOR 1ST YEAR ONLY^

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS
ON PURCHASE OF
2ND NISSAN VEHICLE IN THE FAMILY*®

[FOR DETAILS CLICK HERE](#)

Offer valid from 20th March to 19th May 2022 on applicable models purchased for personal use. Offer not available for vehicles purchased for Commercial use, Rent-a-car, Taxi, Government and Driving School.
** Voucher can be redeemed for purchase of Value-added service products, Service contracts and Parts at SBA Service Centers. #Periodic Maintenance Service only. Whichever is earlier. Offer includes only 10,000 kms service intervals. @1st year Oman & UAE only. ^ For 1st year only. @ & ^ Applicable for private registrations only. For Commercial registrations additional amount needs to be borne by the customer. *Additional PMS Service for new car, exclusive discount on labor charges, parts & trade-in benefits. Second car purchase should be either in the name of existing Nissan owner or his/her immediate family member (wife/husband/son/daughter/brother/sister) to avail additional benefits under the scheme. Conditions apply. *EMIs shown are calculated on the price of the base model with 20% down payment, 2.75% rate of interest for 10 years loan tenure through Bank Muscat. Subject to credit approvals. Conditions apply.

**Bahwan
International
Group**



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**Suhail Bahwan
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