

Private sector salaries by April 21

As per the provisions of the Labour Law issued by Royal Decree No 35/2003, private sector establishments must pay the employee wages for the month of April by Thursday (April 21), keeping in mind the ensuing occasion of Eid al Fitr. The decision is aimed at helping the employees in the private sector to prepare themselves adequately in advance for Eid al Fitr.



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AL HARTHY SECURES SUPERB SECOND ON GRID



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OIL FIRMS SECURE INJUNCTIONS TO STOP UK CLIMATE PROTESTS



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BEYOND KARAK: A TEA SOMMELIER REVEALS THE SECRET TO A PERFECT CUP



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO ZIMBABWE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the Republic of Zimbabwe on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Mnangagwa and the people of his country further progress and prosperity. — ONA

SMES TO PROVIDE COURIER SERVICES

Oman Post and Asyad Express, an affiliate of Asyad Group, in cooperation with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), announced registration for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to provide postal and courier services in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The registration began on Sunday and will be on for one week. Nasser bin Ahmed al Sharji, CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, said that this initiative comes within the framework of utilising sale outlets and increasing postal service points all over the country. DETAILS ON P3

Decree introduces amendments to State’s Administrative Apparatus

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 14/2022 introducing amendments to the State’s Administrative Apparatus.

Article (1) stipulates that the amendments attached to this Decree shall apply to the system of the

State’s Administrative Apparatus promulgated under Royal Decree No 75/2020.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts the amendments attached to this Decree or contravenes their provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official

Gazette and enforced on the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No 15/2022 introducing amendments to Royal Decree No 31/2012 on the establishment of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Article (1) replaces the text of First Article of aforementioned

Royal Decree No 31/2012 as follows: “A centre titled National Centre for Statistics and Information shall be established and shall report to the Council of Ministers”.

Article (2) the term “Minister of Economy”, wherever it has occurred in the System of the National Centre for Statistics and

Information, shall be replaced with the term “Council of Ministers”.

Article (3) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (4) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

PROMOTING TRADITIONAL CRAFTS



A training programme was held for children under the age of 15 in the Wilayat of Bahla to teach them pottery, with the aim of preparing a generation interested in traditional crafts, especially pottery. – ONA

8 businesses mandated to enable e-payment service for customers

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion issued a Ministerial Decision No 386/2022 on providing electronic payment services for consumers.

Article (1) stipulates that establishments and commercial companies operating in the activities of selling foodstuff, gold and silver, restaurants and cafes, selling vegetables and fruits,

electronics, building materials and tobacco products, as well as all activities in industrial zones, complexes, malls and gift markets are mandated to provide the electronic payment service for all consumers.

The move seeks to achieve comprehensive digital transformation through cooperation and integration between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and In-

vestment Promotion, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The ministry affirmed that consumers can choose between paying electronically or by cash. SEE ALSO P13

Fak-Kurba secures release of 447 people

KABEER YOUSUF

[@kabeeryousef](#)

Fak-Kurba or Ending Financial Crisis initiative, organised by the Omani Lawyers Association, managed to release 447 insolvent persons since the beginning of the 9th edition of the initiative till now. Those released were imprisoned or were about to be imprisoned due to civil, commercial, labour and Sharia claims.

Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, Chairman of the Association, said that those released were from all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman as follows, 148 cases from South Al Sharqiyah, 77 from South Al Batinah, 70 from North Al Batinah, 45 from North Al Sharqiyah, 39 cases from Al Dhahirah, 30 from Al Dakhiliyah, 9 cases from Musandam, 5 cases from Dhofar and 4 from Al Wusta.

Dr Al Zadjali affirmed that the execution departments in various courts are working closely with the Omani Lawyers Association to achieve this humanitarian goal. He added that the efforts of individuals and institutions in giving hands to those in need are highly appreciated.

We highly appreciate the efforts of individuals and institutions, and we look forward to bringing joy to insolvent persons and their families, as we move towards Eid al Fitr

DR MOHAMMED AL ZADJALI

“We highly appreciate the efforts of individuals and institutions, and we look forward to bringing joy to insolvent persons and their families, as we move towards the Eid al Fitr”, said Dr Al Zadjali.

“Fak-Kurba initiative is run by Royal support and from other good Samaritans in the society, and we move forward with the humanitarian work in line with the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who has envisioned on the importance of charity in the society, TURN TO P3

16 RAMADHAN 1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	Dhuhr	Asr
04:25 AM	12:11 PM	03:39 PM
Maghrib	Isha	
06:34 PM	07:47 PM	

INSIDE



OVER 20 WOUNDED IN JERUSALEM VIOLENCE

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STORM CLOUDS OVER THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

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WASHINGTON: Follow the pollen. Records from past plant life tell the real story of global temperatures, according to research from a climate scientist at the Washington University in St Louis.

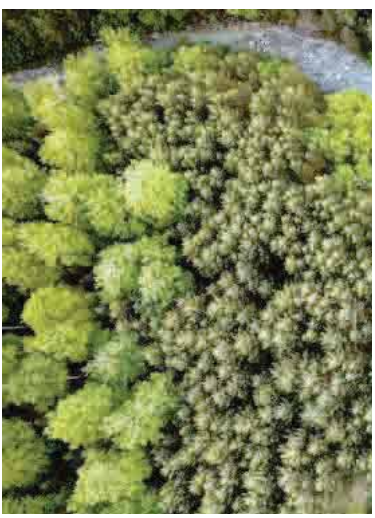
Warmer temperatures brought plants — and then came even warmer temperatures, according to new model simulations published in ‘Science Advances’.

Alexander Thompson, a postdoctoral research associate in earth and planetary sciences

in Arts and Sciences, updated simulations from an important climate model to reflect the role of changing vegetation as a key driver of global temperatures over the last 10,000 years.

Thompson had long been troubled by a problem with models of earth’s atmospheric temperatures since the last ice age. Too many of these simulations showed temperatures warming consistently over time.

But climate proxy records tell a different story. Many of



those sources indicate a marked peak in global temperatures that occurred between 6,000 and 9,000 years ago.

Thompson had a hunch that the models could be overlooking the role of changes in vegetation in favour of impacts from atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations or ice cover.

In reality, the changes to vegetative cover were significant.

Early in the Holocene epoch, the Sahara Desert in Africa grew

greener than today — it was more of a grassland.

Other Northern Hemisphere vegetation including the coniferous and deciduous forests in the mid-latitudes and the Arctic also thrived.

Thompson took evidence from pollen records and designed a set of experiments with a climate model known as the Community Earth System Model (CESM), one of the best-regarded models in a wide-ranging class of such models. — Agencies



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■ OMAN, CHINA REVIEW MILITARY COOPERATION



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman. The two sides reviewed areas of military cooperation between the two countries and means of enhancing them. They also discussed several matters of common interest. — ONA

Agreements signed to set up projects in Al Dakhiliyah

NIZWA: The Governor's Office of Al Dakhiliyah signed nine agreements on Sunday to implement various development and service projects in the governorate to the tune of RO 3.5 million.

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 bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah. — ONA

Vaccination of children challenging than adults

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkutttyv

A fully vaccinated child population will strengthen herd immunity in society, halting the further spread of the virus. Booster doses in adults and children are expected to reduce the impact of any new virus variants, reveals a study in the Sultanate of Oman.

“The risk of children contracting long Covid-19 can impair children's quality of life, development and perhaps leave a lifelong health impact”, suggests the study published in the latest edition of Oman Medical Journal.

However, implementation of the vaccination drive among children is expected to be more challenging than among adults. The member states of WHO have affirmed that implementing Covid-19 vaccination programmes during the pandemic required rigorous planning and coordination of activities and resources ahead of time.

The study was carried out by Salah al Awaidy of the Office of Health Affairs, Ministry of Health, Faryal Khamis, Adult Infectious Diseases, Department of Medicine, Royal Hospital and Thamra al Ghafri, Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health.

“Taking such meticulous preparations ensure all stakeholders at the country level are aligned and prepared for a smooth roll-out of the vaccination programmes, including contingency plans for unforeseen challenges, and to ensure positive reception from the citizenry,” urges the study.

Effective nationwide immu-



nisation of children requires the participation and confidence of many stakeholders, including parents, the public, and various government partners and requires resources to be in place.

The study conducted before the re-opening of the schools found extended school closures causing a significant psychological impact on children, and educationists and psychologists are increasingly calling for their early reopening.

“The safest way to open schools and keep them open is to fully vaccinate all children. With them back at school, parents and caregivers will be able to resume their workplaces, increasing their productivity and income levels”, it urges.

The world has already experienced how the 2021 adult vaccination drive against coronavirus succeeded in averting a huge number of infections and hospitalisations and saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

It is time to repeat the exercise for children now that an increasing array of Covid-19 vaccines have been tested and approved

for paediatric use.

The study stressed a socio-behavioural survey among the public and the healthcare workers (HCWs) in the Sultanate of Oman to assess their perceptions and attitudes on vaccinating children and adolescents.

The survey results will assist the policymakers in planning the vaccination drive. This will also help them to understand the prevalence and nature of vaccine hesitancy among the Omani public.

“This, in turn, will help the generation of structured public education campaigns to inculcate a well-reasoned understanding of the need for vaccinating all children”.

While stressing the crucial role of HCWs, who are generally trusted by the public, the study moots imparting further training of the HCWs and update themselves with the latest developments in Covid-19 prevention and management, understand the people's misinformation and the fears, and be ready with clear scientific explanations that reassure and motivate the public towards acceptance of paediatric vaccines.

Wheat harvest season begins in Wilayat of Adam

ADAM: The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Adam in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah has started harvesting wheat crop in various villages.

The cultivation of wheat crop begins in Adam in November until March each year. Wheat is harvested in a number of villages using modern machines instead of the traditional method. Farmers provides care to the crop from the beginning of the season until harvest time to ensure a good product.

Wheat cultivation thrives in the

Wilayat of Adam, thanks to the abundance of water and suitable fertile soil, as well as the keenness of farmers to growing this type of crop. The cultivated land area and production of wheat may vary due to the climatic conditions in each region in terms of rains.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in Adam distributed this year 525 kg of wheat types. The cultivated area reached 40 feddans (each feddan equals 4,200 square metres).

Al Bashayer farm cultivates the largest area, amounting to 29 feddans and the amount of the



farm's production hit 33 tonnes of wheat.

The ministry urges farmers to make use of the support provided to them in terms of good, high-yield varieties recommended by agricultural research stations, as well as harvesting equipment and other services offered to farmers to achieve an economic return for them, increase the local product of wheat and reduce dependence on the imported wheat.

Production of wheat in each feddan ranges between 800-1,000/kg, according to the quality of each variety. — ONA





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Shura holds regular meeting, approves draft amendments



MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura held its 11th regular meeting of the third annual session (2021-2022), under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman, on Sunday.

At outset of the meeting, the chairman of Majlis Ash'shura extended sincere greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan, praying for the return of this auspicious occasion on His Majesty, the Omani people and the Arab and Muslim population with blessing and bounties.

The chairman welcomed Mohsin bin Mohammad bin Salem Fadhel, who took the oath as the new representative of the Wilayat of Salalah, replacing Abdullah bin Hussain al Mashoor who joined the council following the death in February of Abdullah bin Hussain al Mashoor.

During the meeting, member Yusef bin Mohammed al Maamari, presented an urgent statement on a desire for the declaration of a charitable organisation for the release of insolvent

The session approved the vision of the Economic and Financial Committee on the draft agreement on linking payment systems between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the countries of the GCC countries

persons.

The meeting approved the draft amendments of some provisions of the Public Notary Law. Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubai, member and rapporteur of the Legal and Legislative Committee, read out the committee's report noting that the committee elaborately studied the draft amendments taking into account all aspects and dimensions in line with electronic developments particularly electronic transactions.

The session approved the vi-

sion of the Economic and Financial Committee on the draft agreement on linking payment systems between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the countries of the GCC countries.

Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, head and rapporteur of the Economic and Financial Committee, spoke about the importance of the draft agreement and its role in providing economic benefit. He said that the agreement comes in recognition of the global economic and financial changes and the importance of consolidating the principles of common economic unity among the GCC countries as well as emphasising the importance of enhancing economic relations and financial cooperation.

He added, in consideration of the fact that financial and developmental activities are entirely dependent on advanced financial systems operated by central banks, the presence of a modern financial payment system based on the real-time and continuous gross settlement (RTGS) technology, becomes mandatory.

The council also approved the report of the Education and Scientific Research Committee regarding an expressed desire for enhancing the role of the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education.

The committee's report was read out by Jamal bin Ahmed al Abri, Head and Rapporteur of the committee. He explained that the committee's study was based on the importance of following up on quality assurance procedures for education in the Sultanate of Oman.

He added that Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education is an important pillar in ensuring the quality of educational institutions and the government has paid attention to the education sector at its various levels.

The council also approved an expressed desire for increasing the monthly pensions reimbursed to social security families in light of the opinion of the Services and Social Development Committee.

Fak-Kurba secures release of 447 people

FROM P1

as well as reflecting the cohesion and solidarity of the Omani society", said Dr Al Zadjali, who is the supervisor of Fak-Kurba initiative.

"We believe that everyone deserves a second chance"

The initiative, in its 9th edition this year, has introduced online platform aiming at collecting financial donations to release those who have been imprisoned due to financial civil, commercial or labour claims.

There are many criterion to be applied to select people who really deserve the support.

Accordingly, the insolvent must not be a previous beneficiary of the initiative and the amount shall be related to a civil, commercial, Sharia or labour case, with a maximum of RO 2,000. Priority will be given to those who have less claims, bearing in mind that the selection

of cases that meet the conditions is made by the Directorate General of Execution Affairs in the Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary Council. Requests shall not be directly addressed to the initiative, but through the above Directorate General.

Fak-Kurba initiative has, over the past years, helped nearly 4,000 insolvent persons who were imprisoned or who were about to be imprisoned due to various claims covered by the initiative and covered all the governorates.

Nearly 100 male and female lawyers were part of this campaign which has won second place in the Sultan Qaboos Voluntary Work Awards, as it aims to highlight the role of lawyers in volunteer work and activate their participation in social responsibility, thanks to the community solidarity and humanity.

It's mulberry season in Mahdha

MAHDHA: The village of Wadi Al Hyool in the Wilayat of Mahdha in the Governorate of Al Buraïmi is famous for the cultivation of many seasonal agricultural crops such as fruits and vegetables, particularly the cultivation of mulberries, locally known as "Fursad" which is one of the trees that are widely planted in home gardens.

The cultivation of mulberries is one of the crops that have many health nutritional benefits, as it is rich in antioxidants, dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals. This type of fruit protects the body from the risks of cancer, heart and digestive diseases.

The village of Wadi Al Hyool



is unique in the abundance of water that flows throughout the year to irrigate seasonal crops such as grapes, mulberries, figs, guava, mango, bananas, lemons, pomegranates, and the cultivation of garlic and onions, among other crops. — ONA

Illegal passenger ferries warned

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT) said that some fishing boat owners have been involved in unauthorised activity, such as transporting passengers from the Shannah Port to Masirah and vice versa.

It added that these boats lack the minimum requirements of maritime safety for the transportation of passengers as stipulated in ministerial decisions that regulate the operations of marine units. MTCIT warned the owners of the mentioned boats to comply



with regulations. "It is possible for anyone who has a desire to practice the activity of passenger transport or water taxi to obtain a licence from competent authorities."

Some of the requirements include that the company must be commercially registered, must have a licence to practice the activity of water taxi by fare, certificate of origin of the marine water

taxi unit, proof of ownership, age of the taxi unit shall be not more than 15 years from the date of its construction or reconstruction, except for those with fiberglass, customs release statement if the unit was purchased from outside the Sultanate of Oman, a comprehensive insurance document of its crew and passengers, licensing of radio communication equipment, a copy of the passport or ID card of the captain.

As part of the long-term plans to revamp the public transport system in line with changing times, MTCIT issued a decision 33/2022 on regulating water taxis based on the maritime law.

Oman Post, Asyad Express partner with SMEs to provide postal services

MUSCAT: Oman Post and Asyad Express, an affiliate of Asyad Group, in cooperation with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), on Sunday announced the beginning of registration for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to provide postal and courier services in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The registration will be open for one week.

Nasser bin Ahmed al Sharji, CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express said that this initiative came within the framework of utilising sale outlets and increasing postal service points all over Oman.

Al Sharji added that the



number of new outlets set up by the company through its partners in the private sector reached 107. Those outlets contributed to boosting postal revenues as they rose by 43% in the Governorate of Muscat.

Another 48 outlets are planned to be set up by the end of the fourth quarter in 2022, which will bring the total number of outlets to 213. — ONA



Reviving faith to bring back hope

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

Halfway through the holy month of Ramadhan, most people would have adapted to the changes and might even form the good changes as habits.

The act of worship is much more during this month as it includes, in addition to prayers and fasting, refraining from negative thoughts and deeds. They are beyond physical acts, including anything that would violate the fasting or the act of worship.

Saif al Raheili, an active speaker at Sultan Qaboos Islamic Information Centre, explained that the experience of Ramadhan actually fixes your soul and your body at the same time.

“And this is exactly what is mentioned in the Holy Quran. When you fast, it is better for you because this is an opportunity as it is a group act. Everyone is doing it, so it becomes easier for you to follow, and then you can proceed with the other months with the same concept”, explained Al Raheili.

So the month of Ramadhan is totally a journey of body, mind and soul.

“This is the month when Muslims are kind to the poor and concentrate on their actions as they want Allah to accept this act of worship. So they are trying to give as much as they can towards humanity to prove that they are good believers and good slaves to Allah”, he explained.

While the world goes through confusion and stress as nations or individuals, there seems to be a lack of faith. “Absolutely. The lack of faith is lacking in the promise that

Allah will meet you one day. And he has promised that he will not let go of whatever you have done as good”, said Al Raheili

So when you do that good, you become impatient with the challenges you face in this life, or you are working towards the giving aspect such as giving money, giving knowledge or giving the community whatever you can to participate in improving the society. This you cannot do unless you have a promise, and that promise is meeting the One who has asked you to do this because you are expecting a reward.”

This actually, he explained, gives one the hope that whatever a person has done is not going away.

So is there a way to bring back hope? Because people are losing resilience and give up easily these days. And how can we bring back hope?

“So bringing back hope means you need to reconstruct or rebuild your relationship. It is like a relation, as a slave to God. So you need to declare yourself as a slave. That is first, and you need to get rid of the titles that you entitled yourself with so you can become something else.

And this gives some calmness to yourself. And that’s the start. Once you declare yourself as a slave, you will not feel that difficult to follow the commands one by one. Until you are actually improving yourself, like on a ladder you take step by step and remove whatever there is like fear, depression and so on.”

According to Al Raheili, all of this will go away when you are actually rising closer to the relationship.





Over 17,000 visit Frankincense sites in Dhofar

SALALAH: The number of visitors to the Land of Frankincense sites in the Governorate of Dhofar during the 1st quarter of 2022 stood at 17,155 compared to 16,679 visitors in the same period of 2021, according to the latest data released by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar.

The number of visitors to Al Baleed Archaeological Park and the Museum of the Frankincense Land reached 8,005 visitors during the 1st quarter of 2022, while the visitors of Samahram Archaeological Site stood at 3,911.

Moreover, the number of visitors to the Wbar



Archaeological Site reached 5,239.

The Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Samahram, Wbar and the Wadi Dokka archaeological sites are registered on the

World Heritage List under the name “Land of Frankincense” sites.

The Ministry of Heritage and

Tourism, represented by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar, develops the sites and provides them with service and aesthetic facilities to serve the goals of cultural and archaeological tourism in the governorate.

— ONA

OFWs can vote for Philippine polls till May 9

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

Filipinos living in the Sultanate of Oman can vote for the Philippine national elections till May 9, the actual date of voting in the country.

According to sources in the Philippines Embassy, there is a facility for the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to cast their votes in advance of the actual date. The voting process for them in the Sultanate of Oman like other countries started on April 10, which will continue till May 9.

In the Sultanate of Oman there are 42,264 registered voters, with 19,584 seafarers and 22,680 land-based workers. Meanwhile, in order to encourage more Filipinos to cast their ballots, the Philippine Embassy in Muscat conducted overseas voting and consular outreach on Sunday (April 17) in Salalah on Friday (April 15) at the Muscat International Hotel.

The Middle East is home to the largest number of Filipino



overseas voters. Dubai tops the list with 191,799 voters, followed by Riyadh with 151,968 and Abu Dhabi, the third in the list, with 98,408 voters. Nearly half or 786,997 voters are based in the Middle East and Africa. There are 450,282 overseas voters in Asia-Pacific, 306,445 voters in North and Latin America and 153,491 voters in Europe.

According to sources in the Philippines Commission on Elections, almost 68 million of the 110 million Filipinos are qualified to vote for the Philippine national elections on May 9, for presidency, vice presidency, 12

Senate seats, 330 House of Representatives seat, and almost 18,000 local government positions. Filipino citizens working or residing abroad can cast their votes for this upcoming elections.

“Filipino citizens residing or working outside the Philippines who are qualified to vote can cast their ballot by virtue of Overseas Absentee Voting Act, officially known as Republic Act (RA) No. 9189 which was enacted in February 4, 2003. RA 9189 states that all Filipino citizens abroad who are not disqualified by law and at least 18 years old by the time of elections will be entitled to vote. The eligible individuals are required to file their applications personally at the Philippine embassy or consulate nearest their region.

They are also required to be holders of a valid Philippine passport with an accomplished overseas absentee voting (OAV) registration form from the Commission on Elections (Comelec). For sea-based Filipinos, a photocopy of their seaman’s book is required,” said the sources.

24-carat Tanjore artwork for Muscat Yog Mahotsav

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

To mark the launch of ‘Muscat Yog Mahotsav 2022’ artist Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna created a 24-carat gold special Tanjore artwork on surya namaskar (sun salutation) which is a vibrant technique within the yogic repertoire.

The event is being organised by the Indian Embassy in association with yoga organisations in the Sultanate of Oman. The special artwork was unveiled by Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador. The event, Muscat Yog Mahotsav, is a festival of peace, health and well-



being and being held in the run-up to the eighth International Day of Yoga. It will feature over 75 curated yoga events across Oman for 75 days till June 21, 2022.

Kavitha Ramakrishna said, “It was an honour to create this 24-carat gold Tanjore artwork on surya namaskar (sun salutation),

combining a sequence of 12 elegantly linked asanas. For the Tanjore piece I depicted the different postures of surya namaskar which is considered the king of asanas. Known for their classiness, rich colours, gold embellishments and attention to detail, Tanjore paintings are a class apart. I consider surya namaskar too as a therapeutic practice where yoga mat becomes the canvas. The intention is to stay present with the breath while doing the Tanjore painting as well as the yoga practice. It has been fulfilling to bring both art forms together for this art work.”

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
EHC/2022/010	ACCOUNTING CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR NAMA SHARED SERVICES COMPANY	24-Apr-2022	15-May-2022	25/- (Plus VAT amount: 2.5 OMR) Total amount: 27.5 OMR Non-refundable

- To purchase this Tender, Online payment is available on our website (www.nama.om) as following:
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 4. Once the supplier administrator approved, you will get the email.
 5. After receiving the email, kindly make payment for the tender using the link available in the website.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using isupplier portal. No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person’s name and the company details.



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Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 277
E-Mail: Yasmeen.allawati@Holding.nama.om



TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy
Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender collection	Last Date For Tender Submission
2022/3	Request for Proposal (RFP) for the NCO Web Based Application	25 Omani Rials	22/4/2022	29/5/2022

First ● All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board can participate and collect the specifications and conditions of the tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website and attach an electronic copy of the temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate with a value of (1%) of the value of the tender submitted and valid for (90) days from the last date of submission of bids. It has to be addressed to
HE Chairman of the Tender Committee of the Ministry of Economy.

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

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

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Presidential candidates refuse to back rival

MANILA: Three rivals of Philippine presidential candidate Leni Robredo refused to back her campaign on Sunday, dousing speculation they would withdraw from the race to improve her chances of defeating the son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Voter surveys show Robredo is a distant second behind Marcos Jr, but a recent bump in the polls and huge crowds at her rallies have raised hopes among her fervent fans that the campaign is gaining traction.

There has been speculation that worse performing candidates were considering pulling out and endorsing Robredo — the incumbent vice president and only woman in the race — to ensure Marcos Jr was defeated in the May 9 elections.

The latest Pulse Asia Research survey showed Robredo on 24 per cent with Marcos Jr on 56 per cent.

But in a vitriolic press conference on Sunday, Francisco Domagoso, Panfilo Lacson and Norberto Gonzales — who are on single digits or less — accused Robredo of trying to get them to withdraw and strip them of support.

“Each of us will continue with our respective presidential campaigns,” Domagoso, a celebrity mayor, told reporters at a luxury hotel in Manila.

“I’m calling for Leni to withdraw because whatever you’re doing is



Philippine presidential candidates Manila City Mayor Domagoso, former defence secretary Gonzales, and senator Lacson show their joint statement during a press conference in Makati City. — AFP

not effective against Marcos.”

Analysts said it was not clear how many votes Robredo would gain from their exit in the raucous democracy where voter decisions were driven by personality rather than ideology.

But their backing would have energised her campaign, said Cleve Arguelles, an assistant lecturer in political science at De La Salle University in Manila.

“It would send a really strong signal to the other campaign that she has gained a new momentum,” he said.

There are no runoffs in

PHILIPPINES’ POLLS

Philippine presidential elections, with the victor only required to win more votes than everyone else.

Lacson accused Robredo of “lying”, claiming she had previously told him that she would not run for president. He also alleged she had exaggerated the crowd size at a recent rally.

“You deceive once, you deceive twice, you will deceive all the time,” he said.

Domagoso, the top second preference for president in the Pulse Asia survey, said the polls were “polluted” and questioned their accuracy. The candidates said rival Manny Pacquiao, who was not at the gathering, was also on board with their decision.

A member of Pacquiao’s team tweeted the boxing legend would “never” quit the presidential contest.

Robredo’s spokesman Barry Gutierrez accused the three candidates of “theatrics” and asserting their positions through “bluster and falsehood”. — AFP

Over 20 wounded in new Jerusalem violence

TEL AVIV: More than 20 Israelis and Palestinians were wounded on Sunday in several incidents in and around Jerusalem’s flashpoint Al Aqsa Mosque compound, two days after major violence at the site.

The latest clashes take the number of wounded since Friday to more than 170, at a tense time when the Jewish Passover festival coincides with Ramadhan. They also follow deadly violence in Israel and the occupied West Bank in late March and early this month that has killed 36 people.

Early on Sunday morning, “hundreds” of Palestinian demonstrators inside the mosque compound started gathering piles of stones, shortly before the arrival of Jewish visitors, police said.

Jews are allowed to visit but not to pray at the site, also known as Temple Mount, the holiest place in Judaism and third-holiest in Islam.

The police said its forces had entered the compound in order to “remove” the demonstrators and “re-establish order”.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said 19 Palestinians were wounded, including at least five who were hospitalised. It said some had been wounded with rubber-coated steel bullets.

A team near the entrance to the compound early on Sunday morning saw barefoot Jewish worshippers leaving the site, protected by heavily armed police.

Outside the Old City, in



A Palestinian man prays in front of the Dome of Rock mosque at the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem’s Old City. — AFP

Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem, Palestinian youths threw rocks at passing buses, resulting in seven people being treated for light wounds at Shaare Zedek hospital, the medical facility said.

Video released by the police showed two Israeli buses, their windscreens and side windows smashed in, driving down a road near the Old City as young men showered them with rocks. The police said they had arrested 18 Palestinians.

Senior Palestinian official Hussein al Sheikh said on Sunday that “Israel’s dangerous escalation in the Al Aqsa compound ... is a blatant attack on our holy places”, and called on the international community to intervene.

The chief of the Hamas which controls the Palestinian enclave of Gaza meanwhile warned Israel that “Al Aqsa is ours and ours alone”. “Our people have the right to access it and pray in it, and we will not bow down to repression and terror,” Ismail Haniyeh said in a statement. — AFP

Water conservation through public participation in India

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Water resources in India, directly linked to conservation and utilities, occupy a challenging domain that focuses on affordable and safe water while maintaining environmental quality.

The NITI Aayog’s latest estimates hint at the availability of about 1,140 cubic metres of water per capita in India by 2050. An annual per capita water availability of less than 1,700 cubic metres is considered enough to warrant a situation of water scarcity. In addition, estimates peg a 6 per cent loss in GDP due to water scarcity alone in a country with a vast population. The data seems to be warning India of a possible situation of acute water scarcity, which could easily snowball into

a deeper socio-economic and humanitarian crisis.

“However, with the strong emphasis within our culture, cross-border environmental issues have always formed an integral part of every Indian’s life. Inspiring people to live environmentally responsible, these issues have come to occupy the mainstream narrative,” said a social worker who is pursuing the cause of water conservation in a remote Indian village.

Addressing significant environmental issues and moving towards developing an ecologically-sound framework, India has remained at the forefront of many such global initiatives. The government has been taking up multiple such steps to accord the topmost priority to the concept of water governance.

From creating a focused



ministry for water resources to implementing a holistic conservation approach, the government has taken numerous measures in this direction.

Apart from the river interlinking projects, the government has

supported an innovative approach towards schemes with the ‘Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana’, ‘Per Drop More Crop’, ‘Namami Gange and Jal Jeevan Mission’. With the Jal Jeevan Mission’s launch in 2019, around 90 million households

The newly-launched ‘Catch the Rain’ campaign lays emphasis on ensuring arrangements for rainwater harvesting before the onset of the monsoon

have been provided with similar water connections at a rapid pace over the last two years alone.

At this stage, around 125,000 villages in 100 districts can boast of adequate infrastructure to have enabled water supply in every household.

Therefore, one could state with confidence that India has been able to manage the tough balancing act of meeting the expectations

and well-being of over a billion lives as well as ensuring ecological advancement.

An interesting initiative to help with such conservation is the newly-launched campaign ‘Catch the Rain.’ Emphasis is laid on ensuring arrangements for rainwater harvesting before the onset of the monsoon. Tree plantation, cleaning, puddle construction and other awareness related drives are conducted as part of the campaign to create a mass movement of its own.

Efforts have been made to make proper and judicious use of water through the dam safety rehabilitation programmes. With about 5,000-odd dams in India, these infrastructural tools possess the power to play a significant economic, political, geographical and social role in the region.

YANGON Myanmar to free prisoners in new year amnesty

Myanmar’s junta said it will release more than 1,600 prisoners from jails across the country to mark the Buddhist new year, without specifying whether those being pardoned were protesters or common criminals. The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since Aung San Suu Kyi’s civilian government was ousted last year in a military coup, which sparked huge protests and a deadly crackdown.

State television announced



that 1,619 prisoners, including 42 foreigners had been “pardoned” and will be released to mark the new year.

It was unclear whether anti-junta protesters or journalists jailed for covering the coup will be among those freed. — AFP

SYDNEY Australian ban on cruise ships ends

Australia’s ban on cruise ships entering the country’s waters ended on Sunday after more than two years. Last month, the government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison said it decided not to renew the ban which has been in place since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland outlined additional security measures for passengers and crew in preparation for the ships to return, news agency AAP



reported.

Western Australia and Northern Territory will allow smaller vessels to visit their ports while Tasmania and South Australia were still to announce their plans, broadcaster ABC reported. — dpa

TRIPOLI Libya oil firm to close major oil field

Libya’s National Oil Corporation announced on Sunday the closure of production at a major oil field in the country’s south, declaring a “force majeure”. “On Saturday... the Al Fil field was subjected to arbitrary closure attempts, due to the entry of a group of individuals and the prevention of the field’s workers from continuing production,” the NOC said on Facebook.

It added that the field was shut down on Sunday — marking the second closure in a matter of



weeks — “making it impossible for the NOC to implement its contractual obligations”. The firm said it “is obliged to declare a state of force majeure” and would no longer be able to provide crude to the Melitah complex on the northwestern coast. — AFP



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In brief

■ KABUL



AFGHANISTAN DEATH TOLL IN 'PAKISTAN STRIKES' RISES

The death toll from Pakistani military air strikes in the eastern Afghanistan provinces of Khost and Kunar has risen to at least 47, officials said.

"Forty-one civilians, mainly women and children, were killed and 22 others were wounded in air strikes by Pakistani forces near the Durand line in Khost province," Shabir Ahmad Osmani, director of information and culture in Khost said about the strikes that took place on Saturday.

Two other officials confirmed the death toll in Khost, while an Afghan official said six people were killed in Kunar province.

■ ROME



ITALIAN PM HAS NO PLAN TO SEEK SECOND TERM

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi has confirmed that he is not intending to run in the country's next parliamentary elections, due next year. "This is contrary to my career and experience," the 74-year-old told the Corriere della Sera newspaper. Draghi, a former head of the European Central Bank, was asked to form a government in February 2021 to avoid a major political crisis.

Since then, he has presided over a cabinet made up of almost all the parties in the Italian parliament. However, his government's mandate is due to end in spring 2023, when parliamentary elections are to be held.

■ STOCKHOLM



CLASHES OVER ANTI-IMMIGRATION RALLY IN SWEDEN

Plans by a far-right group to publicly burn copies of the Quran sparked violent clashes with counter-demonstrators for the third day running in Sweden, police said. Litter bins, a bus and a car were all set on fire in a series of incidents in the southern city of Malmo overnight, police said.

"The situation calmed down towards 3 am," police spokeswoman Kim Hild told SR public radio, adding that no officers were hurt, but a number of members of the public were slightly injured. Nearly 20 complaints had been filed, including for vandalism.

The clashes on Saturday broke out after a rally by the group's supporters on Saturday.

Ukraine vows to fight to the end in Mariupol, says PM

KYIV: Ukraine on Sunday vowed to fight to the end in Mariupol after a Russian ultimatum expired for remaining forces to surrender in the southeastern port city where Moscow is pushing for a major strategic victory.

"The city still has not fallen," Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said hours after Moscow's deadline for fighters holed up and surrounded in a sprawling fortress-like steelworks to surrender passed.

"There's still our military forces, our soldiers. So they will fight to the end," he told ABC's "This Week", with Moscow shifting its military focus to gaining control of the eastern Donbas region and forging a land corridor to already-annexed Crimea.

Russia's defence ministry said that there were up to 400 mercenaries inside the encircled Azovstal steel plant, calling on Ukrainian forces inside to "lay down their arms and surrender in order to save their lives."

Moscow claims Kyiv has ordered fighters of the nationalist Azov battalion to "shoot on the spot" anyone wanting to surrender.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky said that if Russian forces kill Kyiv's troops remaining to defend the city, then a fledgling negotiation process to end nearly two months of fighting would be ended.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had already said the talks were at a "dead end."

Shmyhal said that Ukraine wanted a diplomatic solution



Part of destroyed Russian vehicles near Gusarovka village in Kharkiv oblast, eastern Ukraine. — AFP

"if possible," but added: "If the Russians wouldn't like negotiations, we'll fight to the end, absolutely. We will not surrender.

While several cities are under siege, he said, not one — with the exception of Kherson in the south — had fallen.

He said more than 900 towns and cities had been liberated.

As Russia scales up attacks on Ukraine's eastern flank, at least five people were killed and 13 wounded in a series of strikes in second city Kharkiv, just 21 kilometres from the Russian border and an air strike hit an

armaments factory in Kyiv.

Maksym Khaustov, the head of the Kharkiv region's health department, confirmed the deaths following a series of strikes that journalists on the scene said had ignited fires throughout the city and torn roofs from buildings.

At one site, saw a blood-stained coat next to a pool of fresh blood on the ground. A local reported hearing between six and eight missiles hit in the kind of strike that has become a daily occurrence.

On Friday, shelling of

residential areas of the city killed 10 people. On Saturday, a strike claimed two more lives.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk urged Russian forces to allow evacuations from Mariupol.

"Once again, we demand the opening of a humanitarian corridor for the evacuation of civilians, especially women and children, from Mariupol," Vereshchuk wrote.

Zelensky said the situation in Mariupol is "inhuman" and called on the West to immediately provide heavy weapons. — AFP

Pope calls for peace in Easter blessing

ROME: Marking Easter Sunday with the traditional "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) blessing, Pope Francis has urgently called for an end to all wars and conflicts worldwide.

"We have seen too much bloodshed, too much violence," the head of the Catholic Church said in front of some 100,000 worshippers on St Peter's Square in Rome.

Much like the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus Christ celebrated on Easter, today "our hearts are filled with fear and terror when so many of our brothers and sisters had to lock themselves up to protect themselves from the bombs," Francis said.

The war in Ukraine dominated Easter celebrations in the Vatican, held with a bare minimum of restrictions for the first time since the pandemic began.

"May a new dawn of hope soon rise over this terrible night of suffering and death!" the pope said, urging states to relent. "Let peace be chosen. Let there be no more flexing of muscles while people suffer."

— dpa

Le Pen accused of embezzlement

STRASBOURG: Accusations of embezzlement have surfaced against Marine Le Pen (pictured), just as the far-right nationalist politician is set to enter the run-off election for the French presidency on April 24.

The public prosecution in Paris had received a report from the EU's anti-fraud office OLAF issued on March 11 which contained allegations against Le Pen and was currently being examined, the prosecutor's office said on Sunday.

Parts of the report were published by investigative news site Mediapart on Saturday. In it, Le Pen is being accused of embezzling nearly \$148,000 in EU funds during her time as lawmaker in the European Parliament between 2004 and 2017.

Le Pen's lawyer Rodolphe Bosselut, who is quoted in the Mediapart report, has denied the accusations. The presidential hopeful reserved the right to take legal action against former assistants or service providers who may have embezzled funds or committed other misconduct without Le Pen's knowledge, he said.

According to Bosselut, OLAF is not an independent

agency. The lawyer also criticised the timing of the report's publication, ahead of the second round of voting in France's presidential elections next

Sunday, where Le Pen will face incumbent President Emmanuel Macron.

According to Mediapart, the report also names three former EU lawmakers from Le Pen's Rassemblement National (National Rally) party - formerly Front National: her father Jean-Marie, her former partner Louis Aliot and the party's former vice president Bruno Gollnisch.

Together they are said to have embezzled a total of 486,000, for example for national policy purposes or to support service providers that are close to the party.

Aliot, who is now mayor of the southern French city of Perpignan, also denied the accusations in comments made to broadcaster Franceinfo on Sunday.

Accusations of this kind against Le Pen and the Rassemblement National are not new. For years, assistants working for EU lawmakers from the party, who are paid by the EU parliament, have been suspected of actually working for the Rassemblement National. — dpa



South Africa deluge easing, as death toll rises to 443



Water from the Indian ocean batters the Blue Lagoon beach as weather patterns worsen following heavy rains in Durban.

— AFP

DURBAN: Rains were expected to let up in South Africa's flood-ravaged east on Sunday after one of the deadliest storms in living memory killed nearly 443 and left tens of thousands homeless.

Floodwaters engulfed parts of the southeastern coastal city of Durban and surrounding areas this week ripping apart roads, destroying hospitals and sweeping away homes and those trapped inside.

The city of 3.5 million was overcast but national forecaster with the South African Weather Service, Puseletso Mofokeng, said "rainfall is actually clearing".

"The rainfall is going to clear all completely as we

move to Wednesday," he said. But recovery operations and humanitarian relief continued in the coastal city of 3.5 million whose beaches and warm Indian Ocean waters would normally have been teeming with Easter holidaymakers.

The number of flood-related emergency calls had decreased compared to early last week. "Emergency services are still currently on high alert on Sunday morning," Robert McKenzie of the provincial KwaZulu-Natal emergency services said.

It rained on Saturday and overnight, "however now, it has stopped," said McKenzie.

Even so, emergency services

were busy attending to a scene in the district of Pinetown where a house collapsed overnight.

"Fortunately now the flood waters have receded and (some) roads cleared. It's a lot easier to access the community," he said.

Christians congregated at churches across the city to pray for those affected by the floods as they celebrated Easter Sunday.

Government and charities were marshalling relief aid for the more than 40,000 people left homeless by the raging floodwaters.

The government has announced an immediate \$68 million in emergency relief funding.

— AFP

The spiritual essence of art



Dr Zahra Akbari

The writer is a researcher and art-therapist

The work of art either being planned for or being improvised, reveals the universe as the master of improvisation. The universe is dynamic and robust in its ways of supplying us with resources or using our potentials for good.

It reminds us to take a moment to reflect and get more out of what we already have. It treats us with fiestas when we indulgently overuse its resources. The universe goes along with what we do but never agrees when we exceed. The nature artistically flows and renews itself while artists capture a moment and freeze it in the shape of painting, poetry or music.

The artistic manner of universe in healing its wounds lies not only in reusing the utilised sources but also introducing new ways to enjoy

natural resources. When nature is harmed, it mends its wounds by harmonising elements and redefining the scene. The nature acts like a song composer who writes the notes of existence by putting extra emphasis on some notes and omitting others. It also brings about new notes and takes a different pitch whenever necessary. The climax of this symphonic orchestra is a rich piece of music in the form of a new scenery or birth of a new species.

Within every individual there is a natural artist which acts the same as the Mother Nature. This “artistic self” can be the real healer for one’s painful memories and experiences. The scars on the soul and psyche cannot be removed but they can be healed if the remedy comes from

ART HAS A MAGICAL TOUCH ON OUR SOUL WHICH OVERLOOKS THE WORLDLY ELEMENTS OF OUR LIVES

within.

Like the nature, artworks also show transcendental elements. Art has a magical touch on our soul which overlooks the worldly elements of our lives. This transcendental essence is a mystery which touches our hearts. The day we begin listening to the musical voice of nature calling out for our attention, we start learning about the spirituality reflected in art.

Art and mysticism, or in a broader sense religion, share five common features; connection with nature, presence in the moment, solitude, love and creativity. Art draws a connecting line between the world of matter and spirituality. It comes from the world within the artist, reflecting the essence of soul and manifesting a materialistic presentation. The route from the internal world of the artists to the external world where we all live and observe is a private and individual path for the artists.

Artists usually seek tranquillity and solitude to turn their intuitions into artworks. The meditated state of mind connects the core of heart and soul to the essence of universe. To go into solitude is a common practice among artists, spiritual

leaders and even those who would like to pray in silence. This solitude unites the heart and mind with the transcendental. Art plays the role of a vessel for showing unity between the world of matter and spirit.

The artists take time to be at the present moment. The sense of carpe diem entraps the huge potential of the universe in a single moment created by the artist.

It is interesting that a common belief among mystics is to ‘live the moment’. Many of religions preach that thinking for a moment in silence is worth years of praying. The solitude and capturing the power of ‘now’ as an eternal moment in the universe triggers the power of creativity which is the intrinsic attribute of the one creator of the universe.

Underground homes wait for tourism revival

JIHAD DORGHAM

Gharyan’s unique underground houses were hewn into the mountainside centuries ago and many lie abandoned, but residents of the Libyan town are hoping tourism can help restore their heritage.

“My great-great-great-great-grandfather dug this yard 355 years ago,” said Al Arbi Belhaj, who owns one of the oldest houses in the mixed Berber-Arab town south of Tripoli.

His ancestor would have used a “tajouk” pickaxe to chip away at the ground before loading the rubble into a woven date-palm “gouffa” basket to carry it away, he said. Dug deep into the arid Nafusa mountains at around 700 metres above sea level, the home would have been protected against the scorching summers that bring temperatures up to 45 degrees Celsius.

It would have also stayed warm throughout the often snowy winters. The region’s bedrock has a consistency that allowed the underground dwelling — known as a damous — to last for centuries without collapsing.

Some of the buildings are over 2,300 years old, and ancient Greek historians mentioned their existence, according to historian Youssef al Khattali. The area also has burial sites dating back to Phoenician times, he added.

Today, Belhaj says he is the owner of the oldest underground home in Gharyan, a town where many residents have family records and property deeds dating back centuries.

The warren of rooms dug into the rock around the courtyard once housed as many as eight large families, he said. He was the last person to be born there, in 1967.

In 1990, like many people seeking more comfortable dwellings with running water and electricity, the family moved out of the home, but they kept ownership of it. Now, Belhaj has renovated it and turned it into a tourist attraction.

While late ruler Muammar Gaddafi allowed tourists to visit the country on organised trips, visitors have been thin on the ground since his fall in a 2011 revolt, which sparked a decade of chaos.

But the region’s Berber villages have continued to attract domestic tourists and Belhaj is hoping that a return to relative stability could open the door to more visitors from Europe and elsewhere.

He charges an entry fee equivalent to a dollar for Libyans, or two for foreigners. While some come for a cup of tea and to explore the building, others stay for lunch or spend the entire day there.

Damous structures were once common across a stretch of western Libya and eastern Tunisia — the other side of a border only drawn up in 1886. “The same tribes extend from Nalut to Gabes,” said historian Khattali, referring to towns on the Libyan and Tunisian sides. — AFP

A free piece of advice for Putin



Thomas L. Friedman

The writer is an American political commentator and author

As Vladimir Putin embarks on his plan B — a massive military operation to try to grab at least a small bite of eastern Ukraine to justify his misbegotten war — I thought: Who could give him the best advice right now? I settled on one of America’s premier teachers of grand strategy, John Arquilla, who recently retired as a distinguished professor of defence analysis at the US Naval Postgraduate School. When I called Arquilla and asked him what he’d tell Putin today, he didn’t hesitate: “I would say, ‘Make peace.’”

Arquilla did not pluck his phrasing from thin air. After the D-Day landings on Normandy on June 6, 1944, it became quickly obvious that the Germans could not contain the Allies’ beachhead. So after a German counterattack near Caen failed on July 1, the top German commander on that front, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, phoned Berlin to report the debacle to the army chief of staff, Wilhelm Keitel, who then asked him, “What shall we do?” — to which von Rundstedt famously replied, “Make peace, you fools! What else can you do?”

The next day, von Rundstedt was removed — not unlike what Putin has just done, bringing in a new senior general, one who helped crush the opposition movement with unrestrained brutality — to run phase two of his war. This did not work for the Germans, and without making any predictions, Arquilla explained why he believed that Putin’s army, too, could meet very stiff resistance from the undermanned and underarmed Ukrainians in this new phase.

It starts, he argued, with all that is new in this Ukraine-Russia war: “In many respects, this war is our era’s Spanish Civil War. In that war, many weapons — like Stuka dive bombers and Panzer tanks — were tested out by the Germans, and the allies learned things as well, before World War II. The same is being done in Ukraine when it comes to next-generation warfare.”

Arquilla recently published a book on next-gen warfare, ‘Bitskrieg: The New Challenge of Cyberwarfare.’

“In that book, I outlined the three new rules of war, all of which I am seeing being employed by the Ukrainians,” he explained. “The first is that ‘many and small beats large and heavy.’ The Ukrainians are operating in squad-level units armed with smart weapons, and these are able to disrupt far larger

formations and attack slow-moving, loud helicopters and such. So even though they’re outnumbered by the Russians, the Ukrainians have many, many more units of action — usually between eight and 10 soldiers in size.”

Arquilla said that these small Ukrainian units armed with precision-guided smart weapons like killer drones, anti-aircraft weapons and light anti-tank weapons “can take out the Russians’ much larger and more heavily armed tank units.”

The second rule of modern warfare playing out in Ukraine, he said, “is that ‘finding always beats flanking.’ If you can locate the enemy first, you can take

‘WAR IS NOT JUST A NUMBERS GAME ANYMORE. YOU DON’T NEED BIG NUMBERS TO SWARM THE OPPONENT WITH A LOT OF SMALL SMART WEAPONS’

him out. And especially if the enemy is made up of a few large units, like a 40-mile-long convoy of tanks and armoured personnel carriers, you’re going to hammer the hell out of them with your small squads, without having to outflank them with an equal-sized force.”

I asked Arquilla why the Ukrainians are so good at finding. “The Ukrainians are making very good use of small drones, particularly those Turkish drones, which are tremendous,” said Arquilla. But it’s their human sensors — the informal Ukrainian observer corps — that are devastating the Russians. Grandmas with iPhones can trump satellites.

“The Ukrainian observer corps is made up of babushkas and kids and anyone else who has got a smartphone,” he said. “And they’ve been calling in the locations of where the Russian units are and where they’re moving. And so the Ukrainian forces have this big edge in finding the Russians in this big country, and that is giving their small units with smart weapons” real-time, actionable intelligence.

The third rule of new-age warfare playing out in Ukraine, said Arquilla, is that ‘swarming always beats surging.’ He explained: “War is not just a numbers game anymore. You don’t need big numbers to swarm the opponent with a lot of small smart weapons. I am sure you’ve seen some of the videos of these Russian tanks and columns, where suddenly one tank gets taken out at the front and then another at the rear, so the Russians can’t manoeuvre, and then they just get picked off.”

Since this is the next phase of warfare and the Russians are not stupid, they will surely adjust in phase two, no?

— *The New York Times*



Firefighters try to extinguish a fire in a residential building following bombardment in central Kharkiv amid the Russian assault on Ukraine. — AFP

Fasting boosts spiritual and physical values



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

Ramadhan is a month of learning for it brings different lessons to Muslims during their fasting period of the day, from the dawn to the sunset. This month is the holiest month in the Islamic Calendar and a significant occasion for Muslims worldwide. It's importance and value as a month is marked in different forms and rituals over the month-long period. Ramadhan stands as a generous guest visiting every house of Muslims,

bringing blessings and graces of different sorts. In a point of fact, fasting was first prescribed in the month of Ramadhan and assigned to other nations before it has been assigned to the nation of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). This has been affirmed in the Holy Quran when the Almighty Allah addressed people in the verse: "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil"

The key significance of Ramadhan is marked by the reveal of the Holy Quran. This is acknowledged by the verse of the Quran, "The month of Ramadhan in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever of you sights the month, he/she must observe fasts that month and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number of days which one did not observe fasts must be made up from other days".

Moreover, fasting urges Muslims to revive different aspects of living practices in life. Fasting goes beyond its physical requirements and benefits. For instance, personal desires, morning coffee, cigarette and breakfast, meals throughout the day time are all given up for a noble cause, which is the purification one's soul and inner self. Fasting is a spiritual practice that does not just consist of refraining from eating and drinking, but from every kind of selfish desires and wrong-doings too.

Generally, observing Ramadhan brings a sort of spiritual aspect that complements social, physical and moral parts. Spiritually, Ramadhan can be regarded as the victory of the soul over earthly needs. Fasting is not merely of the body, but basically of the spirit as well. In fact, the ultimate purpose of fasting is to acquire Taqwa, or the feeling that Allah is watching us all the time. As well, it intends to enhance the feeling of closeness to Allah, so Muslims perform extra prayers and recitation of the Holy Quran.

Further, fasting teaches self-restraint, self-confidence and persistence. A fasting Muslim should refrain from anger, foul language and gossip. Fasting also helps developing and strengthening one's power of self-control to resist wrong desires and bad habits. Besides, fasting promotes charity and generosity as Muslims get more sympathetic with the suffering of others.

On the other hand, fasting reminds Muslims of all those poor people and needy families within the society. It basically reflects the daily struggles of poor people who are striving to afford the food stuff and other life necessities for themselves and their families. For that reason, Muslims become more thoughtful and sympathetic to their poor brothers and sisters during Ramadhan. In return, good deeds are usually conducted in this month to reflect the spirit of giving and care among people.

Overall, fasting is a valuable experience towards achieving self-improvement and reform. Ramadhan marks the best time to start sustaining the good deeds and principles to be habitual in everyday life. Actually, Ramadhan is a school that teaches rewarding lessons and gives an insightful experience! Thus, it is the time to evaluate one's spiritual and physical values.



Storm clouds over global economy



Eswar Prasad

The writer is a Professor of Economics in the Dyson School at Cornell University, is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and the author of *The Future of Money: How the Digital Revolution Is Transforming Currencies and Finance*

This was supposed to be the year of post-Covid normalisation, labour-market healing, and a revival of economic growth. Yet it is turning out to be a fraught period of geopolitical realignments, persistent supply disruptions, and financial-market volatility, all of which are playing out in a context of surging inflationary pressures and limited policymaking space.

Owing to these developments, the latest update to the Brookings-Financial Times Tracking Indexes for the Global Economic Recovery (TIGER) shows an overall loss of growth momentum, with considerable unevenness across countries in their vulnerability to adverse domestic and international developments. The war in Ukraine, Covid-19's resurgence in China, and the lack of macroeconomic policy options available to most governments will make 2022 a tough year for global growth. And although Covid-19's disruptive effects seem contained in most parts of the world, the potential for new variants to emerge means that it will remain a wildcard.

The spike in geopolitical tensions has exacerbated global supply-chain disruptions. With prices already surging and demand holding up well in most major economies until recently, conditions are ripe for an escalation of inflationary pressures around the world. Worse, most governments and central banks will find it difficult to bolster demand if it shows signs of flagging in the face of mounting economic uncertainty and financial volatility. Consumer and business confidence have already taken a hit, and that bodes ill for consumer demand and especially for business investment.

The US economy continues to power along: headline employment and unemployment numbers have returned to their pre-pandemic levels; industrial output has been robust; and overall domestic demand remains strong, serving as a major engine of global growth. But the US Federal Reserve is at risk of losing control of the inflation narrative, which means that it could be forced to tighten monetary policy even more aggressively than it has signalled, raising the risk of a marked growth slowdown in 2023. High oil prices, a yield-curve inversion (when the yield on short-term debt is higher than on long-term debt), and a flailing stock market all point to – and feed – a widespread sense of impending difficulties.

Meanwhile, China's determination to stick to its zero-Covid strategy has come to seem increasingly unviable. Consumer demand, investment, and production are all showing signs of weakening, which

could have implications beyond China. On a more positive note, housing prices have levelled off, financial pressures have receded, and consumer price inflation remains relatively moderate. The Chinese government and central bank therefore have more room to manoeuvre than policymakers in other major economies do, and thus will probably enact more stimulus measures to counter weakening growth momentum. But the government's commitment to keeping

FOLLOWING RUSSIAN WAR ON UKRAINE AND A RESURGENCE OF INFLATION AROUND THE WORLD, THE PROSPECTS FOR A ROBUST GLOBAL RECOVERY FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAVE DIMMED

a lid on longer-term financial risks will remain a constraining factor.

For their part, euro zone economies are engaged in the difficult task of weaning themselves off Russian natural gas as quickly as possible. That could be immensely disruptive to some industries, though with a modest and short-lived overall hit to growth. If diminished energy supplies begin to exact a toll, the German economy's strong recovery will become much shakier.

Similarly, Japan's consumption-driven rebound has already been derailed by the disruptive effects of Omicron, clouding the prospects for a sustained recovery. And after bouncing back from the pandemic, the UK economy is

heading into a difficult period, with rising inflation, higher taxes, and supply-chain disruptions accompanying a formidable set of global headwinds.

The vise is also tightening on many emerging-market and developing economies that were already suffering from surging global inflation, a rising dollar, and unfavourable financial conditions (restricting their access to foreign funds). That said, major emerging-market currencies have generally held up well, reflecting modest requirements for financing current-account deficits and healthy stocks of foreign-exchange reserves. And the spike in commodity prices has been good news for some developing economies.

While India is enjoying a sharp economic rebound, high inflation and rising oil prices could crimp growth if they prove persistent. Brazil, too, is experiencing a modest growth revival, but, with a presidential election in October, it remains beset by political instability. And the Russian economy, of course, has been hammered by a combination of trade and financial sanctions. This will not directly affect global growth, as Russia accounts for barely 2 per cent of global GDP; but given the country's importance as a commodity exporter, its war in Ukraine will add to price pressures, which in turn will limit other central banks' room for manoeuvre.

Policymakers have a daunting high-stakes balancing act ahead of them. In most economies, monetary policy is constrained by inflationary pressures and fiscal policy is limited by high levels of public debt. Keeping the global economy on a reasonable growth track will require concerted action to fix the underlying problems. © Project Syndicate, 2021



A woman hugs a child as a train prepares to leave the main railway station in Zaporijia, southern Ukraine on Sunday. – AFP

sport

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Mane inspires Liverpool past Man City to FA Cup final

LONDON: Liverpool reached the FA Cup final as Sadio Mane's double inspired a 3-2 win over Manchester City that kept alive their quadruple bid and shattered their rivals' treble hopes.

Jurgen Klopp's side are chasing an unprecedented clean-sweep of the four major trophies in a single season.

They remain on course to achieve that incredible target after a scintillating first half display in Saturday's semifinal at Wembley.

Ibrahima Konate put Liverpool ahead and Mane doubled their lead thanks to a blunder from City keeper Zack Steffen.

Senegal forward Mane struck again before half-time and, although Jack Grealish and Bernardo Silva netted after the interval, City were unable to complete a remarkable revival.

Liverpool will make their first FA Cup final appearance since 2012 on May 14 when they face Chelsea or Crystal Palace, who meet in Sunday's semifinal.

The Reds, into the FA Cup final for the 15th time, haven't won the competition since 2006, while Klopp has yet to lead them to a domestic knockout trophy.

Trailing Premier League leaders City by just one point with seven games left, Liverpool have already won the League Cup and have also reached the Champions League semifinals, where they will play Villarreal.

Despite Klopp's protestations that the quadruple is an impossible dream, this was another step towards football immortality.

For City, fatigued physically and mentally, it was a game too far as Liverpool handed them a first defeat in 11 games.

Both league meetings this season had ended in 2-2 draws,

including a pulsating clash at the Etihad Stadium last weekend.

But, battered and bruised after surviving a gruelling Champions League quarterfinal at Atletico Madrid on Wednesday, City were unable to match Liverpool's intensity as they surrendered possession with uncharacteristic mistakes.

Pep Guardiola claimed City were "exhausted", giving him "no choice" but to make changes, with Kevin De Bruyne on the bench alongside Ederson, Ruben Dias and Rodri, while Kyle Walker was sidelined with an injury.

In contrast, Klopp recalled Mane, Mohamed Salah, Virgil van Dijk and Trent Alexander-Arnold after resting his key players for Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal second leg against Benfica. Guardiola will believe his selection was the right move if City can pip Liverpool in the title race and reach a second successive Champions League final.

RELENTLESS REDS

It was a bad day from start to finish for City, who issued an apology after their fans forced referee Michael Oliver to cut short a pre-match tribute to the 97 Liverpool fans who died at Hillsborough 33 years ago by chanting through the minute's silence.

Liverpool exacted revenge on the pitch, tearing into City and taking the lead in the ninth minute.

Konate had scored with headers in both legs of the Champions League quarterfinal against Benfica, but City surprisingly opted not to give the French defender special attention. — AFP



Al Mouj Golf named second best golf course in ME

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Golf has achieved a top two ranking across the Middle East and North Africa carried out by the Golf World 100 Panel of Today's Golfer magazine.

The championship 72-par, 18-hole course is surrounded by two kilometres of uninterrupted coastline overlooking the Sea of Oman and is set against the backdrop of the majestic Al Hajar Mountains.

The setting earned Al Mouj Golf full marks with judges describing it as 'outstanding' when assessing it on the aesthetic value of its surrounding views, the course itself as well as its atmosphere.

The panel which is made up for 12 golf experts from around the world, also said that the Greg

Norman-designed course "is a contender for our World Top 100 as is beautifully presented and Oman has a course to be exceptionally proud of".

This is the first time Today's Golfer magazine has carried out the rankings and, says its Golf World 100 editor Chris Bertram: "This is our favourite work by Greg Norman, who made fine use of a wonderful Gulf-side site to create hole after memorable hole.

"Rarely do you go for long with hitting towards, alongside or over the edge of the water. That is very rare in the Middle East and sets Al Mouj Golf apart."

Al Mouj Golf which is Oman's first links-style course and has hosted the Oman Open (European



Tour) Championship, has attracted many other recognitions and accreditations since it opened in 2011. Titles include Winners of the IAGTO sustainability award for community value and Audubon and GEO Certification for strong leadership in sustainability and golf.

GLOBAL RECOGNITION

Commenting on this achievement, Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said: "It's wonderful to see Al Mouj Golf achieve global recognition once again. It really is one of the shining jewels in the Al Mouj Muscat crown and awards like this can only elevate its reputation further. It is also a great demonstration of

how we continue to provide the very best amenities and lifestyle experiences.

"Sports tourism and the leisure sector remain very much central to our strategy for sustainable growth and our incomparable setting will always be an important differentiator for Al Mouj Muscat."

In addition to its playing attributes, Al Mouj Golf also has a long-term commitment to environmental and sustainability awareness and implementation, and is one of only 20 across the globe to have been awarded dual certification for its work on nature, resource preservation and the community. Home to 173 different bird species, it has become a haven for wildlife.



RCB's Dinesh Karthik plays a shot.

‘Bigger goals’ as IPL star Karthik targets India comeback

MUMBAI: Dinesh Karthik said he is eyeing an India comeback after his unbeaten 66 off 34 balls powered Royal Challengers Bangalore to a 16-run win over Delhi Capitals on Saturday.

The in-form Karthik steered Bangalore to 189 for five after Glenn Maxwell's breezy 55 in the second match of the day in Mumbai.

Delhi, who are still searching for their maiden Indian Premier League title, could only muster 173-7 despite a 38-ball 66 from David Warner.

Karthik, a wicketkeeper-batter who has amassed 197 runs while batting mostly at seven, stood out as he put on an unbeaten stand of 97 for the sixth wicket with Shahbaz Ahmed, who hit 32, as Bangalore plundered 69 runs from the last four overs.

“I have bigger goals. I’ve been working really hard. My aim is to do something special for the country,” man of the match Karthik, who last played for India in the 2019 50-over World Cup, said. “This is part of my journey. I am doing everything I can to be part of the India team.”

The 36-year-old made full use of a dropped catch on five to tear into the opposition attack in the final 18 balls and smashed Mustafizur Rahman for four

fours and two sixes in a 28-run 18th over.

Maxwell unleashed his power to lay the foundation for the total. The Australia batter took on left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav in one over to hit 23 runs before he fell to same bowler.

In reply, Delhi faltered after Warner's departure and Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood struck twice in one over including the big-hitting Rovman Powell for nought as wheels came off the chase.

Skipper Rishabh Pant attempted to hit back with his 17-ball 34 but became pace bowler Mohammed Siraj's second wicket as Virat Kohli leapt to take a stunning one-handed catch at cover. Bangalore jumped to third in the 10-team table led by newcomers Gujarat Titans.

In the first match of the day, Lucknow Super Giants skipper KL Rahul smashed an unbeaten 103 as they handed five-time IPL winners Mumbai Indians their sixth straight loss this season.

Rahul, playing his 100th IPL match, steered Lucknow to 199 for four. Mumbai could only manage 181-9 to lose by 18 runs and remain winless in the T20 tournament this edition, further denting their hopes of making the play-offs. — **AFP**

Oman end tri-series with dominant win over PNG

DUBAI: Oman ended their 4-game tri-series against Scotland and Papua New Guinea with a comfortable 85-run victory over the latter, at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Saturday night.

Batting first after winning the toss, Oman lost Kashyap Prajapati early, but a 124-run partnership between the in-form Jatinder Singh and skipper Zeeshan Maqsood placed them in total command. Jatinder took centre stage and led the scoring for his side with a magnificent 77-ball 79. Zeeshan played the supporting role while making 52 runs himself.

A late-middle order wobble followed, but Ayaan Khan ensured that the platform set earlier was taken full advantage of. He cleared the boundary on 4 occasions on his way to an unbeaten, run-a-ball 62 and with some late help from Kaleemullah, powered Oman to an imperious first-innings score of 277-8.

Norman Vanua was the pick of the PNG bowling unit and finished with figures of 3-50 in 8 overs.

In response, PNG fell well short. Charles Amini held his own for the duration of a valiant 60-run knock while Norman Vanua and Tony Ura chipped in with scores of 27 and 25 respectively. Ultimately however, the damage done in the first innings proved too much to repair in the second and PNG were bowled out for 192 with 5.3 overs to spare.

For Oman, Bilal Khan continued his stunning run of form with another 5-wicket haul — his third in the space of just 9 games. He finished the 4-game tri-series with a jaw-dropping tally of 13 wickets. Khawar Ali was the other one with more than 1 scalp to his name in this match.

While collecting his Player of the Match award, Bilal said, “I’m always happy to bowl in Dubai. Whether it is with the old or new



Bilal Khan in action.

ball, in the middle overs or at the death, I always bowl with heart. I enjoy it and manage to pick up some wickets too.”

Referencing Jatinder and Bilal's current form and his takeaways from the tri-series as a whole, Zeeshan

Maqsood offered, “Jatinder is a top order batsman and when he scores, the job for the middle and lower order becomes easier.

Similar case with Bilal as well. When he gets breakthroughs early on, the rest of the innings gets a little easier.

“In the tour, the pace bowlers have contributed a lot. Jatinder scored a lot of runs — a 100 and 2 fifties. Even in the game yesterday against Scotland, we performed brilliantly and never gave up until the end. There are just a few niggles that we need to sort out but

many positives to take forward”. Oman lead the ICC Men's CWC League 2 table by 16 points, having played 16 games more than second-placed Scotland.

BRIEF SCORES: Oman 277-8 in 50 overs (Jatinder Singh 79 (77b, 7x4, 2x6), Ayaan Khan 62 (62b, 2x4, 4x6), Zeeshan Maqsood 52 (108b, 3x4); Norman Vanua 3-50) beat Papua New Guinea 192 all out in 44.3 overs (Charles Amini 60 (92b, 3x4); Bilal Khan 5-54) by 85 runs.

PSM open with win in Ramadhan tournament



MUSCAT: PSM Seniors won the opening match of the Ramadhan tape ball cricket tournament which began at the Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) ground on April 15.

In the opening ceremony, chief guest Mian Mohammad Riaz, owner of Mian Mohamamd Riaz & Partners, cut the ribbon and played a ball bowled by Ameer Hamza, Chairman of PSM Board of Directors. Special guest Kiran Akbar, Head of Chancery, Embassy of Pakistan, also played a ball to declare the event open in front of a sizeable crowd at PSM ground under lights.

In the first match, PSM Seniors won the toss and invited Pakistan Embassy to bat first.

Pak Embassy openers Atiq-ur-Rehman and Hanif got a splendid start of 108 runs between them before the fall of Atiq, who scored a blistering fifty (21 balls, 5x6, 4x4). Hanif scored 35 (5 x6, 1x4) with total 139 runs in the allotted 12 overs.

Amir Hamza of PSM Seniors bowled superbly to take 4 wickets for 17 runs in 4 overs.

In reply, PSM seniors lost wickets in regular intervals.

Amir Masood (34) and Mukhtar (25) put them back in the game. Yamin hit a useful 23 and



Abdul Qayyum sealed the victory for PSM in the penultimate over.

Allah Ditta of Pak Embassy got 3 wickets in 3 overs for 19 runs.

Amir Hamza was declared the man of the match for his 4-17 and special batting prize was given to Atiq-ur Rehman of Pak Embassy. Kiran Akbar handed over the prizes. A crowd of about 400 witnessed this event.

In the next matches on Sunday, Ex-PSM XI will take on Orient XI (9.30 pm) and Ahmad Mohsin Trading meet Dhaheen CC of Mawaleh at 10.40 pm.

Oman women win padel title in Dubai

WALEED AL JAHWARI

MUSCAT, APRIL 17

Oman national women's team emerged the champions of the Gulf Cup 'Dubai 2022' padel tournament in Dubai on Sunday.

Oman women beat hosts UAE 2-1 to win the final of the first GCC padel tournament held as part of the activities of the ninth edition of the Nad Al Sheba sports tournament.

In the three-match final, the UAE team won the first match 6-0, 6-0.

Oman came back strongly in the second match by claiming it by the same margin. The Omani women kept their performance at the same level to take third match also by 6-2, 6-1 and clinch the title.

The UAE finished runners-up and Kuwaiti ended third.

In the men's category, Shaikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Juma al Maktoum, President of the UAE Padel Federation crowned the UAE national team after they beat Qatar in the final 2-0.

In the first two matches, the UAE team outperformed the Qatari team 6-4, 6-3, 5-1 and 6-3,



6-2, 6-4.

Kuwait came in third place after their 2-1 victory over the Bahrain team in the match to determine the third place. Oman men's team could not progress after suffering several losses.

The Oman delegation was led by Ibrahim bin Khalfan bin Salem al Shibli, head of the Amateur Sports Department at the General Directorate of Sports Activities at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The men's team consisted of team manager Hisham bin Salem al Ibrahim, team coach was Mazen al Shaibani and assistant

coach Abdullah al Owaidi. The men's players included Nabil al Shaibani, Abdullah al Barwani, Ahmed al Barwani, Khaled al Barwani, Younis al Rawahi, Fawaz al Mandhari, Yasser al Barwani and Aktham al Riyami.

The women's team included coach Mazen bin Saif al Shaqsi, and players Fatima bint Talib al Nabhaniyah, Sarah bint Abdul Majeed al Balushiyyah, Azza bint Ali al Hinaiyah, Maryam bint Abdulmajeed al Balushiyyah, Maliha bint Saleh al Owaidiyah, Eithar bint Talib al Balushiyyah, Farah bint Rashid al Zubair and Judd bint Issa Lashko.

Al Harthy secures superb second on grid

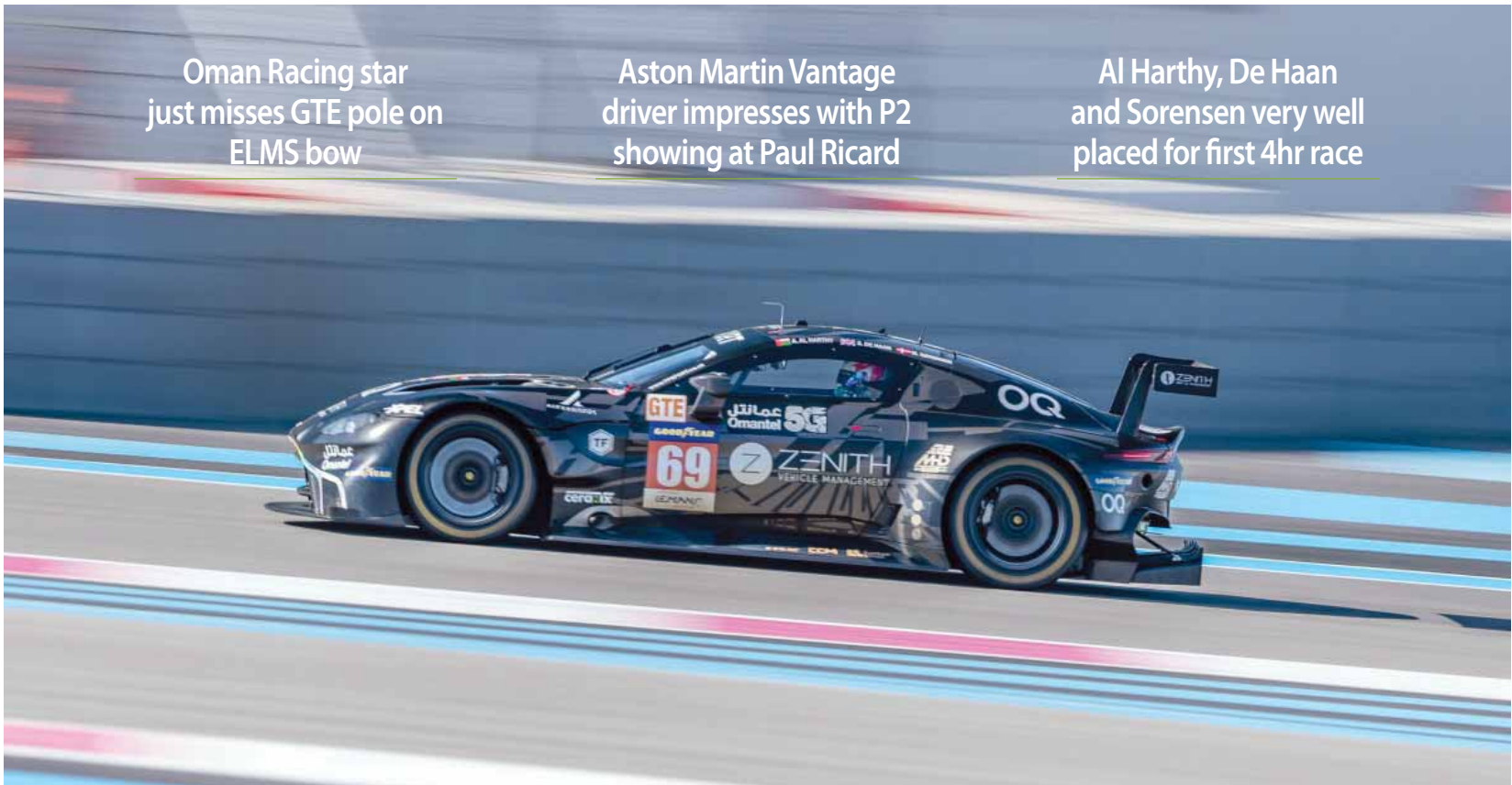
PAUL RICARD: European Le Mans Series debutant Ahmad al Harthy produced an absolutely fantastic performance during the first qualifying session of the 2022 season at Circuit Paul Ricard on Saturday, to secure a front-row start in the GTE class for Sunday's four-hour race in the south of France.

Holding pole position with only two minutes of the session to go, the Oman Racing driver did improve his time further the next time around but just missed out on a dream grid-topping effort by a mere 0.154 seconds in the No 69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE.

Strong and competitive during the pre-event build up throughout race week along with team-mates Sam De Haan and Aston Martin factory driver Marco Sorensen, the three worked hard on the set-up of the car to get it working as well as possible in both qualifying and race trim.

"I'm really happy with our qualifying", said Al Harthy, "We were very close to being P1 but a front row of the grid start is something great for my first weekend in ELMS. It's a new format for me, a new car, so I'm happy with my performance and there is so much more to improve on. It's going to be a long race, so we're starting in the perfect place on the front row,

"From a teamwork perspective, we've all been working a lot to



Oman Racing star just misses GTE pole on ELMS bow

Aston Martin Vantage driver impresses with P2 showing at Paul Ricard

Al Harthy, De Haan and Sorensen very well placed for first 4hr race

understand the car and understand our race pace. Hopefully everything will go to plan in the race. Once again, I am delighted to have qualified on the front row of GTE – a big thank you to everyone at Oman Racing."

Beginning the week with two days of very productive testing at the Le Castellet venue on April 11 and 12, the Oman Racing trio returned to the track on April 15 for the first free practice while Al Harthy gained additional track time in the stand-alone session for



Bronze graded drivers – lapping second fastest with a time of 1m55.106 seconds (274.81 km/h).

Following another free practice on Saturday morning, where the No 69 Aston Martin was eighth on the times, GTE qualifying took place early in the afternoon with Al Harthy behind the wheel – each squad's 'Bronze' drivers tasked with qualifying their respective cars for the weekend's race.

In the battle at the sharp end throughout, the Omani – who is

supported by the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS – moved onto pole position with just two minutes to go thanks to a lap of 1m55.008 seconds.

Although slipping down to second shortly after, Al Harthy responded and improved his time with his next effort to dip below the 1m55 seconds barrier but ultimately had to settle for, a nonetheless excellent, second fastest with a lap of 1m54.909 seconds (270.68 km/h).

Anees appointed as ITPF vice-president

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 17



The International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF), which is based in Muscat, appointed Anees bin Mohammed al Maamari as vice-president for executive affairs for a period of 2022-24 term. Al Maamari will replace Yousuf bin Ali al Hooti who submitted his resignation due to private reasons which was accepted by the Annual General Assembly which took place in Muscat recently. Anees had served as vice-president in a previous term of the federation.

ITPF is chaired by Mohammed bin Issa al Fairuz, Anees al Maamari as vice-president for executive affairs, Prendum Moneer as vice-president for technical affairs, Khalid al Hajri as vice-president for media and marketing affairs, Haider Hussain Ali as vice-president for development and training affairs. Bukfutev Sergi, Paul Prawn, Rafat AbdulRahman, Atif al Attar, Abid Saleem Khan are the board members. Haitham al Lawati is the secretary-general and Salim al Balushi is the assistant secretary-general.

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BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion issued Ministerial Decision 386/2022 on providing electronic payment services for consumers. Article (1) stipulates that establishments and commercial companies operating in the activities of selling foodstuff, gold and silver, restaurants and cafes, selling vegetables and fruits, electronics, building materials and tobacco products, as well as all activities in industrial zones, complexes, malls and gift markets are mandated to provide the electronic payment service for all consumers.

The move seeks to achieve comprehensive digital transformation through cooperation and integration between the Ministry of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The ministry affirmed that consumers can choose between paying electronically or by cash. It also urges all establishments and companies to provide the electronic payment service in all stores and outlets and to reconcile their situation before the implementation of the decision. Ministerial Decision 386/2022 is in line with the Commercial Law promulgated by Royal Decree 55/90 and the Commercial Companies Law promulgated by Royal Decree 18/2019.

(With inputs from ONA)

Oman’s bourse to introduce short selling and securities lending

Capital market transformation: Raft of measures to enhance MSX’s appeal to new market makers and thereby boost liquidity: CEO

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu



The Capital Market Authority (CMA) is preparing to authorise the use of ‘short selling’ for the first time in the Sultanate of 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 the Sultanate of 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 rebuy 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, say experts.

According to Haitham bin Salim al Salmi (pictured), CEO of Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), plans for the authorisation of short selling will be announced

soon as part of efforts to enhance the appeal of the Omani capital market to new market makers.

Speaking at an online forum recently, he said short selling will be enabled alongside the introduction of ‘Securities Lending and Borrowing’ (SLB), a mechanism through which investors can borrow or lend shares to other market

participants. Borrowers in SLB are usually short-sellers.

“To introduce market makers, we need to introduce Security Lending & Borrowing (SLB) and Short Selling. (Both) are there in our amendments that will be issued within a month, but haven’t been announced yet.

Our systems are ready to enable short-selling services and SLB; if we need market makers, they cannot perform without short selling and SLB,” Al Salmi stated. In recent months, the MSX has unveiled a series of measures and initiatives to help strengthen its positioning as an Emerging Market bourse.

Besides reinforcing its role in national economic development,

MSX is also undergoing a major transformation ahead of its strategy to go public at the end of around five years. MSX, together with the regulator, are currently exploring ways to attract market makers in increasing numbers to the Omani capital market, said Al Salmi.

“We want market makers; we are creating incentives for market makers to come and operate in Oman,” he stated, adding that the Authority is currently reviewing “3 to 4” market maker applications. “You’ll hear from us soon when we launch the first market maker is appointed, and following that liquidity provider funds (will be announced),” he added.

OIA strategises to boost performance of subsidiaries

Key platform: 5th forum of National Economic Diversification programme held

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

In continuation of its governance efforts to enhance the general performance of its companies and achieve better alignment and integration, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) organised the fifth forum of its Rawabet programme.

The event was attended by many high-profile professionals, including several ministers and under-secretaries, chairpersons and CEOs of OIA companies and a number of specialists. In his opening remarks, Abdulsalam al Murshidi, OIA President, said, “There are indicators of growth in OIA’s National Development portfolio. Currently, two sectors contribute

to the profitability of this portfolio, most prominently the energy sector, followed by the logistics sector.”

He added: “There are indicators of the increased contribution of several other sectors in the national development portfolio in the upcoming years including tourism, food and fisheries, technology sector and mining.”

He added that 5th Rawabet Forum is at a vital stage in the timeline allocated for the Business Plan Cycle where OIA companies work on their 5-year business plans.

The companies will submit the first draft of their plans in August and the final draft in October 2022. OIA will, in turn, approve these plans by December 2022. The forum began with an overview presentation discussing OIA’s strategy in managing its National Development portfolio, which is built on eight main strategic priorities including financial sustainability, selective growth, contribution to the GDP, attracting



private investors, divestment, In-country Value (ICV), synergies and implementation of the governance framework.

Then CEOs of OIA Companies took turns presenting their companies’ strategies. The forum featured presentations from 12 OIA companies, including OMRAN Group, Oman Air, Oman Airports, Asyad Group, Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), OQ, Mining Development Oman

outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The Strategic Framework also targets to enhance diversification when allocating capital resources and encourages the partnership with the private sector in new investments.

The strategy team within Rawabet has reviewed the strategies and business plans of the holding companies in the National Development Portfolio. Based on the current positions of the companies, its goals, and OIA’s strategic priorities, the team has set key performance indicators for the Boards of Directors for its respective companies.

Separately, the team is issuing OIA’s Business Plan Guidelines, ensuring consistency and best market practice across its companies.

The Rawabet programme was launched by OIA in September 2020 and has since delivered many outcomes. Most prominently, it published 11 policies and guidelines, including the Code of Governance, the tendering and

procurement policy, investment policy and divestment policy. Additionally, the programme launched the ICV initiative ‘Qimam,’ which focuses on generating locally produced goods and services according to clear guidelines.

Qimam aims to increase Omanisation, develop Omani competencies, and supply local products to encourage and develop local industries. Rawabet also succeeded in launching several initiatives to support SMEs, enable them, and enhance their contribution to the national GDP.

Since its formation, Rawabet was able to carry out over 400 joint interactions between OIA and its companies, involving over 70 OIA specialists and 300 specialists from OIA companies. It also held several workshops with chairpersons of the boards and CEOs of OIA companies. Moreover, it organised over 40 seminars relevant to general governance frameworks. — ONA

be'ah Ramadhan drive to fight food waste

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) welcomes this year's holy month of Ramadhan with a new social engagement campaign entitled Asrar Al Buyut (House Secrets) addressing the growing concerns of food waste and excess using unconventional comedic and awareness messaging.

Aside from posts and short messages on social media, be'ah brings you a mini-series of short comedy videos released every Sunday at 09:00 pm.

The videos accompany two be'ah sanitation workers, Ramadhan and Kareem, on their garbage collection rounds, as the garbage containers give away secrets behind the houses' closed doors. Light is shed on the painful reality of food waste by comedic and colourful commentary raising awareness to a serious and growing problem.



Through this innovative and fun campaign, be'ah aims to reduce food waste, encourage the public to reduce the amount of food prepared in Ramadhan, and adopt best practices in food management to save produce and build a sustainable future.

Commenting on the successful campaign, Ahmed al Kharousi,

Section Head Social Outreach and Community Engagement, said "be'ah is keen to share the joy of the holy month of Ramadhan with the public, and it takes this occasion to raise awareness on key issues.

Food waste is no small threat, its impact is significant on global warming, food security,

and economic and financial resources. We are happy to see that this year's Asrar Al Buyut campaign is a success, and we hope that it introduces better consumer behaviours that reflect the true spirit of Ramadhan; the spirit of compassion, charity and responsibility."

"The impact of food waste is

not only social and economic, but is also environmental. Estimates suggest that 8-10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions are associated with unconsumed food. When food is left unconsumed and is discarded in landfills, it begins to rot and produces methane, a greenhouse gas more potent than CO2", Al Kharousi added. "This issue has become a global priority and was incorporated in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 12.3) due to its severe contribution to food insecurity, malnutrition and economic losses at a time of recession and attempted recovery."

In line with its sustainability plans, be'ah continues its community engagement efforts throughout the holy month of Ramadhan to promote a culture of sustainability and environmental responsibility and raise public awareness on their role in preserving Oman's environment and natural resources.

Omantel names new Chief Commercial Officer



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

Omantel has announced the appointment of Aladdin bin Abdullah Beit Fadhil as the new Chief Commercial Officer with effect from April 1, 2022.

Aladdin Beit Fadhil possesses an extensive experience in the ICT sector where he served as Vice-President of the Consumer Business Unit.

Since 2004, he has taken up several positions in Oman Mobile and Omantel, where he was part of the call centre, sales management and quality management team.

He has also served as the General Manager of Service Delivery before being appointed as the Vice-President of Consumer Business Unit in Omantel two years ago.

Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Omantel, said: "Aladdin Beit Fadhil's appointment comes during an important phase of Omantel's journey as we recently announced the launch of our new strategy, which will help prepare Omantel for the next phase of its growth and deal with current and future challenges."

Aladdin Beit Fadhil stated, "The Sultanate of Oman's telecom sector is growing at a rapid pace and the competition is increasing locally and internationally.

I will work with my colleagues as one team to further enhance the company's growth, strengthen its position as the Sultanate of Oman's leading provider of integrated telecommunications services and enhance its leadership in the telecom sector", he added.

Alizz Islamic Bank SSB issues 162 Sharia resolutions in 2021

MUSCAT: The Sharia Supervisory Board (SSB) at Alizz Islamic Bank issued 162 Sharia resolutions in response to several inquiries in 2021. Additionally, it reviewed monthly reports and policies, investment proposals and Sharia auditing reports; and presented appropriate guidelines in accordance with Sharia.

The Sharia Audit and Compliance Department plays a positive role in offering Sharia-compliant solutions to the bank's customers, particularly wholesale banking customers that need more customised products. Furthermore, the management introduced several products last year, and there are other products to be announced in 2022 that all comply with Islamic sharia under the supervision and directions of the SSB.

The Sharia Audit and Compliance Department also conducted regular Sharia auditing on retail and business banking services and treasury transactions. To achieve its main objective of ensuring that all transactions with customers, products and services are Sharia-compliant, the



Department carried out several key roles.

In this respect, the SSB reviews documents relating to the bank's products, operations, and procedures to ensure that all transactions were conducted in accordance with the rules of Sharia. It presented reports on its findings to the Sharia Supervisory Board (SSB) and the management, who in turn took the necessary steps to enhance the Sharia compliance of the bank's services and products.

In 2021, the Sharia Audit and Compliance Department offered a training course on the rules and principles of financial transactions in Sharia, as well as operations and documents of Islamic financial transactions. Moreover, branch staff, customer

service representatives, the sales teams and the credit management team at the bank were offered a training programme.

Issa bin Salem al Riyami (pictured), Head of the Sharia Audit and Compliance Department said: "The Sharia Supervisory Board held 7 meetings over the past year during which it reviewed the bank's business, operations and its compliance with the resolutions and fatwas in conducting such transactions.

The existence of the Sharia Supervisory Board contributes to giving further assurance to the shareholders and depositors, and without any doubt, confidence is one of the most important success factors for a bank."

AlRiyami added: "The members of the Sharia Supervisory Board are scholars with knowledge and expertise in Islamic commercial jurisprudence. The bank offers to its customers the peace of mind that no funds pertaining to Alizz Islamic Bank are invested in non-Sharia compliant assets or taken from any non-Sharia compliant sources."



NBO shares the spirit of giving during the holy month of Ramadhan

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has utilised its annual Ramadhan community outreach programme, to share the spirit of giving across Oman and give back to the community by distributing 1,800 food hampers to families in need and people with disabilities.

Partnering with Al Rahma Association, Association Of Early Intervention For Children With Disability and Nida Al Khair Charity Team, the bank has continued to raise awareness of the charitable organisations

and provide support for the community.

As part of the initiative, over 150 iftar boxes were given to families of children with rare diseases as part of the bank's Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. Each hamper was personally delivered to the families by volunteers from NBO, strengthening the bank's bond with the local community and providing much needed assistance, as well as peace of mind, during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Bank Muscat launches special offer with attractive interest rates on home and personal financing

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision and efforts to improve financial inclusion, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman has announced reduced rates for selected customer segments, who are not currently availing of any financing facilities from the bank.

New customers can also avail the attractive offer by applying for financing facilities or transferring their existing financing to Bank Muscat.

Omani nationals in government institutions, Tier 1 companies, select government

and private sector entities and pensioners are eligible for this special offer, which has attractive interest rates starting at just 4.75% for personal financing and home financing, and a reduced rate of 4.5 per cent on home financing for employees of select organisations.

Customers can also enjoy lower interest rates on short-term personal financing starting from 4 per cent. Customers may note that the offer is open till June 30, 2022 to all those who fulfil the applicable criteria.

The bank has also launched a Sayyarati Ramadhan offer where



customers can enjoy low interest rates on financing starting from 3.5 per cent for new and used cars. The Sayyarati offer will be available until May 31, 2022.

Speaking on the occasion,

Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani (pictured), General Manager — Products, Bank Muscat, said: "As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat has been constantly innovating over the last four decades to provide the best banking and financing products and services in Oman in line with its customers' needs.

We are pleased to offer highly-competitive offers on various financing options to different customer segments on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan. We would like to thank our customers for their

strong confidence in the bank's products and services as well their constant feedback, which helps Bank Muscat to continue innovating and offering new products and services in line with its vision to serve you better, everyday."

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFM.

Its range of digital banking channels including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking are

helping customers meet the vast majority of their financial needs 24/7. The bank offers various financing options aligned to customer needs and its aim of facilitating a high standard of living for people in Oman.

All interested customers may use the loan calculator that is available at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx> to view details of the financing options available to them. For general information on financing options, please refer to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/default.aspx> or call 24795555.



One year journey of VAT in Oman: Key developments



JAY DUSEJA

The year 2021 was a momentous and remarkable milestone for the tax regime in the Sultanate of Oman, with the introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) from April 16, 2021.

The completion of one year since the implementation of VAT has been marked by several key developments for businesses and individuals alike, as we see that guidance on the law continues to evolve.

In its first year, VAT and other taxes contributed to raise the government revenue by 29.6 per cent as of February 2022, when compared to 2021. Further, taxpayers in Oman have witnessed various key developments.

- The Tax Authority (TA) staggered the mandatory VAT registrations in four phases for smooth implementation across the country.

Starting with businesses having annual supplies greater than RO 1 million that were mandatorily required to register from April 16, 2021, the last phase of registration required businesses having annual supplies of more than RO 38,500



to register before February 28, 2022 and implement VAT from April 1, 2022 mandatorily.

- VAT Registration and Compliance were also required to be done by individuals, government entities, ministries and Non-Profit Organisations, having annual taxable supplies like commercial rental income, sale of goods, etc., exceeding the mandatory threshold of RO 38,500 per annum.

- The list of food items subject to VAT at 0 per cent was increased from 93 basic food items to an extensive list of 513 food products, which is by far the highest in GCC and kept in best interest of the residents. The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has also issued directives for the labelling of such products with 0 per cent VAT for greater transparency to consumers.

- Four free zones within

the Sultanate of Oman were classified as 'Special Zones' for VAT, wherein supplies made to these zones would be subject to 0 per cent VAT based on certain conditions, to promote foreign investment and the companies in the said special zones.

- Supply of oil, oil derivatives and natural gas was classified under zero-rating of VAT including the procurements made by the operators for upstream and midstream sectors.

- A facility for the postponement of Import VAT was introduced for Taxpayers, benefiting Importers by mitigating the cash-flow due to VAT and administrative challenges faced during import of goods in Oman.

- The Tax Authority (TA) provided blanket approval to all taxpayers for the issuance of 'Simplified Tax Invoices' for all supplies below RO 500 by mere

submission of intimation and samples with TA.

- Sector-wise guidelines have been issued by the TA for the benefit of businesses in the Oil & Gas, Real Estate, Education and Logistics sectors and various awareness sessions are organised in various governorates.

As we enter the second year of Oman's VAT journey, it will be increasingly important for businesses to remain proactive and play an active role in ensuring compliance with VAT requirements. Based on our experience across the GCC, here are some of our key takeaways for businesses as we move forward:

- Entities, especially SMEs and Individuals to analyse the applicability of VAT on various types of income and expenses and register if the mandatory threshold is crossed, to prevent late registration and non-compliance.

- Issue valid tax invoices with all the required details to customers. Your tax invoices impact your brand value in the market.

- Ensuring that the ERP is optimised from a VAT perspective to apply the correct VAT rate (5 per cent, 0 per cent, Exempt, Out of Scope) and to enable the generation of compliant tax documents and reports.

Speaking about the importance of tax compliance, Surandar Jesrani — Group Managing Partner & CEO of MMJS Consulting encourages companies to take the benefit of learnings of VAT implementation in other GCC member states, build robust tax policy and processes and to make the best use of technology.

Further, he suggests the principal officers/responsible persons of the company to conduct a VAT health check on regular intervals to ensure that the various compliances are done correctly by their company. Nasser al Khamisi, Country Partner at Morison Muscat, suggests that taxpayers must make sure to receive and retain valid tax invoices from their suppliers while paying 5 per cent VAT on their procurements for claiming Input tax where eligible.

In case 0 per cent VAT is charged on export of goods and services or any other type of supplies, companies must maintain sufficient evidence and must ensure all conditions of zero-rating are fulfilled. Otherwise, 5 per cent VAT becomes applicable as local supplies along with additional tax of 1 per cent

per month at the time of VAT assessments.

Companies which are export oriented or dealing majorly in zero-rated supplies need to evaluate the option of Import VAT postponement for better cash-flow management.

If any Oman-based entity has paid 5 per cent VAT in the UAE, they may explore the UAE VAT Refund scheme to save 5 per cent cost of UAE VAT on their procurements. VAT-registered persons must file VAT returns and make payment of VAT due in time and maintain records for a minimum of 10 years /15 years as applicable with reconciliation of VAT returns and financial statements for VAT audits.

Businesses will have to gather voluminous data behind every return, structure it for the purpose of audit, maintain reconciliations, document trails etc.

It is imperative that businesses review their tax positions and suo-moto rectify mistakes prior to starting the audit.

- Track regular updates in VAT laws and regulations and implement the same efficiently and seek guidance or clarification in case of ambiguity in interpretation of the law;

- Implement maker-checker processes before sign-off to strengthen internal control systems and procedures;

- Conduct regular VAT training sessions to update the internal teams on the latest VAT developments. *(Jay Duseja is Senior Manager — Tax at MMJS Consulting team)*



A China Eastern Airlines aircraft is seen at the Beijing Capital International Airport. — Reuters

China Eastern restarts flights using Boeing 737-800 jetliners after March crash

BEIJING: China Eastern Airlines has restarted using Boeing 737-800 jetliners for commercial flights less than a month after a crash that killed 132 people on board and grounded over 200 of its aircraft, data from a tracking website showed on Sunday.

China Eastern flight MU5843, operated by a three-year-old Boeing 737-800 aircraft, took off from the southwestern city of Kunming at 09:58 am on Sunday and landed at Chengdu, also in southwestern China, at 11:03 am local time, data from Flightradar24 showed.

That aircraft, which completed a test flight on Saturday, departed Chengdu

at 13:02 pm for Kunming, according to Flightradar24.

Another Boeing 737-800 jet conducted a test flight on Sunday morning in Shanghai, where China Eastern is based, Flightradar24 data showed.

On March 21, Flight MU5735, which was en route from Kunming to Guangzhou, crashed in the mountains of Guangxi and killed 123 passengers and nine crew members in mainland China's deadliest aviation disaster in 28 years.

China has retrieved both of the black boxes and has said it would submit a preliminary report to the UN aviation agency ICAO within 30 days of the event. — Reuters

Oil firms secure injunctions to stop UK climate protests



Activists hold a banner as they block Lambeth Bridge during the Just Stop Oil protest in London, Britain. — Reuters

LONDON: Three firms involved in Britain's oil sector, including ExxonMobil, have secured injunctions to stop protests by climate change activists which have caused widespread disruption this month, the government said.

Environmental groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil have been staging daily protests in London and across the country which have mainly been focused on oil facilities.

Navigator Thames, ExxonMobil and Valero have now secured civil injunctions to allow

them to minimise disruption and prevent further problems, Britain's business department said.

"While we value the right to peaceful protest, it is crucial that these do not cause disruption to people's everyday lives", Energy Minister Greg Hands said.

"That's why I'm pleased to see oil companies taking action to secure injunctions at their sites, working with local police forces to arrest those who break the law and ensure deliveries of fuel can continue as normal."

The opposition Labour Party

has been calling for nationwide injunctions to stop the activists, who want the government to commit to ending all new fossil fuel infrastructure immediately, saying their protests were leading to shortages at fuel stations.

As well as targeting oil refineries and depots, demonstrations have been staged at the London base of oil firm Shell and at the Lloyd's of London headquarters. In their latest action on Friday, activists said they had blocked off four bridges in central London. Police have arrested 600 people since the protests began. — Reuters

Ukrainian Railways limit exports of some food staples

KYIV: Ukraine's state-owned railway company has temporarily restricted the transportation of some agricultural goods through border crossings to Poland and Romania, consultancy APK-Inform said on Saturday. It gave no reason for the restrictions.

Ukraine, a major agricultural producer, used to export most of its goods through seaports but since Russia's war has been forced to export by train via its western border.

APK-Inform said restrictions on the movement of goods to Poland through Yahodyn have been put in place from April 16 to 18. There are also restrictions on the transportation of cereals, oilseeds, grains and other food products through Izov to the Polish towns of Hrubieszew and Slawkov.

From April 16 until further notice, there are restrictions on the export of grain and seeds to Romania through the Dyakovo and Vadul-Siret crossings, the consultancy said.

Ukrainian Agriculture Minister Mykola Solskyi said this week the main task of the ministry was to find alternative ways to export Ukrainian grain. — Reuters

Twitter can afford to refuse Musk’s \$41 billion bid

There are offers that are too good to refuse. Elon Musk’s \$41 billion bid for Twitter is not one of them. The world’s richest man says he will pay \$54.20 a share for the social network, but may sell his 9% stake if the company rejects his non-binding offer, which he describes as “best and final.” Twitter has multiple reasons to hold out for more. If this were a standard takeover, the price might look compelling. Musk is dangling a 38% premium to the last closing price before he unveiled his stake on April 4. Twitter’s business is expected to throw off about \$400 million of operating profit in 2024, according to forecasts compiled by Refinitiv.

After deducting tax and factoring in Twitter’s roughly \$2 billion of net cash, Tesla’s boss would earn a return of roughly 1% on his investment. Twitter’s board said on Thursday it is carefully examining the offer. That’s a welcome change from the three-paragraph agreement directors hastily extracted from Musk when inviting him to join the board on the day he unveiled his stake. They cannot ignore the entrepreneur and his 82 million followers. But they are right to be careful. The main problem is taking Musk at his word. It’s less than a week since Musk walked away from the deal to buy no more than 14.9% of the company. In 2018, he claimed he had secured financing to possibly take Tesla private, but that turned out not to be true. Musk’s offer also depends on government approvals and due diligence, giving him potential excuses to back out. Musk’s late disclosure of his initial Twitter stake might also delay the process. Musk’s offer depends on completing financing, though that should be less of an obstacle. He sold over \$16 billion in Tesla stock last year, and still owns a roughly 17% stake in the \$1 trillion automaker. Banks have been happy to lend against Musk’s shares in the past. Then there’s the question of price. Twitter’s stock was trading about 30% higher than the bid in the summer of 2021. Companies like Disney and Salesforce.com have kicked the tires at Twitter in the past and might jump in if the company put itself up for sale. After an initial pop, Twitter shares were trading at around \$47 on Thursday morning, suggesting that investors doubt that Musk is serious. The board can afford to be equally sceptical. — Reuters

The world’s richest man says he will pay \$54.20 a share for the social network, but may sell his 9% stake if the company rejects his non-binding offer, which he describes as “best and final.”



GOLDEN GRAINS
Labourers unload wheat grain from a trailer at a wholesale grain market on the outskirts of Amritsar, India. — AFP

The end of an economic illusion



JOHN H COCHRANE
The writer is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution

TARIFFS, INDUSTRIAL PROTECTIONS, LABOUR-MARKET DISTORTIONS, RESTRICTIONS ON SKILLED IMMIGRATION AND OTHER SUPPLY-CONSTRAINING POLICIES HAVE DIRECT COSTS THAT CANNOT BE OFFSET BY PRINTING MORE MONEY.

Inflation’s return marks a tipping point. Demand has hit the brick wall of supply. Our economies are now producing all that they can. Moreover, this inflation is clearly rooted in excessively expansive fiscal policies. While supply shocks can raise the price of one thing relative to others, they do not raise all prices and wages together. A lot of wishful thinking will have to be abandoned, starting with the idea that governments can borrow or print as much money as they need to spray at every problem. Government spending must now come from current tax revenues or from credible future tax revenues, to support non-inflationary borrowing. Stimulus spending for its own sake is over. Governments must start spending wisely. Spending to “create jobs” is nonsense when there is a widespread labour shortage. Unfortunately, many governments are responding to inflation by borrowing or printing even more money to subsidise energy, housing, childcare and other costs, or to hand out more money to cushion the blow from inflation — for example, by forgiving student loans. These policies will lead to even more inflation. Expanded social programmes and transfers must be funded from stable long-run tax revenues, from taxes that do not impose undue costs on the economy. These facts will make it much more difficult for policymakers to continue ignoring budgets and the disincentives that are embedded in many social programmes. The bailout bandwagon will end. The 2008 financial crisis was met with a torrent

of borrowed and printed money to stimulate the economy and bail out banks and their creditors. The Covid-19 recession was met with a tidal wave. Once again, government money went to bail out creditors, prop up asset prices, and provide more stimulus. Given these precedents, our financial system now firmly trusts that the government will borrow or print money in the event of any future crisis. But once fiscal space has run out and given way to inflation, the government’s ability to stop the next crisis may evaporate. When people no longer have confidence that the borrowed money will be repaid, or that the printed money will be soaked up again, they will not lend more. Today’s small (so far) inflation is a taste of this fundamental change. The “secular stagnation” debate is settled. Since 2000, long-term growth has fallen by half, representing one of the great unsung economic tragedies of the twenty-first century. After rising by an average of 3.6% per year between 1947 and 2000, US real (inflation-adjusted) GDP growth has since averaged just 1.8% per year. Was this sclerosis a case of demand-side “secular stagnation” that, given persistently low interest rates, had to be addressed with oodles of “fiscal stimulus?” Or did it follow from a reduction in supply owing to the corrosive effects of protected and over-regulated industries, or to deeper problems such as the erosion of educational performance or a lack of innovation? We now know that it was supply, and that more stimulus will bring only more inflation. If we want growth — to reduce

poverty; to pay for health, environmental protections and transfers; or for its own sake — it will have to come from unleashing supply. Tariffs, industrial protections, labour-market distortions, restrictions on skilled immigration and other supply-constraining policies have direct costs that cannot be offset by printing more money. The return of inflation and Russia’s war in Ukraine signal the end of stupendously counterproductive energy and climate policies. Our governments have been pursuing a dangerously myopic strategy of shutting down US and European fossil-fuel development before alternatives are available at scale, strangling nuclear energy and subsidising grossly inefficient (and often carbon-intensive) projects such as California’s high-speed train to nowhere. The folly of this approach is now plain to see. After blocking the Keystone XL Pipeline and limiting oil and gas exploration, US President Joe Biden’s administration has now gone begging to Venezuela and Iran to make up for a shortfall in energy supply. Similarly, although cracks have appeared, the Germans still can’t bring themselves to allow nuclear power or fracking for natural gas. Efforts to strangle domestic fossil-fuel companies via financial regulation continue unabated. For example, on 21 March, just as Russia’s war on Ukraine was driving gas prices sharply higher, the US Securities and Exchange Commission decided to announce expansive new climate-related disclosure rules designed to discourage fossil-fuel investment. © Project Syndicate, 2022

Macron talks up green credentials ahead of French election

President Emmanuel Macron promised to put the environment at the heart of his government if he is re-elected next weekend, in a speech in southern France designed to appeal to young and green-minded voters. Macron held a major rally in the port city of Marseille while his rival, far-right leader Marine Le Pen, visited a village west of Paris. Polls indicate Macron is stretching his lead over Le Pen, with a fresh survey on Saturday by Ipsos Sopra/Steria suggesting that Macron would triumph with 55.5 per cent versus 44.5 per cent

for Le Pen. “I hear the anxiety that exists in a lot of our young people”, Macron told the rally. “I see young people, adolescents, who are fearful about the future of our planet.” He said a “powerful message” had been sent in the first round of elections on April 10, when nearly eight million voters backed hard-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon and his ecology-heavy programme. “It’s up to us to react and up to us to take action”, Macron said. As well as promising to make France “the first major nation to abandon gas, oil and coal”, Macron said he would appoint

a prime minister who would be formally tasked with “ecological planning”. He also promised new investments in renewable technologies, energy-saving residential renovations and organic food production, while pledging crackdowns on air pollution and single-use plastics. The speech was a clear pitch to the young and left-wing voters who backed Melenchon and Greens nominee Yannick Jadot in the first round who will be crucial in the second round on April 24. The idea of a prime minister tasked with “ecological planning” was first proposed

by Melenchon and Macron’s team said adopting the idea was part of efforts to “enrich” the president’s platform. Macron accused Le Pen of being “a climate change sceptic” and attacked her for proposing to dismantle wind turbines, which the far-right leader views as being costly, inefficient eyesores. Surveys show the environment as one of French voter’s main priorities, but it has been overshadowed as an issue during the election campaign by the war in Ukraine and the spiralling cost of living. Several hundred activists from the Extinction Rebellion climate activist group blocked a

main road in the centre of Paris on Saturday to denounce the “inaction” of political leaders. “This is the only way of ensuring that everyone talks a bit about climate change”, said Antoine, a young Extinction Rebellion activist who declined to give his surname. Le Pen meanwhile was touring the village of Saint Remy-sur-Avre, about an hour and half’s drive west of the capital, where she came top in last weekend’s first round. After hearing complaints about the loss of hospital beds and bus services locally, she promised to “govern the country like a mother, with common

sense” and to defend “the most vulnerable”. Although both candidates claim to have strong environmental programmes, they have clear differences in foreign policy, attitudes to immigration and the economy. Eurosceptic Le Pen wants to wind back France’s commitments to the European Union and proposed a closer alliance between Western military alliance Nato and Russia once the war in Ukraine is over. Macron and Le Pen are set to meet in a head-to-head debate on Wednesday evening which has proved crucial in swaying voters in the past. — AFP

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Beyond Karak: A tea sommelier reveals the secret to a perfect cup

Tea is just tea — watered down, bitter and normally just make sense with milk and sugar. How many usually have this thinking when it comes to tea? Kenyan tea sommelier Maureen Karyuky, now based in Oman, explains that there's more to tea making and shares the secret to making the perfect cup... **P20**

Global warming: Even cacti can't take the heat

SIXTY PER CENT of cactus species will wind up in less hospitable climates over the coming decades as global warming sets in, according to new research challenging the long-held assumption the iconic desert plants will thrive with more heat.

By 2070, up to 90 per cent could be threatened with extinction due to climate change, habitat loss and other stressors, triple the current percentage, scientists reported in Nature Plants.

Some 1,500 species of cacti spread across the Americas live in varying climates, ranging from sea-level deserts to the high Andes mountains, from bone-dry ecosystems to humid tropical forests. Biodiversity hotspots rich in species and numbers include central Mexico and the Brazilian Atlantic Forest.

To test the notion that cacti will benefit from a warmer and more drought-prone world, researchers led by Michiel Pillet from the University of



Arizona examined data on more than 400 species and ran models projecting how they would fare at mid-century and beyond under different greenhouse gas emissions scenarios.

The findings "paint a more pessimistic future," according to the study, pub-

lished on Thursday. Currently, the main threat to cacti is expanding agriculture, along with land degradation, biodiversity loss and harvesting for various uses. Even without climate change, cacti "is one of the most endangered groups of organisms on the

planet," with more than 30 per cent classified as at risk of extinction, the authors note.

Under a moderate emissions scenario in line with current policies, global warming will soon be a significant threat as well.

"Our results suggest that climate change will become a primary driver of cactus extinction risk, with 60 to 90 per cent of species assessed negatively impacted" by global warming, the researchers reported.

Within four or five decades, some 25 per cent of cacti species could experience unfamiliar climates over a quarter of their current range.

Earlier studies have shown impaired photosynthesis -- the process by which plants use sunlight to make foods from CO2 and water -- with only two degrees Celsius of global warming. Earth's average surface temperature, including oceans, is already 1.1C warmer than preindustrial times, and about 1.7C warmer over land only. — **AFP**

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

Say, "I take refuge with the Lord of Daybreak. From the evil of what He created. And from the evil of the darkness as it gathers. And from the evil of those who practice sorcery. And from the evil of an envious when he envies.

Al Falaq

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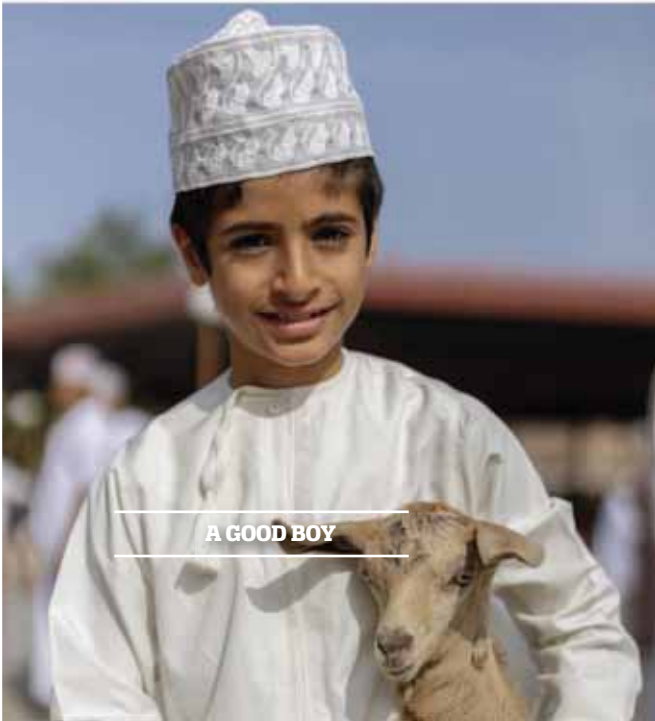


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Around the World

TRENDS

Get this straight: Curls bounce back in Cairo



"SHAGGY," "MESSY," "unprofessional". Natural curls were once looked down upon in Egypt, where Western beauty standards favoured sleek, straight locks. Now, things are changing.

For Rola Amer and Sara Safwat, their curls were once a career-hindering nuisance. Now part of an aesthetic liberation movement sweeping Egypt in recent years, they own a curly hair salon that caters to women and men like them.

Amer used to spend hours straightening her bouncy curls, she told AFP as she began her day at the Curly Studio, which became Egypt's first natural hair salon in 2018. "Curly hair takes a lot longer to cut than straight hair," Amer said, meticulously snipping her way through a client's curly mane in an affluent suburb of Cairo.

Three hours later, she can finally show the result to her client, and both are delighted as the salon buzzes around them.

It's a far cry from Amer's own experience a few years ago. "If I ever left my hair curly, I'd feel shaggy, like I wasn't taking care of myself," she said.

In this rare type of salon in Cairo, the final product fits each client's curl pattern, and rollers have replaced straightening irons to prevent heat damage.

Safwat, 38, explained the dangers of straightening, adjusting her curly bangs as she spoke.

"One time, a mother brought her three-year-old daughter. She had tried a chemical treatment to straighten her hair, and now it was falling out," she said.

The obsession with straight hair, rooted in what Safwat calls "completely false beauty ideals," compelled generations of women to burn their hair to a crisp using chemical treatments and excessive heat damage.

A MARKED CHANGE

With her curls considered "unprofessional" Safwat says that, before she became a hairdresser, she would often be asked in job interviews: "Will you be coming in to work like this?"

In the early 2000s, Lebanese singer Myriam Fares was one of the first curly-haired icons in the Middle East. Halfway across the world, Black women in the United States were increasingly embracing their curls in a natural hair care movement. Many of the biggest brands built by Black women at the time would eventually find their way onto the shelves of curly salons in Cairo.

In 2012, Egyptian actress Dina el-Sherbiny became one of the first to break the taboo on screen, flaunting her chestnut curls in hit TV series "Hekayat Banat" (Girls' Stories).

Ten years later, curly heads feature in TV shows, movies and the billboards that line Cairo's highways, a marked change in pop culture.

In Hollywood, Egyptian-Palestinian actress May Calamawy even shows off her curls in Marvel's latest series, "Moon Knight," helmed by Egyptian director Mohamed Diab. "There has been a real social movement," Doaa Gawish told AFP. In 2016, Gawish launched a Facebook group called The Hair Addict to help women give their hair a break from harsh chemicals and blow dryers. Within months, the online forum had grown from 5,000 to more than 80,000 members, as the local cosmetics market grew by 18 per cent, according to Euromonitor International.

Two years later, Gawish launched her eponymous haircare company.

"A lot of big cosmetics companies started releasing products for curly hair, because they could see it was an essential customer base," Gawish told AFP.

This base is steadily growing in Egypt's sizable cosmetics market. With a population of 103 million, the country has about 500,000 salons and more than three million employees, as estimated in 2020 by Mahmoud el-Degwy, head of the hairdressers' division at the Cairo Chamber of Commerce. — AFP

CULTURE

Tunisian weavers turn rags into eco-friendly rugs



NAJET UNRAVELS an old pair of jeans, raw material for a designer carpet: traditional, eco-friendly crafts are being adapted for new markets thanks to a project born in the Tunisian desert.

"I learned to weave at a young age, from my mother," said the 52-year-old from the oasis town of Nefta, 500 kilometres (310 miles) south of Tunis.

Now, she is making a living from it.

She is selling her Turkish-style kilim rugs via Shanti, a social enterprise that helps artisans from across the North African country reach buyers and bring vital revenue into some of its most marginalised communities.

Shanti is the brainchild of Najet's Franco-Tunisian nephew Mehdi Baccouche.

"Unstitching old jumpers, tearing up old cotton garments, making rugs out of them, it's a folk art found in all Tunisian homes," he told AFP.

While the skill "has been around forever", reaching buyers is a challenge, he added.

Back in 2014, he had asked his aunt to weave carpets for his friends, soon moving to selling them via Facebook.

Seeing the potential, two years later he created Shanti, which buys carpets and takes charge of getting them to consumers.

It also employs designers who work with artisans to improve their design skills and make their products more marketable.

"These are my creations, they come out of my imagination and Shanti approved them," Najet said.

'RECYCLE CLOTHES'

Najet uses an eclectic array of old pullovers, socks and assorted pass-me-downs from the local flea market, giving them a new life as rugs.

She has little fear of running out of raw materials.

Despite a lean patch, the Tunisian clothes industry still keeps 1,600 firms in business, providing 100 times that many jobs.

In Nefta, a town of some 22,000 people, Shanti has also set up a haberdashery where weavers have free access to balls of wool recycled from second-hand clothes.

The association's local coordinator Fatima Alhamal, Najet's daughter, says the store makes "a huge difference".

Previously, "craftswomen had to go and find materials, which they had to pay for, then earned 12-15 euros for a kilim".

Now Shanti pays them 40 euros (\$43) apiece, up to a maximum of four a month each to avoid pressuring them into overwork.

It then sells them in Tunisia and abroad.

The association also helps the workers improve their work spaces, for example with air conditioning — a necessity in southern Tunisia's blistering summer heat.

The work has changed the social standing of the women involved.

"People see them completely differently now," Fatma said.

Najet says she is happy to be making a living from home.

"I don't have to go out for anything, I can cook and eat here, I can work comfortably."

ECO-FRIENDLY

Baccouche said at first people teased him for getting involved in "an old ladies' craft".

But the project fills a valuable niche in an area where women are disproportionately underemployed, and which has faced an ever-worsening economic crisis since before the revolt that sparked the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011.

"It was important to show that you can be an old woman who never went to school and doesn't know how to use the Internet, but you can still do something and earn a living from it," he said.

Yet the association also tries to avoid creating conflicts within families.

It pays the women not in cash but in post office accounts where their husbands can't see how much they are making — or use it to pay household bills.

Using its system of ordering in advance, Shanti runs a boutique in the capital Tunis.

"L'Artisanerie" also acts as a space for coordinators who train artisans from other rural areas, making bamboo furniture, poetry and embroidery.

In four years, more than 200 producers have been able to find a market for their work. Sixty work every day for L'Artisanerie.

"We're trying to show that you can make something 100 per cent Tunisian, with Tunisian materials and skills, but with a design that fits current tastes," Baccouche said.

Some products, joint creations by artisans and Shanti designers, are sold to design-conscious Tunisians.

Others are exported or sold to bigger firms — such as Indigo, a manufacturer for Zara, or Mango, which recently bought 164 rugs made from recycled jeans.

For now, the system still relies on some support from non-profits such as Oxfam or on Danish development aid.

But Baccouche has big ambitions, with Shanti expanding into sustainable agriculture and eco-tourism. "We're trying to set up an entire, eco-friendly production and logistics chain," he said. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Coachella music festival returns after three-year hiatus



CALIFORNIA'S COACHELLA will kick off on Friday for the first time since 2019, with hundreds of thousands of people flocking to the premier desert music festival, as the United States sees Covid-19 cases edge up.

The mammoth event that takes place over two three-day weekends — and this year features Billie Eilish, Harry Styles and the Weeknd with EDM stars Swedish House Mafia as headliners — traditionally kicks off the year's summer concert circuit.

Coachella's 2020 edition was scrapped as the coronavirus pandemic came into full force, and two years of chaotic cancellations, rescheduled shows and lineup shakeups ensued.

As it returns after a three-year hiatus, Coachella is considered a bellwether for the multi-billion-dollar touring industry that's still on shaky ground after persistent pandemic setbacks.

After other large-scale festivals including Lollapalooza last year required proof of vaccination or a negative Covid-19 result, Coachella this winter announced it would not require any such mitigation measures, including masks or social distancing.

The festival is held mostly outside, welcoming some 125,000 revellers daily from all over the nation and abroad, many of whom camp and fill up hotels nearby.

There will be two testing sites on festival grounds. Jose Arballo — a senior public information representative for the public health department of Riverside County, where Coachella takes place — said there also would be bolstered testing facilities nearby.

"Any time you have large groups of people gathering in public settings there's some issues there — but we're hoping that more people will be vaccinated... and that more people will wear masks anyway," he told AFP.

"If people aren't feeling well, even if it might cost them something financially, we hope they can forgo going."

Arballo said that case numbers in the county had "plateaued in the last couple weeks," but "other people will be coming in from all over the country and other places in the world where maybe the case rates aren't that low."

He also noted that unreported at-home testing has possibly skewed case rate data downward, and anticipated the county would be able to assess the festival's public health impact by the middle of next week — just ahead of the festival's second string of dates.

Nationwide, Covid-19 cases are down sharply from where they were in January but recently have started ticking up, with the United States averaging approximately 38,000 cases a day, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The vast majority of new cases stem from the highly transmissible Omicron sub-variant, known as BA.2, according to the CDC.

Some universities have reinstated mask mandates as has the city of Philadelphia, but for the most part regulations nationwide, including in California, remain relaxed.

'EVERYBODY MISSES THIS'

Major acts playing sets at Coachella include Megan Thee Stallion, Phoebe Bridgers, Doja Cat and Brazil's Anitta.

The Weeknd and Swedish House Mafia were last-minute additions after chaos agent Kanye West unceremoniously pulled out of his headliner spot. Travis Scott pulled out after a deadly concert stampeding tragedy at his Astroworld show in Houston last year, while 2020's anticipated headliner Frank Ocean is set to return to the desert in 2023. Also on deck are French rockers L'Imperatrice, superstar DJ Stromae, recent Grammy winner Arooj Aftab, Palestinian DJ Sama' Abdulhadi and South Africa's Black Coffee, who made Grammy history last week after winning a Grammy for Best Dance/Electronic Album, the first African act to do so.

And in a last-minute surprise, Arcade Fire will play a set on Friday evening.

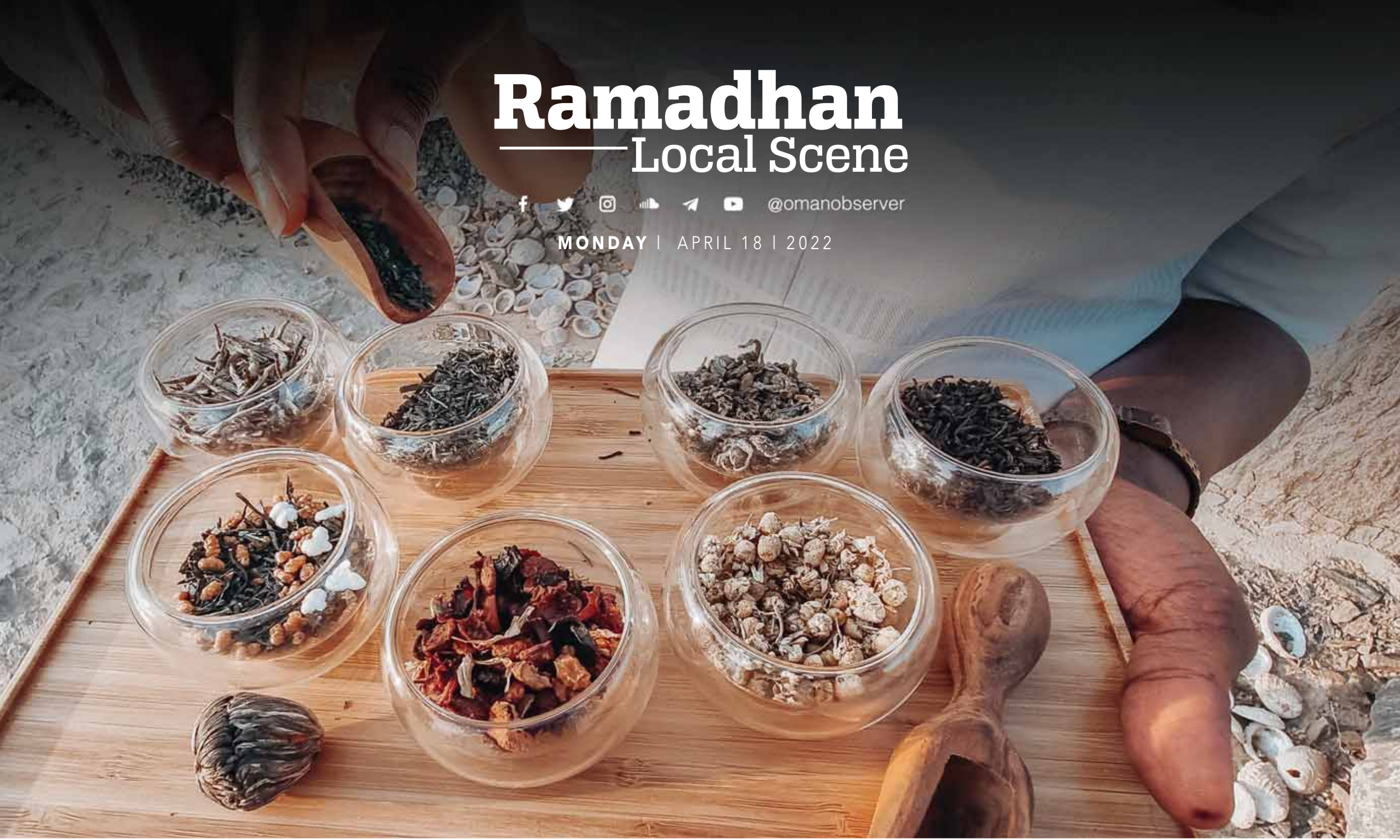
Coachella is a major draw for Indio, the city where it takes place, a desert municipality of just under 95,000 people whose slogan is "The City of Festivals." — AFP

Ramadhan

Local Scene

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MONDAY | APRIL 18 | 2022



Beyond Karak: A tea sommelier reveals the secret to a perfect cup

By Yeru Ebuon
Instagram: @yru_ebuon

The preparation of tea has to be particular because if you're not doing it precisely, there is an after effect — it can be on the taste, it can be on the colour or the flavour.

These words stayed in my head as a series of ingredients were presented before us by Kenyan tea sommelier Maureen Karyuky. The ingredients were placed on crystal containers paraded on a wooden board and came in different forms — some recognisable as leaves while others were processed just like those you see on tea bags sold at the grocery stores.

"Not a lot of people know that there are different brewing methodologies to get different results. There are many factors that affect the flavour including what water you use, how long you boil it and at what temperature. The quality of the tea is dependent on how well you know your tea", she explained.

Under the calm, breezy sky of

Dhofar and overlooking the relatively calmer Arabian Sea, the more she talked about the details of the proper tea making process, I can't help thinking of how simple my friends usually make karak tea whenever we go on camping.

Karak tea is an addiction whenever we go on long road trips. We know where to pick the best karak from Fins all the way to Ras Al Hadd. If my Omani friends make it, it's a simple process of boiling water, dumping a bunch of random tea-bags, a tonne of evaporated milk, a cup of sugar and yes, mostly, cardamoms.

I've never really paid attention to what goes into the boiling pot. All I know is that I have a particular flavour profile of karak tea that I like and absent one of those ingredients, I complain that it's not up to the standard. Only when Maureen deconstructed the whole process did it make sense what true art tea making is.

I really did not understand tea before coming to Oman. In fact, I always ended offending people when I say that there's no big deal

about it since it's simply putting tea leaves on boiling hot water. The Japanese and the Chinese will totally be embarrassed by me being Asian at all. On an untrained palate, all tea tastes the same — watered down, sometimes bitter and only made sense when there's sugar. What's a good tea? Before Oman, my answer will be milk tea with bubba. Two years in Oman, it's chai and karak.

"When someone prepares a tea and I taste it, I can tell you many things about it and whether the person knows how to make one very well", Maureen shared. All I can think of is that we can never bring her camping.

Maureen has been in Oman for 3 years. Now based in Mirbat, she is the tea sommelier for Alila Hinu Bay providing guests with some of the most memorable tea experiences one can have in this part of the country.

With Kenya being one of the world's top producers of tea, Maureen's passion for it did not blossom until she started working in Dubai. As a lifestyle and events

hostess, she was given an opportunity to work in the Lobby Lounge where high tea was usually served. While her country was an exceptional source of tea, she also didn't have an idea what the difference between black and green tea was.

"For me, tea is just tea. I struggled when guests were asking for green tea or black tea as I didn't know the difference. With curiosity, I decided I want to learn more about it and that's when I fell in love with the whole process and the art of tea making", she said.

"During my time learning about tea, I discovered that it's a vast field and that there's a wealth of knowledge that I have to learn and know by heart. I went on to study almost everything about tea — their sources, their origin, how the ingredients are processed, their flavour profile and what food they usually go well with. It's really interesting having to go through the whole journey", Maureen added.

"My becoming a tea sommelier started out as a self-study. Eventually, my then manager at a resort became my mentor. She was a certified tea sommelier that trained in a Canadian School of Tea. It became an apprenticeship of sorts and it's from that hands-on experience that my knowledge grew and expanded. If you put a series of ingredients in front of me or make me taste a tea, I will be able to tell what that ingredient is, what's its origin and what its flavour profile."

Other than Kenya, China, India, Sri Lanka and Turkey are the largest producers of tea usually ranking as the world's top producers. Japan and Indonesia are also two of the countries producing the best teas in Asia while Turkey and Iran are notable within the MENA region.

Maureen comforted however that just because you don't know about the art of tea yet that it's totally out of your league.

"There are a lot of people out there who have a problem differentiating between teas. In fact, this is a common concern that they can't really tell the difference. But to appreciate tea, you have to either learn about it or grew up in a house-

hold that has a high appreciation for the whole concept. It was upon my study that I learned what I learned. This knowledge comes with practice and exposure", she said.

"As a tea sommelier, I have tasted over a thousand different ways how to prepare and mix and match tea. Teas are actually very flexible. If you love pomegranates, we can make a concoction that blends the tea well with pomegranates", she added.

The most common teas, Maureen explained are white, green, oolong (a mixture between the green and the black) and black tea. White is the unprocessed one while black is the fully processed, fully oxidized tea.

"Those who are really into tea, they might ask for really premium quality ones or well-processed ones that come from specific regions. There are teas that are expensive because they are only produced in small quantities and come from a specific region of the world", she said.

"As a sommelier, my goal is always to ensure that I brew the perfect cup of tea", Maureen shared.

Asked how that is made, she explained, "There are many people who complain that their tea is bitter. Tea making is about understanding a lot of different factors including the temperature of the water and the ingredients used. To get the perfect cup, I would suggest identifying which type of tea you love. Once you have identified the ingredient, you can do a few readings on what temperature works well with your chosen ingredient. You can also expand your knowledge on what mixes well with that concoction and what its effects are. As an art, it takes patience and understanding. But the more that you dedicate time to learn what works for you, the better your tea experience become", she said.

"Or, I can gladly recommend and show the process to you. But that would require a visit to Dhofar and in our property where we have afternoon tea available for our guests", she invited. You can follow Maureen on Instagram @maureen_karyuky or @alilahinubay for details.