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DJOKOVIC ABLE TO DEFEND WIMBLEDON TITLE WITH COVID RULES LIFTED



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GCC STATES MUST HARNESS DIGITISATION TO BECOME LOGISTICS SUPERPOWERS



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WORLD'S OLDEST PERSON EYES NEW LONGEVITY RECORD



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S SIERRA LEONE AND TOGO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Julius Maada Bio of the Republic of Sierra Leone on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Bio and the people of his country. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Faure Gnassingbé of the Republic of Togo on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Gnassingbé and the people of his country. — ONA

HM GREET'S SOUTH AFRICA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Ramaphosa and the people of his country further progress and prosperity. — ONA

AN ATTRACTION FOR MARINE TOURISM



Among the rocks and water, Khor Najd in the Wilayat of Khasab in the Governorate of Musandam overlooks with its unique aesthetics, has become an attraction for marine tourism, which constitutes an economic asset for the Sultanate of Oman. – ONA

Rains likely in next two days

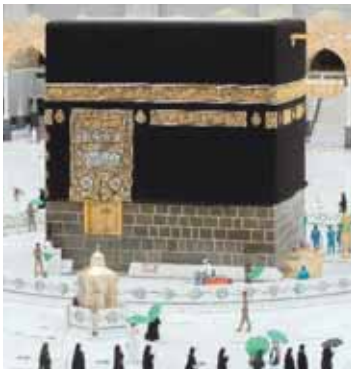
STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Oman's Met Office said that the northern parts of the Sultanate of Oman are forecast to witness advection of convective clouds over the next two days with chances of scattered rain and occasionally thundershowers on some parts of Al Hajar Mountains. Al Hajar Mountains saw extensive formation of local clouds over the past days. Thundershowers of varying intensities associated with fresh wind and hail storm on vast areas of Al Hajar Mountains. Rains of varying amounts were reported in the Wilayat of Ibbri. SEE ALSO P3

Haj e-registration to open on May 9

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs has announced that the e-registration of citizens and residents for Haj 1443 AH will be open from May 9 to 14, 2022. Registration can be made through the electronic system (www.hajj.om). The ministry added that the registration can be through the ID number or ID card or mobile number.

As for the conditions and controls for Haj registration through the electronic system, the ministry added that the applicant must be at least 18 years old and under 65 years old. The ministry said that the applicant must meet the conditions and controls of the target group for Haj, and who has completed taking the doses of approved vaccines for coronavirus (Covid-19), with a certificate endorsed by the health authorities in the Sultanate of Oman, and submitting a negative PCR result taken within 72 hours prior to travel time to Saudi Arabia. The quota of the Sultanate of



Oman in 2022 is 6,338 pilgrims, reducing the number by 45 per cent due to the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic. "Registration for Haj will open on the electronic system and those who want to perform this year's Haj need to register on the website", a spokesperson from the ministry told the Observer. The spokesperson indicated that the registration process is done through the link directly during the specified period, as the system provides three methods for direct registration (registration by entering the civil number, personal card or mobile phone number. **TURN TO P5**)

424 people freed under Fak-Kurba initiative

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

As part of the ongoing Fak-Kurba initiative, as many as 424 new prisoners were released in the third week of the blessed month of Ramadhan, helping hundreds of families whose members were in custody for minor financial issues. They can celebrate Eid al Fitr with their dear and near ones due to Fak-Kurba initiative, which helps release people caught in minor financial cases. This is in addition to the 447 people released in the first two weeks of the holy month. Out of the 424, 160 are from Muscat; 120 from Northern Al Batinah, 31 from South Al Batinah, 46 from Al Dakhiliyah and 67 from Al Buraimi. The release of these people who were imprisoned or were about to be imprisoned due to civil, commercial, labour or Sharia claims against them and ordered by the courts, comes days after a gesture to support the initiative was announced.


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

DR MOHAMMED BIN IBRAHIM AL ZADJALI
Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Lawyers Association

Fak-Kurba, an initiative of the Omani Lawyers Association, is run by Royal support and from other good Samaritans. "Because we believe that everyone deserves a second chance, we could secure the release of nearly 4,000 insolvent

persons through Fak-Kurba initiative. They were imprisoned or about to be imprisoned due to various claims from them", said Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Lawyers Association. "We highly appreciate the efforts of individuals and institutions. As we move towards the Eid al Fitr, we look forward to bringing joy to the insolvent persons and their families." The initiative, in its 9th edition this year, has introduced an online platform (http://fakkrba.om) aiming at collecting financial donations to release those who have been imprisoned due to financial civil, commercial or labour claims. There are conditions to avail cover under Fak-Kurba. The insolvent must not be a previous beneficiary of the initiative, and the amount should be related to a civil, commercial, Sharia or labour case, with a maximum of RO 2,000. **TURN TO P5**



25
RAMADHAN
1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr 04:17 AM	Dhuhr 12:10 PM	Asr 03:36 PM
Maghrib 06:38 PM	Isha 07:53 PM	

INSIDE



BOMBER KILLS FOUR TEACHERS IN PAKISTAN

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THE GATHERING STAGFLATIONARY STORM

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‘A Day in Nizwa’ bus trips during Eid al Fitr holiday

MUSCAT: Mwasalat, one of the companies of the Asyad Group, launches its tourism programme "A Day in Nizwa" during the Eid al Fitr holiday, and it includes regular bus trips from Muscat to Nizwa to provide an exploration tour of its cultural, civilisational and archaeological landmarks. Mwasalat said that the trips start from the second day of Eid

al Fitr and continue until the fifth day of Eid, and that the buses depart from the company's station in Athaiba in Muscat Governorate and head towards the Wilayat of Nizwa in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The daily trip will be operated from May 2 and 5. The bus will start from Athaiba Bus station at 7 am and return to



the same place at 5 pm. Mwasalat has introduced this service in response to the increasing demand for visiting Nizwa, which is one of the most preferred domestic destination for tourists and residents alike, in addition to highlighting the pivotal role that public transportation can play in revitalising and facilitating domestic tourism... **TURN TO P5**



Eid prayers in open spaces to be allowed within Covid protocols

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Mass Eid prayers in open spaces can be conducted on Eid day within strict Covid protocols following the dos and don'ts of the pandemic as instructed by the Supreme Committee on Covid-19, according to the office of His Eminence the Grand Mufti.

The clarification comes in the wake of a flurry of queries on whether Eid prayers, which are conducted twice a year, can be organised on the Eid day, which is likely to fall on June 2, and all the rituals of Eid are in place from various corners of society.

"Eid prayers can be conducted within strict adherence of the Supreme Committee measures prescribed against the recurrence of the pandemic but other rituals, shaking hands and hugging each other and wishing can be avoided for the safety of the society," Office of the Mufti told the Observer.

The Supreme Committee, which studied the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate of Oman, has restricted the attendance at the blessed Eid al Fitr prayer to recipients of the Covid-19 vaccines and prevented the entry of unvaccinated people. The prohibition includes children under the age of twelve while adhering to social distancing,



wearing a face mask in closed places, and avoiding shaking hands and embracing when greeting.

These decisions came in light of the latest data about the virus and the statistics of the infected and those hospitalised in the

The clarification comes in the wake of a flurry of queries on whether Eid prayers, which are conducted twice a year, can be organised on the Eid day

wards and intensive care rooms in the various hospitals and protect all members of society from this disease.

Also, all attending the prayers are urged to continue taking preventive measures, such as wearing face masks, maintaining physical distancing in closed places, and adhering to healthy habits when sneezing and coughing.

The Supreme Committee has also urged to sustain the ban on holding all events and gatherings in public places, especially greeting and gatherings and mass celebrations of Eid.

Additionally, the committee has also banned holding wedding and mourning events in mosques, halls, and other public places, and called on everyone to adhere to all precautionary measures aimed at protecting people.



Oman Airports to focus on smart corridor

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman Airports is working on a Five-Year Plan to develop the aviation sector in the country.

With emphasis on providing amenities to passengers, the company will implement projects to digitalise retail sales and privatisation of ground handling.

Oman Airports said that its investments in the current year (2022) would be on creating a smart corridor by digitising the entire journey process of the traveller and on reducing carbon emissions.

Speaking to the 'Observer', Shaikh Aimen al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, said that by the end of the year, there will be projects as part of the plans to go green, which will include installation of solar panels to generate electricity for internal use at airports in the country.

He added, "The predictions are that the air traffic will return 60 to 60 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels this year, 70 to 80 per cent by 2023 and full 100 per cent by mid-2024-25."

As a company under Oman Investment Authority, it will

focus on signing a concession agreement for all airports, managing the second Southern Runway project, expanding the direct network to various destinations and developing the air freight business.

It will seek to operate airports outside the Sultanate of Oman; the company will also focus on establishing free zones near airports, managing civil and oilfield airports, and developing the lands of Muscat and Salalah airports in cooperation with the private sector.

The national airline would seek to promote the Sultanate of Oman as a destination for travel.

"The airline will target key markets and adopt an effective business model."

The investment portfolio of the Omran group amounted to RO 675 million, while the number of hotel assets reached 30, including three under construction, five major projects and eight projects in partnerships.

The most notable projects of the group during the upcoming plan are the sustainable city of Yiti and the business centre at Madinat Al Irfan in Muscat.

SAF HONOURS SLAIN SOLDIERS' KIN



The Chief of Staff Office, represented by the department of military social services, honoured a number of families of deceased soldiers from SAF and the Ministry of Defence. The move comes within the framework of the attention accorded by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) to its affiliates.

Omani team develops centralised cloud services repository

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

The 34th issue of Scientific Insights magazine, being published by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has examined an Omani research project that developed technical solutions for cloud services and created a central electronic system that searches for offers available in various websites of different service providers, including categorising and saving them, for those seeking cloud services, whether they are individuals or institutions.

The research project, titled 'A Centralised Cloud Services Repository (CCSR) Framework for Optimal Cloud Service Advertisement Discovery from Heterogenous Web Portals', was conducted by Dr Asma bint Musabab al Kalbani, Assistant Professor at the Department of Information Technology and Head of the Scientific Research

Department at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibri.

Cloud computing refers to providing information technology resources such as software and hardware as services that can be accessed over the Internet instead of buying them as expensive products that require installation, operation, maintenance and others. In this regard, Dr Asma said that the idea of the project was to develop technical solutions for cloud computing technology. The project aimed to solve the lack of an independent central market that allows those who want to request a specific cloud service to search and access advertisements and offers of cloud computing services available from providers of those services globally.

Dr Asma elaborated that the project's central system searched for offers and advertisements for cloud services from the Internet and provides them in a central repository that later allows the



service requester to access and browse these advertisements with less effort. Moreover, the system consisted of two main parts: The Harvesting as-a-Service (HaaS) and the service repository module. The Harvesting as-a-Service is a developed technical tool to collect data from various websites that offer cloud computing services and store them in the data warehouse, which is responsible



for storing and organising the data extracted from various websites in this central repository, and its role is to assist the service requester in the process of searching and accessing for various offers and advertisements for cloud computing services.

Concerning the research project results, Dr Asma confirmed that the experiments proved the effectiveness of the

developed system that enabled the consumer to search and retrieve advertisements for cloud services with a higher efficiency of 90 per cent than its accuracy. The developed harvesting service tool was also compared with traditional tools used in data collection on a large scale, as the tool proved its efficiency in extracting data from websites with high quality and in a short time. Dr Asma recommended to conduct more experiments to develop the infrastructure of this central market.

The research team consisted of principal investigator Dr Asma al Kalbani, Dr Walayat Hussain, Lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, University of Technology Sydney, Australia, and Dr Jung Yoon Kim, Assistant Professor at the Graduate School of Game, Gachon University, South Korea.

In regard to the importance of the research project, Dr Asma said:

The research was published in the IEEE Access journal of the world-renowned IEEE organisation, and it has a high impact factor equal to 4.098 in 2021 and for five years similar to 4.676, which are two distinct indicators in the field of computer science research. There is much reliance on this type of research cooperation and these distinguished indicators to supplement the remaining research indicators to contribute to raising the percentage of research output in the Sultanate of Oman and raising the level of national universities and research centres in international rankings.

Scientific Insights is a scientific journal published every three months by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in both Arabic and English. To read more interesting articles in the fields of science and innovation, interested readers can access the magazine online through the ministry's official social media channels.



RAO commander honours excelling teams

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), honoured the shooting team for winning the second

place in the thirty-third light weapon shooting competition of the Sultan's Armed Forces. The commander of RAO also honoured the beach games teams for winning the first place in the football and volleyball competitions and the second place in handball competition. Also honoured were the beach cycling team that took part in the Oman Cycling Association championship and the compass orientation team for winning the first place in the general ranking.

Zakat helps build an inclusive society

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Zakat al Fitr is one of the most prominent obligations of Muslims at the end of Ramadhan. It is a charity that Muslims give during the holy month. It has manifestations of social solidarity in Islamic law.

Zakat is the second pillar in terms of correctness that creates interdependence and financial cooperation in society. It is obligatory for all Muslims, young or old, to do charity in the form of cash or corn, values of which vary from country to country.

Its value in the Sultanate of Oman ranges from RO 1 to RO 1.5, depending on the party that a Muslim wishes to pay zakat. Generally, zakat is given by the head of the family on behalf of all the individuals he supports.

With the advent of the blessed month, there are platforms to collect donations. These platforms make payment easier for citizens and residents electronically. These associations distribute the money to the deserving poor and



It is obligatory for all Muslims, young or old, to do charity in the form of cash or corn, values of which vary from country to country

needy. The scholars permitted the possibility of paying zakat in cash through those platforms.

Oman has launched a portal for donations to charitable societies so that all residents and citizens can make online donations without visiting the charitable offices.

The electronic zakat, launched by the Ministry of Awqaf and

Religious Affairs, is an integrated system that allows citizens to benefit from a range of services related to zakat and alms and allows the feature to follow up on the request and the actions taken in it.

It also provides several services, including the possibility of calculating zakat from the smart

calculator and the payment of public or current alms. Or pay various types of penances and Zakat al Fitr from Ramadhan and enable them to deliver zakat.

Zakat has good economic effects that accrue to the individual, society, the state and Muslims. As one of its most important economic effects, it contributes to improving the living, health and educational standards of the poor. It helps alleviate the financial burden of the state by agreeing to provide subsidies to the needy, such as orphans, the elderly and others.

It is a means of achieving economic justice; it helps to invest; because whoever owns money must invest it, and the state helps to encourage it by various means.

Investment benefits the country's economy and raises the value of its budget, and finally, provides security to the state. Zakat helps fight poverty.

In zakat, social and economic goals are achieved. The wisdom in it is to build a good, integrated and equitable society as much as possible.

HEAVY RAIN AND WIND LASH PARTS OF THE COUNTRY



Rains of varying amounts fell on the Wilayat of Ibri accompanied by active wind and hailstorm mostly on the mountains. Heavy rain lashed Al Tiwi village in Ibri causing wadis to overflow.

Three held for drug smuggling



The Coast Guard Police, in cooperation with the Department of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation in the North Al Batinah Governorate Police Command, arrested three people of Asian nationality on charges of smuggling and possession of narcotic drugs as well as illegal entry to the country. A total of 42 kg of hashish, crystal and heroin meths was confiscated. Legal procedures have been initiated against them.

Tender Announcement

In accordance with the Government Digital Transformation Program 2021 – 2025, ITHCA Group would like to announce the following tender in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology:

Tender No.	ITHCA-T-003-2022
Description	Study, Design and implementation of the National Unified eServices Portal
Tender Fee (OMR) Non-refundable	800 OMR
Last Date for Collection	17/05/2022
Bid Submission Date	30/06/2022 (2:00 P.M.)

The tender documents can be obtained from tender@ithca.om from the date of publication of this announcement.

Office Hours:

7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Sunday – Thursday

Eligibility Criteria and Brief Scope of Work can be obtained from:

www.omanbroadband.om
tender@ithca.om

www.ithca.om [f](https://www.facebook.com/ITHCAgroup) [i](https://www.instagram.com/ITHCAgroup) [in](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ITHCAgroup) [yt](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCITHCAgroup) @ITHCAgroup

STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



READ THE LABEL BEFORE BUYING

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

If shopping is necessary, reading the food labels correctly makes it purposeful. The price tag is often looked at more than once and even double-checked and compared with the price in other shops, whereas the nutritional label is hardly noticed.

In many countries, it is a regulation to have the nutritional value published on the food package, and in the Sultanate of Oman, the ingredients have to be listed in Arabic as well.

Muscat Municipality has issued guidelines for the public to bear in mind when purchasing food. The consumer awareness initiative reminds the general public of the importance of the verification process of the product expiry date and the production date.

The expiry date is often overlooked when purchasing in bulk or when buying products that are on sale.

On its social media campaign, Muscat Municipality advised customers "to look out for their ideal properties such as colour, lustre and firmness," while choosing vegetables and fruits.

The campaign also states that once bought, chilled or frozen food must be transported and stored with care. Meanwhile, the nutritional label found on the packaging usually gives a brief on information about energy in Kilojoules- KJ, Kilocalories - Kcal that is referred to as calories but what is also important is to read other factors such as levels of fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugar, protein and salt.

According to eatingright.org, these are the points one must keep in mind while reading Nutritional Facts Label.

"Step 1 - Start with the **servings size**, step 2 - compare the total **calories** to your individual needs," states eatright.org.

This is important, especially if one is on a diet plan, so dutifully compare the labelled amount to what is the allowed allowance.

"Step 3 is to let the per cent Daily Values (DV) be a guide: per cent DVs are for the entire day, not just one meal or snack. A food item with a 5-per cent DV of fat provides 5 per cent of the total fat that a person who needs 2,000 calories a day should consume."

eatingright.org also points out that 'low' is 5 per cent or less.

"Aim low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium. The High is 20 per cent or more. Aim high in Vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre," differentiated the organisation.

The organisation points out that it is also highly significant to consider additional nutrients such as protein.

And, of course, food with more than one ingredient must have an 'ingredient list' on the label. They are listed in descending order as per the weight. Eating Right Organization says this is extremely important for individuals who have allergies or people who follow religious values.

So, in other words, it is best to make it a habit to read the labels on food packages to know what is one eating.

THE PRICE TAG IS OFTEN LOOKED AT MORE THAN ONCE AND EVEN DOUBLE-CHECKED AND COMPARED WITH THE PRICE IN OTHER SHOPS, WHEREAS THE NUTRITIONAL LABEL IS HARDLY NOTICED



Inflation rises by 3.6pc in March

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

The inflation rate as per the consumer price index in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 3.6 per cent in March compared to the same month in 2021. The inflation rate also increased by 0.1 per cent from February 2022, according to the data of the monthly consumer price survey issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The data showed an increase in transportation costs by 6.6 per cent, education by 5.1 per cent, foodstuffs and non-alcoholic beverages by 4.9 per cent,



miscellaneous goods, and services by 3.9 per cent, tobacco products by 3.9 per cent, the health group by 2.9 per cent.

The costs of housing, water, electricity, gas and fuel prices

went up by 2 per cent, the furniture, fixtures, household equipment and regular household maintenance costs increased by 1.2 per cent, and restaurants and hotel spending group by 1.1 per cent.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate witnessed the highest rate of increase in inflation at 4.5 per cent, followed by North Al Batinah Governorate at 4.4 per cent, South and North Al Sharqiyah governorates at four per cent.

The Governorate of Muscat recorded the lowest inflation rate of 2.9 per cent, during the month of March 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.



Nahida power plant worth RO 17m begins operations

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company has announced the official launch of 'Nahida' power plant in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The total cost of the project reached RO 17 million. The power plant, which operates on 132/400 kV, is considered the main linking grid between the north and south of Oman by connecting the power network of Oman Electricity Transmission Company in the north with the power network of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The plant consists of 14 gas cells with a voltage of 400 kV, two transformers with a voltage of 132/400 kV as each transformer has a capacity of 500 MVA, and 8 gas cells with a voltage of 132 kV, as well as control, protection, communications devices and associated construction works.

Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhy, CEO of Oman Electricity Transmission Company, said that this plant is an addition to the main electricity grid and it is the link that connects the power network of the north with the "Rabt" or "Link" project. This will multiply the efficiency and integration among power grids in Oman.

Al Rumhy added that Nahida power plant will play a vital role in enhancing the reliability and safety of managing the electricity sector. — ONA

424 people released under Fak-Kurba initiative

FROM P1

The priority will be given to those who have fewer claims, bearing in mind that the Directorate General makes the selection of cases that meet the conditions 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.

The Execution Departments in the various courts of the Sultanate of Oman are working closely with the Association to achieve this humanitarian goal. Nearly 100 male and female lawyers are part of this mega release campaign that 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.

Haj e-registration to open on May 9

FROM PAGE 1

He added that contractors and Haj companies are prohibited from interfering with the registration of those wishing to perform Haj to ensure transparency and pilgrims are given the freedom to choose the Haj company of their wish.

REGISTRATION FOR WOMEN

The ministry clarified that a woman's registration in the system must be preceded by the registration of one of her mahrams for Haj this season, and the registration will be based on the civil number recorded in the personal card,

provided that it is valid. Also, he further said that the applicant must use his personal mobile phone number during the registration process to receive text messages from the system or personal e-mail, which is the considered means for communicating with any procedures or notifications and their consequences.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Performing Haj on behalf of those fall under the 'beneficiaries of social security' category can do so in coordination with the ministry. "Registration for availing the aid

from the Haj committee for people under the beneficiaries of social security category is possible and one needs to coordinate with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development", he added.

The ministry has set up a hotline for technical support and inquiries through 80008008 during official working hours or submitting a report via the notification screen in the electronic system for registering pilgrims of the Sultanate of Oman via the link www.hajj.om/contact.

By Kabeer Yousuf

'A Day in Nizwa' trips during Eid al Fitr holiday

FROM P1

to attract new segments of visitors and contribute in activating the role of this sector.

The tour is scheduled to begin with a visit to the most prominent places in the wilayat, especially the historic Nizwa Castle and the Nizwa Archaeological Market to learn about its role in trade throughout history, and to know about the work of Omani traditional craftsmen. It also includes recreational breaks with a selection of cultural activities and folk arts that shed light on ancient heritage.

The tour continues with a visit to Al Aqar neighbourhood, which dates back to 1,500 years, using electric tourist carts. — ONA



Real estate deals value hits RO 587.5m by March

MUSCAT: The total value of property transactions in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of March 2022 declined by 14.9 per cent to reach RO 587.5 million compared to the same period of 2021, showed the latest data by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oman's government collected RO 16.2 million as real estate transaction fees by the end of March 2022, comprising a drop by 23.7 per cent. The traded value of sale contracts also fell by 5.3 per cent to reach RO 299.1 million.

The number of sale contracts went down by 22.4 per cent to reach 19,265 contracts, compared to 24,816 contracts during the same period in 2021. The traded value of mortgage contracts declined by 22.6 per cent at the end of March 2022, to reach RO



284.5 million, compared to RO 367.6 million during the same period in 2021.

The number of mortgage contracts reached 4,717, constituting a fall by 3.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2021 when it stood at 4,873 contracts. The traded value of exchange (barter) contracts went down by 44.7 per cent to reach RO 3.9 million by the end of March

2022, compared to RO 7 million during the same period in 2021. The number of title deeds issued as at the end of March 2022 reached 60,251 constituting a drop by 19.1 per cent over the same period in 2021. The number of title deeds issued for GCC citizens went down by 1.4 per cent to reach 212 title deeds compared to 215 title deeds during the same period in 2021. — ONA

الشركة المتحدة للتمويل ش.م.ع.ع

United Finance Company SAOG

Board of Directors' Report for the period ended 31st March 2022

Report on material events covering the interim financials

Overview and Future Outlook

The first quarter of 2022 has been a very positive quarter for Oman and there is much to look forward to. S&P has upgraded Oman's credit ratings to BB- from B+ with a stable outlook. The various initiatives taken by the government to curb spending and reduce the budget deficit have been successful. The high oil prices have helped, and so has the clear direction given by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al-Said that the surpluses from the oil prices will be used to reduce the country's debt, rather than any additional spending. This has buoyed both the Omani government bonds as well as the stock markets. Public debt to GDP ratio is expected to reduce from the current 65% to less than 50% by the end of 2022, and real GDP is expected to grow by 3.9% in 2022.

This is excellent news for the economy and especially for the banks and finance companies. As the effects of the pandemic wind down, business activity has picked up and there is an air of positivity and hopefulness for the year ahead.

Performance highlights

United Finance Company SAOG Net Profit after tax surged by 66% to RO 254 thousand and the Total Income increased by 7% to RO 1,956 thousand. Costs were kept under control and Total Expenses declined by 2%. The Net Debtors portfolio stood at RO 79.5 million as at 31st March 2022 as against RO 82.7 million in March 2021. The decrease in loan portfolio was due to the prudent approach being adopted as we continue to be careful on who we lend to, and our capital adequacy ratio is in excess of 52%.

Provisioning position

The company has provided RO 205 thousand as provision during Q1 2022 taking the total provisions of the company to over RO 18 million, and we continue to maintain one of the highest provisions against non-performing loans amongst FLCs. In addition, the Company also maintains a special reserve of RO 2.37 million to guard against unforeseen delinquencies.

Funding

The company has adequate funds to meet its current business requirements. Market liquidity has improved and Banks have renewed/ replenished credit facilities to meet the business requirements of the company. We have managed to secure new funding lines and the Management is confident of mobilizing the required funds at reasonable interest rates to meet the budgeted business levels of the current year.

Board Elections

Board Elections were held on 31 March 2022 and following members were elected to the Board of the company: Mr. Mohamed Abdulla Mohamed Al-Khonji – Chairman
HE Hassan Ihsan Nasseb Al-Nasib – Deputy Chairman
Mr. Waseem Salah Qaraeen – Chairman of ARCMC
Mr. Hussam Hisham Omar Bostami – Director
Mr. Fariborz Vessali – Director
Mr. Salman Hussain Salman Al-Lawati – Director
Mr. Mohammed Mahmood Ahmed Al-Raise- Director

Acknowledgement

We thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said may God always protect him, His Government, Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and other regulatory authorities for their support and guidance during the quarter. We also thank our bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. We also extend our thanks to the management and staff of the company for their continued support and hard work.

Mohamed Abdulla Mohamed Al Khonji
Chairman

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31 MARCH 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
ASSETS		
Property and equipment	2,322,747	2,383,995
Deferred tax asset	16,923	16,923
Deposit with the Central Bank of Oman	250,000	250,000
Investment securities	554,150	554,150
Instalment finance debtors	79,502,584	82,776,541
Other receivables and prepaid expenses	166,832	200,225
Cash and cash equivalents	1,999,247	1,135,294
TOTAL ASSETS	84,812,483	87,317,128
EQUITY		
Share capital	34,914,441	34,914,441
Share premium reserve	528,402	528,402
Legal reserve	5,117,232	4,915,750
Special reserve	2,368,989	2,368,989
Foreign currency reserve	-	294,514
Impairment reserve	1,911,736	1,911,736
Retained earnings	2,739,514	631,660
Total equity	47,580,314	45,565,492
Liabilities		
Borrowings	28,436,111	33,883,342
Corporate deposits	4,000,000	3,000,000
Creditors and other payables	4,386,787	4,754,942
Taxation	409,271	113,352
Total liabilities	37,232,169	41,751,636
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	84,812,483	87,317,128
NET ASSETS PER SHARE	0.136	0.131

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
Instalment finance income	1,876,742	1,727,387
Interest expense	(409,509)	(553,089)
Net instalment finance income	1,467,233	1,174,298
Other income	78,909	92,963
Operating expenses	(1,017,685)	(804,044)
Depreciation	(22,470)	(24,030)
Allowance for expected credit losses	(204,587)	(259,059)
Profit before tax	301,400	180,128
Income tax expense	(47,210)	(27,019)
PROFIT AND TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD	254,190	153,109
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.003	0.002

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of such request addressed to:

Chief Executive Officer, United Finance Co. SAOG
P O Box 3652, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: 24577300 Fax 24561557
E-mail: ufc@ufcoman.com, Website: www.ufcoman.com



Lebanese protesters rally against the draft law on capital control outside the parliament building in Beirut. – AFP

Lebanon tells military to probe migrant boat capsized

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s government on Tuesday tasked the armed forces with investigating how an overpacked migrant boat capsized, a tragedy some survivors have blamed on the military.

At least six people were killed late on Saturday in the Mediterranean Sea off the northern port city of Tripoli in the country’s deadliest such maritime incident in years.

The circumstances were not entirely clear, with some on board claiming the navy rammed their boat, while officials have insisted the traffickers attempted reckless escape manoeuvres.

The government in an emergency session “tasked army command with conducting a transparent investigation into the circumstances behind the incident under the supervision of the relevant judicial authority,” said Information Minister Ziad Makari.

The announcement came after survivors took to TV stations and social media to accuse the military of insulting passengers aboard the ship and then deliberately cracking its hull.

The disaster ignited widespread public anger just weeks before May 15 parliamentary elections in the small country hit by a severe economic crisis in recent years.

The Lebanese armed forces said 48 people were rescued, but it has remained unclear exactly how many would-be asylum-seekers were crammed onto the boat when it set off.

The United Nations refugee agency UNHCR said the boat was carrying at least 84 people when it capsized about three nautical miles off the coast — which would leave some 30 people unaccounted for. Lebanon was once a transit point for asylum-seekers from elsewhere in the Middle East who were hoping to reach the EU island state of Cyprus, 175 kilometres away.

However, Lebanon’s unprecedented economic crisis that has plunged millions into poverty is driving growing numbers of its citizens to also attempt the perilous crossing. The UN says more than 1,500 people have tried to leave Lebanon illegally by sea since the start of 2021. — AFP

Bomber kills 4 teachers at Pakistani university

KARACHI: A woman bomber from a Pakistan fighter group killed four people, including three Chinese nationals, in an attack on a minibus carrying staff from the Confucius Institute at Karachi University on Tuesday.

The Baloch Liberation Army — one of several groups fighting for independence in Pakistan’s biggest province — claimed responsibility, saying it was the first suicide attack by a woman assailant.

Chinese targets have regularly been attacked by fighters from Balochistan, where Beijing is involved in huge infrastructure projects as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

Fighters have long harboured resentment against lucrative mining and energy projects in the region, saying locals do not see the benefits and are being pushed off their land.

The “Baloch Liberation Army accepts responsibility of today’s self-sacrificing attack”, the group’s spokesman, Jeeyand Baloch, said in a statement published in English on Telegram.

Karachi police confirmed four people had died, including the minibus driver and three staff from the Confucius Institute, the cultural and educational programme that China operates at universities around the world.

CCTV footage broadcast by local channels showed a woman standing near the gate of the institute, inside the Karachi University grounds, as the minibus pulls up.

When it gets to within a metre



Police inspect a site around damaged vehicles following a bombing near the Confucius Institute affiliated with the Karachi University in Karachi. – AFP

she turns her back on it and detonates a bomb strapped to her body.

Pakistan’s new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif immediately condemned the attack.

“I am deeply grieved on the loss of precious lives including of our Chinese friends in the heinous attack in Karachi today,” he tweeted.

Sharif only took over as premier after Imran Khan was ousted by a no-confidence vote earlier this month, and tackling a resurgence in militancy will be one of his biggest challenges.

Fighters have long harboured resentment against lucrative mining and energy projects in the region

“I strongly condemn this cowardly act of terrorism,” Sharif said, adding “the perpetrators will surely be brought to justice”.

In February, Baloch separatists staged four days of attacks across two locations in the province, killing nine soldiers.

Tensions have flared in recent years in Balochistan following a massive influx of Chinese investment.

China is upgrading energy links and infrastructure as part of a \$54-billion programme known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, with both nations wary of security threats to the projects.

In April 2021, a bomb attack at a luxury hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, killed four and wounded dozens. The ambassador was unhurt. — AFP

Kim pledges to boost North Korea’s nuclear arsenal

SEOUL: North Korea will rapidly accelerate the development of its nuclear arsenal, leader Kim Jong Un said while overseeing a vast military parade showcasing his most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles, state media reported on Tuesday.

Despite biting sanctions, North Korea has doubled down on Kim’s military modernisation drive, test-firing a slew of banned weapons this year while ignoring US offers of talks — as analysts warn of a likely resumption of nuclear tests.

Dressed in a white military uniform trimmed with gold brocade, Kim watched as tanks, rocket launchers and his largest

ICBMs were paraded through Pyongyang late on Monday for the founding anniversary of North Korea’s armed forces, state media reported.

Kim vowed to “take measures for further developing the nuclear forces of our state at the fastest possible speed,” according to a transcript of his speech at the event published by the official Korean Central News Agency.

“The nuclear forces, the symbol of our national strength and the core of our military power, should be strengthened in terms of both quality and scale,” he said.

Repeated negotiations aimed at convincing Kim to give up his



People watch a TV screen showing a news broadcast of a military parade held in Pyongyang to commemorate the 90th founding anniversary of the Korean People’s Revolutionary Army in Seoul. – AFP

nuclear weapons programmes have come to nothing, and he warned on Monday that he could

use his atomic arsenal if North Korea’s “fundamental interests” were threatened.

“The fundamental mission of our nuclear forces is to deter a war, but our nukes can never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent,” he said, according to the KCNA transcript.

North Korea had paused long-range and nuclear tests while Kim met then-US president Donald Trump for a bout of doomed diplomacy, which collapsed in 2019. Last month, Pyongyang test-fired an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017, and satellite imagery shows signs of activity at a nuclear testing site, which was purportedly demolished in 2018 ahead of the first Trump-Kim summit.

Kim’s messaging on the purpose of his nuclear weapons could be a response to South Korea’s new hawkish, conservative President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol, who takes office May 10, analysts said.

“It’s noteworthy that Kim is now talking more specifically about the purpose of his nuclear weapons,” said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies.

“South Korea’s president-elect Yoon has threatened a pre-emptive strike on Pyongyang if needed, and Kim seems to be indirectly saying that he may have to respond with nuclear tactics should Yoon indeed proceed.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES

COLOMBO

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka to sell ‘golden’ visas

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka announced it would sell long-term visas to attract desperately needed foreign currency after the island nation ran out of dollars to pay for food and fuel. Foreigners who deposit a minimum of \$100,000 locally will be granted permission to live and work in Sri Lanka for 10 years under the “Golden Paradise Visa Programme,” the government said.

The money should be locked in a local bank account for



the duration of the stay, the government said in a statement. “This scheme will help Sri Lanka at a time when we are facing the worst financial crisis since our independence,” media minister Nalaka Godaheva told reporters in Colombo. — AFP

TOKYO

Japan PM urges warmer ties with S Korea

Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a South Korean delegation that the countries “can’t afford to waste time” in improving relations, following years of tensions over wartime issues.

The meeting in Tokyo represents a cautious step towards mending ties ahead of expected visits to the two US allies by President Joe Biden, and with growing regional security threats from North Korea and China.



“Given the current international situation, where the rules-based international order is under threat, now is a time when strategic cooperation... is needed more than ever,” Kishida told the delegation, according to a foreign ministry statement. — AFP

RAMALLAH

Israel reopens Gaza border on improved situation

Israel has reopened its border with the Gaza Strip to allow the entry of workers and traders following a slight easing of the security situation. The Erez border crossing was closed on Sunday after several rocket attacks fired by Palestinian activists in Gaza. The Israeli authorities stressed late on Monday that the reopening of the crossing remained contingent on the security situation. Normally, some 12,000 Palestinians cross into Israel from the Gaza Strip everyday for work. Militant



Palestinian fired rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel late on Saturday for the first time this year. On Friday, there had been fresh skirmishes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem’s Old City. — dpa



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In brief

WASHINGTON



BIDEN ISSUES FIRST PARDONS OF PRESIDENCY

US President Joe Biden wielded his clemency powers for the first time, announcing pardons for three people, including the first Black man to serve in the White House's Secret Service detail. Biden also announced the commutation of sentences for 75 others, mainly going to those serving lengthy terms for non-violent drug offenses.

"America is a nation of laws and second chances, redemption and rehabilitation," Biden said in a statement. The pardons are for "people who have demonstrated their commitment to rehabilitation and are striving every day to give back and contribute to their communities," he said.

PARIS



FRANCE CONDEMNS LIFE SENTENCE FOR TURKEY'S KAVALA

France on Tuesday condemned the life sentence handed by a Turkish court to leading civil society activist Osman Kavala, saying his detention violated Turkey's international obligations. "France strongly condemns the life sentence," the foreign ministry said, calling for Kavala's "immediate release" and the dropping of all charges against him.

He had been detained for more than four-and-a-half years "in violation of Turkey's international obligations," the French ministry added. France's statement echoes similar statements by Germany and the US expressing dismay at the verdict issued by the Istanbul court on Monday.

TUNIS



TUNISIAN OPPOSITION FOR ALLIANCE AGAINST PRESIDENT

A veteran Tunisian opposition figure announced the creation of a new alliance to "save" the country from deep crisis following President Kais Saied's power last year. Ahmed Nejib Chebbi (pictured), 78, a prominent left-wing politician who opposed Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's rule, said the new National Salvation Front aimed to unite political forces.

"We want a return to legitimacy and democracy," he told a news conference in the capital Tunisia. Saied on July 25 last year sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized wide-ranging powers.

US hosts weapons summit for Ukraine

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE: Top US officials hosted emergency talks with allies in Germany on Tuesday on supplying Kyiv with more weapons to fend off Russia's attack, as the UN's chief headed to Moscow in a bid to avert further escalation of the conflict.

The meeting of 40 countries at the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany comes after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Ukraine of only "pretending" to negotiate a ceasefire and warned of a "real" risk of a new world war.

Moscow's war of its neighbour, now in its eighth week, has triggered widespread outrage among Western nations who have provided weapons and other assistance to Ukraine's embattled President Volodymyr Zelensky.

But the Western powers have been reluctant to deepen their direct involvement, wary of drawing Moscow's ire and sparking military confrontations beyond Ukraine's borders.

"We believe that they can win if they have the right equipment, the right support," US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said following his visit to Kyiv on Sunday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The two officials promised \$700 million in new aid to Ukraine, after months of pleas by Zelensky



A Ukrainian soldier sits on an armoured personnel carrier driving on a road near Sloviansk, eastern Ukraine. — AFP

for heavier firepower.

And Germany said it would begin supplying anti-aircraft tanks, a clear shift after refusing for weeks to provide more advanced equipment, and a sign that Berlin was abandoning its cautious approach towards Moscow.

Military specialists said Western allies wanted to equip Ukrainian forces to halt the long-range bombings by Russia in the eastern Donbas region,

**US has promised
\$700 million
in new aid to
Ukraine, after
months of pleas
by Zelensky for
heavier firepower**

which aim to push back Ukraine's troops so that Russian tanks and troops can move in.

Attack drones, anti-aircraft missiles and sophisticated intelligence from Western agencies could prove vital for slowing the advance of Russia's military might, they said.

But stoking fears of a wider conflict, several blasts were reported on Tuesday in the neighbouring ex-Soviet state of Moldova, in the Russian-backed separatist region of Transnistria.

In Moscow, UN Secretary-



German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht speaks on the sidelines of a meeting with members of a Ukraine Security Consultative Group in Ramstein, western Germany. — AFP

General Antonio Guterres was to hold his first in-person talks with Putin since the fighting began on February 24.

"We are extremely interested in finding ways in order to create the conditions for effective dialogue, create the conditions for a ceasefire as soon as possible, create the conditions for a peaceful solution," Guterres said at the start of talks with Lavrov.

— AFP

Finland FM: Date for Nato not fixed yet

HELSINKI: No fixed date has yet been set for Finland to take a decision on whether to join Nato, Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto told parliamentary reporters in Helsinki on Tuesday.

While it would be advantageous for Finland and Sweden to go through the accession process simultaneously, the two countries would take their own decisions, Haavisto said.

The minister thus did not confirm reports in the tabloid

press to the effect that both Nordic countries were planning to make application to the alliance simultaneously in mid-May. But he did welcome the fact that Sweden was accelerating its security analysis.

This meant that decisions on accession could be made within days of each other, but there was no agreement between the two neighbours, even if they did keep each other informed on progress, Haavisto said.

While both are Nato part-

ners, they are not official members of the alliance.

The Russian war of Ukraine prompted intense debate in both over joining Nato.

The Finnish government presented an analysis to parliament almost two weeks ago that laid out the benefits and risks of membership.

A similar Swedish report that had been planned for the end of May has now been brought forward to May 13.

— dpa

Denmark suspends Covid vaccination campaign

COPENHAGEN: Denmark, which in February lifted all curbs related to the coronavirus pandemic, said on Tuesday it was suspending its widespread Covid-19 vaccination campaign.

Noting that the epidemic was under control and that vaccination levels were high, the Danish Health Authority said the country was in a "good position."

"Therefore we are winding down the mass vaccination program against Covid-19," said Bollerette Soborg, director of the authority's department of infectious diseases.

Around 81 per cent of Denmark's 5.8 million inhabitants have received two doses of the vaccine and 61.6 per cent have also received a booster.

Denmark noted a drop in the number of new infections and stable hospitalisation rates.

While invitations for vaccinations would no longer be issued after May 15, health officials an-



Denmark's Crown Prince Frederik arrives at the UN City, and is received by Inger Andersen (C), Director-General of the UN Environment Programme and Denmark's Minister of the Environment, Lea Wermelin during the opening of the UN's new Climate Center in Copenhagen. — AFP

ticipate that vaccinations would resume after the summer.

"We plan to reopen the vaccination programme in the autumn. This will be preceded by a thorough professional assessment of who and when to vaccinate and with which vaccines," Soborg said.

As a wave of the Omicron variant hit the country last November, Denmark intensified its immunisation campaign, accelerating access to booster shots and offering a fourth dose from mid-January to the most vulnerable.

— AFP

IAEA chief: Russian takeover of Chernobyl was 'very dangerous'



The giant protective dome built over the sarcophagus covering the destroyed fourth reactor of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant — AFP

CHERNOBYL: Russia's temporary takeover of the Chernobyl site was "very, very dangerous" and raised radiation levels but they have now returned to normal, the head of the UN atomic watchdog said on Tuesday.

"The situation was absolutely abnormal and very, very dangerous," Rafael Grossi told reporters as he arrived at the sarcophagus that covers the nuclear reactor's radioactive remains.

Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, was visiting the site on the 36th anniversary of the world's worst nuclear disaster.

Russian troops took over the site on February 24, the first day of Russia's war of Ukraine, taking Ukrainian soldiers prisoner and detaining civilian staff.

The occupation lasted until the end of March and raised global fears of nuclear leaks.

Grossi said radiation levels

were now "normal".

But he added that "there have been some moments when the levels have gone up because of the movement of the heavy equipment that Russian forces were bringing here and when they left".

Ukrainian officials have said Russian soldiers may have been exposed to radiation after digging fortifications in "many places" at the site and stirring up clouds of dust with their armoured vehicles.

On April 26, 1986, an uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction destroyed the reactor in an accident that was initially covered up by the Soviet authorities. Many hundreds died though the exact figure remains disputed.

Eventually, 3,50,000 people were evacuated from a 30-kilometre radius around the plant, an exclusion zone that remains uninhabited, apart from some elderly residents who returned despite an official ban. — AFP

Caring for the planet – one book at a time



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

It is surely not a coincidence that Earth Day and World Book Day should both fall in the same week.

With increasing uncertainty around the world economy and the general state of the world, the larger and more permanent issue of climate change has once again taken a back seat.

Earth Day was a much needed reminder that none of the challenges of the world will mean much if the planet itself doesn't survive the way we know it.

As if on cue, World Book Day arrived to show us how the enduring values of learning and sharing knowledge could be the only way out of a world which is looking for hope and meaning in its future.

It is a truism that the world is built on stories, but it is more appropriate to remember that our earliest stories are those which have to do with nature – fables show animals talking to trees and flowers dancing in the forest.

Myths and mythology often deal with the elements of nature – earth, water, air and fire, showing how fundamental they are to life.

Indigenous communities around the world knew how to follow the rhythm of nature. The stories they share until now revolve around the power of the rivers, the spirituality of trees and the importance of every single being, no matter how small.

From the Incas to the Inuits and the Maoris, storytelling is an essential way to communicate

COLLECTING STORIES OF NATURE FROM BEDOUIN COMMUNITIES WILL ADD PRECIOUS KNOWLEDGE, ADDING TO THE RICH HERITAGE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

beliefs, values and ways of life to the younger generations.

It is a tradition that has to be retained and actively encouraged worldwide.

“Indigenous storytelling is a powerful tool for preserving biocultural diversity,” according to Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares, from the University of Helsinki.

This means that communities

must be approached diligently and their stories documented before their storytellers leave the world without gifting their knowledge.

Children's stories of nature from traditional communities teach children to live in harmony with other inhabitants of the Earth: by protecting animals, habitats, and even the rivers and oceans.

‘Sweetest Kulu’ by Celina Kaluk, ‘The rainbow serpent’ by Dick Roughsey and Daniel Auger’s ‘Gandmother’s stories: how the earth and sky began’ are some of the most beloved stories by indigenous writers in Canada and Australia.

There is also a rich choice of literature revolving around nature for adults. From Thoreau’s ‘Walden’, ‘Born Free’ by Joy Adamson to

Amitava Ghosh’s ‘Nutmeg’s curse’, there in an endless array of choices of fiction and non-fiction which uses nature as its main theme – at times bleak, most times hopeful.

While the publishing industry in the west has woken up to the untapped world of indigenous storytelling, the Middle East has vast potential to unearth the stories of its communities.

Collecting stories of nature from Bedouin communities or exploring intangible heritage like the songs of fishermen along the coast of the Sultanate of Oman will add precious knowledge, adding to the rich heritage of the Middle East.

It will also engage youngsters in the story of their time, making them stakeholders in their future.

All in the family: Philippine dynasties tighten grip on power

ALLISON JACKSON

If the son of former Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos wins the May 9 presidential election, he will not be the only Marcos currently in power — and will almost certainly not be the last. Elite families have long ruled the poverty-ravaged nation, holding on to positions of power for generations by dishing out favours, buying votes or resorting to violence.

Analysts say the system has become more pervasive in the decades since a popular uprising deposed Marcos and forced the family into exile.

New dynasties have entrenched themselves in politics, smothering electoral competition, stunting economic development and worsening inequality.

“Power begets power — the more they stay in power, the more they accumulate power, the more powerful they get,” said Julio Teehankee, a professor at De La Salle University in Manila.

The archipelago has produced about 319 dynastic families, dating back to when the country was a US colony in the first half of the 20th century, Teehankee said.

Dozens have withered, but in 2019, members of at least 234 such families won positions in mid-term elections, he said.

They have flourished in a feudal and corrupt democracy where parties are weak, fragmented along clan lines and plagued by defections.

Power, however, is not static. Families can win and lose it — and make a comeback.

After the fallen dictator died in 1989, the Marcoses returned to their traditional stronghold of Ilocos Norte and began tapping local loyalties to get elected to a succession of higher positions.

Ferdinand Marcos Jr, 64, is now on the verge of clinching the ultimate dynastic victory: the presidency.

The family also wants to make a clean sweep of the top posts in its northern bastion.

Launching their campaigns in the provincial capital Laoag, Marcos candidates stood together in front of a “Team Marcos” sign as thousands of supporters cheered.

Marcos Jr’s eldest son is a first-time candidate, seeking one of two congressional seats in the windswept province of corn and tobacco farms. A cousin is defending the other. His nephew — the son of his sister Imee, a senator — is vying for re-election as governor, while a cousin’s widow is the incumbent vice-governor.

Marcos Jr said the family was not a dynasty, but his cousin Michael Marcos Keon, seeking a second term as Laoag mayor, disagreed. “This is all dynastic,” said Keon, 67, who also served as governor after Marcos Jr hit the three-term limit — a tactic often used to keep positions in the family. — AFP



CHRIS CAMERON

The writer is based in the Washington bureau of NYT

How US can sponsor Ukrainian refugees

The Biden administration established a programme that allows Americans to sponsor Ukrainian refugees and have them temporarily stay in the United States under a system known as humanitarian parole.

The programme, called Uniting for Ukraine, is a piece of a larger initiative to temporarily resettle as many as 100,000 Ukrainian refugees, but migrants themselves cannot directly apply.

Instead, a sponsor in the United States must apply on their behalf, and then migrants may complete the process after their sponsor is approved.

Here’s how the programme works:

American Sponsors

Most people who reside legally in the United States — including green card holders and other immigrants — may apply to sponsor Ukrainian migrants, as long as they can prove they can financially support them. That could include providing room and board or direct payments to the refugees for necessary expenses.

Sponsors must designate specific refugees to assist. Welcome.US, a humanitarian group for refugee resettlement, has created a mailing list for people interested in becoming a sponsor.

Here’s a step-by-step process of how sponsors can apply:

- Go to the web portal for the programme at dhs.gov/ukraine.
- File an I-134 form. This document helps prove the sponsor can financially support the Ukrainians while they are in the US. Sponsors must document their own income and assets, as well as the income and assets of the migrants and families being sponsored.
- The sponsor will then go through a government vetting process “to protect against exploitation and abuse” of the migrants, according to the instructions on the web portal. Officials reviewing the application may also ask the sponsor for additional supporting evidence or an interview before approval.
- If approved, the sponsor will be notified in writing.

Ukrainian Migrants

Ukrainian citizens and their children and spouses or common-law partners can qualify for humanitarian parole under the programme. They need not be in Ukraine now, but must have fled after February 11.

After their sponsor is approved,

Ukrainians and families who were listed in the application will receive notification of the next steps in the process.

Those include:

- Confirming personal information — such as names, dates of birth, phone numbers and addresses — as well as family relationships using a myUSCIS account.
- Providing evidence of vaccination for measles, polio and the coronavirus.
- Passing security checks.
- Undergoing a medical screening for tuberculosis within 14 days of arriving in the United States.

THE PROGRAMME WAS INTENDED TO BE SPEEDIER THAN THE USUAL IMMIGRATION PROCESS, BUT COULD NOT SAY HOW LONG IT MIGHT TAKE

After completing the necessary steps, migrants will be notified of final approval and authorisation to travel to the United States through myUSCIS. Migrants must then enter the United States within 90 days, and are responsible for arranging their travel once approved.

Other Questions

How long can a Ukrainian migrant stay?

Ukrainian migrants who are approved for the programme may stay for up to two years. They may also request authorisation to work in the US once they arrive.

How long will the process take?

The administration said the programme was intended to be speedier than the usual immigration process, but could not say how long it might take.

Can a Ukrainian already in the United States apply?

Ukrainians already in the United States cannot apply for humanitarian parole. They can, however, apply for temporary protected status, which allows them to stay and work for up to 18 months, as long as they were in the United States since April 11 or earlier.

What happens now to the Ukrainians at the Mexican border?

The Biden administration closed the border to Ukrainian migrants on Monday. Anyone still in Mexico can apply for humanitarian parole with a sponsor, but must wait for approval before entering the United States.

How much does it cost to apply?

There is no fee for Ukrainians to apply for humanitarian parole through this programme. Filing for humanitarian parole through the standard form costs \$575 per person. Ukrainians who already paid that fee through another pending application can have it refunded.

— New York Times



Oxana Nikitas, a refugee from Ukraine, weeps as she holds her daughter Nika, 3, after arriving in Medyka, Poland.

A day for books passed off quietly!



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

Every year on April 23, celebrations take place in countries around the world to recognise the scope of books and respect their role as a bridge between generations and across cultures. Although the day passes quietly without much pomp and fanfare, the World Book Day is observed in order to promote reading, publishing and copyright.

April 23 was a natural choice for Unesco's General Conference held in Paris in 1995 to pay a worldwide tribute to books and authors on this date, encouraging everyone to access books.

A symbol in world literature, the day holds a special significance as it marks the death anniversaries of two of the world's greatest and prominent writers – William Shakespeare and Spanish chronicler Inca Garcilaso de la Vega.

Shakespeare created a new epoch in world literature. Known for his beautiful language, he had a great influence on English literature. A great writer, his language was understood even by the common people of those times. Shakespeare's plays do not grow old with time. His plays are regularly performed in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and his iconic works stand out for being the "first biological and spiritual mestizo in America".

FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE AS A FATHER, I HAVE NOTICED THAT THE MORE MY CHILDREN COULD READ, THE BETTER THEY WERE ABLE TO WRITE AND UNDERSTAND. HOWEVER, IN TODAY'S TECH-DRIVEN WORLD, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO INCULCATE IN CHILDREN THE VALUE OF READING BOOKS

His stories have left their mark, and perhaps the best known is the so-called 'Real Commentaries of the Incas', a literary historical book that had its first publication in 1609, in Lisbon, Portugal.

The World Book Day is also a platform for developing a life-long habit of reading for pleasure, benefiting from the improved life chances the event brings them. The day is celebrated as an occasion for more children, from all backgrounds, developing a life-long habit of reading for pleasure, benefiting from the improved life chances the event brings them.

Unfortunately, children today read less frequently than any previous generation and enjoy reading less than young people did in the past.

Use of too much technology is making the human mind lazier each day. Electronic gadgets are considered a way of life! Buying and storing books is looked upon as a waste of precious space at home and it may even be considered as old fashioned!

There is no denying the continued growth of the digital media, but at the same time there is no reason why the good old habit of reading books should disappear. Research has proved that reading helps improve inter-personal communication skills, development of vocabulary and self-confidence.

Reading has the ability to transport us to incredible places, unearth and explore new cultures, languages and experiences that can shape the way we look at the world.

From my own experience as a father, I have noticed that the more my children could read, the better they were able to write, the better their diction and understanding. However, in today's tech-driven world, it is more important than ever to inculcate in children the value of reading books.

As Unesco's message on the occasion said, "Books have long embodied the human capacity to conjure up worlds, both real and imagined, giving voice to the diversity of human experience. They help us share ideas, obtain information and inspire admiration for different cultures, enabling far-reaching forms of dialogue between people across space and time."

Whether virtual or physical, reading helps them a lot in their path to become change-makers and trendsetters. As American writer Mason Cooley who is known for his witty aphorisms, said, "Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are!"



The gathering stagflationary storm



Nouriel Roubini

The writer is Professor Emeritus of Economics at New York University's Stern School of Business, is Chief Economist at Atlas Capital Team, CEO of Roubini Macro Associates and Co-Founder of TheBoomBust.com

The new reality with which many advanced economies and emerging markets must reckon is higher inflation and slowing economic growth. And a big reason for the current bout of stagflation is a series of negative aggregate supply shocks that have curtailed production and increased costs.

This should come as no surprise. The Covid-19 pandemic forced many sectors to lockdown, disrupted global supply chains and produced an apparently persistent reduction in labour supply, especially in the United States. Then came Russia's war on Ukraine, which has driven up the price of energy, industrial metals, food and fertilisers. And now, China has ordered strict Covid-19 lockdowns in major economic hubs such as Shanghai, causing additional supply-chain disruptions and transport bottlenecks.

But even without these important short-term factors, the medium-term outlook would be darkening. There are many reasons to worry that today's stagflationary conditions will continue to characterise the global economy, producing higher inflation, lower growth and possibly recessions in many economies.

For starters, since the global financial crisis, there has been a retreat from globalisation and a return to various forms of protectionism. This reflects geopolitical factors and domestic political motivations in countries where large cohorts of the population feel "left behind." Rising geopolitical tensions and the supply-chain trauma left by the pandemic are likely to lead to more reshoring of manufacturing from China and emerging markets to advanced economies — or at least near-shoring (or "friend-shoring") to clusters of politically allied countries. Either way, production will be misallocated to higher-cost regions and countries.

Moreover, demographic ageing in advanced economies and some key emerging markets (such as China, Russia and South Korea) will continue to reduce the supply of labour, causing wage inflation. And because the elderly tend to spend savings without working, the growth of this cohort will add to inflationary pressures while reducing the economy's growth potential.

The sustained political and economic backlash against immigration in advanced economies will likewise reduce labour supply and apply upward pressure on wages. For decades, large-scale immigration kept a lid on wage growth in advanced economies. But those days appear to be over.

Similarly, the new cold war between the US and China will produce wide-ranging stagflationary effects. Sino-American decoupling implies fragmentation of the global economy, balkanization of supply

chains, tighter restrictions on trade in technology, data and information — key elements of future trade patterns.

Climate change, too, will be stagflationary. After all, droughts damage crops, ruin harvests, and drive up food prices, just as hurricanes, floods and rising sea levels destroy capital stocks and disrupt economic activity. Making matters worse, the politics of bashing fossil fuels and demanding aggressive decarbonisation has led to underinvestment in carbon-based capacity before renewable energy sources have reached a scale sufficient

WHILE RECENT SHOCKS HAVE MADE THE CURRENT INFLATIONARY SURGE AND GROWTH SLOWDOWN MORE ACUTE, THEY ARE HARDLY THE GLOBAL ECONOMY'S ONLY PROBLEMS

to compensate for a reduced supply of hydrocarbons. Under these conditions, sharp energy-price spikes are inevitable. And as the price of energy rises, "greenflation" will hit prices for the raw materials used in solar panels, batteries, electric vehicles, and other clean technologies.

Public health is likely to be another factor. Little has been done to avert the next contagious-disease outbreak, and we already know that pandemics disrupt global supply chains and incite protectionist policies as countries rush to hoard critical supplies such as food, pharmaceutical products and personal protective equipment.

We must also worry about cyberwarfare, which can cause severe disruptions in production, as recent attacks on pipelines and meat processors have shown. Such incidents are expected to become more frequent and severe over time. If firms and governments want to protect themselves, they will need to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on cybersecurity, adding to the costs that will be passed on to consumers.

These factors will add fuel to the political backlash against stark income and wealth inequalities, leading to more fiscal spending to support workers, the unemployed, vulnerable minorities, and the "left behind." Efforts to boost labour's income share relative to capital, however well-intentioned, imply more labor strife and a spiral of wage-price inflation.

Then there is Russia's war on Ukraine, which signals the return of zero-sum great-power politics. For the first time in many decades, we must account for the risk of large-scale military conflicts disrupting global trade and production. Moreover, the sanctions used to deter and punish state aggression are themselves stagflationary. Today, it is Russia against Ukraine and the West. Tomorrow, it could be North Korea engaging in more nuclear brinkmanship. Any one of these scenarios could lead to a hot war with the US.

Finally, the weaponisation of the US dollar — a central instrument in the enforcement of sanctions — is also stagflationary. Not only does it create severe friction in international trade in goods, services, commodities and capital; it encourages US rivals to diversify their foreign-exchange reserves away from dollar-denominated assets. Over time, that process could sharply weaken the dollar (thus making US imports more costly and feeding inflation) and lead to the creation of regional monetary systems, further balkanizing global trade and finance.

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Workers work at a construction site in Beijing. – AFP

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Late Kean strike gives Juventus important win in Serie A

ROME: Moise Kean's late goal gave Juventus a hard-fought 2-1 win at Sassuolo in Serie A on Monday, allowing them to close the gap on third-placed Napoli to one point.

Sassuolo had done more than enough to claim a share of the points when Kean struck two minutes from full-time.

A long ball out of defence from Leonardo Bonucci ended with Kean, a 67th minute substitute for Alvaro Morata, turning Vlad Chiriches and firing the ball between goalkeeper Andrea Consigli's legs at the near post.

The last-gasp win keeps Juve in fourth place, eight points adrift of leaders AC Milan but, perhaps more significantly, eight points clear of Roma, who are chasing them for the final Champions League spot.

It was a frustrating loss for Sassuolo who were the better team for most of the game, posing problems from the outset when Davide Frattesi's header at the near post from a Domenico Berardi corner kissed the

crossbar on its way over.

Gianluca Scamacca was also sharp, forcing Juventus keeper Wojciech Szczesny into a fine save.

Juve's first real attack almost brought reward when Paulo Dybala thought he had found the net, only for Frattesi to block at the last moment.

Sassuolo broke the deadlock for a deserved lead in the 39th minute.

Morata lost possession in midfield and Berardi produced a delightful backheel to send Giacomo Raspadori clear.

Raspadori's powerful shot gave Szczesny no chance, but Juve were level on the stroke of half-time.

Dybala made light of an awkward angle to thrash the ball into the roof of the net despite Sassuolo's claims that Morata fouled Giorgos Kyriakopoulos in the build-up.

That set the stage for Kean's last-gasp heroics as Juve consolidated their place in the top four. — **AFP**

100 paddlers took part at Salalah TT tourney



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

As many as 100 paddlers took part at Salalah Club Table Tennis tournament in its first edition which concluded recently under the auspices of Mohammed bin Humaid al Kalbani, Director General of Social Development in the Governorate of Dhofar, in presence of Salalah club Chairman.

The seven days event featured four competitions represented in cadets, juniors and senior competitions. Three matches were held in the tournament finals. In the first match of the cadet's competition, Bader al Shanfari played against Ali

al Awadi. Al Awadi was the champion after defeating his opponent with a score of two sets, compared to a set by Badr al Shanfari, who finished as runner up, while Omar al Ashry won the third place award.

In the second match that brought together Ali al Awadi with Ahmed Baowain in the final of the junior competition, Al Awadi was able to win by 2-0 while Ahmed Baowain came in second place and Yousuf Bait Obaid took third place award.

In the last match on the Singles of the senior category, Hossam Shalaby managed to win the championship title after defeating Walid Jaaboub in the final match. Saeed Fadel came in third place.

Djokovic able to defend Wimbledon title with Covid rules lifted

LONDON: Novak Djokovic will be allowed to defend his Wimbledon title after All England Club officials confirmed players will not be required to be vaccinated to compete at the tournament this June and July.

The world number one, who defeated Matteo Berrettini to win his sixth Wimbledon crown last year, has played only three tournaments in 2022 because of entry restrictions imposed by various countries, including his deportation from Australia.

With most nations relaxing their rules around the virus, though, Djokovic should be free to play a full schedule through the clay and grass-court stretches, although he is currently still unable to enter the US.

Speaking at Wimbledon's spring briefing, Chief Executive Sally Bolton said on Tuesday: "As you will be aware, the requirements set out by government to enter the UK do not include mandatory vaccination and, therefore, while of course it is encouraged, it will not be a conditional entry to compete at the Championships this year."

Last year's covid - related restrictions, which included reduced crowds for most of the tournament and strict conditions imposed on the players, will all be lifted.



Bolton said: "We are planning to return to a normal Championships this year. And so we don't intend to implement any of the Covid-19 measures that we saw last year in any substantial fashion.

"But we are, of course, keeping

it on our radar in case we need to take further action when we continue to engage with DCMS (the relevant government department), public health officials and with other sports.

"But this means that players

will be able to return to their own choice of accommodation. We will see full capacity crowds for the whole event. And we're absolutely thrilled to welcome back the wider tennis family to Wimbledon this year." — **dpa**



Raducanu set for fourth coach in a year

LONDON: US Open champion Emma Raducanu is set to appoint her fourth coach in a year after ending her association with Torben Beltz after just five months, she said on Tuesday.

The 19-year-old is due to play in the Madrid Open this week as she builds up to the French Open but said she felt she required a "new training model".

The Lawn Tennis Association's (LTA) head of women's coaching, Iain Bates, will work with Raducanu this week.

She will bid to build on her run to the Stuttgart quarterfinals last week where she lost to world number one and eventual champion Iga Swiatek.

"I want to thank Torben for his coaching, professionalism and dedication over the last half a year", said Raducanu, who on Monday rose to her highest world ranking of 11.

"He has a huge heart and I have enjoyed our strong chemistry during the time together.

"I feel the best direction for my development is to transition to a new training model with the LTA supporting in the interim."

Beltz previously coached former world number one and fellow German Angelique Kerber when she won the Australian Open and US Open titles in 2016.

Raducanu has gone through a number of coaches in the past year since she first made her mark in reaching the last 16 at Wimbledon, even before she had received her final school exam results.

She replaced Nigel Sears with Andrew Richardson after Wimbledon, but Richardson's contract was not renewed despite Raducanu's stunning success at the US Open.

Raducanu could turn towards Italian Ricardo Piatti, who has coached among others France's former world number seven, the mercurial Richard Gasquet, and 2016 Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic.

He is available after cutting ties with compatriot Jannik Sinner, who he guided into the men's world top 10.

Raducanu trained at his academy prior to embarking on her clay court campaign earlier in April. — AFP

Chiellini to say 'goodbye' to Italy in Argentina clash

MILAN: Giorgio Chiellini will bring down the curtain on his international career this summer after Italy face Argentina in the so-called 'Finalissima' at Wembley, the site of his greatest career triumph.

The 37-year-old was one of the key figures of the Azzurri's Euro 2020 victory, captaining his country to a dramatic win over England at the iconic stadium where he will lead out his countrymen on June 1.

The Finalissima is a new match which pits the European and South American champions against each other in a one-off encounter.

"I'll say goodbye to the national team at Wembley, where I reached the highest point of my career by winning the Euro", he told DAZN after Juventus' 2-1 Serie A win at Sassuolo on Monday night.

"I'd like to say goodbye to the Azzurri with a nice memory. It will definitely be my last game for Italy."

Chiellini, who has been capped 116 times, was hoping to take part in one more World Cup before saying 'ciao' to fans, but Italy missed out on the 2022 tournament in Qatar, hastening the centre-back's departure from the international game.

He has had a mixed Italy career, reaching the Euro 2012 final -- where Italy were outclassed by Spain losing 4-0 -- but had a difficult time at World Cup finals.

Italy exited in the group stage both in 2010 -- when they were the defending champions -- and 2014 before slumping to a historic play-off defeat to Sweden in 2017 which cost them a place in the



2018 tournament.

Chiellini also suffered the ignominy of being bitten by Luis Suarez as Italy exited behind

Uruguay and Costa Rica in 2014.

Roberto Mancini's side have to wait until at least 2026 to take part in football's global showpiece

after being knocked out of the 2022 edition in Qatar by North Macedonia, again in the play-offs, last month. — AFP

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Hitam emerge Ramadhan football champions

DUQM: Hitam Sports Team emerged champions in the Ramadhan Football Tournament 2022 here recently.

Hitam beat the Special Economic Zone team at Duqm 2-1 in a well-fought final.

The tournament brought together 16 sports teams this year, which were divided into different groups. The first match of the tournament, which was held at Durat Duqm Stadium, kicked off on the second day of Ramadhan.



The tournament witnessed great excitement in its rounds that included a number of teams from the Wilayat of Duqm, as well as other teams formed by players from the different companies operating in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Organising this tournament was supported by Al Team Company for Investment and Real Estate Services, in cooperation with the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Deccan Chargers claim Deccan Box title

MUSCAT: Indian Social Club, Oman — Deccani Wing (DW) organised its first edition of box cricket tournament, Deccan Box Cricket (DBC) played on Friday at Seeb Club Ground, Mawaleh.

Seven teams participated for the qualifying league stage and knockout semifinals were played between Deccan Warriors against Deccan XI and Deccan Royals against Deccan Chargers Champions. Deccan Warriors and Deccan Chargers Champions reached the final.

Final match was keenly fought where Deccan Warriors after winning the toss elected to bat and scored 39 runs for the loss of 8 wickets in 8 overs. Mohammed Saleemuddin, Abdullah and Sami took 2 wickets each. In reply, Deccan Chargers Champions made 40 runs for 3 wickets and reached the target in 5.2 overs. Abdullah was adjudged as man of the match and also man of the series for his all-round performance.

Deccani Wing office bearers Ismail Baig, co-convenor, Mansoor Sabri, treasurer and Zaheer Al Deen, head of



organising committee welcomed chief guest Mohammed Raheemuddin, former chief vice-president India National Trade Union Congress – Andhra Pradesh.

Chief Guest Mohammed Raheemuddin handed over the champions trophy to winning captain Mohammed Saleemuddin. DW Co-Convenor Ismail Baig gave away the runners-up trophy to captain of the team Niamath.

The organising committee headed by Zaheer Al Deen and members Naimath, Mirza Zulkhader, Abdul Ghaffar and Zaki received a lot of accolades for holding a successful tournament with full Covid protocols in place.

Asfandiyar X1 storm into PSM cricket final

MUSCAT: Asfandiyar X1 marched into the final beating Oriental XI in an exciting second semifinal of PSM Ramadhan Tournament in front of a sizeable crowd on Monday.

At the PSM ground, Oriental XI won the toss and elected to bat first. The first 2 overs were great for Oriental XI as they scored 32 runs but later on the Asfandiyar bowlers came back strongly and kept the runs in check.

Fine batting by Nadeem who scored 36 not out (1x4, 4x6) and Asif Pathan (28) led Oriental XI to



95 for 3 wickets in 8 overs. Zaheer got a wicket for Asfandiyar XI.

In reply, Asfandiyar XI reached the target in 6.4 overs. Sagheer scored 31 runs in 12 balls (3x6, 3x4) as Asfandiyar clinched a place

in the final against Smile Strikers.

Sagheer was declared the man of the match, and was presented a trophy by Chief Guest Chawdahry Ahsan. The final will be played on Wednesday at 9.30 pm.

Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket, will be the chief guest for the final. The organisers have announced cash prizes of \$500 for the winners and \$300 for the runners-up teams.

TATUM SHINES AS CELTICS SWEEP NETS

NEW YORK: Jayson Tatum scored 29 points as the Boston Celtics completed a 4-0 series sweep to eliminate the Brooklyn Nets from the NBA playoffs on Monday.

Kevin Durant delivered a towering 39-point display for the Nets, but it was not enough to stop the powerful Celtics' line-up from sealing a 116-112 victory at Brooklyn's Barclays Center.

Boston's balanced offence and battle-hardened defence once again proved too much for Brooklyn, who trailed from start to finish as a late rally from the home side came up just short.

"We knew who we were facing, we knew how talented they were, and we knew it was going to be a dogfight", said Tatum, who endured a nervous final two minutes after fouling out as the Nets chipped away at the Celtics lead.

"It was 4-0 but each game was back and forth and tough. We just believed in ourselves. We took it one game at a time and didn't get too far ahead of ourselves", Tatum added.

Tatum was one of five Celtics players in double figures, with Jaylen Brown also coming up big with 22 points and point guard Marcus Smart adding 20 points with 11 assists.



Grant Williams delivered four three-pointers off the bench in a 14-point haul while Al Horford

added 13. Second seeds Boston will now face either the defending

NBA champions Milwaukee or Chicago in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

Raptors, Mavs romp
In other playoff action, Toronto stunned the Philadelphia

76ers to keep their series alive while Dallas thrashed Utah to take a 3-2 lead.

Toronto dropped the first three games of their series with the Sixers but are now just one win from tying it up and forcing a game seven after Monday's 103-88 victory.

Sixers talisman Joel Embiid clearly looked to be struggling with the thumb injury that has been diagnosed as a ligament tear.

Embiid once again failed to impose himself, finishing with 20 points, well below his season average of more than 30 points per game.

Sixers star James Harden was also kept quiet with just 15 points while Tyrese Maxey finished with 12 points.

Instead it was Toronto who dominated, jumping into an early first-quarter lead which they never relinquished during a composed performance.

Pascal Siakam led the Toronto scoring with 23 points while OG Anunoby and Gary Trent Jr both had 16 points apiece.

Toronto will now be brimming with confidence as they head into game six in Canada on Thursday.

No team has ever come back from a 3-0 deficit in an NBA playoff series. — AFP

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New solar, wind projects on anvil in Oman

Energy transition: 4th solar IPP envisioned in Adam, 5th IPP in Al Wusta

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A raft of new solar and wind-based power generation projects is being lined up for procurement to help meet electricity demand growth in the Sultanate of Oman over the next six years.

Provisional plans drawn up by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the single buyer of all new electricity and water output, envision the need for a fourth solar photovoltaic (PV) based Independent Power Project (IPP) to support growing electricity requirements within the Main Interconnected System (MIS) – the grid that covers much of the northern half of the Sultanate of Oman.

Dubbed ‘MIS Solar IPP 2025’, the new solar-based scheme is proposed to come up in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

“The site for the fourth solar IPP is currently under review,



following completion of a site assessment study in December 2019. Candidate sites include a previously defined site at Adam and a number of sites in other locations.

This project is expected to use PV technology, with capacity around 500 MW. The RfQ (Request for Qualifications) was planned for release in Q4 2021 and the project will have the COD scheduled in Q2 2025,” the power procurer stated in its 7-Year Statement covering

the outlook over the 2021-2027 timeframe.

The country’s maiden grid-connected solar scheme – the Ibri II IPP – came into operation in Al Dhahirah Governorate with a capacity of around 500 MW late last year. Two more solar projects -- Manah I Solar and Manah II Solar IPP – are planned for implementation in the Wilayat of Manah, also in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

An RfQ for a competitive tender covering the development

of a pair of 500 MW solar IPPs, located side-by-side in Manah, was launched just before the pandemic, with the procurement process expected to be revived later this year.

Significantly, a fifth utility-scale solar PV project, tentatively slated for commercial launch in 2027, is envisioned in Al Wusta Governorate. Dubbed ‘Solar PV 2027’, the project will have a capacity of around 600 MW.

Additionally, a first-ever Concentrated Solar Power (CSP)

project with thermal storage is proposed to be set up near Duqm, according to OPWP. A feasibility study is currently underway in this regard, it said.

Wind farms

At least three wind-based projects are planned for procurement over the 2021-2027 timeframe, according to OPWP’s 7-Year Outlook Statement for this period. Within the Main Interconnected System, a wind farm of around 100 MW is planned in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

A pair of 100-metre high wind masts has been installed at specific locations within the wilayat for the collection of wind resource data.

In the Wilayat of Duqm, OPWP has plans to procure at least two wind projects of capacities ranging from 160-200 MW. The ‘Duqm Wind IPP 2025’ project is envisioned on a site within the SEZ at Duqm, said OPWP.

“The installed capacity is nominally estimated at around 200 MW, but will be confirmed following assessment of the measured wind data and wind

farm layout optimisation analyses,” it noted.

Duqm II Wind IPP 2027, another utility-scale wind power project, is proposed to be developed at a site approximately 60 kilometres from Duqm City with a capacity of at least 160 MW.

In Dhofar Governorate, OPWP aims to develop a second wind energy farm, adjoining the country’s first wind project – Dhofar 1 Wind IPP – at Harweel. The new scheme, dubbed ‘Dhofar II Wind IPP’, is sized at around 100 MW of capacity.

In concluding, OPWP stated that it plans to procure around 2,200 MW of renewable energy-based IPPs in the MIS by 2027. This is in addition to the 500 MW Ibri II IPP, which was brought into formal operation earlier this year. Additional renewables-based IPPs are being planned for other systems, it said.

“The locations and type of future RE projects depend on demand growth, approval of transmission projects and site allocations. Procurement timelines may be amended following demand forecast updates,” it added.

Consumer cooperatives can drive socioeconomic growth: Experts

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

The potential for the growth of consumer cooperatives in the Sultanate of Oman was highlighted at a Ramadhan Evening hosted by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Monday night.

Held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, various local and regional speakers underlined the economic and social benefits that accrue to local communities from the operation of consumer cooperatives.

They discussed the importance of consumer cooperatives, the mechanisms of organising and regulating these entities in the Sultanate of Oman, and prospects for benefiting from the experiences of developed countries in this field.

A cooperative is described as an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned enterprise. Cooperatives are democratically owned by their



members, with each member having one vote in electing the board of directors.

According to Anwar Jassim Bourahma, an expert on cooperatives from Kuwait, around 75 cooperative societies are currently operating in the State of Kuwait.

“The first cooperative association was established in Kuwait in 1941, while the law regulating such cooperatives was issued in 1961. Today, there is a Union of Kuwaiti Associations with 12 societies.”

Addressing the forum

Bourahma nevertheless stressed the importance of integrity in the running of successful societies.

“One of the most important things that helps the success of cooperatives is the existence of a successful and honest board of directors and the presence of financial control from the government to maintain credibility and ensure that there are no differences in the boards of directors,” he stated, adding: “Cooperatives contribute to creating jobs for new graduates and students, as well as providing food for the country.”

Sharing the experiences of the Oman Cooperative, which was established in 2015, Jamal Abdullah al Mulla, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors, said the entity began operations in 2018 with a capital of RO 318,000.

However, as the cooperative opened new consumer stores, it began to attract additional local investors, which helped boost the capital of Oman Cooperative to RO 2 million.

But he cautioned that cooperative societies can face challenges too. “One of the most important challenges facing us is sourcing supplies, cost of electricity, customs duties, and also the fact that there is no land allocated to such projects by the government,” he lamented.

“A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned enterprise. Cooperatives are democratically owned by their members, with each member having one vote in electing the board of directors.”

Oman Post, Asyad Express sign BOT deal with developer



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Oman Post and Asyad Express, a member of Asyad Group, signed a partnership agreement with Wujha Real Estate to invest, design and develop plots in line with its land investment plans. The new partnership with Wujha includes an investment deal under the new land investment plans devised by Oman Post and Asyad Express aiming to consolidate and upgrade its assets through multiple build-operate-transfer (BOT) contracts made with private entities.

Wujha has been awarded two investment projects in Al Ghubra and Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos in Muscat to finance the development and operate the sites for 25 years.

Oman Post and Asyad Express plan to keep engaging

the private sector and float additional tenders to build new branches, upgrade existing ones and develop its land plots using private financing. This will add financing sources to Oman Post and Asyad Express and provide private developers with a unique opportunity to take on prime locations and benefit from favourable arrangements and extended periods up to 25 years.

Nasser al Sharji, CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, said, “Our agreement with a leading real estate developer such as Wujha is only the beginning of our land investment programmes. We expect this type of engagements to open new prospects for us to access financing from private sector entities to grow our asset portfolio, optimise the utilisation of these assets and increase their value.”

Ominvest promotes employee engagement initiative

MUSCAT: In a bid to elevate employee's happiness and foster a culture of productive performance, Ominvest — the leading investment company in the Sultanate of Oman — recently organised its first ever sports tournament as part of its employee engagement initiative, which aims to foster team collaboration and encourage workplace flexibility.

The football tournament, which took place between April 19 and 25, was held at the Al Amal Sports Club and saw six Ominvest Group companies participating to win: Ominvest,

Ubhar Capital, National Life & General Insurance Company, National Finance, Oman Arab Bank and Al Ahlia Insurance.

With all the teams competing for the top spot, Oman Arab Bank emerged champions.

The intention behind organising this tournament was to encourage leadership, sportsmanship, collaboration and more importantly, strengthen the ties between Ominvest employees and employees of its Group companies as well.

Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO at Ominvest said "I congratulate the champions for



putting their best foot forward, and I wish the rest of the teams' better luck next time. I also thank all the tournament's participants for the roles they have played in making this sporting event a

great success. Moving forward, we will continue working on other initiatives to further engage our employees and as a result improve collaboration within Ominvest Group companies."

Also commenting on the significance of this tournament, Waleed al Yarubi, Chief People Officer (CPO) at Ominvest, said, "We believe in creating a workplace culture that helps people realise their full potential and enables them to make the most of their skills and abilities.

The tournament's main aim was to foster people engagement, break down barriers and drive collaboration, a key value that is well entrenched in the company's corporate culture and instrumental in driving overall success.

Moreover, the happiness and

well-being of our employees is central to our success as an organisation. When we work together as a team, we achieve our goals together."

Founded in 1983, Ominvest is one of the largest investment companies in the region. Its vision is to be an eminent investment group with significant global reach and impact.

The company seeks to create value for all its stakeholders by prudently investing in growth sectors and markets while implementing innovative solutions, scalable platforms and impactful initiatives.

NBO wins Best CSR Bank, Best Mobile App at World Business Outlook Awards

MUSCAT: In acknowledgement of its commitment to the community and customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been awarded Best CSR Bank 2022 and Best Mobile App 2022 at the World Business Outlook awards.

The app, first launched in 2015, has frequently been enhanced and updated to meet the changing needs of customers, and in 2021 it took on a whole new level as customers were empowered to take care of all their finances conveniently at any time and anywhere. Meanwhile, the bank continues to deliver on its long-term commitment to supporting the community through its CSR efforts.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "To win such awards from such a respected figure in the global business community reinforces our vision for a customer-centric and community-focused approach. We accelerated our innovation plans to meet their needs. Our digital services have been invaluable in empowering customers, providing the same exceptional experience found in every NBO branch in the pocket of every customer, and showing customers that they can count on us in any situation."

Each year, NBO has continued to evolve by introducing new contactless services, including several first-of-their-kind solutions such as the first multi-purpose banking kiosk, which enables



customers to interact directly with the bank and utilise the 24/7 services. Customers were able to open new accounts, pay utility and credit card bills, apply for products and make transfers through the app, while using the scan and pay feature to pay at QR-enabled terminals nationwide.

Most recently, the bank launched its new digital onboarding service, which allows customers to digitally open a new account through the NBO mobile banking app and receive their new cards in person at any kiosk or via home delivery.

World Business Outlook Awards assesses leaders in all sectors to recognise true innovators and the successful implementation of strategies and products. Its comprehensive and unbiased coverage of the financial industry and global economy is a valuable resource for the international business community.

Kia customer wins all-new 2023 Sportage in Scratch & Win campaign

MUSCAT: Emad Mohammed Hejmadi, a businessman from Al Seeb, recently won an all-new 2023 Sportage in Kia's most exciting campaign. As part of the campaign, customers purchasing a new Kia, have an unbelievable opportunity to scratch and win 2 Kia at one time.

Additional scratch & win prizes include, win your purchased Kia back, win all-new Sportage, win up to 20 per cent on display price, win periodic service up to 100,000 kms and VAT on us. The campaign is valid until May 1, 2022. (Conditions apply. Please visit Kia showroom for details.)

Emad Mohammed Hejmadi said, "I'm absolutely thrilled and delighted to have won such a fantastic scratch and win prize. Absolutely unbelievable feeling. I have always been a fan of Kia vehicles. There are so many reasons to buy KIA. The list always keeps growing with time.



The trendy designs of the new Kia models are very impressive. Especially for those who prefer an exceptional combination of elegance, class and versatility. Besides the vehicle, I have also admired Kia's promotions here in Oman, which are very unique and offer customers more than they wished for. I have already encouraged my near and dear ones to make the most of this

fantastic offer before it ends. For all of you customers too, looking to buy a car, please do visit any Kia showroom today."

Reliable International Automotive, the dealers for Kia in Oman, recently launched the All-New Sportage in Oman. The all-new Sportage is an SUV that has been carefully constructed to inspire customers with its striking interior and exterior design.

Bank Nizwa enables SMEs to avail Sharia-compliant financing

MUSCAT: As the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa has played a critical role in broadening the concept of inclusive growth and has supported many industries through innovative Sharia-compliant financing.

In line with the same, the bank signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Oasis Trading and Equipment Co to extend financing to the company's customers and help them in buying Caterpillar vehicles.

The agreement was signed by Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and Bashar Ahmed Aref al Barghouthi, General Manager of Oasis Trading and Equipment Co in the presence of R Narasimhan, General Manager of Wholesale Banking, Khalid al Barwani, Deputy General Manager Wholesale Banking Group and other senior officials from both entities.

Khaled al Kayed said, "Bank Nizwa's Wholesale Banking Group has been at the forefront of financing SMEs, corporates



and specialised project financing and our multi-industry portfolio is a testament to the growing preference for Islamic banking.

We are indeed delighted to have signed an MoU with Oasis Trading and Equipment Company as they mirror similar values of excellence, integrity, and sustainable development.

At Bank Nizwa, we are strongly aligned with the targets set in Oman Vision 2040 and we will continue to support the various industries major segments like construction, power system & material and many others with aim to contribute to achieving immediate economic objectives

of Sultanate of Oman, through Sharia-compliant solutions that have, time and again, proven to be resilient despite the changing economic scenarios."

As per the agreement, Bank Nizwa will be providing structured Islamic financing facilities to customers of Oasis Trading and Equipment Company to enable them to buy 'CAT' machines at subsidised rates.

As a company with over 60 years of experience in the Middle East, Oasis Trading and Equipment Company deals in various CAT machinery, heavy equipment and power systems, which are used for a wide variety of applications,

including earthmoving, building and construction, mining, road making, demolition, waste and scrap handling, electric power generation, and marine propulsion.

In line with Bank Nizwa's growth strategy and contribution to the Sultanate of Oman's economic diversification goals, the Wholesale Banking Group offers services to an extensive range of clients in the construction, marine, oil and gas, infrastructure, power generation, healthcare, tourism, logistics amongst many more. CAT and its equipment cater to all these key sectors.

Many customers rely on CAT's products to advance sustainable progress and improve living standards.

The MoU will, therefore, provide a significant impetus to several key projects in various sectors where the company provides its services, particularly to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to buy CAT machines and equipment at competitive finance costs.

Nesto opens Eid Souq



MUSCAT: Eid is fast approaching, and people everywhere are making preparations for the celebrations. Nesto has also rounded up a list of essentials, activities and offers to ring in the season of blessings and to help its customers prepare for a happy and blissful Eid al Fitr. The retail giant has also launched Eid Souq as part of its Eid promotions.

Eid Souq at Nesto is a traditional Omani style market, which will have special offerings from dates, honey and other grocery items to household and decoration products, home appliances and furnishings with a wide range of curtains and carpets. All other essentials needed for the Eid celebrations are available at the Souq.

In addition to Eid Souq, Nesto has special offers and discounts on a wide array of products, including groceries, frozen foods,

fresh food, hot food & bakery, cleaning & accessories, home furnishings & decor, garments as well as household and home appliances.

Eid is also a time of giving and sharing, for which there are discounts on perfumes, watches, sweet boxes, and assorted gift baskets that serve as easy gifting options for customers keen on making their loved ones feel special.

All Nesto stores will be stocked up with everything that shoppers need under one roof, making it the most affordable one-stop destination for customers.

Nesto stores are designed and tailored to offer customers a complete shopping experience. The deals and promotions rolled out every season are in line with the group's commitment to constantly devise new strategies to cater to the everyday needs of its customers worldwide.

Elon Musk reaches deal to buy Twitter for \$44 billion



NEW YORK: Elon Musk (pictured), the world's richest man, struck a deal on Monday to buy Twitter for \$44 billion, capping a saga complete with hostile takeover threats before delivering him personal control of one of the most influential social media platforms on the planet.

Twitter famously served as a megaphone for former US president Donald Trump before the platform banned him, and Musk — a self-proclaimed “free-speech absolutist” — has said he wants to reform what he sees as the platform's over-zealous content moderation.

“Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated,” Musk said in a statement released by Twitter.

“I also want to make Twitter better than ever by enhancing the product with new features, making the algorithms open source to increase trust, defeating the spam bots and authenticating all humans.”

However advocacy groups were wary of the type of content Musk might allow on the platform, and Derrick Johnson, president of the NAACP civil rights organisation, tweeted, “Do not allow Twitter to become a petri dish for hate speech, misinformation or disinformation. Protecting our democracy is of utmost importance.”

— AFP

GCC states must harness digitisation to become logistics superpowers: Report

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Governments can catch-up if they want to lead in global trade logistics by following a strategic four-point plan GCC countries can become titans of the global logistics industry by creating a digital-first mindset, helping the region move from digital technology adopters on the global stage to disrupters, according to the latest report by Strategy& Middle East, part of the PwC network.

The report, entitled ‘Modernising Gulf Logistics Through Digitisation’, states that the development of an efficient and capable logistics sector is vital for the economic diversification agenda of GCC governments.

It adds that countries in the region have fallen behind their global peers because of three major factors: the lack of modern and integrated infrastructure, insufficient service quality, and legacy processes.

Alessandro Borgogna, partner with Strategy& Middle East, said: “GCC countries are at a turning point. To make real efforts to transform their economies and to enable growth and competitiveness, the GCC will need first to create a digitised and efficient logistics system, supported by a transparent and innovative regulatory.”

Despite the recent slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the global transport and logistics sector market is set to grow robustly from around \$8 trillion in 2020 to around \$12.8 trillion in 2025. “The logistics sector is critical to local, regional, and global economies, as it supports supply chains and facilitates international trade flows. It is essential to businesses and individuals in all industries,” said Haroon Sheikh, a partner with Strategy& Middle East.

GCC governments are engaged in



ambitious plans to change the economic base, move toward sustainability, and capitalise on the region's strategic location as a hub for international trade, and are seeking to increase localisation in such areas as pharmaceuticals, aluminium and consumer goods.

These goals are attainable only if the logistics sector undertakes concerted modernisation and digitisation efforts.

According to the report, the region needs to do more than catch-up if it wants to lead in global trade logistics. This can be done by:

1) Giving digitisation an integral role in policy

For a “digital-first” approach in logistics, GCC governments need to integrate digitisation with policymaking.

Some other governments have adopted data-driven policymaking by developing a “single source of truth”, which integrates data and process points by funnelling them into one system.

With enough trade data, GCC countries could identify new business opportunities, such as by detecting

logistics flows that currently bypass them and that would typically flow through emerging logistics hubs.

GCC countries could also take proactive measures to identify and mitigate any supply chain and trade dependencies on particular economies or regions.

2) Use digitisation to replace legacy processes

GCC governments need to digitise and automate processes throughout the logistics sector to increase efficiency.

Best-in-class ports and customs authorities elsewhere have used digital capabilities to offer end-to-end online services.

3) Streamline logistics with digitisation within enabling ecosystems

GCC governments need to learn from other countries, which are streamlining logistics with digitisation. New entrants are introducing innovative, fully digitised, and sometimes disruptive business models.

Incumbents are also innovating

and overhauling existing models by automating facilities (such as the Deutsche Post DHL Group, which has introduced the Internet of Things [IOT], the network of connected devices, into its warehouses through smart devices as well as automated processes such as sorting), using blockchain, or experimenting with new technologies through incubators and research and development labs.

GCC countries should mobilise innovation rapidly across the value chain by establishing and increasing support for logistics startups.

Governments must provide access to capital, establish incubators with the private sector, and invest strategically in research and development.

4) Enable digitisation for gateway ports

There is also a need for gateway port authorities and operators to digitise processes to reduce inefficiencies, improve transparency, lower logistics costs, and enhance their global competitiveness.

Value-Added Tax in the Sultanate of Oman: One year on



IHSAN KHAROUF

It has been exactly one year since Value Added Tax (VAT) was introduced in the Sultanate of Oman. The implementation was swift, and the rollout took only six months from the initial announcement in October 2020.

Looking at its impact purely from an economic standpoint, the government has clearly delivered on the key goals it had set out to achieve.

There is now an additional source of income to better meet expenditure and tackle government debt which has helped improve the country's credit rating—S&P Global Ratings upgraded Oman's credit level to BB- earlier this month in its first upgrade for the country since 2015.

The upgrade is also partially due to the significant increase in oil prices since the start of 2022 as well as a recognition of Oman's alignment with the steps previously prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with regards to fiscal policy.

Beyond government income,



the impact on the wider economy of a regressive tax such as VAT is truly fascinating but our scope here is limited to its effects on the real estate market and its participants.

At a basic level, VAT should not have a significant impact on developers as all costs are recoverable, this means that all VAT paid by the developer towards construction, consultancy or other services can be recovered against VAT received from sales.

However, this assumes a standard development model where the developer would aim to exit the development as quickly as is feasible. If, however,

the developer adopts a static pricing model and holds on to the assets until this price is met, there will likely be a significant lag between VAT being paid and being recovered, which will be an additional cash flow hurdle to overcome.

At another level, given recent market conditions, demand had been limited for many developments even at pre-VAT pricing; naturally, adding 5 per cent to the outlay required would further negatively impact the likely absorption rates.

In 2018, when VAT was implemented in the UAE, we observed that a number of

developers chose to fully or partially absorb VAT to maintain sales in a weak market. We are aware that some developers in Oman chose to follow a similar path, which added to their financial strain.

We have therefore witnessed increased demand for best use and feasibility studies, especially prior to land acquisition, as developers needed to ensure that the financial investment they made in the land would allow for a viable and profitable development.

We are also noting greater emphasis on phasing as developers seek to bring to market inventory that can match demand.

Beyond completed assets, we understand that serviced land plots will incur VAT if developed up to a certain level. The trigger point that would make an individual plot eligible for VAT is still unclear.

Until this is clarified, we may see some reluctance from developers to bring forward sub-division schemes where a site is developed by way of infrastructure and utilities, as well as some common facilities.

Exit prices for such sites will be more sensitive to variations caused by the imposition of VAT.

The situation for residential buyers depends on the type of asset they are acquiring. Brand new as well as off-plan units incur VAT but the acquisition of units on the secondary market does not. Furthermore, unlike other market participants, residential buyers will not be able to recover their VAT payment.

We had already noted some divergence between primary and secondary markets due to greater pricing flexibility in the latter, and the introduction of VAT further increased this divergence. At the same time, we only note this in schemes where the developer did not realign prices to market levels.

As regards to other market participants, we saw minimal impact on commercial occupiers who can recover VAT paid on commercial rents. However, we

also noted that some smaller firms, especially ones facing trading issues, struggled with the additional strain on cash flow.

As for retail, the sector had been facing major structural and real estate oversupply issues for several years prior to Covid-19. The full impact of VAT on the sector is difficult to assess given that we have only seen normalisation of commercial activities since earlier this year.

At the current level of 5 per cent, we would not anticipate a major impact on shopping habits but we could begin to see pressure on consumers' discretionary spending if VAT is increased to higher levels of around 10-15 per cent in the future.

Naturally, this would in turn have a direct impact on retailers and mall operators. The potential challenges for developers are primarily market related, and would likely have had an impact whether or not VAT was in place.

For this reason, we do not believe that VAT has had the negative impact some had anticipated when it was initially announced.

This is partially due to its current low level as well as other supply and demand factors which are having a larger impact on the real estate sector.

(The writer is Head of Oman Office, Savills Middle East)

Banks enter AGM season wearing green bullseyes

Banks are in green-hued crosshairs. Many of the world’s biggest financial groups, including JPMorgan, Citigroup, Standard Chartered and Credit Suisse, face shareholder votes on their decarbonisation strategies at annual general meetings (AGMs) over the next month. Regardless of the outcomes, the lenders could find themselves under an increasingly uncomfortable spotlight.

The AGM high noon has been inevitable for a year. Last May the International Energy Agency, an influential body representing energy consumers, spelt out that limiting global warming to a manageable 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels implied no new investment in oil and gas.

In November, major western banks joined the banking component of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), obliging them to devise credible 2030 and 2050 decarbonisation plans.

Regardless of the outcomes, the lenders could find themselves under an increasingly uncomfortable spotlight.

Yet those that are major fossil-fuel lenders are wary of taking a financial hit from withdrawing prematurely.

The lead-up to this AGM season has hence been unusually fraught. JPMorgan, Citi and Morgan Stanley unsuccessfully appealed to the Securities and Exchange Commission to allow them to bin environmental lobbyists’ proposals requiring a shareholder vote on the IEA’s net-zero pathway.

European lenders have been trying to reach a compromise with the activists, with the aim of putting just one management-endorsed resolution in front of shareholders.

So far only HSBC has succeeded.

The banks have some consolations. The votes aren’t binding, and plenty of financial types reckon the IEA’s thinking is divorced from reality given soaring energy prices and inadequate oil and gas supplies. In the only comparable AGM poll thus far, 78 per cent of UBS shareholders last month supported the Swiss bank’s climate strategy.

Still, that’s arguably a meaningful protest vote. And banks’ current net-zero plans warrant scrutiny. Lenders like Standard Chartered have been under pressure to green their capital markets activities like bond underwriting as well as their loans, while Barclays’ coal policy has faced criticism. Hardly any are truly in line with the IEA scenario.

The pressure is unlikely to go away. — **Reuters**



H2-POWERED BOAT IN WORLD TOUR

Jean-Baptiste Sanchez (R), captain of the Energy Observer, a boat powered by hydrogen and other renewable energy sources, looks at the catamaran’s solar panels as it is moored in Pattaya, Thailand during a round the world voyage. — **AFP**

Russians use crypto to bypass sanctions



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE DIGITAL EURO IS TO ENABLE PAYMENTS TO BE COMPLETED FASTER AND CHEAPER.

President of the European Central Bank (ECB), Christine Lagarde, has said Russian firms and individuals are using cryptocurrencies to bypass sanctions put in place by the west.

Lagarde told the Bank for International Settlements’ (BIS) Innovation summit: “They are certainly being used as a way to try to circumvent the sanctions that have been decided by many countries around the world against Russia.”

She added: “In Europe, we have taken steps to clearly signal to all those who are exchanging, transacting and offering services in relation to cryptoassets that they are an accomplice to trying to circumvent sanctions that are otherwise applicable.”

Lagarde said crypto’s continued use remained a concern, as there are rising volumes of transactions going from the rouble to stablecoins — cryptos pegged to particular assets — and from stablecoins to other digital assets.

Lagarde said that central bank digital currencies (CBDC) — crypto-like money operated by central banks — will be needed as an “anchor” to enable confidence in stablecoins.

CBDC’s “are associated with safety, solidity, security and benefit (from) the confidence that is often associated with the financial national institution such as a

central bank,” she said.

The ECB is currently designing its CBDC, a digital euro. It is one of 16 CBDCs being actively developed, according to the Atlantic Council, a Washington based think-tank.

However, in total, there are 89 CBDC projects underway. Nine countries – mostly small Caribbean nations – have already launched digital coins.

The main objective of the digital euro is to enable payments to be completed faster and cheaper; Lagarde said it was not intended as another monetary policy tool or to supersede cash.

“We want to make sure that central bank money remains accessible. We believe that a digital euro would safeguard financial stability and monetary sovereignty,” she said. The ECB is slightly ahead of its peers at the Bank of England and the US Federal Reserve on a CBDC project, with both the BoE and Fed still in the research phase. Fed chair Jerome Powell said it is better “to get it right than first.

However, Lagarde said that sentiment is changing. “The fact that President Biden signed an executive order asking players and authorities to focus on (responsible development of digital assets) is a good indication that yes, there is urgency.”

China is the furthest along of the large economies with its CBDC project, a digital

yuan. It is piloting it in several cities such as Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xi’an. The Beijing Winter Olympics also served as a test bed, with \$315,000 dollars in CBDC transactions processed everyday.

Lagarde said China’s project was a major reason the ECB is accelerating development of the digital euro. “We couldn’t just risk being behind the curve and we needed to go ahead and to move full speed ahead.”

The Bank of International Settlements announced last month that it had co-developed two preliminary platforms to facilitate international settlements with digital currencies issued by multiple central banks.

Dubbed “Project Dunbar”, the project has proved that financial institutions can use central bank digital currencies to transact directly with each other on a shared platform, the BIS said.

This would potentially reduce reliance on intermediaries, cutting the cost and time for cross-border transactions.

Decentralised and volatile cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin and ether have received much of the attention in the fast-growing digital asset space, but central banks are beginning to catch up.

Financial authorities in multiple jurisdictions including the UK and US, are exploring the prospect of digital versions of their own national currencies.

The growth engines are sputtering



MOHAMED A. EL-ERIAN

The author, President of Queens’ College at the University of Cambridge, is a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the author of The Only Game in Town: Central Banks, Instability, and Avoiding the Next Collapse (Random House, 2016).

The International Monetary Fund’s revised World Economic Outlook (WEO) is sobering. It is rare for the organisation to revise down sharply its projections for economic growth just one quarter into the calendar year.

Yet in this case, it has done so for 86 per cent of its 190 member countries, resulting in a decline of almost one percentage point in global growth for 2022 – from 4.4 per cent to 3.6 per cent.

Moreover, this forecast is accompanied by a significant increase in projected inflation, and all this bad news is packaged in a wrapping of deeper uncertainty.

There is a downward bias in the balance of risks, and inequality is expected to worsen both within and across countries.

The WEO revision is attracting a great deal of media attention. The focus, understandably, is on the relatively large size of the revisions for the current year, most of which are associated with the detrimental economic effects of Russia’s attack on Ukraine.

The war has disrupted the supply of corn, gas, metals, oil and wheat, as well as pushing up the price of critical inputs such as fertiliser (which is made from natural gas).

These developments have prompted warnings of a looming global food crisis and a severe increase in world hunger. Given the scale of the disruptions, it would not surprise me if the IMF issued a further downward revision to its growth projections – particularly for Europe later this year.

But as important as these 2022 effects are, especially when it

comes to the impact on vulnerable segments of the population and fragile countries, we also must pay attention to the IMF’s 2023 outlook.

The projection for next year points to a medium-term problem that is no less important: the lost potency of growth models worldwide. The IMF does not expect its significant downward revision in global economic growth for 2022 to be offset in 2023.

Instead, it has lowered its forecast for next year from 3.8 per cent to 3.6 per cent, with those revisions applying to both advanced and developing economies.

The implication is that the world’s economic engines are sputtering. This problem is especially worrisome in such a fluid operating environment, because it means that the prevailing growth models are not up to the task of pulling

economies through unanticipated negative shocks. Making matters worse, the same models have also failed to maintain a decent level of inclusive growth during periods of less stress.

Three major secular developments are to blame for the tepid outlook: the changing nature of globalisation; the prolonged reliance on artificial growth boosters; and the long-term failure to invest in the sources of sustained growth.

Economic and financial globalisation have been evolving in ways that make it more difficult for national economies to leverage international trade and foreign direct investment for domestic growth. While the pandemic raised questions about the proliferation and potential vulnerabilities of “just-in-time” cross-border supply

chains, it is worth recalling that trade and investment restrictions were increasing well before Covid-19 emerged. The US-China trade war featured the return of high tariffs and other protectionist measures that have generated far-reaching knock-on effects throughout the global economy.

Moreover, these developments have come at a time when many countries face tighter policy constraints. A return to conventional and unconventional monetary-policy stimulus is now precluded by high and persistent inflation. As the IMF notes, this new environment confronts central banks with very delicate and problematic policy trade-offs, and it exposes the real economy to the potential vagaries of financial-market volatility.

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#Living_with_COVID19

Escape to these five beaches for the long Eid holiday

With the long Eid holiday already announced, it's time to plan out an escape. If you're not flying out of the country, consider the following beach escapes to make your holiday week a memorable one... **P20**

Bahraini artisans toil to preserve sugar-coated tradition

BAHRAINIS WITH a sweet tooth have long been spoiled for choice between a wide array of dessert franchises, but traditional confectioners still hold their ground, especially during Ramadhan.

At the back of his modest shop in the capital Manama, Mohammed Gharib stirs a thick mixture of sugar, saffron and freshly blanched almonds, transforming it into a uniquely Bahraini version of the ubiquitous Middle Eastern

dessert: halva.

"Bahrain became famous for its confectioneries by being a pioneer in this industry in the Gulf region," Gharib said, adding that their popularity of its establishments "continues until today".

Clad in Bahrain's traditional "she-magh" headdress and white "dishdasha" robe, the 70-year-old runs one of the country's oldest confectioneries, named after its founder Hussain Mohammed

Showaiter, who established it in 1850.

"Hussain Mohammed Showaiter was keen to develop this craft and passed it on to his children and grandchildren," Gharib said.

As Bahrainis celebrate Ramadhan along with the rest of the Muslim world, the holy month is a period of appreciation for traditional sweets.

For Mohammed al Fardan, the familiar Bahraini confections remain a fixture on tables for the iftar meal, in which the faithful break their dawn-to-dusk fast.

"Their presence is a reminder of Bahrain's heritage and sense of hospitality," the 51-year-old banker explained.



Though the Gulf region has been swept by a deluge of fast food chains, Fardan is quick to point out that "modern sweets contain preservatives, unlike traditional confectionery".

Main food But while the preservation of heritage is at the heart of the confectioners' craft, they are not averse to innovating to appeal to a younger clientele.

Saleh al-Halwaji, who works in his family-owned shop, says: "My father used to work in confectionery and I used to help him after school."

"Today, we work in the same field with our own children," he said.

Halwaji says he "strives to evolve the sweets and keep up with the times while maintaining their popular character".

"We still make everything ourselves and perhaps that is what attracts so many of our customers, who come to buy sweets but also to watch us make them behind the glass," he said.

Dalal al Shrouqi, an expert in Bahrain's popular heritage, says that "today, technology helps us disseminate everything we want to preserve of our popular heritage by making it known to future generations".

Shrouqi, who has written several books on her country's traditional cuisine, said that while innovative twists are popular, people still prefer "the sweets in their traditional form".

"Things evolve, but the original is still the basis." — AFP

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

The inhabitants of Paradise, on that Day, will be happily busy. They and their spouses, in shades, reclining on couches),

Ya-Seen 55, 56

FATWA



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

QUESTION:

A traveller returns home on a Ramadhan Day. Is he obliged to resume his fasting?

ANSWER:

The traveller who already has broken his fast when travelling has no problem if he wants to continue.

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Sahl bin Sa'd narrated that :

the Messenger of Allah said: "The people will remain upon goodness as long as they hasten to break the fast."

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AROUND THE WORLD

KEEP GOING

World's oldest person eyes new longevity record

FRANCE'S SISTER ANDRE, believed to have become the oldest person alive this week at the age of 118, said on Tuesday she would now like to beat the record of oldest person ever and that work and caring for others had long kept her spry.

"People say that work kills, for me work kept me alive, I kept working until I was 108," the Catholic nun told reporters on Tuesday in the tea-room of the hospice where she lives in the Mediterranean city Toulon.

Although she is now blind and gets around in a wheelchair, she used to care for other elderly people much younger than herself. "People should help each other and love each other instead of hating. If we shared all that, things would be a lot better," Sister Andre said.

Fellow nun Sister Therese, almost 89, wheels her to mass in the hospice's little chapel each morning.

She said that Sister Andre had "a mission to serve others" and that "her deep faith helps her" keep going.

But the sister, long feted as the oldest European before the death of Japan's Kane Tanaka aged 119 left her the longest-lived person on Earth, is not above a little indulgence.

As Toulon mayor Hubert Falco told her that she was "an object of pride and an example to the whole world," she was making sure that he had safely stowed the chocolates and traditional Provence sweets that people had brought for her.

Born Lucile Randon in 1904 in Ales, also in southern France, Sister Andre's days are punctuated by prayer, mealtimes and visits from other residents and hospice workers -- as well as a steady flow of letters, almost all of which she responds to.

Last year, she even survived a Covid-19 infection, becoming a symbol of hope for people from around the world. But she rejects requests for locks of hair or DNA samples.

"Only the good Lord knows" the secret of her longevity, she says with a smile.

While she is "proud" to be the world's oldest person, Sister Andre repeated on Tuesday that "it's not nice being old, because I used to like taking care of others, making children dance, and now I can't do that any more".

But she also has a record to beat in mind: that of Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 in Arles, southern France, aged 122 -- the oldest confirmed age reached by any human being so far.

While Sister Andre does suffer from her limitations "she prays a huge amount and rises above it all," said David Tavella, an activity leader at the hospice who has become her confidant.

She thinks to herself that Calment's record "is within reach, if she's going to stay on Earth, she might as well make it," he added.

Sister Andre's status as the oldest person alive has yet to be confirmed by Guinness World Records, and there is no official institution to bestow the title.

Although other people have come forward saying they are even older than Calment, their claims are difficult to verify because of limited record-keeping in much of the world even in the early 20th century.

But Sister Andre is indeed the oldest "by a long way" of the confirmed super-centenarians according to French longevity tracker Laurent Toussaint -- the next contender being a Polish woman aged 115. — **AFP**



TRAVEL TALES

Thinking About Going to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar? Here's What to Know



THE MOST AVIDLY followed sports event on Earth, the Fifa World Cup, returns this fall -- another chance to find out if what has often been said about soccer is true: That 22 men chase a ball for 90 minutes, and the Germans always win.

At the last World Cup, in 2018, the Germans didn't win. The French did, and they'll be back for this year's tournament in Qatar, along with their young superstar Kylian Mbappé. So will Argentina's incomparable Lionel Messi and Portugal's icon Cristiano Ronaldo in what could be their World Cup swan songs. A new star is sure to rise into the footballing firmament this year -- will it be Canada's Alphonso Davies, born to Liberian parents in a Ghanaian refugee camp and raised in Alberta, now shining for Bayern Munich? And how will the Americans do after failing to qualify for the 2018 tournament?

These are some of the many reasons for fans to head to the 64 matches of the 2022 World Cup tournament in Qatar, where the desert heat has pushed the schedule back from its customary summertime window to November 21 to December 18.

For those planning to attend, the time to get tickets and a place to stay is now. But there are also some compelling reasons not to attend. Below, a primer on Qatar 2022: where to go, how to go and, crucially, should you even go at all.

SO, YOU WANT TO ATTEND. HOW WILL THIS YEAR'S WORLD CUP TOURNAMENT WORK?

This year's World Cup comprises 32 teams, 31 of which have survived the two-year qualifying process. (The 32nd, Qatar, qualified automatically as hosts.) They are placed in eight groups of four teams each, with each team guaranteed at least three matches.

The top 16 advance to the knockout phase -- followed by the quarterfinals and semifinals -- with the world champion crowned at the grand finale at the 80,000-seat Lusail International Stadium in Lusail, a

city just north of Doha, the country's capital, on Dec. 18.

Qatar is by far the smallest country ever to host the tournament, so in some ways this should be the easiest World Cup to attend. All eight stadiums are within a 35-mile radius of Doha, so instead of needing to hop on planes and trains to follow their team over hundreds or even thousands of miles, fans at Qatar 2022 will hardly have to travel at all. In fact, five of the eight stadiums are accessible via the Doha Metro (shuttle buses will take fans to the outlying stadiums).

Even though the tournament will be played in November and December, it will still be hot, with an average high of 85 degrees at the start of the tournament and 75 by the end. But games will kick off in the late afternoon and evening, and all the stadiums (only one has a retractable roof) will be air-conditioned, using solar-powered ventilation and cooling systems designed to keep spectators comfortable.

HOW DO YOU GET TICKETS?

You can enter the ticket lottery until April 28 at 5 a.m. ET. After that, FIFA will conduct a random selection draw, with successful applicants being notified starting May 31. You can apply for tickets to individual matches, or all matches a particular team will play. There is also a way to reserve provisional tickets if your team advances to the knockout phase. Prices range from \$70 to \$220 for individual tickets to group matches and escalate through the knockout phase. Tickets for the championship final will cost from \$600 to \$1,600.

WHAT ABOUT TRAVELLING TO QATAR?

If you succeed in getting tickets, the next thing to do is get a Hayya Card -- a mandatory all-purpose identification card for the World Cup visitor.

The Hayya Card (Hayya means "let's go") not only acts as an entry visa to Qatar but it must be presented -- in addition to your ticket -- to get into the stadium on

match days.

Several airlines fly from New York to Doha, including American, Finnair, Turkish and Royal Jordanian. Qatar Airways offers more than 100 weekly flights from 12 cities in the United States.

Qatar Airways also offers all-inclusive packages that come with match tickets, flights and accommodations. One package featuring tickets to all the U.S. matches (three group games plus a round-of-16 game, if the United States advances) is advertised from \$6,950 per person. Other packages range from \$4,050 to \$7,300, for the one that includes tickets to the championship final.

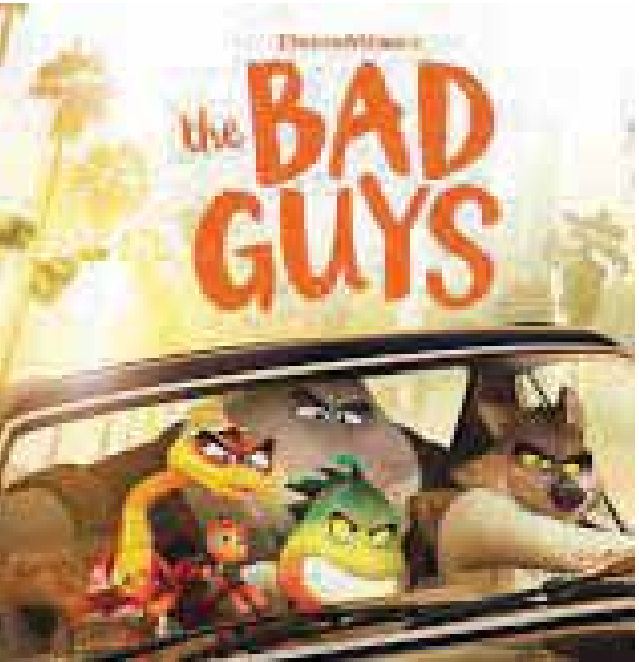
As for the country's coronavirus rules, Qatar currently requires adult visitors to show either proof of vaccination or a certificate of recovery to avoid quarantine, as well as negative results from a test taken within 48 hours of departure. Current in-country regulations require masking on public transport and in stadiums, stores and hotels. Proof of vaccination is required to enter many buildings, and travelers are required to have Ehteraz, a Covid-19 notification app, on their phones.

HOW ABOUT ACCOMMODATIONS -- CAN QATAR HANDLE THE INFUX?

Beds may be hard to come by, with just 130,000 rooms for the up to 1.5 million visitors expected over the tournament. Apartment complexes meant to house fans are still being built, many near expressways and in dusty industrial zones. The Qatar 2022 website has an accommodations portal that is the best place to start your search for lodgings. The website features listings at hotels, apartments and villas or aboard two large cruise ships docked at Doha for the duration of the tournament. There is also an option to stay at "fan villages," which the site describes as "a variety of casual camping and cabin-style accommodation for the avid fan," accompanied by a photo of a tent amid vast sand dunes. "More information coming soon," says the caption. — **NYT**

ENTERTAINMENT

'Bad Guys' finish first in N American box office



THREE NEW releases helped fuel the North American box office this weekend, with Universal's animated action-comedy "The Bad Guys" on top with an estimated \$24 million take, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported on Sunday.

"Bad Guys," a sort of animal-eye version of "Oceans 11," follows the exploits of a wickedly clever gang of creatures. Produced by DreamWorks Animation, the film has a voice cast including Sam Rockwell, Craig Robinson, Awkwafina, Marc Ramon, Anthony Ramos and Lilly Singh.

Overall, this was a good weekend for family-gearred films -- hit harder by the Covid effect than films targeting other demographics -- with Paramount's "Sonic the Hedgehog 2" again placing second, at \$15.2 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period.

"Family moviegoing was certainly rocked by the pandemic, but families are returning now," said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "We're still far from pre-pandemic levels... but this is a good start."

Third spot went to "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore" from Warner Bros., at \$14 million, a fairly sharp drop from last weekend's \$43 million opening for the Wizarding World film.

New releases claimed the next two spots. "The Northman" from Focus Features took in \$12 million. It tells the blood-soaked story of a Viking (played by a ripped Alexander Skarsgard) who seeks revenge on the man who killed his parents and usurped his father's throne.

Nicole Kidman, Ethan Hawke, Bjork, Anya Taylor-Joy and Willem Dafoe round out the ensemble cast.

And in fifth was Lionsgate's very meta film "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent," at \$7.2 million. Nicolas Cage plays, none too seriously, a man named Nick Cage.

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (\$5.4 million) "The Lost City" (\$4.4 million) "Father Stu" (\$3.3 million) "Morbidity" (\$2.3 million) "Ambulance" (\$1.8 million) — **AFP**

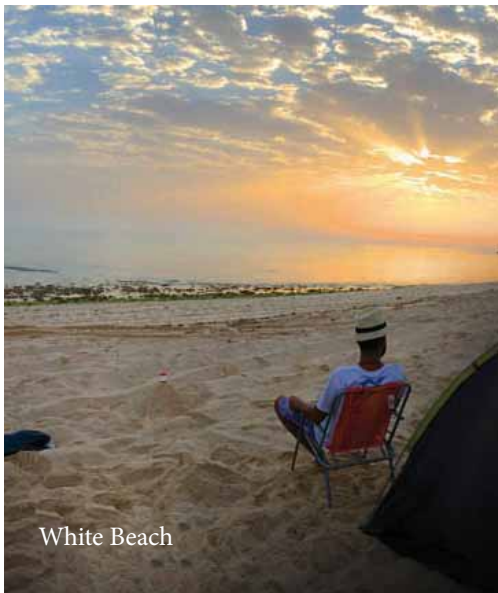
Ramadhan

Local Scene

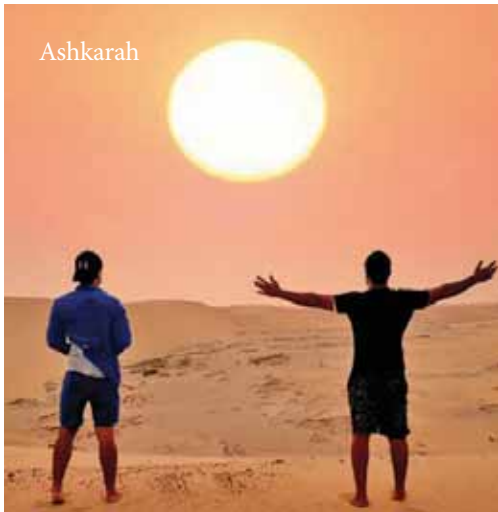
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WEDNESDAY | APRIL 27 | 2022

Masirah Island



White Beach



Ashkarah



Shiyah



Barr al Hikman

Escape to these five beaches for the long Eid holiday

By Yeru Ebuen
Instagram: @yru_here

With the long Eid holiday already announced, it's time to plan out an escape. If you're not

flying out of the country, consider the following beach escapes to make your holiday week a memorable one.

THE SWEET WHITE BEACH OF FINS

During Eid, the whole stretch

of Fins and the neighbouring cliffs of Tiwi will definitely get filled with campers and adventures. If you're looking for the best spot to enjoy some sweet time on the beach, look no further than the White Beach in Fins, one of the best destinations barely an hour away from Muscat.

White Beach is definitely one of Fins most alluring beaches attracting hundreds of campers every holiday. The few kilometres of white sand are best for activities like barbecue, beach volleyball and even football.

Our suggestion, go at an earlier time to book your spot. This is a first-come, first-serve camp so consider bringing your own portable toilets.

THE BEAUTIFUL COVE OF SHIYAH

About 15-minute drive from Sur one will find the tiny but beautiful cove of Shiyah. Located right in the middle of Sur and Ras al Hadd, the waters here are crystal clear and fade into the emerald embrace of the sea. It's one of the beach coves nearest to Sur and the nearby clears had been a favourite spot for camping for a lot of families. While one needs to go down the cliff through paved steps, the climb

up can be a little tiring. But once you're on the sand, it's the perfect place to spend an afternoon swimming. To enjoy this place, you should expect to carry all your provisions up and down the steps.

THE INVITING WATERS OF ASHKARAH

Located about 312 kilometres from Muscat, Ashkarah is both deceptive and beguiling. The waves can be tough depending on the time of the year making this place a great escape to catch some waves for surfing. A little farther from the town proper is a long stretch of white sand that is also frequented during holidays by families within the area as well as travellers from Muscat. What we personally love about Ashkarah though is that this is the closest place you can experience where the dunes meet the sea. If you can handle some waves, then this is a destination you should check out during this long holiday.

THE PRISTINE SANDBARS OF BARR AL HIKMAN

It's a long drive from Muscat passing through tricky roads located around five hours from the capital towards the stark

landscape of Al Wusta. Conquer the challenges on the road and you will be welcomed by the soft, beautiful beaches of Barr al Hikman described as a shorebird paradise and the Maldives of the Middle East. There's already a temporary camp set up here for people to experience and along with it are some water activities like kayak and kiteboarding but make sure to book early as the Eid will definitely bring a lot of people to this part of the Sultanate of Oman.

THE CAMPER'S PARADISE OF MASIRAH

Another long drive from Muscat and crossing over to another island by a ferry, Masirah promises not just pristine beaches but also amazing sand and diverse mountains. A visit here means having the option to select over 20 different beach locations that will fit your fancy. With the long Eid, it's an amazing time for you to consider a drive to this island which is also home to sea turtles and other dynamic marine life. Just a reminder though. All stores are located at the edge of the island where the port is located. Make sure to buy your provisions before heading out to the different beaches.