

‘Maqam’ initiative launched

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, under its community services, launched a unique initiative which aims to provide temporary and adequate housing for the needy families who have been ravaged by life conditions. Titled the ‘Maqam’, this initiative aims to shelter and give a helping hand to those families exposed to many challenges and who no longer have the ability to find an adequate housing. **DETAILS ON P3**



P10

AL BASHAYER CLINCH MAIDEN FIRST DIVISION LEAGUE CROWN



P15

INDONESIA BANS PALM OIL EXPORTS AS GLOBAL FOOD INFLATION SPIKES



P20

SULTANATE OF OMAN IN THE EYES OF AN OPHTHALMOLOGIST



MUSCAT

REGISTRATION FOR MUNICIPAL VOTING

The Ministry of Interior on Sunday issued a ministerial decision specifying the period of nomination for the third term of the municipal councils elections from May 15 to June 2. The Ministry of Interior announced the registration for the third term of the municipal councils elections will begin on Monday. The ministry called on citizens who have not registered in the electoral register to apply for registration on the elections website elections.om and to ensure that their ID cards are equipped with PKI.

— ONA

10,017 CITIZENS EMPLOYED IN Q1

The total number of employment opportunities and replacement of expatriates with citizens in the public and private sectors reached 10,017 during the first quarter of 2022, constituting 29 per cent of the target number for 2022 which stands at 35,000. In its quarterly indicator for 2022, the Ministry of Labour affirmed that job opportunities of replacing expatriates in the public and private sectors with Omani employees reached 2,573 out of 10,000, constituting 20 per cent.

DETAILS ON P2



23 RAMADHAN 1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	Dhuhr	Asr
04:19 AM	12:10 PM	03:36 PM
Maghrib	Isha	
06:37 PM	07:51 PM	



SIX DEAD AFTER MIGRANT SHIP CAPSIZES OFF LEBANON



P6



THE WORLD'S LARGEST PLANE BECOMES WAR CASUALTY



P8

Decree appoints under-secretary for Ministry of Information

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

Royal Decree No 18/2022 on amending Royal Decree No 95/2020 defining the prerogatives of the Ministry of Information and endorsing its organisational structure. Article (1) stipulates that the annex attached to this Decree shall replace Annex No 2 of the aforementioned Royal Decree No 95/2020.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the date of its issue.

UN CHIEF CALLS FOR CALM IN JERUSALEM



The United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, emphasised the centrality of the Palestinian cause, calling on all parties to calm down and avoid any provocations and stressing the need to respect the special status of the holy sites in Jerusalem. This was stated at an iftar party held by Ambassador Dr Mohamed al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, within the context of Oman's presidency of the Arab Group in New York. The event was attended by the representatives of the Arab countries to the UN.

DETAILS ON P5

Oman coordinates release of 14 foreigners from Yemen

MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to answer a request made by the governments of the United Kingdom, Republic of Indonesia, Republic of India and Republic of the Philippines, to provide assistance in the release of 14 citizens who were detained in Yemen on various cases, the Sultanate of Oman coordinated with the relevant authorities in Sanaa who responded to these efforts. Following communications with the

France votes in showdown for Macron and Le Pen

PARIS: French voters headed to the polls on Sunday for the run-off vote between incumbent President Emmanuel Macron and far-right nationalist challenger Marine Le Pen in an election that could have ramifications far beyond France's borders.

Macron voted in the northern town of Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, accompanied by his wife, Brigitte, in the race that is set to determine whether he will keep his job for another five years.

Le Pen, of nationalist Rassemblement National (National Rally) party, voted in the northern town of Hénin-Beaumont, near Lille. Pro-



A ballot is validated as voters cast their vote during the second round of France's presidential election in Creon, some 20 km from Bordeaux, southwestern France. — AFP

sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to facilitate the issuance of the required permits, the released were transported on Sunday from Sanaa to Muscat via a Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) aircraft prior to their return to their home countries. — ONA

GMT) on Sunday, down by more than two percentage points from the same time in the second round of the 2017 presidential race, the interior ministry said.

Participation was also two percentage points below what it had been at 5:00 pm in the first round of voting on April 10, when Macron and his far-right challenger Marine Le Pen advanced to the run-off.

On the basis of the official figures, polling organisations estimated that the abstention rate was on course for 28 per cent which, if confirmed, would be the highest in any presidential election second-round run-off since 1969.

SEE ALSO P7

for the Ministry of Information, along with his existing grade and financial allocations.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the date of its issue.

Royal Decree No 20/2022 on extending the membership of the

EID AL FITR HOLIDAY ANNOUNCED

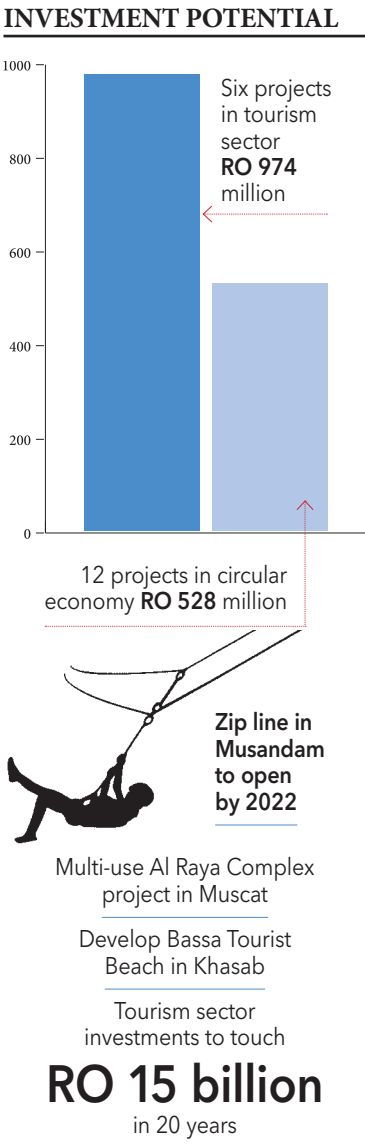
As per the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Eid al Fitr holiday 1443 AH for employees in the State's Administrative Apparatus and other legal entities, as well as establishments in the private sector will be from Sunday, 29th Ramadhan 1443 AH, corresponding to May 1 to Thursday, May 5. Work will resume on Sunday (May 8). The Ministry of Labour pointed out that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday — if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work — provided they compensate the workers for the holiday. — ONA

New investment opportunities to boost economy

MUSCAT: Eighteen investment opportunities with a total investment volume of more than RO 1.5 billion were unveiled by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the government and private sectors, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Sunday. These opportunities will be in the tourism and circular economy sectors for waste management projects.

These opportunities, which will be announced through the "Invest in Oman" platform, focus on the areas of recycling waste electrical and electronic equipment, implementing a biogas plant to produce electricity and heat, producing fertiliser, a waste-to-energy plant, used cooking oil, recycling glass waste, green waste recycling, waste paper, cardboard, copper and aluminium, lead-acid battery treatment facility, fish waste recycling and investment opportunities in a number of tourism projects in various governorates.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. Speaking on the occasion, he said that these proposed projects represent an integrative and promising model. They are the first set of many opportunities, particularly in the tourism sector, which are estimated at more than RO 15 billion during the next 20 years.



represent the starting point for building a solid base for the tourism sector and the addition of a diversified dimension to the national economy. It is expected that these projects will be completed within the next four years.

SEE ALSO P13



More than 10,000 Omanis employed during Q1 2022

MUSCAT: The total number of employment opportunities and replacement of expatriates with Omani citizens in the public and private sectors reached 10,017 during the first quarter of 2022, constituting 29% of the target number for 2022 which stands at 35,000. In its quarterly indicator for 2022, the Ministry of Labour affirmed that job opportunities of replacing expatriates in the public and private sectors with Omani employees reached 2,573 out of 10,000, constituting 20%.

The rate of job opportunities by replacing expatriates with Omani employees in the private sector reached 34% as 5,434 job opportunities were offered out of 16,000. Of those 1,806 vacancies were Omanised jobs for General Education Diploma (GED) holders, while 1,785 opportunities are in the level of managers, specialists and technicians.



As for the training field, the rate of employment and replacement of expatriates with Omani workers reached 78% as 1,553 job opportunities were offered out of 2,000. The same reached 7% in the private sector as 457 opportunities were offered out of 7,000. Of those, 137 are employment-linked training jobs, while 320

opportunities were through the training of entrepreneurs. The Ministry of Labour affirmed its keenness to boost the labour market with a highly productive national workforce. It also reiterated that its plans of replacing expatriates with Omani citizens are progressing as planned. — ONA

Agreement inked to manage, operate tissue culture research centre



BAHLA: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), on Sunday signed an agreement on the management and operation of a tissue culture (farming) research

centre in the Wilayat of Bahla, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The agreement was signed by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Eng Saleh bin Mohammed al Shanfri, CEO of OFIC. As per the agreement, tissue

culture saplings will be produced to provide the needs of the agricultural sector, as well as the local and international markets. The production will stand at 120,000 saplings per year and it will go up to 300,000 saplings per year in the first phase of the project. — ONA

Oman Air to target key markets

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The National airline, Oman Air, will focus on financial sustainability by focusing on key markets and a flexible business model. At the presentation of the companies under the Oman Investment Authority, Oman Air said the new strategy is to link the Sultanate of Oman to the world, promote it as a destination for travel, and make the company a major enabler for the Omani economy.

“The airline aims to improve the company’s financial sustainability through operational initiatives that cover the network of destinations, target key markets, and adopt an effective business model,” it said. Oman Air also announced a plan for the travel and tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman to benefit from the World Cup (Qatar 2022) in partnership with Omran, Oman Airports and official authorities in the country, to establish a city for fans coming to the World Cup at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Apart from providing hotel facilities, it will offer an air bridge for the matches venues in Qatar.

The airline stated that it seeks to enhance its operations by seeking to join the One World alliance, which includes more than 1,000 destinations in more than 180 countries around the world, and through a strategic partnership with Qatar Airways to reach more destinations. It will seek to restructure the aircraft fleet. Oman Airports said its five-year plans include signing a concession agreement for all airports, managing the second southern runway project, expanding the direct network of destinations, developing air freight business, operating airports outside the Sultanate of Oman, establishing an airport

❖ AIRBRIDGE TO BE DEVELOPED FOR QATAR 2022 WORLD CUP FANS
❖ AIRLINE TO BENEFIT FROM THE ONE WORLD ALLIANCE
❖ OMAN AIRPORTS TO FOCUS ON DIRECT FLIGHTS TO THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



Oman Air aims to improve the company’s financial sustainability through operational initiatives that cover the network of destinations, target key markets, and adopt an effective business model

free zone, managing all civil and oil airports in the Sultanate of Oman, stimulating privatisation by developing the lands of Muscat and Salalah airports. The investment portfolio of the Omran Group is RO 675 million, while the number of hotel assets has reached 30 hotels, three of which are under construction. Meanwhile, With the aim of

contributing to the growth of the Omani economy, Omani Investment Authority decides to divide portfolios with clear objectives and specific terms of reference, while ensuring that there is no overlap between them, namely the “National Development Portfolio” and the “Generation Portfolio”. Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of the Oman Investment Authority, said that the National Development Portfolio will manage all assets of more than 160 local companies, in addition to supporting the state’s general budget through dividends, privatisation proceeds and treasury management. The generational portfolio will include foreign and some local assets, including public and private markets, in addition to real estate.

Crafts for Nostalgia: Custom-made cradles are just km away

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A bit of Oman and its traditions are depicted by this craftsman from Yiti, now based in Al Amerat. He makes miniature traditional wooden cradles amongst many other mementoes based on the Sultanate of Oman. He designs and creates traditional utensils. To stack them, he has the wall model with built-in shelves found in the traditional Omani houses. Khalifa al Hadi had chosen mechanical and electrical for his vocational training course, including welding. But a different craft that kept attracting him was carpentry. He had no training but had an urge to indulge in it, not surprising because he had watched his grandfather and granduncle build wooden boats and doors as a young boy.



covered with seashells because my place is near the sea. Then in 2010, I registered at the ministry as a craftsman and for handicrafts. After that, I started attending exhibitions conducted by the ministries, colleges and hotels,” he explained. He was a participant at Dubai Expo 2020. At this Ramadhan, Khalifa was exhibiting his handicrafts at Iftar organised by Talabat Oman at Sablat Rozna.

For more than 50 to 60 years, his grandfather made boats, doors and windows. He used to have his workshop by the beach. The wood was brought from India and the coasts of Africa, especially to make the small fishing boats.



“For the making of windows and doors, they used Omani wood such as Sidr and other varieties of trees. At the workshop, he used to also repair the boats. I also learnt a little bit about how to make windows,” he pointed out.

Now he makes miniature windows and doors, but where did his grandfather and granduncle sell the windows and doors? People did not buy ready-made doors and windows then. “They made as per orders. And

the orders came from within the village and outside the village. In addition, part of their work was also to repair boats if the boats faced damages in the sea,” he said. But now, the lifestyles have changed — the fishing boats are

fibreglass made, and windows and doors are ordered online and even imported at times. Accordingly, Khalifa has also manoeuvred. He has been making the products in smaller sizes, selling them online through social media and showcasing his handmade collector’s items in exhibitions. He also has a passion for renovating old Omani wooden boxes — Mandoos, and even recycling them by making new products. “I can make 12 small cradles in three days’ time. I take orders, and even if there are three orders, I make them in a group because it is easier and economical that way,” he noted. In the meantime, he is also getting orders to make real-sized full-fledged cradles. “Today, I have the machinery to cut the wood, and this makes the work easy and quick,” said an excited Khalifa, who has successfully maintained traditions in his own unique style. His Instagram account is @khalifahandmade. The fact is custom-made cradles are just a few km away.



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Maqam initiative launched to provide shelter for the needy

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The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, under its community services, launched a unique initiative that aims to provide temporary and adequate housing for the needy families who have been ravaged by life conditions.

Titled the ‘Maqam’, the initiative aims to shelter and give a helping hand to those families exposed to many challenges and who no longer have the ability to find adequate housing due to the circumstances in life which happened without their intention.

The initiative was launched under the auspices of Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

“Ensuring a decent life for the



citizen is a national mission and a duty that all members of the society can contribute to and is one of the most important priorities and necessary needs that contributes to preserving human dignity, security and stability in the community; hence the initiative trying to find suitable housing for poor families,” said Ali al Ghafri from the Awqaf.

The Maqam endowment initiative was established by a decision of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Under this, priority will be given to those who do not have suitable

accommodation and are waiting for housing assistance from the government or any of the associations in this field.

“One of the main objectives of the Maqam initiative is to seek to achieve the principle of cooperation in righteousness and piety, and to encourage the members of the society to be generous and to help others who deserve to be helped,” said Ali al Ghafri from the Awqaf.

Maqam also aims at enhancing societal awareness of the need for cooperation, and to help the needy in line with the Oman Vision 2040 , which seeks to improve the standard of living and welfare and achieve social justice.

Maqam initiative will include a community partnership and solidarity between real estate owners with generous good Samaritans of the society who allocate part of their housing facilities as a temporary shelter to the deserving members of the Maqam initiative as well as

members who need community support to provide them with a decent life like everyone else.

The members of the Maqam initiative were formed through the direct nomination of a group of brothers and sisters as members, executives and volunteers from different service bodies of Maqam who have sufficient experience in enriching lives around the globe.

Families will be selected based on the recommendations from the authorities, government bodies, associations and charitable groups and citizens with urgent need registered with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning or with the government associations are given priority.

Also, any families of prisoners who have no means to live, and families of drug addicts who are unable to provide for their families’ necessities are considerably looked into. Those deserving families can get in touch with the Awqaf officials on www.mara.gov.om.

■ RARE ROCK OF SAID AQAN



The Saidaqaan rock, located 45 km away from the Wilayat of Sadah, is one of the most important heritage and tourist sites of Dhofar Governorate. The location of Saidaqaan rock is a favourite place for the residents to hold their social occasions and gatherings and even debating public issues. – ONA

Shabab Oman II arrives at Jeddah Islamic Port

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

After nine days of sailing, the Shabab Oman II anchored at Jeddah Islamic Port in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as part of the international voyage.

The journey is part of the itinerary of its outbound journey under the slogan ‘Oman, the Land of Peace.’ The trip embodied the famous approach of the Sultanate of Oman by extending bridges of love and brotherhood with the peoples of the world through ‘Oman, the land of peace’ message carrying with it the fragrance of the ancient Omani naval history and the achievements of the bright present, and perpetuating the message of brotherhood and harmony among the various peoples of the world.

During its sixth international journey, the ship will visit 30 seaports in 18 countries, where it will participate in the Kiel Sailing Festival, Festival in the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as its participation in the sailing ship racing festival in Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands. In addition to its participation in a number of festivals and celebrations on a journey. International, during which the ship will travel more than fifteen thousand nautical miles back and forth in six months and 12 days.

An official take-off ceremony for the ship was held under the auspices of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal



al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court. “I was honoured with the participation of the Royal Navy of Oman in their celebration of the departure of the ship to the

European continent, and it is an opportunity to commend this trip and the previous one. Trips and the great role that this ship plays in consolidating the Omani maritime

role, and this is an extension of the Omani maritime history and the Omani role in splitting the seas, whether east or west in this world, in addition to the positive role in

enlightening the world about the path of the blessed and renewed renaissance in all sectors in this country under the high patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin



Tariq, the Supreme Commander — may God protect him and his patronage — as well as highlighting the Omani cultural and tourist attractions, and spreading the message of peace and harmony among the various peoples. They have a good return, God willing.”

Along with the ship’s crew, 35 trainees from the Sultan’s Armed Forces and the General Directorate of Scouts and Guides are aboard the ship, during which the trainees will undergo a training programme during the duration of the trip, in addition to participating in spreading the Sultanate of Oman’s message of spreading friendship, love and harmony among the peoples of the world.

SHOPPING IN TRADITION

UNLIKE THE PREVIOUS TWO YEARS WHEN RAMADHAN AND EID MARKETS WERE ONLINE DUE TO THE



COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES LIKE LOCKDOWNS, PHYSICAL SHOPPING THIS YEAR IS AT ITS PEAK. BOTH TRADITIONAL MARKETS AND SHOPPING MALLS NOW ARE OPEN UNTIL LATE HOURS

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Ramadhan, the most important month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is when Muslims worldwide abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. It is the time of reflection and spirituality, charitable giving, and abstemiousness.

At the same time, every Muslim country has its unique traditions when it comes to celebrations. In the Sultanate of Oman, the most vibrant and lively places for citizens and residents to experience during the period are the traditional souqs that spring up all across the country.

Holding the country’s cultural legacy, the pulsating souqs in the country hold a significant role as far as the shopping during the month is considered.

Unlike the previous two years when Ramadhan and Eid shopping was done online due to the Covid-19 pandemic and precautionary measures like lockdowns, shopping this year done physically and has reached its peak. Both traditional markets and shopping malls open until late hours.

The last week of Ramadhan is always quite busy. While women shop for ornaments, clothes bags, perfumes, and household accessories, men usually look for kummahs, perfumes, walking sticks, khanjars and traditional handicrafts.

“Ramadhan shopping usually starts after the noon prayer and ends around midnight. Shopping centres are always busy and crowded during the period because people are looking for Eid clothing as well as gifts to give to their family,” said Mubarak al Wahaibi in Ruwi.

He said shopping is not complete without a trip to traditional markets.

“These places have a different feel to it. We always ensure that we visit other souqs like the one in Seeb Muttrah Souq has a charm of its own”, he said

Although malls and shopping complexes offer a variety of shopping experiences, people in Sultanate of Oman love to visit the traditional shopping places, including the seasonal habta markets held in all the governorates. Muttrah Souq in Muscat is one of the oldest markets and a symbol of the country’s old-world charm. This beautiful open market caters to all the needs during festivals.

The small lanes in the centuries-old souq are packed with local craftsmanship that will likely blow the visitors away. Boutique stores sell everything from jewellery, rugs, clothing, pots and even silverware.

Apart from its stocks of Incense and antiques, elegant gold and silver jewellery, it has a large number of abaya and dishdasha stores, and small and big shops selling just about everything from food to clothes.

Dates which are traditionally used to break one’s fast, traditional souqs are the better places to shop for them. The dates available vary in colour, size, ripeness and sweetness.

“These markets not only help preserve the traditions but also take them forward”, said Hamed al Lawati, a bank employee, who was a resident of the area till a few years back.

Eid Habta is another ancient legacy that has been preserved by successive generations. These markets, on open spaces or under the shade of palm trees or near castles and forts, are held in all governorates and wilayats and begin 10 days before the Eid and continue until the day before the Eid. Habta markets witness huge turnout of citizens, residents and tourists. The Habitat markets in all governorates and wilayats begin 10 days before the Eid and continue until the day before the Eid.

Many people move from one Habta to another in the nearby wilayats to search their markets for the best, especially from live meat or to enjoy the atmosphere associated with Habta, such as the sale of sheep, cows and camels at auction.





PASI’s Single Account to ease workers’ contributions

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) is planning to launch a ‘Single Account’ facility to streamline the contributions of workers employed in the private sector. The facility is likely to be launched by the end of this month.

With this service, PASI is looking at raising the level and quality of the electronic services with easy, flexible and sustainable procedures to collect contributions for the insurance protection system. The project includes all companies registered in the insurance protection extension system. A total of 17,000 companies are registered under the

scheme.

Under the scheme, each account is linked to the company’s commercial registry. It is assigned only to the payment of PASI monthly contributions. It cannot be used for any other banking transactions, and it is safe, fast and easy.

The Single Account number differs from one company to

another. Each account is linked to the company commercial registry and is included in the company monthly notice payment. Thus, automatic payment is confirmed. Also, one of the goals of this project is to know the deposited amounts and process them electronically.

Payments through a Single Account in the PASI scheme are

confirmed electronically, with no human involvement, and monthly contribution amounts can be paid through direct transfers using the account number mentioned in the payment notice through the local and international banks.

Also, there is no need for a third party like banking or financial or collectable institution for payment as contribution will go

direct to PASI. There is no limit to determining the bank transfers. The Single Account number cannot be used in the other financial transactions with PASI because it is only for the monthly contribution payment.

The Single Account initiative is an attempt to curtail so many financial transactions done for the purpose.



Guterres emphasises centrality of the Palestinian cause

NEW YORK: The United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, emphasised the centrality of the Palestinian cause, calling on all parties to calm down and avoid any provocations and stressing the need to respect the special status of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

This was stated at an iftar party held by Dr Ambassador Mohamed al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate

of Oman to the United Nations, within the context of Oman’s presidency of the Arab Group in New York. The event was attended by the representatives of the Arab countries to the UN.

The UN Secretary-General called on the international community to do everything possible to help the stakeholder parties to arrive at a settlement based on the UN resolutions, the international law

and the conventions signed between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The UN Secretary-General urged the donor countries, including the Arab countries, to provide financial support to the activities and programmes overseen by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) due to its direct effect on the lives of the Palestinians. — **ONA**

I’tikāf’ is back as Ramadhan enters final phase

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The mood is upbeat among fasting people as the mosques have been open overnight to perform I’tikāf’ a mode of prayer staying inside the mosques. Covid-19 restrictions didn’t allow I’tikāf’ for two years.

The Arabic term I’tikāf’ means remaining steadfast and dedicating oneself to something. In terms of Ramadhan prayers, it indicates taking up residence inside the mosque in a specific way for a specified time, according to the Sharia.

“We are glad to Almighty Allah for yet another opportunity of I’tikāf’ in mosques and gain His blessings after two years of pandemic when we didn’t have the chance to pray inside the mosques,” said Qais al Hasani, a Darsait resident.

The last ten days are special because it is during one of these nights that the ‘Night of Power’, or ‘Qiyamul Lail’, is bestowed, and it is the same night the Holy Quran descended the earth for humankind. The Holy Quran says about this night as a night better than a thousand nights and believers are well aware of the power in the Night of Majesty. I’tikāf’, which is also known as ‘ritual retreat’, is a phase when believers make it a point to stay inside the mosques for a certain number of days, usually from Ramadhan 21, devoting oneself to ‘ibadah’ during these days and staying away from worldly affairs till the moon is sighted for Eid al Fitr.



Whoever spends the night of Laylat ul-Qadr in prayer out of faith will be forgiven his previous sins in the hope of reward. It simply indicates that believers, during the course of the next ten days, need to make the most of ibadah, good deeds, reciting Quran, dhikr, making dua, Qiyamul-lail, among others; as the benefits are in multiple folds.

“Since we are moving to the end of the holy month of Ramadhan, believers should have a retrospect of what he or she has been offering, and it should reflect on their deeds, prayers, supplications and dig deeper into the blessings of the holy

month,” Shaikh Ismail Menk, Mufti of Zimbabwe, has said.

People in the Sultanate of Oman expressed the joy of being able to do I’tikāf’ as a means to share the great positivity that they have been able to find in the face of the pandemic over the last two years.

“The last ten days of the holy month is the time when believers should submit in prayers, supplications and dua all the more but I earnestly request all to follow the Covid-19 protocols aimed at safety of the society which needs to be followed inside and outside the mosques as well,” Mohammed Faizi, a scholar added.

Kuwait Airways announces flights to Salalah



MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Sunday approved Kuwait Airways to operate two flights per week to Salalah Airport during the khareef season, starting from June 7, 2022.

Last week, the CAA approved the Saudi airline, “Flynas” to operate three flights per week from Riyadh to Salalah. Flynas flights will be operated during the khareef season, starting on June 16.

Salalah Airport will also receive, on April 29, the first direct flights of the Wizz Air, a budget airline from Abu Dhabi, with 14 flights per week, in addition to the scheduled flights from Gulf Air. Gulf Air will operate two flights per week

between June 28 and September 29 from the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Al Jazeera Airways will operate three flights a week between June 2 and August 29, while Kuwait Airways will operate two flights between June 7 and September 13.

Some airlines that currently operate their flights throughout the year will add capacity during the khareef season. Qatar Airways currently operates five flights per week, and Air Arabia 12 flights per week, including 10 from Sharjah and two from Abu Dhabi. Flydubai operates three flights per week from Dubai and two flights a week from Pakistan Airlines and Air India Express.

TENDER NOTICE



Minerals Development Oman SAOC (MDO) would like to invite qualified Local & International Companies to participate in the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Closing Date of Selling	Submission Date	Eligibility	Fee
(MDO-TD -2022-03)	Provision of Exploration Drilling Works on Concession 12A-1 & 12A-2	12/05/2022	31/05/2022	International and Local Registered Companies who are experienced and certified in this kind of service.	OMR 100 (Non-Refundable)

● All participating Companies shall submit a Bid Fee of 1% of the bid value and offer validity for (90) days. Bid Bond must be obtained from a Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman, and it should be addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee of Minerals Development Oman.

● SMEs with Entrepreneurial card (Riyada) are exempted from payment of Bid Fee.

● Bid Fee shall only be accepted through bank deposit in the following bank account:
Account Name : Minerals Development Oman SAOC
Bank : Sohar International Bank
Branch : Al Gurum Branch
Account : 005020046853
Swift Code : BSHROMRXXX

*Please note that the original copy of the bank deposit receipt shall be handed over to Minerals Development Oman before collecting the Tender documents. For international firms, they may send the receipt via tenders@mdo.om

● Tender documents can be obtained from the main office of Minerals Development Oman, Contracts & Procurement Department located at the **Airport Heights, Bousher, Building No. 53 Plot No. 5, Fourth Floor, Al Seeb, Sultanate of Oman** from the date of publication of this announcement. **(Office Hours: 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM, Sunday to Thursday).**



6 dead after migrant ship capsizes off Lebanon

TRIPOLI: At least six people died, including a little girl, and almost 50 others were rescued after an overloaded migrant boat capsized off north Lebanon during a chase by naval forces, Lebanese officials said.

The boat carrying nearly 60 people capsized on Saturday night near the port city of Tripoli, the departure point for a growing number of people attempting a potentially lethal sea escape.

The deadly accident, weeks ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for May 15, is not the first of its kind for the crisis-hit country grappling with its worst-ever financial crash.

But it marks a grim reminder of the suffering behind a growing number of people, including Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees, risking their lives at sea in search of a future abroad.

“The army’s naval forces managed to rescue 48 people and retrieve the body of a dead girl... from a boat that sank while trying to illegally smuggle them out,” the army said in a statement. “Most



Lebanese soldiers search for survivors off the coast of the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. (Inset) A man cries at the entrance of the hospital morgue in Tripoli where corpses of people who died when their boat capsized a day earlier off the coast of the northern Lebanese city. — AFP

people on board were rescued,” the army said, without specifying their nationalities.

The army retrieved five corpses off Tripoli’s coast on Sunday, the state-run National News Agency reported, hours after the body of

a little girl was returned to shore.

Wails of relatives rang out from a Tripoli morgue where the corpses were being kept, according to a correspondent.

Dozens looked on as a group of men stormed into the morgue and

pulled out the corpse of a victim for burial, the correspondent said.

Nearby dozens of young men lobbed stones at two army tanks, to vent their anger at the sea tragedy. At Tripoli’s port, relatives of the missing impatiently waited for

The deadly accident is not the first of its kind for the crisis-hit country grappling with its worst-ever financial crash

news of their loved ones.

“My nephew, he has five children and his wife is pregnant with twins. He was trying to escape hunger and poverty,” one man told AFP at the dockside harbour.

Haissam Dannaoui, the head of Lebanon’s naval forces, said the 10-metre boat built in 1974 was designed to only accomodate six passengers.

But it was crammed with nearly 60 would-be migrants and took to sea without any safety precautions, he told a news conference.

Dannaoui said the army tried to thwart the smuggling operation before the ship sailed out of the Qalamoun region, south of Tripoli, but could not reach the departure point in time.

An ensuing sea chase saw two naval patrols trying to force the migrant boat to turn back.

“Unfortunately, the captain (of the migrant boat) decided to carry out manoeuvres to escape,” leading to the vessel crashing into the patrol ships, Dannaoui said.

The impact cracked the hull of the migrant boat, which quickly submerged, he said.

“In less than five seconds, the boat was under water,” Dannaoui said, adding that passengers were quickly handed life jackets.

But one of the survivors said a naval ship had deliberately crashed into the migrant boat to force it back. “Tho patrol boat crashed into us twice... to drown us,” the man said at the port, before he was silenced and carried off by a crowd of survivors’ relatives.

The United Nations humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon Najat Rochdi called for an end to these repeated tragedies.

“It’s horrific to see deprivation still pushing people to take a perilous journey across the seas,” she said on Twitter. — AFP



Fishing boats conduct a search operation for missing people aboard the ‘Kazu 1’ sightseeing boat, in the Sea of Okhotsk near Shari, Okhotsk Subprefecture of Hokkaido. — AFP

Ten confirmed dead from tour boat missing off coast of Japan

TOKYO: At least 10 people are dead after a tour boat with 26 people on board capsized off Japan’s northern coast, according to the country’s coastguard.

The bodies of seven men and three women were found floating in the water on Sunday and were brought to hospital, where the deaths were confirmed. Seven passengers remain unaccounted for, after nine were rescued earlier.

The nine were found unconscious in water around Hokkaido’s Shiretoko Peninsula and taken to hospital, broadcaster NHK reported.

Rescue efforts continue despite high waves, to find the remaining

passengers, including two children, and the boat.

The accident happened while the boat was in waters off Kashuni Falls, a popular scenic site near the tip of the peninsula, the Kyodo news agency reported.

The area is famous for its drift ice and is home to many rare plants and animals; it was declared world natural heritage in 2005.

On Saturday, after getting caught in high waves, the crew of the KAZUI issued a distress signal to the coastguard, reporting that water was entering the ship.

Contact with the boat was lost a few hours later, and the coastguard launched a search

operation involving a helicopter and several boats.

Twenty-two adult passengers and two children were aboard along with two crew. Their identities, apart from the 54-year-old captain and a second crew member, are unknown. Japan has currently shut its borders to foreign tourists due to the pandemic.

Water temperatures in the area have been about 3 degrees Celsius, with high waves and strong winds reported on Saturday.

Fishing boats returned to port on Saturday because of bad weather, Kyodo reported. — dpa

First commercial flight from Sanaa postponed

SANAA: The first commercial flight out of Yemen’s capital in six years was indefinitely postponed on Sunday, after failing to obtain permits from the coalition, the national carrier said.

Yemen’s government blamed the Ansar Allah fighters for the postponement. The capital’s airport was due to receive the commercial aircraft on Sunday morning, reviving hopes that the war-torn country could resume some normal operations.

A seven-year conflict pitting the government against Ansar Allah fighters has killed hundreds of thousands of people and pushed the country to the brink of famine. UN special envoy Hans Grundberg voiced concern and called on the warring parties to work with his office “to find a solution that allows the flights to resume as planned.”

A renewable two-month truce that went into effect in early April “is meant to benefit civilians including through reducing violence, making fuel available, and improving their freedom of movement to, from and within their country,” Grundberg said.



Raed Talib Jabal, Under-Secretary, Civil Aviation and Meteorology Authority (CAMA) during a press conference at the Sanaa International Airport. — AFP

The plane, operated by national carrier Yemenia, was expected to take off from the government-controlled southern port city of Aden, stop off in Sanaa, and transport passengers in need of medical treatment to Jordan’s capital Amman. But hours before the flight, the airline said “it has not yet received operating permits”.

Yemenia said it hoped “all problems will be overcome in the near future”, without specifying a date. There was no immediate

reaction from the military coalition that controls Yemen’s airspace.

But Yemen’s Information Minister Moammar al Eryani said the Ansar Allah were responsible for the flight being scrapped, Yemen’s official Saba news agency reported. Eryani accused the Ansar Allah of trying to take advantage of the flights to “smuggle” members of Lebanese group Hizbullah onto the plane using “fake names and forged documents.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES

SHANGHAI

China Covid death toll rises to 39

Shanghai reported 39 Covid deaths on Sunday, its highest daily toll despite weeks of lockdowns, while China’s capital Beijing warned of a “grim” situation with rising infections. The world’s second-largest economy has been struggling to stamp out its worst outbreak in two years with a playbook of harsh lockdowns and mass testing as it sticks to a strict zero-Covid policy, taking a heavy toll on businesses and public morale.

The cosmopolitan business



hub of Shanghai has been almost entirely locked down since the start of the month, snarling supply chains, with many residents confined to their homes for even longer as it became the epicentre of the outbreak.

BASHIQA

Iraqi Christians celebrate first Easter ‘Holy Fire’

With joyous ululations, thousands of Iraqis have celebrated for the first time the arrival of the “Holy Fire” brought from Christianity’s holiest site in Jerusalem to mark Orthodox Easter.

With chanting and prayers, excited crowds gathered on Saturday night to greet the flame’s arrival at the Syriac Christian Orthodox Mar Matta monastery of St Matthew, about 28 kilometres from the war-ravaged city of Mosul in northern Iraq.

“It is a message of peace and



love for all... a message of resurrection for this bruised country, so that it can regain its strength, its security and its peace,” Bishop Timathos Moussa Shamani, of the Mar Matta monastery, said.

NEW DELHI

EU chief in India with Ukraine on agenda

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will press India over its neutral stance on the Ukraine war during trade, security and climate talks. New Delhi has long walked a tightrope in its relations with the West and Moscow and Russia’s attack of its neighbour has highlighted the difficulty of the balancing act. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government has not openly condemned the Kremlin or backed a UN Security Council vote that deplored Moscow’s “aggression”.



Von der Leyen’s itinerary began with visits to local climate change initiatives, where she praised India for its “ambitious” renewable power target and said the Ukraine war had thrown energy security issues into the spotlight.



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MONDAY | APRIL 25 | 2022

7

In brief

WASHINGTON



RETIRED LONGTIME US SENATOR, 88, DIES

Former US senator Orrin Hatch, who retired in 2019 and is one of the longest-serving senators in US history, died on Saturday at age 88, his foundation announced. The Orrin G Hatch Foundation wrote on its website that he “passed away at 5:30 pm on Saturday, April 23, 2022 in Salt Lake City, Utah, surrounded by family.” A conservative Republican from the western state of Utah, Hatch was elected to the US Senate in 1977, his first public office and a position he held for 42 years.

Through his long tenure in the Senate, where seniority is prized, he was able to rise to the chairmanship of several powerful committees, including those overseeing trade, healthcare, taxes and the judiciary.

LJUBLJANA



SLOVENIANS VOTE IN DIVISIVE ELECTIONS

Slovenians voted on Sunday in parliamentary elections expected to be a tight race between conservative Prime Minister Janez Jansa and a political newcomer in the polarised EU country. Jansa, 63, an ally of nationalist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and admirer of US ex-president Donald Trump, is polling head-to-head with Robert Golob, former chief of a leading power company.

Wearing a tie in the national colours of Ukraine, blue and yellow, Jansa cast his vote in his village of Arnace in the northwest, shortly after polling stations opened at 7 am.

LAGOS



NIGERIAN OIL BLAST KILLS AT LEAST 80

An explosion at an illegal oil refinery in southern Nigeria has killed at least 80 people, the emergency services said on Sunday, as calls grow for the government to clamp down on stealing. The blast occurred late at the illegal site between the southern oil states of Rivers and Imo, police said.

“We recovered at least 80 badly burnt bodies at the scene”, Ifeanyi Nnaji of the National Emergency Management Agency in the area, said, adding that the toll could rise. “We learnt many bodies are in nearby bushes and forests as some illegal operators and their patrons scamped to safety.” Many people had “severe burns”, he said, adding some later died in hospital.

French vote in presidential election watched worldwide

PARIS: French voters were heading to the polls on Sunday for the run-off vote between incumbent President Emmanuel Macron and far-right nationalist challenger Marine Le Pen in an election that could have ramifications far beyond France's borders.

Macron voted in the northern town of Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, accompanied by his wife, Brigitte, in the race that is set to determine whether he will keep his job for another five years.

Le Pen, of nationalist Rassemblement National (National Rally) party, voted in the northern town of Hénin-Beaumont, near Lille.

Pro-European, liberal Macron led his rival in most polls ahead of the closely-watched race, with a lead of between 55 per cent and 56.5 per cent.

By noon, 26.41 per cent of voters had cast their ballots, the Interior Ministry said. Turnout was marginally higher than the 25.48 per cent who had cast their ballots by noon in the first round of voting that took place two weeks ago.

Some 48.7 million French citizens are eligible to vote for Macron or Le Pen, who are facing each other in a run-off for the second time.

Compared to the run-off vote five years ago that sent Macron to



France's President and presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron, French far-right party Rassemblement National (RN) presidential candidate Marine Le Pen and French far-right Reconquête! party President Eric Zemmour leave after voting for the second round of France's presidential election at a polling station in Le Touquet, northern France. — AFP

the Élysée Palace, turnout levels were slightly lower, with 28 per cent having cast their ballot by noon in 2017.

Since the first round of voting on April 10, the lawmakers have been feverishly campaigning to win supporters who backed hard-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who came third in the first round. Persuading disenchanted voters to head to the polling booths will also be critical.

Macron has been emphasising his commitment to climate protection. Meanwhile Le Pen is calling for the constitution to be altered to allow for preferential treatment of French citizens when it comes to access to social welfare and housing.



Many politicians and journalists called on the public to back Macron in the second round, hoping that Le Pen will be definitively defeated as she was in 2017.

Macron won then with 66 per cent, but the result is expected to tighter on Sunday.

The decisive vote is also being closely watched by lawmakers in Brussels, Berlin and Washington, as Le Pen's aims include fundamentally altering the European Union by giving national law primacy over European Union law, for example.

Macron's re-election meanwhile is widely seen as a guarantor for stability and continuity in French foreign

relations.

French presidents are elected for five-year terms, to a role that has a major influence on the country's politics and greater power than the prime minister, who is appointed by the president.

Initial projections were expected as soon as all polls close at 1800 GMT. Some voters already cast their ballots on Saturday in French overseas territories such as the Caribbean.

Once a winner becomes clear, the candidates have each made plans to greet their supporters.

Macron is preparing to receive his backers at the Champ-de-Mars near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, 'Le Parisien' newspaper reported.

— dpa

Two dead, six missing in Poland mine accident

WARSAW: Rescuers searching for survivors in a coal pit accident in the south of Poland have found two dead and located two more, but another six miners are still missing, the mine owners JSW said. “The rescuers have carried a second miner... to their base where the doctor pronounced him dead. He has now been brought above ground,” the company said in a statement.

“Another rescue team is going to find the others they were able to locate” late on Saturday, despite not having been able to establish contact. “Once the two other miners have been taken out, the rescuers will continue... to look for the other six still missing,” JSW said.

The accident on Saturday -- the second such incident in Poland last week -- happened at the Zofiwka mine in the south. Poland, which relies on coal for some 70 per cent of its power, has had several other mining disasters in recent years. — AFP

German left-wing party opts to pick new leadership slate



Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, co-leader of Germany's left-wing Die Linke party.

BERLIN: Germany's hard-left Die Linke party (The Left party) plans to pick a new leadership slate in June, as it recovers from its worst-ever federal election showing last year and the recent departure of one of its top officials.

“In light of the serious situation for the party, we're convinced that the party leadership needs a new mandate from the party conference,” read a Sunday statement. There were only two votes against the plan.

Formed in 2007 as a coalition of descendants from communist-era parties from eastern Germany and left-leaning western politicians, the party has made inroads in the country's east. However, it barely made it into the Bundestag at last year's

elections in what was the party's worst showing at federal level so far.

Then Susanne Hennig-Wellsow decided to give up her leadership role on Wednesday, citing personal reasons and unfulfilled expectations about party renewal, but also concerns about the way the party deals on in its own ranks.

The last was linked to allegations of sexual violence between member sin the party's branch in the western state of Hesse.

Party members had already been set to meet June 24-26 in the central city of Erfurt to discuss their party platform. Now that meeting will include a leadership election.

The party had not been set to pick new leaders until February. Janine Wissler, who was left as the sole leader in a party that traditionally has dual leadership after Hennig-Wellsow's departure, will provisionally be in charge until a new leadership slate is in place.

The assault allegations will also be discussed in June, with party members hoping they can introduce some tools to prevent a repeat of such problems.

— dpa

US officials to meet Zelensky on first wartime visit to Kyiv



Wreckage of a car in the northern outskirts of Kharkiv as the governor of the eastern Kharkiv region said on Telegram that Kyiv retook three villages near the Russian border after ‘fierce battles’ with Russian troops. — AFP

KYIV: The United States' top diplomat and defence chief were set to make their first wartime visits to Kyiv since Russia attacked Ukraine two months ago, with fierce battles raging in the east of the country.

The trip by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin comes as the war enters its third month with thousands dead and millions displaced.

A series of European leaders have already travelled to Kyiv to meet President Volodymyr Zelensky and underscore their support, but the United States -- a leading donor of finance and weaponry -- has yet to send any top officials.

In his daily video address on Saturday night, Zelensky said he was preparing for “tomorrow's important talks with American

partners”. The State Department declined to comment on the highly sensitive trip by two of President Joe Biden's top cabinet members.

Their visit comes as Russian forces show no sign of easing their attacks and after a missile strike on the southern city of Odessa that Ukraine said killed eight people, including an infant.

“Among those killed was a three-month-old baby girl. How did she threaten Russia? It seems that killing children is just a new national idea of the Russian Federation,” Zelensky said.

He also accused Russia of being a terrorist state and of acting like Nazis in the shattered port city of Mariupol, which has been devastated by weeks of intense bombardment.

“New facts about the crimes

of the occupiers against our Mariupol residents are being revealed. New graves of people killed by the occupiers are being found. We are talking about tens of thousands of dead Mariupol residents,” he said.

The latest of many attempts to evacuate civilians from Mariupol failed on Saturday and an embattled unit of Ukrainian fighters holed up in tunnels under a sprawling steel mill there appeared in increasingly desperate straits.

Zelensky also issued a new call on Saturday for a meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin “to end the war”.

“I think that whoever started this war will be able to end it,” Zelensky said, adding he was “not afraid” to meet the Russian leader, who attended an Orthodox Easter service in Moscow. — AFP

The true essence of Ramadhan



DR NISMA HARIS

The writer is a content creator, health and wellness advisor

Is just abstaining from food and drinks what Ramadhan is all about? It is more about abstaining from our unhealthy habits and disciplining our mind, body and soul.

Ramadhan presents a sample lifestyle that can be effectively incorporated into our lives. Prolonged hours of fasting followed by long Taraweeh prayers in the night, gives an inference how despite being immersed in busy schedules one can strike a balance between maintaining a healthy and spiritually balanced lifestyle.

How the 24 hours of the day can be meticulously planned with wise distribution towards meals, sleep, work schedules, and spirituality; is

the core of Ramadhan.

With the passing generations, we are losing the very crucial trait of being early to bed; early to rise. Specifically, our upcoming generations are more night persons; credit goes to our distorted schedules. Don't fall into the trap of staying up the entire night until Suhoor (pre fasting meal) and then dozing off until noon. Albeit our bodies are accustomed to functioning at their best when we are awake early. Waking up early for suhoor and prayers is a way healthier start to your day; both for the mind and the body.

Talking about the food habits during Ramadhan, it is not

RAMADHAN IS A RESET AND ROBUST REMINDER THAT WE CARRY A RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS OURSELVES AS WELL AS TOWARDS FELLOW HUMANS

about cooking the entire day and eventually indulging in lavish iftars. Nothing can be as detrimental as loading your body with a belly full of rich and heavy iftar dishes after a day of fasting.

Spending the entire night partying and binging on food items will do more harm than good. A huge chunk of the world's

population is starving; when we experience the pain of hunger and bodily weakness, it becomes easier to comprehend the plight of the destitute and the unfortunate. Henceforth, charity is highly recommended during the month of Ramadhan.

Besides, Ramadhan teaches patience over anger, compassion over hate, gratitude over complaining, humility over pride, and generosity over miserliness. When one gets to imbibe and practice these virtues during the weakest state of their bodies (not eating), there is not a speck of doubt that it will be far easier to implement and carry forward this

principal message of Ramadhan in our everyday lives. We live in a world surrounded by complexities in relations, unhappy relationships, or unfulfilled expectations but when we master an attitude of endurance, empathy and letting forgo, a significant share of our issues will be sorted.

Giving a quick rundown, Ramadhan is a reset and robust reminder that we carry a responsibility towards ourselves as well as towards fellow humans. When you attain a state of balance for yourself, you're better equipped to do bigger and better things and create healthier and peaceful societies around you.

War steals the show at Venice Art Biennale

KELLY VELASQUEZ & REBECCA GNIGNATI

Pavlo Makov fled Russia's attack with almost nothing but is proud to represent Ukraine at this year's Venice Biennale, which raises questions about the role of art at a time of war.

"I feel myself much more a citizen of Ukraine than an artist from this country," the 63-year-old said ahead of the opening this weekend of one of the world's most prestigious art exhibitions. He added: "I'm simply doing something that I have to do. It's like a duty."

Back after a pandemic-induced break, the 59th edition of the Biennale has been overshadowed by the war in Ukraine.

Organisers banned Moscow's representatives in protest at the attack, while Ukraine's national exhibit only made it here after being whisked out of Kyiv on the day Russian troops crossed the border.

Makov's installation comprises 78 light blue funnels mounted on a triangle through which water flows, slowing as it travels downwards to drip slowly into the collecting basin, echoing in the otherwise silent space. He describes his work, "The Fountain of Exhaustion", as "a metaphor for contemporary life". "I don't think art can change the world. But art can help us to survive," he said.

Makov sees as unavoidable Russia's exclusion from the Biennale, where 58 countries are represented in national pavilions showcasing 213 individual artists. "The dialogue with Russian culture we have now has only one place, at the front," he said. The funnels for his work were brought from Kyiv by curator Maria Lanko, who left the Ukrainian capital when Russia attacked on February 24 and drove for six days through Romania, Hungary and Austria to Italy.

The 35-year-old had been preparing for war, although she had to leave behind the massive base of Makov's installation.

"We kind of joked, saying: 'Okay, if ever something starts we can put those boxes in a private car and take them out,'" she said.

In the nearby Giardini, the halls of the Biennale's Russian pavilion are empty.

The curator and artists resigned following the attack, with artist Kirill Savchenkov saying "there is no place for art when civilians are dying".

Organisers of the Biennale praised the move and subsequently banned anyone linked to the Russian government from the entire event, joining a global cultural boycott of Moscow over the war.

They also financed the reconstruction of Makov's artwork. "It is definitely due to this solidarity (that) we have this project finished here," he said.

Makov himself left Ukraine with his family -- including his 92-year-old mother. They are currently in Austria. Packing in haste, initially "I only took documents and money," he said.

The Biennale, which is open to the public from April 23 to November 27, was due to take place in 2021 but was postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak. — AFP



JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

The writer is an American Pulitzer prize-winning journalist

One Ukrainian war casualty: The world's largest airplane

The day war broke out, one of Ukraine's most decorated pilots stepped onto the balcony of his three-story home to watch a battle raging at a nearby airport. From where he was standing, the pilot, Oleksandr Halunenko, could see the explosions and feel the shudders. The Russians were attacking his country, and he was worried about something close to his heart.

Mriya. The plane.

In a hangar a few miles away rested the world's largest airplane, so special that only one was ever built. Its name is Mriya, pronounced Mer-EE-ah, which in Ukrainian means The Dream. With its six jet engines, twin tail fins and a wingspan nearly as long as a football field, Mriya hauled gargantuan amounts of cargo across the world, mesmerizing crowds wherever it landed. It was an airplane celebrity, aviation enthusiasts say, and widely beloved. It was also a cherished symbol of Ukraine.

Halunenko was Mriya's first pilot and loved it like a child. He has turned his home into a Mriya shrine — pictures and paintings and models of the aircraft hang in every room.

But that morning, he had a terrible feeling.

"I saw so many bombs and so much smoke," he said. "I knew Mriya could not survive." The war in Ukraine, not even 2 months old, has already destroyed so much: thousands of lives, entire families, happiness and security for countless people.

But it has also destroyed material things that mean a lot — homes burned to the ground; supermarkets that fed communities smashed by shelling; toys and prized possessions scorched beyond recognition.

In the case of Mriya, which took a direct hit during the pivotal battle at that airport, the damage to the aircraft has stirred an incredible outpouring of what can only be described as grief. Heartbroken airplane buffs around the world are getting Mriya tattoos. A sad cartoon has been circulating, with tears streaming out of Mriya's eyes.

But there may be no one as broken up as Halunenko, who comes from a generation in which emotions are not so easily shared.

"If I were not a man," he said, "I would cry."

Halunenko, 76, was a child of the



The wreckage of Mriya, the world's largest cargo aircraft, at the Antonov airfield in Hostomel, near Kyiv, Ukraine.

THE DAMAGE TO THE AIRCRAFT HAS STIRRED AN INCREDIBLE OUTPOURING OF WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS GRIEF

Cold War. His father was a Russian army captain, his mother a Ukrainian peasant. Both died when he was young.

At boarding school in southeastern Ukraine, he took flying lessons and discovered he had a gift. He became a MiG-21 fighter pilot and then an elite Soviet test pilot. He captained all kinds of aircraft, from sleek new fighter planes to powerful freighters but nothing as grand as what he would soon fly.

In the 1980s, the Soviet leadership was eager to get back into the space race. Engineers designed a reusable spacecraft called the Buran that looked like the US space shuttle.

But the components were spread all around — the shuttle was constructed in Moscow, the rockets were made hundreds of miles away, and the launchpad was in Kazakhstan. The only feasible way to get everything in the same place was to fly the shuttle and the rockets on the back of a plane, a really big one.

And so, at the Antonov aviation

company production plant in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, Mriya was born. It made its first flight in 1988, Halunenko at the controls.

At 276 feet long and six stories high, the plane, designated AN-225, was bigger than any other in the sky. It boasted 32 landing wheels and a wingspan of 290 feet. Its maximum takeoff weight stood at a staggering 1.4 million pounds, far more than a fully loaded 747. Its nose cone flipped up so that big objects, like turbine blades or even smaller jets, could be slid into its cavernous belly.

There are different ways to measure size, but experts said Mriya was longer and heavier than other giant aircraft.

"The AN-225 absolutely was the largest airplane ever built, of any type, for any use," said Shea Oakley, an aviation historian in New Jersey. "People came out to see this airplane wherever it flew just to marvel at the size of the thing."

Mriya wasn't easy to fly, especially with a space shuttle strapped to its back. It turned in wide arcs — Halunenko held his arms straight out like wings and rocked side to side. On the ground it was hard to dock.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the shuttle programme went down with it. Mriya was repurposed into a gigantic flying workhorse. It hauled generators, vast pieces of glass, stupendous quantities of medical supplies and even battle tanks.

— The New York Times

Time for sharing moments and feelings alike



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

As days, weeks, months and years are not all the same, we experience different moments and occasions all the year round. Undoubtedly, there are very special times to us, which people mostly observe with family or loved ones whom they live with or are close to. Joining family, friends, colleagues or neighbours to commemorate a particular occasion or be together marks a key reason to celebrate a social or special

gathering. This reflects the philosophy of life that interpret people are social creatures. That is why they mostly like to get together, marking different occasions and enjoying good times for even simple causes. Humans are social beings and they are happier and better when connected to one another. They are social creatures not occasionally or accidentally, but always! As Mother Teresa stated, “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other”. Belonging to one another is not only reflected in serving others and helping them, rather it comes in the form of socialising with others too. Hence one belongs to other fellows when sharing with them memorable moments and occasions. Though, people experience a different impact when moments sometimes happen during seasonal or spiritual period of time in the year. The month of Ramadhan, for instance, comes on top of such special seasons of celebration and togetherness.

Ramadhan is basically about people getting together more than other times of the year. This is backed by their highly intensified emotions of caring and sharing during Ramadhan. In fact, it is a month about appreciating, reunion and cementing relations between people and families. The month’s spirit essentially brings the strong feeling of importance of sharing togetherness and being close to family in particular. As in addition to sharing spiritual moments of Ramadhan, it promotes sharing feelings with others too. People usually share moments of joy and spirituality with family, friends, colleagues and society overall. The value of sharing moments in Ramadhan is marked through different images of gatherings such as iftar (breaking fast), Taraweeh prayers (special ritual in Ramadhan) and evening meetings in which most people spend their time together by exchanging visits.

Breaking the fast in Ramadhan, as a religious ritual, in groups or as a big family revives the feeling of unity and togetherness of humans as social creatures. Such moment brings a thrilling emotion of happiness to socialise with loved ones in a blessed time of the year. Performing the Taraweeh prayers with other Muslim brothers reveals a special feeling of pride to stand with others worshipping the Almighty Allah. Of course, there are other forms of togetherness marked by Muslims during Ramadhan. What brings them all together in two different forms of rituals and gatherings is being all brothers of Islam, practicing their worship and religious rituals together as Muslims. Regardless of their nationality, language and background, such daily gatherings during Ramadhan reflect the commendable unity and harmony of Muslims. This spirit is observed by Muslims in different parts of the world where they converge and meet for prayers and perform religious ceremonies.

Ramadhan is always a great time for togetherness and experiencing the aspects of caring and sharing. All the enjoyable moments that people share with family, friends, colleagues or neighbours even will definitely etch in the minds and last forever. They will be stored in one’s box of memories and will be recalled someday in the years to come. Just remember that life is not lived by what we gain, but what we give to others.



Are the kids leaning right?



Michael Bröning

The writer is a Director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung office in New York, serves on the basic value commission of Germany’s Social Democratic Party and is the author, most recently, of Vom Ende der Freiheit (Dietz, 2021)

For decades, young people’s leftward leanings were considered an iron law of politics. “If people are not conservative at 40, they have no head,” Winston Churchill probably never said, “but if they are not liberal at 20, they have no heart.”

From John F Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Tony Blair to Barack Obama and Jacinda Ardern, the leading lights of the left have regularly built political careers on the promise of youthful progressivism.

This pattern is so culturally ingrained that it is largely taken for granted. But electoral outcomes in many Western democracies have begun to suggest a very different dynamic. In the first round of the French presidential elections this month, Emmanuel Macron achieved only a narrow victory (27.85 per cent) over the right-wing populist Marine le Pen (23.15 per cent). His success was based not so much on the fervor of the young as on the caution – and alarm – of older voters.

Post-election studies show that Macron carried only one age group comfortably: voters aged 65 and older. Le Pen outperformed him among those aged 25-49. And while the far-left candidate, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, gained slightly more than one-third of the youth vote, Le Pen and the other far-right candidate, Éric Zemmour, received the combined support of an unprecedented 22 per cent of first-time voters. Among voters between the ages of 25 and 34, the far right’s support increased to more than 35 per cent. In France, it seems, the kids are not d’accord.

A similar trend appears to be unfolding across southern Europe, with young voters in Italy and Spain also tilting dramatically to the right. Vox, the Spanish right-wing populist party, has quickly emerged as the country’s third-largest political force, owing to the support it has received not so much from stereotypical stick-in-the-mud septuagenarians as from disgruntled, predominantly male, and less educated younger voters.

In Italy, more than half of young voters currently support right-wing parties such as Fratelli d’Italia, former Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini’s party, Lega, and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s party, Forza Italia. Even in affluent Sweden and Germany, young voters’ natural alignment with progressive parties seems to be ending. Recent polls in Sweden show “no clear differences in terms of age” among those supporting the far-right Sweden Democrats, meaning that younger voters are as likely as older ones to cast a ballot for the party. While the

IT HAS LONG BEEN ASSUMED THAT YOUNGER VOTERS WILL TEND TO SUPPORT PROGRESSIVE AND LEFT-LEANING PARTIES, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE SPECIFIC ISSUES AT STAKE IN ANY GIVEN ELECTION

Sweden Democrats have always had their share of mainly young male voters, their support among voters aged 18-24 increased from 7 per cent in 2014 to 11.8 per cent in November 2021.

Similarly, in Germany’s federal elections last year, the pro-business Free Democratic Party was the surprising top choice for first-time voters, even beating out the Greens.

And in recent state elections in eastern Germany, the far-right Alternative für Deutschland gained unparalleled support from young people. In Saxony-Anhalt, the party gained the largest share of votes among the under-30s, as well as among those aged 30-44.

The question now is whether a similar trend will continue in Germany’s most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, when it holds elections in May.

To be sure, this pattern of young people turning away from the left is not universal — yet. In the United Kingdom

and the United States, younger voters remain committed to progressive parties overall. The Democrats are expected to keep a firm hold on younger voters in the US midterm elections this fall. Whereas half of voters aged 65 and older support the Republican candidate in their respective district, this level drops to a mere 29 per cent among voters under 30.

Younger American voters’ enduring alliance with the Democrats may be due in part to policies specifically tailored to their economic interests. Leading Democratic politicians have run on proposals to cancel student debt and pursue more robust forms of redistribution to reduce economic inequality.

But while progressive parties around the world should take note of this achievement, that doesn’t mean they can ignore the lessons from recent elections elsewhere. Although progressives still generally outperform the right in many Western democracies, the momentum is shifting. Current trends are a stark reminder that success at the polls is not demographically predetermined.

Like their older counterparts, young voters will ultimately support the candidates who offer convincing solutions to the problems that are most pressing in their own lives.

If progressive political movements fail to meet this basic condition, they may well lose their longstanding advantage among this electoral cohort. The notion that young people will always go for progressives will become a myth, rather than a reliable model.

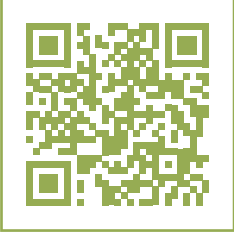
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A French national living in Nepal prepares to cast her vote in the second round of France’s presidential election at the French Embassy in Kathmandu on Sunday. – AFP

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Al Bashayer clinch maiden First Division crown

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Al Bashayer club lifted their maiden 2021-22 First Division League title after defeating Al Oruba 2-1 in a thrilling final clash on Saturday night at Seeb Stadium.

Diyooob's strike in 13th and 21st minutes delivered the historic title to Al Dakhiliyah-based team for the first time ever in history while the consolation goal of the opponent was netted by Abdullah Saleh in the 65th minute.

Later, chief guest Eng Bader bin Saud al Zaidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman, gave away the medals and trophies. Al Bashayer club players received the gold medals and the league shield while Al Oruba players got the silver medals. The final match was witnessed by Shaikh Salim al Wahaibi, Chairman of Oman Football Association (OFA), in presence of officials and invitees.

Al Bashayer and Al Oruba teams secured the final promotion spots in the 2021-22 Omantel



League after they topped their groups in the final stage while Sur club joined them as third club to the top-flight league as they defeated Al Khabourah 1-0 in the

play-off game.

CLOSE MATCH

In the first division final, both teams pressed hard from the

start for an opening goal. Despite domination of Al Oruba, Al Bashayer managed to open the account as Diyooob found the opener in the 13th minute from a

tight ground ball.

Eight minutes later, Diyooob doubled the result after taking advantage from Al Oruba goalkeeper moving forward. Al

Bashayer led 2-0 at the break.

In the second half, Abdullah Saleh reduced the gap in the 65th minute. Later, Al Oruba's players created different scoring attempts but failed to score the equaliser as the match ended in favour of Al Bashayer at 2-1.

Hamed al Shaqsi, head coach of Al Bashayer club, said after the match that the team's progress to the top-tier league and clinching the league title for the first time came after hard work from everyone in the club.

"We had a good collaboration from every member in the club starting from board directors, technical team, players efforts and continuous support from our loyal audience. This brought the accomplishment for the club," he added.

Al Shaqsi affirmed that the target is to be different at Omantel League and they aim to stay among the top teams. "We will set a different plan for the team to prepare properly for the next season," he ended.



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade in Tender Board Registration
5/2022	SERVICES	BOOK PRINTING BAYYAN ALMOSHKEL	25/-	FIRST GRADE

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 30/04/2022.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 16/05/2022.

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

West Asian beach soccer draw today

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Jordanian capital of Amman will host the draw for the second West Asian Football Federation (WAFF) beach soccer tournament on Monday. The tournament will be hosted by Saudi Arabia from May 16 to 21.

Seven teams will participate in the tournament including Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Palestine, Bahrain and Kuwait.

During the draw, the teams will be divided into two groups, so that the first and second placed teams will qualify for the semifinals.

On the other hand, the remaining teams will play to determine the positions from five to seven in the league system.

The West Asian Football Federation has communicated the mechanism of draw to the participating federations along with the technical and administrative instructions for the tournament.

The Oman beach soccer team continued its training in its internal camp attended by 16 players chosen by national coach Talib bin Hilal al Thanouni. Oman came second in the first edition of the WAFF beach championship hosted by Iran in 2013.

Oman squad: Mundher al Oraiimi, Mashal al Oraiimi, Salim al Oraiimi, Khalid al Mukhaini, Amjad al Hamdani, Nuh al Zadjali, Ahmed al Owaisi, Younis al Owaisi, Sami al Balushi, Abdullah al Buraiki, Yahya al Buraiki, AbdulRahman al Fazari, Sameer Jameel, Mohammed al Mawali, Nuh al Battashi and Abdullah al Souti.



Oman dominate friendlies against Kazakhstan

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Oman national hockey team will play their fifth friendly match against Kazakhstan on Monday at the hockey stadium at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Oman had won their past four matches after scoring 11 goals in the matches and conceding only two goals. Oman won the first match 1-0, the second 5-0, the third 2-1 and the fourth 3-1.

The Malaysian coach of Oman hockey team, William Chu, gave the opportunity to

the selected players. Fahd al Lawati, Mohammed al Lawati, Ashraf al Noubi, Wael Sanjour, Hussam Farag Allah, Adnan al Hasani, Amjad al Hasani, Osama al Shibli, Ammar al Shuaibi, Sanad al Fazari, Ahmed al Balushi, Asaad al Qassimi, Khaled al Shuaibi, Ashraf al Nasiri, Salah al Saadi, Rashad al Fazari, Ibrahim al Farsi and Osama Bait Fadaa, Mahmoud Ashour, Faisal al Loun, Sami al Loun, Fahd al Nawfali, Ahmed al Nawfali, Akram Ashour, Thani Bait Rajiboun, Mohammed al Nawfali, Elias al Nawfali and Aseel Ammar Sweid.

INDIAN EMBASSY HOLDS FRIENDSHIP CUP FOR EMBASSIES

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Indian Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman has come up with a unique cricket tournament to commemorate 75 years of Indian Independence celebration termed as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

The two-day Friendship Cup 2022 tournament saw the teams from the embassies of India, the United Kingdom and the United States of America along with a Chairman's XI side from the Oman Cricket compete for honours.

The tournament was opened by the Indian Ambassador Amit Narang along with UK Ambassador Bill Murray, US Ambassador Leslie M Tsou and Oman Cricket Vice-Chairman Paul Robert Scheridan at the Oman Cricket Academy grounds in Al Amerat on Friday evening.



Also present was Oman national team coach Duleep Mendis who is also the Chief Development Officer at Oman Cricket.

"We decided to organise such a tournament after good support from the other embassies and Oman Cricket," Amit Narang told

Oman Daily Observer.

"At first we were a little hesitant as it needs good effort and support for such a tournament. But the feedback from other embassy staff was encouraging and Oman Cricket offered to shape our teams for the tournament. So the event



became a reality and it was a great occasion as we are involved in the celebrations for the Indian Independence reaching 75 years," the Indian ambassador said.

On day one of the tournament, Indian Embassy started with a six-wicket win against US Embassy in

the opening match at OC Turf 1.

Chasing 98-6 set by the US in 12 overs, India reached the target in 8.4 overs with the loss of four wickets. Ayyoob hit 43 and Sameer scored 36 for India. Afzal and Sameer took two wickets each for India.

At OC Turf 2, OC Chairman's XI

beat UK Embassy by 63 runs.

Batting first, OC belted 120 for 4 in 12 overs. Hemal Mehta top-scored for Chairman's XI with 33 runs. Mark Stephenson got two wickets for the UK Embassy.

In reply, the UK team could only manage 57-6 in 12 overs. Ajith D'Costa took two wickets for OC.

In the late matches, OC Chairman's XI beat Indian Embassy by 7 wickets and USA beat UK by 26 runs. At OC Turf 1, Indian Embassy posted a total of 64-8 in 12 overs.

In reply, Chairman's XI reached 65-3 in 9.3 overs. Damodar Katti top-scored with 37 runs. Abhilash took two wickets for India.

At OC Turf 2, US Embassy posted 87-8 in 12 overs. Raja Zulqarnain Mubarik top-scored with 22 runs and took one wicket for the US.

Chasing the total, UK fell short by 26 runs at 61-7 in 12 overs.

Verstappen wins Emilia Romagna GP to rekindle title defence

IMOLA, Italy: World champion Max Verstappen rekindled his title defence on Sunday with an accomplished victory ahead of team-mate Sergio Perez in a dominant one-two triumph for Red Bull at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

In a rain-affected race, the pole-sitting 24-year-old Dutchman came home more than 16 seconds ahead of his team-mate as Charles Leclerc and Ferrari endured a disappointing day in front of passionate home support at the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari.

Leclerc, who started second on the grid, finished sixth after making a poor start and spinning in the closing laps while running third, allowing Lando Norris to take the final podium place for McLaren.

George Russell produced a stirring drive for Mercedes to come home fourth after starting 11th, fending off Valtteri Bottas's Alfa Romeo at the finish, while team-mate and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton finished a distant 14th.

It was Verstappen's second win this season after Saudi Arabia, which has also included two retirements, and the 22nd of his career.

He reeled off a grand slam weekend with pole position, victory and fastest lap as well as victory in Saturday's sprint race.

He moved up to second in the title race behind Leclerc, reducing



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen steers during the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at the Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari race track in Imola, Italy. — AFP

his deficit from 45 points to 27 to set up the prospect of an intense duel this year.

"Today, you never know with the weather how competitive you are going to be but I think we did very well and this one-two is very deserved," said Verstappen.

"The start was very important but afterwards, judging the conditions and when to swap to the slick tyres, because in the lead you have to always dictate the pace."

AlphaTauri's Yuki Tsunoda finished seventh ahead of four-time champion Sebastian Vettel in an Aston Martin, Kevin



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium. — AFP

Magnussen of Haas and Lance Stroll in the other Aston Martin.

A morning downpour eased shortly before the race, leaving the track in a treacherously wet condition and the teams faced with a difficult choice on tyres and strategy.

For the packed crowds of 'tifosi' huddled on open grandstands and grassy banks, it was a disappointing day. Verstappen surged into the lead from pole position.

Leclerc, starting second, was passed by the Dutchman, Perez and Norris before Daniel Ricciardo in a McLaren tangled with Sainz at the first chicane.

It was a second consecutive early exit for Sainz after his misery in Melbourne.

The Spaniard was left beached in a gravel trap, prompting a first Safety Car intervention to recover the Ferrari while Ricciardo survived their impact to pit for fresh tyres.

After a fine start, Russell had risen from 11th to sixth behind Magnussen's Haas, while Hamilton made more cautious progress in 11th, having started 14th.

After several attempts, Russell passed the Dane at the Variante Alta.

On lap eight, Leclerc passed Norris for third at Tamburello, but faced a six seconds deficit to Perez as, in the pits, Fernando Alonso retired his Alpine, damaged in an early collision with Mick Schumacher's Haas. — AFP

Oman Cricket administrator Iqbal Ariwala passes away



MUSCAT: Iqbal Ariwala, International Cricket and Administration Manager of Oman Cricket, passed away on Saturday. The last rites were completed at the Amerat Cemetery at 10 am the following morning.

Iqbal took the post of Domestic Head and Admin Manager in December 2015 but was an honorary member of Oman Cricket for the two decades prior. His passion and commitment to the cause of improving the standard of cricket in the Sultanate of Oman distinguished him as one of Oman Cricket's finest operators. He discharged his duties diligently and was one of the foundation pieces of its success story. On a personal level, he was an affable and approachable man who brought zeal and energy to the workplace.

Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer at Oman Cricket said, "I've lost a close friend and confidant today. Iqbal was one of the most genuine and hard-working individuals I've ever known — one who devoted his life to Oman Cricket. My thoughts and prayers are with his family. May his soul rest in peace."

Iqbal's demise leaves a big void in the cricketering fraternity. He has left an indelible mark on the sport and his contributions will continue to live on in the hearts of everyone associated with the Oman Cricket family.

Kohli flops again as Hyderabad thrash Bangalore

MUMBAI: Virat Kohli's second successive golden duck in the IPL saw Royal Challengers Bangalore crash to 68 all out and lose to Sunrisers Hyderabad by nine wickets on Saturday but the team insisted their star batter will bounce back.

Kohli, who also fell to a first-ball duck against Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday, came to the crease in the second over after South African pace bowler Marco Jansen bowled Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis for five.

Kohli pushed hard at a ball angled across him by the left-arm quick, and edged to Aiden Markram at second slip, who pouched a comfortable catch.

Kohli, the standard bearer for Indian cricket who has been replaced by Rohit Sharma as India's captain across formats, has now scored just 119 runs from eight matches. "He is somebody who has performed consistently for a number of years at this franchise. I think he is going through a rough patch in the sense things are not



going his way at the moment," said Bangalore head coach Sanjay Bangar.

Hyderabad romped home with 12 overs to spare and move second in the 10-team table led by Gujarat Titans who beat Kolkata Knight Riders by eight runs in the first match of the day.

Meanwhile, India's cricket chief Sourav Ganguly said the play-offs of the 15th edition of the IPL will be hosted by Kolkata and Ahmedabad, likely at full crowd capacity. — AFP

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A promotional poster for the 'AS'SIR CONTEST' featuring a white Toyota Yaris 2022. The poster includes Arabic text for Ramadan, the contest name, prize details (2 Toyota Yaris, 2022, YM, S/D 1.5 Classic), a value of up to RO 35000, participation instructions (MCT 13:00, 90458, Send to SMS), and the presenter (Nada Al Balushi). It also mentions the contest is broadcast on General Radio & Shabab Radio and includes social media handles @ShababRadioOman and @GeneralRadio.



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Oman Flour Mills subsidiary announces Australia foray

QASIM AL MAASHAN
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Atyab Investments, the investment arm of Oman Flour Mills (OFM), has set up a new company in Australia, one of the world's biggest grain and livestock farming nations. OMAUS Pty Australia was recently established with the aim to “contract with growers in Australia”, Atyab Investments said in a press statement.

The new company also aims to achieve better procurement terms for its grains through this venture. Growers too will benefit by dealing directly with the end-consumers, it further stated.

“Long-term through this company, OFM plans to invest into the agriculture sector in Australia. There is tremendous potential within this sector, Australia is well-known as a premium producer of grains and cattle, OFM hopes invest within Australia through OMAUS PTY,” the company added.

Circular economy, tourism projects worth RO 1.5 billion unveiled

LARGE PORTFOLIO: Investment opportunities valued at over RO 15 billion to be unlocked over next 20 years

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the government and private sectors, unveiled at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Sunday a total of 18 investment opportunities of an aggregate investment volume of over RO 1.5 billion. These opportunities are concentrated in the tourism and circular economy sectors.

These opportunities, details of which will be made available via the “Invest in Oman” platform, pertain to recycling waste electrical and electronic equipment, a biogas plant to produce electricity and heat, fertiliser production, waste-to-energy plant, recycling of used cooking oil, glass waste, green waste, waste paper, cardboard, copper and aluminium scrap and fish waste.

The list also includes a lead-acid battery treatment project, while other investment opportunities pertain to the tourism initiatives in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Sunday’s event was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. He affirmed that these proposed projects represent an integrative and promising model.

They are the first group of many investment opportunities,



particularly in the tourism sector, which are estimated at more than RO 15 billion during the next 20 years.

He added that these projects represent the starting point for building a solid base for the tourism sector and the addition of a diversified dimension to the national economy. It is expected that these projects will be completed within the next four years.

For her part, Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion, said these investment opportunities include six initiatives in the tourism sector with an investment volume of approximately RO 974 million, as well as 12 opportunities in the circular economy sector for waste management with an investment volume of RO 528 million.

She pointed out that the move comes as part of the ministry’s efforts to identify investment opportunities in partnership with the Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAAS), Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran), Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah) and Jabal Bausher Heights Real Estate Development Company.

She explained that for some investment opportunities, feasibility studies and market assessment studies are required.

Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, said that the Group is working to provide investment opportunities for local and international partners and to attract leading brands in the field of hospitality, culture and entertainment to the Sultanate of Oman. He pointed out that the three projects proposed for investment by Omran are represented in the

project to implement the second phase of the integrated tourism project “Yiti”, the business centre project in Madinat Al Irfan in Muscat to develop commercial facilities within the masterplan for the eastern side of the city, and Musandam Adventures project, which includes the establishment of an adventure centre and a marina and hotel.

The first phase of the same project will witness the inauguration of the zip line, which will be opened in 2022, forming a starting point to enhance tourism experiences and products in the Governorate of Musandam.

Sulaiman bin Ahmed al Kindi, CEO of ASAAS, said that the company is close to completing the multi-use Al Raya Complex project in the Ministries District in the Governorate of Muscat.

He added that the project is one of the major public-private partnership projects.

Integrated operations are expected to start in March 2023, so that the market will be one of the historical markets and tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman. Al Kindi added that the company is maintaining cooperation with Omran Group to develop the Bassa Tourist Beach in the Wilayat of Khasab, which includes a walkway, a park and shops.

He also said that the company is also developing Al Sharq project in the Wilayat of Barka in the Governorate of South Al Batinah.

This project includes recreational park, a zoo and aqua park with international specifications, as well as a commercial area, an educational and entertainment centre, a residential area, and two hotels (3 and 4 star) with more than 500 rooms. **(With inputs from ONA)**

Appointment of Investor Relations Officers to be mandatory

New guidelines: IR Officers to communicate the company's equity story to investors for the purpose of achieving fair price valuation and increasing shareholder value

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Publicly traded companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) will soon be required to appoint dedicated Investor Relations Officers (IRO) with responsibility for the accurate, up-to-date and timely dissemination of key information to the investor

community.

The move is one of several initiatives unveiled by the Omani bourse in line with its strategy to, among other goals, secure an upgrade to Emerging Market status, as well as to enhance its investment appeal ahead of its planned listing on the MSX within the next five years.

According to MSX Chief Executive Officer Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, the role of the Investor Relations Officer is to communicate the company's equity story to the investors for the purpose of achieving fair price valuation and increase shareholder value.

“The concept of an Investor



Relations Officer is really important because it can link the investors directly with the top management of the company.

Investors have the right to get information on time; they are entitled to get any information that can affect the fair price valuation

of the company”, Al Salmi said.

“Each company has to assign an officer who has to answer investors’ queries, and they are also responsible for any disclosures that are required to be made. The IROs need to make sure that all the information they disclose to any investor is available to all the investors at the same time.”

Addressing an online forum recently, Al Salmi said the MSX is currently in discussion with the market regulator, the Capital Market Authority (CMA), for the introduction of regulations to make appointments of Investor Relations Officers mandatory for publicly listed companies.

To this end, “soft regulations” have already been issued by the bourse to prep listed companies for this new requirement.

Under these guidelines, publicly traded businesses are required to nominate IR Officers, and also include their contact particulars on the website of the company, as well as on the MSX portal.

Further, to help in the smooth and effective rollout of the initiative in the Sultanate of Oman, MSX recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA). Additionally, the Oman IR Chapter of the Association has been set up, he added.

Omran Group launches ‘Double Your Delight’ promotion during Eid holidays

ATTRACTIVE OFFER: 30 per cent discount at 16 different hotels across all governorates

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

As part of its efforts to enhance local tourism, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) launched a ‘Double Your Delight’ promotion, offering locals and residents an array of staycation options with 30 per cent discount at 16 different hotels spread across the country’s governorates.

The new promotion will provide distinguished hospitality experiences and recreational and



cultural activities for individuals and families, as well as encourage them to explore and enjoy the most prominent tourism components and to enjoy the Sultanate of Oman’s unique tourism offerings.

The offers will be available from April 28 to May 7, 2022, at Alila

Hinu Bay, Atana Stay Salalah, City Hotel Duqm, Crown Plaza Duqm, Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC, Crowne Plaza Resort

Salalah, InterContinental Muscat, Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz - Carlton Hotel, Atana Khasab Hotel, Atana Musandam Resort, Atana Stay Al Ashkara, Barcelo Mussanah Resort, dusitD2 Naseem Jabal Akhdar Resort, Masirah Island Resort, Ras Al Jinz, and W Muscat.

Guests are invited to book at their preferred hotel destination directly through the dedicated “Double Your Delight” online platform by visiting the hotels’ websites.

Omran Group continues to work with all stakeholders, partners to activate the tourism sector’s role to boost the local economy by providing suitable tourist environment for all visitors and offering an exceptional offer for the guests in Omran’s hotels and resorts.

Zubair Corp signs pacts for digital transformation project



MUSCAT: The Zubair Corporation signed two agreements with SAP and KAAR software companies as part of the Corporation’s Digital Transformation Project.

One of the most important projects launched by the Corporation, the purpose of this project is to develop and enhance work systems and to ensure it is on par with the highest international standards.

The two agreements were signed on behalf of the Corporation by Abdullah bin Zahran al Balushi, Adviser to the Chairman of the Board of Directors, and on behalf of ‘SAP’ and ‘KAAR’ by Sergio Maccotta, SVP and GM - Middle East South, SAP MENA LLC and Guardian George, Co-founder and Director of KAAR Technologies respectively.

The agreements were signed in the presence of Al Zubair Muhammad al Zubair, Vice Chairman of The Zubair Corporation, and a number of the senior management from the Corporation and the two companies.

Commenting on the signing of the agreement, Al Zubair Muhammad al Zubair said, “The Zubair Digital Transformation Project is one of the most important projects that the Corporation is currently working on. Through this agreement, we seek to develop an integrated electronic system that deals with all the operations of The Zubair Corporation and the group’s subsidiaries.”

Green Hydrogen Summit to include Future Energy Leaders programme

MUSCAT: Birba Energy, the organiser of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman 2022 ‘Global Conference & Exhibition’, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Intisar al Busaidy, an Omani Phd researcher in Petroleum Engineering, to conduct the ‘Future Energy Leaders Programme’ as part of the summit.

GHSO 2022 Summit and Exhibition will take place at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) from December 5 – 7, 2022.

The Future Energy Leaders Programme aims to encourage research and development in the clean energy sector, particularly green hydrogen.

It is targeted at students enrolled in science and engineering colleges from around the world.

Presented by young Omani



The Future Energy Leaders Programme aims to encourage research and development in the clean energy sector, particularly green hydrogen.

energy professionals, the programme will provide an

opportunity for students to showcase their research findings at the event. Participating students will be assured space within the exhibition area to showcase their research findings.

Three teams with the best abstracts will also get a chance to present their findings at the summit.



Alizz Islamic Bank holds first Sharia meeting

MUSCAT: The Sharia Supervisory Board of Alizz Islamic Bank held its first meeting for the year 2022 at the bank’s headquarters in the Central Business District of Ruwi. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Dr Ibrahim al Sawafi, the newest member of the Sharia Supervisory Board.

During the meeting, the CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, Sulaiman bin Hamad al Harthi presented and discussed the bank’s performance during the first quarter of this year and the most important developments in Alizz Islamic Bank.

Highlighting that the performance was in line with the strategic plan despite the

challenges witnessed in the opening months of the year.

Issa bin Salem al Riyami, Head of the Sharia Compliance and Audit Department at Alizz Islamic Bank, said: “Islamic banks do not compromise on Sharia principles, even though it is an institution that seeks to achieve a desired profit for shareholders and depositors, because Islamic banking is a system of trade through which the sale is carried out.

Purchasing goods and services and investing capital by taking risks in order to obtain legitimate profits. It is based on the principles of Islamic Sharia that permits trade and prohibits usury.”

Annual Souq Al Wathbah evokes excellent response

MUSCAT: The annual Souq Al Wathbah organised by Bank Muscat and The SMEs Development Authority at the bank’s Head Office from April 21-23 received an excellent response from Omani SMEs and the general public with hundreds of visitors thronging the over 120 SME stalls at the 3 day event.

The Ramadhan Souq featured many products and services encompassing fashion, beauty, food and health products and was organised as part of the bank’s Social Corporate Responsibility (CSR) and its strong commitment to promoting SMEs and Public-Private Partnership.

Earlier, the Souq was inaugurated by Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, CEO, SMEs Development Authority, in the presence of Shaikh Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat and other officials from both institutions.

Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi,

Senior Assistant General Manager – SME, Bank Muscat, said: “SMEs are a pillar of support and creator of jobs in Oman. Bank Muscat, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2022, has been playing an important role in supporting this vital segment by providing a large number of highly essential financial and non-financial support, which improves overall financial inclusion and economic stability in the Sultanate of Oman.

We are delighted to play our role in Public-Private Partnership to create opportunities for local entrepreneurs to successfully grow the market for their products and services through a number of initiatives.

We thank the SMEs Development Authority for the strong support and partnership in hosting the annual Souq Al Wathbah thereby enabling SMEs to play an important role in the further progress and development



of Oman.”

Ibrahim al Balushi added that the Souq was organised in 2022 after a long gap because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Fortunately, the event witnessed excellent participation from both Omani entrepreneurs and visitors thereby

contributing to the overall success of the event, which was held after abiding with the regulations set by the Supreme Committee for Dealing with Covid-19.

He further explained that this year’s edition witnessed an excellent diversity in products

offered as well as competitive prices. In addition, a number of new entrepreneurs participated in the event.

He wished all success to the participants and SMEs and assuring them that the bank would continue offering the best banking

services and facilities for their financial needs.

The bank’s Al Wathbah SME department offers a comprehensive suite of tailor-made finance solutions and non-financial services targeted at small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Credit facilities, both funded and non-funded in nature, are available to all sectors. Further support is extended through non-financial services in areas of education, coaching, networking opportunities and workshops.

Earlier in 2021, the bank organised a free VAT Registration and Advisory desk at the Head Office for the benefit of its large numbers of SME customers. It must be mentioned in this regard that Bank Muscat is continuously partnering with both government agencies and the private sector to promote entrepreneurship in Oman, as part of its focus on supporting the strategic goals of the ambitious Oman Vision 2040.

Indonesia bans palm oil exports as global food inflation spikes

JAKARTA: Indonesia, the world's top palm oil producer, announced plans to ban exports of the most widely used vegetable oil, in a shock move that could further inflame surging global food inflation.

The halting of shipments of the cooking oil and its raw material, widely used in products ranging from cakes to cosmetics, could raise costs for packaged food producers globally and force governments to choose between using vegetable oils in food or for biofuel. Indonesia counts for more than half of global palm oil supply.

In a video broadcast, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo said he wanted to ensure the availability of food products at home, after global food inflation soared to a record high following Russia's war of major crop producer Ukraine.

"I will monitor and evaluate the implementation of this policy so availability of cooking oil in the domestic market becomes abundant and affordable", he said.

The announcement will hurt consumers in top buyer India and globally, said, Atul Chaturvedi, President of trade body the Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA).

"This move is rather unfortunate and totally unexpected", he said. Alternative vegetable oil prices spiked in response to the measure which will take effect on April 28.

Soybean oil, the second most



A worker lifts harvested palm fruits to a transport truck before processing into crude palm oil (CPO) at a palm plantation in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. — AFP

used vegetable oil, rose 4.5% to a record high of 83.21 cents per pound on the Chicago Board of Trade.

Global prices of crude palm oil, which Indonesia uses for cooking oil, have surged to historic highs this year amid rising demand and weak output from top producers Indonesia and Malaysia, plus a move by Indonesia to restrict palm oil exports in January that was lifted in March.

Household product and food companies including Procter & Gamble Co, Nestle SA and Unilever PLC are large purchasers of palm oil. Oreo cookie maker Mondelez International Inc accounts for 0.5% of palm oil consumption globally, according to its website.

Other countries have

experimented with crop protectionism to try to keep domestic prices down.

Argentina, the world's top exporter of processed soy, briefly halted new overseas sales of soy oil and meal in mid-March before hiking the export tax rate on those products to 33% from 31%.

Global edible oil markets have been roiled this year by Russia's war on Ukraine, a move Russia calls a "special operation" to demilitarise its neighbour, which cut off shipments of sunflower oil from the region. The Black Sea accounts for 76% of world sunoil exports and commercial shipping from the region has been severely affected since Russian forces entered Ukraine in February.

Large supplies of alternatives including soy and rapeseed oil are

THE HALTING OF SHIPMENTS OF THE COOKING OIL AND ITS RAW MATERIAL, WIDELY USED IN PRODUCTS RANGING FROM CAKES TO COSMETICS, COULD RAISE COSTS FOR PACKAGED FOOD PRODUCERS GLOBALLY AND FORCE GOVERNMENTS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN USING VEGETABLE OILS IN FOOD OR FOR BIOFUEL.

not readily available either, after droughts hurt the most recent crops in Argentina, Brazil and Canada.

New facilities for processing soy and canola oil are expected to open in the United States and Canada respectively in coming years, as demand for plant-based biofuels grows, but ramping up production in the near term will be difficult.

Industry group the Clean Fuels Alliance America said the move could hurt biofuel producers, even though US biodiesel and renewable diesel producers don't use palm oil, as supplies of all oils are tight.

"Sky would be the limit for edible oil prices now. Buyers were banking on palm oil after sunoil supplies fell because of the Ukraine war", a Mumbai-based dealer at a global trading firm said. "Now they (buyers) don't have any option as soy oil supplies are also limited." — Reuters

Germany's economy to contract under Russian gas embargo

BERLIN: An embargo on Russian natural gas could cause Germany's economic output to drop as much as 5% this year, the Bundesbank warned, potentially driving the country into a recession while further pushing up already high consumer prices.

The central bank's predictions, largely in line with those of several economic institutes, also serve as a warning of the danger Europe's largest economy could face if Russia decides to cut off gas exports to Europe.

The central bank said that its predictions were couched in uncertainty, given the unpredictable nature of the crisis surrounding Russia's war in Ukraine. But its economic modelling showed that cutting off Russian natural gas, which before the war accounted for 55% of Germany's total supplies,

would cause gross domestic product for the year to shrink by 2%, instead of growing by 3%.

"Natural gas prices are likely to rise the most, as Russian deliveries are difficult to replace in the short-term", the bank said. Roughly one-third of all natural gas is used for industrial production, including steel and chemicals.

The IMF warned that the war in Ukraine would drag down the eurozone economy. It downgraded its forecast of economic growth to 2.8% from the 3.9% it had predicted in January. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen also warned that a ban on Russian gas could have a "counterintuitive" effect and harm Europe's economy more than Russia's by driving up the global price of fuel.

— The New York Times



A man works at a car assembly line in Wolfsburg, Germany. — AFP

Britain's steelmakers scorched by white-hot power prices

ENGLAND: Steel boss James Brand raises his voice above the roar of metal being funnelled into a foundry furnace as he details how rampant costs have pushed him to raise his prices by 70%.

Yet he says that, despite this hefty hike, his customers in sectors including oil and gas, autos and construction are placing new orders at a record-breaking gallop. His order book has ballooned from the usual 4-6 weeks to 6 months.

Those clients anticipate further price rises at a time when the cost of pig iron and scrap metal is going through the roof, fuelled by the Ukraine war, and the vast amount of energy needed to melt the two inputs into cast iron has never been more expensive.

"With raw materials and costs escalating, customers are thinking, 'If I don't buy now, in two months it will be even more expensive'",

Brand said amid the heat, dust and hubbub of United Cast Bar's (UCB) factory in a part of northern England that once powered the Industrial Revolution.

"People are placing orders ahead, to try and fix as many costs as they can." Having once struggled to increase prices at all, UCB is now reviewing them every month and gradually marking them up, extra costs that will seep into global production lines, further stoking inflation and a consumer cost-of-living crisis.

Yet Brand said despite the price rises, the pressures were still building on the business. Without giving full financial details, he said UCB's gross margin had dropped by about 6%. Similar problems are being felt by steelmakers and other industrial companies across Europe.

They're caused by rocketing



A worker cuts newly manufactured bars of steel at a foundry in Chesterfield, Britain. — Reuters

power prices, driven by a supply squeeze, as well as ongoing Covid disruption and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The situation is particularly acute in Britain, though. The steel industry there faces electricity prices that are 50-60% above those faced by peers in Germany and France due to environmental policies, a reliance on gas, as well as power transmission and carbon permit costs above those in Europe.

This spells trouble for companies like UCB, which devours power for its two 8-tonne electric-induction furnaces, which reach over 1,400 degrees Celsius to melt the scrap and pig iron, before the molten metal is poured into a receiver to cast into the desired shape and cool, ready to go to the US, Australia, New Zealand or within UK.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BRUSSELS

EU sets new online rules to curb illegal content

Alphabet unit Google, Meta and other large online platforms will have to do more to tackle illegal content or risk hefty fines under new Internet rules agreed between European Union countries and EU lawmakers.

The agreement came after more than 16 hours of negotiations. The Digital Services Act is the second prong of EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager's strategy to rein US tech giants.



Last month, she won backing from the EU and lawmakers for landmark rules called the Digital Markets Act that could tech giants to change their core business practices in Europe.

BEIJING

China should act to boost growth over 5%

China should take steps to soften the economic impact of Covid-19 and boost annual economic growth back above 5%, a top central bank official said on Sunday.

Wang Yiming, a member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the People's Bank of China, told an economic forum the effective management of macroeconomic policies was critical in laying the foundation for the country to achieve the national growth

target of around 5.5%.

Gross domestic product rose 4.8% in the first quarter from the same period last year.

Beijing should "actively and effectively" expand domestic demand, stabilise the country's industrial supply chains and manage market expectations, Wang said. His comments come as Shanghai — China's most populous city and most important economic hub — battles the country's biggest Covid outbreak.

OSLO

Norway's wealth fund to support Bayer management

Norway's \$1.3 trillion wealth fund will vote next week to support top management at German drug and farm products maker Bayer AG, but will vote against the remuneration package of CEO Werner Baumann, it said on Sunday.

Shareholders will vote on April 29 at Bayer's annual general meeting on whether or not to ratify the executive board's business conduct during 2021, a standard



procedure at German AGMs. The Norwegian fund owned 2.27% of Bayer's shares at the end of 2021, valued at \$1.19 billion, making it the company's fifth largest shareholder.

Egypt gig economy workers face rough ride

Young men on bikes and scooters zip through Cairo, Egypt’s sprawling megalopolis, dodging cars to deliver more than a million orders each day, with little physical or legal protection.

Egypt’s digital gig economy is growing, as economic pressures push more of its key demographic — educated, urban youth — into the work-on-demand model.

Engineer Mohamed Sherif, 37, joined online food ordering company Talabat as a bicycle courier in Alexandria three months ago because he couldn’t find a job. “They bleed you dry left and right, but there’s nothing else to do”, he said.

In early April, Talabat couriers called a two-day strike to demand higher wages, with only a fraction of the 12,000 workforce joining.

The work stoppage reflected, however, the state of Egypt’s sizeable, app-based gig economy.

Inflation has climbed to a three-year high of 12.1 per cent while the Egyptian pound plunged to 18 per cent of its value.

The mounting economic hardships come as global commodity prices have soared following Russia’s war in Ukraine.

In Egypt, where 60 per cent of the 103-million-strong population are under 30 and 14.5 per cent of university graduates are unemployed, digital labour platforms have attracted 100,000-200,000 workers. Uber alone employed 90,000 drivers in 2019, all without contracts, insurance or social security.

Fairwork, a project by the University of Oxford, worked with the American University in Cairo to rate the working conditions of seven of Egypt’s largest digital labour platforms.

Uber, Talabat and grocery app Mongez scored one out of 10, while ridesharing start-up Swvl — which made headlines for its \$1.5 billion Nasdaq debut earlier this year — scored just three out of 10.

Omar Ramadan, whose home maintenance and cleaning services start-up FilKhedma rated highest at five out of 10, said working conditions are seldom discussed in the tech ecosystem. “It’s very rare to talk about how much we’re paying people, if this is fair or not, if we’re taking advantage of people’s vulnerability.”

A third of Egyptians live in poverty and nearly the same number are vulnerable to falling into poverty, the World Bank says. The average family’s monthly income is 6,000 EGP (\$325).

— AFP

Egypt’s digital gig economy is growing, as economic pressures push more of its key demographic — educated, urban youth — into the work-on-demand model.



PUMPED-KIN

A man carries a pumpkin for sale at a wholesale fruit and vegetables market in Lima. Peruvian food sector exports to the European Union in 2021 reached \$3,432 billion, growing by more than 13%. The main exports include fresh and dried avocados, unroasted coffee, blueberries, grapes and mangoes, among other products. — AFP

This inflation is demand-driven



JASON FURMAN

The author, a former chair of president Barack Obama’s Council of “Economic Advisers, is professor of the Practice of Economic Policy at Harvard University’s John F Kennedy School of Government and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics

TO BE SURE, INFLATIONARY PRESSURES REFLECT BOTH SUPPLY AND DEMAND FACTORS, THE EXACT COMBINATION OF WHICH IS UNKNOWNABLE.

Commentators have generally offered two arguments about advanced economies’ performance since Covid-19 struck, only one of which can be true. The first is that the economic rebound has been surprisingly rapid, outpacing what forecasters expected and setting this recovery apart from the aftermath of previous recessions.

The second argument is that inflation has reached its recent heights because of unexpected supply-side developments, including supply-chain issues like semiconductor shortages, an unexpectedly persistent shift from services to goods consumption, a lag in people’s return to the workforce and the persistence of the virus.

The first argument is more likely to be true than the second. Strong real (inflation-adjusted) GDP growth suggests that economic activity has not been significantly hampered by supply issues, and that the recent inflation is mostly driven by demand. Moreover, there is reason to expect demand to remain very strong, which means that inflation will persist.

To be sure, inflationary pressures reflect both supply and demand factors, the exact combination of which is unknowable. But when considering the economy as a whole, it is implausible that all the individual supply stories would add up to the generalised inflation we have seen. It is far more likely that the increase in demand exceeds what the economy can produce, leading to higher prices.

By definition, price growth equals the growth of nominal output minus the growth of real output (with a small difference due to compounding).

Over the course of 2021, US real GDP grew by 5.5 per cent, nominal GDP grew by around 11.5 per cent, and GDP price growth thus came in at around 5.9 per cent. For the OECD as a whole, real GDP growth was slightly lower, at 4.9 per cent and nominal GDP growth was 10.4 per cent, yielding 5.2 per cent GDP price inflation.

Recall that policymakers largely protected or increased disposable personal income at a time when consumption possibilities were constrained (through most of 2020).

If one considers these excess savings alongside the persistence of low interest rates through most of 2021, a rising stock market, pent-up demand, and additional fiscal support, the magnitude of the increase in nominal GDP is not particularly surprising.

In the United States, discretionary fiscal stimulus totaled \$2 trillion in the 2021 calendar year, but nominal GDP was only \$1.6 trillion higher than it was in 2019. If anything, the surprise is that nominal spending was so constrained, and that saving rates remained so elevated.

What about real GDP? Here, we need to remember that all the supply-side stories are different ways of saying that real output was constrained. According to one common story, consumption shifted from services to goods, and, because goods production

is less responsive to market changes (more “inelastic”), it could not expand quickly enough.

Another story is that labour supply was constrained by the pandemic and the policy response (owing to weaknesses in labour supply in the US, and to reductions in hours worked in Europe). And still other stories focus on particular markets, like the reduction in microchip production or the snarling of US ports.

The problem with these accounts is not that they are false; it is that they miss the most important story in economies that have also experienced surprisingly strong real GDP growth.

Major economies have enjoyed faster recoveries than they did in the wake of the global financial crisis. In fact, the recovery in most countries was more V-shaped than anything we have seen in decades. Growth in 2021 greatly outpaced what forecasters had expected at the end of 2020, when forecasters were already optimistic about Covid-19 being eliminated.

Overall, the US economy grew 1.6 per cent annually from the end of 2019 to the end of 2021, which is only slightly lower than previous estimates of the economy’s potential. That is an amazing accomplishment considering all the headwinds that have reduced potential GDP: Lower immigration, premature deaths, reduced capital formation and the hysteresis associated with high unemployment.

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Growth slowdown fears temper bullishness on currencies

SUJATA RAO

After huge rallies fed by blockbuster commodity price surges, the tide may be turning for currencies such as the Aussie dollar and Colombian peso as fears of a global growth slowdown take hold in markets.

As inflation and higher borrowing costs crimp business and consumer spending, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank this week slashed global growth forecasts by nearly a percentage point and flagged the risk of further drops stemming from China’s Covid lockdowns and sanctions on Russia.

The warnings knocked prices

of oil and metals, though tight supply of most commodities has so far capped losses. Brent crude futures remain above \$100 a barrel while the Refinitiv CRB commodity index is still up nearly a quarter this year.

Eight of the top 30 currency performers this year in a group monitored by Societe Generale are commodity-linked. In a smaller G10 grouping, four of the top five are from commodity exporting countries.

Societe Generale strategist Kenneth Broux reckons however, that the rally is “running on fumes” with a big test for commodity currencies coming from US real yields — or inflation-adjusted 10-year Treasury yields — turning positive this week

for the first time in two years. Central banks are also polishing their hawkish credentials, especially the US Federal Reserve.

A BofA investor survey this week predicted the Fed would hike rates more than seven times this year, up from four times in a March survey.

Anticipation of the resulting growth slowdown may be already taking the edge off commodities and commodity currencies such as the Australian dollar, which rose 10% versus the greenback between end-January and late-March.

The Brazilian real has gained 18% this year and the Colombian peso 8%. “Long Latin American energy exporters and short Asian

importers” has been this year’s most concentrated foreign exchange trade, the head of a US bank’s currency desk said.

April has brought a turnaround, however. The Chilean peso for example, has shed almost half its first-quarter gains as copper prices ease, while signs of a Chinese slowdown have weighed on the Aussie and Kiwi dollars.

Morgan Stanley’s proprietary FX positioning tracker, calculated off client option market positions, reflects the shift, said James Lord, the bank’s global head of foreign exchange.

“Usually exchange rates tend to be very correlated and tend to go in the same direction, but we have seen a huge decoupling between commodity exporting

and importing currencies since the start of the year”, Lord said.

On Morgan Stanley’s scale of minus 100 to plus 100, where 0 is neutral, positioning on commodity currencies reached 75 in March, the highest according to data going back to 2014. The score has since eased, albeit to a still-bullish 62.

“Commodity exporters’ currencies may start to weaken from here because global growth is slowing”, Lord said, noting that extreme positioning means there were “a lot of flows that can go the other way”.

The catalyst could be China. The yuan, crucial to the trajectory of commodities, has fallen to a two-month low against a basket of currencies.

With swathes of China under Covid lockdowns, a gauge of hedge fund positioning compiled by the US CFTC shows a sharp decline in Aussie dollar net longs — currently \$2.1 billion versus six-year highs of about \$6.5 billion in January.

Brazilian real net longs have held up better, though they too are off early March’s record highs of nearly \$1 billion. Hedge funds have also stopped buying the Kiwi and the Canadian dollar.

If growth does slow sharply, currencies’ exalted valuations will be hard to justify — the Norwegian crown’s value on a trade-weighted basis is near its highest, relative to its median value, for the last 50 years.

— Reuters



The festive and eventful celebration of Ramadhan in China

By Kabeer Yousuf

Ramadhan in China is celebrated with the same passion and divinity just like everywhere else in the world. Ramadhan and Eid al Fitr are celebrated by Muslim ethnic groups such as Uygur, Hui, Kazak, Uzbek, Tajik, Tatar, Kirgiz, Sala, Dongxiang and Bonan. While there might be different groups, Chinese Ramadhan begins with the moon sighting. After the sunset, some people go to

different areas where they will have good access to viewing the moon which is an integral part of the celebration. Some prefer valleys with an unobstructed view of the skies. Once the crescent moon is sighted, the month of Ramadhan officially starts. On the 27th day of Ramadhan, Laylat-ul-Qadr, which is one of the most powerful nights in Ramadhan and is the night when the Holy Quran was sent down to mankind, people in China prepare some delicious iftar meals and send them to the mosque for everyone to share. Some people also

invite others to eat iftar meals at home. Those with better economic conditions also hold banquets to entertain guests. After dinner, one can go to the mosque to pray and recite the Holy Quran. Some people prefer preparing some walnuts, melon seeds, peanuts or cooking some lamb bones at home. They will chat while eating and remain sleepless all night. In some areas of China, one can see beautiful decorations with lanterns at night and bring gifts to each other to celebrate the night. In some areas like Xinjiang, Ningxia and other ethnic minority areas, Eid al Fitr is a holiday. At the end of Ramadhan, before the Salat al Eid, the Zakat al Fitr is donated according to the number of members in the family. On Eid al Fitr, Muslims get up early, bathe and burn incense. All the adult males

go to the mosque to pray and listen to the sermons of the imam. This Fajr is the largest one of the year. During Eid al Fitr, each family prepares traditional food with ethnic flavours and characteristics, such as fried Sanzi, fried Youxiang (both of them made with flour), and boiled jam. At the same time, they also slaughter sheep, chickens, rabbits and make Liangfen (a Chinese traditional food consisting of starch jelly) and vegetable stew. Every household is stocked with abundant festive food, given to relatives, friends, and neighbours. During the festival, people will ignore past frictions, shake hands and make peace. They will sing and

dance to the music, there is joy and a festive mood everywhere. In China, Eid al Fitr has become a traditional cultural festival for all ethnic groups that believe in Islam. With the development of society, Eid al Fitr has also added a lot of new content. In addition to participating in traditional activities, various cultural and recreational activities will also be organised. In China, fasting by Muslims is a normal religious activity, which is carried out completely according to individual wishes, protected by law, and has never been interfered with by anyone. During Ramadhan, the Chinese government do carry out many measures to ensure a smooth and peaceful fasting period. They are watchful of food hygiene and make efforts to reduce traffic congestion to make sure smooth running of all activities during the month to promote national unity and social harmony.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the People of the Elephant? Did He not make their plan go wrong? He sent against them swarms of birds. Throwing at them rocks of baked clay. Leaving them like chewedup leaves.

Al Feel



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

FATWA

QUESTION:
A person who has been fasting in Oman is suddenly required to travel to the United Kingdom, where the fasting hours are much longer. At what time should he break his fast?

ANSWER:
The Almighty says: Eat and drink until the white thread you found from the black thread of dawn (Al Baqarah: 187). It means fasting time doesn't depend on the number of hours. He should be fasting before sunrise until sunset.

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Marwan ibn Salim al Muqaffa' said:

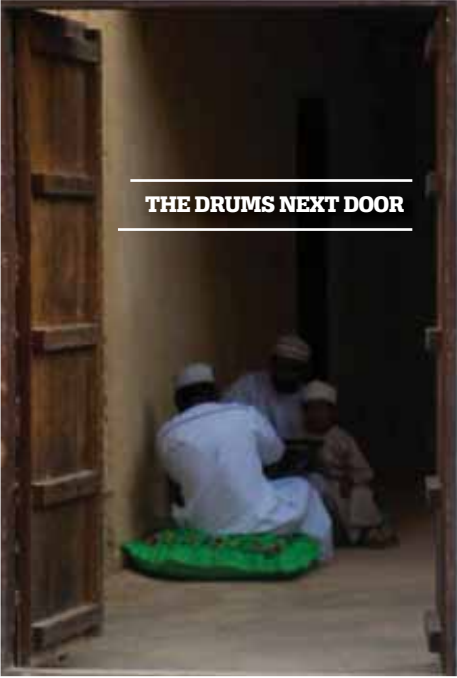
I saw Ibn Umar holding his beard with his hand and cutting what exceeded the handful of it. He (Ibn Umar) said that the Prophet said when he broke his fast: Thirst has gone, the arteries are moist, and the reward is sure, if Allah wills.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Salalah, Oman

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AROUND THE WORLD

ENVIRONMENT

Scientists to scour African waters to gauge ocean pollution



SCIENTISTS ON Saturday began a five-month mission to study how plastic pollution in Africa's main rivers and climate change stresses are impacting microorganisms in the Atlantic ocean, they announced.

The survey is being staged from the 33-year-old Tara research schooner which arrived in South Africa's Cape Town on Friday ahead of the expedition up the West African coast.

The researchers will analyse how nutrients and pollution in major African rivers - the Congo, Orange, Gambia and Senegal - are affecting the Atlantic.

They will trace the sources of plastic pollution at river mouths, to understand their distribution and the types of material involved.

The research station will also cast nets that can go up to 1,000 metres below the ocean's surface, to collect samples from ecosystems called "microbiomes", to be analysed in labs on land. The data gathered will help answer key questions about the world's oceans.

The researchers will also study the Benguela Current, which moves up from South Africa to the Namibian and Angolan coasts.

It pulls up cold water from the ocean depths in a process known as upwelling, bringing nutrients to the surface.

"You get more nutrients here than anywhere else in the world," Emma Rocke, a 42-year-old research fellow at the University of Cape Town, who is working on the vessel, told AFP.

"Understanding that, and characterising it at a microbiome level is something that hasn't been done really ever, and more importantly, it's not incorporated in climate change models".

She said the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports published so far don't consider the microbiome, "yet without it, ocean life would not exist".

Marine biologists will later study an upwelling current off the Senegalese coast, the world's third most powerful after Benguela and the Peru-Chile upwelling system.

The Tara vessel is on its 12th global mission and it involves 42 research institutions around the world.

Tara Ocean Foundation executive director Romain Trouble, 46, said that this is the first time the ship has traversed the West African coast.

"There's very little data on this kind of microbiome, microscopic species, in this ecosystem," he said.

University of Pretoria's microbial ecology and genome professor Thulani Makhalanyane, 37, will be focusing on the effect of agriculture and plastic pollution from African rivers.

"In coastal communities, we expect to see evidence of a high degree of pollution," said Makhalanyane. "We are also interested in other polluters that are perhaps not as well characterised, things like antibiotic resistance genes".

The vessel left its homeport of Lorient in France in December 2020 to embark on a 70,000-kilometre journey. Since then, it has traversed the coasts of Chile, Brazil and Argentina, as well as the Weddell Sea in Antarctica. — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

Iraq exhibits restored art pillaged after 2003 invasion



VERDANT LANDSCAPES, stylised portraits of peasant women, curved sculptures — an exhibition in Baghdad is allowing art aficionados to rediscover the pioneers of contemporary Iraqi art.

Around one hundred items are on display in the capital, returned and restored nearly two decades after they were looted.

Many of the works, including pieces by renowned artists Jawad Selim and Fayiq Hassan, disappeared in 2003 when museums and other institutions were pillaged in the chaos that followed the US-led invasion to topple dictator Saddam Hussein.

Thousands of pieces were stolen, and organised criminal networks often sold them outside Iraq.

Tracked down in Switzerland, the US, Qatar and neighbouring Jordan, sculptures and paintings dating between the 1940s and 1960s have been on display since late March at the Ministry of Culture, in a vast room that used to serve as a restaurant.

"These works are part of the history of contemporary art in Iraq," ministry official Fakher Mohamed said.

ARTISTIC RENAISSANCE

Pictures and sculptures were in 2003 spirited away from the Saddam Arts Centre, one of Baghdad's most prestigious cultural venues at the time.

While he crushed all political dissent, Saddam cultivated the image of a patron of the arts. The invasion and years of violence that followed ended a flourishing arts scene, particularly in Baghdad.

Now, relative stability has led to a fledgling artistic renaissance, including book fairs and concerts, of which the exhibition organised by the ministry is an example.

It helps recall a golden age when Baghdad was considered one of the Arab world's cultural capitals.

Among canvases of realist, surrealist or expressionist inspiration, a picturesque scene in shimmering colours shows a boat sailing in front of several "mudhif", the traditional reed dwellings found in Iraq's southern marshes.

Other paintings, in dark colours, depict terrified residents surrounded by corpses, fleeing a burning village.

Elsewhere, a woman is shown prostrate in a scene of destruction, kneeling in front of an arm protruding from stones.

There is also a wooden sculpture of a gazelle with undulating curves, and the "maternal statue" — a work by Jawad Selim that represents a woman with a slender neck and raised arms.

The latter, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, was rediscovered in a Baghdad district known for its antiques and second-hand goods shops. It was in the possession of a dealer unaware of its true value, according to sculptor Taha Wahib, who bought it for just \$200.

'PRICELESS WORKS'

Looters in some cases had taken pictures out of their frames, sometimes with cutters, to steal them more easily.

"Some pieces were damaged during the events of 2003 — or they were stored in poor conditions for many years," Mohamed, the culture ministry official, told AFP.

But "they were restored in record time," he said.

Other works are being held back for now, with some waiting to be restored — but they will be exhibited once more, Mohamed pledged. He wants to open more exhibition rooms to show the entire collection of recovered items.

"Museums must be open to the public — these works shouldn't remain imprisoned in warehouses," he said.

The 7,000 items stolen in 2003 included "priceless works", and about 2,300 have been returned to Iraq, according to exhibition curator Lamiaa al Jawari.

In 2004, she joined a committee of artists committed to retrieving the many stolen national treasures.

"Some have been recovered through official channels" including the Swiss Embassy, she said, but individuals also helped.

Authorities coordinate with Interpol and the last restitutions took place in 2021.

The selection on display will be changed from time to time, "to show visitors all this artistic heritage," Al Jawari said.

Ali al Najjar, an 82-year-old artist who has lived in Sweden the past 20 years, has been on holiday in his homeland.

He welcomed the exhibition.

"The pioneers are those who initiated Iraqi art. If we forget them, we lose our foundations" as a society, Najjar said. — AFP

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



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

UNDER THE SABLA'S SHADOWS

Akin to a consultative, cultural and educational council, the sabla played (and still does) a huge social role in Oman. It was the place where neighbours met on many occasions, where wedding contracts were announced and where guests were welcomed. The adults sat in regulated lines, while the youngsters in a corner. It was a particularly effective educational institution for the latter. Remaining silent unless asked by the elders to talk, they would take turns in enthusiastically serving the attendants with qahwa and water.

They would learn in the sabla both local principles and traditions and hear proverbs and accounts of their elders' tales, something that contributed to developing their personalities. No wonder you would see a child at an early stage of his life, probably before 14, rather sombre and serene, disciplined as to when he should listen and when he should talk, logical in his thinking and mature enough to take responsibility.

In those days, raising children was not an exclusively parental issue. Having the right to both direct and guide, or better still, to discipline any child who misbehaved, every man was like a father to all children. If a father was told that his child misbehaved and someone accordingly punished him, he would not hesitate to thank that person; he might even go so far as to further punish his child.

When I see the current generation, I wonder how they could digest the principles we lived by.

Not only raising children but other social responsibilities were communally shared. Honouring the guest, for example, wouldn't simply be the responsibility of the person whose house he entered; it would rather be the responsibility of all people, both those in the nearest home and those living farthest away. All would join together to welcome the guest and invite him in their homes. If he stopped eating, he would be asked to have more. The children would attend to his animal, feed it, give it water and lead it to an appropriate place. They would take the guest's gun from him as a gesture that he was safe, he was amidst hospitable people, and that he had no need for the gun. They would clean it and put it away in a safe place in the sabla.

People stood by each other in a genuine brotherly fashion. For example, if a farmer was harvesting any crop, all would help him wholeheartedly without expecting any pay. The farmer would provide them with food, usually qashe, small and dry fish, dates and sidaf, leaves of tree from valleys. If someone started building a house, they would all take part. If a dispute arose, it would be settled without resorting to court. Despite its limited resources, our society was a unified and coherent entity, one single extended family anchored by, first and foremost, revering the elders and respecting each other.

These experiences are what we present to today's generation and the succeeding ones. It is up to them to examine them and judge them in the manner they wish.

Ramadhan

Local Scene

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Oman in the eyes of an ophthalmologist

Kaushalendra Singh

The Sultanate of Oman is a country that keeps you well and treats you well. When you plan to leave even after many years of service, it forces you to think and re-think.

"This is a country with amazing peace and one of the most hospitable people on the earth", said Dr Mukund Nayak, who served the Sultanate of Oman as an ophthalmologist for 25 years.

He calls it a second home and a place that allowed him to live peacefully and respectfully. For the sake of his family compulsions, he is leaving the country by the month-end.

"My stay in Oman with my family all these years is memorable. Oman is a very peaceful place to live for all expats. That is why people from all corners

of the world live here comfortably without fear of any kind."

Muscat, for him, is beautiful, clean and picturesque. Ocean on one side and a series of mountains make it natural. It has its own beauty and texture well blended with culture and rich heritage.

Despite rapid progress, the Sultanate of Oman kept its natural beauty and heritage intact. The people are very friendly and helpful. I am sure, once you live here, it is very difficult to forget Oman, he says.

"For me, it is my 'Karma Bhoomi' (workplace), and India is my Janma Bhoomi (birth-place). I can comfortably say that I have had a remarkable and memorable journey of my life here.

Looking back, the experience has been satisfying and unparalleled. The country, its people, and its splendour has captivated us right from the beginning

and every minute of our stay here."

His profession gave him the unique opportunity to interact with Omani people. His wife, who is also a doctor and children too had a memorable stay.

"Being a doctor, I have seen the transition of old and conventional healthcare facilities to the state-of-the-art hospitals... I can say without a doubt that the whole country is a picnic spot with mountains, deserts, date palm gardens, fountains, calm and natural beaches, rich culture hospitality, friendliest people and above all, efficient maintenance of law and order."

While coming to the Sultanate of Oman 25 years ago, he had apprehension in his mind and hope in his heart. But while going back, he counts the years spent here as the most fulfilling professionally and personally.

"We are grateful to the kind and friendly people of this land

for allowing us to be of service to them and for the good times we had here. When we crossed the shores of India, we were quite immature and nervous... But now we return, more mature and confident. Nothing would have been possible without the help of our sponsors, colleagues, friends and our own clients. I also personally thank local newspapers for publishing my health-related articles quite often, which were quite informative and educative, according to my own clients."

He admits when he first came to Muscat, he never intended to stay so long. However, as time passed, he felt more at home with its peaceful atmosphere. He is not able to describe in a few words his real feelings of happiness while living in the country and the pain of leaving it.

"The Sultanate of Oman has a rare quality that only a very few

countries may have. It binds people together irrespective of nationality. It is a true example of 'the world being one family.' It creates a feeling of wanting to return now and then and bask in a warm embrace, just as a child wants to be reassured by the tight hug of a mother. In the Sultanate of Oman, we experienced the right atmosphere for nurturing relationships, be it a friendship or between family members", says Dr Mukund's wife Dr Thara Mukund.

"The able governance of the able rulers of this great nation has made all this possible. We, all expats, should be grateful to the rulers of this nation for giving us an opportunity to serve this wonderful land. I am leaving the Sultanate of Oman with a heavy heart. I have got love, affection and support across Omanis, colleagues and my friends", she says and wishes to come back again and again.