

HM greetings to Syrian President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and long life to President Assad, praying to Allah Almighty that the friendly Syrian people achieve their aspirations of stability, progress and prosperity. – **ONA**



P10

AL ORUBA
EARN OMANTEL
LEAGUE
PROMOTION



P15

CHINA'S ECONOMIC
GROWTH UNDER
THREAT
AS VIRUS TAKES HOLD



P19

'GREEN CITIES'
FOCUS OF
LARGEST DUTCH
GARDEN EXPO



MUSCAT

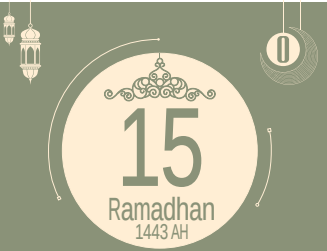
1,327 UNITS COLLECTED
AT MEGA BLOOD DRIVE

The Indian community donated a record total of 1,327 units of blood during the 'Mega Blood Donation Drive' organised during the Community Service Fortnight or 'Sewa Utsav' by the Embassy of India. The 'Sewa Utsav' was organised by the embassy with support of Indian community from March 31 to April 16 to commemorate 75 years of India's independence. The 'Mega Blood Donation Drive' was inaugurated on April 2 by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality. **DETAILS ON P3**

TUNIS

FUEL-LADEN SHIP
SINKS OFF TUNISIA

A tanker carrying 750 tonnes of diesel fuel from Egypt to Malta sank on Saturday off Tunisia's southeast coast, but officials said a large spill would likely be avoided. The crew of the 'Xelo' vessel had issued a distress call on Friday evening and sought shelter in Tunisian waters from bad weather before going down in the Gulf of Gabes in the morning, the authorities said. Environment Minister Leila Chikhaoui said the situation was "under control". **DETAILS ON P6**



15
Ramadhan
1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr
04:27 AM

dhuhr
12:12 PM

asr
03:39 PM

maghrib
06:34 PM

isha
07:47 PM

INSIDE



FIVE AFGHAN CHILDREN
DIE IN ROCKET ATTACKS

P6



JOE BIDEN'S SPRINGTIME
OF DISCONTENT

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Economy on solid path to recovery, says World Bank

MUSCAT: A new World Bank report on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states foresees a significant improvement in the Sultanate of Oman's fiscal and external positions in 2022, on the back of rising hydrocarbon production and non-oil revenues. At the same time, continued curbs on public expenditures are

anticipated to further strengthen the country's finances, it noted. The latest GCC Economic Update warns, nonetheless, of downside risks as well, notably, potential resurgent pandemic pressures, volatility in oil prices and slower implementation of the government's reform programme. "After a difficult 2020, the

Sultanate of Oman's economy is on a solid path to recovery amid the easing of pandemic pressures, higher hydrocarbon outputs and wide-ranging government reforms. Front-loaded fiscal reforms, including VAT and cuts in spending are expected to turn the country's fiscal and current account deficits into surpluses,

starting from 2022", the Washington DC-headquartered international financial institution stated. The report affirms that a 'gradual' recovery is under way as the Omani economy recoups from the "dual impact" of global pandemic and the associated collapse in oil prices.

Overall growth is estimated at 2.1 per cent in 2021, buttressed by a 2.2 per cent increase in hydrocarbon GDP, an uptick in oil production stemming from the easing of Opec+ curbs and the commissioning of a new Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) plant in Salalah. **DETAILS ON P13**



A SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE

There are five sea turtle nesting sites all over the Sultanate of Oman and one of them is in Muscat. In a highly urbanised city, one of the greatest challenges is how to protect the life cycle of these sea turtles despite developmental changes happening in areas around them. Mohammed al Hasani and Hassan al Qasbi perform an important role in making a seamless experience not just for sea turtles as they lay their eggs and the hatchlings head back to the sea but also to educate people on the life cycle of these gentle marine sea creatures. **DETAILS ON P20**

Ramadhan to occur twice in 2030

SAMUEL KUTTY
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Ramadhan will occur twice in 2030, first in January and then again in late December in the same year, astronomers have predicted. This phenomenon, according to Saudi astronomer Khaled al Zaqaq, is because the Islamic Hijri calendar is based on lunar cycles,

while the Gregorian calendar marks the Earth's passage around the sun. The twice-yearly observance earlier occurred in 1997 and after 2030, it is due to happen again in 2063. The disparity between the two calendars means that Ramadhan will fall twice in one Gregorian year roughly every 30 years, the astronomer said in a video posted

on his Twitter account. "The fasting month will fall twice that year, first in January and then again in late December", he said. In the year 1451 AH (Anno Hegirae), Ramadhan will begin on January 5, 2030, and in the year 1452 AH it begins on December 26, 2030, and this means that fasting will be for 36 days in the year 2030.

OMAN FLAYS
JERUSALEM
VIOLENCE

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman has condemned the arbitrary and illegal actions of Israel and its occupying forces in the Palestinian territories. A statement posted on the Foreign Ministry's Twitter account said: "Their attack on the sacred places of Al Aqsa mosque and Al Haram Al Sharif, on unarmed and wholly innocent worshippers, is a flagrant violation of international law and a grave provocation for Muslims around the world. The international community must shoulder its responsibilities by promoting justice and law, by ending the occupation and achieving peace

people were wounded in clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police in Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque compound. The clashes come after three weeks of deadly violence in Israel and the occupied West Bank, and as the Jewish festival of Passover and Christian Easter overlap with the holy month of Ramadhan. "We call on all sides to exercise restraint (and) avoid provocative actions and rhetoric", State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement. "We urge Palestinian and Israeli officials to work cooperatively to lower tensions and ensure the safety of everyone."

The European Union is following violence at Temple Mount near the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem with "deep concern", EU foreign affairs spokesperson Peter Stano said. — **Agencies**

Al Bustan Palace is world's ninth most luxurious hotel

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Sultanate of Oman has bagged a prestigious title for having one of the most luxurious hotel stays in the world, according to a new research. The presidential suite with sea view at Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Muscat, stood as the ninth most luxurious hotel room in the world, costing a massive £4,619 per night. Two Italian hotels and three Middle Eastern hotels have featured among the world's top 10 most expensive hotels. The research carried out by



Sleepseeker looked into the cost of rooms around the world to reveal where the world's most expensive and luxurious hotel rooms are located. According to the research, the most expensive hotel room in the world is the Royal two-bedroom suite at the Raffles Makkah Palace in Mecca. It will cost travellers a whopping £15,232 per night. What makes it to be the most costliest is that it features view of the Holy Kaaba, Islam's most sacred site. The second most expensive hotel room in the world is the Royal suite with King Bed at the Four Seasons Hotel Firenze in Florence, costing £13,450 a night.

The third most expensive hotel room in the world is the Deluxe Double Room with spa bath at the Hotel Relais Orso in Rome, costing £10,481 per night. "The most important thing to consider when you're travelling is how well you're going to be looked after. Leisure travel largely depends upon the guest's choice which varies from having his/her own personal concierge and complimentary drinks to sleeping under the most comfortable duvets. And there's no better way to achieve this than staying in the most luxurious hotel room you can find", a representative from the Sleepseeker said.



Aerial spraying campaign against date palm pests begins in Dhank



DHANK: The aerial spraying campaign to combat the dubas palm bug began in the Wilayat of Dhank in the Al Dhahirah Governorate on Saturday. The campaign is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in a number of wilayats.

The campaign aims to reduce the spread of the dubas bug in farms and preserve palm trees and their products, given the importance of the palm in the food and economic aspects.

Every year, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources' prevention apparatus prepares a project to combat the dubas bug in the Sultanate of Oman. The project aims to protect palm trees from the dubas bug which the ordinary farmer cannot resist with his own effort. — ONA

Several regional airlines to add flights to Salalah



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Salalah Airport achieved a growth in the number of arriving passengers in the first quarter of this year by 89 per cent and departing passengers by 72 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Salim bin Awad al Yafei, Executive Vice-President of Salalah Airport, said that Oman airports have implemented all precautionary measures issued by the concerned authorities, which allowed the gradual return of passengers and aircraft movement.

He said Salalah Airport will receive, on April 29, the first direct flights of the Wizz Air, 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



Salim bin Awad al Yafei

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, 2022.

Flynas will operate three 3 flights per week between June 2 and August 30 from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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.

Salalah Airport achieved three global ratings during the year 2021/2022 from the Airports Council International, which included the best airport for hygiene standards in the region in 2020 and the third place for the quality of airport services in 2021.

Al Yafei said Oman Air and SalamAir have also increased daily flights, in addition to charter flights from some European countries that operate annually in the winter season at the rate of two services a week.

Phishing scammers resurface with new tricks

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Scammers have resurfaced with text messages or phone calls to bank customers warning that their accounts have been blocked in order to gather their debit card information. A dangerous scam ever, fraudsters also offer their services for replacing the bank cards with new ones, which they claim have special and distinct features.

As the new scam started doing the rounds, citizens and residents have reported about messages they have been receiving from unknown numbers informing them about their ATM card being blocked.

“Dear customer, your ATM card has been blocked because you did not have an update yet. If you want your ATM card to work properly, contact us at this number...” The sender also provides a phone number for contact.

John Mathew got a text message on his phone last week and immediately worried because this account was being “blocked for suspicious activity”.

“It was terrifying to hear that my bank was going to be locked,”

said John, a marketing executive, adding, “I always used my card for almost everything.”

Last week, the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations Department of the Royal Oman Police arrested one person for violating the banking laws in the country.

According to the ROP, its research and investigation team monitored an advertisement on a social media platform that offered services for replacing bank cards and including additional features in return for a sum of change.

In a poster in its twitter handle, the ROP warned the public to be wary of the fraudulent messages and asked them not to respond to suspicious advertisements on social media platforms and messages sent from unsolicited phone numbers.

“Fraudsters may steal data from your information and use it for purchases or cash withdrawal from your bank accounts. Beware of opening websites that are linked to an e-mail or text messages following a spate of scam messages doing the rounds in the Sultanate of Oman,” the ROP warns.

Cardholders are asked to provide their personal card

information — full card number, expiration date, security code on the back of the card, and their PIN. The fraudster then tells the customer they will receive a code via text message on their phone, and they are to give that code to the fraudster.

The Central Bank of Oman and other commercial banks continuously alert citizens and residents to be on their guard against such messages being sent via social networking sites.

“Dear Customer, the bank will never ask you for PIN, OTP, CVV, Card Number, account details, or password over the phone, SMS, WhatsApp, or a web link. Never share your banking details with anyone, and do not respond by calling unknown numbers,” said an alert from a leading bank.

Cases of electronic fraud have been increasing globally over the past few years and often cause tremendous financial and psychological harm to both individuals and businesses alike.

The banks operating in Oman do not use social networking sites to contact individuals or businesses and remind customers always to protect their confidential information.

■ LIVELY RAMADHAN ATMOSPHERE IN MUSCAT



An Egyptian dancer performs the traditional Tannoora dance at a restaurant in Muscat during the holy month of Ramadhan.
— AFP



New projects in industrial cities up 3.4%

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) received 325 requests for investment, 252 of which were signed for various industrial, service and commercial activities in 2021.

The number of new projects in the industrial sector is 106. The total number of projects in the cities affiliated with Madayn registered a growth of 3.4 per cent, bringing the total number of projects to 2,255.

The number of national cadres in these projects reached 21,124, with an Omanisation rate of 38 per cent in 2021 compared to 37 per cent in 2020

There has been an increase in the volume of investments by RO 108.39 million, with a growth rate of up to 1.6 per cent compared to 2020, where the Suhar Industrial City managed to attract more than RO 37 million in 2021.

The total investments in the industrial cities of Sur and Samayil exceed RO 18 million.

OCCUPANCY RATE

On the other hand, Madayn achieved growth after several new cities came under its umbrella. Investments Rusayl, Suhar, Raysut, Sur, Nizwa, Al Buraimi, Samayil, Ibri, and Mahas, in addition to the Free Zone in Al Mazyona and the Knowledge Oasis Muscat, exceeded 132 sq m, and thus the

The number of national cadres in these projects reached 21,124, with an Omanisation rate of 38 per cent in 2021 compared to 37 per cent in 2020

total rentable areas in these cities reached of 89.9 million square metres in 2021.

The occupancy rate in the Rusayl Industrial City reached 96 per cent, while it is 99 per cent in the Raysut Industrial City.

In 2021, the industrial cities issued 1,035 licenses, 383 permits, and 104 engineering plans.

Several incentives to enhance investment opportunities in the industrial cities in Buraimi, Ibri, Al Mudhaibi, Thamrait included an exemption from the rental value for a period of two years for all new projects, followed by a reduction in the rental value for a period of three years at a rate of 50 per cent for contracts during the period from 2021-2024, as well as reducing all other fees listed in the investment regulation by 50 per cent for all new projects during the period 2021-2024, in addition to reducing licensing fees for information technology at a rate of 50 per cent for a period of two years during the period from January 1, 2021 - until December 31, 2022, for existing and new projects in the Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

Significant increase seen in farmed fin fish production



MUSCAT: Blue Waters, a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), saw a significant increase in its sales of farmed fin fish in 2021, registering 1,350 tonnes, an increase of 27 per cent compared to the same period the previous year. The company said it is targeting an output of 2,350 tonnes this year.

Eng Nabil bin Salem al Ruwaidi, CEO, Blue Waters, said that the company aims to increase its production capacity of the existing floating cage farm in the Wilayat of Qurayat to 5,000 tonnes over the next three years. This is part of its

The company aims to increase its production capacity of the existing floating cage farm in the Wilayat of Qurayat to 5,000 tonnes over the next three years

ENG NABIL BIN SALEM AL RUWAIDI
CEO, Blue Waters

expansion plans and its vision to advance the fish farming industry in the Sultanate of Oman to meet the increasing demand for fish in the GCC countries. He explained that the company's products have been very popular with consumers across the Gulf region because of their high quality.

A number of projects associated with fish farming in the Wilayat of Qurayat were announced that would place the wilayat as home for the largest aquaculture projects in the Sultanate of Oman. He noted that a fish packaging factory and a complex of fodder stores are

currently under implementation at the fishing port in Qurayat. In the coming years, a fish hatchery will be established in the Ramla area in Qurayat in addition to a specialised centre for the maintenance of floating cages in the Daghamar area.

Meanwhile, the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta accounted for 70.1 per cent of the Sultanate of Oman's production of fish during the year 2021 through artisanal fishing, and the production of the two governorates amounted to 646,734 tonnes of fish, crustaceans, mollusks. — ONA

1,327 units collected during mega blood donation drive

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

The Indian community donated a record total of 1,327 units of blood during the 'Mega Blood Donation Drive' organised during the Community Service Fortnight or 'Sewa Utsav' by the Embassy of India. The 'Sewa Utsav' was organised by the embassy with support of Indian community from March 31 to April 16 to commemorate 75 years of India's independence.

The 'Mega Blood Donation Drive' was inaugurated on April 2, 2022 by Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and was held in multiple cities of the Sultanate of Oman with the generous support of Ministry of Health.



The 'Mega Blood Donation Drive' was organised at the embassy premises and Bousher Blood Bank in Muscat on April 2 and April 9 to 15. The Indian Social Club (ISC) branches in Salalah, Suhar and Sur also took part in the mega blood

donation drives in the respective cities, which saw enthusiastic participation of the community members.

Ambassador Amit Narang commended the overwhelming support received from Indian

community in collecting record number of blood units to support the work of blood banks in the Sultanate of Oman. He thanked Ministry of Health officials, doctors, nurses, and support staff Dr Zainab al Araiimi and Mohsin

S al Sharyani for their tremendous support in organising the blood donation drive at Muscat.

The ambassador conveyed his appreciation to organisations such as BEC, Lulu, L&T, Jindal Shadeed, BLS, Al Turki, Al Ansari, Kihimji

Ramdas, Naranjee Hirjee & Al Nabha as well as members of Indian Social Club, Indian Schools, Sewa Muscat, Manav Seva International, Kerala Pravasi Association, Nanma Kasargod, Ambedkar International Mission, Sahaj Yoga, & Maru Nattil Malayalee Association in Oman for their stellar support in making the drive a success.

"This blood donation drive reflects the core Indian thought of 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' ie working for the welfare of others and is in line with the pious service-oriented spirit of the holy month of Ramadhan," he said and added that the extraordinary effort of the Indian community for blood donation showed their love for their Omani brothers and sisters and will go a long way in strengthening India-Oman friendship.



WANT TO EXPERIENCE RAMADHAN? TRAVEL



VINOD NAIR

[@vinot_nair](#)

Observing the holy month of Ramadhan is universal across all continents of the world, albeit in different styles, especially when it comes to iftar cuisines and celebrations at night.

For globe trotters, travelling during Ramadhan can be a memorable experience, especially because many Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt and the Maldives are popular tourist destinations.

According to sources in the travel industry, “Despite long fasting hours,

Ramadhan days are like any working day (except for the weekend). Muslims prefer to stay home, fast and have iftar with family and friends. This makes Ramadhan an off season for the travel industry, which in turn makes efforts to tempt potential clients with special promotions and discounted prices.”

While travelling during this month can be a worthy and learning experience, it also calls for the need to take extra caution because Ramadhan is culturally and sensitive in many societies when it comes to following traditions.

Rajesh Ghosh, a travel operator, based in the region, said, “People are

usually allowed to consume food and beverages at airports or on board a flight, but it is legally prohibited to do so in public.”

He added, “We advise our customers who take tour packages from us during Ramadhan to dress conservatively, not play music or eat, or drink in public.”

While travelling in a Muslim country, it is good to make note that the staff at customer services, taxi operators and hotel crews must be fasting like any local Muslim resident of that place. “It is absolutely necessary to be patient, polite, considerate and tolerant even if it is this duty to ensure the well-being of

their clients”, said Salim Kamal, who previously worked in the hospitality industry.

While flying, airlines provide meals during the flight hours, but it is necessary to ensure that there is no inconvenience caused to the passenger sitting next to you who must be fasting.

Ramadhan is still a month to visit places and experience the way it is followed in different cultures. “I personally feel non-Muslim travellers must visit places during Ramadhan to enjoy the true meaning of this holy month and how its message is conveyed in different cultures”, Gosh said.



Foreign transporters held for illegally operating in Sultanate of Oman

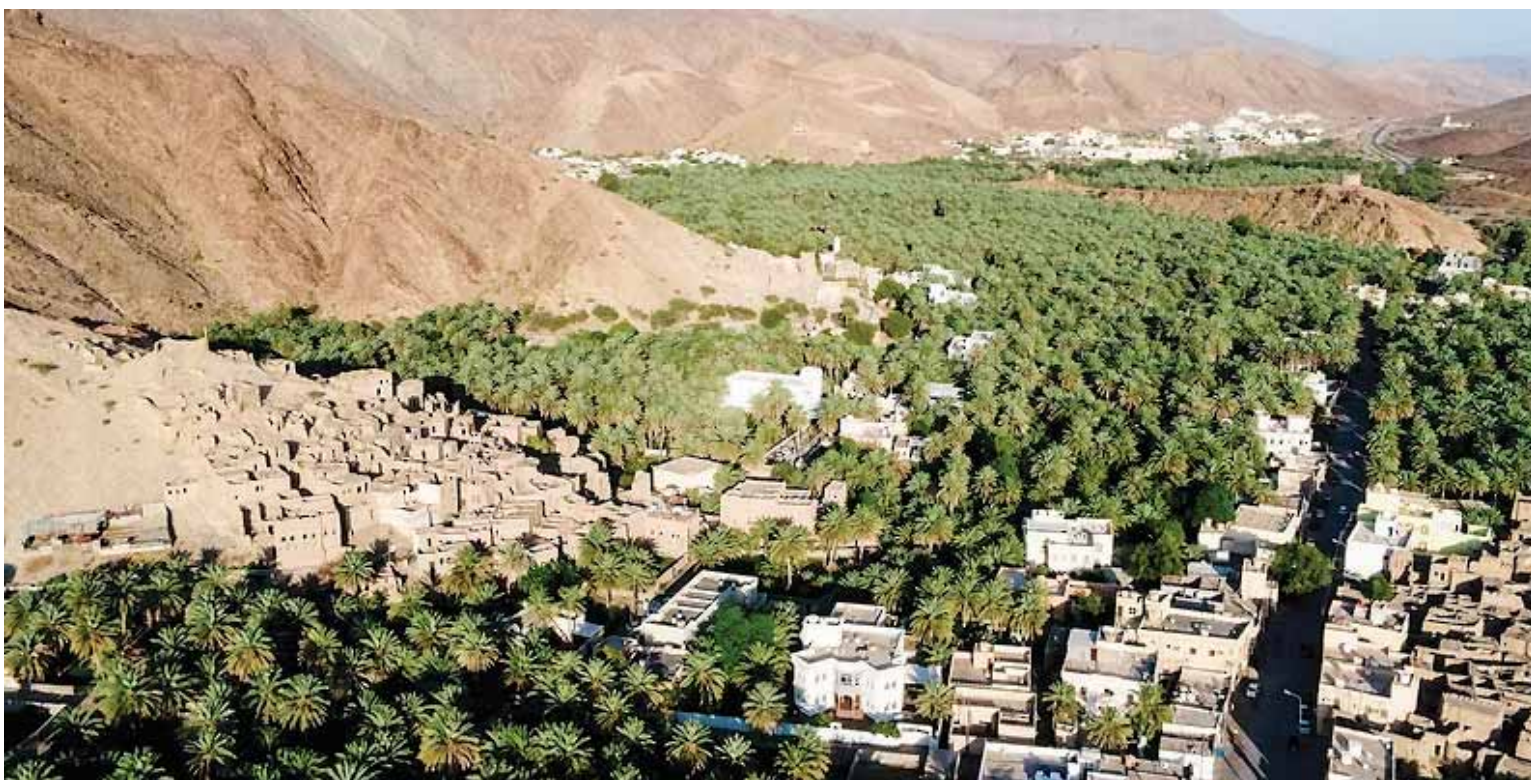
MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in cooperation with Royal Oman Police (ROP), has detected foreign means of land transport operating inside Omani and staying inside the country for periods longer than is permissible thereby violating the terms of the transit permit and the Land Transport Law.

The Ministry of Transport,

Communications and Information Technology advised companies and individuals involved in the land transport service in Oman, to get agreement with local land transporters.

The ministry affirmed that it will carry on with its inspection and campaigns on foreign means of land transport to ensure abidance by the law and regulations governing entry to Oman.

A GREEN OASIS



Birkat Al Mouz in the Wilayat of Nizwa in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is a place where the past and present coexist in harmony. Birkat Al Mouz is the gateway to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (The Green Mountain). It enjoys many unique landmarks, such as Bait Al Ridaydah Fort, Al Khatmeen Falaj 'ancient irrigation system' and several archaeological sites. – ONA

Iftar meals distributed to needy families

MUSCAT: As part of the knowledge-sharing platform commitment to giving back to society, Knowledge Oman in association with Malabar Gold & Diamonds have jointly collaborated to distribute Iftar meals and food provision kits to the needy families and homes in Al Amerat.

“We have engaged community members by collaborating with Malabar Gold & Diamonds to seek, identify and visit needy homes to distribute Iftar meals. The activity helps our members to learn about the values and impact of giving in a personal and professional capacity,” said Knowledge Oman President, Balqees al Hassani.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds have partnered with regional associations that include



embassies, and like-minded organisations in GCC and Far East to distribute Iftar meals and food provision kits to deserving labourers and

families. Knowledge Oman as part of its commitment to giving back during the month of Ramadhan has partnered with Malabar to jointly support

the mission.

As part of the Knowledge Oman giving back programme, Knowledge Oman has visited Sultan Qaboos University Hospital to distribute gifts to the patients, help set up children library in Muscat and Musannah, support the blind association with IT labs, donate gifts and spend time with the elderly at the Rustaq care home, distributing food during Ramadhan and supporting the International Volunteers Initiative from idea to launch.

“Giving is a blessing yet doing it during the blessed month of Ramadhan is a big bonus from God. We are honoured to partner with Malabar and deliver the noble mission together,” said Tariq al Barwani, Founder of Knowledge Oman.

Petrol, diesel production drops

MUSCAT: The total products of refineries and petroleum industries in the Sultanate of Oman decreased by 30.4 per cent by the end of February 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, according to statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The statistics showed that the production of ordinary car fuel M91 amounted to 1,558,200 barrels at the end of February, a decrease of 7.1 per cent compared to the end of February 2021, which amounted to 1,676,700 barrels.

The production of M95 fuel amounted to 1.7 million barrels, a decrease of 35.9 per cent compared to 2,680,700 during the same period in 2021.

The sales decreased by 16.6 per cent to reach 1,863,500 barrels, while exports amounted to 462,600 barrels at the end of February this year, a decline of 13.4 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

And the production of gas oil (diesel) witnessed a decrease of 39.1 per cent in February this year to reach 3,994,500 barrels, and its sales decreased 1 per cent to reach 2,47,500 barrels, and its exports decreased 58.1 per cent compared to the same period in 2021 to reach 2,878,400 barrels. – ONA



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (10/2022)

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/029	2022/MM/QS-14	RFP for Replacement & Maintenance of Network Switches (Phase 1) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	08/05/2022	26/05/2022	Excellent
PRE/22/025	2022/MM/QS-15	Supply and Installation of Playground Equipment and Outdoor Fitness Equipment in Public Parks (E- Tender)	Rial 25	08/05/2022	26/05/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/026	2022/MM/QS-16	RFP for Renewal of AMC for Muscat Municipality IT Infrastructure (E- Tender)	Rial 25	08/05/2022	26/05/2022	Specialist

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology
In AL Khuwair invites for the Following Tenders:

TENDER NO	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
29/2022/ MTCIT/HQ-7	SUPPORT RENEWAL OF BARRACUDA FOR G CLOUD	13/04/2022	25/04/2022	15/05/2022	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD IN SUPPLY (ALL GRADES)	(25/-) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL NON- REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with General Secretariat of the Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by local bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (1%) of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to (Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee).

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail : etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE

www.mtcit.gov.om

[@mtcitoman](https://www.mtcit.gov.om)

Renewed Russian strikes shatter Kyiv calm

KYIV, Ukraine: Russia stepped up air strikes on Kyiv on Saturday, killing at least one person at a tank factory a day after Moscow warned it would renew attacks following two weeks of relative calm in the Ukrainian capital.

Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said at least one person was killed and several wounded in the attack.

Smoke rose from the Darnytsky district in the southeast of the capital after what Moscow said were “high-precision long-range” strikes on the armaments plant.

“Our forces are doing everything possible to protect us, but the enemy is insidious and ruthless,” Klitschko said.

“It’s no secret that a Russian general recently said they were ready for missile attacks on the capital of Ukraine. And, as we see, they are carrying out such shelling.”

A heavy police and military presence was deployed around the factory, the day after a similar strike on a plant that produced the Neptune missiles Kyiv and Washington say sunk Russia’s Black Sea naval flagship on Thursday.

Russia, which used sea-based long-range missiles to hit the Vizar plant on Friday, says the Moskva missile cruiser sank while being towed back to port after ammunition exploded on board.

Amid escalating tit-for-tat sanctions since President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine on February 24, Russia on Saturday said it was banning entry



Smoke raises from an oil refinery in Lysychansk about 120km north of Donetsk, on Saturday. – AFP

to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and several other top UK officials.

“This step was taken as a response to London’s unbridled information and political campaign aimed at isolating Russia internationally, creating conditions for restricting our country and strangling the domestic economy,” the foreign

ministry said in a statement.

The ministry accused London of “unprecedented hostile actions”, in particular referring to sanctions on Russia’s senior officials, and “pumping the Kyiv regime with lethal weapons”.

SANCTIONS

Britain has been part of an international effort to punish Russia with asset freezes, travel

bans and economic sanctions, and Moscow’s new entry blacklist includes Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, and Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

Saturday’s strike on the Ukrainian capital was among the first since invading Russian forces began withdrawing from regions around Kyiv last month, instead

turning their focus on gaining control of the eastern Donbas region.

Kyiv regional governor Oleksandr Pavliuk said there were at least two other Russian strikes on the city on Friday and that civilians thinking about returning should “wait for quieter times”.

Residential areas of Kyiv were struck repeatedly at the beginning

40,000 more flee war: UN

GENEVA: Many of the nearly five million people who have fled Ukraine will not have homes to return to, the United Nations said on Saturday as another 40,000 fled the country in 24 hours.

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said 4,836,445 Ukrainians had left the country since the Russian invasion on February 24 — a number up 40,200 on Friday’s total.

The UN’s International Organization for Migration (IOM) says nearly 215,000 third-country nationals — largely students and migrant workers — have also escaped to neighbouring countries, meaning more than five million people in all have fled Ukraine since the war began.

of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Moscow has denied intentionally striking civilian infrastructure.

A Pentagon official said that the sinking of the Moskva, which had been leading Russia’s naval effort in the seven-week conflict, was a “big blow” for Moscow, while the fate of its crew of more than 500 was uncertain.

— AFP

Five Afghan children die in Pakistan rocket attacks: Officials

KABUL: At least five children and a woman were killed in an eastern Afghan province when the Pakistani military allegedly fired rockets along the border in a pre-dawn assault on Saturday, officials said.

Since the Taliban seized power last year in Afghanistan, border tensions between the neighbours have risen, with Pakistan claiming militant groups were carrying out attacks from Afghan soil.

The Taliban deny harbouring Pakistani militants, but are also infuriated by a fence Islamabad is erecting along their 2,700-kilometre border known as the Durand line, which was drawn up in colonial times.

An Afghan government official and a resident in the eastern Kunar province said Pakistani forces fired rockets early on Sat-



Demonstrators take part in a protest against Pakistani airstrikes in Khost Province, in Khost on Saturday. – AFP

urday that left six people dead.

“Five children and a woman were killed and a man wounded in Pakistani rocket attacks in Shelton district of Kunar,” provincial director of information Najibullah Hassan Abdaal said.

Ehsanullah, a resident of Shel-

ton district who goes by one name as many Afghans do, said the assault was carried out by Pakistani military aircraft. A similar pre-dawn assault was carried out in Afghanistan’s Khost province near the border, another Afghan government official said. — AFP

Fuel-laden ship sinks off Tunisia

TUNIS: A tanker carrying 750 tonnes of diesel fuel from Egypt to Malta sank on Saturday off Tunisia’s southeast coast, but officials said a large spill could be avoided.

The crew of the Xelo vessel had issued a distress call on Friday evening and sought shelter in Tunisian waters from bad weather before going down in the Gulf of Gabes in the morning, the authorities said. Environment Minister Leila Chikhaoui said on Saturday that “the situation is under control” in an interview aired on state television.

“There are minimal leaks, which are not even visible to the naked eye and fortunately the oil is evaporating, so there should not be a disaster in the Gulf of Gabes,” said Mohamed Karray, spokesman for a court in Gabes.

The spokesman had said earlier that the tanker carrying 750



tonnes of diesel had issued the distress call before it “sunk this morning in Tunisian territorial waters”.

The Equatorial Guinea-flagged Xelo was headed from the Egyptian port of Damietta to the European island of Malta when it requested entry to Tunisian waters.

The tanker is 58 metres (63 yards) long and nine metres wide, according to ship monitoring website vesseltracker.com.

It began taking water around seven kilometres (over four miles) offshore in the Gulf of Gabes and the engine room was engulfed, according to a Tunisian environment ministry statement.

It said Tunisian authorities evacuated the seven-member crew. Environment Minister Leila Chikhaoui was travelling to Gabes “to evaluate the situation... and to take necessary preventive decisions in coordination with the regional authorities”, a ministry statement said.

Authorities have activated “the national emergency plan for the prevention of marine pollution with the aim of bringing the situation under control and avoiding the spread of pollutants”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TRIPOLI

Six dead, 29 missing as migrant boat sinks

Six people were found dead and 29 are missing and presumed dead after their boat capsized off the coast of Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said on Saturday.

A small wooden boat carrying around 35 migrants capsized off Sabratha, #Libya yesterday,” the IOM tweeted.

“The bodies of six people have been retrieved while 29 others are missing and presumed dead. At least 53 migrants have been reported dead or missing off Lib-

ya this week alone.”

Libya, wracked by a decade of conflict and lawlessness, has become a key departure point for African and Asian migrants making desperate attempts to reach Europe.

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka halts share trading as protests spiral

Sri Lanka on Saturday announced a five-day share trading halt after the crisis-hit country hiked interest rates and declared a default on its external debt during the traditional New Year holiday, as trade unions and top cricket stars joined protests demanding the president’s resignation.

The move came ahead of Colombo’s planned talks with the International Monetary Fund in Washington on Monday to negotiate a bailout as the country

has run out of foreign exchange to finance even the most essential imports.

The island nation is grappling with its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948.

DURBAN

More rain lashes S Africa’s flood ravaged east

South Africa’s flood-ravaged east was hit by more rain on Saturday after the deadliest storm to strike the country in living memory killed nearly 400 people and left tens of thousands homeless.

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

Emergency services in the southeastern KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, where Durban

is located, were on high alert as weather forecasters predicted more rain over the weekend.

“The death toll has increased and currently stands at 398, with 27 people still missing,” said a government official.

Why Ukraine war crimes trials could take many years

RICK GLADSTONE AND FARNAZ FASSIHI

The brutalities of Russia’s war in Ukraine have stoked enormous demand among Ukrainians and much of the Western world for investigations, indictments, arrests and trials for the attackers and their commanders, notably President Vladimir Putin of Russia. Some leaders, including President Joe Biden, have even accused them of genocide.

The calls for accountability have pressed for prosecutions not only at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which was established precisely for such a purpose, but in other courts and even special war crimes tribunals that could be created specifically to put suspects on trial, like the proceedings against the Nazis who were judged at Nuremberg. And yet, despite the speedy collection of evidence in Ukraine and an outpouring of international co-operation to build criminal case files, the likelihood of any significant war crimes trials, much less convictions, could be years away — if they ever occur — especially for Putin.

Russian authorities have denied all responsibility for civilian killings and abuse, and Putin has falsely depicted the troves of evidence as fabricated smears.

“Everybody wants the war to stop, and save Ukraine immediate pain, and see the chief perpetrators in the dock,” said Leila Sadat, an international law professor at Washington University in St. Louis and an adviser to the International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor. “Unfortunately, that is not going to be quick.”

What, exactly, are war crimes?

They are actions by antagonists in armed conflicts that violate international agreements and treaties like the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which were designed to limit the barbarities of war and protect the lives and safety of non-combatants — civilians, medics, aid workers — as well as soldiers who can no longer fight, like prisoners, the wounded and the sick. It is a war crime, for example, to knowingly bomb a hospital, a school or a place where civilians are sheltering, or to kill enemy soldiers who have disarmed and surrendered.

What does the International Criminal Court do?

The court, established in 2002 under an international treaty known as the Rome Statute, was empowered by the countries that ratified the agreement to investigate and prosecute not only war crimes, but two arguably more sinister types of crimes: genocide — acts aimed at destroying a racial, religious, ethnic or national group — and crimes against humanity — acts including murder, enslavement, rape and other sexual abuse, torture, starvation, abduction and forcible displacement as part of a widespread, systematic attack.

In 2018, the court was empowered to investigate and prosecute a fourth type of crime: the crime of aggression, which prohibits the leaders of any country from “the planning, preparation, initiation or execution” of an attack on another country in violation of the United Nations Charter — in other words, making it illegal to attack another country. Although major restrictions were placed on the court that narrowed its jurisdiction in crime-of-aggression cases, legal scholars said it was the first time since the Nuremberg



Workers wearing protective gear exhume bodies at a site where civilians killed during Russian occupation were buried, on the grounds of the Church of Saint Andrew in Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv, recently, amid Russia's military war launched on Ukraine. — AFP

trials that an international tribunal had been empowered to try suspects for crimes against peace.

Why are many of these crimes difficult to prosecute and prove?

The circumstances of what constitutes a war crime can be fuzzy and disputed. The bombing of a hospital may appear to be an obvious war crime, but the attacker could argue that the bombing was unintentional, or that the building had been used by enemy troops, or that it had been storing weapons. Such assertions cannot be easily disproved in court. Just because civilians are killed in an armed conflict does not necessarily mean they were deliberately targeted.

Genocide convictions are even harder to attain because they require an especially high burden of proof. While the evidence may be there — mass graves, razed villages, witness testimony, intercepted communications — prosecutors must show that the defendants were committing atrocities with the intent to destroy a particular group. That essentially requires getting inside the minds of the perpetrators.

Jurisdiction is another issue. Only 126 countries have ratified the Rome Statute — meaning the International Criminal Court’s authority to prosecute is generally limited to those countries, which conspicuously do not include Russia or Ukraine (or the United States). Ukraine has granted the court jurisdiction to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, which can proceed without the need for Russia’s consent. But prosecuting the crime of aggression would require consent from Russia, the aggressor, which legal scholars say the Kremlin would never provide.

Moreover, trials at the International Criminal Court require the defendants to be present. The court has no power to enforce its arrest warrants. The likelihood that Russia

would extradite anyone to face such trials is extremely remote.

Have other national leaders been prosecuted for war crimes?

Yes, and those prosecutions took years. Slobodan Milosevic, the onetime leader of Serbia and Yugoslavia who presided over ethnic atrocities in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, was the first former head of state to be tried for war crimes, in 2002. He died in his cell in The Hague as his four-year trial in a special court drew to a close, before a verdict had been reached.

Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, was sentenced to 50 years in 2012 by a special court for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone during its civil war in the 1990s. Laurent Gbagbo, the former president of Ivory Coast, was acquitted at the International Criminal Court in 2019 of crimes against humanity and other charges related to violence that followed the country’s presidential election in 2010. The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Libya’s former leader, Moammar Gadhafi, in 2011 accusing him of crimes against humanity, but he was killed that October in Libya.

Former president Omar al Bashir of Sudan has been wanted for many years by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide and war crimes in the Darfur region, but he has not been extradited by Sudan’s transitional government.

In 2018, a special UN-backed tribunal in Cambodia found that the Khmer Rouge had committed genocide during its notorious rule four decades earlier, and the tribunal issued guilty verdicts against the two most senior surviving members of the regime, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan.

Military memo deepens possible interstellar meteor mystery

JOEY ROULETTE

In early 2014, a dishwasher-size meteor dashed over the shores of Papua New Guinea before sunrise as it burned up in the fiery friction of Earth’s atmosphere. But two Harvard researchers argued that this wasn’t just any space rock: It originated from another star system, they said, making it the first observed meteor of interstellar origin. They wrote up the extraordinary claim and submitted it to an astronomy journal. But the paper was not accepted for publication. Reviewers noted a lack of sufficient detail to verify the claim about the fireball in the published data, which came from a Nasa database and relied on readings that were obscured because they were from US intelligence community satellites and could reveal how the military monitors missile launches.

“We had thought this was a lost cause,” said one of the researchers, Amir Siraj, a Harvard undergraduate student studying astrophysics. Without the more thorough data, he conceded, it was difficult “to figure out whether the object was truly interstellar or not.”

But, it turned out, the truth was out there. Last month, the US Space Command released a memo to Nasa scientists that stated the data from the missile warning satellites’ sensors “was sufficiently accurate to indicate an interstellar trajectory” for the meteor. The publication of the memo was the culmination of a three-year effort by Siraj and a well-known Harvard astronomer, Avi Loeb.

Many scientists, including those at Nasa, say that the

military still has not released enough data to confirm the interstellar origins of the space rock, and a spokesperson said Space Command would defer to other authorities on the question. But it wasn’t the only information about meteors to be released. The military also handed Nasa decades of secret military data on the brightness of hundreds of other fireballs, or bolides.

“It’s an unusual degree of visibility of a set of data coming from that world,” said Matt Daniels, assistant director for space security at the White House’s Office of Science and Technology Policy, who worked on the data release. “We’re in this renewed period of excitement and activity in space programmes generally, and in the midst of that, I think thoughtful leaders in multiple places said, ‘you know, now is a good time to do this.’”

In recent years, a pair of objects that passed through our immediate stellar neighbourhood drew considerable attention because they were confirmed to have originated outside the solar system. The first object was Oumuamua, a long, flat body that zoomed through the solar system in 2017. Loeb, one of the two who studied the 2014 meteorite, has also attracted attention and dispute by arguing that Oumuamua was technology sent by intelligent life. Other astronomers are still debating what kind of natural object it was. In 2019, Borisov, a comet roughly the size of the Eiffel Tower, became the second confirmed interstellar visitor. A piece of it broke off in 2020 after it rounded the sun.

While data from classified military satellites may not have aided the study of those interstellar visitors, they could



A Perseid meteor seen from the International Space Station.

Many scientists, including those at Nasa, say that the military still has not released enough data to confirm the interstellar origins of the space rock

help academic researchers study objects closer to Earth. They could also aid Nasa in its federally assigned role as defender of planet Earth from killer asteroids. And that is the goal of a new agreement with the US Space Force that aims to help Nasa’s Planetary Defence Coordination Office better understand what happens when space rocks reach the atmosphere.

Daniels played a key role in the Harvard researchers’ effort to clinch a public statement from Space Command. After getting rejected from The Astrophysical Journal Letters, a peer-reviewed scientific publication, Loeb said he contacted a colleague at Los Alamos National Lab who eventually connected him with Daniels. Daniels then brought up the meteor in a conversation with Space Command officials in 2020, which kick-started government efforts to make a public statement on the military satellite’s data about the purported interstellar meteor.

“I knew that this would be a challenge, and so it was an ongoing conversation for some time,” Daniels said.

Sharing sensitive military satellite data with astronomers has led to significant scientific discoveries in the past.

A group of satellites deployed in the 1960s by the United States to detect covert detonations of nuclear weapons on Earth accidentally became the key instruments used to make the first detection of extraterrestrial gamma ray bursts. The bursts showed up on the satellites, code-named Vela, as single bursts of energy, confusing analysts at Los Alamos who later declassified the data in a 1973 paper that spurred academic debate about the bursts’ origins.

Stop procrastinating and start working



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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Procrastination can have a negative impact on your mental and physical health, and here are a few tips on how to beat it.

A few weeks ago, I planned to go cycling as first thing in the morning, but reaching home from the mosque after fajr prayer and feeling the coldness of an air-conditioned room made me decide that it's too warm outside to cycle and it's better to go back to sleep saying I will cycle another day.

Procrastination is defined as “the act of delaying or postponing a task or set of tasks”. In other words, it is the force that prevents you from following through on what you set out to do. Procrastination is a common behaviour that we all do from time to time and for different reasons, but it can become a problem if we do it too often since keeping work to the last minutes and the risk of missing deadlines can cause stress. Such stress can

have negative consequences to mental and physical health.

A recent study reported that people with heart disease were more likely than healthy people to self-identify as procrastinators. The study also showed that procrastinators with hypertension and heart disease were less likely to change their lifestyle, eat healthy diet or exercise regularly.

According to psychologists, there are several reasons for procrastination, and some are related to the task ahead. For example, we are more likely to delay tasks we find difficult, unpleasant or boring but some time the reasons are related to feeling anxious or having low self-esteem which makes us doubt our abilities to complete the tasks. Yet some people enjoy the thrill of keeping tasks to that last minutes as they believe they work best under pressure.

So, what can we do to overcome

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procrastination?

Like addressing any unhealthy behaviour, the first step is admitting to yourself that you are a procrastinator, then trying to find out the best way to beat it. Remember that relying on willpower alone to address procrastination does not always

work, instead try to learn tips to manage the situation.

Psychologists suggest that instead of ignoring the unpleasant aspects of a task, try considering them to be an important part of achieving your goal. It will improve your motivation to start working. Other tips include looking at the positive aspects in the task you keep postponing instead of just focusing on the rewards that await you after completing the task, be it passing the exam or getting the promotion; and trying to find something good and enjoyable about the process itself such as learning new things or building wider social networks. Another tip is to plan well and break down big projects to small steps. Once you get started with these steps you are more likely to gain confidence and progress with the full task.

Being kind and compassionate towards oneself is also helpful since

procrastinators are often highly critical of themselves. Try telling yourself: “I’m not the first person to procrastinate, and I won’t be the last”.

Focus on doing your best, instead of worrying about what others think of you. If you tend to use social media when procrastinating, then limiting access to online news and social medial while working will help you focus on the task ahead. Keep your phone away when working and disable notifications from your laptop.

Set aside a special time to use your phone during your break but be mindful how long these breaks are.

Finally, remember that adapting new habits takes time and efforts so keep practising the tips above and see what works well for you. Remember to share it with others, so that we can all learn from each other.

Girls’ education ban reveals deep rifts within Taliban

JAY DESHMUKH AND SAJJAD TARAKZAI

The Taliban prohibition on girls’ education shows the movement’s ultra-conservatives retain tight control of the hardline group, and exposes a power struggle that puts at risk crucial aid for Afghanistan’s desperate population, experts say.

The ban has triggered international outrage and even left many in the Taliban movement baffled by the decision.

THE BAN HAS TRIGGERED INTERNATIONAL OUTRAGE AND EVEN LEFT MANY IN THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT BAFFLED BY THE DECISION

“The order was devastating,” a senior Taliban member said. “The supreme leader himself interfered.”

All Taliban officials who spoke to AFP on the subject did so on condition of anonymity, due to the sensitivity of the topic.

Secondary schools for girls were ordered to shut last month,

just hours after being reopened for the first time since the Taliban’s return to power in August.

The shocking U-turn came after a secret meeting of the group’s leadership in the city of Kandahar, the Taliban’s de facto power centre.

Officials have never justified the ban, apart from saying the education of girls must be according to “Islamic principles”.

But one senior Taliban official said that Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and some other senior figures were “ultra-conservative on this issue” and dominated the discussion. Two groups — the urban and the ultra-conservatives — have emerged in the movement, he said.

“The ultra-conservatives have won this round,” he added, referring to a group of clerics including Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Sharai, Minister for Religious Affairs Noor Mohammad Saqeb and Minister for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Mohammad Khalid Hanafi.

The clerics feel excluded from government decisions and voicing their opposition to girls’ education is one way to restore their influence, said Ashley Jackson, a London-based researcher who has worked extensively on Afghanistan.

She said the “outsized influence of this out-of-touch minority” has prevented the country from moving ahead with something the vast majority of Afghans favour — including much of the leadership.

“It shows that Kandahar remains the centre of gravity for Taliban politics,” said International Crisis Group analyst Graeme Smith. — AFP



Abdi Latif Dahir

The author is a NYT columnist

Tanzania’s first female president wants to bring her nation in from the cold



Tanzania ’s President Samia Suluhu Hassan listens to US Vice-President Kamala Harris (not in the picture) make a statement for the press before a meeting in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on Friday, in Washington, DC. – AFP

Shortly before midnight on a spring night last year, Samia Suluhu Hassan, then Tanzania’s first female vice-president, appeared on television to announce to a shocked nation that the president was dead.

President John Magufuli, an autocrat known as “The Bulldozer,” had denied that coronavirus existed in his country, rejected Covid vaccines and died after a weeks-long absence from public view amid unconfirmed reports that he had contracted the virus.

His death catapulted Hassan, 62, to a historic position as Tanzania’s first female president. Known as “Mama Samia,” she is currently the only female head of government in Africa. On Friday, she met in Washington with a fellow path-breaker, Kamala Harris, the first woman and first woman of colour to be vice-president of the United States.

Since taking office, Hassan has set off on a different path than her predecessor. She encouraged Covid vaccinations by publicly taking the shot herself, lifted a ban on pregnant girls in schools and began to amend some Magufuli-era economic regulations to lure back investors.

But her first challenge, Hassan said in an interview last week at the state house in the capital, Dodoma, was to overcome the notion that a woman could not lead Tanzania.

“Most of the people couldn’t believe that we can have a woman president and she can deliver,” Hassan said. “The challenge was to create a trust to the people that yes, I can do it.”

She said that other African female leaders — including Liberia’s first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Sahrle-Work Zewde, the president (though not head of government) of Ethiopia — quickly came to her support, urging her in a virtual meeting to remain confident, seek counsel and listen to her inner voice.

“They all gave me courage that you can do it,” said Hassan, who was fasting for the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan.

Since ascending to power in March last year, Hassan has positioned herself as a unifying national figure willing to challenge the establishment and bent on

bringing her country in from the cold after five years of isolationism under Magufuli, who rarely travelled abroad.

Tanzania, a nation of 60 million people that borders eight other countries in eastern, central and southern Africa, was long seen as a bulwark of stability in a region torn by ethnic strife and civil war.

But Hassan, who is expected to run for president in 2025, takes the helm of a polarised nation with a battered economy and growing unemployment, a slow pace of vaccine deployment and a growing clamour for constitutional overhauls.

In addition to meeting US officials during her trip to the United States, she is also set to court investors, seek assistance in improving public health partnerships and promote Tanzania as a vibrant tourist destination.

In Washington, one issue Hassan is likely to face is the war in Ukraine. Tanzania was among the African nations that abstained from the United Nations vote condemning the war — a move Hassan said was in line with Tanzania’s long-standing position of nonalignment.

Pushed on this, she said that in “Tanzania, we don’t know why they are fighting,” adding that Russia and Ukraine should sit down to talk.

“The world has to convince Putin not

to fight,” she said.

Hassan, who is soft-spoken and comes across as reserved, said that as vice-president, it was “tough” working with Magufuli at times, and that she argued with him on several issues, including his Covid denialism. She rebutted the idea that he had succumbed to Covid and said he had died of heart complications.

As president, she said, her main priority was to revive the economy, build thousands of schools and health clinics, extend clean water and electricity to rural areas and complete key infrastructure projects — including a railway line and a major hydropower plant. She said more than 250 new businesses had already been registered in the country last year.

Yet concerns have persisted about the pace of change under her government.

Over the past year, activists were abducted, two newspapers were temporarily suspended by the government and the main opposition leader, Freeman Mbowe, was jailed for several months on terrorism-related charges before his release. Political rallies outside elections have been banned in the country since 2016, when the government accused the opposition of wanting to use them to cause mass civil disobedience.

— *The New York Times*

It's how you live that matters: Moderation in all things...



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One can only applaud the recently announced government initiative to target premature deaths resulting from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), as an indication that the Sultanate of Oman is not only stepping out from beneath the dark cloud of the pandemic and emerging into a new societal health vision, but also heralding a return, again, to holistic healthcare for all.

NCDs, in recent decades have, say prominent analysts,

proven the number one cause of death and disability around the world, mainly in the guise of cancers, heart disease, respiratory diseases, renal failures, strokes, and diabetes, which even as we were ravaged by Covid-19, kept their relentless pressure on health sectors everywhere.

However, if there is a silver lining to the NCD dilemma, it is that scientific and medical advances continue to offer meaningful support and care options, to mitigate the worst of the effects of these illnesses, especially where low and middle-income societies, and less well-informed populations, are concerned.

Accounting for 74 per cent of all deaths, and with a late onset disability ratio during the last four years of life as severely affected by disability, it's clear these

are ailments that will not simply 'go way' either, as the recipe for sustaining effective programmes in the face of NCDs requires effective economic support, community, society, and school awareness and education programmes, community healthcare support, and most damning of all, responsible individual responses to NCDs.

Why? Because as many

as three-quarters of all NCDs are preventable, with tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy and passive lifestyles, and air pollution counted as significant modifiable risk factors. I'm not suggesting for one moment that it is petulance or foolishness that see people struck down, or suffer terribly from these lifestyle choices, but that when science determines that for many of us, it is our weaknesses that have the capability to drive us to an early, or earlier, grave. So, we must trust the science.

Remarkably, the good choices, such as neglecting good dietary awareness, reduced alcohol intake, or tobacco use, and maintaining sensible physical fitness, not only reduce the risk of NCDs, but are the most effective economic response to the issue. Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger," but for all his profound influence upon intellectual history, he had a mental breakdown at 45 and died a decade later after ten years in a vegetative state. So, ironically I guess... "There but for the grace of God..."

I mean, apart from Homer Simpson, who else today would neglect their individual well-being for short-lived gratification? For 25 months now, we have been unwilling participants in a global lottery we didn't want any part of. We were all losers in some way, and all did what we had to, to stay alive. Why wouldn't you want to apply a similar rationale, in terms of living or dying, suffering or disability, to the even more callous NCDs?

From an environmental perspective, I believe the Sultanate of Oman is well placed, having generally a 'clean,' blue-sky environment most of the world would sell their souls for, and the Sultanate of Oman clearly takes its responsibilities as signatories to the 1992 Rio Declaration that promoted "a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." Sustainable national economic imperatives, social concern, education, and action, and environmental awareness, require little more than a will beyond what could be seen as Governance 101 in any case, yet we always come back to NCDs being a matter of individual choice.

"We are," as Marcus Tullius Cicero pronounced, "our own worst enemies." But famously, he was put in his place by inventor/philosopher/politician, Benjamin Franklin, saying, "I have met my enemy, in the eyes of others." We could well heed his words and maybe let our modesty, our behaviour, and our lack of excesses not only identify us as thoughtful, wise, and in terms of staying alive, for longer, considerate of those around us. Don't be seduced by the wiles of 'la dolce vita,' of incomparable indulgence, wretched gluttony, and debauchery. Instead, be guided by Epictetus, who said, "Fortify yourself with moderation, for it is an impregnable fortress." Ramadhan Kareem.



Joe Biden's springtime of discontent



Elizabeth Drew

The writer is a Washington-based journalist and the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall

Poor Joe Biden. Even when, according to most opinion-makers, he's been doing things right, he cannot get a break in the public's opinion. Despite the fact that Biden pulled Nato out of the ditch into which Donald Trump had kicked it (in order to destroy the alliance, something Russian President Vladimir Putin desired), restored America's global leadership, and made more progress in reviving the economy in 15 months than almost anyone thought possible, his poll numbers remain abysmally low.

At Biden's urging, Congress passed legislation, which had been hanging about for years, to make big investments in America's deteriorating infrastructure. Unusually in the current hyper-partisan climate, Republicans in both chambers backed the infrastructure bill (their constituents also don't want their bridges to collapse). Biden improved the government's response to the ravages of a pandemic, including passage of a \$1.9 trillion rescue plan to help individuals and the economy. He also salvaged the US Postal Service, something Trump had politicised almost beyond recognition.

Yet, Biden's poll numbers have dropped to a dismal 40 per cent approval rating. At the same time, large majorities seem to feel that the country is headed in the wrong direction — the measurement to which some political strategists pay the most attention. Even his winning Senate confirmation of a historic figure, the first black woman to sit on the Supreme Court, did little to improve his overall political situation. Blacks and their allies have a much larger agenda, especially the effort to restore voting rights that the Republicans have been curtailing, something which Biden hasn't been able to deliver on because of the filibuster.

There are numerous reasons why Biden can't get a break. The highest inflation in 40 years agitates the public daily. In the week leading up to the Easter and Passover holidays, the inflation rate hit 8.5 per cent.

There isn't much the president can do about inflation. He can hope for a further unfreezing of supply chains, with more container ships able to dock at US ports. He can open the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to try to lower gasoline prices, and can promote clean



energy. Biden has done these things — to limited effect so far. Gasoline prices are now the highest in US history. Their rise has been exacerbated by the war between Russia and Ukraine.

EVEN THOUGH MOST
OPINION-MAKERS
THINK HE IS DOING
THINGS RIGHT, US
PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN
CANNOT CATCH
A BREAK FROM US
PUBLIC OPINION

One reason Biden receives little credit for his accomplishments is that he wildly overpromised at his presidency's onset. He approached his legislative agenda as if he had more than 50 votes in the Senate (with vice-president Kamala Harris to break a tie), and a margin of five in the House.

Indeed, Biden seemed to assume that all Senate Democrats would support whatever he proposed. When this didn't work out, he came across as a plaintiff in a negotiation in which he often failed. A summons to the Biden White House apparently inspired no awe.

Moreover, a group of progressive Democrats in the House have acted almost as an independent party. They appear to feel that they owe Biden nothing; if their actions weaken him and the Democratic party, so be it. They even insisted on their own response to Biden's State of the Union

address, heretofore unheard of. Some progressive positions, or presumed ones (such as "defund the police" whatever that means) have driven away moderates. This has helped Republicans continue to exploit race and crime. Biden's unwillingness to side openly with or against the left in his party leaves open the question of what he stands for.

But Biden's problems with the public are more fundamental and are ingrained in Biden's persona: he lacks what can be called "presidentialness." The ostensibly easy-going pol (he has a temper that his staff knows well) too often fails to come across publicly as a commanding figure. Biden has a stature gap. Moreover, unlike his two predecessors, Trump and Barack Obama, Biden has no cult following to fall back on.

Biden was elected essentially as a decent man who knows his way around politics — and wasn't Trump — which hasn't been enough to carry him over the rough spots as president. On occasion, Biden's lack of self-discipline created those very spots. His presumed skill in handling foreign policy took a big hit with the US exit from Afghanistan, which was widely deemed (I think unfairly) a "debacle." And in late March of this year, at just the moment that majorities of the public (up to 70 per cent) were expressing doubt of his ability to handle challenges produced by Russia's war on Ukraine, Biden undermined his thoughtful speech in Warsaw about the struggle between authoritarianism and democracy by ad-libbing that Putin "cannot remain in power." ©Project Syndicate, 2021

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Al Oruba team members celebrate after their promotion to Omantel League.

Al Oruba earn Omantel League promotion



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Danial Etor, Said al Dhabouni and Juma Darwees' goals powered Al Oruba to thumping 3-0 win over Qurayat in the 2021-22 first division league late on Friday. With the win, Al Oruba ensured a top-place finish in Group A with

22 points to grab a promotion to top-tier Omantel League after a two-year gap, next season.

At the Sur Sports Complex, Danial Etor put coach Farooq Abdullah's men ahead in the 10th minute while Said al Dhabouni doubled the lead in the 25th minute. Former national team player Juma Darweesh confirmed



Al Oruba's promotion to the top-tier league as he netted the third goal in the 40th minute. The hosts kept the scoreline intact in the second half to earn the promotion ticket.

Al Oruba have won the Omantel League shield four times during 2014-2015, 2007-2008, 2001-2002 and 1999-2000.

Also, they have won the same number of the titles in the HM Cup.

In another tight fixture, Al Khabourah advanced to the play-off match despite their loss against Al Shabab 2-1. The northern Batinah team was second in the group. Salim al Darmaki and Bashar al Balushi



scored for Al Shabab, while Irisa Siga netted the consolation goal for Al Khabourah.

Al Khabourah will meet the 12th placed team in Omantel League to decide the team which will remain in the Omantel League. In another match, Ibri defeated Bausher 3-1 at Ibri Sports Complex. Jan Marsillo

put the visitors ahead in the 17th minute but the hosts bounced back strongly as Ahmed al Kharusi scored the hat-trick in the 34th, 45th and 92nd minutes.

Earlier in April, Al Bashayer club had booked their direct promotion to Omantel League as a first team in the first division league from Group B.

Scotland edge Oman in final-over thriller once more

DUBAI: Oman fell to a 2-wicket defeat against Scotland in their ICC Men's CWC League 2 encounter at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Friday.

Batting first after winning the toss, opener Kashyap Prajapati fronted Oman's charge. He made up for missing out in the earlier games with a spectacular 81-run knock this time around.

While Kashyap was a key feature of Oman's innings in the first 40 overs, the other batters weren't able to step up in support during this period. Khawar Ali looked in fine nick for the duration of his stint in the middle, but his dismissal for 25 runs combined with the one of Kashyap 8 overs later, left Oman in choppy waters with the scoreboard reading 152-5 after 39.2 overs.

However, an invaluable 53-run partnership between Mohammad Nadeem and Naseem Khushi bailed Oman out and took them to a formidable first innings score of 225-7. Nadeem finished on an unbeaten 53 while Khushi collected 29 runs himself.

For Scotland, Michael Leask was the star of the show in the first phase of play. He picked up 3 key wickets and also pocketed the catch



Oman's Kashyap Prajapati plays a shot against Scotland.



Oman's Kaleemullah bowls against Scotland.



Oman's Bilal Khan bowls against Scotland.

that brought Kashyap's time in the middle to an end. Adrian Neill, Mark Watt and Safyaan Sharif claimed the remaining scalps.

Chasing, Scotland's top-order of Kyle Coetzer, Matthew Cross and Christopher McBride combined for just 8 runs. But a 98-run stand between Richie Berrington and George Munsey kept them in the

hunt. Berrington in particular fought through visible discomfort to top score with a brilliant 110-ball 73. Munsey scored 43.

The problem for Scotland during the middle overs was a lack of boundaries. 131 deliveries between the 16th and 38th overs saw none. Oman were collectively excellent on the field during this period and

kept the pressure on the batters with disciplined bowling and tight fielding. Their efforts succeeded in creating breakthroughs too, as Dylan Budge followed Munsey back to the changing room in the 36th over with the score at 143-5.

However, Scotland's lower order stepped up in massive fashion to turn the tide in their favour.

Michael Leask upped the scoring rate with his 21-run knock and Safyaan Sharif chipped in with a vital 17 runs to further reduce the deficit. Finally, Mark Watt's efforts, with the bat for a change, proved enough to seal the win. With 12 runs needed off the final over, he hit two boundaries and finished the game with 1 ball to spare.

Watt ended proceedings with 35 runs and collected the Player of the Match award post-game. Bilal Khan and Kaleemullah picked up 3 wickets apiece for Oman.

BRIEF SCORES:
Oman 225-7 in 50 overs (Kashyap Prajapati 81 (106b, 9 x 4), Mohammad Nadeem 53 (51b, 3x4, 1x6); Michael Leask 35-3) lost to Scotland 226-8 in 49.5 overs (Richie Berrington 73 (110b, 5x4); Bilal Khan 3-47, Kaleemullah 3-45) by 2 wickets.



Trust Golf Asian Mixed Stableford Challenge LEADERBOARD				
		POINTS	ROUND 4	
1	SIHWAN KIM	49	7	
2	MAJA STARK	47	13	
3	BUDSABAKORN SUKAPAN	42	9	
4	PHACHARA KHONGWATMAI	41	11	
5	SADOM KAEWKANJANA	40	12	
T6	JOOHYUNG KIM	39	7	
T6	NATIPONG SRITHONG	39	5	
T8	ANDREW DODT	38	13	
T8	JAZZ JANEWATTANANOND	38	11	
T8	CHANETTEE WANNASAEN	38	4	

Sihwan Kim bags second Asian Tour win

BANGKOK: American golfer Sihwan Kim swept his second tournament in two months on Saturday, winning the Asian Mixed Stableford Challenge in Thailand as local teen sensation Ratchanon Chantananuwat suffered disappointment after his record-breaking victory last week.

Sixty players from the men's Asian Tour and Ladies European Tour teed off in the \$750,000-prize tournament which wrapped up on Saturday at Siam Country Club's Waterside Course near Pattaya.

Kim scored seven points in the final round for a 49-point total, under the modified stableford scoring system.

He had a rollercoaster on Saturday with six birdies, two bogeys and a double.

After sealing the win, he was splashed with water bottles to mark the Thai New Year Songkran festival.

"My putting has just been phenomenal, that's pretty much what got me through it," Kim said.

The 33-year-old has been in fine form — winning his maiden Asian Tour victory last month at Hua Hin Thailand, but had previously not won a title since turning professional in 2011.

The event's leading lady was

rising Swedish star Maja Stark, 22, coming in second place with a total score of 47 after notching up one eagle and four birdies on Sunday.

Thailand's Budsabakorn Sukapan, 24, was in third place on 42 points and her compatriot Phachara Khongwatmai, 22, was a point behind.

Argentinian Maggie Simmermacher, 26, provided wow factor with a hole-in-one at the 12th hole, but finished further down the field.

Meanwhile, 15-year-old Thai young gun Ratchanon failed to make the cut on day two of the competition after becoming the youngest-ever winner of an elite international tour when he claimed last week's inaugural Asian Mixed Cup.

"I am just tired. I tried my best, I wanted to be in the zone," he said.

His focus will now shift to the upcoming Southeast Asian Games in Vietnamese capital Hanoi in May ahead of the International Series England and British Amateur Championship in June.

Ratchanon, who has to balance homework with competitions, is only the fifth amateur — and first since 2009 — to win on the Asian Tour. — AFP

HYDERABAD ROMP TO THIRD WIN

TRIPATHI, MARKRAM SHINE IN 7-WICKET WIN OVER KOLKATA



MUMBAI: Rahul Tripathi and Aiden Markram hit half centuries to guide Sunrisers Hyderabad to a third successive IPL victory on Friday but skipper Kane Williamson said there is scope for improvement.

Chasing 176 for victory against Kolkata Knight Riders, Hyderabad rode on a third-wicket partnership of 94 between Tripathi (71) and Markram (68 not out) to achieve their target with 13 balls and seven wickets to spare in Mumbai.

Tripathi set the tone for Hyderabad's dominance with his 21-ball fifty and repay the team's faith after he was bought for \$1.13 million in the February auction of the Indian Premier League.

The uncapped Indian, who played for Kolkata last season, fell to Andre Russell after his 37-ball blitz including four fours and six sixes but Markram kept up the charge.

South Africa's Markram finished off the chase with a four and two sixes as Sunrisers won three in a row after their opening two losses this season of the Twenty20 tournament.

Williamson said the performance was a "step up" from their previous two victories.

"To go and chase like we did and Rahul Tripathi playing an absolutely incredible knock and also Aiden Markram. Two

To go and chase like we did and Rahul Tripathi playing an absolutely incredible knock and also Aiden Markram. Two amazing contributions for us in different roles but all in all a very good team performance

KANE WILLIAMSON
SRH skipper

amazing contributions for us in different roles but all in all a very good team performance," Williamson said.

The New Zealand skipper added, "For us we always know these little things to improve on and the guys are working really hard. So far we're seeing those signs of improvement."

Earlier, Nitish Rana, who made 54, and Russell, who hit an unbeaten 49, guided Kolkata to 175 for eight after being invited to bat first.

Kolkata struggled to build partnerships as Hyderabad pace bowlers T Natarajan and Umran Malik shared five wickets.

Australia's white-ball skipper Aaron Finch did not last long in

his first outing for Kolkata, caught behind for seven off Marco Jansen.

Natarajan then struck twice in one over to send back Venkatesh Iyer and Sunil Narine to push Kolkata on the back foot.

Wickets kept tumbling as Shreyas Iyer attempted to rebuild in his 28-run stay before Malik, who clocked speeds up to 150 kmph (93 mph) bowled the skipper with a yorker.

Rana hit back with Russell for company and reached his fifty in 32 balls.

The duo added 39 runs for the sixth wicket and Russell kept up the tempo after Rana's departure in the 18th over.

The West Indian all-rounder, nicknamed 'Muscle' Russell for his power-hitting, finished off the innings with two sixes and a four in his 25-ball knock but it was not enough in front of the Tripathi show.

"He was struck down in the last game with cramps but great to see him grab the game by the scruff of the neck and showed leadership in that top-order," Hyderabad coach Tom Moody said of the man of the match Tripathi. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES: Sunrisers Hyderabad 176-3 (Rahul Tripathi 71, Aiden Markram 68*, Andre Russell 2-20) beat Kolkata Knight Riders 175-8 (Nitish Rana 54, Andre Russell 49*; T Natarajan 3-37) by 7 wickets.

Chennai's Chahar ruled out of IPL with back injury



NEW DELHI: Chennai Super Kings pace bowler Deepak Chahar, the second-most expensive player at the Indian Premier League auction, has been ruled out of the tournament due to a back injury, organisers said on Friday.

Chahar, known for his ability to swing the new ball, was acquired for \$1.85 million in the February auction, the highest figure after Ishan Kishan who was sold to Mumbai Indians for \$2 million.

The bowler, 29, was expected to join his team in late April but the injury has put paid to his plans.

Chahar's absence appears to have affected Chennai's team balance, with the side losing their first four matches on the trot.

The four-time winners finally tasted their first victory of the season on Wednesday when they beat Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Only Mumbai Indians, winless after five games, are below them on the points table.

Meanwhile, Delhi Capitals physio Patrick Farhart has tested positive for Covid-19.

"He is being closely monitored by the DC Medical Team at the moment," organisers said in a press release.

India has recorded a slight increase in the number of coronavirus cases in recent weeks but is nowhere near the peak seen between March and May last year.

At least 4,000 people were dying every day at the height of the pandemic in 2021, according to official figures.

On Friday, the health ministry reported around 1,100 new cases. — AFP

Former skippers want Stokes as England Test captain

LONDON: Former England captains Michael Vaughan and Mike Atherton say talismanic all-rounder Ben Stokes should fill the vacuum left after Joe Root resigned as Test skipper.

Stokes — presently nursing a knee injury — can take the England job with an easy conscience as he had said he would turn it down if his good friend Root was sacked.

Root, though, walked of his own accord announcing his resignation on Friday.

It followed a dire past year of results reaching its nadir with a 4-0 thrashing by Australia in the Ashes series and then a 1-0 loss to the West Indies.

Root, appointed as Alastair Cook's successor in 2017, holds the record for the most matches (64)

and most wins (27) as England skipper, but he also has the unwanted record for most defeats (26).

Vaughan — who skippered England in 51 Tests and unlike Root won an Ashes series — told the BBC Stokes is the natural choice.

Veteran fast bowler Stuart Broad has also been mentioned as a potential captain but his place in the side is seen as being less secure — he was controversially omitted from the West Indies tour.

"I don't see anyone else who could take the position and be guaranteed of their place in the side," said Vaughan referring to Stokes.

"In Ben Stokes you have clearly got someone who has got a smart



cricket brain, he's going to give it everything, he is certainly going to have the respect of the players around him."

FEW CANDIDATES

Vaughan, though, added Stokes will require help from other experienced players in the team.

"Stokes is everything in a person and a player that you would want," said 47-year-old Vaughan.

"But he will need a lot of support around him because when you have got that all-rounder tag and they've got that persona that they think they can do everything.

"You need to have someone say 'listen Ben, just concentrate on what you're really good at' and that's out on the field, making

decisions and trying to just give us your best performance."

Atherton — who captained England 54 times — said 30-year-old Stokes could be a stop gap skipper.

"That Root stepped down of his own accord makes it easier now for Ben Stokes, the only viable candidate, to take over," wrote Atherton in *The Times*.

"Loyalty is everything to Stokes and he would not have wanted to take over had he felt that Root had been pushed aside.

"Stokes should be given the job, but it does not have to be for the long term. A short, sharp shock is required."

Former England Test bowler and now BBC cricket correspondent Jonathan Agnew

agreed with Atherton regarding it not needing to be a long term appointment. However, he took issue with Stokes being a natural fit for the captaincy.

"There are so few candidates that it rules out any kind of long-term appointment," Agnew told the BBC.

"Someone like Ben Stokes could be one if he is fit enough, but I do not know if it is good for Stokes or for English cricket if he was saddled with the captaincy.

"You look back at the big characters that have captained England like Ian Botham, Kevin Pietersen and Andrew Flintoff — they have all failed as captains.

"We all want Stokes to go out there and express himself"

— AFP



Spain's Sara Sorribes plays a return to Netherlands' Arantxa Rus. - AFP

Poland, Italy, Spain and Kazakhstan cruise into BJK finals

PARIS: Poland, Italy, Spain and Kazakhstan booked their places in the Billie Jean King Cup finals on Saturday as they took unassailable 3-0 leads in their ties. World No 1 Iga Swiatek crushed Romania's 324th-ranked Andreea Prisacariu 6-0, 6-0 in 45 minutes to seal victory for hosts Poland in Radom. In Sardinia, Italian Camila Giorgi also won 12 successive games as she dispatched Harmony Tan of France 6-2,

6-0 to give Italy a 3-0 advantage. Spain were the only away team to win as Sara Sorribes Tormo sealed their place in the finals by beating Arantxa Rus 6-0, 6-4 in s-Hertogenbosch in The Netherlands. Elena Rybakina had to work harder to clinch Kazakhstan's surprising win over Germany, winning 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 in Nur-Sultan. "Really proud of us," Swiatek told the competition web site. "It's been a long

journey. It took us a few years, step by step to progress and qualify finally." Tan, ranked 107th in the world, played ahead of 34th ranked Alize Cornet and jumped into a 2-0 lead before the hard-hitting Giorgi took complete control. In Prague, the Czechs took a 2-1 lead over Great Britain as Marketa Vondrousova beat US Open champion Emma Raducanu 6-1, 6-1. "The score looks easy but it was a tough match and she was a bit injured," said Vondrousova. Seven qualifiers are being finished on Saturday. After Friday's matches, USA lead Ukraine 2-0 and Canada lead Latvia 2-0. The winners will join Switzerland, Australia, Belgium and Slovakia in the finals later this year. — AFP

Tsitsipas sets up Zverev semifinal

MONTE CARLO: Defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas recovered from 0-4 down in the final set to defeat Diego Schwartzman on Friday to reach the Monte Carlo Masters semifinals where he will face Olympic champion Alexander Zverev. Greek third seed Tsitsipas had been a set and 5-2 ahead at one stage and seemingly cruising to the last four. However, his Argentine opponent hit back only to be thwarted in a quarterfinal which wrapped up at 11:00 pm local time. "I don't think I've ever made such a comeback in my career. It was crazy... I found the resources and I'm proud of it," said Tsitsipas. Second-seeded Zverev won through 5-7, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) against Italian 12th-seed Jannik Sinner in just over three hours. Alejandro Davidovich Fokina and Grigor Dimitrov advanced to the other semifinal. "Sad to have won," said an ironic Zverev to a crowd made up of many vocal Italians. Davidovich Fokina added Indian Wells champion Taylor



Germany's Alexander Zverev serves during his quarterfinal against Italy's Jannik Sinner at the Monte-Carlo ATP in Monaco. - AFP

Fritz to his high profile scalps this week with a 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 win. The 22-year-old Spaniard, ranked 46th in the world, ousted world number one Novak Djokovic in the second round. On Saturday, he will play Dimitrov, who also needed three sets to get past Poland's Hubert Hurkacz 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2). "When you beat the world

number one it gives you a lot of confidence physically, mentally and technically," said Davidovich Fokina. Zverev, the world No 3, shrugged off a thigh problem and looked to have the upper hand, reeling off a series of 13 winning points for a 4-1 lead in the first set against a 20-year-old opponent nursing a blistered foot. — AFP

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Oman’s economy on solid path to recovery: WB

Rebounding growth: The report affirms that a ‘gradual’ recovery is under way as the Omani economy recoups from the “dual impact” of global pandemic and the associated collapse in oil prices

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

A new World Bank report on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states foresees a significant improvement in the Sultanate of Oman’s fiscal and external positions in 2022, on the back of rising hydrocarbon production and non-oil revenues. At the same time, continued curbs on public expenditures are anticipated to further strengthen the country’s finances, it noted.

The latest GCC Economic Update warns, nonetheless, of downside risks as well, notably, potential resurgent pandemic pressures, volatility in oil prices and slower implementation of the



government’s reform programme. “After a difficult 2020, Oman’s economy is on a solid path to recovery amid the easing of pandemic pressures, higher hydrocarbon outputs, and wide-ranging government reforms. Front-loaded fiscal reforms, including VAT and cuts in spending are expected to turn the country’s fiscal and current account deficits into surpluses, starting from 2022,” the Washington DC-headquartered international financial institution stated.

The report affirms that a ‘gradual’ recovery is under way as the Omani economy recoups from the “dual impact” of global pandemic and the associated collapse in oil prices.

Overall growth is estimated at 2.1 per cent in 2021, buttressed

“
Frontloaded fiscal reforms, including VAT and cuts in spending are expected to turn the country’s fiscal and current account deficits into surpluses, starting from 2022.

WORLD BANK

by a 2.2 per cent increase in hydrocarbon GDP, an uptick in oil production stemming from the easing of Opec+ curbs, and the commissioning of a new Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) plant in Salalah.

The World Bank report further noted: “Non-oil GDP is estimated to have rebounded by almost 2 per cent in 2021, signalling the recovery of domestic and external demand, aided by increased vaccine penetration that boosted

the sectors most impacted by the pandemic (tourism, hospitality and retail).

Annual inflation switched from negative territory in 2020 and picked up to an average of 1.5 per cent in 2021, due to the introduction of VAT last April and to improved domestic demand.”

Importantly, GDP growth is projected to surpass 5 per cent in 2022, while the economy strengthens in the medium-term, buoyed by a combination of strong hydrocarbon output and ongoing structural reform.

The hydrocarbon sector itself is anticipated to grow by more than 8 per cent, fueled by higher natural gas output from the Khazzan and Ghazeer fields in BP’s Block 61, it noted, adding that the non-oil economy will grow by over 2 per cent in 2022 as well.

However, overall growth is projected to decelerate to an average of 2.7 per cent annually during 2023-2024, although the hydrocarbon sector is expected to remain the main driver of growth, the World Bank added in its update.

Omantel,
OIA set up
Pearl REIF

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Omantel in collaboration with Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has established a Real Estate Investment Fund called Pearl REIF Fund, a special purpose REIF company approved by the Capital Market Authority. The share capital of Pearl REIF is RO 42,477 million.

Omantel’s contribution to the Pearl REIF is in-kind and to this effect it has entered into a definitive agreement with Pearl REIF for a sale and lease back of its headquarters building located in Madinat Al Irfan.

In consideration of its in-kind contribution, Omantel will receive 279,086 million units of RO 0.100 each in the Pearl REIF and cash in the amount of RO 27,091 million for the total value of its in-kind contribution.

Recycling to cut municipal waste by 60% by 2025: be’ah

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Oman Environmental Holding Services Company (be’ah) says it has ambitious targets to reduce the amount of municipal waste disposed of in landfills through the adoption of a recycling and reuse strategy covering 60 per cent of solid waste by 2025.

To this end, it has formulated plans for the recycling of commercially valuable wastes such as construction and demolition waste, used tyres, lead acid batteries and so

on, to help achieve sustainability and reduce primary resource extraction.

Fahad bin Ali Kharousi, Head of Planning — Municipal Waste, said be’ah presently oversees solid waste collection covering 100 per cent of the population.

These services are provide through contractual arrangements with specialised international companies.

At least 10 engineered landfills and 16 transfer stations are also part of the company’s solid waste management infrastructure, he noted.



Al Kharousi acknowledged that be’ah continues to face challenges particularly

with regard to the improper waste disposal habits of some individuals in society.

He cited the “increasing phenomenon” of trash dumping outside designated waste bins, wanton disfiguring and destruction of bins and the practice of leaving livestock offal by the roadside.

These practices, he warned, not only mars the beauty of Oman’s natural settings, but also contributes to the growth of pests like rodents. Likewise, construction debris should only be disposed of in designated sites, he added. **(With inputs from ONA)**

Al Shawamikh signs MoU with Asyad DryDock to support renewable energy initiatives

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Well-known Omani local community contractor Al Shawamikh Oil Services has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Asyad DryDock to develop renewable energy delivery initiatives in dry dock services in Duqm.

The MoU was signed by Dr Aflah bin Saeed al Hadhrami, CEO of Al Shawamikh Oil Services, and Dr Ibrahim bin Bakhit al Nadhiri, CEO of Asyad Shipping and DryDock, in the presence of a number of officials from both companies.

The MoU complements



Al Shawamikh Oil Services’ orientation towards renewable and sustainable projects, in which the company supports Asyad DryDock in all technologies of

Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZD).

Al Shawamikh will also encourage experts from both companies to exchange ideas on case studies to promote renewable energy projects, decarbonisation and experimental techniques.

Al Shawamikh Oil Services is keen to experiment new emerging technologies in various aspects of green energy in coordination with Asyad DryDock, pursue opportunities in the development of projects of an energy-saving nature, reducing carbon emissions by millions of tonnes, improving energy or any other environmental initiatives, which will place the dry dock in SEZD among green

facilities in the world.

Dr Al Hadhrami, CEO, said: “To meet the aspirations of (Oman’s 2040) vision, Al Shawamikh Oil Services moves forward with renewable and sustainable projects through the signing of a MoU with Asyad DryDock, aiming to invest the techniques of the 4th Industrial Revolution in relation to renewable energy to make the dry dock port in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm within the global green facilities.

This is done through the development of renewable energy projects, reduction of thousands of tonnes of carbon and placing Oman’s name among the leading countries in renewable energy.”

Bank Nizwa launches several Ramadhan campaigns

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman’s leading and most trusted Islamic bank, has announced a wide array of activities that it will run during the blessed month of Ramadhan. Encouraging the spirit of volunteerism and acts of benevolence, the premier bank collaborated with local charitable organisations to distributed food packages and iftar meals in all the areas it operates. Through such initiatives, the bank seeks to strengthen its bond with those in the community. As a bank that integrates strong Sharia principles in all its operations, Bank Nizwa has always remained at the forefront of joining hands with organisations that mirror its values. Since Ramadhan is the month

of giving and helping the ones less privileged, the bank has set up donation booths in association with, Al Rahma Charitable Organisation and in head office and branches. In an endeavour to reinforce support to low-income families and those in need, Bank Nizwa will also run a month-long campaign focused on its Sadaqah and Zakah accounts. This will help to raise additional funds that will be channelised to help the less fortunate. To instill Islamic principles and values in the youth of Oman, Bank Nizwa will also host a children’s Quran recitation competition in alliance with the Oman Association for the Holy Quran. One of the concepts Islam



considers important for human prosperity is “Barakah”, which is the Arabic term for “divine blessings”. Therefore, children will be invited to recite ayahs from the Quran that concentrate on “Barakah”. With a keen focus on the youth of the country, the Quran recitation competition will not only boost awareness about the teachings of Islam but will help

raise a more socially conscious, ethical and empathetic generation. “Ramadhan is a month of blessing and giving back. Through these initiatives, we at Bank Nizwa, want to give back to the community and promote harmony, compassion and philanthropy”, said HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said, head of marketing and corporate communication: “This blessed time is incomplete without helping others and Bank Nizwa’s core values include being helpful to its community. Our institution has vowed to go above and beyond in aiding those in need”, she added. Being a responsible corporate citizen, Bank Nizwa encourages its employees to undertake an active role in volunteering and,

therefore, all Ramadhan activities will be executed by the bank’s staff. Through such personal involvement, the bank has been able to solidify its relationship with the community. In line with Oman Vision 2040 and its emphasis on sustainable growth through ongoing community welfare activities, Bank Nizwa has successfully positioned itself as a progressive bank that contributes to the socio-economic progress of the nation. By leading initiatives that embrace all aspects of Sharia values, norms and principles, the bank will continue to play a transformational role and set benchmarks in the Islamic banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

Ooredoo sponsors teams in football tournament

MUSCAT: Supporting all sports lovers from every corner of Oman, the Ramadhan Football Tournament has returned to Muscat and Nizwa after a two-year break due to Covid-19 with thirty-two teams from each region kicking off their campaign to win the trophy this month. So for football enthusiasts, Ramadhan nights are now filled with even more excitement! Be part of the action each night from 9:30 pm at the indoor football field of Bausher Club in Muscat and the Al Nasr team in Nizwa to cheer on your favourite teams. Games will take place every night throughout Ramadhan until a champion is crowned. The tournament attracts many of the best and most skillful players in the region, including former Oman national team members, players from the Oman Professional League and local teams. The Ooredoo Group is a passionate supporter of football in communities across Oman and throughout the GCC, and enjoys long-term relationships



with seven-time Ballon d’Or winner, Leo Messi, brand ambassador for Ooredoo, and his club, Paris Saint-Germain. Ooredoo launched its ‘Hello World’ campaign to give football fans the opportunity to win tickets to some of the biggest matches across Europe including the El Clásico between FC Barcelona, Real Madrid and Der Klassiker between FC Bayern and Borussia Dortmund. Ooredoo will be hosting official Fan Parks during the upcoming Qatar 2022 Fifa World Cup kicking off on 21 November 2022 so that fans can enjoy all the action live on big outdoor screens and experience the atmosphere of a month-long festival of football.

Ahli Islamic offers auto Takaful insurance for all vehicle owners

MUSCAT: Sharing Ramadhan blessings with its patrons and customers, ahli islamic has announced an irresistible Ramadhan Auto Takaful offer in through its Takaful Insurance partner ‘Al Madinah Takaful Insurance’, providing a comprehensive rate of 1.4% for vehicle owners who have a claim free record during the past one year, and for vehicles up to 6 years from the date of first registration. Effective until July 31, 2022, this special holy month offer will be applicable for individual saloon cars and for 4WD private vehicle owners. It will also be extended to clients who utilise the exclusive offer to book their policy in advance during the campaign period. Customers availing this exciting opportunity will benefit from the policy’s extended dealership repair for additional premium and the waiving of excess amount for the first claim. Besides, the third party rate, starting from RO 40, will be a bonus for customers seeking easy and convenient motor insurance policies. Yousuf al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of ahli islamic, said, “The Ramadhan Auto Takaful offer resonates with the sharing and caring spirit of the holy month. It reflects our commitment to go the extra mile to create opportunities that are in sync with the sentiments of our customers. We have structured the campaign to specifically fulfil immediate and future needs of our customers, who are constantly seeking easy and convenient avenues to insure their prized possessions. “As has been observed over the years, the



likelihood of our customers purchasing cars during Ramadhan is much greater than during other times of the year. We are enhancing their purchase plans with a comprehensive insurance policy that will not only help embolden their decisions, but also assure them with the sense of security that an effective policy confers. We would like to urge vehicle owners to take advantage of this offer and enjoy the spirit of the season in the true sense of the word”, Al Rawahi added. With no excess amount for the first claim and extended dealership repair for additional premium, the offer is a cinch for both old and new vehicle owners. The limited period campaign, however, will be available only for drivers above the age of 25 and for vehicle owners who have made no claims during the past one year.

Audi Oman launches generous Ramadhan offer



MUSCAT: Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has announced an exclusive offer across their model line-up, giving customers a variety of benefits to own a new car during the holy month of Ramadhan. Audi Oman is offering customers 7-year or 105,000 kms service package, 5-year or 150,000 kms manufacturer warranty, 7-year roadside assistance and hassle-free trade-in for any vehicle in Oman on the models. Three winners of a raffle draw will get an opportunity to drive an Audi in Europe. The raffle draw will be conducted after the campaign period and the dealer will cover flight, accommodation, transportation and driving experience fees. As part of the campaign customers need not make down payment, however the benefit is subject to approval by Omani banks. The offer, which has already begun, is valid till May 15, 2022.

While conditions apply, offers are not in conjunction with any other deals or discounts that have been offered. Christian Nehme, General Manager of Premium Motors Oman, said: “We at Audi Oman, continuously strive to add value to our customers in every way and the Ramadhan campaign assures our dedication to understanding their requirements. This special Ramadhan campaign offers a variety of benefits and customers stand to gain enormously. Audi models boast of high horsepower engines with incredible handling, luxurious interiors and class leading technologies. They also score highly on consumer safety surveys. We encourage prospective buyers to move towards the future with Audi this Ramadhan.”

Premium auto brand Exeed to roll into Oman

MUSCAT: Premium auto brand Exeed will roll into Oman, with the company reportedly in talks with leading automobile groups for distributorship here. On March 13, 2022, the Exeed brand media release has been successfully arranged in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia marking the official landing in the Gulf markets for the first time. Up to now, Exeed is launched successfully in China and Middle East market, which is well-received by both local and regional customers. As an independent premium brand, Exeed is a new entrant in the global high-end automobile market. It inherits the essence of the century-old European automobile industry and incorporates the latest intelligent technologies from China, to build all the new models up to international standards with global vision to deliver quality Chinese products to the world. The European R&D centre of Exeed, located in Munich, Germany, brings in a team of



hundreds of competent and experienced designers from BMW, JLR and other top international brands. Thanks to the profound experience accumulation of these European automobile masters, a pure European high-end fashion and the design concepts of future cars are given full play. Due to the collaboration with JLR, Exeed’s R&D and manufacturing system, the company have reached new heights. As a premium automobile designed for global consumers, Exeed has withstood extreme

natural conditions across the world. Whether it is in freezing temperatures of -50 degrees Celsius in Siberia, scorching temperatures of 55 degrees Celsius in the Middle East, or crossing the South American plateau, each field test was monitored by experts from both sides. Besides, ensure that the quality of the product ranking at the top of the world. Exeed also drew lessons from JLR manufacturing processes to sustain its high-end and luxurious quality. Based on deep insight into global consumers and rapid upgrading

of their demands, Exeed is extraordinarily good at targeting these differentiated demands, thus being credited as a brand created by global consumers. For instance, targeting winter conditions in Russia, Exeed is equipped with an all-round heating package that leads the market; aiming at the hot weather in Oman, Exeed adds the rear air outlet and an electrodeless fan to cool the engine; considering numerous ramps in South America plateau regions, which put higher demands on the power system, Exeed adopts a high-speed ratio gearbox to increase the torque. With the essence of the centennial history of the European automobile industry forming the bedrock, Exeed creates its architecture by integrating the latest intelligent technologies of China. Exeed’s global R&D centre and top partners, including Magna, Bentler, Getrag and BorgWarner, jointly build an intelligent and

modular automobile architecture that covering A to C class sedans, SUV, CROSS, MPV and new energy automobiles. Exeed’s proprietary architecture is powered by a 2.0TGDI engine with 400N•m peak torque. Its fourth-generation electrical architecture serves as the foundation for L2.5 and higher levels of autonomous driving with a cage energy-absorbing capsule body, six-position airbags, and 12 top class ADAS features. Exeed earned a five-star+ safety rating in C-NCAP crash tests, setting a new C-NCAP record. Exeed’s brand connotation is transcendence and exploration, which represents the transcendence of ourselves and the exploration of limits, as well as the continuous breakthrough of new premium automobile experience. After Exeed’s entering into Oman, we believe that local consumers will enjoy a premium driving experience beyond perception.



Oman Flour Mills procures locally grown wheat

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Oman Flour Mills (OFM) says it is continuing to procure the wheat harvests of Omani farmers as part of its 'Wealth Is In Our Farms' initiative aimed at promoting food security, while enabling local farmers to enter the domestic food market.

Flour produced from the national wheat crop is now available in the local market, the publicly traded firm said in a press statement.

Khalaa Fail Mattar Jaddad, a wheat farmer who owns a farm in the Nejd area of Thamrait Wilayat, said: "I cultivated about 55 acres of wheat using local species distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resource. Thanks to the support we received from the Ministry, we harvested about 64 tonnes of wheat."

Qais bin Abdulrahman al Abri, who grows wheat in the Wilayat of Bahla said: "Wheat is a crop that generates a rewarding income when it is cultivated in proper conditions. We have produced 35 tons of wheat by cultivating 35 acres of farmland this season."

'We are well-placed to see substantial growth in 2022': Tethys Oil

Buoyant outlook: Al Jumh prospects in Block 56 to potentially open up a new source of reserves and production for Swedish energy firm

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

Swedish-based energy firm Tethys Oil, which is currently focused entirely on its sizable upstream assets in the Sultanate of Oman, says it is gearing up for a period of renewed growth across its portfolio in 2022, in trend with a vigorous rebound under way across the global hydrocarbon sector.

Stockholm-headquartered Tethys Oil, which has a total of five onshore blocks in its upstream portfolio — three of them operated blocks — is emerging as an increasingly important player in the country's hydrocarbon space.

"We are well placed to see substantial growth in 2022", said Magnus Nordin, Managing Director.

"Oil prices will fluctuate and world events will ebb and flow, but



Tethys will continue its journey, holding firm on this unruly sea. Given the circumstances we also had quite an active year not least

in our operated areas", he stated in the company's newly released Annual Report for 2021.

Non-operated Blocks 3&4,

Oil prices will fluctuate and world events will ebb and flow, but Tethys will continue its journey, holding firm on this unruly sea.

MAGNUS NORDIN

Managing Director, Tethys Oil

which currently account for all of Tethys Oil's hydrocarbon output, will see a significant ramp-up in drilling activity over the course of 2022, according to the Managing Director.

A work programme drawn up for the two adjoining blocks, operated by CCED, calls for the drilling of almost double the number of wells drilled last year.

"This catch-up investment aims to increase both production and reserves", he remarked.

Much attention will also be focused on Block 49, a promising onshore license in The Empty Quarter. Home to the Dauka-1 well — the first-ever well drilled in the Sultanate of Oman back in 1955 — the Block was also the

subject of a more recent drilling programme.

The Thameen-1 exploration well — the first solo-operated well by Tethys Oil in its 10-year-long presence in the Sultanate of Oman — revealed a gross hydrocarbon column of close to 40-metres in the primary target.

"Block 49 is in low spend study mode as we continue to evaluate the results of the Thameen well. We must decide the way forward during the second quarter (of this year)", Nordin stated.

Block 58 — Tethys Oil's newest acquisition located just south of Block 49 — is being prepped for a drilling programme planned in 2023. "Block 58 will see the bulk of its activity towards the end of 2022 when we expect to have defined a number of drillable prospects of various sizes and chances of success", the Managing Director said.

Finally, Block 56 on Oman's southeast coast will also see a flurry of activity in 2022 centring primarily on the Al Jumh prospects in the northwestern part of the Block. "Success here will establish a new source of reserves and production for Tethys in Oman", Nordin added.

MSX CLOSES THE WEEK HIGHER

MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 0.71 per cent. All indexes ended the week higher except for the financial index. The financial Index closed lower by 0.03 per cent. Service index and industrial index ended higher by 2.40 per cent and 1.42 per cent respectively.

The MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 0.81 per cent. From the initial financial results posted on the MSX website so far, our analysis indicates that the Services Sector companies have shown the best year-on-year (YoY) performance so far, with combined net profit of the sector at RO 5.9 million in 1Q22 as compared to RO 1.5 million in 1Q21.

This was largely anticipated as Covid-related restrictions had adversely affected the sector last year. The sector has been supported by the Oil & Gas marketing & services sector as well as hospitality to some extent.

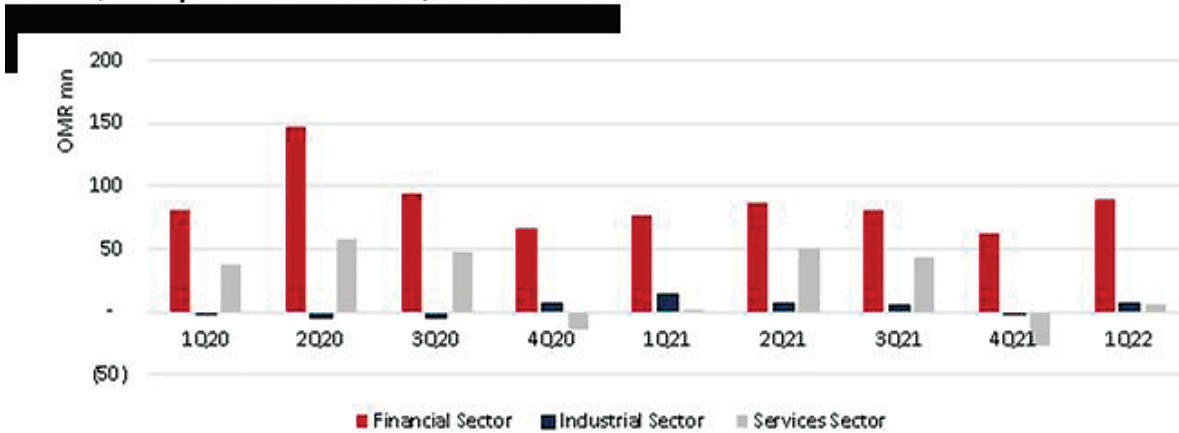
The second-best performing sector is the Financial Sector, supported by the investment and brokerage as well as the banking & insurance sectors, posting a combined net profit of RO 90 million in 1Q22 as compared to RO 77 million in 1Q21.

This, again, has resulted from a widespread economic recovery feeding into the sector's IFRS 9 models and expected credit loss expenses, when compared with the pandemic-strewn economic indicators last year.

The Industrial Sector's combined net profit for 1Q22 has halved from 1Q21.

We believe this is likely due to

MSX- Quarterly Combined Net Profit, OMR mn



Source: MSX, Bloomberg

Oman's annual inflation rate eased for the second straight month in March, mainly due to a sharp drop in the prices of fish and seafood products. Inflation — as measured by the Sultanate of Oman's consumer price index — decreased to 3.6 per cent in March 2022 compared with 4.0 per cent recorded in February and 4.4 per cent in January this year

elevated commodity prices, which negatively affect raw material costs for these companies.

The food & beverage sector (5 companies have reported so far) has seen its combined net profit drop about 90 per cent YoY in 1Q22, especially Oman flour Mills, likely adversely affected by the escalation in global wheat prices in lieu of the Russian-Ukraine war.

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Inflation — as measured by the Sultanate of Oman's consumer price index — decreased to 3.6 per cent in March 2022 compared with 4.0 per cent recorded in February and 4.4 per cent in January this year, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The consumer price index (CPI) for food and non-alcoholic beverages items, which have nearly 24 per cent weight in Oman's CPI, rose by 4.9 per cent in March compared to the same month of the previous year.

The value of landed fish in Oman in October 2021 rose by 16 per cent MoM to RO 45.8 million while Total Traditional Fishery Production rose by 30 per cent to 91.9k. On YoY basis, the value rose 27 per cent, while the production number was flat.

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP),

the sole procurer of new power generation capacity, has invited qualified consultants to bid for its contract for the provision of technical advisory services linked to the development of the first Waste-to-Energy (WTE) project in the Sultanate of Oman.

A Request for Proposals (RfP) issued by OPWP, a member of Nama Group, comes on the heels of last month's key agreement signed with Oman Environment Services Holding Company (be'ah), which operates and manages the country's municipal waste sector.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has invited local and international mining companies with experience in mining projects to participate in a new tender round targeting rich potash reserves in the Sultanate of Oman. Potash salts, which are primarily used in the production of fertiliser, among other commodities, are found in four blocks — 53-A, 53-B, 53-C and 51-D — covered in the latest tender round.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

China's economic growth under threat as virus takes hold

BEIJING: The mounting cost of China's zero-Covid policy threatens to derail Beijing's ambitious GDP target, analysts say, as supply chains snarl, ports face delays and Shanghai remains mired in lockdown. Growth in the world's second-largest economy was already slowing in the latter half of last year with a property market slump and regulatory crackdowns, leading policymakers to set their lowest annual GDP target in decades for 2022.

But analysts said the figure of 5.5 per cent would be tough to achieve with stay-at-home orders halting production and stunting consumer spending in key cities. Experts from 12 financial institutions forecast GDP growth of 5.0 per cent for the full year.

They expect a figure of 4.3 per cent for the first quarter, just above the 4.0 per cent recorded in the three months prior. Official first-quarter data will be published on Monday. "China's economy saw a good start in January and February with less energy constraints, domestic demand recovery... fiscal stimulus, and resilient exports," said Gene Ma, head of China research at the Institute of International Finance.

But surging virus cases in March and lockdowns have "severely disrupted supply chains and industrial activities", he added.

The analysts predicted the coronavirus outbreak would



A man in seen in a construction site in Beijing. — AFP

reverse the gains made earlier in the year.

Carmakers this week warned of severe disruption to supply chains and possibly even halting production completely if a lockdown in business hub Shanghai continues.

Premier Li Keqiang said this week that state support should be stepped up and tools including cuts to the reserve requirement ratio for banks could be tapped to help virus-hit sectors. Other major cities struck by Covid outbreaks include southern tech powerhouse Shenzhen, which went into full lockdown for almost a week in March.

"The hit to retail sales could be even bigger, as dining-out services — around 10 per cent of retail sales — were temporarily suspended in a few provinces," Goldman Sachs said in a recent report.

But economists expect bigger consequences of the lockdowns to surface in April data and bog down growth. — AFP

Global economy braces for China inflation shock

China's battle against Covid-19 is set to deliver the world economy another blow on top of the war in Ukraine. Chinese manufacturing hubs are seizing up as authorities stamp out fresh outbreaks. Despite talk about diversifying supply chains, the world's dependence on Chinese factories has only increased.

Roughly three-quarters of China's top 100 cities — accounting for over half of national GDP — have implemented varying degrees of pandemic restrictions as of April 6, according to research firm Gavekal.

Most of Shanghai's 26 million residents were confined to their homes for over two weeks, which has shuttered warehouses and curbed access to the world's busiest container port; iPhone supplier Pegatron has halted production at two of its nearby plants.

The plan is to completely suppress contagion at whatever the cost. Draconian lockdowns enabled China to quickly restart factories after the early outbreak in 2020, but the Omicron variant is more contagious.

The economic toll will be felt beyond China's borders. Disruptions resulting from the trade war with the United States and then the pandemic saw many governments and executives talk up plans to hedge their dependence on Chinese suppliers; World Bank chief David Malpass recently argued that diversification would "probably be good for everyone". That hasn't changed much on the ground. China's share of world exports climbed to 15.4% last year, surpassing pre-pandemic levels of 13.1% in 2019, Bernstein analysts estimate.

Prolonged disruptions in the world's factory will likely stoke rising prices worldwide.

Inflation in the United States is at a 40-year high while Euro zone prices rose to a record 7.5% in March. Surging energy and raw material costs are also to blame for the higher-than-expected increases in China's factory-gate and consumer prices in March.

The lockdowns have already hit trade. The European Chamber of Commerce in China said on April 7 that its members reckon Shanghai port volumes were down 40% week-on-week; shipping giant Maersk has warned of congested container terminals, trucking shortages, and reduced air freight. Beijing's refusal to live with the virus could mean higher prices for everyone.

— Reuters

China's share of world exports climbed to 15.4% last year, surpassing pre-pandemic levels of 13.1% in 2019.



STOCK SHOCK

Investors react at the Colombo Stock Exchange in Sri Lanka. The Securities And Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka said on Saturday it was directing the Colombo Stock Exchange to suspend the stock market for five business days from Monday. — Reuters

The entertainment shift towards videogaming (part II)



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The writer is a member of the International Press Association

VIDEO GAMES TEND TO HAVE MULTIPLE CURRENCIES WITHIN THEIR ECOSYSTEM, WHICH OFTEN WORK AS DEPENDENCIES.

Some might wonder where is Nintendo in this ranking. Well, Nintendo has acquired "only" 7 studios as direct subsidiaries.

However, Nintendo EPD is divided into ten internal production groups developing games like The Legend of Zelda, and all the Mario franchise.

Nintendo is a different case for many reasons, including the type of content produce, which tends to be mostly lighthearted and family friendly, as opposed to the gore games available for Sony PlayStation and Microsoft xbox.

In 2017, Nintendo released the Nintendo Switch console, which saw an amazing success with more than 100 million units sold, ranking 5th in the hall of fame of the best selling consoles.

Unlike PlayStation and xbox that are exclusively playable when wired, Nintendo leads the market for handheld and hybrid devices. With such a large user base, game developers have come up with many ways to monetise their efforts over time.

In fact, as much as the Star Wars franchise in the big screen has built a long lasting legacy, games such as Pokemon,

Mario, Call of Duty, Grand Theft Auto, World of Warcraft, Halo — to mention a few — have been attracting players for more than a decade.

And with the ability to update content dynamically, game adventures are literally never ending.

A growing trend in the video game industry is live service games: Multiplayer games that continually receive more content updates over time.

They usually require no subscription fees to play but encourage players to purchase "seasons" of content, as if it was a Netflix entertainment TV series. Moreover, these type of games offers endless customisation opportunities. All of them come with a price tag, obviously.

Video games tend to have multiple currencies within their ecosystem, which often work as dependencies.

For example, in Red Dead Redemption 2 — an open world game set in the Far West — players can earn Dollars, Gold, and Capitale while playing and repeating missions over and over again.

When the player wants to customise the character, most items can be bought with Dollars and rare items with Gold.

Earning Gold in the game is slower than earning Dollars, so impatient players can access the in-game store, and purchase Gold using cash... the real-world cash, whichever is the currency in their country.

On the other hand, Capitale can be used to play exclusive missions, being the game currency that can only be earned.

The reasoning behind this complex dynamic of multiple currency became popular after an experiment proved that as humans we tend to devalue currency, when a token enters into the equation.

For example, if we attend a food festival and we need to pay each item we eat in cash, we would buy less food than using a token.

In fact, often fairs and festivals require visitors to exchange real cash for tokens at the entrance, and accept tokens only for the payment of goods. This step in between renders us numb to the transaction, as we perceive that we are not spending cash, but worthless tokens.

So, with more and more clever ways to entice players into spending recurrent amounts of money on their favourite video games, there is no doubt that the industry is set to continue growing.

What if Germany boycotts Russian energy?



DALI MARIN

The author, a Professor of International Economics at the School of Management of the Technical University of Munich, is a research fellow at the Centre for Economic Policy Research and non-resident fellow at Bruegel

Since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his war on Ukraine, the German government has been under mounting pressure to join a proposed European embargo on Russian energy.

It is widely believed that stopping Russia's war will require cutting off its financing, which is coming in the form of billions of dollars of payments for oil and gas exports.

The German government opposes an energy embargo, with Minister of the Economy Robert Habeck arguing that it would lead to mass unemployment, poverty and widespread social unrest.

But are these concerns valid? Germany is certainly heavily dependent on Russian energy. It sources 55% of its gas, 34% of

its oil, and 26% of its coal from Russia. But finding substitutes for Russian oil and coal would not be particularly difficult.

In fact, Germany has already agreed to join a European embargo on Russian coal, and it has announced plans to diversify away from Russian oil by the end of this year (though that may be too late to make a difference for Ukraine).

Unlike pipeline-delivered natural gas, oil and coal have global markets and can be purchased from pretty much anywhere. Moreover, Germany has strategic reserves of both. Gas poses a greater challenge, because it can be delivered only through existing pipelines.

The question, then, is whether Germany can find short-run substitutes for imports from Russia.

For an answer, we can consult a new ECONtribute policy brief by a group of top German economists who have sought to quantify the consequences of ending Russian gas imports.

The authors' results are highly credible. They use a state-of-the-art multisector macro model to account for the complexities of modern supply chains, and they bring to bear detailed knowledge of the German energy market.

The study finds that an immediate end to Russian gas would cost Germany 0.5-2.2% of GDP. That is a potentially sizable reduction in growth, but it is by no means catastrophic. Even in the worst-case scenario, the contraction would be less severe than the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, when German GDP fell by 4.6%.

The estimated output loss varies widely, depending on how well the German economy can reallocate resources to other sectors and find substitutes for gas.

The study assumes that the "elasticity of substitution" is very small, but not zero, meaning that while Russian gas is difficult to replace, German households and firms could still switch to other energy inputs and import more gas from the Netherlands or Norway in the short-term.

The output losses would be modest (below 1% of GDP) even if the elasticity of substitution is very small, because in an economy with complex supply chains, there are more possibilities to find alternative suppliers.

One risk to consider, however, is what economists call the O-ring feature of supply chains (a

reference to the catastrophic failure that caused the 1986 Challenger space shuttle disaster): If one crucial link in the chain breaks, all the links below it can collapse, too, generating fallout that propagates across the whole economy.

In any case, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz dismissed the paper in a widely watched interview, arguing that its models do not account for the realities on the ground. He contends that basic physics — such as the time it takes to build a new pipeline — stand in the way of mitigating output losses as much as the paper envisages.

Moreover, he insists that the government is more familiar with the relevant constraints than the study's authors are, because it is in constant contact with major businesses.

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An insightful conversation with a turtle ranger

In a highly urbanised city, one of the greatest challenges is how to protect the life cycle of sea turtles despite developmental changes happening around them. Mohammed al Hasani and Hassan al Qasmi perform an important role in making a seamless experience not just for sea turtles but also in educating humans on how to protect the species... **P20**

Ancient art of Ukrainian Easter eggs preserves culture, history

MARIA FEDACHTCHIN'S fingers trembled a bit as she etched the first intricate lines of beeswax along the smooth, unblemished shell of an egg cradled in her palm. She's learning to design pysanky, the ornately decorated traditional Easter eggs of Ukraine, where the 60-year-old was born and lived until her 1991 immigration to Chicago. But her focus was rattled by news that

Russian rockets had just struck her hometown of Lviv in western Ukraine, the area where her parents, sister and other loved ones still reside. "My hands are shaking right now," she said, periodically glancing at her phone, hoping for text messages from relatives or news alerts. "You don't know what can happen at any moment."

Fedachtchin was one of about a dozen women attending a recent pysanky workshop at the Ukrainian National Museum in Chicago. The tenor of the room was solemn, in contrast to the brightly coloured eggs on display around the museum, showcasing the artwork of different regions of Ukraine as well as various historical periods.

The class started about a half-hour after back-to-back airstrikes hit Lviv, a historical cultural centre of Ukraine and, more recently, a haven near the Polish border for Ukrainians evacuating following the full-scale Russian invasion that began in late February.

Several workshop participants had spoken to relatives overseas and learned they were safe; others were still awaiting calls.

Artist and instructor Anna Chychula began the class by recounting one of the many legends surrounding pysanky. There is said to be an evil monster shackled to a cliff and each Easter egg - singular pysanka

-creates another link in the chain that binds him. The fate of the world depends on the survival of these fragile eggs, according to ancient lore, or the beast will be unleashed upon the world.

Today, this mythical monster is widely believed to be embodied in Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose war on Ukraine continues in its sixth week.

"So you're doing very important, beautiful work today," said Chychula, whose pysanky have previously been featured at the Art Institute of Chicago and currently at the Field Museum. "Make the chain stronger. Know that you are making a difference. Because a pysanka is a hope. It is a prayer. It is a wish."

The war has ignited waves of egg deco-



rating around the globe, from church groups to classes to pysanky fundraisers, with the proceeds from egg sales helping Ukraine relief efforts. The Facebook page Pysanky for Ukraine has more than 8,000 followers worldwide, many posting photos of their own eggs along with words of encouragement for those threatened or displaced by the war.

"This beautiful Ukrainian tradition was

passed down to me from my maternal grandparents," one woman from Indiana posted on the site, with a half-dozen images of her pysanky.

"Prayers for peace to my family, and all families, still in Ukraine."

As Fedachtchin dipped her egg in yellow dye, she said her hand was growing increasingly steady, the artwork absorbing some of her concentration and worry. The painstaking technique becomes easier with time and practice, she said.

Her niece, who has small children, had already fled to Poland. Other relatives remained in Lviv, volunteering at night to help pick up refugees at the train station and caring for those displaced by the war.

Her mother and father are in their 80s and don't want to leave their home, which is a few miles outside of Lviv.

As airstrikes racked the city, her mom spoke of gardening and washing the windows, to ready their house for Easter.

Fedachtchin and her sister had laughed, wryly. If an explosion were to shatter the windows, they asked, would it matter if the glass was clean or not?

"Life has to go on, no matter what," Fedachtchin said. "Because everything is crazy. Sometimes I want to wake up and say this is not real. How can it happen in the 21st century? It's unbelievable." - **tca/dpa**

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

When there comes God's victory, and conquest. And you see the people entering God's religion in multitudes. Then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness. He is the Acceptor of Repentance.

(An-Nasr)



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

FATWA

QUESTION:
A person drank water accidentally during Imsak. He realised this during Al Fajr. What should he do?

ANSWER:
If he was aware that the period of Imsak has already begun, he should make amends for that slip on the same day.

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that he heard the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, saying:

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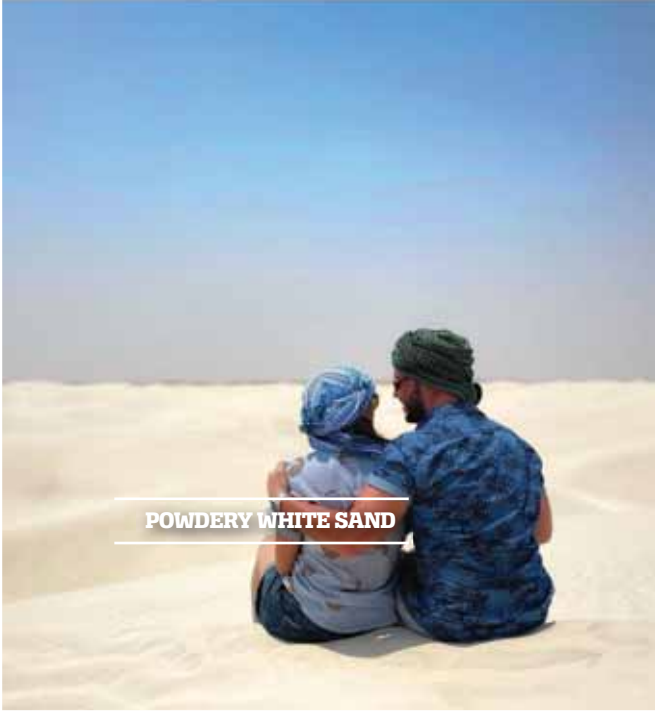


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Around the World

TRAVEL TALES

'Time to close' Parthenon marbles row: Acropolis museum director



THE NEW DIRECTOR of the Acropolis Museum has called for an end to the long-running dispute for the return of the Parthenon marbles to Greece, noting that London's parliament could rule on the issue.

"It's time for the matter to be closed," Nikos Stampolidis told AFP in an interview.

"We are not talking about just any work of art far from its place of origin", but of "part of an architectural monument that is a symbol of global culture", said Stampolidis.

"An act of the English parliament would be enough to return the friezes to Greece," Stampolidis said, referring to the British parliament in Westminster.

The Parthenon temple was built in the 5th century BCE on the Acropolis to honour Athena, the patron goddess of Athens.

In the early 1800s, workmen stripped entire friezes from the monument on the orders of the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Lord Elgin.

Elgin sold the marbles to the British government, which in 1817 passed them on to the British Museum where they remain one of its most prized exhibits.

Athens insists the sculptures were stolen.

But successive Greek governments and officials — including the late Melina Mercouri, the celebrated actress who also served as culture minister — have failed to make headway in the dispute.

'LEGALLY ACQUIRED'

In March 2021, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the Greek daily *Ta Nea* that he understood the "strength of feeling of the Greek people" on the issue.

But repeating Britain's longstanding position, he insisted that the sculptures "were legally acquired by Lord Elgin, in accordance with the laws in force at the time".

Last November, after a visit to London for talks with Johnson, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Greece could loan the British Museum other "iconic artefacts" in return for the marbles.

He also insisted that Athens would not be emboldened to ask for the return of additional items.

"We believe the marbles are a special case, a one-off," Mitsotakis said.

The Acropolis museum is "the one place on earth where you can properly admire the marbles in context, as you stand in front of 2,500 years of history and look across the panoramic vista towards the temple above," Mitsotakis wrote in the *Daily Mail* in November.

In January, the *Times*, a staunch supporter of the British Museum on the issue, changed its position.

"Time and circumstances are changing. The sculptures belong in Athens. They must now return there," the daily said. — **AFP**

GASTRONOMY

Thai... caviar? Farm produces delicacy in tropical climate



AT HIS UPMARKET Bangkok restaurant, Michelin-starred chef Thitid "Ton" Tassanakajohn spoons black caviar onto a plate, adding the newly affordable Thailand-made delicacy to his reinterpreted traditional family recipes.

The luxury food, better associated with chilly northern nations, is breaking into the Southeast Asian country's fine-dining scene, with the 37-year-old celebrity cook able to economically serve the roe thanks to an innovative farm outside the capital.

Using high-tech harvesting methods, a Thai-Russian partnership is offering a more ethical and affordable product, sparing the endangered fish that provide the delicacy from their usual fate of death.

"The price is... more affordable, I would say, compared to the ones that we imported," Ton explained, as he sprinkled caviar over Thai dip "Lhon Pu" at his restaurant Lahnyai Nusara.

Using caviar also helps challenge perceptions that Thai cuisine must always be spicy with strong flavours, he added.

"I think it's opened many doors for many chefs to use it as well," he said.

COOL FISH

Roughly 200 kilometres away at the popular seaside resort town of Hua Hin, it is time to harvest "black gold" at the Thai Sturgeon Farm, which supplies local distributor Caviar House.

Hundreds of the giant fish swim in tanks kept at a balmy 21 degrees Celsius (70 Fahrenheit) — a world away from the chilly Caspian Sea

where the species live in the wild.

"No one else has this kind of farm in a tropical climate," the farm's co-owner Alexey Tyutin told AFP.

The fish — considered living dinosaurs — can survive for up to 100 years and are typically up to four metres long.

Traditionally caviar producers kill the female fish to extract the eggs, but Tyutin's farm "milks" the sturgeon.

Using the fish for as long as possible helps make the venture sustainable and profitable, the 55-year-old said.

During harvesting, fish are moved to the "winter room", initially set at six degrees Celsius and increased to 15, before their eggs are extracted.

"Let's say if the fish weighs 25 kilograms, we usually expect about 2.6 to 2.7 kilograms of caviar," Tyutin said, adding that the farm estimates it may produce up to two tonnes this year.

Breeding sturgeons in a simulated environment requires vast amounts of energy — despite the use of solar panels, the monthly electricity bill is almost \$9,000.

"We are chilling down the water because the water temperature outside is 31 degrees. These fish can't tolerate it and they will die immediately," Tyutin said.

But Thailand's tropical climate has given the business a competitive advantage as the higher water temperature helps sturgeons mature at six years old compared to 11 in Russia.

THAI PRIDE

While Caviar House is only selling domestically at the moment — with a tin of the deli-

cacy retailing for between \$230 and \$832 — they hope to expand to exporting in the future.

Recent European Union sanctions against Moscow over the Ukraine invasion have targeted caviar, but the restrictions are largely symbolic as Russia is only a small exporter.

Instead, competition comes from China, which has become the market giant, producing 84 percent of the world's sturgeons, according to a European Commission report.

The industry suffered during the pandemic with high-end restaurants, airlines and cruise ships battered by travel curbs, although some fine-dining establishments adapted by decreasing portions and incorporating them into takeaway meals.

But the international caviar market is expected to record a compound annual growth rate of seven per cent between 2020 and 2025, according to a 2021 report by Technavio Research.

France, Germany, China, Spain, the United States, Japan and Russia are major markets but demand is fast growing in other parts of the Asia-Pacific region. Well-heeled Thai foodies and chefs are recognising the benefits of caviar, rich in vitamins, minerals and omega-3 fatty acids.

"It took only a few days for Thai chefs to start ordering after we sent samples for them to try," farm co-owner Noppadon Khamsai, 43, told AFP. "They say this is a good product and the importance is it's made in Thailand, and they're really proud to be presenting this Thai product."

— **AFP**

CHANGING WORLD

'Green cities' focus of largest Dutch garden expo



DUTCH KING Willem-Alexander on Wednesday opened the gates to one of Europe's largest gardening fairs, a once-in-a-decade show focusing this year on how to make cities greener.

But critics have denounced the show, which features displays by 200 participants from 25 countries, as a "money pit" that has massively over-run its budget.

The Floriade 2022 exposition, which runs until early October, is expected to draw more than two million enthusiasts to the central city of Almere.

The Floriade 2022 shows "what a green city could be like in the future... what kind of materials could be used for this and what role the horticultural sector could play in it", said its curator, Annemarie Jorritsma, a former mayor of the city.

"On top of that, when the show is finished it will be a fantastic residential area," she told AFP.

Each decade, a different Dutch city gets to host the gardening extravaganza. Almere, the latest, is a city that was itself created by the Dutch by draining part of the former Zuiderzee bay to reclaim land.

As well as being a showcase for Dutch horticulture, each participating country has its own pavilion.

China's is showing "new ways of using bamboo", said Jorritsma. Italy is focusing on permaculture, while France shows how metallic imitations of trees can be used to cool cities.

The German pavilion is decorated with plants including garden plants, trees, food crops and wildflowers to form a "living ecosystem whose appear-

ance would change throughout the exhibition", organisers said.

"The Floriade is the best place to show what countries have to change their cities," Detlef Wintzen, one of the exhibitors at the German pavilion, told AFP.

COST CONTROVERSY

The event has however been criticised for budget overruns that threatened its very existence.

Dutch media have reported that Almere has significantly over-run its 10-million-euro budget (\$10.8 million) for the project.

Financial daily *Financieele Dagblad* estimated that costs could be as high as 200 million euros — with losses of up to 100 million — but said there was a "thick fog" hanging over the official costs.

First held in Rotterdam in 1960, the organisers of the last three Floriades — 1992, 2002 and 2012 — have all been criticised for losses totalling millions of euros.

And some media reports have even suggested that this could be the last-ever edition of the show.

Almere — the country's youngest city — plans to have a "green residential area by the water" after the end of the Floriade designed by Dutch architect Winy Maas.

Some 660 homes will be built in the "Hortus" district, many of them made from durable materials such as moss and mushrooms.

An imposing colourful building in the middle of the exhibition will eventually serve as social housing, and "floating homes" are also planned.

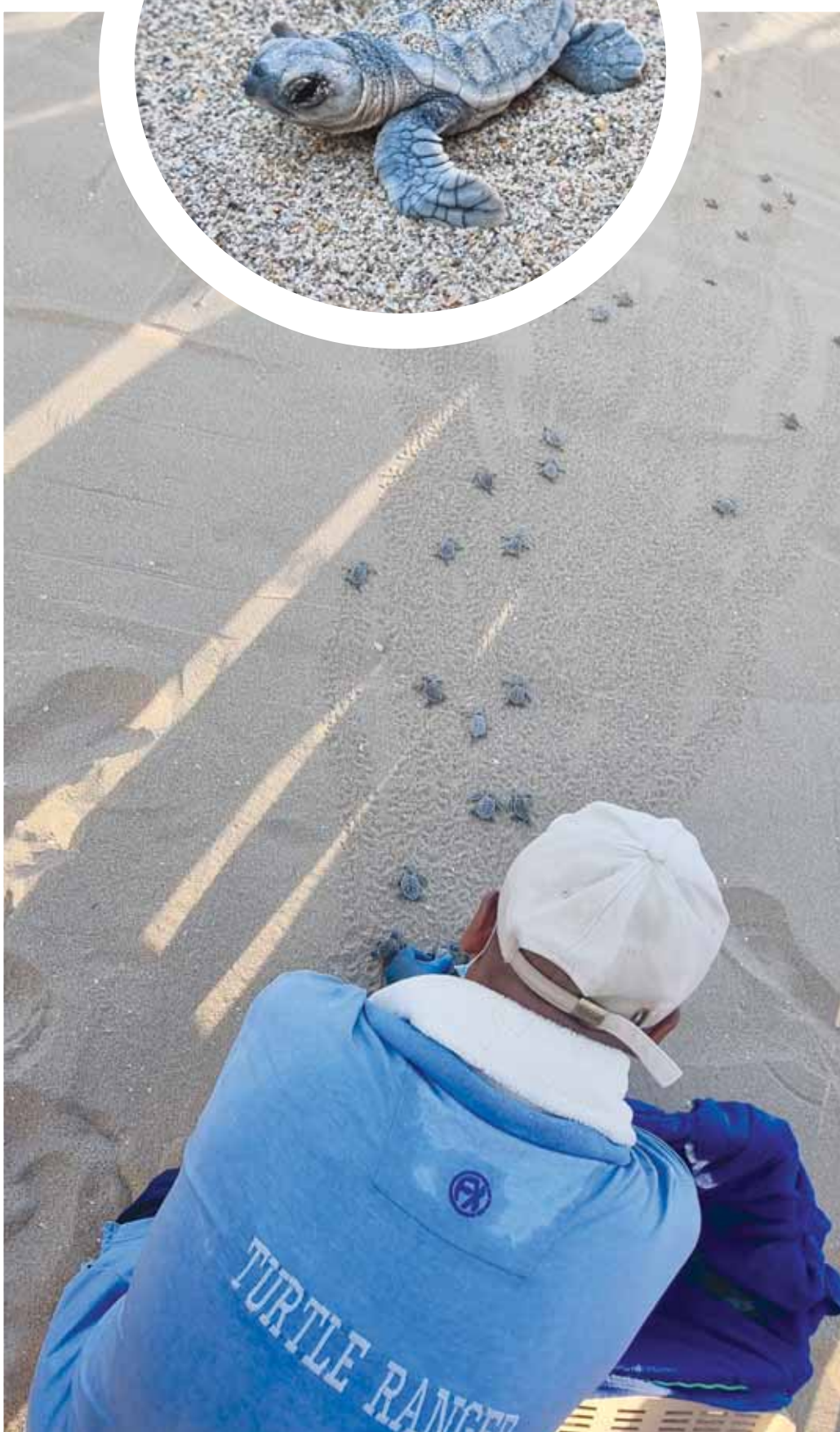
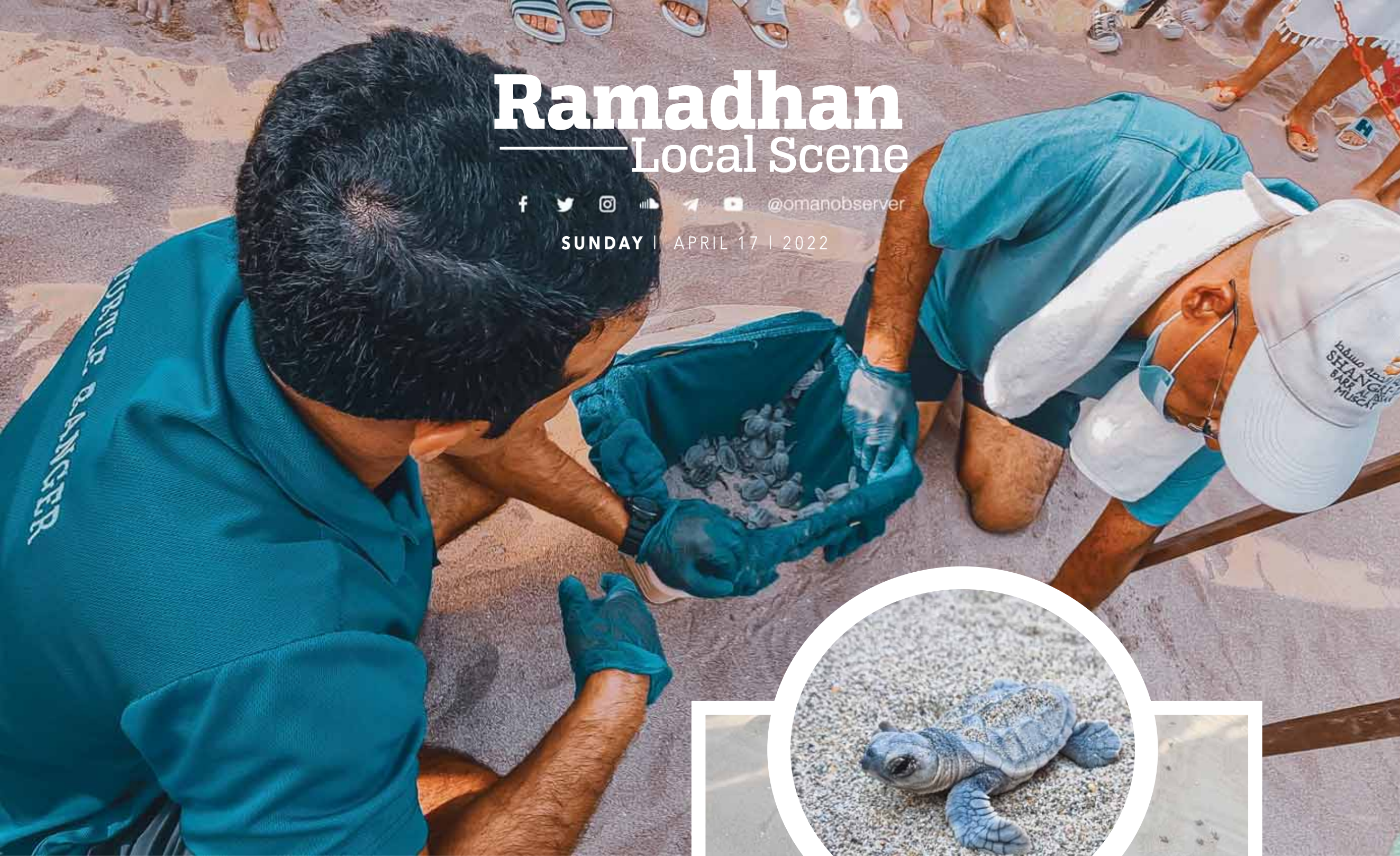
Members of the public can visit the Floriade from Thursday onwards. — **AFP**

Ramadhan

Local Scene

f t i s @omanobserver

SUNDAY | APRIL 17 | 2022



An insightful conversation with a turtle ranger

By Yeru Ebuon
Instagram: @yru_here

There are five sea turtle nesting sites all over Oman and one of them is in Muscat. In a highly urbanised city, one of the greatest challenges is how to protect the life cycle of these sea turtles despite developmental changes happening in areas around them.

For the sea turtles in Oman, it may take more than 20 years for them to come back home, but they usually do to lay eggs and ensure that the existence of the species continues. While time is of no bearing to these sea creatures, humans are usually transforming different areas and locations at a much faster rate and while sea turtles might have been born on an isolated pristine beach many years ago, they usually come back home to an area now encroached by humans or developed to become a centre of entertainment and human social activities.

Mohammed al Hasani and Hassan al Qasmi perform an important role in making a seamless experience not just for sea turtles as they lay their eggs and the hatchlings head back to the sea but also to educate people on the life cycle of these gentle marine sea creatures and what role the human's play in the preservation of the species.

Just this year alone, the sea turtle beach at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah already witnessed 77 nests of which 421 hatchlings already made it back to the sea. Last year, Mohammed and Hassan recorded 135 nests with over 4,500 hatchlings in total. The best year according to their record was in 2008 when there were 186 nests and they've released 16,000 hatchlings to the sea.

The property is one of the most popular hospitality destinations in the country offering not just luxury stays and experiences but also, the perfect getaway set amidst towering mountains and white-sand beaches with exceptional pools and lazy rivers making it an ideal destination not just for families but international guests as well.

Oman Daily Observer reached out to Mohammed, who's also adopted the pet name Momo, to talk to him regarding his role as a turtle ranger, what his journey has been like and why we need turtle rangers all over Oman.

CAN YOU TELL US WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO BECOME A TURTLE RANGER?

Growing up in Qantab, a beachside enclave between the mountains, I've been close to the sea since I was young. There have been many times I've encountered turtles while snorkelling and boating around the coast. It was when I had to help untangle a turtle caught up in a fishing net that I felt the need to embark on a

journey to help these wonderful creatures. When I joined Shangri-La, I had the opportunity to undergo training with Five Oceans, an environmental consultancy organisation where I learnt about the nesting process, safe handling of hatchlings, creating a safe environment for guest interactions and many more skills required to support the programme at the resort and aid in conservation.

DID YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH TURTLE RANGER CERTIFICATION TO BECOME EFFECTIVE AT WHAT YOU DO?

I was recruited specifically to take on the role of Turtle Ranger by Shangri-La in 2005. I'd been doing this job for over 16 years now. In the earlier part of my career, I had to undergo many trainings. The beach at Shangri-La is one of only five turtle nesting sites in Oman making this role a very important one. One of the trainings I underwent was with the Environment Authority at Ras Al Hadd where I learnt to tag and measure turtles for tracking and educational research.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT A TYPICAL DAY IS LIKE FOR A SEA TURTLE RANGER?

In the morning I would do a patrol of the beach looking for any new nests that may have popped up in the night. If I do come across one, I will cordon the area off to ensure its safety. Then I will check for any turtle hatchlings or movements

in all the nests that are due for hatching. In the event I do find a nest with baby turtles, I will ease their path out of the nest and prepare them for release. Usually, on days we release the hatchlings to sea, an area will be cordoned off allowing space for guests to enjoy this wonderful moment. Apart from looking after the well-being of the turtles, I also host daily talks from 4 pm - 5 pm, educating guests about Turtles and their behaviours. At night, my colleague Hassan and I would do a patrol on alternative dates to observe any turtles coming in for nesting.

DO YOU RECORD HOW MANY TURTLES ARE COMING TO NEST AND HOW MANY HATCHLINGS THERE IS EVERY SEASON?

Yes absolutely, this is part of our daily ritual whenever there's a nesting or hatching happening. 2008 was the best year with 186 nests and over 16,000 hatchlings. For this year, we've had 77 nests with 421 hatchlings that have already made their way to the sea this year. We're looking forward to welcoming more nests and hatchlings over the next few months.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT SEA TURTLES?

Sea turtles are very unique. After a period of 20-22 years, turtles return to the shores they were born to lay their

eggs. This in itself is a natural phenomenon. Another interesting fact is that the gender of the turtle will depend on the temperature of the sand. Usually, if the sand is hot, you will find mostly females hatching, if the sand is cool, the hatchlings will be mainly males.

WHY IS YOUR ROLE IMPORTANT?

Oman is a highly urbanised city where it would have been easy for these sea turtles to feel displaced. Part of what we do is educate people so they will have more appreciation and respect for the sea turtles. Most important is helping out the greater effort of preserving the species. Oman has been exemplary in its programme of preserving sea turtles with the creation of nature reserves where they can thrive. As turtle rangers in Muscat, we have better opportunities to interact with people. People don't have to drive far to have the sea turtle experience. With every interaction, whether it's with adults or children, it's amazing to see them gain a better understanding of how to live with nature. The role is important as we are demonstrating that the two species can co-exist and inspiring others to take the role of protector of the weaker species.

You can follow Mohammed on Instagram: @oman.turtle.ranger. For Muscat sea turtle experience, you can inquire on @shangrilabarraljissahresort