

No cases of zika reported in Oman

The Ministry of Health has refuted social media reports on registration of cases of zika in the Sultanate of Oman and confirmed that no cases of this disease have been reported in the country. It urged citizens and residents to rely on official sources for appropriate information.



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FRUSTRATING START FOR OMAN RACING TEAM AT ELMS



P15

INDIA WHOLESALE PRICE INFLATION ACCELERATES IN MARCH



P20

DIP INTO THE "HEALING WATERS" OF AL HINN SPRING



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Lolwah bint Fahd bin Abdulaziz al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah Almighty to dwell the departed soul in paradise and grant her family patience and fortitude. — ONA

PATIENT TREATED FOR BACTERIAL INFECTION

The Sultanate of Oman has registered the first mycobacterium canariense infection in the world medically known as endocarditis, an inflammation of the valves of the heart. The patient underwent a successful valve replacement surgery followed by long-term antibiotic treatment. Dr Zakariya bin Yahya al Balushi, inflammatory and infectious disease consultants at the Royal Hospital, said this is the first case of infection in Oman by the recently-detected bacteria. **DETAILS ON P2**

17

RAMADHAN

1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr04:24 AM

Dhuhr12:11 PM

Asr03:38 PM

Maghrib06:34 PM

Isha07:48 PM

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SHANGHAI REPORTS FIRST COVID DEATHS

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SUMMONING THE SPIRIT OF BRETON WOODS

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THE SCENT OF THE ROSES



The cultivation of roses is one of the treasures of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and one of the most important sources of livelihood for its residents. The rose season begins in March and peaks in April, and ends in early May of every year. The green terraces, which rise more than 3,000 metres above the ground, are covered with roses. **DETAILS ON P3**

MAJLIS ASH'SHURA HOSTS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER

Restructure of social security system soon

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The Majlis Ash'shura on Monday hosted Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, who delivered her ministry's statement at the 12th regular meeting.

The council's members requested the minister to speed up the finalisation of the Civil Societies Law and the regulation of voluntary work and refer them to the Council of Oman. Members also asked for expediting the declaration of a charitable organisation for the release of insolvent persons.

The members also sought an increase in monthly pensions reimbursed to social security families and an expansion of the social security umbrella to encompass more segments such as the laid-off workers especially after the economic downturn and the ensuing rise in electricity and water bills.

The minister of social development emphasised that the building of the social protection systems in an integrated manner



Her Excellency
Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar

requires the development of smart governance mechanisms which ensure coordination and cooperation between ministries and other actors to provide these services in accordance with clear and specific procedures.

The ministry has sought, through the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), to devise an initiative for restructuring the social security system in building an integrated and effective system to ensure social protection for all members of the society, she added. **TURN TO P2**

Oman bans partially hydrogenated oils

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The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has issued a decision banning production, import and/or marketing of partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) and food products in which these oils are used.

According to Food Safety and Quality Centre: "This decision shall come into force after three months from the date of publication in the official Gazette" Partially hydrogenated oil contains trans fat that can raise cholesterol and result in health complications. In 2015, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said that partially hydrogenated oil is not safe and removing it from food could prevent thousands of heart attacks each year.

Partially hydrogenated oil (PHO) is a solid form of vegetable oil that has undergone hydrogenation. This process adds hydrogen molecules to the liquid vegetable oil and transforms it into a solid at room temperature. During this process, trans fat forms.

Trans fat is the worst type of fat to consume because it lowers your body's good cholesterol and raises the bad cholesterol, according to experts.

"Non-communicable diseases (NCD) represent a major public health issue and have been responsible for untimely deaths in the country", said the experts.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has launched the National Monitoring Framework for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases in 2021.

UN Security Council to meet today on Jerusalem unrest

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council will meet on Tuesday over violence around a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site that wounded 170 people at the weekend, diplomatic sources said.

The meeting, called by China, France, the UAE, Norway and Ireland, will be a closed-door event, and comes after days of violence near Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque compound.

Meanwhile, Jordan summoned the Israeli charge d'affaires to object to "provocative Israeli violations" at the flashpoint Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem, the foreign ministry said.

Violence at and near the Al Aqsa compound has since early Friday wounded more than 170 people, mostly Palestinians, almost a year after similar tensions sparked an 11-day conflict between Israel and



A general view shows the Dome of Rock Mosque in Jerusalem's flashpoint Al Aqsa Mosque compound on Monday. — AFP

Palestinian in Gaza. Jordan serves as custodian of holy places in east Jerusalem, which Israel occupied in 1967 and later annexed in a move not recognised by most of the international community.

The foreign ministry

"summoned the charge d'affaires of the Israeli Embassy in Amman... to deliver a message of protest over illegitimate and provocative Israeli violations at the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque", it said in a statement. — Agencies



Plan to restructure social security system

FROM PAGE 1

MERGER OF FUNDS

The minister said that the merger of pension funds in the Sultanate of Oman aims to restructure them and enhance their role in creating a social protection system which supports inter-generational solidarity and fairness and ensures their financial sustainability.

The statement said the ministry provides rehabilitation services for people with disabilities, including autism spectrum, mental disabilities and severely disabled people, in 31 government centres, in addition to 11 civil society centres and 37 private centres.

The minister said that the National Autism Centre and autism centres in Sur and Salalah will be opened during the year (2022-2023). In addition, the construction of Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in the Wilayat of Ibbi,



will be completed.

HELP DEBTORS

The minister said the formation of the Al Gharmeen Charity Association to help debtors who are unable to pay loans, will be announced soon.

She said that a series of meetings were held with the founding committee of the association that includes specialists from various competent authorities.

She said the Assistant Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman

has responded about the Al Gharmeen Charity Association and work is under way to make an announcement soon. "Steps will be taken to prevent duplication with other associations working for the same cause."

UTILITY BILLS

The minister also said that the ministry is following up on the issue of high electricity and water prices for families registered under the National Subsidy System.

The departments affiliated

with the ministry in the various governorates were directed to follow up on the situation of these families and help them register in the National Subsidy System for electricity and water.

"A large number of those eligible for subsidy did not register in the system and their numbers stood at 37,215", she said.

CYCLONE RELIEF

The minister said that immediate aid was provided to those affected by Cyclone Shaheen, which covered 33,687 families who applied for financial assistance following damages to their homes and properties in Musannah, Al Suwaiq, Al Khabourah and Saham.

A total of RO 16,913,000 were disbursed to 16,913 families whose houses were fully damaged in the cyclone. Each family got RO 1,000. The transfer of funds started on October 8, 2021 and the last payment was made on January 12, 2022.

OMAN AND US SIGN AGREEMENT



MUSCAT: An agreement on the employment of official employees' spouses was signed at the Foreign Ministry here on Monday between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America (USA). The agreement was signed by Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Foreign Ministry's Under-Secretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Leslie M Tsou, Ambassador of the US to Oman. As per the agreement, spouses of officials at diplomatic missions are permitted to work in non-governmental establishments in the host country. The agreement comes within the framework of the advanced relations between Oman and the US and in affirmation of the two countries' keenness to boost cooperation. – **ONA**

Patient treated for first-ever bacterial infection

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has registered the first mycobacterium canariense infection in the world medically known as endocarditis, an inflammation of the valves of the heart.

The patient underwent a successful valve replacement surgery followed by long-term antibiotic treatment.

Dr Zakariya bin Yahya al Balushi, inflammatory and infectious disease consultant at the Royal Hospital, said this is the first case of infection in Oman by the recently-detected bacteria.



The first case of mycobacterium canariense was reported in the Canary Islands in 2004, hence the name was derived. Many cases were registered

afterwards, however no case of inflammation to the heart valve has ever been registered. The case of mycobacterium canariense infection registered in Oman is the first bacterial infection to the heart valve in the world.

He noted that the patient was treated by replacing the heart valve and received long-term antibiotics for at least a year, pointing out that this scientific breakthrough is the joint work between the Royal Hospital and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, and it was published in a well-known scientific journal.



Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company

Diam Hayat

Member of Nama Group

Tender Notice

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company hereby announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2443944/2022	Replacing the Existing Distribution Pumps with the New Pumps in Rustaq Pumping Station	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/4/2022	30/5/2022
T/2446915/2022	Construction of Water Distribution Networks and House Connection in North Al Batinah Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/4/2022	30/5/2022
T/2443956/2022	Consultancy Service for Supervision of the Construction of A'Seeb Wilayat Water Networks in Muscat Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	RO 1,500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/4/2022	6/6/2022
T/2445914/2022	Supply & Installation of New IT Infrastructure	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	RO 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/4/2022	30/5/2022
T/2445913/2022	Design, Supply & Installation of Drum Screen Control System at Al Ansab STP	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/4/2022	30/5/2022
T/2439505-2/2022	Call-Off Contract for Repair and Maintenance of Fiber Optic Cables for Two Years	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 25/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/4/2022	30/5/2022
T/2443842-1/2022	Supply of Packaging Materials for Kala Compost	Local Companies Registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/4/2022	11/5/2022

- The tender documents can be purchased from Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from the date of publication of this announcement until 28/4/2022. The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through Supplier Login.
- Applicants who are not registered with OWWSC shall register from <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> to have the login credentials of Supplier portal.
- All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through OWWSC e-tendering page (Supplier Login).
- All participating Companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope to OWWSC's Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 3:00 pm on the bid submission date. Bid Bond must be obtained from a Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of OWWSC.
- The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through OWWSC e-tendering page not later than 3:00 pm on the date specified above.
- For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om or Email to: tender@owwsc.nama.om



www.owwsc.nama.om

Bahla celebrates middle of the month of Ramadhan



AMAL AL RIYAMI
BAHLA, APRIL 18

The Al Soor Volunteer Team of Bahla Club organised an event to celebrate the night of Al Aqaba (the night of the middle of Ramadhan) at Bahla's famous market.

The event was attended by more than 150 children of different ages from Bahla and nearby places.

The event began with the reception of children in the market square after Tarawih prayers. The children were divided into two groups. Saleh al Abri led the first



group of children which passed through the Bahla Heritage Market chanting and praying.

Ayman al Shukaili led the

second group. His chants were heard throughout the Bahla market. The children walked behind him, saying Amen.

Traditional souqs, old alleys and ancient walls of the Bahla Heritage Market added a distinctive character to the event.

Khamis al Maslihi, Head of the Al Soor Volunteer Team, said: "Before the event, we coordinated with the sellers with the stores to participate in this event by distributing some gifts, sweets and some free coupons to the children which brought a special joy to the participating children."



■ **TWO INJURED IN DHOW FIRE AT KHASAB PORT**



A fire erupted on a wooden ship, which was anchored at the Port of Khasab, on Monday. Firefighting teams in collaboration with the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo), put out the flames before spreading to other ships anchored at the port. Two people were rushed to hospital to receive treatment from minor injuries.

ROSE AROMA

FILLS JABAL AKHDHAR AS HARVEST SEASON PEAKS

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, APRIL 18

The cultivation of roses is one of the treasures of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and one of the most important sources of livelihood for its residents, who practice flower filtration and extraction of their pure and fresh water, which is found in almost every home in the Sultanate of Oman.

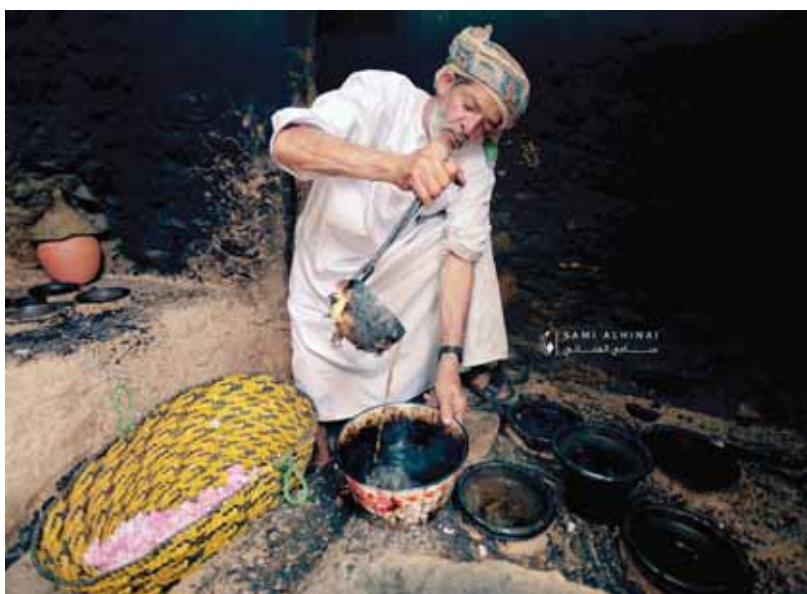
The rose season begins in March and peaks in April and ends in early May of each year. The green terraces, which rise more than 3,000 metres above the ground, are covered with roses. This cultivation is spread in large mountain areas and concentrated in the villages of Al Ain, Al Shurajjah, Saiq and Al Qashaa.

Salim bin Rashid al Toobi, Director of Agriculture Department in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, recently said: "The number of rose plants from which mountain rose water is extracted is estimated at about five thousand trees distributed over a total area of 7 acres. The amount of production is about 4,000 litres per acre or about 28,000 litres for the total area planted with rose trees."

Al Toobi added that the ministry had distributed rose water distillation machines that are alternative to the traditional ones that depend on wood as fuel. It also provided guidance programmes concerned with the process of pruning, fertilising and caring for the Omani rose trees.

Despite the distribution of distillation machines that may speed up the process of making rose water, following the traditional method is the secret behind the quality and accuracy of making green mountain rose water special. The rose water industry is a traditional craft that has been attached to the people of Jabal Al Akhdhar for hundreds of years.

Since the beginning of the



emergence of rose flowers, people tend to pick roses in the early morning and sometimes in the evening. All family members cooperate in picking roses from the orchard in a beautiful cooperative process throughout the rose

season.

After the rose is harvested, the process of distilling it in unique factories is designed by farmers. It is a building made of mud, stones and pottery utensils placed on it. The area of this factory varies

according to the area of the rose trees for the farmer. The distilled rose water collected through the evaporation process. This process lasts about four hours. For some, the work continues throughout the rose season, according to the

quantities of roses available. The resulting rose water is collected and left for a period ranging from one month to forty days until the impurities are deposited. After that, it is stored in a pottery pot and remains in it for three months.



The number of rose plants from which mountain rose water is extracted is estimated at about five thousand trees distributed over a total area of 7 acres. The amount of production is about 4,000 litres per acre or about 28,000 litres for the total area planted with rose trees

SALIM AL TOOBI

Director of Agriculture Department
in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar

Then the product is packed in glass bottles with a capacity of 750 millilitres and then marketed in the local markets, where its value ranges between RO 8 to RO 10. Some bottles of (500 millilitres) are valued at RO 5.

This season has become one of the tourist components that visitors to Jabal Al Akhdhar are keen to see and learn closely about the traditional and modern rose water manufacturing mechanism. According to the annual statistics, the number of visitors is constantly increasing, and this is due to the unique and distinctive features of Jabal Al Akhdhar and its cool and refreshing weather.

During the rose season, tourists can tour some of the agricultural paths through the villages of Jabal Al Akhdhar. Thus, they have the opportunity to see the rose trees and watch the people picking roses early in the morning.

There are also some traditional factories that tourists can view and see the old method used in the distillation of rose water.



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Modesty is the keyword of the holy month, but flouting minimalism during and after iftar is landing many in hospitals, according to doctors and nutrients. Doctors agreed that many patients they saw during or after Ramadhan seemed to have followed a wrong eating pattern and consumed oily foods and carbonated drinks on an empty stomach. A piece of advice for them is to 'break the fast sensibly and reap the full health benefits of Ramadhan' lest they be ready to face abnormal health conditions, including high BP, palpitation, bad cholesterol, breathlessness etc.

"All the benefits of fasting will be overshadowed by drinking very sugary carbonated soft drinks and rich, heavy, fatty meals immediately after iftar because the internal organ system was getting used to the low intake period, and a sudden inflow of foods especially carbonated drinks can trigger problems", said Dr Benny Panakkan.

Experts are unanimous in saying that eating patterns like this can spike blood sugar and triglycerides after the meal triggering the cascade of metabolic events leading to atherosclerosis or the process of developing clogged arteries leading to heart attacks and strokes.

According to Vandana Luthra, owner of wellness, beauty and skincare products range and services, "No food is bad, and it's us who make it good or bad. The additives, extra ingredients and additional stuff that we add to make a food of one's choice make it either better or harmful."

"Ramadhan is a month that gives you spiritual wellness, as well as mental and physical, feel-good moments. It's time to achieve the best of everything, and people through fasting are achieving exactly the same", she said.

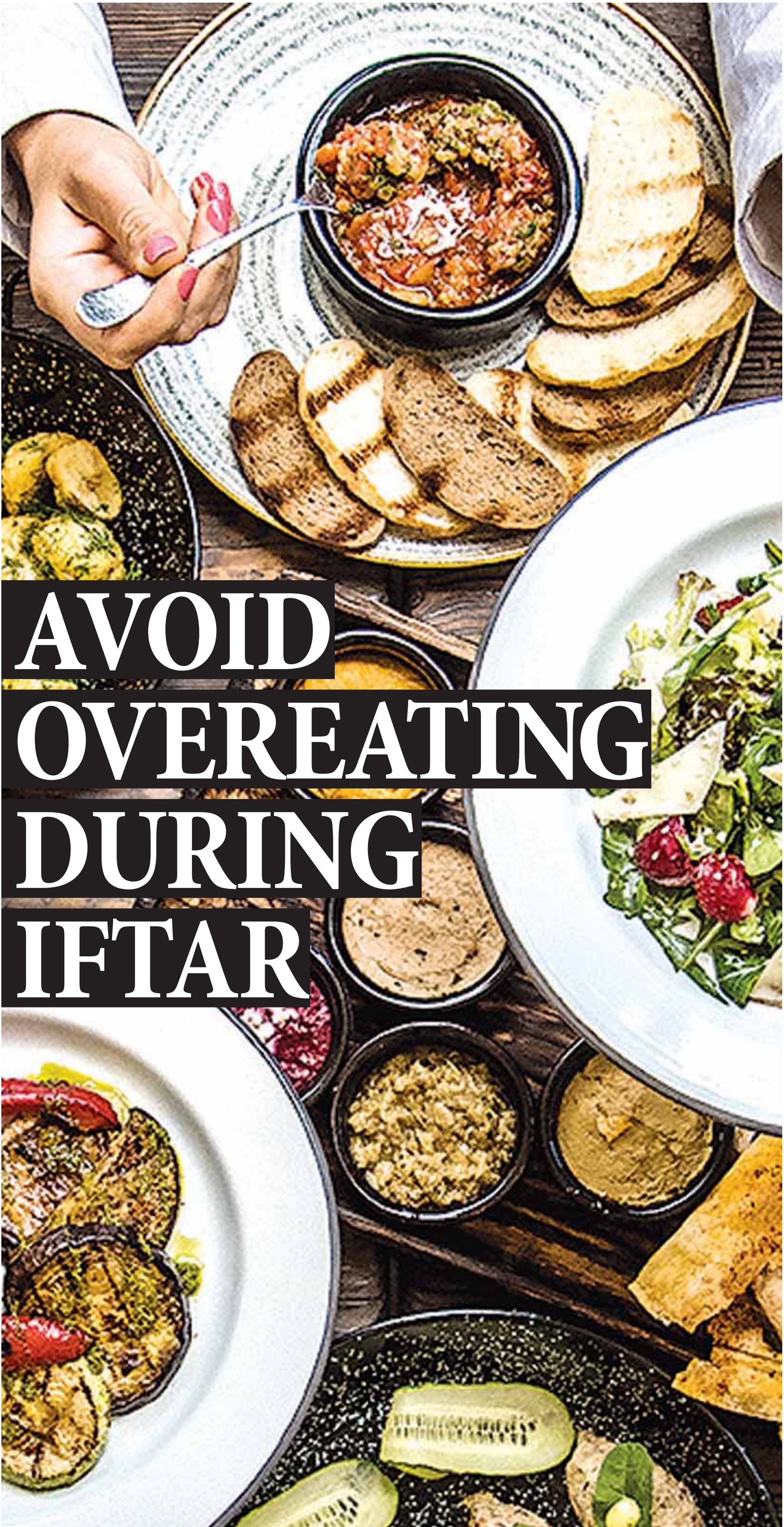
Medics say fasting people can have any food of their choice during the iftar, but control should be applied to intake.

"Dehydration can be one of the risks of fasting especially during the holy month of Ramadhan during the summer as foods and drinks are limited to before sunrise and after sunset", says Mini Padikkal, Clinical Dietician.

"Basically, fasting teaches us modesty, minimalism and empathy but contrarily, many are taking iftar and post-iftar time an occasion to compensate for the lost food and tend to overeat resulting in various lifestyle diseases", adds Padikkal.

In many cases, people tend to take heavy meals immediately after iftar, usually fatty foods. This leads to pain in the stomach in the form of acidity or gastritis in medical terms, nausea, and indigestion.

In short, overeating or 'feasting over fasting' should be avoided during all the meals during the holy month, especially during iftar. The body's immediate need at the time of iftar is to get readily available energy sources in glucose, particularly for the brain and nerves. So it is always good to break the fast in the traditional way with dates and fruits. Dates provide energy in the form of sugar. Fruits help to maintain water and mineral balance in the body. Soups and cereals can follow it. Make sure your soup includes generous amounts of vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, peas, green beans, squash and carrots.





Be on guard against pigmented patches in summer: Expert

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Come summer, and it's time for heightened cases of skin pigmentation disorders. The issue can vary from discoloured marks or brown spots appearing on the skin to pigmented patches.

This was discussed at a recent continued medical education (CME) programme on "Hyperpigmentory disorders and newer modalities treatment to prevent sun damage in this summer" at the Millennium Hotel, Muscat.

Speaking as a key speaker at the programme, Specialist Dermatologist Dr Shibu Mohammed of Bader al Samaa Group of Hospitals said that skin pigmentation disorders can occur in anyone.

Dr Abdulla Mufti al Qurashi, Dermatologist Al Nahda Hospital was the chief guest.

"From annoying patches of discolouration to freckles and dark spots, to pigmented patches, hyperpigmentation can take many forms".

Dermatologists from different hospitals in Muscat attended the function. Dr Eman Goher, Dr Ahmed Ramdan, Dr Ramy Fikri and MostafaTarek Elsayed of Business unit of DEVART lab were also present at the programme.

"Specially, when we have been exposed to the harmful UVA UVB radiation of the sun for a long time", he said.

Throughout the summer months, pigmentation problems can be heightened as the sun can cause a significant increase in the production of melanin, leading to

darker patches of the skin being likely to appear, Dr Shibu said.

"We should take maximum care to avoid the consequences of pigmentation problems on our skin. But, to prevent it, it's important to first understand exactly what it is", he said.

Pigmentation means colouring. Skin pigmentation disorders affect the colour of the skin, and it gets the colour from a pigment called melanin. Special cells in the skin make melanin.

"When these cells become damaged or unhealthy, it affects melanin production. Some pigmentation disorders affect just patches of skin. Others affect the entire body", Dr Shibu, who is a well-known dermatologist and cosmetologist and an international speaker working both in India and the Sultanate of Oman said.

Children exchange love and goodies during Qaranqasho



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

There was fun, laughter and cheers in the air when nearly 1,000 children gathered after iftar and prayers to celebrate the Qaranqasho at the Ahli Sidab Club on Sunday.

They sang, danced and vied in a diverse number of activities filled with fun and competition where everyone was feted and sweets and goodies were distributed.

Above all, there was unity in the air, and urged every human being to be united for the goodness of the world, by the DJ.

Qaranqasho is a celebration for children in the Arab world developed to keep the children who fast motivated, and is celebrated in the middle of the holy month of Ramadhan and is one of the most prominent customs passed down through the generations.



It aims to draw joy on the faces of children, reward them and encourage them to fast. It also achieves and enhances social communication and instills it in them.

"There has been a tremendous response from the children and their parents to the Qaranqasho. I feel this overwhelming reception was due to the fact that such events were not held for the last two years

due to the pandemic," Nawal al Balushi of Magical Events which conducted the mega Qaranqasho.

There were more than 1,000 children and their families at the spacious Ahli Sidab Club in the Wilayat of Sidab.

Children of the Arab world celebrate Qaranqasho which is a colourful social tradition by children who are dressed in their best and with a great amount of joy on their faces, visit homes in groups and move through the lanes singing folk songs related to this beautiful tradition inspired by the authentic Omani heritage. The hosts of these children welcome them with sweets and gifts and share their joy.

"Children from different wilayats celebrate Qaranqasho with dance and music and foods and gifts while elders refresh their acquaintances in the neighbourhood," said Huda al Zakwani, a media professional with Oman Radio.

Dengue infected should not donate blood

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

People with dengue fever have been asked not to donate blood as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the disease. The Department of Blood Banks at the Ministry of Health has also decided not to collect blood in areas where the cases of dengue fever have been found.

However, the Blood Bank has been asking healthy people to donate blood, which is of prime importance in saving the lives of others. Blood donation in the Sultanate of Oman has been voluntary and without any fee, as the MoH works on the idea of not importing blood from outside the country.

In light of the spread of dengue fever that is caused by the Aedes mosquito, the Department of Blood Banks announced it would take maximum care to avoid the spread of dengue fever through blood collected from an infected person.



Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, had sounded alarm earlier about the dengue fever in some parts of the capital area during the past weeks. He warned that the mosquito that spreads dengue fever also caused symptoms of yellow fever noticed in some African countries.

He said the authorities were doing joint activities to combat the spread of the disease, and awareness programmes were carried out in educational and other institutions.



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors/consultant specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
10/2022	Electrical tapping from 11 KV network at Maqshan	Specialist in electrical works & registered in grade (C) in DCRP	28 April 2022	30 May 2022	130/- R.O
11/2022	Building works-Wudam	Excellent	28 April 2022	30 May 2022	420/- R.O
12/2022	Building works-Salalah	First and Above	28 April 2022	06 June 2022	110/- R.O
13/2022	Building works-Salalah	First and Above	28 April 2022	06 June 2022	200/- R.O

***For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)**

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as soft copy (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.



Shanghai reports first Covid deaths since lockdown

SHANGHAI: China said on Monday that just three people have died from Covid-19 in Shanghai since a gruelling lockdown began last month, despite recording hundreds of thousands of cases of the fast-spreading Omicron variant in the eastern megacity.

Authorities said the first deaths from China's biggest outbreak since the virus wave in Wuhan over two years ago were three people aged 89 to 91, all of whom had underlying health issues and had not received Covid vaccines.

Beijing insists that its zero-Covid policy of hard lockdowns, mass testing and lengthy quarantines has averted fatalities and the public health crises that have engulfed much of the rest of the world.

But some have cast doubt on official figures in a nation with low vaccination rates among its vast elderly population. Shanghai health officials noted on Sunday that less than two-thirds of residents over 60 had received two Covid jabs and less than 40 per cent had received a booster.

Unverified social media posts have also claimed unreported

The three reported victims in Shanghai 'deteriorated into severe cases after going into hospital'

deaths — typically before being scrubbed from the Internet. Hong Kong, meanwhile, has attributed nearly 9,000 deaths to Covid-19 since Omicron first surged there in January.

The three reported victims in Shanghai "deteriorated into severe cases after going into hospital", according to a government account, with city health official Wu Qianyu telling a Monday press conference that "underlying disease" was the direct cause of death.

The eastern business hub has simmered under lockdowns since March, with many of its 25 million residents confined to their homes as daily caseloads have topped 25,000 — a modest figure by global standards but virtually unheard of in China.



A child receives a swab test for the coronavirus during a Covid-19 lockdown in Pudong district in Shanghai. — AFP

Many inhabitants have flooded social media with complaints of food shortages, spartan quarantine conditions and heavy-handed enforcement, circulating footage of rare protests faster than

government censors can delete them.

But officials have vowed to continue isolating anyone who tests positive regardless of whether they show signs of the disease —

with asymptomatic infections accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the more than 22,000 new local cases on Monday.

China last reported new Covid-19 deaths on March 19 —

two people in the northeastern rustbelt province of Jilin — the first such acknowledged deaths in more than a year.

China's ruling Communist Party has touted its hardline pandemic approach as proof that it places human life above material concerns — unlike many Western democracies, which it argues have sacrificed lives by failing to stop the virus.

Beijing has also acknowledged that dropping restrictions could let the pathogen run amok through its under-resourced healthcare system, potentially causing millions of deaths — particularly among the elderly, who are at risk of developing more severe disease.

But experts say political considerations are also at play, with the party staking popular legitimacy on crushing emerging outbreaks in a year that will likely see President Xi Jinping secure a precedent-busting third term in office.

"This is a sensitive and critical year for the regime", said Lynette Ong, associate professor of political science at the University of Toronto. — AFP

Iran blames US for delays to revive N-deal

TEHRAN: Iran on Monday said an agreement with world powers to revive the 2015 nuclear deal was still not in sight, blaming the United States for the delay.

"More than one issue is still pending between Iran and the United States", Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

"Messages (from Washington) sent through (European Union coordinator Enrique) Mora these past weeks... are far from providing solutions that could lead to an accord", he told reporters.

Iran has been engaged in efforts to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly, and the United States indirectly since April 2021.

Mora, who coordinates the indirect US-Iran talks, visited Tehran last month for talks with Iranian officials, and later went to Washington. At the time, Mora said he hoped to close the gaps remaining in the arduous negotiations.

The agreement fell apart



Saeed Khatibzadeh

in 2018, when then-president Donald Trump withdrew the US and reimposed crippling economic sanctions. Iran, in response, began rolling back on most of its commitments under the accord.

Khatibzadeh on Monday blamed Washington for delays to restore the nuclear deal.

"The United States are responsible for these delays, because they are taking their time to give replies" that would be suitable for Iran, he said.

Earlier this month, Khatibzadeh's counterpart in the State Department Ned Price said it was Tehran that was not giving way to make a deal possible. — AFP/dpa

Syrian war drama makes TV breakthrough

DAMASCUS: A Syrian war drama figures this month on the Ramadhan menu of a Saudi-owned television channel.

Syrian dramas have long been popular across the region, though many broadcasters have shied away from Syrian-produced shows.

Syrian actors, however, have still found their way on to screens through pan-Arab productions and historical dramas produced by Gulf networks, such as the popular Bab al Hara series. But shows made exclusively by Syrians were largely shunned.

The Saudi-owned MBC channel has started airing a Syrian-made series, "Suspended", during Ramadhan — a period that this year started April 2 and during which viewership peaks across the Middle East.

The Arabic-language show shot outside Damascus is "the first social drama made entirely by Syrians to air on a Saudi-owned TV channel since 2011", said Director Seif Elsbei.

For its part, MBC said that it "has never had any problem with productions or actors from Syria". "MBC is keen on hosting Syrian dramas... on its screens and platforms", not just during Ramadhan but throughout the



Children walk by a car during the filming of the Syrian Social series in the Wadi Barada suburb of Damascus. — AFP

rest of the year, Ali Jaber, the network's director, said in an emailed statement.

"Drama has beat politics in the race to renew relations", said Badih Sanji, a Syrian journalist and researcher.

The Syrian war drama was filmed in the Wadi Barada suburb of Damascus, a former battleground.

Crammed with clips of destruction and despair, the series revolves around the lives of Syrians who have returned to the area after years of displacement.

Among the show's main characters are a man who had

opposition leanings in the early years of the war. In one scene, security forces interrogate him and force him to name another opposition sympathiser whom they later arrest.

"The return of Syrian social dramas is a breakthrough", Elsbei said on the set of the show as children ran around charred vehicles used as props.

It "ushers in a new way of engaging with Syrian dramas by TV networks in the Gulf", Elsbei said.

The series is not only airing on MBC channels but also on the popular streaming service

Shahid, likewise owned by the MBC group.

The wide exposure is seen as a boon to Syria's filming industry, which has been struck by dried-up funding and the exodus of major talent, mainly to Egypt and Dubai.

"We suffered greatly from the years-long boycott of Syrian drama", said Yamen Alhajali, screenwriter of the series.

"Art should be treated as art", not as politics, he said. For Alhajali, MBC's popularity guarantees the show a wide audience.

MBC "is one of the most important platforms in the Arab world", he said.

"It has a wide audience and large viewership which will give the show a rightful reach."

This Ramadhan season, around 20 Syrian shows of various genres are airing on TV screens at home in Syria, as well as across the region.

For Ahmad al Sheikh, the producer of Suspended, this marks the start of a long road towards recovery.

"Gulf channels are an essential supporter of Arab drama", he said. "We are at the beginning of the road again, and we hope this drive will continue."

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka PM trims cabinet of relatives

Sri Lanka's embattled leader dropped two of his brothers and a nephew from his cabinet, following public anger over the ruling family's mismanagement of a crippling economic crisis and calls for his resignation.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has presided over the island nation's most painful downturn in memory.

The new cabinet retains Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, Gotabaya's older brother and the head of Sri Lanka's ruling clan,



while leaving out eldest sibling Chamal and younger brother Basil, the former finance minister. Mahinda's eldest son Namal, who had been touted as a future leader before the crisis, was also dropped.

SEOUL

US, S Korea launch bilateral military exercises

The US armed forces and South Korea were holding one of their regular military exercises. The nine-day commando exercise has begun as planned, a spokesman for United States Forces Korea (USFK) said. The training exercise using computer simulations takes place twice a year. The current exercise takes developments in the pandemic into account.

The exercise is intended to "strengthen the joint operational capability and improve the



defence posture" of both alliance partners.

The USFK did not give details on the number of soldiers involved. The US has stationed 28,500 soldiers in South Korea to deter threats from North Korea.

TRIPOLI

Key Libyan oil export port closed

Libya's National Oil Corporation announced the closure of operations in major oil fields after staff in the key export terminal of Zueitina were blocked from working.

"The National Oil Corporation is obliged to declare a state of force majeure on the oil port of Zueitina, including all fields and producing stations associated with this port and shipping facilities until further notice", NOC chief Mustafa Sanalla said in a statement. Declaring force



majeure is a legal move allowing parties to free themselves from contractual obligations when factors such as fighting or natural disasters make meeting them impossible.



In brief

ROME



ITALY'S PM TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi has contracted the coronavirus. The 74-year-old tested positive but had no symptoms, the Italian government announced on Easter Monday.

The prime minister of the multi-party government will therefore not travel to the African countries of Angola and the Republic of Congo this week as planned, it added.

Draghi wanted to negotiate with the countries' governments about gas supplies. Italy wants to wean its energy supply off Russian gas as a reaction to the war in Ukraine.

According to the government, Italy will be represented on the trip by Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio and the Minister for Ecological Restructuring, Roberto Cingolani.

— dpa

STOCKHOLM



26 ARRESTED AFTER VIOLENT SWEDEN PROTESTS

Sweden has arrested 26 people after weekend clashes between police and protesters rallying against plans by a far-right group, police said. Eight people were arrested in the city of Norrköping and 18 people were detained in the neighbouring city of Linköping, police said. On Sunday, clashes erupted in both cities for the second time in four days over rallies by anti-immigration and Hard Line, led by the Danish-Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan. Police said officers wounded three people after firing warning shots during Sunday's clashes. Paludan, a lawyer and a YouTuber who intends to stand in Swedish legislative elections in September but does not yet have the necessary number of signatures to secure his candidature, is currently on a 'tour' of Sweden.

— AFP

MUNICH



GERMAN COUPLE PERISH IN HIKING ACCIDENT

A married couple from central Germany fell to their deaths while hiking near the popular Alpine destination of Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

The landlady of the holiday home where the 55-year-old woman and her 60-year-old husband were staying reported them missing on Saturday, police announced. Emergency services found their lifeless bodies below a hiking trail near Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the village of Grainau. The couple presumably set off on April 13 for a hike from Grainau in the direction of Osterfelderkopf summit. On a snowy section of the trail, the two fell and suffered fatal injuries.

— dpa



Debris from a destroyed car litter the street at the scene of an explosion near a grocery store, following bombardment in Ukraine's city of Kharkiv. — AFP

No progress in Ukraine peace talks, says Kremlin

MOSCOW: There is still no progress in sight in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine negotiations to end the war, according to the Kremlin.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was cited by the Interfax news agency as saying that Ukraine had repeatedly changed its position and that there were inconsistencies when it came to coordination.

The "special military operation", as the Kremlin refers to the war, is going according to plan, Peskov said. He added that the Kremlin had seen photos of the burning Russian warship 'Moskva' that later sank, saying: "To what extent they are authentic and correspond to reality, we cannot say." Ukraine had said it had hit the 'Moskva' with two Neptune missiles. Russia claims that a fire broke out on board, which then led to the sinking.

Meanwhile, air strikes killed at least seven people in Ukraine's western city of Lviv on Monday, as Russia pounded targets across the country and massed forces for an expected all-out assault in

Air strikes kill at least 7 people in Ukraine's city of Lviv

the east. The air strikes in Lviv came just hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Moscow of wanting to "destroy" the entire eastern region of Donbas bordering Russia.

Russia's defence ministry said it had hit 16 military targets at various locations across Ukraine.

Following the attack on Lviv, black smoke billowed from the gutted roof of a car repair shop in the northwest of the city as air raid sirens wailed.

"Fires were set off as a result of the strikes. They are still being put out. The facilities were severely damaged", Lviv regional governor Maksym Kozitsky said on social media.

In the south, Russia continued its push to capture the besieged port city of Mariupol where the last remaining Ukrainian forces prepared for a final stand.

Ukraine has pledged to fight on and defend the strategic city,

defying a Russian ultimatum for remaining fighters inside the encircled Azovstal steel plant to lay down their arms and surrender.

Russian state TV on Monday broadcast a video of what it described as "Britons" captured fighting for Ukraine and demanding that Prime Minister Boris Johnson negotiate their release.

The two haggard-looking men asked to be exchanged for Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian tycoon close to President Vladimir Putin, who was recently arrested in the pro-Western country.

Ukraine then aired its own video featuring Medvedchuk calling for his exchange in return for an evacuation of civilians and troops from Mariupol.

"I want to ask Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to exchange me for Ukrainian defenders and residents of Mariupol", he said in the video published by Kyiv's security services, wearing black clothes and looking directly into the camera.

US to host global Covid summit on May 12

WASHINGTON: A global summit to chart an end to the Covid-19 crisis and plan for future upheavals will occur on May 12, the White House said on Monday, even as President Joe Biden struggles to get vital pandemic funding from Congress.

The virtual gathering will be co-chaired by the United States, along with current G7 president Germany, G20 president Indonesia, African Union chair Senegal and Belize, the current chair of the CARICOM Caribbean grouping.

"The summit will redouble our collective efforts to end the acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and prepare for future health threats", the countries said in a joint statement.

This will be the second global huddle on the pandemic, which has killed more than six million people and triggered profound disruption to leading economies and trading patterns in the two years since it began to spread.

Biden hosted a similar summit last September, at which he urged partners to surge vaccines and ensure that 70 per cent of every country has been vaccinated by September this year.

Although death rates are plummeting worldwide, the virus continues to spread, preventing many leading countries from fully lifting restrictions, while

This will be the second global huddle on the pandemic, which has killed more than six million people

Shanghai in China is in the midst of a draconian lockdown.

Summit hosts appealed for maintaining the sense of urgency.

"In advance of the May 12 summit, we are calling on world leaders, members of civil society, non-governmental organisations, philanthropists and the private sector to make new commitments and bring solutions to vaccinate the world, save lives now, and build better health security — for everyone, everywhere", the joint statement said.

"The emergence and spread of new variants, like Omicron, have reinforced the need for a strategy aimed at controlling Covid-19 worldwide", it said.

And while the latest variants are less lethal, the summit statement stressed there must be a focus on stopping similar future catastrophes from taking the world by surprise.

"We know we must prepare now to build, sustain and finance the global capacity we need, not only for emerging Covid-19 variants, but also future health crises", the statement said.

— AFP



US President Joe Biden, alongside First Lady Jill Biden during the annual White House Easter Egg Roll of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

10,000 soldiers in South Africa flood relief effort

DURBAN: A week after deadly storms started lashing South Africa's east coast, the army said on Monday 10,000 troops were on the ground to help restore key services and aid the search for 63 people who remain missing.

The death toll stands at 443, but with each passing day, hopes diminish of finding more survivors.

"The tragedy currently unfolding in our province is one of the worst natural disasters in the recorded history of our country", KwaZulu-Natal provincial government said.

Funerals were being held across the city of Durban, which bore the brunt of the storms, as grim tales of the catastrophe continued to emerge. One woman was found dead with her three grandchildren after their car was washed away, while rescuers reported finding bodies washed into dams, local media reported.

Swathes of eThekweni, the



Members of the Disaster Management and other law enforcement agencies search for a missing person believed to be swept in a flood in Bellair north of Durban following heavy rains, mudslides in Durban. — AFP

municipality that includes Durban, remain without power or water, and the province said it could take time before services are restored.

"There are areas that have suffered extensive damage which

will take longer to repair", it said in a statement.

Many streets remain slathered with mud, although the main roads have been cleared enough to allow water tankers to the hardest-

hit areas. But eThekweni Deputy Mayor Philani Mavundla said in a television interview that 80 per cent of the city's water works were down, making it difficult to even fill the tankers.

Some of the troops include plumbers and electricians who joined the mammoth task of trying to get life back to normal.

Soldiers are also providing field accommodation and water purification systems, the army said.

The deadliest storm on record dumped apocalyptic levels of rain on Durban and surrounding areas of KwaZulu-Natal.

Some 40,000 people were left homeless and more than 550 schools and nearly 60

healthcare facilities have been damaged, according to government tallies.

South Africa is winding down a long weekend for the Easter holidays. Many children are due to return to school on Tuesday, but authorities warned that 271,000 students may not be able to attend due to damaged schools.

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

— AFP

Crisis point in the world of work



DR ANCHAN C K

The writer is an international adviser for business, economy and investments

We are about to reach the crisis point in the world of work. The generation of digital natives who have joined the working population over the last decade are questioning fundamental assumptions about employment.

They are not prepared to simply do what they are told. They are asking questions about why we work the way we do, and are not satisfied with the answers. In the rest of their lives they use technology to free them from constraints of time and place, but their job is based on an assumption that these are fixed. They use social media to relate to friends at a distance but are expected to spend endless hours in office-based meetings as part of their jobs.

There is extensive evidence that people are choosing to move jobs in order to improve their work or life balance. No longer does a big pay packet bring satisfaction to

employees with scarce skills. They recognise that time is as valuable an asset as money. So they will be attracted to work environments where people are expected to have a personal life and not have sacrificed their freedom in the name of career progression.

The new approach to work involves a shift in control from employer to employee. In the age of ‘smart’ working an individual is in control of their own time. They decide when and where to work and are trusted to do so by their boss. There is no assumption that work can only be done in the usual daytime shift at the usual workplace. Many people, particularly those employed for their creativity, do their best work outside of the traditional hours.

The biggest hurdle that managers have to jump is to stop measuring inputs hours worked and start measuring outputs

THE NEW APPROACH TO WORK INVOLVES A SHIFT IN CONTROL FROM EMPLOYER TO EMPLOYEE. IN THE AGE OF ‘SMART’ WORKING AN INDIVIDUAL IS IN CONTROL OF THEIR OWN TIME

achieving outcomes. If the basis of recognition for work is what is actually produced, then the time and place of the activity is almost irrelevant. This evolution from fixed working patterns to highly flexible work arrangements is a journey currently being undertaken by many employers.

The leaders are now introducing results-only measurement systems and autonomous working schemes where employees have high degrees of freedom. Others are following along behind with different degrees of ‘agility’ and varying levels of

empowerment for their people. But, regardless of where they are in this journey, there is one clear direction in which they are all heading.

Now life is more complicated. Technology has freed work from the constraints of a fixed place and given the worker more choice over when to perform it. ‘Work’ is no longer a place to go to, it’s an activity for a purpose. It is a process for achieving results and it is the output that counts. Rewarding outcomes that contribute to the goals of the enterprise seems much more logical than rewarding effort that may contribute nothing towards business success.

We now have a generation of young people joining the workforce who have never known a world without the Internet. They expect to be able to communicate with their colleagues wherever they are and whenever they choose. They cannot understand the traditional

boundaries between home and work life and the need to be tied to a fixed desk in order to get work done. They are questioning the long hour’s culture and the pattern of work that has been inherited from previous generations.

The management systems, leadership practices and communications processes that we use today were built during the Industrial Age of work. But the outdated approach to work does not fit with today’s values of equality, freedom, and flexibility.

Instead of converting work into a set of tasks to be performed by an employee it is being seen as a product that is paid by results. So to get a piece of work done it is quite practical to put out a request on the Internet and to offer it to an independent contractor or freelancer. In today’s connected world, work is becoming more of a tradable commodity.

Presidential rivals gird for high-stakes debate

CHRISTOPHE PARAYRE AND VERONIQUE MARTINACHE

Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen traded barbs as they returned to campaigning for the French presidency ahead of a prime-time debate that is likely to prove decisive ahead of Sunday’s second-round run-off.

The two rivals held low-key events after a brief Easter pause as they paced themselves before Wednesday’s face-off, when the centrist Macron will defend his record over the past five years against his combative far-right rival.

It will be a rematch of their debate in 2017, when the same two finalists clashed at the same stage of the campaign, but which most analysts say was handily won by Macron, who was making his first-ever attempt at public office. Le Pen, making her third run for the presidency, insists she is better prepared this time around.

“I’m very confident, and I think I’m going to win,” the National Rally candidate said during a visit to the sunlit village square in Saint-Pierre-en-Auge in Normandy, western France.

“I hope this debate is carried out calmly... I hope it won’t be what I’ve been hearing for the past week, a series of insults, fake news and excesses,” she said.

“She knows her programme perfectly, and she knows very well how Macron is going to try to attack her,” Le Pen’s close ally Louis Aliot, the far-right mayor of Perpignan in southern France, told France Inter radio.

The latest opinion polls suggest that Macron has the edge, giving him scores of 53 to 55.5 per cent against 44.5 to 47 per cent for Le Pen.

But allowing for margins of error, Macron knows there is no room for complacency, and polls have often underestimated the results of far-right candidates in the past — most notably in 2002, when Le Pen’s father Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the presidential run-off against Jacques Chirac.

Macron took aim at Le Pen’s proposal to hold constitutional referendums on tougher immigration laws and her plan for “national priority” for French citizens for jobs and welfare benefits, and to create the possibility for citizens’ initiatives to propose and vote on legislation.

“She is implying that once elected, she believes she’s above the Constitution since she can decide not to respect it by changing the rules,” he told France Culture radio in an interview published on Monday. — AFP

‘Fortress Australia’ has a new message: Come back

TACEY RYCHTER AND ISABELLA KWAI

Moments after the Australian government announced that it would reopen the country’s borders to international travellers later this month, Emily Barrett locked in a fare for a flight to Sydney. The 32-year-old nanny from Palo Alto, California, spent three days researching and talking to Australian friends before she decided to book her trip to the island continent, which for two years had some of the world’s strictest border controls and longest lockdowns aimed at controlling the spread of the coronavirus.

“They all said, ‘if we go back into a lockdown now, people will go into the streets,’” she said. Her two-week trip is scheduled to start a few days after the border opens on Monday.

Potential travellers and tourism operators alike are cautiously optimistic about the reopening of “Fortress Australia,” but many wonder if the isolated nation’s ongoing Covid restrictions — such as vaccine and testing requirements, as well as mask mandates — will make the return of international travel more of a trickle than a splash. Australia’s reputation for rigidity and reclusiveness during the pandemic — at odds with the inviting, easygoing nature portrayed by the country’s tourism boards — may also be a hurdle to overcome.

“There is no doubt that a full recovery will take time, but we are confident that the demand for Australia is strong,” said Phillipa Harrison, the managing director of Tourism Australia, the country’s tourism board.

Tourism was one of the fastest growing sectors in Australia’s economy before the pandemic, contributing 45 billion Australian dollars in 2019.

Australia is among the world’s most immunised countries for Covid-19, with 94 per cent of people over 16 fully vaccinated. Through 2020 and 2021, the country pursued a tough “zero Covid”



The Pacific Explorer makes its way to dock at the overseas passenger terminal on Sydney Harbour as Australian authorities lifted a ban on cruise ships after relaxation in Covid-19 restrictions. — AFP

strategy that closed national and state borders; restricted Australians from returning home and even leaving; enforced month-long lockdowns and required its few visitors to undergo expensive hotel quarantines. Surging cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus in January, which persist, but have since declined, tipped most of the country into a new ‘living with the virus’ phase.

“It’s about coming back so the virus is under our control, whereas we felt that the virus was controlling us,” said Catherine Bennett, a public health researcher at Deakin University in Melbourne, adding that opening the borders represented a turning point. “This is saying: We’re ready for this.”

Australia’s grand reopening comes with a few ground rules. Travellers entering the country must be fully vaccinated to avoid a costly two-week hotel quarantine, and must test before arrival — somewhat common requirements for travel now.

But it will take a little more time for Australia’s welcome mat to roll out all the way. The entire state of Western Australia — a third of Australia’s vast land mass, but home to just 10 per cent of the population

— has essentially been closed to both international travellers and even vaccinated Australian citizens for most of the pandemic. It plans to reopen to vaccinated travellers on March 3, with testing rules on arrival.

The state, which has reported about 2,900 total cases and 10 deaths since the pandemic began, is home to Perth — one of the world’s most remote major cities — more than 7,000 miles of coastline, the Kimberley region’s dramatic sandstone gorges and wine destinations like Margaret River. While the federal government can open the nation’s borders, the states can still set their own Covid restrictions, including entry rules.

“We desperately want people to come back,” said Graeme Skeggs, a general manager at Adam’s Pinnacle Tours, one of Western Australia’s larger tour companies, which, until the pandemic, operated luxury tours of the state’s renowned coastlines and landscapes. Much of their business evaporated after Covid struck, and some smaller operators the company worked with have closed. “Two years is a lot longer than any of us thought,” Skeggs said.

— *The New York Times*

Traditions and history of Qaranqasho



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

Qaranqasho, children's celebration held in the middle of the holy month of Ramadhan came back with a bang this week after two years break.

Along with it came the debates on whether it is too commercial or has it gone away from the main purpose.

I remember covering Qaranqasho in the 1990s in Qurum, where children gathered and under the supervision of few parents the children visited homes for treats. They carried bags to collect their goodies and sang together the Qaranqasho song. Kids look forward to the event and are slowly introduced to the beauty of the holy month of Ramadhan.

WHILE THE DEBATE CONTINUES ON THE ORIGIN OF QARANQASHO, THE CHILDREN ARE PROBABLY GOING THROUGH THEIR GOODIES BAG AND CHERISHING THE EVENING

Even before Ramadhan began this year gift shops were lined up with materials for Qaranqasho from decorations to gifts. The children carried stones for acoustic accompaniment as they sang.

Um Saif grew up in Sidab, Muscat, and she remembers her Qaranqasho in the 1980s. Behind their house they had a mountain and so stones were readily available. She pointed out that the stones had to be of similar size. The families in the neighbourhood would give popcorn and halwa to children. She remembered how they would wear new dress just like Eid. They had more fun, she says now her children go to the neighbours and are given chocolates, toys and balloons. But in Musannah, 100 km away from Muscat, in the 90s kids had begun to incorporate milk cans in the place of stones.

“They made louder noise than the stones”, said Nasser Harrassi, looking back at his days of Qaranqasho. Gifts might have changed and the means of acoustics might have evolved, but children of today still sing the same song and the spirit of Qaranqasho continues.

There were gatherings held in many places. Bahla Souq had a special function for the children bringing back the souq to relevancy for the young generation. So did Sidab and Musannah along with many other places. New memories were generated and if there was some extra effort then it could be the impact of coming out of the pandemic.

Maybe there was an extra zest to the activities this year. While the debate continues on the origin of Qaranqasho , the children are probably going through their goodies bag and cherishing the evening.

Not just the children, people are in the mood for giving and Qaranqasho is a wonderful opportunity to create joy and spread it among the young ones.



Summoning the spirit of Bretton Woods



Rt Hon Liam Byrne

The writer is a member of the UK Parliament and Chair of the global Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and IMF, served in the cabinet of former prime minister Gordon Brown as Chief Secretary to the Treasury

A riptide is about to hit the global economy, and the West needs America to help. Just as longstanding Nato allies are helping Ukraine fight against Russia, we need the old Bretton Woods allies to win the peace. That will require equipping the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank with the tools they need to stabilise poorer countries ravaged by the conflict-driven spike in energy, food prices, Covid-19 and climate change.

Towards the end of World War II, wise Americans knew that prosperity was the best guarantor of peace — and of continued US influence. When delegates from 44 countries met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire to plan the post-war international financial system, US president Franklin Roosevelt spoke for many when he declared that, “The economic health of every country is a proper matter of concern to all its neighbours, near and distant.” Together with European allies, the United States created the World Bank, the IMF, and then the Marshall Plan to rebuild shattered Western economies so that they became strong enough to resist the Soviet Union.

The world needs similar visionary leadership again today. After all, the economic disruption wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic pushed as many as 124 million people worldwide into extreme poverty — the first rise in global poverty this century. According to the World Bank, as many as a dozen developing economies may be unable to service their debts in the coming months.

By investing in programmes to tackle Covid-19, these countries have exhausted their capacity to borrow and now face sharply rising interest rates as the West unwinds the monetary stimulus of recent years. And Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine means that their governments also face new demands to protect citizens from soaring wheat, maize and energy prices.

The OECD recently reported that the prices of wheat and maize had increased by over 80 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively, from their January 2022 average, while the cost of oil has doubled since last year. Without help, many economies may fail, with unpredictable consequences. The 2010-12 Arab Spring was initially triggered by soaring food and gas bills, and we are now seeing economic and political instability in places like Sri Lanka.

As great-power competition once again divides the world, the West cannot afford to allow the risks of inflation-fuelled instability to fester. During a recent British-American parliamentary exchange, US leaders vented

their anxiety about Chinese investment in Asia and Africa. But we also heard that American leaders have learned a lesson of history: The US cannot defend the homeland by standing on the goal line; instead, it must engage upfield.

THE WEST, LED BY THE UNITED STATES, MUST EQUIP THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND AND WORLD BANK WITH THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO STABILISE POORER ECONOMIES RAVAGED BY THE SPIKE IN ENERGY, FOOD PRICES, COVID-19 AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Yet, amid today's crisis, America risks conceding ground by failing to expand the institutions it helped create in 1944. Consider, for example, the IMF's new Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST), which the Fund's executive board approved on April 13. The RST is designed to help recycle the massive \$650 billion in new special drawing rights (SDRs, the IMF's unit of account) allocated to Fund shareholders last year. That is potentially a big bazooka in the war on want.

Created by the IMF in 1969 and originally pegged to gold, SDRs can supplement member countries' reserves. They give governments vital wiggle room to redeploy funds or exchange their holdings for

currencies, including dollars.

The US had proposed donating \$21 billion of its SDR allocation to the IMF for its Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust and the new RST. But the final budget passed by Congress did not include the necessary language authorising the US Treasury to act. This provision was included once again in the budget that President Joe Biden's administration recently presented. America's friends and allies need to urge Congress to give it the green light.

The nature of SDRs prevents the US from using them for domestic spending. And contrary to what some American politicians like US Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana have perhaps willfully misunderstood, SDRs cannot be used by hostile actors like Russia or Iran as some kind of “Amazon gift card”, because SDRs are effectively dud coins unless they are exchanged for something useful like dollars, euros or renminbi. That is something neither America, Europe, nor China will countenance for these countries.

But America and its allies can give their SDRs to the new IMF trusts, which can then deploy the funds to make vital loans to countries that the West wants to support. Pooling SDRs in this way will greatly leverage America's investment, thereby providing substantial new funds to help stabilise vulnerable US allies in the developing world and finance crucial investments in their low-carbon energy independence. More generally, such an initiative will provide a shining example of US leadership.

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Sri Lankans shout slogans during an ongoing anti-government demonstration near the president's office in Colombo on Sunday. – AFP

sport

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Chelsea march into FA Cup final

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, APRIL 18

Making it into cup finals seems to become a habit with Chelsea as their comfortable 2-0 victory over Crystal Palace saw them enter their fifth FA Cup final in six years and their third in succession. It followed their appearance only in February in the League Cup final when they lost to Liverpool after a penalty shoot-out. The two teams will meet again in the final next month.

Liverpool, in top form, are

chasing four possible trophies this season and the Chelsea Manager, Thomas Tuchel, who has taken Chelsea to six finals during his 15-month reign remains undaunted. He said: “I don’t care about their (Liverpool) other titles. We lost a final (League Cup) and we gave everything in that final. It was a big match that went until the very last penalty and we were unlucky and lost it. Of course, we want to turn things around.”

He added: “We were here last season in the FA Cup final, we

are again here and that means an unbelievable lot to us because the FA Cup is the most prestigious and traditional cup in the world. All we can do now is to be well prepared because it will be another hard fight given their quality and run of form. It makes the season so much sweeter if you have a final you can win.”

The first half was dull, with Chelsea it seemed a case of tired legs after their epic Champions League quarter final away to Real Madrid in midweek. Palace looked underwhelmed and seemed to

wait for counter attacks. Chelsea missed a chance to score on the half hour when Cesar Azpilicueta miscued a volley from a cross by Timo Werner.

TOOK CONTROL

It wasn’t until 20 minutes after the break that Chelsea scored and took control. Palace’s Tyrick Mitchell lost possession which allowed Kai Havertz to cross — clipping Marc Guehi — to substitute Ruben Loftus-Cheek who had replaced the injured Mateo Kovacic. Loftus-Cheek was

quick to unleash a fierce shot into the roof of the net with a slight deflection from Guehi in a packed penalty area.

Chelsea were now in full flow and in the 76th minute doubled the lead. Jordan Ayew lost the ball allowing Timo Werner, who had a fine game and was man-of-the-match, to exchange passes with Mason Mount who, having advanced into the box, steered the ball inside the right post. The game seemed over for Palace.

Finally, in the last minute, striker, Romelu Lukaku, on as

substitute, missed a sitter when he inexplicably hit the post from close range. His loss of form seems to continue.

Palace Manager, Patrick Vieira, said: “We had chances and we didn’t score. We had a couple of opportunities where we didn’t give the ball at the right time. There’s still a big gap between Chelsea and ourselves. But I’m very proud of the players and the way they performed against a team who have been European champions and should be on a different level to us.”

Seeb thrash Al Ittihad to go top of OL

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Seeb registered their fourth consecutive victory in the Omantel League 2021-22 with a 4-1 thrashing of Al Ittihad at Al Saada Stadium on Sunday night.

The win helped Seeb reach 44 points and take the top spot of the league table with a two-point lead over Al Nahda who have 42 points. Dhofar are third on 40 points.

With six more rounds remaining, league leaders Seeb will face Al Rustaq, Bahla, Al Suwaiq, Al Nasr, Al Musannah and Dhofar in the forthcoming rounds.

The HM Cup champions entered the fixture with a clear target to snatch the three points from the hosts. A strong start was made by Seeb strikers as Marwan al Siyabi netted the opening goal in the fifth minute of the match.

Seeb’s top-scorer Mohsin al Ghassani doubled the score when he took advantage of a defensive mistake in the 38th minute.

Post the second half with 15 minutes, Mohammed Ramadhan



strengthened Seeb’s lead by scoring third goal while Al Ghassani ensured Seeb’s win as he netted the fourth goal with 10 minutes to go.

In the dying minutes, Shabib Saleh scored the only goal for the hosts. After the defeat, Al Ittihad

remained in the danger zone with 14 points at 13th place.

AL NASR HOLD AL NAHDA

Al Nahda were held to a 1-1 draw by Al Nasr at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. The draw put Al Nahda

in the second position.

Salalah representatives Al Nasr are in fifth place with 34 points.

In another fixture, Saham managed to earn one point from Salalah giants Dhofar as the match ended at 1-1 draw. At Al Rustaq Sports Complex, coach Rasheed Jaber’s men went ahead with Hussain al Sharhi scoring in the first half but Salim Habib found the equaliser in the 40th minute. Dhofar had played out a goalless draw against Al Musannah in their last match. Saham’s situation is getting worse as they are positioned at the bottom of the table with 10 points only.

Meanwhile, Al Musannah emerged a crucial 2-1 winner over Muscat while Oman club registered a 2-0 win against Al Rustaq. Bahla spoiled Sohar’s triumph as they snatched a 2-2 draw after scoring twice in the dying minutes.

Al Suwaiq beat Nizwa 2-0 to remain at the comfortable zone at eighth place with 27 points while the hosts are still in the relegation area with 15 points at 11th place.



Oman Karate Committee to hold coaching course

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Oman Karate Committee will organise a coaching course on Thursday and Friday at the Al Amal Club for the Deaf. Two days course will feature participation of a large number of karate trainers in the Sultanate of Oman. This course comes within the activities held by the committee during the 2022 plan through which it aims to develop the technical level of karate instructors and refine basic and technical skills in the field of training. Dr Ali bin Talib al Raisi, a member of the Oman Karate Committee, will be the

lecturer for the programme and will deliver the session.

It is worth noting that the Omani Karate Committee took this step in order to unify the efforts of all coaches in training, after the issuance of the organising regulations of the Omani Committee and its intention to unify the players’ tests for the different grades of belts.

It is expected the technical lecture will include different chapters including the basics for karate coaches, the best ways on developing younger karate players, fundamentals training used for junior coaching.



MILLER AND 'NIGHTMARE' MALIK SHINE IN IPL SUNDAY BLOCKBUSTER

PUNE, India: South Africa's David Miller on Sunday said coming in to bat early made him "shine" as his unbeaten 94 led Gujarat Titans to a thrilling three-wicket IPL victory over holders Chennai Super Kings.

Chasing 170 for victory, Gujarat slipped to 48-4. But Miller put on an attacking 70-run sixth wicket stand with Afghanistan's Rashid Khan (40) and propelled his team to their target with one ball to spare in Pune.

Rashid, an ace leg-spinner who stood in as captain in place of injured Hardik Pandya, smashed three sixes and a four off Chris Jordan in a 25-run 18th over.

Rashid fell after his 21-ball blitz but Miller completed the job, taking 13 runs in a dramatic final over from Jordan.

Miller hit a six after two dot balls, was caught at short third man only for the delivery to be called no ball for height, and then hit a four and finished the match off with a two.

"I wanted to see the ball, hit ball," said man of the match Miller.

"Coming in at the powerplay (inside six overs) allowed me to shine, when the ball is harder than normal. Got more time too, so that was cool."

Miller praised Rashid's cameo. "Rashid's batting releases a lot of pressure. Exceptional over, in my opinion that over was the game-changer and he struck it beautifully," he said.

He struck eight fours and six sixes in his 51-ball knock

Gujarat, one of the two new franchises in the expanded 10-team IPL, consolidated their position at the top with five wins from six matches. Chennai



slipped to five losses in six games. Rituraj Gaikwad's 73 went in vain after the opener guided

Chennai to 169 for five. He put on a 92-run third-wicket stand with Ambati

Rayudu, who hit 46, after the wickets of Robin Uthappa and Moeen Ali.

Skipper Ravindra Jadeja, who took over the captaincy ahead of the season after Mahendra Singh Dhoni stepped down, provided a late blitz with his unbeaten 12-ball 22, but Miller's knock overshadowed every other innings in the match.

'NIGHTMARE' NETS

In the first match of the day, speedster Umrans Malik returned figures of 4-28 including a maiden 20th over to help Sunrisers Hyderabad to their fourth straight win as they beat Punjab Kings.

Malik, an up and coming Kashmiri quick who has clocked speeds of over 150 kilometres per hour (93 mph) in this edition of the Twenty20 tournament, claimed three wickets in the final over that also witnessed a run-out to bowl out Punjab for 151.

Punjab batter Liam Livingstone hammered 60 off 33 balls.

In reply, Hyderabad rode on a fourth-wicket unbeaten stand of 75 between Aiden Markram (41) and Nicholas Pooran (35) to achieve the target with seven balls and seven wickets to spare.

Malik's speed has been the talking point of this IPL and Hyderabad team-mate Glenn Phillips said the quick bowler is a "nightmare" in the nets.

"He's absolutely rapid," Phillips, a New Zealand wicketkeeper-batter, said.

"Facing him in the nets is a nightmare. I've got my chest guard on to not get hurt. Imagine what those balls (during the contest) will be feeling out there."

— AFP

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Maharashtrian Konkani Boys emerge BCL champions



MUSCAT: An utterly dominant Maharashtrian Konkani Boys won a BCL third edition (afternoon league) title here on Friday, beating FC Goa by eight wickets in the final played under floodlights at grassy ground in Maabela.

Earlier after winning the toss and putting the opposition to bat first, Konkani Boys' Pradeep Salian (3-13) bowled with his fiery pace ran through FC Goa top order before another pacer Ruban Durai (3-19) and Somnath Poojary (2-30) castled out middle and lower order. Only Umer Aslam (12 balls 21) from FC Goa could resist the high quality bowling attack to some extent to take his side to 80 which ended up not being enough for Maharashtrian Konkani Boys' power-packed batting line-up.

Needing 81 to win, Konkani Boys lost their opener Akbar Shaikh very early in chase but Wasim (37 of 28 balls) and Guru Prasad (24 not out of 21 balls) came together for a second-wicket partnership to take their side to glory. The target was chased comfortably with

2.4 overs to spare. Wasim was adjudged as the man of the final.

Wasim from Konkani Boys was also declared man of the tournament for his brilliant batting performance. Wajid Shah of FC Goa was named best bowler whereas Rehmat Ali from UGB Barka was awarded with best fielder prize of the tournament.

Mohammad Irfan, the manager of Al Danube served his presence as a chief guest for the grand finale of BCL-3, where the winners and runners-up trophies were handed by him to the respective captains. Also honourable guests Azra Aleem and Mohammad Aleem Anis congratulated all the players. The BCL committee thanked all of their sponsors, organisers, participating teams, support staff and volunteers for making this event much more successful with their efforts.

Brief scores: FC Goa 80 all out in 11.5 overs (Umer Aslam 21, Ali Hamza 12; Pradip Salian 3-13, Ruban Durai 3-19) lost to Maharashtrian Konkani Boys 83-2 in 9.2 overs (Wasim 37, Guru Prasad 24*; Wajid Shah 1-15) by eight wickets.

Tsitsipas aiming for 'top two' after defending Monte Carlo crown

MONTE CARLO: Stefanos Tsitsipas said he is aiming to finish the season in the world's top two after successfully defending his Monte Carlo Masters title with a hard-fought victory over Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in Sunday's final.

Third seed Tsitsipas hammered 21 winners and made only 11 unforced errors in the Monaco sunshine to win 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) in an hour and 36 minutes.

It was the 23-year-old Greek's eighth ATP title and first in 11 months as he made the perfect start to the clay-court season.

"I can definitely have a great season and maybe finish it in the top two," said the world number five, whose triumph in Monaco was his fourth tournament success on clay.

"This year I really want to have good results on grass and on hard courts because I'm sure I can score big ATP points there."

"If I manage to win matches there with as much consistency as on clay, I think I have a great chance of finishing the year in the top two. It's one of my big goals."

Novak Djokovic, Daniil



Medvedev, Alexander Zverev and Rafael Nadal currently sit above Tsitsipas in the ATP rankings.

Tsitsipas became the sixth player to win back-to-back Monte Carlo Masters in the Open era, emulating Nadal, Juan Carlos Ferrero,

Thomas Muster, Bjorn Borg and Ilie Nastase.

"It's great, especially because the fans were there. It was livelier than last year," said Tsitsipas, who beat Andrey Rublev in the 2021 final, which was held behind closed

doors due the Covid pandemic.

He is gearing up for another tilt at the French Open title after losing last year's final at Roland Garros to Djokovic despite leading by two sets.

"I think my tennis is excellent on all surfaces, although it adapts better to clay," added Tsitsipas.

Davidovich Fokina had knocked out world number one Djokovic earlier this week but could not repeat those heroics in his first ATP final, losing for the third time in as many meetings with Tsitsipas.

"I always thought about being in the final here one day... I hope to be here again next year," said Davidovich Fokina, who also reached the quarterfinals last year. The world number 46 struck first on Sunday, breaking in the third game, but Tsitsipas hit straight back with a magnificent forehand up the line to level the first set at 2-2. The set remained on serve until game eight, when Tsitsipas broke as Davidovich Fokina fired a backhand into the tramlines.

The Greek star wrapped up the opener with a hold to love, capped off by an ace. — AFP

Qurum Stars win Danube Ramadhan cricket title



MUSCAT: Qurum Stars edged Kala Cosco by three runs to win the Danube Ramadhan cricket tournament organised by the Al Hail Cricket Team on Sunday.

Sheik Irfan from Danube Company presided as the chief guest and Doshambe al Balushi, Ismail, Waleed, captain of OCT Al Hail CT and Khalid al Balushi, senior board member of Al Hail CT, were also present at the concluding ceremony.

In the final, Qurum Stars captain Vishal Desai won the toss and elected to bat first. Qurum Stars went on to score 56 runs in the stipulated 8 overs for the loss of 5 wickets. Waseem top-scored with 19 runs and Mubin hit 16 runs.

For Kala Cosco, Omar Mahamood took 2 wickets giving away 7 runs. In reply, Kala Cosco ended three runs short at 53-4 in 8 overs. Eshan was the top-scorer

with 20 runs while Rubin (1-8), Imran (1-4) and Kamran (1-15) bowled impressively for Qurum Stars.

Mubin was declared man of the match, for his match-winning 16 runs, while Waseem Abbas of Kala Cosco was declared as man of the tournament. Irfan of Kala Cosco was adjudged as best bowler of the tournament taking 12 wickets. Waseem of Qurum Stars became the best batsman of the tournament after scoring 120 runs.

The tournament was sponsored by building materials company Al Danube and supported by Al Mudhish Company, Oman Oasis Company, Ayan International LLC, Cricket Cottage and Baab Al Hail Trading.

Organisers thanked Ibrahim of Ayan International for the support.

Disappointing start for Oman racing team at Elms

FRANCE: Circuit Paul Ricard front-row qualifier Ahmad al Harthy didn't have the opportunity to battle as intended for an opening round GTE podium during the European Le Mans Series curtain-raiser on Sunday, 17th April, when team-mate Sam De Haan was barged into retirement on the very first lap.

Following a sensational performance by Oman Racing's Al Harthy in his maiden ELMS qualifying session on Saturday afternoon at the French track, hopes were justifiably high of a very strong challenge for silverware during race one of the season – the 4 Hours of Le Castellet.

Things began well when the race got underway at 11.00 local time, with British driver De Haan maintaining second position off the start in the black and silver No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE and then taking the GTE race lead.

At the end of lap one, though, a multi-car tangle at the final corner among the LMP3 class contenders resulted in the Oman Racing car receiving hard contact to the front-right. Forcing De Haan off the track with broken steering, retirement



was all but instantaneous.

Although managing to rejoin the track, albeit a long way down the GTE order, the damage meant De Haan had no option but to park the Aston Martin at the side of the track on the start/finish straight and begin the season with a bitterly disappointing retirement through

no fault of his own.

"It's really unfortunate what happened in the race", said a disappointed Al Harthy, "After we had taken the lead, an LMP3 car just completely lost control and contact was made on the front-right of our car which broke the steering arm. From there we had to

retire the car. Sam did a great job with the start, he did a great job gaining the lead and everything was going as planned.

"Our strategy was very solid, based on our race runs in testing and practice, and we did learn a lot over the last week at Paul Ricard testing and analysing the car. We

have some time to get back and re-prep for Imola now but from what we've seen in qualifying here, the car was really strong and our pace as a team is really strong. I'm really looking forward to all of that materialising in round two."

While the dejection of the outcome to round one of the ELMS

season will take time to process, double GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup Pro-Am Champion Al Harthy already has his sights fixed on race two of the season at Imola in Italy which will take place on Sunday, 15th May.

Determined to hit back in style, not least for long-time partners Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, Oman's number one racing driver says no stone will be left unturned when preparing for next month's ELMS contest.

He added: "Everyone worked so hard over the past week and everything had gone to plan up to the incident, it's a major disappointment for us all but we'll be back! I have to say a huge thank you to everyone at Oman Racing, to the TF Sport guys who prepare the car, and to all of the partners who are an integral part of this journey into European Le Mans Series this year."

Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari in Imola, Italy, will host the second event of the European Le Mans Series campaign over the weekend 14th/15th May.

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Major seaweed cultivation project proposed off Duqm

Mariculture wealth: Port of Duqm and DEME Concessions (Belgian) make headway in techno-feasibility study to support implementation of OMAR Seaweed Farm off SEZ, in collaboration with SQU

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

Omani coastal waters off the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Duqm are tipped to host a large-scale seaweed cultivation project which, together with a host of other such investments, could herald the Sultanate of Oman's entry into the global multibillion dollar mariculture industry.

The proposed offshore seaweed project is a collaborative venture between Port of Duqm and DEME Concessions (a Belgian-based global provider of dredging, marine infrastructure and offshore energy solutions) with the support of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

In a recent post affirming its role in the project, Port of Duqm stated: "In collaboration with DEME, Port of Duqm is participating in the 'Seaweed



Aquaculture Project' through conducting weekly seawater measurements and sampling in the seaport to examine the potential for seaweed aquaculture in the concession area of the seaport."

Globally, seaweed farming is estimated to generate in excess of \$10 billion in annual revenues to investors. Seaweeds – part of the algae family – are processed into a variety of compounds that find application in the health foods, pharmaceutical, animal

feed, cosmetics, industrial gums, chemicals and fertiliser production sectors.

As part of its concession with the Omani government, Port of Duqm oversees the operation and management of the maritime gateway, as well as sizable swathes of land within the SEZ for industrial and warehousing purposes.

Also included in its remit are large offshore stretches overlooking the port area.

Last May, DEME Concessions

signed a cooperation agreement with SQU to explore the feasibility of developing a seaweed farming project off Duqm, among other locations in the country.

Dubbed 'OMAR', coined from Offshore Mariculture in Oman, the site of the seaweed farm has since been the subject of a techno-economic study involving, among other things, the collection and study of native seaweed species, monitoring of marine and environmental conditions and other offshore

Globally, seaweed farming is estimated to generate in excess of \$10 billion in annual revenues to investors. Seaweeds – part of the algae family – are processed into a variety of compounds that find application in the health foods, pharmaceutical, animal feed, cosmetics, industrial gums, chemicals and fertilizer production sectors.

The offshore waters of the Duqm SEZ, according to the project team, are known for their abundance of "fish resources, biodiversity and high level of nutritional building blocks".

This coastal stretch is thus qualified as "one of the most appropriate and exceptional locations for the development of logistics marine hubs and mariculture businesses that will help to diversify the economy in Oman", the website noted.

The start-up phase of the OMAR Seaweed Farm is envisioned in 2023. Given the economic benefits associated with seaweed cultivation, a number of private and public sector entities are keenly pursuing opportunities to invest in this promising sector.

Subsidiaries of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), wholly owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), are also weighing prospects in mariculture ventures. UK-based SuSeWi (formerly Feed Algae) says it plans to develop a 100,000-tonnes per annum capacity micro algae farming project with an estimated investment of around \$430 million in the Sultanate of Oman.

(Picture courtesy: Port of Duqm)

Blue Waters signs pacts for two aquaculture projects

BUSINESS
REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has signed usufruct agreements with wholly government-owned Blue Waters LLC for the implementation of a pair of finfish projects with an investment of RO 13.4 million. While one project will focus on tuna aquafeed, the other is on finfish farming.

The agreements were signed by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources with Shaikh Nasser bin Sulaiman al Harthy, Chairman of Blue Waters' Board of Directors.

Dr Al Habsi said the agreements are in line with the ministry's efforts to support fish farming projects which



contribute to increasing local fish products, as well as providing job opportunities for Omani youth. Those projects will also boost the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), he noted.

The tuna aquafeed project will target international markets that import high quality tuna. Capacity is expected to reach

400 tonnes annually during the first phase, rising to 2,000 tonnes in future phases.

The project, worth RO 4.8 million, will be set up on a total area of 193 hectares. The finfish farming project will expand its capacity from 3,000 tonnes to reach 5,000 tonnes.

As per this agreement, the project will be expanded by

developing a new marine area in the Wilayat of Qurayat on a total area of 3.75 million square metres at a cost of RO 8.6 million.

Blue Waters LLC is a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), which is part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

(With inputs from ONA)



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Bank Muscat supports Fak-Kurba initiative for 5th year, helps resolve 260 humanitarian cases

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has extended its support to the ninth edition of the 'Fak-Kurba' project in line with its commitment of Corporate Social Responsibility and community service. The Fak-Kurba initiative is organised by the Omani Lawyers Association in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development and the Council of Administrative Affairs of the Judiciary.

This year's contribution by Bank Muscat will reunite 260 citizens with their families on the joyous occasion of Eid al Fitr. The bank has previously supported 826 humanitarian cases in the previous four years. It must be noted that none of these cases relate to payments involving banks or financing institutions in

the Sultanate of Oman. The Fak-Kurba initiative is implemented through voluntary efforts by the Omani Lawyers Association. The initiative has contributed to resolving many cases and succeeded in bringing joy and happiness to many Omani families.

The Association has been working tirelessly since 2012 for the success of the project and in partnership with a number of partners, with the project seeing great success over the years.

Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, the supervisor of Fak-Kurba, said: "Bank Muscat is one of the leading institutions that is continuously supporting the initiative. In continuance of the support it provides to the initiative,



Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zadjali

and to emphasise its strategy in social responsibility, Bank Muscat has contributed this year to resolve 260 cases. The initiative is based on the support of individuals and institutions that have proven their eagerness to participate in this noble cause over the years, thereby confirming the values of solidarity and cooperation to help those in



Hamza bin Abbas al Ajmi

need and relieve their distress. Dr Mohammed al Zadjali confirmed that Bank Muscat is keen to support the initiative.

Today, it continues its contribution for the fifth year, and this is what prompts us to invite other institutions in this country to follow the bank's example in providing contributions to achieve

the goals of this initiative. For his part, Hamza bin Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager — Credit, Bank Muscat, expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Omani Lawyers Association and all others involved with the project. He said: "The Bank is proud to support this unique and noble initiative by the Omani Lawyers Association, which has been one of the most successful social responsibility initiatives in Oman and has brought joy to many Omani families in their hour of need."

Hamza al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager – Credit, Bank Muscat added: "Bank Muscat is proud to be a leading institution in the field of social responsibility in the Sultanate of Oman and will continue to take part in initiatives, which serve the community and spreads happiness amongst those facing hardship. The bank will continue to join hands with Civil Society institutions for various social development initiatives such as this which bring joy and happiness to the hearts of those who require assistance, especially during the blessed month of Ramadhan."

The bank is delighted to support this great humanitarian initiative for the fifth consecutive year. It has helped secure the release of 1,086 citizens for the past 5 years who meet the eligibility norms,

Changan Oman announces attractive Ramadhan promotional offers



MUSCAT: Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE), part of Bahwan International Group, has announced an attractive offer on a range of Changan model variants and its an part of its exclusive Ramadhan promotion to mark the Holy Month.

The 'Driving Forward This Ramadhan' offer is available on models including CS95 (2.0L Turbo Engine, 224 hp, 6-speed AT, 4 WD, seven seater) CS75 Plus (2.0 L Turbo Engine, 220 hp, 8 speed AT); CS85 Coupe (2.0L Turbo Engine, 224 hp, 8 sped AT); CS35 Plus (1.4 Turbo, 155hp) EADO Plus (1.4 Turbo,155hp and1.6L Engine, 116 hp) and Alsvin (1.5L Engine, 105 hp), Hunter.

The Ramadhan offer which the customers can avail during the period includes free service (2 years/35,000 kms to 3 years/55,000 kms), free insurance, free registration, manufacturer's warranty (6 years/2,50,000 kms) and assured fuel card to all customers buying Changan model variants in addition customer purchasing CS95 4WD, CS85 Coupe and CS75 Plus will get exclusive gift of Apple Watch 41mm 7 series till May 20, 2022 and this special Ramadhan promotion is exclusively designed for individual showroom customers not applicable for Fleet /Corporate buyers.

A senior official for AGAE said, "We would like to underline that the Holy Month of Ramadhan is the best time to buy Changan vehicles and retail customers stand to benefit enormously from the Ramadhan promotion. We would like to appreciate our valued customers for their trust in the brand through this special scheme. We are happy to offer the best for our customers."

Hyundai Motor Group Executive Chair named 'Visionary of the Year'



MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor Group's Executive Chair, Euisun Chung, won the 'Visionary of the Year' award at the inaugural Newsweek World's Greatest Auto Disruptors event. The World's Greatest Auto Disruptors 2022 programme has evolved from Newsweek America's 50 Greatest Disruptors – a list of visionaries, innovators and pioneers – introduced in 2021.

The new awards recognise agents of change in the automotive industry who are using technology in ways that will profoundly and positively impact people's lives.

One of six awards conferred at the event, 'Visionary of the Year' is given to a leader who is taking significant actions to shape the future of the automotive industry now and over the next 30 years. Newsweek recognised Chung for his significant role in the rise of Hyundai and Kia in the global automotive industry.

Under his leadership and bold vision for the future, the Group is redefining what is possible in mobility, and providing greater freedom of movement for humanity through vehicle electrification, robotics and advanced air mobility (AAM).

Lulu launches iftar meal initiative

MUSCAT: During this holy month, Lulu Oman has launched a noble initiative to provide wholesome Iftar meal boxes to commuters on the move, who are delayed from reaching home to break their fast. The aim of this initiative is to embody the spirit of Ramadhan through a visible expression of social unity.

Continuing Lulu's core philosophy to support the community, the group has rolled out this initiative, in association with N7N Volunteers team who will be engaged in the distribution at different traffic signals like Basher, Darsait, Markaz al Bahja and at similar locations in major towns like Suhar and Salalah.

Speaking on the initiative, Shabeer K A, Regional Director – Oman, said "In our own humble way, this is a reflection of our continued commitment of spreading a culture of charitable work and humanitarian initiatives that create social impact. Also, furthering our vision of giving back to the community we operate, gives us great pride".



"We are thankful to the N7N Volunteers Team for supporting this idea by distributing the Iftar meal boxes for families and commuters who are still on the road and are yet to break their fast," he added.

Mohammed al Zadjali, Spokesperson for the N7N Group stated, "It was an honour for N7N Volunteers team to collaborate with Lulu to achieve this campaign. We always strive to help the community and to be given this opportunity from Lulu felt like the cherry on top! We look forward to do more such activities and give back to the community whenever the chance presents itself," he

added. In addition to this, Lulu has tied up with various other charitable organisations in Oman to support their Ramadhan activities and provide the Iftar boxes to those who are in need.

As part of its multi-pronged Corporate Social Responsibility campaign, Lulu Group has constantly been investing in social initiatives and community development programmes that create tangible positive impact in the lives of people, society, the environment, in addition to building a cohesive and mutually supportive society.

Ominvest holds 'Strategic Management Process Programme' to empower employees

MUSCAT: In an effort to enable a qualified workforce and build employee capacities, Ominvest recently held a 'Strategic Management Process Programme' that aims to equip trainees with the concepts and tools required to think strategically and translate actions into effective results.

The three-day Programme was attended by nominated employees, introducing them to a 'culture of thinking' through interactive workshops and various practical and group exercises.

The programme is a Chartered Management Institute (CMI) recognised certification, which provides successful participants with a 12-months CMI membership to benefit from.



Commenting on the importance of the programme for the company, Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO at Ominvest, said, "Investing in the training and development of our people enables us to remain competitive and build capacity around

latest practices. It also proves our commitment to developing the skills and expertise of our talents. Providing them with the right tools and skills to elevate performance, productivity and profitability ultimately means a more impactful contribution

to the value we create for all stakeholders."

Al Balushi added, "We are extremely proud of the team we are building, with plans in place to consistently upskill and develop their capabilities. Our corporate purpose is "Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies", and there is no better area to start making a difference than the development and progress of our very own people."

'Excellence' and 'Collaboration' are two of the important pillars in Ominvest's five core corporate values, and we always devise strategies that sharpen our people's expertise and give them the confidence to excel, while also engaging employees from

Ominvest's group companies."

The top 10 performers of the recent Programme will be invited to take part in an advanced version of the Programme, receiving a more in-depth insight into the strategic management cycle, from assessment and analysis to strategy formulation and implementation.

Founded in 1983, Ominvest is one of the largest investment companies in the region. Its vision is to be an eminent investment group with significant global reach and impact. The company seeks to create value for all its stakeholders by prudently investing in growth sectors and markets while implementing innovative solutions, scalable platforms and impactful initiatives.



Less than a third of IPOs in the GCC succeed: Report

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 18

With 38 GCC market debuts, 2021 was the best year for new listings since 2007. Yet, the high volume of listings disguises the reality that only one-third are successful, says a new report by Iridium Advisors.

Specifically, just 38 per cent of IPOs were priced adequately - the majority of companies leave too much money on the table. Only 32 per cent of companies traded within the typically desired share price range of 20 per cent within the first 30 days of going public. And merely 31 per cent of new listings outperform companies that are already listed in the longer term.

These are among the findings of the report, entitled 'The Renaissance of IPOs in the GCC', that examines the success rate of company listing and demystifies some common misconceptions about IPO winners and losers. Iridium's analysis of 457 initial public offerings in the GCC region between 2005 and 2021, benchmarked companies against three objective criteria of success:



1. Underpricing: the difference between the IPO offer price and the first-day closing price
2. Stabilisation period: the 30-

day period of price stabilisation post-listing

3. Excess return: the relative company share price versus a country index over time

"It is very encouraging to see government-owned and private companies embracing public equity markets in the GCC," says Oliver Schutzmann (pictured), CEO of Iridium Advisors and a co-author of the report.

"With a well-thought-out programme of new public listings,

which is already underway, the region has the opportunity to re-energise its capital markets and attract foreign capital to diversify economic growth.

Nevertheless, there is still a big mountain to climb to unlock the true capital markets potential of listed companies for both issuers and investors."

Companies planning a public listing need to be aware of the high probability of disappointment and ask why this should be the case.

Iridium's analysis has identified three key areas that are commonly overlooked by company owners, directors and senior management that can play a part in improving the odds of success:

1. There are different dynamics at play in the primary and secondary market:

- The primary market is where shares are issued
- The secondary market

is where shares are traded. Successful issuers recognise that investors trade among themselves in the secondary market without any direct involvement from the company, and that their company is only worth as much as the last share price.

2. There is a difference between pre-IPO and post-IPO investors:

- Pre-IPO investors typically invest short-term
- Post-IPO investor

usually invest long-term. Companies whose share price outperforms its benchmark after the listing understand that there are different types of investors with varying motivations and interests.

3. The assumption that Public

Relations and Investor Relations are synonymous could lead to failure:

- The purpose of PR is to generate short-term interest
- The purpose of IR is to attract long-term investment

While both PR and IR have an important role to play, PR features more prominently before and after an IPO, while IR often tends to remain an afterthought.

Schutzmann concludes by adding: "The risk of value destruction is real for private and public sector companies in the GCC preparing for an IPO, SPAC, or a direct listing in 2022. It is, however, not inevitable.

Key areas of focus to improve the chances of success are taking a long-term view in pre-IPO preparation, identifying the right type of investor, and developing the capability to create organic relationships with the professional investment community. These three steps can guard against major share price gyrations after a listing and will go a long way to ensure that the region's companies - and their owners - are rewarded with the right valuation by the market."

Oil slips on demand fears and supply worries limit losses



Workers look at a drilling rig at a well pad of the Rosneft-owned Prirazlomnoye oil field in Nefteyugansk, Russia. — Reuters

TOKYO: Oil edged lower on Monday pressured by worries over slowing demand in China, although concern over tight global supply and the deepening Ukraine crisis kept Brent crude above \$111 a barrel.

China's economy slowed in March as consumption, real estate and exports were hit, taking the shine off faster-than-expected first-quarter growth numbers and worsening an outlook already weakened by Covid-19 curbs and the Ukraine war.

Brent crude, the global benchmark, fell 26 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$111.89 at 10:55 GMT, sliding from the highest since March 30 of \$113.80 hit earlier in the session.

US West Texas Intermediate was down 11 cents, or 0.1 per cent, at \$106.31. "Some Asian investors booked profits as they became worried about slowing demand in China," said Satoru Yoshida, a commodity analyst with Rakuten Securities.

Data on Monday also showed China refined 2 per cent less oil in March than a year earlier, with throughput falling to the lowest since October as the surge in crude prices squeezed margins and

tight lockdowns hurt demand.

Oil surged to the highest since 2008 in March, with Brent briefly topping \$134, as Moscow's attack on Ukraine added to supply concerns due to sanctions on Russia and buyers avoiding Russian oil.

Adding to supply-side pressure, Libya's National Oil Corp on Monday declared force majeure at Zueitina oil port and warned that "a painful wave of closures" had begun hitting its facilities.

Libya had halted production from its El Feel oilfield. "With global supplies now so tight, even the most minor disruption is likely to have an outsized impact on prices," said Jeffrey Halley, analyst at brokerage OANDA. Russian production declined by 7.5 per cent in the first half of April from March, Interfax reported on Friday and EU governments said last week the bloc's executive was drafting proposals to ban Russian crude.

Ukrainian authorities said missiles struck Lviv early on Monday and explosions rocked other cities as Russian forces kept up their bombardments after claiming near full control of the port of Mariupol. — Reuters

India wholesale price inflation rises in March

NEW DELHI: India's wholesale price inflation rose in March after easing in the previous month, preliminary official data showed on Monday. The wholesale price index rose 14.55 per cent year-on-year in March, following a 13.11 per cent increase in February.

Economists had forecast 13 per cent inflation. In January, inflation was 13.68 per cent. The food index rose 8.71 per cent annually in March, following an 8.47 per cent increase in the previous month.

The high rate of inflation in March was primarily due to rise in prices of crude



Residents buy tomatoes from a vegetable market in Ahmedabad, India. — Reuters

petroleum & natural gas, mineral oils and basic metals due to disruption in global supply chain.

The primary articles inflation rose to 15.54 per cent from 13.39 per cent in February. The fuel and power index grew 34.52 per cent annually in March, following a 31.5 per cent increase in the previous month.

The manufactured products index rose 10.71 per cent yearly in March, following a 9.84 per cent growth in Feb. On a month-on-month basis, the wholesale price index increased 2.69 per cent in March, following a 0.76 per cent rise in the previous month. — dpa

China's economy accelerates in Q1

BEIJING: China's economic growth accelerated in the first quarter of the year to 4.8 per cent, official data showed on Monday, but the government warned of "significant challenges" ahead while massive Covid-19 lockdowns started to bite.

The world's second-biggest economy had lost steam in the latter half of last year with a property slump and regulatory crackdowns, pulling down growth.

But it exceeded expectations in the first three months of 2022, growing 4.8 per cent on-year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said, with Lunar New Year spending and factory production cajoling growth.

The weeks ahead, however, appear treacherous for the economy with Beijing's unrelenting zero-Covid approach to outbreaks clogging supply chains and locking down tens of millions of people — including in the economic dynamos of Shanghai and Shenzhen as well as the northeastern grain basket of Jilin.

Virus restrictions in March have already gouged at retail sales, as consumers shied away from shopping and drove up unemployment. "With the domestic and international environment becoming increasingly complicated and uncertain,



Labourers work at a construction site in Beijing, in this file photo. — AFP

economic development is facing significant difficulties and challenges," NBS spokesman Fu Linghui said on Monday.

The pandemic rebound — as well as the sanctions binding Russia's economy — ups the ante on officials to deliver Beijing's full-year growth target of around 5.5 per cent.

The target comes in a pivotal political year for President Xi Jinping who is eyeing another term in power at the Party Congress to be held this autumn.

The current virus outbreak is

the worst since the peak of the first wave which emerged in Wuhan in late 2019 and the economy is beginning to weaken.

Industrial production growth eased to 5.0 per cent in March, NBS data showed, down from the January-February period.

Meanwhile, retail sales sank 3.5 per cent and the urban unemployment rate ticked up to a 22-month high of 5.8 per cent last month. "March activity data suggests that China's economy slowed, especially in household

consumption," Tommy Wu, lead China economist at Oxford

Economics, said in a note. China's government is trying to balance "minimising disruption against controlling the latest wave of Covid infections", Wu said, but he warned of a drag on economic activity into May or beyond.

Last week, carmakers warned of severe disruptions to supply chains and possibly even a halt on production completely if the lockdown on Shanghai's 25 million inhabitants persisted.

— AFP

The elusive politics of Elon Musk

JEREMEY W PETERS

The opinions poured in, 280 characters at a time, as to whether it was good or bad that Elon Musk had offered to buy Twitter for more than \$40 billion and take it private.

A person’s politics typically dictated how they felt: Conservatives cheered it as a victory for free speech. Liberals fretted that misinformation would spread rampantly if Musk followed through with his plan to dismantle how the social network monitors content. But what no one seemed to be able to say with any certainty was what kind of political philosophy the enigmatic billionaire believes himself.

That’s because Musk, 50, who was born in South Africa and only became an American citizen in 2002, expresses views that don’t fit neatly into this country’s binary, left-right political framework.

He is frequently described as libertarian, although that label fails to capture how paradoxical and random his politics can be. He has no shortage of opinions on the most pertinent and divisive issues of the day, from Covid-19 lockdowns (“fascist,” he called them) to immigration restrictions (“Very much disagree,” he has said.)

There is not much consistency in the miscellany of his public statements or his profuse Twitter commentary — except that they often align with his business interests. And despite the intense partisan reaction to his unsolicited bid to buy Twitter, his opaque politics make it difficult to say whether the elation and fear about how he would run the company are justified.

He has railed against federal subsidies, but his companies have benefited from billions of dollars in tax breaks and other incentives from federal, state and local governments. He has strenuously opposed unionisation, criticising the Biden administration for proposing a tax credit for electric vehicles produced by union workers.

He is the co-founder of an electric car manufacturer, Tesla, who quit former President Donald Trump’s business councils after the administration pulled out of the Paris climate accord. But he recently ran afoul of environmentalists for calling for an immediate increase in domestic oil and gas production, although it would not be helpful to his businesses in electric cars and solar energy.

He is an avowed enthusiast for the First Amendment. But he tried to force a journalist to testify in a defamation lawsuit against him, and he has often had outsize reactions to criticism.

Four years ago, he floated a plan to



The assembly line at Tesla’s factory in Fremont, California.

create a website to rate the credibility of reporters, calling it Pravda, in an odd nod to the Soviet Union’s propaganda publication. (Nothing much came of it.) And a venture capitalist wrote at length about Musk cancelling his order for a new Tesla after the investor complained about a Tesla event.

Musk said he was a registered independent when he lived in California, the state he famously and loudly left for Texas because he said its business climate had grown too inhospitable. He has described himself as “politically moderate” but added, “Doesn’t mean I’m moderate about all issues.” He did not respond to a request for comment.

His concerns about the way Twitter censors content echo those of conservative activists and politicians who have argued that social media companies are poor arbiters of truth and should not be engaged in policing speech.

One person who has worked closely with Musk said that it is Musk’s firmly held belief that in a functioning democracy, it is anyone’s right to say “whatever stupid thing you want.”

This person, who spoke anonymously to not violate Musk’s trust, added dryly, “Which he occasionally does.”

Few issues have raised his ire as much as the coronavirus restrictions, which impeded Tesla’s manufacturing operations in California and nudged him

closer to his decision last year to move the company’s headquarters to Texas. That move, however, was very much symbolic since Tesla still has its main manufacturing plant in the San Francisco Bay Area suburb of Fremont, California, and a large office in Palo Alto.

Over the course of the pandemic, Musk’s outbursts flared dramatically as he lashed out at state and local governments over stay-at-home orders. He initially defied local regulations that shut down his Tesla factory in Fremont.

He described the lockdowns as “forcibly imprisoning people in their homes” and posted a libertarian-tinged rallying cry to Twitter: “FREE AMERICA NOW.” He threatened to sue Alameda County for the shutdowns before relenting.

In an interview in the fall of 2020 with The New York Times’ contributing Opinion writer Kara Swisher, Musk expressed dismay over his belief that the pandemic had brought out irrational fears in many Americans. “It has diminished my faith in humanity, this whole thing,” he said.

At the same time, as the country’s nerves were fraying six months into an outbreak with no end in sight, social media companies came under pressure to take more proactive steps to limit the spread of false information about Covid-19 and the presidential election on their platforms.

And when new content moderation policies after the 2020 election began to affect users on Twitter — where Musk has 82 million followers — he sided with many conservatives and allies of the former president who accused the social media company of arbitrary censorship.

Many accounts that spread disinformation about Covid-19 and vaccines and voter fraud have been suspended or shut down.

People like Alex Jones, a conspiracy theorist who denied the Sandy Hook massacre, and Trump, who used Twitter to rally his followers to march on the Capitol on Jan. 6, have been banned.

Supporters of the former president cheered his possible return to Twitter. A Republican congressman from Texas, Troy Nehls, tweeted, “Make Twitter Great Again.” For his part, Trump, who is promoting his own social media venture, Truth Social, said last week that he doesn’t think he will come back.

“Twitter’s become very boring. They’ve gotten rid of a lot of their good voices,” he complained in an interview on Americano Media, a Spanish language network.

But given Musk’s largely non-denominational political philosophy, some on the right were less sanguine. Ann Coulter, a frequent presence on Twitter, said that the billionaire entrepreneur struck her as “mostly apolitical” and “mostly about promoting himself.”

A person’s politics typically dictated how they felt: Conservatives cheered it as a victory for free speech. Liberals fretted that misinformation would spread rampantly if Musk followed through with his plan to dismantle how the social network monitors content. But what no one seemed to be able to say with any certainty was what kind of political philosophy the enigmatic billionaire believes himself.

China seeks more lending to help its economy

KEITH BRADSHER

Economic policy in China is moving in the opposite direction from most of the rest of the world, with the country’s central bank announcing on Friday that it would ease rules to help promote economic growth as coronavirus outbreaks and lockdowns hurt businesses and consumers alike.

The People’s Bank of China said it would reduce its reserve requirement ratio, effective April 25. The move allows banks to lend a larger share of their assets, while parking less of their money at the central bank, where it earns almost no interest.

The central bank said in a statement that it was acting “to support the development of the real economy and promote the stability of comprehensive financing costs.” Many countries are more worried about fighting inflation than stimulating their economies, and are pushing up short-term interest rates to make it more costly for companies and families to borrow and spend. South Korea and New Zealand have already raised interest rates this week.

The Federal Reserve and the Bank of England both raised interest rates last month. The European Central

But while most of the world has opened up after the pandemic and is spending money heavily and driving up prices, China is not. Household spending is stalling as most of the country’s large cities have imposed lockdowns with varying degrees of severity.

Bank has stopped short of raising rates directly but said on Thursday that it would stop buying bonds, which could indirectly have a similar effect.

But while most of the world has opened up after the pandemic and is spending money heavily and driving up prices, China is not. Household spending is stalling as most of the country’s large cities have imposed lockdowns with varying degrees of severity.

Automakers, consumer electronics manufacturers and other big industries are struggling to operate as lockdowns have prevented much of the country’s truck fleet from carrying components among factories and from carrying finished goods to stores and export ports.

The central bank did not reduce interest rates on Friday morning, as some overseas economists had expected. Cutting interest rates would have given banks an incentive only to lend money to the companies most likely to repay it — which in China means large state-owned enterprises.

Leaving interest rates where they are but telling banks that they can lend more money overall is the latest signal that the Chinese government wants the financial system to provide more money to small and midsize enterprises, which play a crucial role in job creation

but have been among the hardest hit by lockdowns and other measures to control coronavirus outbreaks.

Not reducing interest rates also means that banks can continue to earn enough interest from clients who are still repaying loans, offsetting losses on customers who may become overdue or default on their loans because of financial losses related to the pandemic.

Inflation is not much of a problem right now in China. Consumer prices were only up 1.5 per cent in March from a year earlier, according to official data. Demand has been so weak, especially with many families unable to venture out of their homes because of lockdowns, that stores find themselves with lots of merchandise and little ability to raise prices.

The reserve requirement ratio was last reduced in December. When this week’s cut takes effect, it will reduce the ratio by 0.25 percentage points for most banks and 0.5 percentage points for some of the smaller banks that lend more to struggling small businesses. The reserve ratio reductions will lower the weighted average for China’s financial institutions to 8.1 per cent.

The central bank said that the reduction in required reserves would free the country’s banks to lend an extra \$83 billion.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Modern Open Line LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1114333, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 50,000.000 to 5,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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How Bruneians celebrate the holy month

By Kabeer Yousuf

The holy month of Ramadhan in Brunei, the southeast Asian country, is a month of giving, just as any other country is used to, but with the difference that every single household will be taken care of by the royal gesture of making sure that people do possess ample food and other provisions with them for a whole month.

In Brunei, Ramadhan begins with twelve cannon shots being fired at Taman Haji Sir Muda Omar Ali Saifuddin in the capital city of Bandar Seri Begawan, heralding the arrival of the 'month of abundance' in terms of goodness and kindness.

Brunei is closely associated with Islam, its traditions, and religious customs and this is visible in celebrating events and religious festivals, including the holy month of Ramadhan.

In conjunction with the holy month of Ramadhan, 154.5 tonnes of dates from His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam have been distributed to all Muslims in the country irrespective of their age and citizenship whereby each individual is entitled to a box containing 300 grams of dates.

To celebrate Ramadhan, several Islamic activities and events are held during this holy month such as Tadarus, Islamic Talks, Nuzul Al - Quran (17th Ramadhan), etc. Various bazaars and food stalls can be found all over Brunei Darussalam during the fasting month with a delightful selection of exotic foods, drinks and desserts all in one place. Furthermore, throughout the holy month, Muslims in the country perform tarawih prayers at various mosques around the country, with the two most significant mosques consisting of the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque and the Jame' Asr Hassanil Bolkiah Mosque.

Preparations for the month were long begun as houses and shops prepared themselves to welcome the month. Once the sighting of the Ramadhan crescent moon was validated, residents took to the streets, chanting Tahleel slogans. Almost all the houses have Ramadhan lanterns hung lit in front of houses.

The month is also observed as a public holiday season in the country and fasting is not linked to the Muslims alone, as non-Muslims are also accustomed to fasting out of respect for Muslims, who make up the majority in the country, and as an evidence of successful social coexistence.

"This is good news for Muslims in this

country, in particular, to be able to perform the fasting obligation in a comfortable environment, which is also a blessing to Brunei," Brunei's Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah had urged his people to the observation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) outlined by the authorities to continue, adding that it is imperative not to "ignore precautionary measures, for as long as they are needed," while welcoming the first day of Ramadhan.

One of the inherited traditions in the holy month is that the Sultan of Brunei attends religious ceremonies during Ramadhan in the grand mosque with his ministers and the public. He is keen to prepare soohur for those who worship in the mosque.

With a population of nearly 450,000 people, Brunei Darussalam, a tiny country with tropical forest covering three-quarters of the total land area of 5,765 square kilometres, is one of the world's richest nations.

This year, as Brunei has put the epidemic under control, Ramadhan markets are full of life and bustling with people from across the world. These Ramadhan markets, located across the country, and with vendors offering Malay-style cakes, barbecue, various drinks and other Muslim deli-



cacies, nights come alive with a large number of people from all ethnic groups reluctant to give up till suhur time, the time for morning prayers.

"Ramadhan in Brunei is an experience altogether. The Iftar, suhur, Ramadhan gatherings, networking and so on and so forth, are something which one shouldn't miss," says Dato Sulaini Said, Diplomatic representative of Brunei to the Sultanate.

Brunei is known for its clean, hygienic and sturdy local eateries which serve the customers local delicacies as well as foreign cuisines to the taste and preferences

of the people visiting them. Hotels are required not to serve dine-in customers in daylight hours under local law. Consumption of food, drinking and smoking in public places during daylight are also offences under the law, under which offenders can be prosecuted.

"However, non-Muslims can buy fast food takeaway in restaurants or eateries and have them in their houses as a matter of respecting the month," adds Sulaini.

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

Say, "O disbelievers. I do not worship what you worship. Nor do you worship what I worship. Nor do I serve what you serve. Nor do you serve what I serve. You have your way, and I have my way.

Al Kafirun



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

FATWA

QUESTION:
Is external usage of ointment considered breaking the fast?

ANSWER:
External usage does not affect fasting. Just like bathing during days of Ramadhan is acceptable, in the same context, using external ointments is also permissible.

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Sahl b. Sa'd (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger as saying:

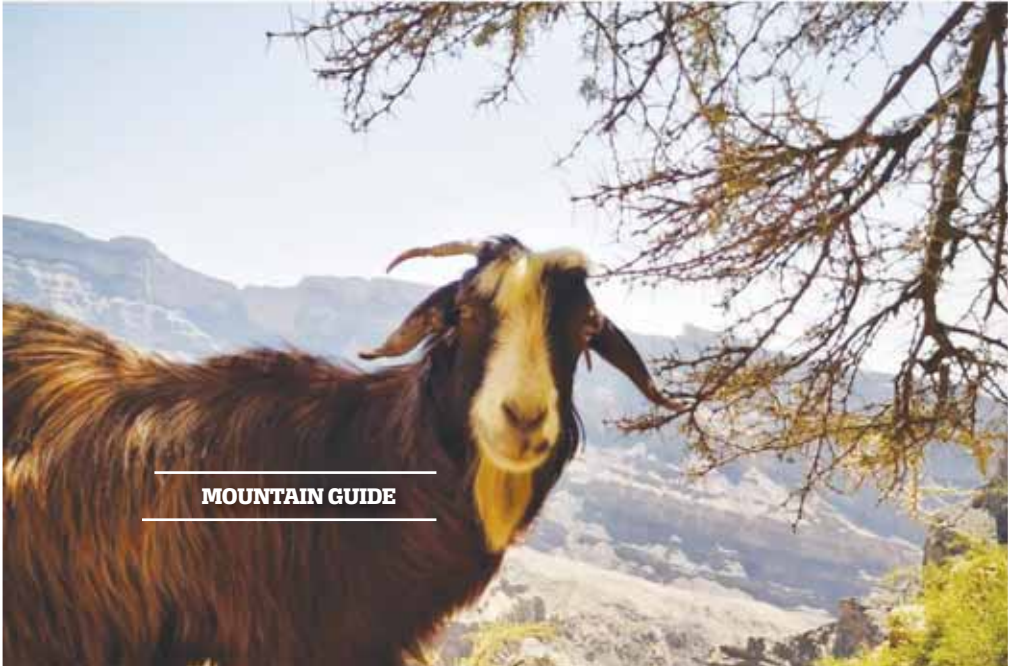
In Paradise there is a gate which is called Rayyan through which only the people who fast would enter on the Day on Resurrection. None else would enter along with them. It would be proclaimed: Where are the people who fast that they should be admitted into it? And when the last of them would enter, it would be closed and no one would enter it.

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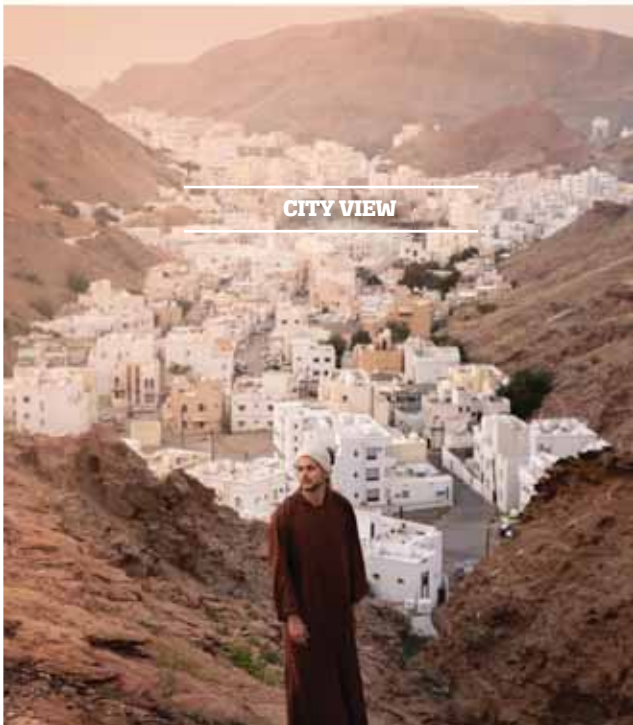


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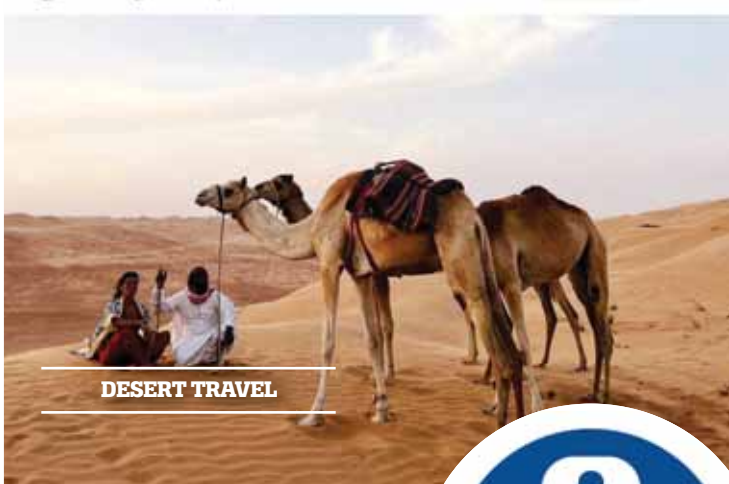


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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Arooj Aftab, the Grammy-winning Pakistani singer serenading Coachella



FRESH OFF OF her historic Grammy win, the Brooklyn-based Pakistani singer Arooj Aftab has added another feather to her cap with a debut at the much-touted Coachella music festival.

She graced the California desert with a set that centred her melodious Urdu lyricism, a barrier-breaking move as she became the first Pakistani to play the prestigious festival. For Aftab, the language barrier no longer exists: "This is a door that's opened."

The 37-year-old -- who just released a cover of Spanish flamenco revisionist Rosalia's "Di mi nombre" -- sees a revolution in popular music, with artists sailing freely past genre and borders.

"There's a movement happening in the music industry at large," she said on the grounds of Coachella, where she delivered a moving performance of her work that fuses ancient Sufi traditions with inflections of folk, jazz and minimalism.

"The audience and the musicians are creating music and the audiences are listening to music with a lot of freedom in their minds. Less genre-genre, less border-border," she said.

"It's so free, and open, and really, really beautiful."

She credits the Latinx community for making huge inroads in this respect, citing Rosalia along with Becky G, Karol G, J Balvin and Bad Bunny as influential in the transformation. "The trap movement definitely changed the way listeners listen," Aftab said, referring to the explosion of Southern US hip hop that later made it's way into Latin America and fused with reggaeton.

The surge of Latin music on US airwaves and especially on streaming platforms "created a big opening in the minds of listeners in America," she continued.

"They now listen to music that they don't understand, and it's fine! They love it. That's a big step."

Aftab said that opening has allowed her to feel more liberated with her own creations, putting out music based on emotions, without limitation.

"It's a personal music," she said. "It's not 'my country, my country' -- it's global music. It's everything that we feel, it's all the people that we meet."

"Whatever makes my heart sing is in the music."

A HIGH

With three studio albums, Aftab mere weeks ago made history in becoming the first Pakistani solo vocalist to nab a Grammy, winning for her song "Mohabbat" in the Best Global Performance category.

She was also nominated in the prestigious Best New Artist field -- although that award went, as expected, to pop sensation Olivia Rodrigo.

But Aftab is basking in the moment of recognition, savouring her career accolades as well as her two performance dates at the premier Coachella festival.

"It feels really amazing, it's a high -- it's a high moment in my career," the singer said. "I've been working towards this moment and imagining that this moment would come, or not."

"And it did! Which is miraculous."

Featuring artists from all over the world, the 2022 Coachella poster is a reflection of music's globalisation and genre fluidity. For Aftab, that's a big win. "This is a door that's opened, for sure." And I'm going to leave the door open, for sure. — AFP

FASHION

'What if Africa was the birthplace of fashion?'

LAST SPRING, when much-loved designer Alber Elbaz unexpectedly died from Covid-19 just after introducing a label called AZ Factory, the fashion world first mourned, then wondered what would happen to his new company, backed by the luxury conglomerate Richemont. How could it go on without him?

An answer came earlier this year: Enlist a series of "amigo" designers to carry on the spirit of experimentation and self-care that defined AZ Factory, expressing that spirit as they saw fit: in clothes, but also in objects, at installations, whatever. And the first would be Thebe Magugu, a 28-year-old South African designer, founder of a namesake label and winner of the 2019 LVMH Prize for emerging talent.

This month, Magugu unveiled his collection for AZ Factory, which will be sold in two drops in June and September. Here he reveals how it happened and what it meant to take on the mantle of Elbaz.

Q: HOW DID YOUR COLLABORATION WITH AZ FACTORY COME ABOUT? DID YOU KNOW ALBER?

A: I never met him, but when we first got satellite television, I used to see his fashion shows. Then last year, I got an email from Alex Koo, Alber's partner, saying he and the AZ Factory team were planning this tribute show, "Love Brings Love," and they'd invited 44 or so brands to pay homage to Alber. He asked me to take part, and I said, "Of course."

It was such a beautiful show, seeing everyone's interpretation of Alber looks throughout the years. Two or three months passed, and I got another email from AZ telling me about its strategy going forward, that the company would invite creatives across fashion, photography, what have you, to work with the brand, and I really wanted to do it. I wanted to tease the connection between myself and Alber, especially the fact that we're both from the continent: him from Morocco and me from South Africa.

That was the starting point of the collection. And then the question I posed was: What if Africa was the birthplace of fashion?

Q: WHAT IF?

A: Well, first and foremost, the values of fashion in the Northern Hemisphere have to do with storytelling -- this idea of many hands working and knowledge that can be passed on from generation to generation. And those are really the same values we have in Africa for African crafts.

Q: SO HOW DID YOU CONNECT THESE TWO?

A: I started researching a lot of silhouettes and merging them with my own. Before he passed, Alber had been working on quite a few prints with an Algerian printmaker named Chafik

Cheriet. A lot of them were animal prints but quite abstracted, and I was immediately attracted to them. It's almost as if this collection completes a collection that never was. One of my

We also did a lot of trompe l'oeil, like the skirt that looks pleated but is just a flat piece of fabric that's printed with the grooves and the impressions of a pleat. Even the belt is fake.



Q: THIS DOES SOUND LIKE A COLLABORATION TO ME, THOUGH. WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT?

A: The word collaboration, especially now, implies a power dynamic. But here, there was no brief imposed. And what makes it quite special is that I got to leave the project with quite a few resources, especially technical resources. A lot of times, the AZ design studio was doing things that I technically didn't know how to do. And they gave me contacts to certain suppliers and manufacturers. That makes it more like an incubator in a way.

Q: WHAT ELSE DID YOU LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE?

A: I was really struck by the sense of kindness and duty to others that Alber had. It's not that common in fashion. Somewhere in our history, the idea of kindness began to be associated with weakness or indecision. But people like Alber, and like Virgil Abloh and some others I have interacted with, operate from that inherent sense of kindness, even at the heights they reach. They still retain that soul and humanity. Kindness, I think, will get you quite far. I really deeply believe in karma. What you put out will make its way back. — NYT

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



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A car being both a bounty and a cause of pity

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

A CAR IN MISKIN

I remember the first car that arrived in Miskin and stopped motionless in the aabiya, the open square. It was driven by Sayyid Hamoud bin Nasr al Busaidi, who served in the Oman Coastal Regiment. On patrol in the region, Al Busaidi and his companions left their car and went into the village to have qahwa with Shaikh Rashid bin Said al Kalbani and the other tribesmen. As customary, the guests were taken to the sabla, the council in the Omani tradition, where they were dutifully and warmly served. The car remained in the village square. It was something of a wonder to people, probably like a new "animal" that they took pity on as having travelled long distance and consequently suffered a great deal. It was, however, something of a bounty to us, as we had the chance to ride in this strange "creature" and enjoy a tour around the village.

MISKIN MASHYAKHA*

Throughout Omani history, the tribe leader, Shaikh, in Oman has played an active role in his local community. He was akin to the head of a small government, administrating the affairs of his village, no matter how big or otherwise. He would also contact the wali, who in his turn, was the representative of the government in Muscat. Our village was no different from the rest in this regard. It is believed that in the past Esa bin Sulaiman al Kalbani was the Shaikh of our tribe. The masha-kha then went to Shaikh Saif bin Rashid al Kalbani, succeeded by his two sons, Sayyid and Rashid who would take the leadership in turns. If one was away the other would take over. Our elders, my father Rashid and his brothers Ali and Salim, sons of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kalbani and Uncle Saif bin Sulaiman al Kalbani were neighbours to Rashid and Sayyid, all living in

harmony with each other.

Uncle Ali and Shaikh Sayyid bin Saif went to Zanzibar, where they were business partners. My father, Rashid bin Mohammed and Shaikh Rashid bin Saif were on friendly terms with each other both when at home or when travelling. They would also go hunting together sometimes.

As for my uncle Salim, he devoted all his time to attending to people's affairs and settling their disputes, a quality everybody testifies to even today. For such purposes, he would sometimes go to Maqaniyat and Najed. If required, he would go to the wali's office. It is said that if he heard a couple quarrelling with each other, he would not sleep until he had helped them patch up their differences.

When Uncle Ali and Shaikh Sayyid came back from Zanzibar, Shaikh Said moved to Maqaniyat. As for Rashid, he travelled to Saudi Arabia to earn a living and would come back only occasionally. He finally settled in Abu Dhabi. Uncle Salim then took charge of Masha-kha by the unanimous consent of the Miskin people.

My brother used to work in the police. After the death of our father in 1971 he resigned to stay at home and help Uncle Salim in attending to our family and social affairs. Upon the death of Uncle Salim, my brother became the shaikh by the approval of the tribe.

* An Arabic word used in the local dialects of the Arabian Peninsula to refer to the process of choosing a notable person from the tribe both to administer its affairs and represent it in the wider socio-political organisation, especially when coordinating with other tribes or with the representative of the government. The person chosen would be locally referred to as "Shaikh" (the translator).

Ramadhan

Local Scene

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Photo by Abdulmajeed Al Shuaibi

Dip into the “healing waters” of Al Hinn Spring

By Arwa Al Hashimi

Summer in Oman is about finding the best spots to cool down. And this means going to the mountains, swimming on beaches, or diving into wadis or springs.

About two hours drive from Muscat passing through Lizagh is the sulfuric pools of Al Hinn located in Bidbid. Unlike other springs in Oman, however, this one is located in an almost barren land with barely any vegetation near the spring except for some grasses growing right at the beach where some sand accumulated.

This spring is unique for its bluish-green water highlighted because of the high concentration of sulfur in the water. Some of these powdery sulfur is collected below the water while others dry out and stick on rocks creating a beautiful pool that looks painted white.

Over the years, this spring has become popular as a picnic destination for families despite the spring being just a crack on the ground and water accumulating in some deeper parts.

In order to reach this spring, one has to pass between mountains toward

a valley surrounded by very rough terrain. This area has also been attracting hikers because of the challenging walkways that lead to some of the best pools.

Some locals believe that dipping into the sulfuric spring brings many medical benefits including curing skin diseases like rashes and eczema. Others believe that sulfuric water also heals dry scalp, arthritic pain and some internal issues like digestive disorders and menopausal symptoms. There are also small fishes underwater offering the best foot spa one can have in the middle of nowhere as they usually eat out dead skin cells.

The spring is a testament to Oman's diverse environment and comes sunset, the fading red hue of the sun against the backdrop of towering mountains gives the area a unique otherworldly vibe that comes out nice in photos.

As Bidbid is still a growing town, Al Hinn has become one of its top attractions where visitors come not just from Muscat but also from the surrounding villages.

On some weekends, the place is usually packed with visitors wanting to cool down and feel the healing effects of the sulfuric spring.

