

OMAN **Observer**

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HALLIBURTON AND BAKER HUGHES SCRAP \$28 BN MERGER P17



KVYAT FUTURE IN DOUBT AFTER SOCHI 'DISASTER' GP P25



BY ANY OTHER NAME - A NIGHT AT THE PROMS P30

OMAN HM greetings to Polish President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Andrzej Duda of the Republic of Poland on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Duda and the friendly people of Poland further progress and prosperity.

Two persons die of Congo Fever

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health announced that two persons died of Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) over the past month. The CCHF is a widespread disease caused by a tick-borne virus. The virus is transmitted to people either by tick bites or through contact with infected animals. This disease is endemic in the Sultanate as the first case was reported in 1995. Since early 2016 till the end of April, the Sultanate has recorded six cases as three died of the disease. Since there is no effective vaccine available for humans and animals, the only way to reduce the infection among people is to raise the awareness of risk factors.

REGION US and Russia try to save Syria ceasefire

GENEVA: Washington and Moscow said on Monday they were working hard to extend a truce in Syria to Aleppo, the divided northern city where a sharp escalation of violence in recent weeks has left a ceasefire in tatters and torpedoed peace talks. US Secretary of State John Kerry was in Geneva for meetings with other dignitaries to try to revive the two-month-old US and Russia-sponsored cessation of hostilities, which quieted guns for the first time during the five-year Syrian war but which has unravelled in recent days.

REPORT ON P13

INSIDESTORIES



MILITANTS THREATENED TO SLIT OUR THROATS, SAYS HOSTAGE P6



DEEPLY UNPOPULAR HOLLANDE EYES RE-ELECTION BID P9



DEADLY INDIAN FOREST FIRES UNDER CONTROL P10

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT MAX: 33°C MIN: 28°C	SALALAH MAX: 32°C MIN: 27°C	NIZWA MAX: 37°C MIN: 25°C
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SUNRISE 05.31 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:08	DHUHR: 12:03
ASR: 15:28	MAGHRIB: 18:35
ISHA: 20:05	

Private sector needs to boost economy

JOINT MEETING: State Council and Majlis Ash'shura discuss economic situation

MUSCAT: The State Council and Majlis Ash'shura offices on Monday discussed the efforts made by the standing committees to deal with the current economic situation in Oman.

The joint meeting, which was held at the Council of Oman, was chaired by Dr Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Mantheri, Chairman of the State Council, and Shaikh Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Al Mantheri highlighted the importance of these meetings to increase coordination between the two councils in all legislative and regulatory actions.

Regarding the economic challenges being faced by the country, the chairman of the State Council emphasised that it is a very important issue and government and private sectors must cooperate in facing the challenges.

He said that the private sector must play its part to support the national economy more effectively by domestic investment in the country, since the government has provided the private sector with infrastructure, support and appropriate services, and to be a key partner in finding appropriate solutions to the challenges.

A special committee was formed to study the economic crisis and its impact on the society. The committee began its work and has held several meetings and is likely to submit its report and recommendations in July.

Shaikh Khalid said that the Majlis Ash'shura, through its office, standing committees and task forces, continues to follow the economic crisis and its aftermath, as it has already held several meetings and sessions with specialists in banking, economic and tourism sectors, in addition to oil and gas, to listen to the viewpoints of the private sector.

He pointed out that these meetings resulted in a series of proposals and visions to ensure reducing the economic harm caused by the fall in oil prices or limiting them.

TURN TO P2

Major boom seen in retail sector

**KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT**

May 2: Oman's retail sector will witness a major boom with hundreds of millions of rials to be pumped in, major international brands to be flown in and thousands of jobs for locals to be generated with the announcement of Majid al Futtaim's retail expansion plans.

An additional RO 515 million will be invested by this shopping and retail pioneer in the MENA region by 2020 taking the total investment of the group to RO 705 million to the existing RO 190 million investments since 2001 which will be invested in three major malls across Oman including the Mall of Oman in Bausher, besides expanding its current business interests.

This will make Majid al Futtaim the largest investor in the Sultanate's flourishing non-oil sector.



"Our ambitious projects in Oman country, the Mall of Oman open," Alain G Bejjani, CEO of Majid al Futtaim-Holding, said.

TURN TO P5

Experts advise Internet users to carefully manage their online image

Safeguarding your online reputation is critical

**MAI AL ABRIA
MUSCAT**

May 2: Your online reputation is defined by your behaviour in the online environment and by the content that you post about yourself and others.

Experts always advise Internet users to carefully manage their online image, now that technology has made it possible for the online lives of most individuals to be crafted, digitised, collected, recorded, archived and made searchable.

Let's consider the following real-life example! A man proposes to the girl he loves.

Her digital savvy parents check his Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts to understand his behavioural traits, likes and dislikes, the company he keeps, and so on.

What they discover is unpalatable to them with the result that the proposal is rebuffed outright. Moral of the story: Given today's increasingly digitalised

world, people are prone to judge us according to our digital behaviour and attitudes; hence the need to be prudent in what we post online about ourselves.

This is a very real predicament — not just for teenagers but all of us. If someone has to Google us, for example, what is it they will likely uncover about us? Exception may be made for professionals, for whom a positive online presence or reputation is critical.

Likewise, those in business also need

to have a positive online reputation.

Negative digital content has caused numerous individuals and organisations to suffer disgrace.

In an incident that sparked public anger recently, a boy posted a video of himself with a girl in a pose that was contrary to Islamic morality and traditions.

After the video got viral, the Public Prosecution secured jail terms for the couple for propagating negative values.

community levels.

The ministry said it has undertaken many measures to contain the spread of these cases with its team intensifying efforts to spread awareness among parents and the community on the disease's transmission methods and preventive measures.

Campaigns have also conducted to educate people on the need for personal hygiene to prevent the disease. "Samples of water supplied to the Asila village were tested to determine the possibility of any contamination, with the results coming negative."

136 Hepatitis A cases in South Sharqiyah

**STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT**

May 2: With 136 cases of Hepatitis A reported from South Al Sharqiyah since the start of this year (mostly from Asila village with 76 per cent Jaalan Bani Bu Ali) since the start of this year, authorities have stepped up campaign to detect any possibility of water contamination or sanitary hygiene issues.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) said in a statement that the disease is spread due to person-to-person transmissions and not connected with one source or through food supplied either at the school or

community levels. The ministry said it has undertaken many measures to contain the spread of these cases with its team intensifying efforts to spread awareness among parents and the community on the disease's transmission methods and preventive measures.

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Muscat Securities Market general index 30 on Monday closed four points higher at 5,952.10 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 5,948.07 points. The trading value stood at RO 10,967,443, comprising a rise by 158.74 per cent compared to the last session, which stood at RO 4,238,839.



DIWAN OF ROYAL COURT MINISTER RECEIVES AMBASSADORS



MUSCAT: Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, received in his office on Monday M K Pathmanaathan, ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate. The two sides exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed bilateral relations between the Sultanate and Sri Lanka, as well as means of enhancing them in all fields.

FAREWELL TO IRANIAN ENVOY
Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy also received in his office on Monday Ali Akbar Sibawayh, Ambassador of the Islamic

Republic of Iran to the Sultanate to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate. The two sides exchanged conversations and reviewed the relations between the two friendly countries. The ambassador expressed his thanks for the cooperation extended to him during his duty in the Sultanate, which facilitated in carrying out his assignments. Sayyid Khalid thanked the ambassador for the good efforts he exerted to enhance the relations between the Sultanate and Iran, wishing him success. — ONA



Private sector must boost economy

FROM PAGE 1

A special committee was formed to study the economic crisis and its impact on society.

The committee began its work and has held several meetings and is likely to submit its report and recommendations in July.

The meeting also discussed the coordination mechanisms proposed between the two councils, pursuant to the provisions of Article 58 repeated 36 of the Basic Law of the State, in addition to discussing the exchange of results of studies prepared by the councils, when needed.

The meeting touched on the discussion mechanism of draft laws referred by the government through committees in the councils after referring the draft law by Majlis to the Council in order to clarify the rationale for amendment made by committee which studied the law. — ONA

Issues, challenges facing banks in Oman discussed

MUSCAT: Hamood bin Sangour al Zadjali, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), on Monday chaired the annual meeting of CEOs, general managers and officials of banks operating in the Sultanate.

The CBO Executive President stressed the importance of this regular meeting, which comes within the framework of existing cooperation and coordination among banking institutions, CBO, its various departments and units.

He also affirmed the endeavours of

all to find solutions for the issues and challenges facing the banking sector and facilitating its assignments.

Al Zadjali also confirmed that the banks in the Sultanate fulfilled the minimum conditions of Basel III at the end of 2015.

He added that the banks also maintained high levels of basic capital while the CBO financial tolerance evaluators continue in a bid to show the flexible banking system as each bank is required to identify weakness points and adopt proactive measures to limit

such weakness.

The CBO Executive President also pointed out that as part of the continuous application of Basel III, the CBO has issued a paper of ideas on supporting reserve capital at the end of 2015 while the steering principles will be issued during 2016 to facilitate the implementation of the International Financial Reporting Standard "IFRS 9" in the Sultanate.

Those in the meeting presented several ideas and proposals on the themes raised by the meeting.

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Global panel on eliminating racial bias hails Sultanate

GOOD TRACK RECORD: CERD appreciates Oman's role in empowering women



GENEVA: The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), during the session in Geneva, hailed the progress made by the Sultanate in all development fields through providing education and health services for all categories of the Omani society without discrimination, and the role of the Sultanate's government in empowering women and giving them positions in the various state sectors and the private sector.

The appreciation came during a discussion of the Sultanate's reports

of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in the presence of the national team, assigned by the Council of Ministers, to draft these reports, in accordance with the contractual obligations of the Sultanate before the Committee on the follow-up, as well as discussion of the reports about the Convention at the High Commissioner for Human Rights headquarters in Geneva.

The team in-charge, headed by Shaikh Dr Khalifa bin Mohammed al Hadhrami, Vice President of the

Supreme Court, and in the presence and participation of Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Sultanate's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and other international organisations in Geneva, and the membership of Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi Professor of Criminal Law in the College of Law in Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), and Maysaa bint Zahran al Ruqaihiya, Head of Public Prosecution, reviewed the measures taken by the Sultanate in the elimination of all forms of racial

discrimination.

Shaikh Dr Al Hadhrami delivered a speech during which he thanked the CERD for convening this meeting to discuss the reports of the Sultanate and its recognised efforts to promote and protect human rights. He touched on the work methodology and the consultation process for the preparation of these reports in the Sultanate.

The Rapporteur on the Sultanate presented his observations on the reports under discussion, highlighting the accomplished aspects and the other remarks in which 18 international experts took part.

The CERD will receive the report of the Working Group on racial discrimination during the coming period so as to be submitted in the middle of next month to allow the national team to respond to the queries raised in accordance with procedures followed, and the extent of the Sultanate's commitment to activate and implement the provisions of the Convention in line with the laws and national legislations in the Sultanate. — ONA

RAO COMMANDER, UK CHIEF OF GEN STAFF MEET



MUSCAT: Major General Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) received in his office at Muskar al Murtafa on Monday Gen Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the General Staff for the British Army, currently visiting the Sultanate.

The meeting discussed a number of topics and exchanged viewpoints on military matters of common concern.

The meeting was attended by the Military Attaché at the UK Embassy in Muscat.

— ONA

GUtech organises TEDx programme

MUSCAT: The German University of Technology (GUtech Oman) on Monday organised Technology, Entertainment and Design (TEDx) programme under the patronage of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Sarmi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education.

The activities of the event, which was held in Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa, included participation of 9 speakers from various fields, such as science, human and self-development and business.

The TEDx is the first event with university license in the Sultanate. It is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less).

TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics from science to business to global issues in more than 100 languages.

Oman at Tehran Book Fair

MUSCAT: The Sultanate represented, by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and the Ministry of Information will take part in the 29th Tehran International Book Fair, due to be organised in the Iranian capital, Tehran from May 4th to 14th.

The participation comes within the existing cultural goals of spreading the Omani culture and highlighting the Omani intellectual output, as well as exchanging the cultural participations between the two countries in the international book fairs and enhancing the existing cultural relations.

The Sultanate's pavilion will include a selected list of various literary, artistic, intellectual and scientific publications, besides several publications for some government institutions and agencies.

9,655 visited Al Baleed, Samahram sites

SALALAH: The number of visitors to Al Baleed and Samahram Archaeological sites during last April 2016 stood at 9,655 according to statistics released by the Department of Frankincense Land Sites at His Majesty the Sultan's Advisor's Office for Cultural Affairs.

Al Baleed Archaeological Park and Frankincense Land Museum received 6,263 visitors while Samahram Archaeological Site received 3,146 visitors, Wadi Dokka received 111 visitors and Wbar Archaeological Site received 135 visitors.

The Office of His Majesty the Sultan's Advisor for Cultural Affairs is developing several archaeological sites and providing them with utilities to serve the goals of cultural and archaeological tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar.

Al Baleed Archaeological Park Samahram, (Shasir Area) and Wadi Dokka are registered sites on the World Heritage List under the name "Land of Frankincense" sites.

GCC environment under-secretaries meet

JEDDAH: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, took part in the 37th meeting of the GCC Under-Secretary of the Environment Affairs, which was held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Sultanate's delegation to the meeting was led by Najeeb bin Ali al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs.

Lanka beckons Oman tourists

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT

May 2: Oman and the Sri Lanka have been sharing common maritime interests since time immemorial and the same was reiterated when a Sri Lankan was part of the crew of the historic *Jewel of Oman* voyage in 2010.

The momentous bilateral trade and seafaring traditions are replicated in this island nation and tourists are wooed to visit the nation's and enjoy nature and hospitality that surpassed the test of time, according to the Sri Lanka Tourism Board officials.

Both Oman and Sri Lanka share a common code of seafaring tradition and the bilateral relations trace times immemorial.

Speaking to *Observer* on the sidelines of a roadshow organised by the Board, the Sri Lankan Embassy in Muscat and the Mihin Lanka, Deepal Pallegangoda, Country Manager Oman, Mihin Lanka said that the number of Omani visitors has been on the rise and the country is expecting not less than 20,000 Omanis this year with the current rate of progression.

"We are expecting not less than 20,000 visitors to Sri Lanka in 2016 as there is a 20 per cent increase in the same each year", Deepal said. Along with the delegates from Colombo, JH Liyanage, Minister of the Sri Lanka Embassy; Hiruni Rajapakse, Second Secretary, Sri Lanka Embassy; and Ajantha Rathnayake, Assistant Director, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau were also present at the one-day road show and B2B meetings with the Omani counterparts.

Tawi Ateer hospital inaugurated



MIRBAT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of Health Services in the Governorate of Dhofar, celebrated on Monday the opening of Tawi Ateer Hospital in the Niyabat of Tawi Ateer in the Wilayat of

Mirbat. The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar.

— ONA

Entries can be made till August-end, prize distribution ceremony slated for December 18

Award set up to boost Arabic writers

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH

May 2: A biennial award has been constituted to promote Arabic literature and honour those who are instrumental in promoting the language through their writings, promotion and developing scientific research in the Arabic language. The award would be conferred on December 18, which is observed as UN Arabic Language Day.

The award has been constituted in the name of Abdul Qader Salem Ahmed al Ghassani, who was an educationist, avid reader and very fond of Arabic literature.

Last year a public library opened with the help of his vast collection of 12,000 books in Salalah and named as Dar Al Kitab Library.

An initiative of Dar al Kitab Library, the award would be presented every two years in three categories -- initiatives for teaching and learning Arabic language at different stages; putting focus on local issues and translation; and use of technology in promoting Arabic language. Each category would have first, second and third prizes.

The winners would be honoured



with certificates and prizes worth RO 1,000, RO 750 and RO 500 respectively in each category. Entries have already been invited from Omanis for the award and the last date for the submission of works, etc, is August 31.

The announcement of setting up of Abdul Qader Salem Ahmed al Ghassani Award was done under the auspices of Mohammed bin Abu Bakar bin Salim al Ghassani, Shura Member Salalah. Present on the occasion were intellectuals, writers, journalists and other dignitaries from Dhofar Governorate.

Commenting on the vision of

the prize, Mustafa Abdul Qadir al Ghassani, member of the Prize Committee, said: "after setting up a library, we thought like doing something more to promote Arabic literature and preserve the works by using the latest technology. Response is good and we are hoping to get a good number of entries by the end of August."

The board of Dar al Kitab library has set up a committee comprising Mustafa bin Abdul Qadir bin Salim al Ghassani, Dr Ahmed bin Abdul Rahman bin Salem Balkhair, Dr Salim bin Aqeel bin Alawi Muqabail and Mohammed bin Hassan bin

Salim al Ghassani. The judging panel would comprise a group of scientists and researchers consisting of five members.

Dar al Kitab stores a wide range of Abdul Qader's collections that include Islamic, Holy Quran, Arabic language, books on Oman, geography, history and annual subscriptions of several titles.

Among the books listed in the library, the oldest title dates back to 1932, while the latest is published in 2014. Abdul Qader's love for books could be understood from the fact he not only collected these books, but most of them were read by him.

OMAN AIR (S.A.O.C.)

Announcement

Pursuant to a corporatization program, Oman Air SAOC has transferred the business and assets of the cargo handling division to Oman Air Cargo LLC.

Therefore, all rights and obligations of Oman Air SAOC in any existing contracts relating to the cargo handling division have now been assigned to Oman Air Cargo LLC.

For any further enquiries please contact:

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SQU celebrates Annual Day with splendour

IMPRESSIVE RECORD: Vice-Chancellor outlines achievements of students, members | Research and innovation highlighted

MAY 2: Sultan Qaboos University on Monday celebrated its 16th Annual Day with several activities to commemorate the Royal visit of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to the SQU campus. The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Minister of Commerce and Industry. The ceremony included a presentation on research at the university, besides honouring outstanding faculty members, researchers and administrative and technical staff from various colleges, units and centres of the university. The chief guest later opened a research exhibition which displayed the some of the latest research projects carried out at the university, and a student exhibition of artworks and paintings.

Speaking on the occasion, SQU Vice-Chancellor Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani outlined the achievements of the university in academic and related fields. Student Advisory Council started functioning at SQU after completing the election process among students to select the council members. The Vice-Chancellor also listed the major achievements of the academics and researchers at the university. For his outstanding contributions in the field of diabetes and endocrinology, Prof Nicholas Woodhouse, Professor in the Department of Medicine of the College of Medicine & Health Sciences, won the Ibn Sina Distinguished Service Award instituted by the Gulf Chapter of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists. Dr Imad Farouk Saleh, from the College of Arts and Social Sciences got Outstanding Scientist Award in Social Work for 2015 from the Venus International Foundation in Chennai, India. He received the best paper award at the Bali International Conference on Business, Economics, Social Science & Humanities held in Indonesia. Dr Issa bin Hamdoon al Harthi from the College of Engineering was selected as member of the International Association for the Exchange of Students (IAESTE) and became the first Arab to be a member this prestigious organisation. Dr Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Kindi received the best paper Award at the Sixth International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management held in Malaysia. Dr Ali al Badi from the College of Economics & Political Science, along with two of his students Elham M al Mukhaini and Wafa S al Qayoudhi, won the "Excellence in Research Award"



Currently 43 active pacts are in place between SQU and other institutions within Oman and around the world. SQU is in the process of introducing electronic systems at the university to facilitate scientific research.

from Clute Institute, Colorado (a USA-based institute) for exceptional research efforts. Dr Muna Ayed al Awadi from the College of Education won the ninth version of Khalifa Award for Education in the field of general education research at the pan Arab level. The PhD thesis of Dr Adel bin Saeed al Busaidy, from the College of Economics and Political Science, was selected as the best thesis in management at the Arab World level, by the Board of Trustees of the Sharjah Award at its fourteenth session.

In her address, Dr Rahma al Mahrooqi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies & Research, outlined the major achievements of Sultan Qaboos University in research and postgraduate studies. "Between 2001 and 2015, His Majesty's Trust Fund supported 77 projects worth RO 7 million. In the year 2015, SQU offered 63 internal grants worth RO 490,000. The College of Medicine & Health Sciences received internal grants worth

RO 140,000 for nine projects. Other colleges, Engineering, Education and Agricultural Marine Sciences received internal grants collectively worth around RO 266,000".

The Deputy VC said that SQU completed consultancy research projects under eight themes, which fetched RO 17,00,000. "In 2015, the Research Council (TRC) provided 18 open research grants to the university. The major share went to the College of Science for six projects worth RO 12,00,000. Four other colleges got funding worth RO 13,80,000 for 12 projects. In 2015, collaborative research projects between SQU and UAE University received funding worth RO 66,000", she said.

Currently 43 active agreements are in place between SQU and other institutions within Oman and around the world. The Deputy VC further said that SQU is in the process of introducing electronic systems at the university to facilitate scientific research. "The Researchers Database (RDB) is in the design phase. The Research Management System (RMS) will start functioning in September 2016 whereas the first phase of the Research Facilities System (RFS) covering four colleges has been completed", she added. In 2015-2016, six inventions were filed as patent applications with the US Patent and Trademark Office. These inventions belong to communication engineering, nanotechnology and agricultural & marine sciences. The Academic Innovation Assistance Programme (AIAP) at SQU received 95 projects

worth RO 86,000 in the academic year 2015-2016.

Elaborating on research related activities and publications at the university, Dr Rahma al Mahrooqi said that SQU hosted 23 conferences in 2015. "Around 640 academics from SQU attended conferences regionally and internationally last year. Researchers from SQU published 1,420 papers in indexed journals in 2015. The university remained among the top three GCC universities, along with Qatar University and King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals, in terms of faculty publications. SQU is number one in terms of scientific publication in the Sultanate. SQU's Scival field-weighted citation impact is receiving relatively high values for papers published in such areas as immunology and microbiology, psychology, pharmacology, chemical engineering. Researchers from SQU published around 570 articles in Web-of-Science indexed journals and 850 articles in SCOPUS indexed journals".

Commenting on the growth of postgraduate education at SQU, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor said that 473 students enrolled for various postgraduate programmes in 2015. "Most master's students are enrolled in the colleges of Education, Arts & Social Sciences, Economics & Political Sciences, Science, and Engineering, and Law. PhD students are enrolled in programmes across six colleges: Science, Arts & Social Sciences, Engineering, Education, Medicine & Health Sciences and Agricultural & Marine Sciences".

Academic achievements

- ★ Two student teams won the first and second place, at student projects competition, which was held on the sidelines of the International Symposium for Mechatronic Engineering, at the American University of Sharjah.
- ★ SQU team won the first place in the student graduation projects at the Scientific Conference for Industrial Engineering, held in Malaysia.
- ★ SQU bagged the first place at Arab Moot Court Competition.
- ★ Students from SQU won the World Cup at the 38th FIAP Youth Print Biennial 2016 organised by the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP). Students from the College of Engineering received an award for the best presentation at the Fourth international Conference on Renewable Energy held in France.
- ★ A group of students from the College of Science and the College of Engineering won the first place at the Middle East regional level of AAPG Imperial Barrel Award 2016. Students from the university secured prestigious positions at the eighth Annual Wooden Bridge Competition held at the American University in Dubai.
- ★ Three student projects from the university received first place at the seventh Engineering Forum held at the University, which focused social, economic and environmental sustainability", he said.
- ★ SQU student Najwa bint Abdullah al Balushi received the first place in the Architecture and Urban Planning Student Design contest for architecture and planning students organised by the GCC Secretariat.
- ★ Dawood bin Sulaiman al Sulaimani won a silver medal at the exhibition of inventions in Geneva, Switzerland.
- ★ SQU students won the prize of second best integrated show and other prizes in the fourth University Theatre Festival for the GCC universities and higher education institutions, which was held at SQU.

Projects to receive HM's Trust fund

IN her speech during the SQU Day celebrations, Dr Rahma al Mahrooqi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies & Research, announced research projects approved for His Majesty's Trust Fund for the year 2016. The projects are as follows (names of the researchers in brackets):

- ◆ Novel Microfluidics Devices for the Determination of the Total Phenolic Content in Omani Honey and Fruits Samples (Dr Haider al Lawati, Department of Chemistry, College of Science).
- ◆ Identifying Genetic causes of Autosomal Recessive Intellectual Disability (Dr Al Mundher al Maawali, Department of Genetics, College of Medicine & Health Sciences).
- ◆ Management of Tomato Yellow Leaf Curl Disease Complex (Dr Muhammad Shafiq, Department of Crop Science, College of Agricultural & Marine Sciences).
- ◆ New Transition and Lanthanide Metals-based Hybrid Materials for Opto-Electronic Applications (Prof Mohammed Khan, Department of Chemistry, College of Science).
- ◆ Achieving Sustainable Tourism Development: the Strategic Role of Tourism SMEs in Oman (Dr Khaldoon Nusair, Department of Marketing, College of Economics and Political Science).

Speakers from Stanford University present concept at the meeting of The Research Council in Muscat

Chip tags to save endangered turtle, shark population

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT

May 2: A prototype technology is being developed to protect the population of turtles and sharks. Speakers from the Stanford University presented the concept at the meeting of The Research Council in Muscat that was titled, Navigation of Autonomy.

Turtles while protected in Oman, with strict measures by the government, continue to face the dangers of being poached. Once completed the new technique will be able to tell the authorities where the poaching actually took place.

The Research Council's lectures being held at College of Banking and Financial Studies looked at tagging to avoid poaching.

According to the speakers from Stanford University, over-fishing is a critical problem across many of the world's fisheries, and depletion of apex predators such as tunas, billfishes, and sharks is becoming particularly acute. Marine sanctuaries are being established where no-take zones would allow depleted species to recover. Stanford University is now building a FishChip.



"Tracking turtles and sharks have a special interest in the world over. We at the School of Engineering at Stanford University are developing a prototype to ensure they are not poached and are fairly taken so that they can sustain their population. Because with these tags one would immediately know if they are caught and removed from water. What we are interested in is to find out where the turtle or shark is located when they are caught. We want to make sure it is not caught in a sanctuary," explained



Professor Enge from the School of Engineering at Stanford University.

A small tag will go on a turtle or a shark that will be 3cmx3cm and 3cmx1cm.

It contains two satellite systems. One of them is satellite navigation system frequently known as Global Positioning System (GPS) so that when the turtle comes out of the water the sensor on the tag will signal out that the turtle or the shark has been removed from the water. "It gathers GPS data, packages it and sends it over to the second satellite system — Iridium Navigation. The system has Short Messaging Service which can alert the patrolling boat about the location of the incident. The patrol



boat can ensure that the fish has been caught fairly," said Professor Enge.

The real connection to Oman is the very active Agriculture and Fishery industry said the expert. "It overlooks five species of turtles, which come over to Omani beaches to lay eggs. The country cares for the turtles greatly. Some of these species are endangered. So we could see that this prototype could very well be utilised here," he said.

The population of sharks have been driven down. Most of them ending up

in shark fin soup. "It is a bit sad because in some parts of the world when the fishermen take the sharks they only take the fins and throw the body back into the water," explained the professor.

But when the shark is lifted out of the water to remove the fins is when the satellite navigation will alert the authorities in the patrol boat. "As long as the positioning of the capture is transmitted in 30 seconds then we will complete the process before the shark is actually thrown back into the water."

The prototype is expected to be completed by this fall. "We have invited the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to the Stanford University in the fall so hopefully they can see it. We have had deep discussions with our Marine Biologists on how it can be used for turtles, sharks and other fishes as well" concluded Professor Enge.

Professor Enge is also the Director of the Stanford Center for Position Navigation and Time. His laboratory pioneers satellite-based navigation systems for maritime and aviation use. Two of these systems are in wide use today. One is used for coastal navigation worldwide and the other is carried by over 110,000 aircraft in North America and similar systems have been deployed in Europe, Japan and India.

Adult literacy rate at 94.8pc

IMPORTANT FOCUS: Oman earmarked RO 2.5 billion for the education sector this year

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT

May 2: The education system in Oman is receiving impetus from the government's five-year plans and high budget allocation, according to Alpen Capital's newly released 'GCC Education Industry Report'

Reforms such as mandatory ten years of basic education, an increase in the number of school days, encouragement of private higher education institutions, growth of special needs education, and the setting-up of teacher training colleges, among others, have further assisted the development of the country's education landscape. The progress is reflected in an improvement in the adult literacy rate, which reached 94.8 per cent in 2015 from about 81 per cent a decade ago. Despite significant drop in oil prices, the government of Oman has earmarked a generous expenditure of RO 2.5 billion for the education sector in 2016.

This signifies the country's zeal to upskill its youngsters (those under 25 years of age), who form nearly 37 per cent of the total population. With a young population, there is an increasing focus on attaining high-quality education to understand international business culture and acquire skills to succeed in a globalised market.

As of 2014-2015, the Sultanate was home to



over 500 private schools, 27 private universities and colleges, 1,048 government schools, a government university, 17 public colleges, and 14 special institutes. The country's education system registered enrolments to the tune of more than 778,000 students, recording an overall Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 79.2 per cent in 2014.

Alpen Capital's GCC Education Industry report provides an outlook of the GCC education industry until 2020 covering pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational segments across all GCC nations. It also showcases the current state of the education industry across the GCC nations while presenting the recent trends, growth drivers, challenges. In addition, it profiles some of the prominent education providers in the region.

"The GCC education sector is witnessing a robust growth in student enrolments coupled with a steady expansion in related infrastructure. Population growth and rise in disposable income have supported the growth of the private education sector. Further, government measures to encourage private sector investments alongside an increasing preference for international curricula among residents are also attracting renowned foreign education institutes to the region," says Sameena Ahmad, Managing Director, Alpen Capital (ME) Limited.

According to Alpen Capital, the total number of students in the GCC education sector is projected to reach 15 million in 2020, registering a CAGR of 3.6 per cent from an estimated 12.6 million in 2015. An expanding base of school and college age population and increase in the GER across the education segments are likely to drive the growth.

Saudi Arabia will continue to dominate the education market in the GCC by 2020. From an estimated 9.2 million in 2015, the total number of students in Saudi Arabia is projected to grow at an annualised rate of 3.5 per cent to 11 million in 2020. In terms of annualised growth during 2015 to 2020, the number of students in Oman, Qatar, and the UAE are projected to grow faster than the other member nations.

Souq Al Mina: Good response from Omani businesses

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT

May 2: Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) has received an enthusiastic response from aspirants to set up retail outlets at the Souq Al Mina -- the modern business incubator in the upcoming Mina Sultan Qaboos Waterfront Development. Due to the high interest shown by interested businesses, Omran has extended the applications deadline last month and successfully received 251 applications covering a wide variety of activities such as agricultural products, cafes & restaurants, cosmetics & body care, decorative arts, design and fashion, sweets and desserts, floral arrangements, handicrafts, gift and Henna stores, jewellery, photography as well as tourism-related recreational services and activities.

"We are thrilled about the volume and the variety of applications received from Omani entrepreneurs. They have been thinking out-of-the-box just like we had hoped as Souq Al

Mina project aims to support established as well as innovative business ideas that provide an authentic experience to the visitors," said Fahad al Hinai, Senior Development Manager at Omran.

At present, a selection committee from Omran is reviewing the applications to shortlist the ideas based on factors such as innovative approach, services offered, creativity, growth and sustainability planning, strength of vision and market potential.

In the event the applicant's idea is selected for the second and final stage, he or she will be invited to make a presentation to a larger expert committee formed by Omran. Those selected at this stage will secure their retail spaces at the Souq Al Mina and can engage directly with the visitors of the Mina Sultan Qaboos Waterfront by the end of this year.

"We are ready with the Souq Al Mina concept. The innovative ideas selected for the project will boost the tourism sector by creating new experiences and values for consumers," Al Hinai said.

Major boom to retail sector

FROM PAGE 1

He said that out of these jobs, nearly 16,973 will be direct jobs; 25,459 indirect, while 10,000 will be historically working with the group. The group has 33,000 employees in its current operations worldwide, at the moment.

"We have always been pioneering in the Omani market and we are proud to renew our commitment to be the leading GCC investor in the Sultanate through our RO 705 million investments, which include development of Mall of Oman, City Centre Sohar, and My City Centre Sur, as well as additional investments from our retail, leisure and entertainment businesses. We look forward to completing our projects and seeing them deliver more great moments for everyone, every day," Alain Bejjani added.

Mall of Oman, which is expected to be operational in 2020, will be the largest integrated retail, leisure and entertainment destination in the Sultanate. The super-regional mall will feature 350 outlets in a 137,000 sqm retail space.

It will feature Oman's largest snow-park, with an 8,000 sqm play area, and

a Little Explorers edutainment centre. It will also include the Sultanate's first Abercrombie and Fitch and largest VOX Cinemas and Magic Planet, the leading family entertainment centre in the region, as well as a 13,200 sqm Carrefour hypermarket and 292 room hotel, completing its integrated offer.

It is estimated that Mall of Oman's development will generate 29,000 direct and indirect job opportunities.

City Centre Sohar, set to open in 2018, will be the largest shopping and lifestyle destination in its governorate.

The regional mall will be home to 100 new retail outlets across 40,000 sqm. These will include businesses owned and managed by Majid al Futtaim, such as a 7,400 sqm Carrefour hypermarket, and entertainment options including VOX Cinemas and Magic Planet.

The mall will generate an estimated 8,000 employment opportunities in Oman.

My City Centre Sur, which will open in 2017, will be Majid al Futtaim's first community mall in Oman.

The My City Centre retail concept, which was launched by Majid al Futtaim two years ago, features a tailored mix of

lifestyle-orientated retail and service outlets aimed at serving the everyday needs of local communities.

My City Centre Sur will include 16,500 sqm of retail space, comprising 50 outlets, a 6,850 sqm Carrefour hypermarket, Oman's first City Centre Clinic and a Magic Planet.

In addition, Majid al Futtaim is also expanding its existing City Centre Qurum shopping mall in Muscat.

The revamp will see the introduction of Centrepoint, the multi-brand retail concept, as well as additional car parking spaces.

Furthermore, the company is developing the next phase of Al Mouj Muscat, an oceanfront mixed-use destination, and expanding its VOX Cinemas and Carrefour hypermarkets to new locations across the Sultanate.

The continued investment in Oman's retail and leisure infrastructure by Majid al Futtaim supports the country's National Strategy for Tourism 2040, which targets a 6 per cent rise in the contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP and a near doubling of visitor numbers to five million annually, according to the promoters.

Safeguarding your online reputation is critical

FROM PAGE 1

"The consequences can be worse for military personnel because of the high standards to which they are held," a social activist commented.

"Any negative online activity may cause them to lose their positions. Luckily, this individual who was being blackmailed was able to resolve the issue before the matter reached his superior."

Experts advise users to be selective about what they put online.

People should post only information that they comfortable sharing with others. "Don't post anything on your site that would be morally or ethically questionable," experts emphasise.

"Avoid talk of violence, crime, intent to harm others, links to inappropriate sites, references to drugs and alcohol consumption, pornography, suggestive images or videos, and inappropriate language or derogatory or racist comments," they stress.



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Notice Auction No. 01/2016

The Ministry of Health would like to invite sealed bids for the **Lease of Cafeteria of Head Quarter Building** for the Offers should be submitted in sealed envelopes.

Specialized Companies, establishments (**Small and Medium Enterprises**) collect auction documents and specifications from the Directorate of Purchase & Tenders at Ministry's Headquarters between 8.30am and 12.30pm during official working hours on or before 12/05/2016.

A Bank Guarantee or a Certified Cheque valid for 90 days issued by a local bank for (1%) of the Auction Value addressed to Ministry of Health shall be enclosed with the bid as an auction bond that may be reimbursed to unsuccessful bidder. A bid unaccompanied by the auction bond will be rejected.

Offers enclosed in the sealed envelope duly signed and stamped in the original form shall be addressed to H.E. The Chairman of the Non-Medical Tender Committee providing the title of the auction viz:

"Auction No. 01/2016 - for the Lease of Cafeteria of Headquarter Building" is clearly mentioned on it. Envelopes shall not bear any sign that refers to bidder's name or identity.

Offers shall be deposited in the Non-Medical tenders box kept at the Office of H.E. the Under Secretary for Admn. & Financial Affairs at the Ministry's Headquarters latest by 12.00 noon on Tuesday, the 31/05/ 2016. Offers submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The Ministry is not bound to assign any reason for rejected bids.



شركة الكهرباء القابضة ش.م.ع.م
Electricity Holding Group SAOC

إحدى شركات مجموعة نماء
Member of Nama Group

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Electricity Holding Company SAOC (EHC) invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:-

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
EHC15/2016	CLEANING SERVICES FOR NAMA HOLDING	09-MAY-2016	29-MAY-2016	25/- (Non-Refundable)

- Bids shall be submitted in closed envelopes and sealed with red wax addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name and number. Neither the name of the person who submitted the bid nor anything that might refer to his identity should be written on the envelope.
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at the Electricity Holding Company reception area before 02.00 pm time of the Sultanate on **Sunday, 29 May 2016**.
- EHC is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company web site (www.ehcoman.com).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Electricity Holding Company, Bank Muscat: 0423-010776440-018 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned).
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00pm
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.

Electricity Holding Company SAOC

In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307), Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number : +968 24559217 / 295/200-24559295 Fax: +968 24559289
E-Mail: ehcprocurement@ehcoman.com

PUBLIC ESTABLISHMENT FOR INDUSTRIAL ESTATES (PEIE)

INVITATION TO TENDERS



المؤسسة العامة للمناطق الصناعية
Public Establishment For Industrial Estates

Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (PEIE) invites local and international companies for the following tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Board Grade	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Tender Fee (RO)
3/2016	Production of Three Promotional Videos for PEIE	Companies specialized in video production	9/5/2016 1:00 Noon	15/5/2016 12:00 Noon	RO. 25/-

Tender Documents can be obtained from PEIE's Marketing & Promotions Department at Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM1- first floor) at Rusayl (Tel. 24155426/24155411/24155182), during official working hours 07:30 AM to 02:00 PM, Sunday to Thursday.

Tenders must be submitted in closed envelopes sealed with red wax. The Tender No. and name of the project shall be written on the top of the envelope containing the Tender. Nothing should be written on the exterior of the envelope to display the identity of the Tenderer. The Tender must be submitted in the Tender Box kept at KOM 1 Offices.

Tenders must be accompanied by Tender Bond One Percent (1%) of total tender value in the form of bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issue by a local Bank, valid for 90 days from the last date of tender submission

Tenders should be addressed to, The Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, PEIE, Post Box No. 200, Postal Code 124, Rusayl, Sultanate of Oman.

PEIE is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Tender.



TOWARDS CLEAN CAMPAIGN



Philippine Muslim woman and Senatorial candidate Princess Jacel Kiram signs the covenant for a clean election, during a ceremony inside the Manila cathedral, while Roman Catholic cardinal Luis Tagle (L) looks on. Philippine Catholic church leaders urged 80 million Catholics to reject presidential candidates who take "morally reprehensible" positions and whose speech and demeanour are opposed to the teachings of the church. — AFP

Afghan boy photographed in makeshift Messi jersey flees to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: An Afghan boy who became an Internet sensation in January when he was photographed wearing a plastic bag with football player Lionel Messi's name scrawled on it has become a refugee in Pakistan, his family said on Monday.

The family of five-year-old Murtaza Ahmadi worried their child might be kidnapped by a criminal gang.

In February, Messi sent the boy two signed jerseys and a ball. The media attention prompted threats against Ahmadi's family, who became concerned about the safety of their child.

"We moved to Pakistan a month ago as some mafia made threatening calls and we were scared that the boy might be kidnapped," Wahid Ahmadi, a cousin of Murtaza Ahmadi, said. The family, including the boy's parents, two brothers and two sisters, are now living with relatives in Pakistan's south-western city of Quetta. Messi is a star Argentinian striker who also plays for Spanish club FC Barcelona. — dpa

Bali police shoot dead Frenchman resisting arrest

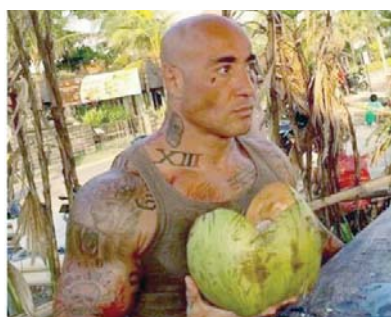
DENPASAR: Police on the Indonesian holiday island of Bali shot dead a French national on Monday after he killed a policeman while resisting arrest, an official said.

Amokrane Sabet (pictured), reported to be a mixed martial arts fighter, was known as a troublemaker in the area in southern Bali where he lived.

"There had been many complaints about him such as eating at restaurants without paying, carrying a knife, and harassing people, but every time we called him in for questioning, he never showed up," Bali police spokesman Hery Wiyanto said. Around 40 police and immigration officials came to arrest the 49-year-old after discovering that his tourist visa had run out in September.

But as they arrived at his residence in Canggu, a village popular with foreign tourists, Sabet emerged brandishing a knife.

"One of our officers tried to approach him and calm him down,



but Sabet stabbed him," said Wiyanto, adding that the officer died from his wounds.

Police then gave Sabet three warnings but as these were ignored, they shot him several times, Wiyanto said. Images circulating online showed Sabet waving a knife and later lying on the ground. The French embassy in Jakarta said it had been informed of the death and was in contact with police.

Such flare-ups of violence are rare in Bali that attracts millions of foreign tourists to its palm-fringed beaches every year. — AFP

The move by Japan is to counter China's growing influence

Japan to support Mekong countries with \$7 billion over three years

BANGKOK: Japan wants to work with countries in the lower Mekong river basin and will help them improve infrastructure and bolster development with 750 billion yen (\$7 billion) in aid over three years, its foreign minister said on Monday.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida made the pledge to help the Southeast Asian economies in Thailand's capital, Bangkok, where on Sunday he began a week-long visit to the region in which Japan competes with China for influence. "Japan would like to work with the countries of the Mekong region to create a framework to support efforts by the Mekong countries in a detailed manner, on a region-by-region basis or on a theme-by-theme basis," Kishida said in a speech.

Japan announced the three-year plan last year. China has offered billions of dollars in infrastructure loans and government aid programmes to Southeast Asian countries.

Kishida did not mention China in his speech. He is also due to visit Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.

Japan would like to work with the countries of the Mekong region to create a framework to support efforts by the Mekong countries in a detailed manner, on a region-by-region basis or on a theme-by-theme basis,' says Kishida in a speech

On Monday, he met Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who has led a military government since the army took power in a May 2014 coup. Thailand has drawn closer to China since the coup which many western countries criticised.

Kishida and Prayuth discussed Thailand's political process, regional terrorism threats and economic challenges, a Japanese official said.

Kishida visited Beijing on the weekend where both China and Japan expressed willingness to improve relations strained over conflicting territorial claims in the East China Sea.

In his speech in Bangkok, Kishida addressed maritime security and renewed a call for countries to respect the rule of law.

He also backed a Southeast Asian bid to draft a code of conduct for the South China Sea, where China's claim to virtually the entire sea clashes with claims to parts of it by Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines.

"We must establish a regional order whereby the principle of the rule of law is truly upheld and practiced," he said. "I would like to renew my call for the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea."

Japanese Prime Minister Shinto Abe is pursuing a more robust foreign policy but Masato Otaka, deputy press secretary at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told reporters Kishida's visit was not aimed at counteracting China's influence. — Reuters

Militants threatened to slit our throats, says Indonesian hostage

RELIEF AT LAST: The sailors spent horrifying days and are now reunited with their families

JAKARTA: An Indonesian sailor said on Monday how Philippine militants threatened to slit his throat during a terrifying kidnap ordeal, a day after he and nine other crew members were released. The sailors were freed on Sunday in the strife-torn southern Philippines after more than a month in the hands of Abu Sayyaf militants, and flew back to Jakarta.

The Indonesians were among about 20 foreigners abducted in a recent Abu Sayyaf kidnapping spree, and their release came just days after the militants beheaded a Canadian hostage.

The sailors, who were taken hostage in late March from a tugboat transporting a coal barge, were reunited with their families on Monday after doctors confirmed they were in good health.

Crew member Julian Philip described how they were taken hostage by eight militants disguised in Philippine police uniforms, who boarded the tug from speedboats and tied up the sailors.

The barge was then abandoned, and the Indonesians were taken to an island and divided into two groups. They were



Indonesia President Joko Widodo stands beside Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, Indonesian Military Chief General Gatot Nurmantyo (R), and State Secretary Minister Pratikno (L) as he talks to reporters after Indonesian hostages were released by militants in the southern Philippines, in Bogor Palace. — Reuters

moved every few days to avoid the military, which has launched an assault against Abu Sayyaf.

"We were all stressed out because they frequently threatened to slit our throats," he told reporters after the 10 were reunited with their families at the

foreign ministry.

However, Philip added the militants did not harm them and he thought that in reality "they did not want any of us to die as they would not get any money".

He said he did not know whether a ransom was paid for their release.

"We were just put in a car and sent on our way and told to look for the governor's house," he said. The sailors turned up at the house of a local governor on Jolo, a mountainous and jungle-clad island in the far south of the Philippines that is an Abu Sayyaf stronghold.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said on Monday the release had been a "long process as the situation on the ground was very volatile, with a high degree of complexity".

But she dodged questions about whether a ransom had been paid. The Abu Sayyaf does not normally free hostages unless ransom demands are met. The militants had demanded \$21 million for the release of Canadian John Ridsdel, whose severed head was found on a street in Jolo.

There were emotional scenes at the ministry as the sailors were reunited with their families, with Youla Lasut, one of the men's wives, giving tearful thanks. "On behalf of my family I would like to thank the foreign minister and the company for their help in releasing my husbands and his friends," she said.

— AFP

CANCER CURE

China probes search engine Baidu over student's death

BEIJING: China's Internet regulator said on Monday it will send an investigation team to Chinese search leader Baidu Inc over the death of a university student, who had used the search engine to look for treatment for his cancer. Wei Zexi, 21, died last month of a rare form of cancer.

He had turned to Baidu to look online for the best place for treatment, finding a department under the Second Hospital of Beijing Armed Police Corps which offered an experimental form of treatment that ultimately failed, according to state media.

Before dying, Wei had posted criticism online accusing Baidu of promoting false medical information, as well as the hospital for misleading advertising in claiming a high success rate for the experimental treatment, state radio said.

"Wei's family says they trusted the treatment because it was promoted by one of the military hospitals which are considered credible, and the attending doctor had appeared on many mainstream media platforms," state radio said.

The regulator said in a short statement Wei's case had attracted widespread attention on the Internet.

It, along with the health ministry and State Administration for Industry and Commerce, would investigate Baidu over the case and "handle it in accordance with the law" and publicise its findings. Baidu said in a statement it deeply regretted Wei's death and sent its condolences to his family.

"Baidu strives to provide a safe and trustworthy search experience for our users, and have launched an immediate investigation of the matter," it said. The company added it welcomed the investigation and would fully cooperate. Reuters was not able to reach the hospital for comment.

Baidu has been in trouble before for medical related issues.

This year, it was criticised for selling management rights for an online forum related to haemophilia to an unlicensed private hospital, which then used the platform for self-promotion and deleted comments that challenged its credentials, the official Xinhua news agency said. — Reuters

S Korea warns of risk North may abduct citizens abroad

SEOUL: South Korea said on Monday it was on guard for the possibility North Korea may try to snatch its citizens abroad or conduct "terrorist acts" after the North accused it of abducting North Korean workers from a restaurant in China.

"All measures of precaution" were in place for the safety of South Koreans abroad including an order to beef up security at diplomatic missions, said the South's Unification Ministry, which handles issues related to the North.

"We are on alert for the possibility that the North may try to abduct our citizens or conduct terrorist acts abroad," ministry spokesman Jeong Joon-hee told a briefing.

The two Koreas have been fierce rivals since the 1950-53 Korean War and tension on the peninsula has been

high since January when North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test. It followed that with a string of missile tests in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions.

South Korea said on April 13 North Korean workers at a restaurant run by the North in China had defected. North Korea accused the South of a "heinous abduction".

North Korea proposed sending family members of the 13 to South Korea for face-to-face meetings but the South rejected the suggestion.

About 29,000 people have left North Korea and arrived in the South since the Korean war, including 1,276 last year, with numbers declining since a 2009 peak. In the first quarter of this year, 342 North Koreans arrived in the South. — Reuters

KIDS AS MONKS



A South Korean child is lifted by a Buddhist monk after having his head shaved during a ceremony entitled 'Children Becoming Buddhist Monks', at the Jogye temple in Seoul. Following the ceremony the children stay at the temple where they are taught about Buddhism until Buddha's birthday on May 14. — AFP

CONDOLENCES

The Staff of

MOOSA ABDUL RAHMAN HASSAN & CO.

express their heartfelt condolences to

**ABDUL AZIZ BIN ALI BIN MOOSA BIN ABDUL
RAHMAN AL RAISI**

**ABD AL RAHMAN BIN ALI BIN MOOSA BIN
ABDUL RAHMAN AL RAISI**

**ADNAN BIN ALI BIN MOOSA BIN ABDUL RAHMAN
AL RAISI**

AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

on the sad demise of

**SHEIKH ALI BIN MOOSA BIN ABDUL RAHMAN BIN
HASSAN AL RAISI**

CHAIRMAN - MOOSA ABDUL RAHMAN HASSAN & CO. LLC

May God Almighty bless the departed soul with eternal
peace and grant enough strength to
all family members to bear this irreparable loss.



MOOSA ABDUL RAHMAN HASSAN & Co. LLC

A DREAM SNATCHED AWAY TOO YOUNG!



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

Late twenties is too young for someone to have their journey halted abruptly. It was the same for the young lady whose profession has been nursing and had been practicing it in Salalah.

She might have healed many with her kind care and words when in distress who might have met her while heading to the hospital for care.

But there wasn't anyone to save her when she might have become numb with pain as she breathed her last. What truly happened — wonder even if she knew.

I only know what people have been telling me, reading in the traditional and social media. Seeing the young healthcare worker's face, recently married and expecting, have made many people get attached to her even though they never met her before.

Is it that feeling of the fact that she could have been part of anyone's or everyone's family that has brought this attachment?

Everyone begins their married life with dreams and hopes. There is anxiety, a bit of fear just in case those dreams don't come true and a delight and excitement of having a new beginning. It has been quite a few days since all those dreams and hopes ended.

Someone decided to on April 20. And that decision taken by someone else who has been hurting the family members' every waking moment. They must be waiting to be woken up to be told that it is all just a nightmare and that everything is fine.

Everyone knows that it will never happen because the investigations are still on to solve the mystery.

Someone out there knows the truth.

But for the parents the cruelty their daughter had to go through would be a wound that can never be healed.

The young lady was hoping to enjoy the journey of being a mother.

Who best to express all that, other than her colleagues who considered her as a sister and shared everything from hopes and wishes to realities of life?

Many things left unsaid, facts unknown to others.

Her family awaited her mortal remains longing to say goodbye to her even if in disbelief.

The partner who took the marriage oath with her, "To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part," is now left all alone minus the wife and minus their dream — the sign of life around which the couple's day to day life had been revolving around.

People use many methods to console the ones who are grieving.

One can blame it on fate, hope that time will heal, but the fact is life can never go back to what it was like prior to April 20.

So she has boarded a flight for the last time.

There is no merry or gifts to give away but cherished memories for her loved ones, family members and friends.

Some of the patients she treated might never know how she said goodbye to the world. After all she was just getting ready for another night of duty as a nurse — a profession she chose to excel in.

Royal Oman Police will do their best to close the chapter conclusively.

But for now it is time to say goodbye to a dedicated professional her organisation, seniors and team vouch for.

Nurses are often referred to as sisters and that is how they were when they reached the hospital to send off their friend to the shores of the land she was born. Never did they think this is how they would say goodbye to their colleague who had become more of a sister in three years' time they worked together.

So the plane crossed the Arabian Sea to take the young lady back to the arms of her parents to say final prayers. The family had been waiting patiently.

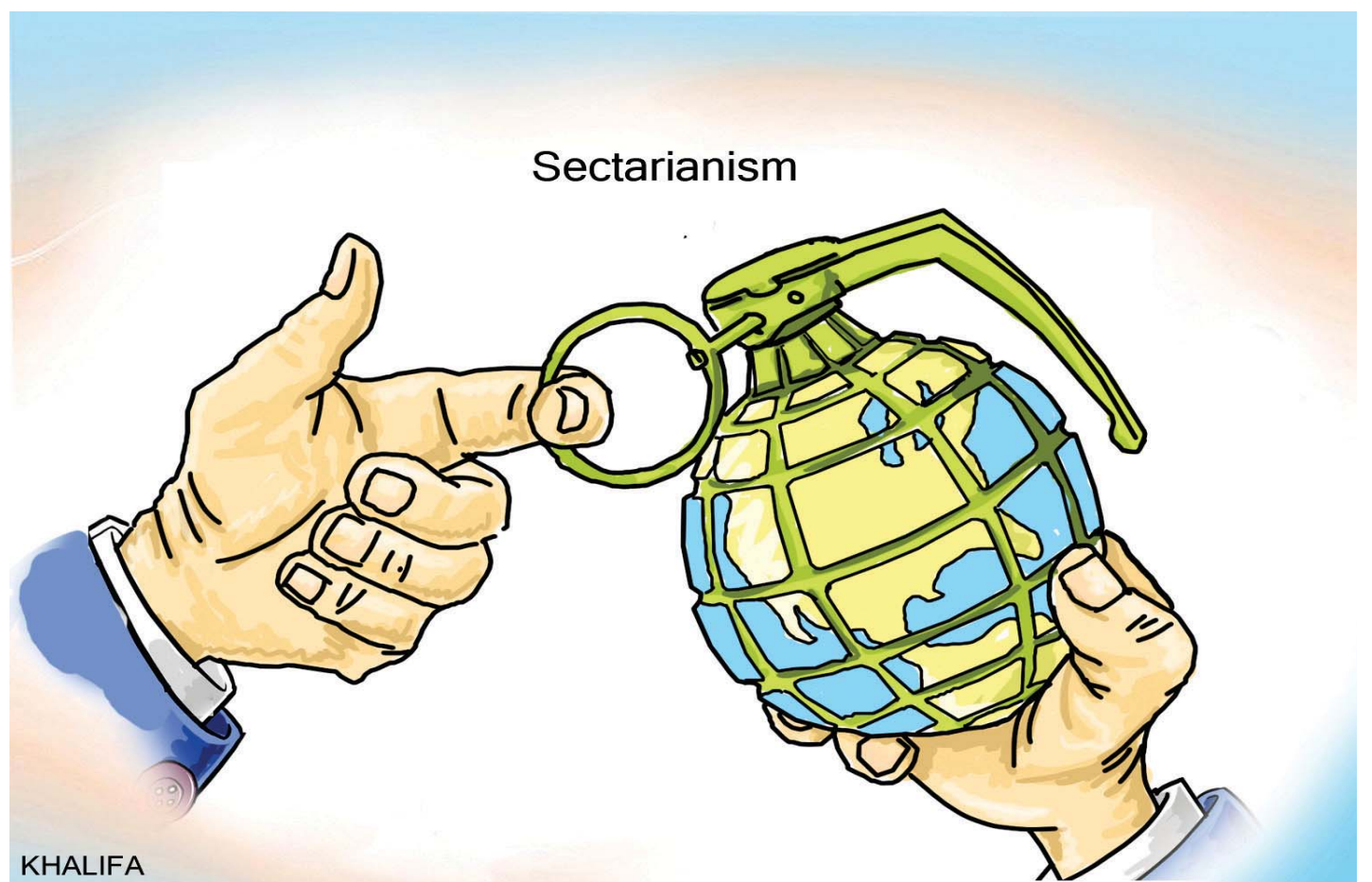
We come from earth to return to earth.

We come alone and leave alone.

And the time we walk on this earth is prescribed, they say.

The departure might have been harsh, but the journey has been one of giving, seeking the affection not just family but her colleagues have for the departed.

Tears continue to flow, but amongst the sobs are the words, Rest in Peace.



KHALIFA

Iraq political reforms in limbo

SALAM FARAJ

Iraq's political reform process was in limbo on Monday after protesters demanding a change of government reacted to weeks of stalling by storming parliament.

Security concerns were also high due to the presence in Baghdad of thousands of pilgrims, who were targeted for the second time in three days with a bombing that killed at least 14 people.

Demonstrators pulled out of the Green Zone, where parliament is located, on Sunday evening, a day after breaching the walls of the fortified government district.

But the protesters, most of whom are followers of Moqtada al Sadr, also warned they would be back on the streets of Baghdad on Friday if their demands were not met.

Sadr supports Prime Minister Haider al Abadi's efforts to form a new cabinet of technocrats to replace the current government of party-affiliated ministers, accused of graft and sectarianism.

There was no clear plan of action emerging on Monday from any of the main players and several sources said Sadr himself flew to neighbouring Iran.

"The leader of the Sadrist movement left at 11:00 am from Najaf airport to the Imam Khomeini airport" southwest of Tehran, a Najaf airport official said.

"Sadr took two other clerics with him," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A source in Baghdad had the same information but there was no confirmation from either his office or Tehran. Iraq's lawmakers looked unlikely to hold another session this week however, with the main parliament building requiring a massive cleanup following Saturday's events.

Thousands of mostly Sadrist protesters pulled down blast

walls around the Green Zone and stormed the chamber after MPs again failed to agree on reforms.

Some MPs were roughed up on Saturday and their vehicles vandalised, and lawmakers appeared wary of exposing themselves to another attack.

"It was decided to hold a parliamentary session next week in another place because the (parliament) hall was damaged," MP Abbas al Bayati said. There was no official statement from the speaker on the issue however.

Abadi called for those who committed violent acts on Saturday to be arrested, but his grip on Iraq's top job looked

more tenuous than ever. A senior official in the Dawa party, of which Abadi is a member, said there was discussion within the party of the premier's resignation.

"We are in a debate inside the party for the first time (on) the demand for Abadi to resign," the official said.

MP, Ahmed al Masari, said his bloc was demanding the restructuring of the political process through... meetings in the coming days".

Another lawmaker said Kurdish MPs in the federal parliament were weighing their participation altogether.

Since coming to power in September 2014, Abadi has faced tough opposition from his predecessor and fellow party member Nuri al Maliki.

Abadi nonetheless enjoys the support of Western powers, who have warned that continued political deadlock risks hampering Iraq's fight against the IS group, which seized control of large parts of the country in mid-2014.

Backed by a US-led coalition, Iraqi security forces have made significant gains in retaking territory from IS in recent months, but still face huge challenges remain.

Demonstrators pulled out of the Green Zone, where parliament is located, on Sunday evening, a day after breaching the walls of the fortified district. But the protesters warned they would be back on the streets of Baghdad on Friday.

Eyeing an Indiana victory, Donald Trump says, 'It's over'

STEVE HOLLAND AND VALERIE VOLCOVICI

Front-runner Donald Trump said on Sunday that he will have essentially sealed the Republican US presidential nomination if he wins Tuesday's contest in Indiana, where he holds a big lead over chief rival Ted Cruz.

A new NBC/*Wall Street Journal*/Marist opinion poll showed Trump with a wide lead in Indiana, 49 per cent to 34 per cent for Cruz and 13 per cent for a third candidate, Ohio Governor John Kasich.

Trump, a 69-year-old billionaire real estate developer, sounded confident in an interview on *Fox News Sunday* when asked whether Indiana would basically end the long-running Republican race in his favour. "Yes, it's over," Trump said. "It's already over."

The poll showed the depth of the challenge facing Cruz, a conservative US senator from Texas who is trying to prevent Trump from winning the 1,237 delegates needed to seal the nomination.

Cruz's hopes rest on emerging as a consensus alternative to Trump at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland on July 18-21.

Former US Secretary of State Hillary

Clinton, 68, leads US Senator Bernie Sanders, 74, of Vermont in the race for the Democratic nomination.

On NBC's "Meet the Press," Cruz, 45, was asked several times whether he would support Trump if the New York businessman was the Republican nominee.

Cruz evaded the question each time and turned the questions into an attack on broadcast media.

Trump, who has amassed 996 delegates, has momentum behind him and looks increasingly likely to win the nomination outright, without a contested convention, perhaps when California votes on June 7. Indiana has 57 Republican delegates.

"I recognise that many in the media would love to see me surrender to Donald Trump because that means that Hillary wins. The media has given \$2 billion in free advertising to Donald Trump," Cruz said.

Cruz said he has momentum in Indiana based on his choice of former candidate Carly Fiorina for his vice-president and Friday's endorsement by Indiana Governor Mike Pence.

Americans will elect a successor to President Barack Obama on November 8.

Trump, who has amassed 996 delegates, according to an Associated Press count, has momentum behind him and looks increasingly likely to win the nomination outright, without a contested convention, perhaps when California votes on June 7. Indiana has 57 Republican delegates.

Three are awarded from each of the state's nine US congressional districts with the candidate who receives the most votes taking them all. The 30 others are awarded to the candidate who wins the most votes statewide.

At a rally in Terre Haute, Indiana, Trump urged Republicans to join his "movement" and turn out for him in big numbers.



Valente Martinez marches with Mexican and US flags during an immigrant rights May Day rally in Los Angeles, California.

— Reuters

Good service is good sense, great service unforgettable

In a world where we are either being served or giving service, it is wise to give the best of what you can in delivering whatever brand of service it is you are offering.

A good level of service leaves everyone involved with a sense of satisfaction, while bad service can, and often does, leave the involved parties dissatisfied and angry resulting in complications and bad blood.

The onus is on the service provider to give at least satisfactory service, anything over and beyond this will be much appreciated by the client and anything below will soon have the service provider wondering why he is losing customers and will end up with him having to close down.

Yes! the customer may well be confused, angry, unreasonable... but as the saying has it 'The customer is king' and in this sense all efforts should be taken to sooth and gently inform the customer to a point of satisfaction.

I'm sure we've all had service experiences that have left us downhearted and dejected and promising never to use that service provider again.

These types of situations are compounded several times over in certain situations; such as

while travelling. Again, I'm sure we all have our own horror stories of downright awful services provided while travelling.

Well, here's one of mine: Some years ago I had booked a flight on a respected regional airline for travel to Europe.

I reached my destination without a hitch and managed to arrive at my holiday place of domicile without any problems and all was well.

It was the journey back home, however, that was fast proving to be a disaster.

I had earlier reconfirmed my flight and reached the airport well on time. It was at the check-in counter where my problems began.

Apparently, I was not booked for that day's flight, but rather on the following day and was referred to see the airline staff at the customer service counter, which I proceeded to do.

It was here where the trouble really began.

I explained to the young staff members that I had reconfirmed my booking as required.

They asked me the name of the person I had spoken to for the reconfirmation and I replied that I could not remember.

Following which, they recommended I stay

overnight at a nearby hotel — at my own expense — and turn up for the flight I was booked on the following day.

I told them that they should foot the bill as I had reconfirmed for today's flight and could not afford to pay for a night at the hotel anyway.

By this time I was getting more and more angry and that was when one of the staff glibly said, how can you claim not to have enough money, what if you had an accident on the way what would you do with not enough money?

I found it to be a preposterous assumption and replied, when I left for the airport it was not in my mind that we might have an accident; I was confident enough to know that I would arrive safely. This was the point where I demanded to see the manager.

They said I couldn't see him for several hours, which was no good to me as by that time the flight would have left.

After sometime of furious complaining, the manager suddenly arrived out of the blue.

By this time I was really riled up, but he immediately put me at ease and reassured me that he would do his best to take care of the matter.

I told him that his comforting words of reassurance had put at ease, so much so that I didn't mind taking transport back to my holiday domicile and returning the next day.

Sure enough, after only just a little while he came back with the excellent news that I would be flying back first class.

I was elated and felt justified.

It was a great and peaceful journey back home and I reflected on what had started out as a complete and utter mess had ended up better than I could have ever expected.

As the manager had told me earlier, there was someone at the destination airport waiting for me to register my complaint, which I did in no uncertain terms.

I relay this story as it has the whole gamut of levels of service, ranging from indifferent, to horrendous, to exemplarily outstanding.

The manager even made sure that the complaint would be registered, which would then allow for no similar repeated instances and, in turn, a better level of service.

Indeed, 'good service is its own reward and bad service its own downfall'.



ALI AHMED AL RIYAMI
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French President Francois Hollande with Prime minister Manuel Valls (C) after the weekly cabinet meeting in Paris.

— AFP

Deeply unpopular Hollande eyes re-election bid

INGRID MELANDER

Jene t'aime plus, mon amour — I don't love you any more, my love — was the wistful song of a love gone cold which greeted followers of President Francois Hollande as they arrived at a rally for him last week.

An odd choice to fire up a political gathering, the track nonetheless captured the deeply unloved quality of Hollande's presidency just as he and his closet backers start to explore whether he has any real chance of a new term in 2017.

Just before he was elected in 2012, Hollande tweeted of the incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy, by then facing broad disenchantment: "Can you imagine five more years with the same?"

Now the same question applies to him.

Since coming to power, Hollande has watched his ratings crumble to historic lows over a failure to restore the economy, doubts over his leadership and policy U-turns on security and other policy.

A poll published April 20 by the Viavoice agency found only one per cent of voters think Hollande would make a "very good" president if given a second term next year; barely 10 per cent judged that he could be "quite good".

A steep fall in membership of his Socialist party shows the disillusionment even among allies: the number of members has halved from 173,000 in the year he was elected to just 86,000.

While last week's gathering in a Paris university building was largely attended by grey-haired supporters, France's youth have little time for Hollande.

Thousands have joined sometimes violent protests against a labour reform he says will encourage hiring but which they fear will make it easier to be sacked.

Polls show many left-wingers who backed him in 2012 won't this time: Without wooing them back he has no chance.

To that end, he has promised more

An odd choice to fire up a political gathering, the track nonetheless captured the deeply unloved quality of Hollande's presidency just as he and his closet backers start to explore whether he has any real chance of a new term in 2017.

subsidies to students and a pay rise for teachers.

Yet many on the left see the labour reform as a betrayal, the last straw after his 2014 pro-business switch and an attempted security crackdown that was ultimately shelved.

"We've lost our credibility," said Benjamin Lucas, the head of the Socialist Party's MJS youth wing said.

As things stand, 12 months before the normally two-round presidential vote, several opinion polls over the past few weeks have shown he would not even secure enough support in the first round to make it to the run-off, whoever his opponents are.

But if his chances of success are slim, Hollande's backers have not given up hope just yet because of small but plausible signs that the euro zone's second largest economy is finally starting to pick up.

"Things are going better," Hollande said last month, a phrase widely picked up and analysed by local French media.

Sure enough data last week showed the economy grew 0.5 per cent in the first quarter, more than expected thanks to the strongest increase in consumer spending since 2004 and a pick-up in business investment.

And France saw in March the steepest drop in the number of jobless since economic boom days of 2000.

The problem is that the French are not convinced.

Household confidence stagnated in April at an eight-month low and expectations for standard of living over the next 12 months declined for the fourth month in a row.

And despite the drop last month, the number of people out of job is still over 600,000 higher than when Hollande — who has promised not to stand again unless he can reverse the jobless trend — was elected.

"Hollande can go on TV and say things are going better but people simply don't believe him," said Emmanuel Riviere of TNS Sofres pollsters.

The government's response to the scepticism: "The President will repeat, repeat and repeat that message until it gets through," a close aide to Hollande said.

To do so, Hollande is making more visits throughout France and especially to firms that are signing contracts and hiring, such as state-owned naval contractor DCNS, which last week beat Japan and Germany to win a \$40 billion submarines deal.

A LONG GOODBYE!

SEBASTIAN SMITH

Dilma Rousseff greets the Olympic flame in Brazil on Tuesday, but the pomp and ceremony will seem empty to a president likely to be suspended from office just a week later.

The arrival of the flame in Brasilia from an ancient Greek temple via Switzerland will trigger a three-month countdown to the Rio de Janeiro Olympics and Brazil's big chance to shine on the global stage.

But the supposedly joyful occasion coincides with the Latin American giant's plunge into a political furnace, with Rousseff facing impeachment — and claiming to be the victim of a coup d'etat.

That means the choreographed events for the torch in the capital could be one of the 68-year-old leftist leader's last major public appearances. On May 11 or 12 the Senate is expected to vote to open an impeachment trial on charges that Rousseff illegally manipulated government accounts. She would be automatically suspended and replaced by Vice-President Michel Temer, the head of Brazil's main centre-right party and once a coalition ally of Rousseff before — in her words — turning "traitor".

A definitive Senate vote on Rousseff's fate could take months more, but unless she was cleared, she would never come back and her nemesis would stay in power until the next scheduled elections in 2018.

On Sunday, Rousseff railed against "the coup" and told union supporters of her Workers' Party that she would "fight to the end".

However, with the Senate vote to suspend her looking near certain, she appears resigned — at the very minimum — to the humiliating prospect of having to abandon her executive offices, called the Palacio do Planalto, in just over a week. "She has ordered the drawers to be cleaned out," *Folha* daily said on Sunday.

And it isn't just filing cabinets that will be looking for a new home. Her Workers' Party ministers and what *Folha* calls "a sea" of government employees are likely soon to be sending out job resumes.

Ten days from the Senate vote on impeachment "nothing about the routine in the Palacio do Planalto resembles the resistance announced by social movements under the cry of "No to the coup!" *Estadao* daily commented on Sunday.

Once suspended, Rousseff will hunker down at the presidential residence on half pay. From there she will attempt to persuade senators that the accounting tricks she is accused of do not amount to an impeachable offence and that the whole procedure is a political, not legal assault — an argument rejected last month by the lower house of Congress.

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INFERNO: Sudden rise in mercury and prolonged dry spell are main reasons for the fires

Forest fires ravage Himachal Pradesh, rains in store



A forest fire in the adjoining hills of Shimla town in Himachal Pradesh. — IANS

SHIMLA: Summer fires in Himachal's grasslands and forests have caused 378 incidents, mainly in the low hills, and destroyed flora and fauna in over 3,000 hectares, a senior forest official said on Monday.

But a major relief is store, with the state's weather department forecasting rain on Tuesday.

"The sudden rise in mercury and the prolonged dry spell are mainly the reasons for these forest fires.

Most of the fire-related cases are from the Shivalik ranges in Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Kangra, Solan and Sirmaur districts and a majority of them are ground fires," principal chief forest conservator SP Vasudeva said.

Records of the forest department said 22 per cent or 8,267 sq km of the total forest area in the state is fire-prone.

A majority of the fires were reported from the pine forests since during summer, the trees shed pine needles that are highly inflammable due to the rich content of turpentine oil.

The pine forests are found up to an altitude of 5,500 feet.

Forest fires have also threatened the existence of the world heritage Kalka-Shimla rail line at several points near Dharampur town, 65 km from here.

"Both sides of the track were under fire but the fire was doused after some

A majority of the fires were reported from the pine forests since during summer, the trees shed pine needles that are highly inflammable due to the rich content of turpentine oil.

hours. The rail traffic was affected for sometime but now normal traffic has been restored," a senior Indian Railways official said.

The Kalka-Shimla rail track was built by the British in 1903 to ferry Europeans to and from this hill town, the erstwhile summer capital of British India.

It was included in the Unesco list of world heritage sites in 2008. A total of 671 fire incidents had destroyed 5,733 hectares of forests in 2015-16.

Billowing smoke from the hills of Shimla, Kasauli, Chail, Dharampur and Nahar towns have become common these days.

"A huge track of forest in the Tara Devi hills (overlooking Shimla town) was ravaged in the past two days,"

villager Ramesh Chand said.

The Met Office in Shimla said there could be light to moderate rain or thundershowers on Tuesday and thereafter.

"Rain and thundershowers are likely to occur over mid and low hills of the state during the next three days," an India Meteorological Department official said.

He said most of the prominent tourist destinations like Shimla, Dharamsala, Palampur, Manali, Kasauli, Kufri, Narkanda and Dalhousie are likely to witness intermittent rainfall till May 5, which will douse forest fires too.

Shimla recorded the season's hottest day on Monday with maximum temperature at 29.8 degrees Celsius, seven notches above the average, the official said, blaming the unusually high temperatures on lack of rain.

Forest officials said most forest fire incidents were deliberate acts.

The villagers also tend to set grasslands afire to get softer grass after the rains. In most cases, the fire from grasslands spreads to nearby forests.

Vasudeva said self-help groups mainly comprising villagers have been formed in the fire-prone districts.

"Besides self-help groups, more than 3,000 fire watchers have been deployed to check fire incidents," he said. — IANS

Forest fires in Uttarakhand under control

NEW DELHI: The government on Monday said forest fires in Uttarakhand were completely under control and no death was reported so far.

"The situation in Uttarakhand is completely under control. I can assure you that there is nothing to worry," Home Minister Rajnath Singh informed Lok Sabha.

Rajnath was responding after the matter was raised by Trinamool Congress member Saugat Ray during Zero Hour.

Some members from Uttarakhand, including Former Chief Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank also raised their concerns.

Rajnath said that shortly after the matter came to his knowledge, a team of his ministry and fire department rushed to the site.

"Three teams of NDRF and three IAF MI-17 helicopters were also engaged to control the situation," he said. — IANS

Congress running away from chopper deal debate

NEW DELHI: The government on Monday charged the opposition Congress with running away from debate on the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper deal and said the entire exercise by the Congress party to raise the Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation (GSPC) mismanagement issue in the Rajya Sabha was a diversionary tactic.

"The Congress is running away from debate and so raising such issues," Parliamentary Affairs Minister M Venkaiah Naidu (pictured) told reporters in parliament premises after the Rajya Sabha was disrupted thrice over the issue of alleged mismanagement in the GSPC during the tenure of Narendra Modi as chief minister in the western state.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders feel the move to raise the GSPC issue has been part of Congress strategy as they feel "nervous" about the debate on the chopper deal that has put the Congress top leadership at the receiving end.



The stand-off over the AgustaWestland deal seems to have magnified as the Congress has threatened to launch a 'march to parliament' stir on May 6.

The Congress members in Rajya Sabha remained determined to have a debate on the irregularities at the GSPC as pointed out in a Comptroller and Auditor General report.

The government side maintained that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Gujarat assembly will separately examine this. — IANS

IN BRIEF

Vijay Mallya resigns from Rajya Sabha

NEW DELHI: Liquor baron Vijay Mallya, whose passport has been revoked by the government, on Monday resigned from the Rajya Sabha.

He sent his resignation to Rajya Sabha Chairman Hamid Ansari on Monday, sources said. The resignation has come after the Ethics Committee of Rajya Sabha unanimously recommended the expulsion of the liquor baron from the upper house of Parliament.

Mallya, wanted for defaulting bank loans to the tune of Rs 9,000 crore, was an Independent member of the Rajya Sabha from Karnataka. He was given a week's time, ending on Tuesday, to put in his papers.

According to Parliament sources, during his tenure of almost 10 years as member of the Rajya Sabha, Mallya had been declaring his assets and liabilities as "nil". The union government too had revoked Mallya's passport after he failed to turn up for a probe into a Rs 9,431 crore default of loans from Indian banks. — IANS

Sushma doing well, to be discharged soon

NEW DELHI: The health of External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who is admitted to AIIMS following chest congestion and arthritis problems, is improving and she will be discharged soon, hospital authorities said on Monday.

"Sushma Swaraj's condition is constantly improving and there is nothing to worry. She will be released soon but we can't say exactly when," said Amit Gupta, spokesperson of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

Asked if Sushma Swaraj had developed any problems during treatment, Gupta said: "Nothing major. She is already a cardiac patient, so there is fluctuation in her health condition. But she is stable now."

Sushma Swaraj was admitted to the AIIMS last week over problems of chest congestion, fever and arthritis.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan visited her to enquire about her health. — IANS

Four killed in homemade bomb blast

KOLKATA: Four people were killed when the crude bombs they were making exploded in India's West Bengal, where bitterly fought state elections are underway, a senior police official said on Monday.

Another six people were injured in the explosion on Sunday night in a village about 360 kilometres (220 miles) north of Kolkata, close to the eastern state's border with Bangladesh.

"Four people were killed and six others injured when the bombs they were making exploded in a house at Baisnabnagar village," Anuj Sharma, West Bengal additional director-general of police, said. "The explosion rocked the area and damaged the house."

Police were investigating the reasons for the bombmaking but no arrests have been made so far, Sharma said. West Bengal is set to hold the final phase of staggered state elections on Thursday.

Homemade bombs are sometimes planted by workers from rival political parties to intimidate voters ahead of polling day. India has sent extra security forces to West Bengal for the election.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee is battling left-wing rivals and the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which rules at national level. — AFP

Security measures cannot stop the drought from ravaging the dam in the parched Bundelkhand region

Armed guards at dams as drought leaves farmers dry

TIKAMGARH: As young boys plunge into a murky dam to escape the blistering afternoon sun, guards armed with guns stand vigil at one of the few remaining water bodies in a state hit hard by India's crippling drought.

Desperate farmers from a neighbouring state regularly attempt to steal water from the Barighat dam, forcing authorities in central Madhya Pradesh to protect it with armed guards to ensure supplies.

India is officially in the grip of its worst water crisis in years, with the government saying that about 330 million people, or a quarter of the population, are suffering from drought after the last two monsoons failed.

"Water is more precious than gold in this area," Purshotam Sirohi, who was hired by the local municipality to protect the stop-dam, located in Tikamgarh district, said. "We are protecting the dam round the clock."

But the security measures cannot stop the drought from ravaging the dam in the parched Bundelkhand region, with officials saying it holds just one month of reserves.

Four reservoirs in Madhya Pradesh have already dried up, leaving more than a million people with inadequate water and forcing authorities to truck in supplies.

Almost a hundred thousand residents in Tikamgarh get piped water

A gunman stands alert at a water reservoir in Tikamgarh in the central state of Madhya Pradesh. — AFP



for just two hours every fourth day, while municipal authorities have ordered new bore wells to be dug to meet demand.

But it may not be enough, with officials saying the groundwater level has receded more than 100 feet owing to less

than half the average annual rainfall in the past few years.

"The situation is really critical, but we are trying to provide water to everyone," Laxmi Giri Goswami, chairwoman of Tikamgarh municipality, said. "We pray to rain gods for mercy," she said.

In the nearby village of Dargai Khurd, only one of 17 wells has water.

With temperatures hovering around 45 degrees Celsius, its 850 residents fear they may soon be left thirsty.

"If it dries up, we won't have a drop of water to drink," Santosh Kumar, a local villager said.

Farmers across India rely on the monsoon — a four-month rainy season which starts in June — to cultivate their

crops, as the country lacks a robust irrigation system.

Two weak monsoons have resulted in severe water shortages and crop losses in as many as 10 states, prompting extreme measures including curfews near water sources and water trains sent to the worst-affected regions.

Many dejected farmers are now moving to cities and towns to work as daily wage labourers to overcome their financial losses and support their families.

At a scruffy, in one of the worst-affected states, dozens of migrants who have fled their drought-stricken villages queue to fill plastic containers with water. — AFP

SPINNING BUSINESS



An employee works inside a garment factory in Kolkata. — Reuters

GRAFT PROBE

Court allows Rajendra to take his cash back

NEW DELHI: A court here on Monday allowed plea of Rajendra Kumar, principal secretary to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, for return of his cash seized by the Central Bureau of Investigation but declined the return of his laptop and iPad.

Special CBI court Judge Ajay Kumar Jain allowed Kumar to take back his cash seized by the agency during investigation, but rejected his plea for the return of laptop and iPad, saying these have been sent to forensic lab for analysis.

The court told Kumar he could move a fresh plea for the return of his laptop and iPad later when the forensic lab returns them after analysis.

The agency seized these gadgets and the cash during searches related to a graft case lodged against Kumar.

According to the first information report, Rajendra Kumar promoted a company, Endeavour System Pvt. Ltd. from 2007, by allegedly misusing his official position and facilitated tenders worth Rs.9.5 crore to the company.

The CBI officials carried out searches at the Delhi Secretariat on December 16, 2015, saying they were investigating corruption charges against Rajendra Kumar.

Kejriwal claimed his office too was raided by the CBI, and linked it to a probe that he had ordered against union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on issues related to alleged corruption in Delhi's cricket association. — IANS

Diesel cab drivers, owners protest ban in capital



Taxi drivers and owners shout slogans as they block a road during a protest in New Delhi on Monday, against the banning of diesel cabs from plying the roads. — AFP

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of taxi drivers and owners protested in New Delhi on Monday against a ban on diesel cabs, the latest initiative aimed at improving air quality in the world's most polluted capital.

India's top court on Saturday ordered taxis run on the dirty fuel off the city's roads, refusing industry requests for more time to switch to greener compressed natural gas (CNG).

Many of Delhi's taxis already run on CNG, but the ban will impact about 30,000 traditional cabs and some working for app-based Uber and Ola services, according to taxi operators.

The Supreme Court has been pressuring authorities to reduce dangerous levels of haze and dust that choke the city, with a string of orders last year including a ban on new, large diesel cars, affecting all road users.

Angry taxi drivers blocked key intersections in Delhi and neighbouring satellite city of Gurgaon on Monday morning, bringing peak-hour traffic to a standstill for hours.

"You can't have knee-jerk solutions to long-standing problems," Balwant

Singh, who heads a taxi union of 500 members, said at a noisy demonstration in central Delhi. "Why go after commercial passenger vehicles only? Private diesel cars are running freely on the roads, why not stop them?"

Some drivers said they knew of no available technology to switch from diesel to CNG and would instead be forced to buy new taxis.

"I sold my house to buy the taxi and now I will have to sit at home and twiddle my thumbs. How will my family of five survive you tell me," said driver Tarun Kumar.

A 2014 World Health Organisation survey of more than 1,600 cities ranked Delhi as the most polluted, partly because of the nearly 10 million vehicles on its roads.

The ban by the court, which was acting on a petition, came just days after the end of another two weeks of "odd-even" that kept about one million cars off Delhi's roads.

The government scheme restricts cars to alternate days according to whether they carry odd or even-numbered licence plates. — AFP

SC to consider NEET exemption applications

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court will hear on Tuesday a batch of applications seeking that NEET for admissions to undergraduate medical courses may not be thrust on the states and they may be allowed to conduct their own entrance examinations.

A bench headed by Chief Justice T.S. Thakur on Monday said the hearing by the special bench headed by Justice Anil R. Dave will take place on Tuesday at 2 pm after a battery of senior lawyers, including Gopal Subramaniam appearing for Jammu and Kashmir, and K. K. Venugopal appearing for Association of Private Medical Colleges of Karnataka, mentioned the matter.

Various states, including the associations of private medical colleges are aggrieved by the top court's Friday order reiterating that admission to undergraduate medical courses will be only through National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) to be conducted by the Central Board of School Education (CBSE).

The first phase of NEET was conducted on Sunday. The second phase will be held on July 24.

In the meantime, a constitution bench of Justice Dave, Justice A.K. Sikri,



There was no violation of right of autonomy of the educational institutions in the CET being conducted by the State or an agency nominated by the state or in fixing fee.

A K SIKRI
Supreme Court Justice

Justice R.K. Agrawal, Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel and Justice R. Banumathi on Monday upheld the Madhya Pradesh law providing for common entrance test for admission to medical courses in private professional colleges and regulation of fee. Justice Banumathi gave a separate but concurring judgment.

Speaking for the bench, Justice Sikri said: "There was no violation of right of autonomy of the educational institutions in the CET being conducted by the State or an agency nominated by the state or in fixing fee."

However, alive to the fact that the central government was pushing for common entrance test NEET, the bench said: "The right of a State to do so (to conduct CET) is subject to a central law."

"Once the notifications under the central statutes for conducting the CET called 'NEET' become operative, it will be a matter between the states and the union, which will have to be sorted out on the touchstone of article 254 of the Constitution.

"We need not dilate on this aspect any further", the constitution bench said, envisaging that in due course there would be the central government's NEET and Madhya Pradesh's CET and there would a question which will prevail.

Under Article 254 if a law enacted by the state legislature is inconsistent with the law made by the parliament on a subject falling under the concurrent list, then the central law would prevail. However, the state law would continue to operate in the state if it has been reserved for the consideration of the president and has received his assent.

However, this would not come in the way of parliament to enact a law that would added to, amend or even repeal such a state law. — IANS

No plans to restart ceasefire with NSCN-K

SHILLONG: The Indian government has no plans to re-enter into a ceasefire agreement with Naga insurgent group NSCN-K, a home ministry official said on Monday.

"There is no official communication on this (re-entering into ceasefire with NSCN-K) from the government of India, and at this moment there are no initiatives from our side," Satyendra Garg, home ministry joint secretary in-charge of northeast affairs, told journalists.

Garg, who reviewed the overall law and order situation in Meghalaya with

state Home Minister Roshan Warjri, however, said the counter-insurgency operations against the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang will continue.

"We will continue with our operations against the NSCN-K and I should say that the overall security situation in Nagaland is okay," he said.

Nagaland Chief Minister T.R. Zeliang had earlier appealed to the Indian government to restart a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN-K to allow peace to prevail in the state.

S.S. Khaplang, a Myanmar Hemi

Naga chieftain who heads the NSCN-K faction, abrogated the ceasefire with the Indian government on March 27, 2015, just a month before the truce was up for renewal.

The group had signed a truce in 2001. After abrogating the ceasefire, Khaplang's rebels went on a killing spree, attacking Indian soldiers in Nagaland and Manipur.

The outfit even mounted the deadly ambush on a convoy of the 6 Dogra Regiment in Manipur's Chandel district on June 4, 2015, killing 18 army personnel. — IANS

MODI MEETS SAYED FAKHAR KAZMI CHISTY



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets with Sayed Fakhar Kazmi Chisty of Ajmer Sharif and the accompanying delegation.

The case has triggered a diplomatic row between India and Italy even as the two countries agreed to abide the decisions of the UN tribunal

Italy says UN court ordered bail for Italian marine

ROME/NEW DELHI: Italy on Monday said a UN court has ordered that Italian marine Salvatore Gironi, detained in India for the alleged 2012 killings of two fishermen, be allowed home on bail while arbitration proceedings in The Hague continue in the case that has soured ties between the two countries.

But Indian government sources rejected the Italian foreign ministry's claim, alleging that Rome was misinterpreting the ruling that "neither releases nor frees any marine (but) only recommends further relaxation of his bail conditions".

According to the foreign ministry in Rome, the tribunal decided Gironi be allowed to go "back to Italy until the end of the arbitration proceedings" which

will decide on the Italian government's plea that it is their jurisdiction and not that of India to proceed against the accused.

"The return of the conditions will be agreed between Italy and India," the ministry said.

Gironi and fellow Italian marine Massimiliano Latorre on board oil tanker Enrica Lexie allegedly shot dead two fishermen off the Kerala coast during an anti-piracy mission in February 2012, reportedly mistaking them for pirates. While Latorre is already back home on health grounds, Italy has been seeking the return of Gironi also.

But India has refused to let Gironi, who is housed in the Italian embassy premises in New Delhi, to leave the



Italian sailors Latorre and Gironi wait to board elevator to reach police commissioner's office in Kochi, in this file photo. — Reuters

country.

The case has triggered a diplomatic

row between India and Italy even as the two countries last year agreed to move

The Italian foreign ministry said the ruling, which is expected to be officially announced on Tuesday in The Hague, comes after 'a constructive attitude of India'.

to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and abide by its decisions.

Italy argues that the marines should have immunity as they were servicemen

working on a mission and that India does not have jurisdiction as the incident took place outside its territorial waters.

The Italian foreign ministry said the ruling, which is expected to be officially announced on Tuesday in The Hague, comes after "a constructive attitude of India".

The court, according to the ministry, has asked both Italian and Indian governments to agree on the date and modalities of Gironi's return home.

But official sources in New Delhi said Gironi was already out on bail. Citing the court order, they said the arbitral tribunal clearly recognised that "Gironi is under India's authority alone" and that "the Supreme Court of India exercises jurisdiction" over him. — IANS



INDIANA VOTES: The real estate mogul is confident of making it by crushing Ted and training his sights on Hillary

Donald Trump looks to smother Ted Cruz

WASHINGTON: An increasingly confident Donald Trump seeks to trounce rival Ted Cruz Tuesday in Indiana and stake his claim to the Republican US presidential nomination, as the billionaire trains his sights on presumptive Democratic standard-bearer Hillary Clinton.

The "stop Trump" movement faces a moment of truth in the Midwestern state, where Cruz's campaign is struggling to win over voters ahead of a potentially decisive primary.

"We are going to win," Trump told CNN early Monday.

The real estate mogul told a rally in Indiana that his campaign was soaring "like a rocket ship," and that with a new NBC poll showing him 15 percentage points ahead of his main challenger Cruz he was all but assured of winning the state.

"If we win Indiana, it's over," he said in Terre Haute.

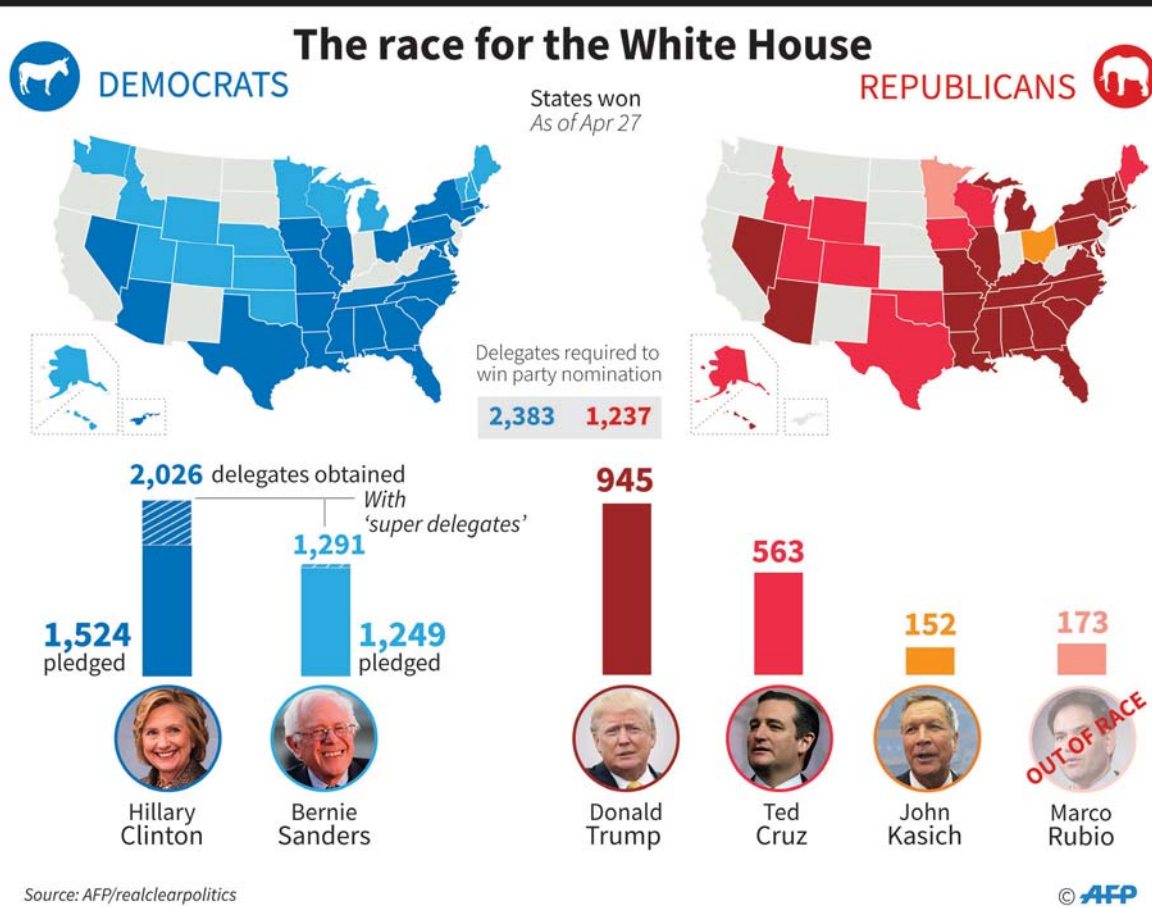
Cruz was counting on Indiana acting as a Trump firewall, blocking him from receiving the 1,237 delegates necessary to secure the nomination at the Republican convention in Cleveland in July.

The Texas senator has openly stated his goal is to snatch the nomination on a second ballot, when most delegates become free to vote for whomever they choose -- but which will only be held if Trump falls short of a majority.

Trump has so far amassed 1,002 delegates, according to CNN's tally.

He now needs just under half of the 502 in play in the remaining 10 contests in order to secure the nomination on the first ballot in Cleveland.

Indiana's winner-takes-all primary



could hand the frontrunner 57 in one swoop.

With momentum favoring Trump — he has won the last six contests — Cruz put on a brave face, telling reporters "the stakes are enormously high" and that he would stay in the race regardless of the Indiana outcome.

"I am in for the distance," Cruz said. "As long as we have a viable path to victory, I am competing to the end."

Should the conservative senator fall short in Indiana, even his supporters

see an extremely steep road ahead.

If Trump sweeps the state "it could be over," former Cruz spokesman Rick Tyler acknowledged on MSNBC.

In that scenario, Trump would need just 39 percent of remaining delegates in a map that favours the billionaire frontrunner, polling well ahead in both largest states, California and New Jersey.

But if Cruz pulls off an upset, he would be strongly positioned in the crunch state of California, Tyler noted, citing Cruz's formidable ground game

and superior organization in The Golden State, which votes June 7 on the final day of the Republican race.

Clinton, with her formidable lead over Bernie Sanders, needs only 21 percent of remaining Democratic delegates to win her party's nomination.

But Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist senator representing Vermont, wasn't throwing in the towel.

At a Washington news conference Sanders insisted the Democratic race would come down to a "contested"

convention, and appealed to hundreds of so-called superdelegates in a bid to grab the nomination.

These number around 700 and, in contrast to pledged delegates, they can vote for any candidate at the party convention in Philadelphia in July.

Either candidate needs 2,383 delegates for victory.

Currently Clinton has 2,176 including 510 superdelegates, while Sanders has 1,400 including 41 superdelegates, according to CNN's tally.

Even with a Sanders nomination a near impossibility, he insisted Monday that his focus on reducing economic inequality and the influence of "special interests and the billionaire class" in politics was resonating with voters.

Meanwhile Trump was already looking beyond Tuesday's contest to a general election matchup with Clinton.

"We're going to get there anyway," he said in Indiana. "And then we can focus on crooked Hillary."

Please, let's focus on Hillary."

Last week the two frontrunners clashed over gender issues, with Trump warning voters that Clinton was "playing the woman card" and that if she were a man she would not get more than five percent of the vote.

Clinton dismissed the comments, saying she was accustomed to "dealing with men who sometimes get off the reservation in the way they behave and how they speak."

Trump doubled down again Monday, saying that "if she didn't play the woman card she would have no chance whatsoever of winning."

— AFP

IN BRIEF

Bodies of climbers emerge after 16 years

KATHMANDU: The bodies of top mountaineer Alex Lowe and his cameraman have been found in a Himalayan glacier, 16 years after they were buried by an avalanche on one of the world's highest mountains.

Two climbers last week came across the men's remains "still encased in blue ice but beginning to emerge from the glacier", a foundation set up in Lowe's memory said in a statement.

Lowe, 40, and expedition cameraman David Bridges, 29, both American, were swept away by a massive snow and ice avalanche on the 26,335-foot Shisha Pangma peak in China in October 1999 while attempting the first American ski descent.

Conrad Anker, who survived the avalanche and went on to marry Lowe's widow and adopt their three sons, said the discovery had brought "closure and relief" to the family.

"Alex's parents are thankful to know that their son's body has been found and that Conrad, the boys and I will make our pilgrimage to Shisha Pangma," said Lowe's widow Jennifer Lowe-Anker in the statement.

— AFP

Australian plan to cull wild horses sparks debate

SYDNEY: An Australian government plan to cull more than 5,000 horses from a national park in the Snowy Mountains has caused an uproar among horse lovers.

The plan involves shooting, trapping or herding in 90 per cent of the wild horses — known as brumbies — living in the mountains as they cause damage to fragile vegetation and endanger native animals.

Jan Carter, president of Save the Brumbies that tries to find homes for wild horses, said the proposal to eradicate thousands of them was "absolutely horrific."

"They are our culture, they are an icon and they deserve to have protection and above all they deserve to have humane handling," she told the *Sydney Morning Herald* Monday.

"We have independent reports ... that they do not cause the damage that they are accused of."

The state government of New South Wales, which administers the park, opened the plan to public discussion last Sunday for two months before finalising arrangements.

— dpa

REMEMBERING CARNAGE VICTIMS



Women wear T-shirts with portraits of their relatives who died in a fire at the Trade Union House two years ago, during a pro-Russian commemorating meeting next to Kulikove Pole Square in Odessa, southern Ukraine. Ukraine's tense Odessa marks two years since clashes killed 48. More than 500 people bearing flowers and banners with pictures of the victims massed on Monday outside metal detectors set up around the Odessa square at which the carnage occurred. — AFP

Australian says he created Bitcoin

LONDON: Australian entrepreneur Craig Wright on Monday identified himself as the creator of Bitcoin following years of speculation about who invented the pioneering digital currency.

Wright was named by three media outlets — the BBC, *The Economist* and *GQ* magazine — and posted a blog on his website.

However, in a defiant interview with the BBC, the 45-year-old insisted that he would have preferred his identity to remain secret, adding he was not seeking cash or honours.

"I don't want money, I don't want fame, I don't want adoration, I just want to be left alone," Wright told the British broadcaster. "If anyone puts me up for awards or anything like that, I will never, ever accept a cent. Ever."

He added that he had not taken the decision to identify himself, saying: "I had people decide this matter for me."

Some raised questions about his claim, suggesting more work should be done to verify it.

Bitcoin is a technically sophisticated

and untraceable currency based on the same underlying mathematics as governments and militaries use to encrypt codes.

Unlike traditional currencies such as the dollar or the euro, which require the sponsorship of a central bank, Bitcoin is decentralised.

Digital coins are created by supercomputers and then traded online or exchanged for goods and services by a peer-to-peer network of computers connected to the Internet.

Despite some early notoriety over its use by drug dealers on the dark web, the system has grown beyond its radical libertarian roots and is being taken increasingly seriously by the financial establishment.

Billions of dollars worth of Bitcoins are now in circulation.

Wright had presented proof that only the true creator of Bitcoin could have provided, the BBC said.

It posted a video of him demonstrating the signing of a message with the public key associated with the first transaction ever done on Bitcoin following its 2009 launch.

These keys had to be created by Satoshi Nakamoto, the pseudonym used at the time by the currency's creator, the broadcaster said.

But *The Economist* was more sceptical, saying there were still a number of steps to go through in order to verify the claim and "important questions remain".

"Imagine that the paternity of a particularly brilliant child is in doubt, and someone steps forward to claim he is the father," its article said.

"In the real world a DNA test would sort the matter out quickly. In the confusing world of Bitcoin... things are not that simple."

The claim also drew scepticism from some members of the tech community on online forums like Reddit.

Jon Matonis, founding director of the Bitcoin Foundation, wrote on his blog Monday that it was his "firm belief" that Wright had invented Bitcoin.

He said he had seen complex cryptographic, social and technical evidence. — AFP

AROUND THE WORLD

Adventurer embarks on solo transatlantic race

PLYMOUTH: Hiroshi Kitada embarked from Plymouth for New York on Monday as the first ever Japanese skipper to attempt the Transat, a 5,650km solo transatlantic race.

The 51-year-old former company boss with a spirit of adventure is aboard a Class40 12 metres single hull, among the world's fastest ocean-racing yachts.

Kitada moved to the French port of Lorient with the intention of racing the Route du Rhum, but is instead taking the greater risk of tackling the Transat.

"I had intended to race solo, but wanted to start with a team race, move on to do a duo, and once I had the experience then go solo," he said through an interpreter.

"I have done some single hull 6.5m sailing but this is my first long-distance solo run," he admitted.

So Kitada embarked from the English South coast with a westerly wind of 12 knots with nine other vessels in his class, two skippered by women and seven French skippered craft.

— AFP

No distress signal from crashed helicopter

OSLO: Norwegian authorities said Monday there was no indication that a helicopter that crashed last week killing all 13 aboard had sent a distress signal. "We are not aware of any distress signal sent by the helicopter," an official from the Norwegian accident investigation board, Koare Halvorsen, said.

"We don't hear anything like that" on the voice recorder box, one of the chopper's two black boxes, he said.

The EC225 Super Puma built by Airbus Helicopters crashed Friday on a small island in the archipelago off the western city of Bergen, en route from a North Sea oil platform.

Thirteen people were killed, including 11 Norwegians, one Briton and one Italian.

It was the deadliest helicopter crash in Norway since 1978 when a Sikorsky S61 crashed at sea, killing 18 people. The cause of Friday's accident was not yet known, but a technical problem appeared to be the most likely reason.

Eyewitness accounts and footage captured on cell phones indicate that the rotor detached just before the crash. — AFP



A Cuban waves a US flag at the Malecon waterfront as the first US-to-Cuba cruise ship to arrive in the island nation in decades glides into the port of Havana. The first US cruise ship bound for Cuba in half a century, the *Adonia* — a vessel from the Carnival cruise's Fathom line — set sail from Florida on Sunday, marking a new milestone in the rapprochement between Washington and Havana. The ship — with 700 passengers aboard — departed from Miami, the heart of the Cuban diaspora in the United States. — AFP

Inferno destroys historic Serbian cathedral in NY

NEW YORK: A historic Serbian church in the heart of midtown Manhattan has been reduced to smoldering ruins, following a massive fire late Sunday.

Parts of the charred exterior walls are all that remain of the Saint Sava Cathedral, an Orthodox church near New York's famed Flatiron building. Authorities have yet to determine what led to the fire, which sent thick plumes of smoke billowing through the heart of the city as massive flames lit up the neighbourhood.

"No cause yet," a fire department spokesman told AFP. "We won't know for a while."

The spectacular blaze occurred just hours after Sunday celebrations at Saint Sava in honour of Orthodox Easter, one of the holiest days of the calendar in the Serbian community.

"We had service on Sunday. There were around 700 people. It finished around 1 pm. Nobody was in the church and then this came," said Father Djokan Majstorovic, who said the church was "very lucky" that the building was empty when disaster struck.

— AFP

Cultural honour for Lebanese author

Renowned Lebanese author Amin Maalouf receives the Sheikh Zayed Book Award 2016 for cultural personality of the year from UAE deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed at a ceremony in Abu Dhabi. — AFP

US launches bid to save Syria truce in Aleppo

FINAL BID: John Kerry says the conflict was going out of control and deeply disturbing but premature to promise any success

GENEVA: US Secretary of State John Kerry launched a desperate push on Monday to salvage a ceasefire in Syria, as the country's second city of Aleppo reeled from a week of fighting that killed hundreds of civilians.

With the two-month old truce brokered by the United States and Russia under severe threat, Kerry said Washington and Moscow had made progress in trying to contain the bloodshed, but warned it was premature to promise success.

The top US diplomat gave some of his most downbeat comments yet after meeting the United Nations Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura in Geneva, saying the conflict was "in many ways out of control and deeply disturbing to everybody in the world, I hope."

The US and Russia have agreed to bolster the number of Geneva-based ceasefire monitors, Kerry told reporters, pledging to work "in the next hours" to rein in violence on the ground.

In and around Aleppo, a week of fighting has killed more than 250 people.

Kerry accused President Bashar al-Assad's regime of deliberately targeting three clinics and a major hospital last week. "The attack on this hospital is unconscionable," he said. "And it has to stop."

There was a relative lull in the unrest later Monday, allowing some residents to venture out into the streets, AFP's correspondents in Aleppo said, with some even opening up shops.

Kerry said a bolstered group of ceasefire monitors will track violations "24 hours a day, seven days a week."

A senior US diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the US, Russia and the UN have moved forward on a new ceasefire mechanism for Aleppo, but a deal was not complete.

Kerry stressed that the goal was to re-enforce a broad truce capable of withstanding further tests.

He said he would call Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov later Monday.

"We're trying to press this as fast as possible but I don't want to make any promises that can't be kept," he told reporters after meeting de Mistura and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al Jubeir — whose government has influence with



US Secretary of State John Kerry with Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al Jubeir during a meeting on Syria in Geneva. — AFP

Kerry has accused President Assad's regime of deliberately targeting three clinics and a major hospital last week. 'The attack on this hospital is unconscionable,' he said. 'And it has to stop.'

key rebel groups.

De Mistura was due to fly to Moscow for talks with Lavrov on Tuesday.

While agreeing in theory to support a ceasefire, Russia has done little to rein in Assad's forces around Aleppo, which were in action again early Monday.

Several neighbourhoods, including the heavily-populated Bustan al Qasr district, were hit, according to AFP's correspondent in the northern city.

Despite the early-morning raids, there was relative quiet in Aleppo's rebel-held east.

Kerry said Washington would press moderate rebels to separate themselves from the Al Nusra Front's fighters in Aleppo.

Russia and Assad's regime have used the presence of Al Nusra, which was not

party to a February 27 ceasefire deal, as an excuse to press their offensive.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor says at least 253 civilians — including 49 children — have been killed on both sides of divided Aleppo since April 22.

The city was initially left out of a deal to "reinforce" the February truce agreement.

The freeze in fighting, announced on Friday, applied to battlefronts in the coastal province of Latakia and Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus.

State television reported a Syrian army announcement on Monday that the freeze has been extended for another 48 hours in Eastern Ghouta, until 1 am Wednesday.

The same "freeze" is set to hold until 1 am Tuesday in Latakia, a regime stronghold.

Syria's conflict erupted in 2011 after the brutal repression of anti-government protests and has since escalated into a complex, multi-faceted war, which has killed more than 270,000 people.

The renewed bloodshed has dampened hopes that the ceasefire could finally lay the groundwork for an end to the conflict.

Last month's peace talks in Geneva failed to make headway, although de Mistura has voiced hope they can resume next month. — AFP

FREE PRESS

Top Sudan court lifts ban on newspaper

KHARTOUM: Sudan's highest court has allowed a leading newspaper to resume publishing, nearly five months after the authorities banned it from printing, the newspaper's editor said on Monday.

Sudan's powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) had suspended the independent *Al Tayyar* newspaper in December after it published a series of editorials criticising the government over subsidy cuts on fuel and electricity.

The newspaper challenged the NISS in the country's Constitutional Court, which ordered that the ban on the daily be lifted. "We will resume publishing in the coming days as we have the court's order," *Al Tayyar's* editor-in-chief Osman Merghani told AFP. The newspaper's lawyer Nabil Adeb confirmed the order. Court officials were not immediately available to comment on the decision.

Al Tayyar was banned along with another newspaper, *Al Jarida*, in May 2015 over reports that it had published articles about child abuse.

The publications were later allowed to resume printing, but *Al Tayyar* was banned again in December.

Security agents of NISS frequently seize the entire print runs of newspapers over articles they deem inappropriate. — AFP

BALANCING ACT



American slackliner Heather Larsen crosses a high wire between two towers at the Tower of David Museum in Jerusalem's Old City. Wearing a harness attached to the line, Larsen walked across a 35 metre span and then a 20 metre line inside the courtyard of the ancient museum of Jerusalem's Tower of David, named after the Biblical king. — Reuters

Iran, South Korea set to triple trade to \$18 billion



Iranian President Rouhani meets S Korean President Park Geunhye in Tehran. — Reuters

TEHRAN: Iran and South Korea have decided to triple their annual trade volume to \$18 billion, President Hassan Rouhani announced on Monday after meeting his South Korean counterpart Park Geun-Hye.

"The two sides decided to increase by three times the current trade volume of around \$6 billion to \$18 billion," Rouhani said in a joint televised press conference.

"We also spoke about tourism, direct flights between Seoul and Tehran, and Korean investment in Iranian tourism infrastructure, including building hotels," he added.

Park is the first South Korean president to visit Iran since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1962, and as Seoul seeks new markets to turn around a lengthy

decline in export revenues.

Her three-day visit comes just months after a historic nuclear deal with world powers lifted sanctions crippling Iran's economy in exchange for limits on its nuclear programme.

Park, who is accompanied by several ministers and a 230-strong business delegation, will also be received by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The two countries have pledged to develop their relations in the energy sector.

"We will expand relations in energy projects and infrastructure... and in oil, gas, railways and ports," Park said.

Tehran hopes this month to increase its oil exports to Seoul to 400,000 barrels per day from a current 100,000 bpd, according to Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh. — AFP

11 Kurdish militants killed in southeast Turkey

ANKARA: Eleven Kurdish militants were killed in operations in two southeastern Turkish provinces, the Turkish military said in a statement on Monday, while a fresh curfew was declared in southeastern province.

Four militants were killed in Mardin's Nusaybin district and seven others in the province of Sirnak, the Turkish military said, giving no further details.

Thousands of militants and hundreds of security force members and civilians have been killed since a 2-1/2-year ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Turkey's ruling AK Party has taken authority to appoint provincial party officials away from Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in a move seen reducing his power over grass roots supporters and consolidating the influence of President Tayyip Erdogan.

The step, decided on Friday at a meeting of the AKP's top executive committee, is one of the clearest signs yet of tensions between Erdogan, who wants an executive presidency in Turkey, and Davutoglu, who would be sidelined if the country's parliamentary system were to be replaced. — Reuters

Iraqi forces retake road to isolated Anbar city

BAGHDAD: Iraqi forces advancing from two opposite directions in Anbar have joined up, reducing the isolation of the city of Haditha, military sources said on Monday.

A statement from Iraq's joint operations command coordinating the fight against the IS group said forces retook several villages from the fighters along the Euphrates River.

The Iraqi army's 7th division had been moving down the river from Al Baghdadi and eventually joined up with forces from the counter-terrorism service moving up from the town of Heet.

"The road is therefore open between Heet and Haditha, via Al Baghdadi, after an 18-month siege by the terrorists of Daesh," the statement said, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

"The siege of Haditha and Al Baghdadi was broken after liberating the strategic highway between Baghdadi and Heet," Major General Ali Ibrahim Daboun, the army commander responsible for the area, said.

However, a commander of Haditha's tribal fighters said the area of Al Dulab, which lies in a loop of the Euphrates just east of Al Baghdadi, was still in IS hands.



Followers of gather at Grand Festivities Square within the Green Zone in Baghdad. — Reuters

"The people are hopeful but for now nobody will take the risk of travelling on this road so long as Al Dulab has not been retaken," Sheikh Abdullah al Jughaihi said by phone from Haditha.

Haditha, 210 kilometres northwest of the capital Baghdad, is the third city in the vast province of Anbar and lies near the country's second largest dam.

It has come under repeated attack since the jihadists launched their massive offensive in Iraq in June 2014, but the dominant tribes there were opposed to IS and able to hold them off.

For months, the city's main lifeline

was the nearby military base of Al Asad, which was only accessible by air.

"The engineering corps of the army continues to remove explosive devices to reopen the road for goods, oil products and food," Daboun said.

Iraqi forces, with backing from the US-led coalition that carries out daily air strikes against IS, has retaken significant ground from the jihadists in recent months.

IS still controls Fallujah city only 50 kilometres west of Baghdad, but it is almost completely besieged by pro-government forces. — AFP

Egyptian police raid press syndicate, arrest 2 journalists

CAIRO: Egyptian police raided the press syndicate in Cairo late on Sunday and arrested two journalists critical of the government, a syndicate official and reporters said in what the labour union called an unprecedented crackdown on the media.

Labour union officials said this was the first time that police had raided its building — a traditional spot in downtown Cairo for staging protests — as authorities seek to quell rising dissent against President Abdel Fattah Sisi.

The interior ministry denied officers had stormed the press labour union building but confirmed it had arrested journalists Mahmoud El Sakka and Amr Badr who work for the opposition website Bawabet Yanayer inside the syndicate.

Hundreds of officers have been deployed in central Cairo since protests erupted on April 15 against Sisi's decision to hand over two islands to Saudi Arabia, with thousands calling for the government to fall, a slogan from the 2011 Arab Spring uprising.

The protests signal that the former general, who is also under fire because of the struggling economy, no longer enjoys the broad public support that allowed him to round up thousands of opponents after he seized power in 2013.

On Sunday, journalists held a sit-in inside the union when officers arrested the two reporters, syndicate officials said.

"The press syndicate calls for the resignation of the interior minister and an open sit-in," the union said in a statement. Mahmoud Kamel, a member of the syndicate board, said over 40 policemen raided the building but the interior

ministry said its force consisted of only eight officers.

"The ministry affirms that it did not raid the syndicate or use any kind of force in arresting the two journalists who handed themselves in as soon as they were told there was an arrest warrant," the interior ministry said in a statement.

A security guard was wounded in the eye when police raided the union, Kamel said.

The state prosecutor said it had ordered the arrest of the two reporters as they were being investigated for "spreading news based on lies" and possessing fire arms and Molotov cocktails, state news agency MENA said.

"This is unprecedented, no president or prime minister or interior minister has ever dared to do something like this," Kamel said. Under the law only a prosecutor is allowed to search the union in the presence of its chairman or deputy, he added.

Dozens of journalists later held a new sit-in at the syndicate to protest against the arrest but police closed off streets to the building on Monday.

Sisi faces criticism for putting the uninhabited Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir in Saudi waters though there are no signs that his rule is under threat.

However, even local media, which once suggested he could do no wrong, have been saying the government has mishandled a series of crises, from a probe into the killing of Italian graduate student Giulio Regeni, 28, in Cairo, to a bomb that brought down a Russian airliner in the Sinai Peninsula last October.

— Reuters



PHOTO OF THE DAY
instagram.com/omanobserver



When you get used to seeing things, you stop seeing beauty. But when you change the way you see things, you will always see it back. A big shout-out to [@anfalsamsphotography](#) for sharing today's photo of the day. For a chance to be featured on this spot, follow and tag us on instagram or use [#OmanObserver](#) or [#BeAnObserver](#) so we can find your post. [#follow](#)

DIGITAL TRENDS

INTERNATIONAL



INDIAN TEEN ACCIDENTALLY SHOOTS SELF WHILE TAKING SELFIE

It's one of those things that shouldn't be happening but it does. Trending this week, an Indian teen accidentally shoots himself in the head while taking a selfie. The teen was using his father's gun as props when it exploded! Statistics released earlier this year placed India at the top of the list for selfie-related deaths.

Subscribe: [96473232](#)

LOCAL



PEOPLE IN OMAN EXCITED ABOUT NEW MALL

It's the kind of news that makes everyone lose their minds. Exciting news in Oman this week is the latest announcement made by Majid Al Futtaim. For its latest project, it is building the Mall of Oman with completion date expected in 2020.

Stories and more at [www.omanobserver.om](#)

WHAT'S UP



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Bill Nye
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Royal Oman Police
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Dear Parents: Protect your children by educating them about the dangers of chewing tobacco.

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Viral Today

You might have seen on Twitter:
#AleppolsBurning
This is what it means



The hashtag #AleppolsBurning has been going viral and trending in both Arabic and English for a number of days now. The hashtag users are trying to draw the world's attention to the crisis in Syria and in Aleppo that is facing recent air bombings. More than 240 people had been killed over the past week and many families are getting displaced. In relation to this, Facebook has also come under criticism since it did not create a Safety Check tool for Aleppo. Safety Check is an online tool that can be used by users to let others know that they are safe and sound. This tool was effectively used following the recent Paris and Brussels attacks. Thousands of social media users have vowed to deactivate their Facebook accounts or turn their profiles red in an effort to draw attention to the Syrian government's air offensive in the city. The social media giant said that "during an ongoing crisis, like war or epidemic, Safety Check in its current form is not that useful for people because there isn't a clear start or end point and, unfortunately, it's impossible to know when someone is truly 'safe!'"



OBSERVER REPORT
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Complements
When two artists meet and fall in love

When two graphic designers meet and fall in love, a new kind of project is born. But their project does not look like any set of romantic snapshots you are likely to see in a Facebook friend's engagement photo album. Every happy couple likes to keep an album full of photos and moments to remember. Brooklyn-based graphic designers Leta Sobierajski and Wade Jeffree have recently launched their own photography project that tells us how bizarre, distorted and creepy love can be sometimes. When the couple met for the first time and felt connected, they thought of expressing their love and reflect on their relationship in this project that they called, "Complements." In this humorous and oddball couple's album full of imagery, you would see faces wrapped in fishing line or pressed flat against glass, upper halves frosted as if frozen to death, dotted all over with googly eyes. The couple hope to inspire everyone by their photos and stress on the fact that a relationship is an emotional bond that can be expressed and shared by an array of feelings.

Images © Leta Sobierajski & Wade Jeffree

Facebook

Buzzing

Duchess Kate is on Vogue

Duchess Kate is on the cover of *Vogue* magazine for its centenary issue. The Duchess was photographed by Josh Olin and this was the first time that the royal consented to being shot for the magazine.

Engaging

SnapChat Vs Facebook

Snap Chat is currently working its way to becoming the social media of choice for some of the youngest app users and it has the possibility to steal the show from Facebook. Are you a fan of this social media app?

Editor's Pick

Oman Observer
Oman is making a progress "in terms of ensuring the rights of workers across the country," said the Director of General Federations of Trade Unions in Oman.

[facebook.com/omanobserver](#)

Letters to the Editor
[editor@omanobserver.om](#)

MALL OF OMAN TO BE READY IN 2020 (MAY 2, 2016)

My friends and I are looking forward to having a global mall in Oman, one that in itself can be an attraction. For a few years now, whenever people go to the Middle East, one can't help but hear Dubai Mall often. How wonderful would it be if the next thing we hear is Mall of Oman? I am hoping that whatever challenges the country is facing today, it will be challenges that can be met and exceeded. I believe in the Sultanate's capacity to triumph. I am happy that my parents brought and raised me here. God bless to everyone.

Ritika S, via email



Helicopter crash victims identified

Norwegian police said on Monday they have identified all 13 people who died last week when a helicopter carrying North Sea oil platform workers crashed on Norway's western coast.

US-EU trade deal risks emerge in leak; fears over consumer safety

SECRET DOCUMENTS: Loopholes seen in world's largest ever bilateral trade pact

BRUSSELS: A massive US-EU trade deal would harm the environment and consumer safety, Greenpeace said on Monday citing secret documents it leaked, as Brussels dismissed the release as a "storm in a teacup".

The campaign group published 248 pages online to "shine a light" on the closed-door talks to forge a so-called Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which would be the world's largest ever bilateral trade pact.

Greenpeace said the deal would place corporate interests above the environment and consumer safety, and inflict a dangerous lack of standards on US and European consumers.

"This treaty is threatening to have far reaching implications for the environment and the lives of more than 800 million citizens in the EU and US," said Greenpeace as it presented the documents in Berlin.

Washington and Brussels have been negotiating the mega-deal since 2013 and want it completed this year before US President Barack Obama leaves office, but it has faced mounting opposition on both sides of the Atlantic.

The European Commission, which negotiates trade deals on behalf of the 28 EU member states, said Greenpeace was "flatly wrong" in its interpretation of the documents.

"I am simply not in the business



(L-R) Juergen Knirsch, Volker Gassner and Stefan Krug of Greenpeace address a news conference as they present a copy of the leaked TTIP negotiations in Berlin. — Reuters

of lowering standards," said Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom in a blog. "Many of today's alarmist headlines are a storm in a teacup," she said, adding that the papers "reflect each side's negotiating position, nothing else."

In Washington, the US Trade Representative said: "The interpretations being given to these texts appear to be misleading at best and flat out wrong at worst."

In Europe, there is deep suspicion that TTIP will erode ecological and health regulations to the advantage of

big business with officials in France and Germany also increasingly voicing doubts about the deal.

Greenpeace said the papers show, for example, that the US wants to be able to scrap existing EU rules in areas such as food labelling or approval of dangerous chemicals if it they spell barriers to free trade. "TTIP is about a huge transfer of power from people to big business," the group said.

The leak, a snapshot from ongoing talks, represents two-thirds of the TTIP draft text as of the latest round of talks in



I am simply not in the business of lowering standards.

CECILIA MALMSTROM
Trade Commissioner

April, and covers a range of sectors from telecoms to autos to agriculture.

Germany's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* daily said the documents "show that the opponents' fears are not unfounded. They show that the reality of the negotiations is worse than these dark forebodings."

One of the many controversial demands is a refusal by the US to stop production of 17 American beverages that use names protected in Europe.

Another controversial TTIP proposal is the goal to set up private investor courts that would allow multinational companies to sue governments if they deem public policy to hinder the terms of the deal.

TTIP is billed as a free-trade deal for the 21st century, focused on harmonising regulations, lowering barriers on investment, opening access to government contracts and addressing new areas like data trade. — AFP

Largest fund to weigh in on executive pay controversy

OSLO: Norway's sovereign wealth fund, the biggest in the world with shares in more than 9,000 companies, will add its influential voice to those of investors increasingly concerned by executives' skyrocketing pay.

Worth nearly 7 trillion kroner (\$868 billion), the fund will lay out its stance on the thorny subject in a "position paper", a spokeswoman for the division of the Norwegian central bank responsible for managing the fund said on Monday.

"It is a theme that we will watch," Martha Skaar said.

Positions taken by the fund, which holds the equivalent of 1.3 per cent of world market capitalisation, are seen as important indicators to other investors.

The publication date of the position paper is not yet known, but it will certainly spike the interest of investors who see the Norwegian fund as a good role model, and who are irritated by the ballooning pay of some executives.

The issue has come to a head in recent weeks at some industry giants.

BP shareholders overwhelmingly rejected on April 14 a pay deal worth \$19.6 million for chief executive Bob Dudley, up from the \$16.4 million he currently receives, as the group clocked up a loss of \$6.5 billion for 2015.

And last week, Renault shareholders also said no to a pay deal for chief executive Carlos Ghosn.

"7.2 million euros for a part-timer?" thundered the Proinvest financial consultancy, which contested the remuneration, in an allusion to the fact that Ghosn also serves as head of Japanese carmaker Nissan.

While the shareholder votes were purely non-binding and will not be followed, they illustrate just how sensitive the issue is.

In a report published on April 21, international influential business figures said executive pay at major British companies sometimes rewarded failure. The following week, several British groups saw their pay deals rejected or contested by shareholders.

In Germany, Volkswagen drew public ire for paying out 63 million euros to 12 top executives for 2015, as the company suffered its first loss in more than 20 years because of an emissions-rigging scandal.

Nonetheless, negative votes like those at BP and Renault remain rare.

In France in 2015, shareholders approved pay packets 87 per cent of the time, compared to 92 per cent in 2014, according to an analysis of 95 annual general meetings conducted by the specialised magazine *L'Hebdo des AG*.

The Norwegian fund, which voted in favour of Dudley's pay raise, has not been too critical of executive pay so far.

In 91 per cent of cases, it approved the salaries paid out to the top-paid US executives in 2014, according to Norwegian financial daily *Dagens Næringsliv*.

But times are changing.

"We have so far looked at this in a way that has focused on pay structures rather than pay levels. We think, due to the way the issue of executive remuneration has developed, that we will have to look at what an appropriate level of executive remuneration is as well," Yngve Slyngstad, Chief Executive of the fund, told the *Financial Times*.

In a globalised world with highly-competitive sectors, companies are torn between the need to attract top-notch talent, and the need for moderation, especially in hard times when cutbacks are called for. — AFP

SPACE EXPLORATION

Phase two of ExoMars mission delayed to 2020

PARIS: The second part of a joint European-Russian mission to probe Mars for traces of life has been delayed two years, with a new launch date set for July 2020, officials said on Monday.

In the first phase, the European Space Agency (ESA) and its Russian counterpart, Roscosmos, hoisted in mid-March two probes bound for the Red Planet.

The Tracer Gas Orbiter (TGO) will examine Mars' atmosphere, and a lander — dubbed Schiaparelli, after a 19th-century astronomer — will settle on the planet's surface in a trial run.

The planned second stage of the mission will dispatch a European rover capable of drilling up to about seven feet into the Martian surface in search of organic matter.

Space agency officials had warned that the follow-on ExoMars mission, originally scheduled for launch in 2018, might be delayed due to technical problems and cost overruns.

"Taking into account the delays in European and Russian industrial activities and deliveries of the scientific payload, a launch in 2020 would be the best solution," both agencies said in a joint statement.

With its suite of high-tech instruments, the TGO aims to arrive at its destination on October 19 after a journey of 496 million kilometres.

Launched on a Russian Proton rocket, the craft is designed to "smell" Mars' atmosphere for gassy evidence of life, past or present.

Schiaparelli will test heat shields and parachutes in preparation for a subsequent rover landing, a feat the ESA said "remains a significant challenge". The 2020 payload will also be lifted into space by a Russian rocket.

The double ExoMars mission will complement the work of Nasa's Curiosity rover, which has been criss-crossing Mars' surface for more than three years. Space has been one of the few areas of cooperation between Moscow and the West that has not been damaged or derailed by ongoing geopolitical tension in Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere. — AFP

More than 1,000 people evacuated from Paris migrant camp

PARIS: Police evacuated more than one thousand people from a makeshift migrant camp near a Paris metro station on Monday, the third time the camp has been cleared in as many months.

Shortly after 6 am, people who had been staying in the tightly packed tents under an elevated section of the Stalingrad station in the north of Paris began boarding buses to take them to reception centres.

The evacuation passed off largely without incident, authorities said.

Although only around 500 people had been counted at the camp the night before, police said around 1,350 people had gathered there Monday to be re-located to accommodation centres, suggesting that migrants from other parts of Paris had swelled their numbers.

Around 150 police officers were involved in the operation to relocate the migrants, mostly from Sudan and Afghanistan.

"We're happy to leave," said Moustafa, a 24-year-old Afghan who had been at the camp for a month.

"There were fights every night at the camp." Another Afghan, Abdullah, said he hoped to

stay in Paris long-term. "That is where the rest of the community is and there is work here."

He said he had given up hope of reaching Britain, the country which many of his compatriots try to reach from France.

"It's a good country here," he said.

Flimsy tents were packed into a small area around the station and the overflowing rubbish bins and piles of mattresses indicated that conditions at the camp had deteriorated in recent weeks.

Jean-Francois Carencu, the prefect of the Ile de France area that includes Paris, said he expected the migrants to request asylum.

"Those who do not request asylum or who behave badly will be expelled," he said. "France is not a place for disorder and chaos."

Nearly 80,000 people applied for asylum in France in 2015, but it has been affected less than its European neighbours by the mass influx of migrants over the last 18 months.

The main migrant camp in France, the so-called 'Jungle' in the northern port of Calais, now holds around 5,000 people, according to charity workers, but the government says that figure is vastly inflated. — AFP



French gendarmes hold a man during the evacuation of a makeshift camp under the Stalingrad metro station in Paris. — AFP

Ukraine's Odessa marks 2 years since clashes

ODESSA: Ukrainian police in the tense southern city of Odessa on Monday discovered grenades near the site of commemorations marking two years since clashes between Moscow and Kiev supporters killed 48.

Street battles between armed backers of the pro-Western government in Kiev and the Kremlin in the historic Black Sea port killed six people and culminated in a building inferno in which 42 pro-Russians died.

The violence erupted at the height of Ukraine's pro-Russian eastern insurgency and sparked fears in Kiev that Moscow was preparing an all-out invasion of the former Soviet state.

That assault never came but the bloodshed ratcheted up the tensions and Russia later accused Ukraine of covering up an investigation into who was ultimately responsible for the deaths.

The two-year separatist revolt Russia denies supporting has now killed more than 9,300 people and — along with the annexation of Ukraine's strategic peninsula of Crimea — plunged Moscow's relations with the West to a



Ukrainian marines patrol the Black Sea port of Odessa during Ukraine's Navy Day on July 27, 2014. — AFP

post-Cold War low. Around 1,000 people carrying flowers and banners with pictures of the victims massed on Monday outside metal detectors set up around the square at which the worst carnage occurred.

"We will never forgive or forget," a group of several dozen pro-Russians chanted while waiting for police to allow

them into the commemoration site.

Victims' relatives eventually sent black balloons and white doves into the bright blue sky as it became clear that the riot-gear officers would not let them approach the building in which their sons and daughters died from the flames and toxic fumes.

Several also plunged to their deaths



Around 1,000 people carrying flowers and banners with pictures of the victims massed on Monday outside metal detectors set up around the square at which the worst carnage occurred

after being unable to withstand the heat of the raging blaze — made worse by the Molotov cocktails being hurled at the building by some far-right Ukrainians.

About 3,000 members of the security forces were called into Odessa as a precaution to prevent a repeat of the violence.

Those troops helped find three grenades hidden near Kulykove Pole — the square where the Trade Union House in which the pro-Russians took

refuge was torched. Police also reported making a handful of arrests but no serious altercations between two groups with diametrically opposed views of who was to blame for what happened in 2014. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said the fatal chain of events was sparked when a group of pro-Russians armed with baseball bats and guns "provoked" the participants of the pro-Ukraine rally. A Ukrainian court is so far only looking into the case of 20 suspects accused of shooting dead six people during the pro-Kiev march.

The results of a probe into who was responsible for torching the building in which the pro-Russians took shelter when chased by armed Kiev supporters have not been submitted to court.

"I urge the government of Ukraine to follow up on the recommendations of the Council of Europe International Advisory Panel and to carry out an independent and transparent investigation," Kiev's EU Ambassador Jan Tombinski said in a statement marking the anniversary. — AFP



SPIRIT OF SUMMER: A participant takes part in the annual Jack In The Green parade involving hundreds of costumed revellers to unleash the spirit of summer in Hastings, southern Britain. – Reuters



FULL BLOOM: Women photograph the flowers in St Jame's Park in London. – Reuters



RIDING THE SKY: A soldier demonstrates his skills during the opening ceremony of eighth annual Warrior Competition at the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Centre in Amman, Jordan. – Reuters



MAJESTIC: People record a water fountain show on their mobile phones in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, China. – Reuters



GINGER PROTEST: A box of ginger, representing courage and a play on words, was seen after a rally organised by journalists to protest the sacking of Ming Pao's Executive Chief Editor Keung Kwok-yuen in Hong Kong. – AFP



CITYSCAPE: The Moroccan city of Chefchaouen in the Rif mountains ranks sixth among the top ten most beautiful cities of the world, dethroning Paris which remains in the top 10 in 7th place, followed by Cape Town (South Africa). – AFP



HAPPILY WEDDED: Newlywed couples attend a mass wedding ceremony in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, China. – Reuters



business

CRUDE OIL PRICE	GOLD PRICES	CURRENCY RATES (RO 1)	GULF STOCK MARKET
Oman Crude \$ 43.31 Brent Crude \$ 47.37 Light Crude \$ 45.90	Oman 24 Kt per gram RO 16.50 Oman 22 Kt per gram RO 15.85 UAE 24 Kt per gram AED 156.50 UAE 22 Kt per gram AED 147.00	US Dollar 2.59 Euro 2.26 British Pounds 1.77 Indian Rupee 172.45 Pakistan Rupee 272.14 Philippine Peso 121.97	Muscat 5,952.10 Abu Dhabi 4,469.81 Dubai 3,385.31 Qatar 10,092.07 Kuwait 5,372.49 Bahrain 1,112.71 Saudi 6,695.95

SOURCE: MALABAR GOLD AND DIAMONDS

Working petroleum system in Block 50 confirmed: MOL

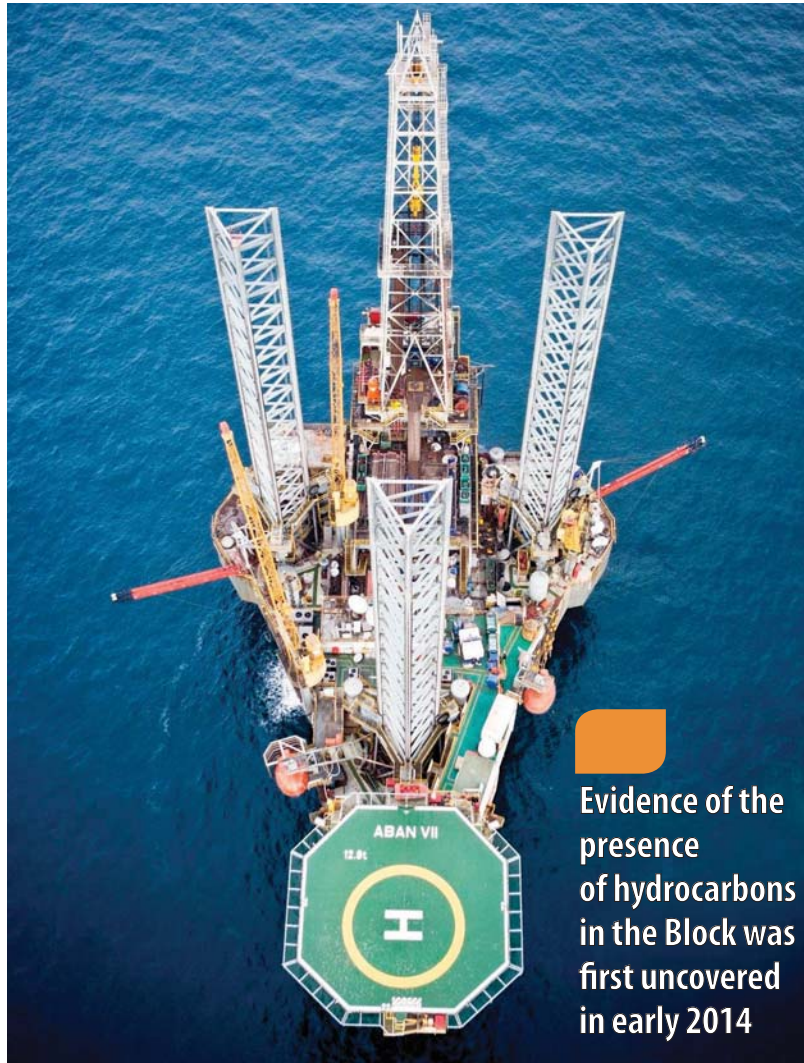
CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT

May 2: Drilling activities targeting Block 50 offshore Oman's eastern seaboard have confirmed the presence of a 'working petroleum system' in the 17,000 sq km concession — a discovery that bodes well for offshore exploration in the Sultanate.

Masirah Oil Ltd (MOL), the company that owns and operates Block 50 under an Exploration & Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) signed with the Omani government, made the announcement last week following the successful completion of the drilling of the Manarah-1 well.

Hydrocarbon shows encountered during the drilling programme proved the presence of a working petroleum system, Masirah Oil said in the statement. Analysis of a petroleum system is key to understanding how petroleum fluids form in the source rock, move to the trap where they are retained, and accumulate in the reservoir from which they are produced.

Announcing the discovery, Dr Rabi Bastia, an advisor at Masirah Oil, stated: "Manarah-1 well's confirmation of the source rock and a working petroleum system in Block 50 gives us great encouragement and important information towards our deeper understanding of the 17,000 sq km block."



Evidence of the presence of hydrocarbons in the Block was first uncovered in early 2014

Evidence of the presence of hydrocarbons in the Block was first uncovered in early 2014 when Rex International Holding, which has an effective stake of 72.03 per cent in Masirah Oil, made a stunning discovery

in GA South in the block.

During a 48-hour test, hydrocarbons were flowed to the surface and the well achieved a light oil flow rate of up to 3,000 stock tank barrels per day (stb/d) with no water production. It was the first offshore discovery east of Oman after around 30 years of exploration activity in the area.

The Block is estimated to have gross mean unrisked prospective resources of 4.7 billion barrels of oil equivalent.

According to the company, the Manarah-1 well was drilled to a target depth in excess of 3,000 metres.

The goal was to evaluate the potential in two sandstone and carbonate primary targets, as well as three secondary targets.

High gas count with oil shows were encountered in both primary targets and two of the secondary targets.

"Side wall cores were collected in another secondary target and preliminary inspection of these indicate an extremely good reservoir quality of the sand as well as source rock potential in the shale intervals. These cores will now be analysed in detail," the company added.

Despite the economic downturn, Masirah Oil says it is drawing up plans for additional wells in the area. It is also in discussion with the Ministry of Oil and Gas for an extension of the current exploration phase.

Halliburton and Baker Hughes scrap \$28 bn merger

NEW YORK: Oilfield services provider Halliburton Co and smaller rival Baker Hughes Inc announced the termination of their \$28 billion merger deal after opposition from US and European antitrust regulators.

The tie-up would have brought together the world's No. 2 and No. 3 oil services companies, raising concerns it would result in higher prices in the sector. It is the latest example of a large merger deal failing to make it to the finish line because of antitrust hurdles.

"Challenges in obtaining remaining regulatory approvals and general industry conditions that severely damaged deal economics led to the conclusion that termination is the best course of action," said Dave Lesar, chief executive of Halliburton.

The contract governing Halliburton's cash-and-stock acquisition of Baker Hughes, which was valued at \$34.6 billion when it was announced in November 2014, and is now worth about \$28 billion, expired on Saturday without an agreement by the companies to extend it, Reuters reported earlier on Sunday, citing a person familiar with the matter.

Halliburton will pay Baker Hughes a \$3.5 billion breakup fee by Wednesday as a result of the deal falling apart.

The US Justice Department filed a lawsuit last month to stop the merger, arguing it would leave only two dominant suppliers in 20 business lines in the global well drilling and oil construction services



industry, with Schlumberger NV being the other.

"The companies' decision to abandon this transaction — which would have left many oilfield service markets in the hands of a duopoly — is a victory for the US economy and for all Americans," US Attorney General Loretta Lynch said in a statement on Sunday.

The European Commission also previously expressed concerns that the deal might reduce competition and innovation.

The Justice Department and Federal Trade Commission, which enforce US antitrust law, have filed lawsuits to stop an unusually high number of deals in the past 18 months. Lynch said last month that the number of big and complex deals being proposed made it "a unique moment in antitrust enforcement."

The collapse of Halliburton's acquisition of Baker Hughes comes as both companies struggle to cope with the impact lower energy prices are having on their clients.

Last week, Baker Hughes reported a bigger-than-expected first-quarter loss and warned that the rig count globally would drop steadily through the end of the year because of fewer new projects.

Euro zone factory growth weakens

BRUSSELS: Euro zone factories did slightly better in April, with output not losing as much momentum as initially thought but growth in activity remaining weak despite the second-deepest price-cutting since early 2010, a survey showed on Monday.

The surveys paint a mixed picture of the wider economy. Manufacturing growth was strong in Italy and Spain last month and Germany showed signs of reviving, but activity in France contracted at the steepest rate in a year.

Markit's manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for the euro zone rose to just 51.7 from March's 51.6, slightly better than an earlier flash estimate of 51.5. A reading above 50 indicates growth.

"The survey is signalling an anaemic annual rate of growth of manufacturing production of just less than 1 per cent, which is half the pace seen in the months leading up to the recent slowdown," said Chris Williamson, chief economist at Markit.

"The survey data therefore so far show no signs of European Central Bank stimulus or the weaker euro helping to revive the manufacturing sector, at least for the euro area as a whole."

The euro zone economy grew 0.6 per cent quarter-on-quarter in the

- ◆ Euro zone factory PMI edged up to 51.7 in April
- ◆ Factories cut prices at second deepest rate since early 2010

January-March period, early data showed on Friday. While that was more than expected, inflation once again fell below zero last month as energy prices dropped.

What is likely to make for grim readings in the survey for ECB policymakers is the deep discounting manufacturers have to resort to in order to drum up new business, even though deflationary pressures appear to be easing slightly.



The output price index came in below the flash reading of 47.7 at 47.4, higher than March's 47.1.

However, the latest result was the second-lowest since early 2010.

A sub-index measuring output, which feeds into a composite PMI due on Wednesday and is seen as a good guide to growth, fell to 52.6 from 53.1 but was slightly better than the flash reading of 52.5.

— Reuters

Veolia wins major waste management contract

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT

May 2: Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) has awarded Veolia, through its subsidiary Veolia Middle East, and its Omani partner Al Ramooz National LLC, a contract for waste management in the Sultanate.

The seven-year contract will focus on establishing the required services across the Governorates of Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi, restructure the municipal waste collection services and improve public awareness of waste management.

The contract will include collection, transportation, and landfilling for the North West region of Oman for municipal waste and will benefit more than 250,000 inhabitants. Veolia will act as the technical leader of the contract and will operate two landfills, whereas Al Ramooz will be in charge of the waste collection and the development of a Material Recovery Facility (MRF).

This waste management contract in the Sultanate of Oman is a milestone for Veolia, its first ever contract for this activity in Oman.

This contract shows how seeking complementary local expertise can be a driver of growth. In line with the development ambition of Veolia in the region, partnership with local players



Omani joint venture partner to set up Material Recovery Facility

is pivotal for creating value in the territories and for the communities.

Xavier Joseph, CEO Veolia Middle East said, "Together with our Omani partner Al Ramooz National, Veolia looks forward to supporting Oman and its people with the best-in-class expertise in waste management. Our key focus for this contract will be to contribute to the implementation

of the best standards for the waste management operations in the Sultanate, as well as support the Omani economy through in-country value."

Tariq Ali al Amri, Chief Executive Officer of be'ah, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company, said: "We are pleased to award the contract in line with our strategy and sector takeover plan, and with our aim to provide high level services in association with an experienced international company like Veolia, which has operations around the globe."

He continued: "At be'ah, our main goals are to structure the waste sector in a sustainable manner as well as to eliminate the environmental damage incurred during traditional waste dumping processes and to support the economy."



Port of Salalah observes annual Safety Day

BUSINESS REPORTER
SALALAH

May 2: Port of Salalah celebrated its annual Safety Day with a new theme of 'Safe for you, safe for me'.

The Safety day included actions to be taken at work places to protect staff, safe systems, and procedures for using equipment, and carrying out tasks that promote safety across the whole port, including the journey to and from the place of work and protection of the family especially preventing fires at home.

The ongoing safety improvements by the port management pays particular attention to employee behaviour at all levels including training, risk assessments procedures, and general ownership, which help enhance all general principles in the port.

Some events were organised by the HSSE department which included activities like general medical check-ups, oil spill exercise, watching movies and senior management presentations. The campaign also included awareness programmes provided by Civil Defence and specialist organisations with displays and exercise's running throughout the day.

David Gledhill, CEO of POS said, "The aim of the International Safety Day is to focus on the importance of the health and safety



to protect all the port staff and contractors in addition to providing safe environment free of accidents and diseases that might cause fatalities and huge losses" Gledhill also praised the efforts of all the staff who implemented the best practices that bring positive results and achieved continuous improvement in this very important area of our business.

Ahmed Akaak, Deputy CEO of POS confirmed that "On this occasion we concentrate on enhancing the safety culture and behaviour at the workplaces." He also

said, "This comes as part of the Port intention to deepen and consolidate the concept of safety culture, and increase safety awareness. It also provides a healthy environment where the welfare of our staff continues to remain high on the agenda"

David Wilson General-Manager HSSE said the port is committed to the safety of its staff and everyone else and together with continued education and support, we can achieve positive productivity and safe working conditions, which will help, secure the future success of Port of Salalah.

Majan University College hosts InventT 2016

MUSCAT: Majan University College hosted a one-day technology-festival "InventT 2016" at its Darsait campus on April 25, 2016.

The event organised by the student council and supported by the Faculty of Information Technology had over 200 attendees from various schools across the Sultanate. "InventT 2016" provided a platform for young talented students to demonstrate their innovative, technical and creative skills. The event commenced at 9.30 am with an introductory note by Professor Vijay Nair, Head of Faculty of IT.

Over 300 students participated in diverse activities, tasks and competitions filled with learning and fun. The platform enabled students display and demonstrate their understanding of cutting edge technologies, from building and assembling PCs to putting across concepts and ideas in form of poster presentations and several hands-on IT related tasks.

One activity, "Build a PC" under time constraint was a magnificent opportunity to showcase talent and harness skills as expressed by a participant in the exercise. Successful attempts were made at creating a 3 D model of the smart house, an aspiration



in line with the country's vision illustrated in the "Poster Challenge" competition.

The "ACL challenge" and "Build a Network" was another really challenging task for the first prize winners, Sara Al-Kiyumi & Sara Al Mahrooqi. "The Quiz" with 60 participants was a showstopper. The event was witnessed by Majan students and lecturers as well as students and Principals from local schools in Muscat. The "Fix the Bug" and "Web Design" contest highlighting Muscat Smart City through e-transformation showed students' problem solving/logic

skills and revealed the potential geek instinct among them.

The venue was packed with elated participants anxious to showcase their talents and skills. The students were highly motivated and expressed their joy and happiness at getting an opportunity to exhibit their knowledge through real time practical implementation "We forgot our forth coming assessments and assignments for a while and enjoyed every moment" commented Event managers, Nahla Al Dahwi and Marwa Al Balushi.

Meethaq focus group meeting obtains valuable customer feedback

MUSCAT: Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, hosted the first focus group meeting aimed at familiarising and obtaining feedback from customers on products and services offered by the leading Islamic banking service provider in the Sultanate. The meeting held at Bank Muscat head office was attended by a large turn-out of Meethaq customers who shared valuable feedback on Meethaq products and services.

Sulaiman Al Harthy, Deputy Chief Executive Officer — Islamic Banking, said: "Meethaq is happy to host the focus group meeting to engage valuable customers in familiarisation of products and services and exchange of customer feedback. As the pioneer of Islamic banking service in the Sultanate, Meethaq is focused on contributing to the growth and development of the banking sector through innovative products and services. The bank remains committed to responsible banking and customer service excellence aimed at contributing to the country's development."

Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in the Sultanate with many achievements contributing to the growth and development of the Sultanate's economy. Meethaq extends support to all



key economic sectors with innovative Shari'a based products and is well positioned to provide Islamic financial expertise and thereby promote the good of society as a whole.

Meethaq is focused on developing as a benchmark Islamic financial institution in Oman and the region. Within just three years of operations, Meethaq has attained the leading position in the Islamic banking industry in Oman in terms of financing receivables, branch network, products and services, IT infrastructure and human resources development. Meethaq not only provides benchmark Islamic financial solutions to support the country's development but also plays a key role in

raising awareness and educating people on important aspects of Islamic banking and finance.

Meethaq offers a full suite of Islamic banking products and services, including savings account, current account, home finance, auto finance, credit card, mobile banking and internet banking. Presently, Meethaq has 18 branches across the Sultanate and plans to expand the network as well as launch new products and services to complement the unique Islamic banking experience.

The bank has invested in staff, systems and controls to ensure the service is delivered in a professional, segregated and fully Shari'a compliant manner.

BUSINESS ALERT

Duqm Refinery launches 'Science of a Refinery'

MUSCAT: Under the patronage of Shaikh Mohsin bin Hamad Al Maskary, Wali of Duqm, Duqm Refinery officially launched The 'Science of a Refinery' programme. The programme aims to instil an interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects amongst school students in Duqm and the surrounded areas.

The chief guest and other dignitaries witnessed school children being introduced to the working of a refinery in theory and then through classroom based experiments learn the core fundamentals of chemistry, physics and engineering and relate this to various processes involved in refining.

"The Science of a Refinery" programme is developed by Duqm Refinery in partnership with Engineering for Kids — Oman Branch, a venture that inspires children in STEM subjects and brings about an interest for these subjects in a fun and inspiring way that complement and enrich the existing school curriculum. The programme is delivered in partnership with Directorate-General of Education in Al Wusta Governorate. The programme is to run for three days through a total of 24 interactive workshops delivered in six schools in Wilayat of Duqm with the aims to impact 500 students aged 8 to 14 enrolled in grades 2 to 8. The programme has been deployed in Bahr Al Arab School, Duqm School, Dahar School, Ras Madraka School, Shumookh School and Haitam School.



Kia Sportage named 'Top Safety Pick+'

THE exceedingly coveted title of Top Safety Pick+ is only given to a vehicle after a rigorous testing regimen by one of the most recognised & respected vehicle safety evaluation authority in the industry — The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

Now, demonstrating Kia Motors' on-going commitment to safety and continuous improvement, the all-new 2017 Kia Sportage has earned the highest designation possible — Top Safety Pick Plus (TSP+) — from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) when equipped with optional front crash prevention. The rating reflects top scores in each of five crashworthiness tests as well as the integration of driver assistance technologies to aid in crash prevention.

"The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is one of the most recognised and respected organisations in the industry when it comes to evaluating vehicle safety, and as such, the Top Safety Pick Plus designation is a significant



achievement," said Orth Hedrick, Vice-President, Product Planning, KMA. "We are especially proud to have our all-new Sportage earn that TSP+ rating in light of IIHS' new, more challenging standards, validating the efforts of our engineers and the priority we place on safety."

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way. No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide.

Jaguar prowls the streets of Dubai in new video

TO celebrate the Middle East launch of F-PACE; Jaguar's first ever Performance SUV, the British luxury performance brand released a short video of the Jaguar F-PACE.

With the stunning Dubai cityscape as its backdrop, the montage entitled "Witness a world first with Jaguar & Burj Khalifa", sees the All-New Jaguar F-PACE prowling the instantly recognisable streets of Dubai as night falls before finishing its journey with an abrupt roar at the iconic Burj Khalifa. The film comes ahead of the eagerly anticipated world-first launch event www.jaguar-me.com/ worldfirst which will include a show-stopping LED light animation on Burj Khalifa, bringing the Jaguar F-PACE to life through a stunning creative and artistic execution.



McDonald's 20th outlet opens in Barka

MCDONALD'S Oman (Al Daud Restaurants LLC) proudly opened its newest restaurant in the heart of Barka. Located just along the main highway close to Barka Factory for Omani Halwa, the first McDonald's restaurant in Barka boasts of its world-renowned Drive-Thru, contemporary design, two-storey dining capacity, with spacious party area, PlayPlace for children and private section for families. Shown on the photo is Ali K Daud (centre), Development Licensee and President of McDonald's Oman together with



McDonald's Oman's management and staff at the recent soft opening of McDonald's Barka, the brand's 20th restaurant in Oman

The Sultan Centre announces first winner of 'Seven Cars in Seven Weeks' promotion campaign

THE Sultan Centre congratulated the first winner of its exciting promotional "Win Seven Cars in Seven Weeks" campaign."

The lucky winner of the first draw was Abdullah Salem Al Rashdi coupon number 154604.

Any customer, who spends RO 10 or more in any TSC store from April 21 till June 8th, will have an opportunity to enter the draw to win one of the 6 remaining Chevrolet Cruzes. Hurry in today, the more you shop the more chances you have to win and drive away in a new Chevrolet Cruze!!!!



Liberty House to bid for Tata Steel UK

Metals major Liberty House, founded by India-born industrialist Sanjiv Kumar Gupta, confirmed on Monday that it will formally bid for the UK assets of Tata Steel, which are on the block after Tata suffered nearly \$3 billion in losses thus far. "We can confirm that Liberty will submit a letter of intent to Tata Steel on Tuesday," a Liberty House spokesman was quoted as saying in the Financial Times.

UAE stocks lead Gulf equity slump as bank profits decline

DUBAI: Equity markets in the United Arab Emirates extended declines on speculation recent gains were overdone after earnings fell at some of the country's biggest banks.

Abu Dhabi's ADX General Index slipped for a second day, dropping 0.8 per cent to 4,506.14 at the close, the lowest level in more than two weeks. First Gulf Bank PJSC, the emirate's third-largest lender by assets, was the biggest contributor to the gauge's retreat after last week reporting a 6 per cent decline in first-quarter profit. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank PJSC, which said on Wednesday its profit fell 18 per cent, slipped a second day. Dubai's DFM General Index lost 1.3 per cent.

Most publicly-traded banks in Abu Dhabi posted declines in first-quarter profits as the fallout from low oil prices

continues to weigh on earnings. The financial results served as a reminder to investors that while crude, the main source of income for the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, has rebounded from a 2003-low in January, it remains 50 per cent below its level two years ago. Rising oil prices helped push stock gauges in UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia into bull markets.

"The UAE markets have been on a steady rally from its low back in mid-January, primarily on speculation," said Ahmed Shehada, the executive director of advisory and institutions at NBAD Securities LLC. "With the volatility in oil and first-quarter results, it's no surprise that the market is starting to lose steam." UAE shares are no longer considered cheap, he said.

Abu Dhabi shares traded at almost



12-times future earnings on Thursday, the most since December 2014. Companies on Dubai's gauge were last week trading at about 10-times expected earnings, near the highest in four months.

UAE Volumes

First Gulf Bank slid 1.5 per cent,

the most in a month, and Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank dropped 2.3 per cent. Union National Bank PJSC fell 0.6 per cent after reporting a 27 per cent decline in first-quarter profit on Thursday.

Trading volumes were depressed, with about 184 million shares changing hands on the DFM General Index,

58 per cent below the 20-day average. Trading on Abu Dhabi's main gauge was less than half the average.

Qatar's QE Index closed little changed. Aamal Co climbed 4.4 per cent after posting a 25 per cent jump in first-quarter earnings. Qatar National Bank SAQ, which last week tapped the debt market and raised \$1.1 billion, slipped 0.4 per cent.

Kuwait's SE Price Index rose 0.2 per cent and Oman's MSM 30 Index added 0.1 per cent. Markets in Bahrain and Egypt were closed for public holidays.

Saudi Maaden

Saudi Arabia's Tadawul All Share Index lost 0.8 per cent, even as Saudi Arabian Mining Co surged 9.9 per cent, the most in five years. Investors are speculating the company known as Maaden will become more profitable

as the kingdom seeks to diversify its economy away from oil. The Saudi Public Investment Fund replaced its representatives on the board and named Aramco's Khalid Al-Falih as chairman.

"Mining and minerals was one of the industries mentioned in the Vision 2030 as a sector that the government is going to invest in," said Mohammed Alsuwaidy, the Riyadh-based head of capital and money markets at Adeem Capital. "Khalid Al-Falih is a member of the Public Investment Fund board, and so that means they're probably going to restructure the company to make it more profitable."

The investment fund is a key part of Saudi Arabia's blueprint for the post-oil era, which Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced last week. — Bloomberg

Oman Air backs CBFS Youth Entrepreneurship Competition



MUSCAT: Oman Air has joined with the Muscat-based College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) to support the ongoing development of entrepreneurship amongst the young people of Oman.

The airline has accepted an invitation from the college to become a strategic partner for the CBFS Youth Entrepreneurship Competition. The competition aims to prepare students for success in an evolving Omani economy by incentivising, contributing and sustaining the success of the winning students. It culminated in a ceremony, which was held under the auspices of Hamad Al Amri, Undersecretary of Manpower, on 24th April.

As a part of its support for the

competition, Oman Air provided the winner with return tickets to Dubai. The tickets will enable them to continue their project by visiting a financial firm in Dubai to exchange skills and expertise, and to enhance their knowledge and experience.

Dr. Khalid bin Abdul Wahab al Balushi, Senior Manager Government Affairs at Oman Air, commented:

"We are pleased and proud to be supporting this important initiative, in partnership with the College of Banking and Financial Studies. The continuing success and expansion of Oman's economy depends on the entrepreneurial flair of today's students, who will go on to become the business leaders of tomorrow."

Ooredoo supports 72 SMEs at Bindera Village



MUSCAT: Proudly supporting Oman's young entrepreneurs, Ooredoo was the Gold Sponsor of the Bindera Village Exhibition, a one-of-a-kind gathering of 72 SMEs from across the GCC.

With Mohsin Al Balushi, Advisor of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry as guest of honour, 46 of Oman's most exciting start-ups, in areas including food, fashion, technology and tourism, showcased their products and services and exchanged ideas with their counterparts from around the region.

Speaking at the SME Exhibition, which was attended by a host of popular celebrities from across the region, Kumail Al Moosawi, Chief People and Corporate Affairs Officer at Ooredoo said: "The entrepreneurial spirit of the budding businesses at Bindera Village is truly inspiring."

One of the cornerstones of Oman's

economic vision for the future; our SMEs have an important role to play in the Sultanate's ongoing prosperity.

Ooredoo is delighted to support these fantastic examples of entrepreneurship as they fulfil their potential.

We look forward to continuing to support and play a part in them realising their goals and ambitions."

Also exhibiting at Bindera Village were some of Ooredoo's Incubator Programme graduates, who used the up-and-coming exhibition to build awareness and a following for their products and services.

Launched last year as part of the Ooredoo Goodwill Journey, 25 community women from Musannah underwent a series of intensive workshops where they were taught essential skills in the disciplines of IT, cooking, and sewing.

MUSCAT SECURITIES MARKET

MSM Daily Bulletin As on 02/05/2016

Regular Market																
ISIN	Security Name	Volume	Turnover	Trades	Open Price	High	Low	Close Pr.	Prev. Close	Diff (RO)	Diff %	Last Pr	Last Bid	Last Offer	Market Cap	Par Value
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	250,400	98,467	39	0.390	0.396	0.390	0.394	0.360	0.034	9.444	0.396	0.396	0.000	21,670,000	0.100
OM0000001681	OMAN AND EMIRATES INV. HOLDING	1,252,912	178,873	53	0.133	0.144	0.133	0.143	0.131	0.012	9.160	0.144	0.144	0.000	17,428,125	0.100
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIA INVESTMENT HOLDING	1,146,837	172,040	78	0.142	0.151	0.142	0.150	0.138	0.012	8.696	0.151	0.151	0.000	13,500,000	0.100
OM0000002820	GULF INVESTMENT SERVICES	561,452	74,372	56	0.129	0.135	0.129	0.132	0.126	0.006	4.762	0.130	0.130	0.132	7,767,305	0.100
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	336,389	84,026	26	0.244	0.257	0.244	0.250	0.241	0.009	3.734	0.257	0.256	0.260	72,662,755	0.100
OM0000001962	AL MADINA INVESTMENT	121,798	8,015	13	0.067	0.067	0.065	0.066	0.064	0.002	3.125	0.066	0.065	0.066	13,671,991	0.100
OM0000002366	AL BATINAH DEV. INV. HOLDING	191,600	19,474	20	0.099	0.103	0.099	0.102	0.099	0.003	3.030	0.099	0.099	0.100	3,060,000	0.100
OM0000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	60,000	70,500	4	1.175	1.175	1.175	1.175	1.170	0.005	0.427	1.175	1.180	1.195	235,000,000	0.100
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	110,000	30,055	6	0.278	0.278	0.273	0.273	0.272	0.001	0.368	0.273	0.272	0.273	27,300,000	0.100
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN	12,750	3,366	2	0.264	0.264	0.264	0.264	0.264	0.000	0.000	0.264	0.264	0.265	389,342,257	0.100
OM0000001525	OMAN INVESTMENT AND FINANCE	27,000	5,720	2	0.212	0.212	0.210	0.212	0.212	0.000	0.000	0.210	0.208	0.210	42,400,000	0.100
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	3,785,048	2,081,776	49	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.000	0.000	0.550	0.536	0.550	349,684,988	0.100
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	222,246	395,598	12	1.780	1.780	1.780	1.780	1.780	0.000	0.000	1.780	1.700	0.000	159,666,000	0.100
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	127,500	63,237	5	0.490	0.496	0.490	0.496	0.496	0.000	0.000	0.496	0.490	0.496	164,112,864	0.100
OM0000001772	AL ANHWAR HOLDING	379,076	86,751	31	0.230	0.230	0.228	0.229	0.229	0.000	0.000	0.229	0.228	0.229	34,367,175	0.100
OM0000002275	SHELL OMAN MARKETING	20,000	38,100	2	1.905	1.905	1.905	1.905	1.905	0.000	0.000	1.905	1.905	2.085	180,975,000	0.100
OM0000002549	BANK DHOFAR	351,400	89,607	13	0.255	0.255	0.255	0.255	0.255	0.000	0.000	0.255	0.250	0.255	433,296,357	0.100
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOMMUNICATION	122,310	195,724	12	1.600	1.610	1.600	1.600	1.600	0.000	0.000	1.610	1.610	1.610	1,200,000,000	0.100
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT	2,250	315	2	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.135	0.135	0.000	0.000	0.140	0.140	0.142	27,000,000	0.100
OM0000003398	BANK SOHAR	1,751,836	317,082	37	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.000	0.000	0.181	0.179	0.181	286,990,704	0.100
OM0000003661	VOLTAMP ENERGY	1,768	738	3	0.418	0.418	0.410	0.420	0.420	0.000	0.000	0.410	0.410	0.420	25,410,000	0.100
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	100,000	76,000	2	0.760	0.760	0.760	0.760	0.760	0.000	0.000	0.760	0.752	0.760	494,717,615	0.100
OM0000004669	SHARQIYAH DESALINATION	1,001,924	4,709,043	26	4.700	4.700	4.700	4.700	4.725	-0.025	-0.529	4.700	4.700	5.000	45,967,015	1.000
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	2,810,549	1,128,927	299	0.406	0.406	0.400	0.402	0.406	-0.004	-0.985	0.402	0.400	0.402	1,003,492,604	0.100
OM0000001145	PORT SERVICES CORPORATION	58,200	15,047	12	0.260	0.260	0.256	0.259	0.262	-0.003	-1.145	0.256	0.253	0.256	24,615,360	0.100
OM0000002028	GULF INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS	7,805	2,025	12	0.262	0.262	0.257	0.259	0.262	-0.003	-1.145	0.262	0.258	0.262	5,439,000	0.100
OM0000004768	AL MADINA TAKAFUL	52,624	3,947	6	0.075	0.075	0.075	0.075	0.076	-0.001	-1.316	0.075	0.074	0.075	13,125,000	0.100
OM0000002176	AL JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS	1,235,100	243,536	113	0.200	0.200	0.193	0.197	0.200	-0.003	-1.500	0.195	0.193	0.195	24,604,898	0.100
OM0000001517	HSBC BANK OMAN	571,000	68,583	25	0.125	0.125	0.119	0.120	0.122	-0.002	-1.639	0.120	0.120	0.121	240,037,535	0.100
OM0000002226	AL JAZEERA SERVICES	84,500	19,435	15	0.230	0.230	0.230	0.230	0.235	-0.005	-2.128	0.230	0.229	0.230	14,078,983	0.100
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEERING AND CON.	3,941,275	460,089	195	0.120	0.120	0.115	0.117	0.120	-0.003	-2.500	0.117	0.116	0.117	33,927,735	0.100
OM0000002846	GULF INV. SER. PREF SHARES	10,000	1,100	1	0.110	0.110	0.110	0.110	0.114	-0.004	-3.509	0.110	0.110	0.118	10,052,986	0.100
	Sum:	20,707,549	10,741,568	1,171												
	Traded Sec.			32												

Parallel Market																
ISIN	Security Name	Volume	Turnover	Trades	Open Price	High	Low	Close Pr.	Prev. Close	Diff (RO)	Diff %	Last Pr	Last Bid	Last Offer	Market Cap	Par Value
OM0000001228	OMAN HOTELS AND TOURISM	5,100	1,352	1	0.265	0.265	0.265	0.265	0.241	0.024	9.959	0.265	0.265	0.000	14,575,000	0.100
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	102,304	12,536	12	0.120	0.125	0.120	0.123	0.120	0.003	2.500	0.120	0.120	0.124	32,806,016	0.100
OM0000001566	OMAN FISHERIES	603,526	40,276	32	0.067	0.067	0.066	0.067	0.066	0.001	1.515	0.067	0.066	0.067	8,375,000	0.100
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	832,761	64,130	37	0.077	0.078	0.077	0.077	0.076	0.001	1.316	0.077	0.077	0.078	115,500,000	0.100
OM0000001475	SWEETS OF OMAN	3,100	3,751	2	1.210	1.210	1.210	1.340	1.340	0.000	0.000	1.210	0.000	1.340	9,380,000	0.100
OM0000001723	OMAN ORIX LEASING	50,000	5,850	1	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.000	0.000	0.117	0.115	0.117	29,371,610	0.100
OM0000002564	AL HASSAN ENGINEERING	525,420	52,949	33	0.102	0.102	0.099	0.101	0.101	0.000	0.000	0.099	0.099	0.100	7,596,000	0.100
OM0000004511	ALIZ ISLAMIC BANK	337,808	20,003	22	0.060	0.060	0.059	0.059	0.059	0.000	0.000	0.059	0.059	0.060	59,000,000	0.100
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	149,599	22,440	23	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.000	0.000	0.150	0.150	0.151	219,390,219	0.100
OM0000001368	CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS IND.	66,														

Dubai property giant Emaar said on Sunday its net profit increased by 17 per cent to \$328 million in the first quarter of 2016, led by "significant progress" in construction. Revenues of the group, which built the world's tallest tower Burj Khalifa, also increased by 17 per cent to 3.529 billion dirhams (\$961 million), it said in a statement.



Japan's Nikkei leads losses in limited Asian trade



A man walks past a display of market indices in Tokyo, Japan on Monday. — Reuters

TOKYO: Tokyo stocks plunged more than three per cent as a surging yen hit exporters on Monday, leading a sell-off across Asia in holiday-thinned trade and after worries about the global economy fuelled sharp losses in New York and Europe.

The losses in Tokyo come after the Bank of Japan's shock decision on Thursday not to unveil any fresh stimulus, while US data also left dealers disappointed.

By the close Japan's Nikkei was down 3.1 per cent, while Sydney shed 0.2 per cent and Wellington 0.4 per cent. Seoul lost 0.8 per cent and Manila dived two per cent. Most other markets closed for the May Day public holiday.

The yen has soared against the dollar since the BoJ decision, which came soon after the Federal Reserve indicated it was keeping its eye on market movements before hiking interest rates again.

And it remains elevated despite

Japan Finance Minister Taro Aso trying to talk it down by hinting at possible intervention if its strength continues.

He said on Saturday the rally was "extremely worrying", adding that "speculative moves are seen behind it".

"Tokyo will continue watching the market trends carefully and take actions when necessary," he said.

The greenback bought 106.50 yen on Monday, slightly up from late on Friday in New York but well down from

the levels above 111 yen before the BoJ's surprise announcement.

"We expect short-term share market volatility to remain high," Shane Oliver, the Sydney-based head of investment strategy AMP Capital Investors, told Bloomberg News.

"Failure by the BoJ to do more soon risks unwinding all the progress on inflation expectations seen under Abenomics, particularly with the yen breaking to ever higher levels," he added, referring to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's growth policy blitz.

With the yen rallying, Japan's exporters were under pressure as it reduces the value of their overseas profits. Sony and Fast Retailing each lost more than four per cent, while Toyota slipped 3.8 per cent.

Troubled car parts maker Takata plunged 9.3 per cent after reports in various media said more than 100 million vehicles equipped with air bags made by the company are likely to be subject to global recalls, up from the current 60 million.

The auto parts giant has been hammered by an exploding air bag defect blamed for at least 11 deaths.

On Sunday China released figures showing the country's factory activity eased slightly in April but continued to expand, helped by a recovery in the property market and indicating some level of stability was returning.

The selling in Asia came after US stocks ended Friday deep in the red as a weak consumer spending reading compounded a below-forecast economic growth result and an uninspiring set of

Gold in Asia trades near highest in 15 months as dollar declines

SINGAPORE: Gold held near its highest in about 15 months in Asian trading as the dollar reached the lowest level in almost a year. Palladium touched the highest since November.



Bullion for immediate delivery was little changed at \$1,292.55 at 2:16 pm in Melbourne, according to Bloomberg generic pricing. The metal closed on Friday at the highest since January 23, 2015. Gold futures for June delivery advanced on Monday as much as 0.6 per cent to \$1,298.50 an ounce on the Comex in New York.

Gold has advanced as the dollar has weakened, closing in on the psychological \$1,300 an ounce level, Australia & New Zealand Banking Group Ltd analysts including Sydney-based senior economist Jo Masters wrote on Monday in a note to clients. "The continued strength in the yen against the USD and the lacklustre earnings season has seen

investor demand remain strong in the gold market."

The Bloomberg Dollar Spot Index, which tracks the US currency against 10 major peers, fell on Monday for a third straight session to the lowest since May. The yen traded close to its strongest level in more than 18 months as concern over the global economy pares the outlook for US interest-rate increases.

Gold ETP holdings rose 1.68 tons to 1,759.1 tonnes as of Friday, data compiled by Bloomberg show. Platinum declined as much as 0.5 per cent, the most in more than a week. Palladium rose as much as 1.5 per cent, to the highest since November. — Bloomberg

corporate reports.

The Dow slipped 0.3 per cent, the S&P 500 was off 0.5 per cent and the tech-rich Nasdaq sank 0.6 per cent.

In Europe, Frankfurt gave up 2.7 per cent and Paris fell 2.8 per cent as a strong jump in euro zone growth was offset by

another fall in consumer prices that fanned worries about deflation in the bloc. London dived 1.3 per cent.

But in early trade in Europe Monday Frankfurt rose 0.5 per cent and Paris firmed 0.6 per cent. London was closed for a public holiday. — AFP

QNB says systems secure after hack attack

DOHA: Qatar National Bank said that its systems were "fully secure" following a cyber attack which potentially exposed the names and passwords of tens of thousands of customers.

In a statement released on its website, QNB also said that the hack would have "no financial impact" on its customers but admitted for the first time that clients in Qatar had been targeted.

"QNB Group's Risk Team monitored abnormal activity in our system environment, this was immediately communicated to relevant authorities," read the statement. "We also took immediate steps and our systems are fully secure and operational. The attack only targeted a portion of Qatar-based customers." The data leak, which was



reported late last month, was said to include details such as mobile phone numbers, credit card numbers and international bank transactions. Media reports claimed that a 1.4GB trove of documents was leaked online anonymously.

Among the information reportedly leaked were the bank details of several journalists working for satellite broadcaster Al-Jazeera, which has its headquarters in Doha.

Another folder leaked apparently revealed details of the work of internal and overseas intelligence agencies and the country's ruling family.

But many Qatar-based customers were left in the dark as in its only previous statement, QNB said it refused to comment on social media reports after reports of the hack circulated online. The bank's statement said some of the information released online was culled from "non-QNB sources". "While some of the data recently released in the public domain may be accurate, much of it was constructed and contains a mixture of information from the attack as well as other non-QNB sources, such as personal data from social media channels," it said. — AFP

Carrier cuts seat capacity 5.1pc in April-June quarter

Virgin Australia warns business travel cooling as election simmers

SYDNEY: Virgin Australia Holdings Ltd joined rival Qantas Airways Ltd in slashing seating capacity, warning firms like mining companies are delaying business travel during a 10-week election campaign that will fuel doubts on economic policy.

As its focuses on a return to profit after years of losses in a damaging price war, Virgin Australia said on Monday it plans to cut seats on its April-June flights by 5.1 per cent to ensure fuller flights. In April, Qantas also trimmed capacity plans citing the run-up to a likely July 2 vote.

"This environment has been impacted by weak consumer demand and sentiment, uncertainty around the federal election and the resources sector downturn," Virgin Australia Chief Executive Officer John Borghetti said in a statement. The capacity cuts add to clouds gathering since Virgin Australia's biggest shareholder, Air New Zealand Ltd, said it may sell its 26 per cent stake. The firm's shares fell 5 per cent to a two-year intra-day low.

The carriers say election campaigns mean businesses delay non-essential travel until they know the outcome.



Last month Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull named a probable election date 10 weeks out — double Australia's usual campaign length.

"It does tend to create a situation where businesses sit on their hands until they get clarity about who's in charge," said Bell Potter analyst John O'Shea. The mining slowdown is "still working its way through the system".

Sliding commodity prices have slammed the country's resources sector. As miners hold off for now on "fly in, fly out" travel — shuttling staff to and from far-flung mines — Virgin Australia will focus seat reductions on regional routes, while it works on a previously announced deal targeting that market with charter operator Alliance Aviation

Services.

Corporate travel is big business for Virgin Australia. The carrier previously set a target of reaping 30 per cent of its revenue from business travel by end-June 2017.

It declined to comment on that goal on Monday, but said it's on track to return to profit this year. It issued a forecast for pre-tax earnings of A\$30 million (\$23 million) to A\$60 million for the year to June 30 — well below the A\$79 million consensus from analysts polled by Thomson Reuters.

Still, the carrier also said earlier this year that it plans to tap its four largest shareholders for a A\$425 million loan, stoking doubt over its progress towards profitability. — Reuters

BIZ BRIEF



Air France-KLM picks Janailac as new CEO

PARIS: Air France-KLM's board of directors appointed Jean-Marc Janailac, the current head of French transport group Transdev, as the group's new chief executive following the surprise resignation of Alexandre de Juniac.

"The board has decided that Mr Janailac will be co-opted as a group director when Mr de Juniac leaves office on July 31 at the latest. He will then be appointed chairman and chief executive officer of Air France-KLM," the board said in a statement.

The appointment of 63-year-old Janailac was widely anticipated but French media had expected the announcement to come on Tuesday at the earliest.

De Juniac announced his departure on April 5 to take charge of aviation industry group IATA by the end of July. He helped Europe's second biggest airline group return to profit last year for the first time since 2008, but his four-year spell at the helm was also marked by acrimonious relations with pilots.

In its statement on Sunday, the French-Dutch airline praised successor Janailac's "knowledge of the airline industry and its customers".

"His capacity for dialogue with employees and other group stakeholders will enable him to meet the challenges that the Air France-KLM group faces," it added.

The airline's return to profits came after a major restructuring to boost productivity and a 2014 strike by Air France pilots that was one of the longest in the company's history.

The results marked a boost in fortunes for Air France after images of two of its executives, their shirts ripped by staff in an angry protest over redundancies, made world headlines last October.

Management in January unveiled a new 2017-2020 growth plan that will include 1,600 voluntary departures by the end of next year, according to union sources. — AFP

Mitsubishi Motors minicar sales plunge

TOKYO: Sales of scandal-plagued Mitsubishi Motors' minicar stumbled in April after the Japanese carmaker acknowledged it had manipulated data on fuel economy tests, an industry association said on Monday.

Japan's sixth-largest carmaker saw its sales of minicars fall 44.7 per cent from a year earlier to 1,477 vehicles in April, according to the Japan Light Motor Vehicle and Motorcycle Association.

Sales of Nissan Motor's minicars dived 51.2 per cent to 5,574 units as some of its vehicles are manufactured by Mitsubishi, the association said. Minicars or mini vehicles have engines with a capacity no larger than 660 cubic centimetres.

Mitsubishi, which also produces the Pajero sport-utility vehicle and the i-MiEV electric car, admitted last month it had falsified data on fuel economy tests since 1991 for four minicar models to present better fuel consumption rates than the actual rates. Since the revelation, Mitsubishi Motors has suspended production of the models at a plant in Kurashiki city, Okayama prefecture.

The production halt is expected to last for at least several months, Jiji Press reported, citing unnamed sources.

The company was also considering pay cuts for 1,300 employees in-charge of the production of the affected models at the plant, Jiji said.

The carmaker said last week it would form a committee of outside experts to further investigate the scandal. — dpa



French Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron (R) shakes hand with a worker during a visit within the inauguration of IDEES group's new factory IDEM, that produces cellulose wadding from cardboard, on Monday, in Fagnes central-eastern France. IDEES group is one of the French leaders of people's integration through the economic sector. — AFP

Australia's Westpac Bank interim profit up

SYDNEY: Australian banking heavyweight Westpac posted a three per cent rise in interim net profit on Monday despite a volatile environment at a time of regulatory changes and bad debt fears. Westpac's Aus\$3.70 billion (\$2.81 billion) result in the six months to March 31 kicked off a week of half-year reporting from the nation's top lenders, which all face similar concerns. It comes as slumping commodity prices squeeze Australia's resources companies, causing worries for banks that have lent them billions of dollars. The banks are also juggling new rules by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority that demand they hold more reserves as a buffer against mortgages — part of a global effort after the 2008-9 financial crisis.

Westpac's cash profit, the industry's preferred measure which strips out volatile items, was Aus\$3.90 billion, slightly below expectations.

Chief Executive Brian Hartzler said the result was sound, given the environment. "Westpac remains well-placed to respond to this challenging environment," he said. "We have strengthened our balance sheet and made good progress implementing our strategy to build one of the world's great service companies by investing in growth, service, and productivity initiatives." In response to the regulatory changes, the bank raised around Aus\$6.0 billion in equity over calendar 2015 which Hartzler said had "materially strengthened the group's capital base", but impacted earnings per share. — AFP

FINANCIAL MARKETS

Expected investment strategies in the coming period



LO'AL BATAINAH
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The interest rates on the US dollar remained unchanged by the US Federal Reserve, as expected, despite the data released on the improvement of the US labour market. The moves is attributed to the fact that the US economy is not yet ready for such changes on the interest rates. The interest rates remained close to 0.25 per cent 0.50 per cent.

At the same time, the Saudi government unveiled its '2030' vision, which included a number of points, the most notable of which are increasing the non-oil revenues by more than 550 per cent and offering less than 5 per cent of Aramco for public subscription, which is expected to bring about \$2 trillion. The plan also includes increasing the assets of the general investment fund from SR600 billion to SR700 trillion and lifting the foreign direct investment from 3.8 per cent to 5.7 per cent.

The IMF reduced its forecasts for the Gulf economy growth from 3.3 per cent in 2015 to 1.8 per cent in 2016 due to the fiscal policies, lack of confidence by

the private sector and declining banking liquidity.

Over the past twenty-five years, the Gulf governments implemented many development plans and endeavours to maintain the levels of public expenditure high and increase financial expenditure on the infrastructure to improve the standards of living of their citizens. Many analysts and economic, especially in the past 18 months, have questioned the outcomes of these plans especially in light of the oil price slump and the ballooning deficit.

The public spending and economic recovery have been among the main reasons for the growth of financial market. This has been very clear over the past four weeks where confidence in the market and the performance of the listed companies climbed again supported by the macroeconomics of the Gulf countries.

The date released about the performance of Gulf banks point out to the growth in credit provided by the commercial banks to the private sector. Initial consolidated figures of the Omani commercial bank listed in the stock market point out to a growth in the credit portfolio. (+4 per cent on quarterly basis and +11.4 per cent year to year basis) at the first quarter of this year. The deposits also grew by 3 per cent quarter to quarter basis and 5 per cent on annual basis. In general the loan to deposit ratio stood at 102 per cent at the first quarter of this year compared to 101 per cent at the previous quarter and



96 per cent at the corresponding quarter last year. This means that the Omani banks continue their credit operation despite the fears highlighted by the credit rating agencies about the ability to continue their normal credit operations due to declining businesses by some sectors especially oil and gas and the remarkable decline in the government deposits. This raised doubts about the ability of the government to augment the operations of the commercial banks. I believe this was compensated by the good performance of the private sector activities.

The main challenge for the financial markets is to have the ability to activate

the banking liquidity. The good liquidity indicator and easy access to credit will surely drive the market upward and will lead to better performance of some stocks compared to their current level. Listed companies, as well as unlisted companies, are expected to foster gains. Still, companies will remain cautious during the second half of 2016 after the sluggish growth of the economies in the region and the regional unrest which may add to the pressures on the stocks and the performance at the market.

The market is watchful for the decision, plans and strategies that will be implemented by managers of investment funds especially after disclosing the

cash and stock dividend in the Gulf stock markets. The results unveiled by the UAE, Oman and Saudi markets are promising and assuring especially if we take into consideration the decline in some activities and operations as well as the halt of many products and services until the picture in the region become clearer.

Analysts are expected to analyse the performance of many companies and the outcome of such analysis will have a direct effect on the investment strategies that will be pursued throughout the year.

There are three main factors that affect the strategies that will be pursued by managers of investments and investment funds in the Gulf region namely oil prices, how the deficit will be financed and whether the planned projects will be implemented or shelved.

If the services of the financial and service sector have been sought to meet the needs of the upcoming projects the best strategy will thus be to invest in financial and banking sector as well as the service sector as both sectors are expected to benefit from the future circumstances and the expansions they have made earlier.

In terms of performance, the financial and service sector have been the best. The two sectors are also the best in terms of stability and security. Moreover, the two sectors play a key role in the growth of the modern Gulf economies therefore the governments in the region, especially in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman will augment this sector.

“When we consider any strategy for investment, we should try to remain away as possible from any sector or business or a product whose demand may go down due to the economic downturn.”

When we consider any strategy for investment, we should try to remain away as possible from any sector or business or a product whose demand may go down due to the economic downturn.

We have to bear in mind as well to be away from the states and economic with high debts ratio to the GDP and with high deficit ratios to the GDP. We need to consider carefully the ability of these companies and economies to reduce their debts and service for such debts especially at a time the major companies are witnessing downturn of their businesses and the value of their assets go down as well. In such scenario, the strength of these companies and profitability will go down and therefore their contribution to the revenues at these economies- through tax paying and employment of manpower, will go down as well.

(A number of researches, studies, articles and opinions have been used in brief in this article.)

HOUSE RENTAL

Berlin cracks down on Airbnb rentals to cool property market

Berlin from Sunday began restricting private property rentals through Airbnb and similar online platforms, threatening hefty fines in a controversial move meant to keep housing affordable for locals.

The German capital fears that the growing trend of people letting out apartments to tourists through sites such as Airbnb, Wimdu and 9Flats is cutting into a limited property supply and driving up rents.

From May 1, the city-state will enact a new law known by the German mouthful of “Zweckentfremdungsverbot”, or prohibition of improper use.

It is “a necessary and sensible instrument against the housing shortage in Berlin,” said Andreas Geisel, Berlin’s head of urban development.

“I am absolutely determined to return such misappropriated apartments to the people of Berlin and to newcomers,” he said.

Rents in Berlin shot up 56 per cent between 2009 and 2014, although at around 10 euros per square metre this year, they are relatively low compared to other major European cities.

Given that it is more profitable to rent out whole apartments for short holiday lets, some investors are holding on to apartments for such rentals rather than having long-term tenants.

San Francisco-based Airbnb.com — short for the business’s original name AirBed & Breakfast — is the biggest of several sites that allow people to offer and find such rental accommodation worldwide.

While Berlin has become one of Europe’s top travel destinations, with 30.2 million overnight stays last year, the Airbnb trend has also impacted the local hotel industry.

According to research firm GBI, the private online bookings represent a “parallel market of an additional 6.1 million” overnight stays a year.



The new law was passed in 2014 and provided for a two-year transition period that ended on April 30, after which owners are only allowed to rent out rooms via such portals, not entire flats or houses.

Offenders can face fines of up to 100,000 euros (\$113,000).

To catch them, the city has even appealed to the “civic spirit” of its residents and asked them to anonymously report any suspected misuse online.

Tim Boening, a 41-year-old artists’ agent who rents out a loft in the trendy Kreuzberg district, said he wasn’t shocked by the new law, given the practices he has witnessed.

There is, for example, “the nice couple with two small apartments who move in together into a bigger place and keep the two apartments to rent them out on Airbnb,” he said.

“I don’t think that’s good, it should be stopped,” he said, as these apartments are not available to “normal” tenants.

Marika, 48, couldn’t agree less and is furious about the change, having long rented out four apartments near the

“We will continue to encourage Berlin policy-makers to listen to their citizens and to follow the example of other big cities... and create new, clear rules for normal people who are sharing their own homes.”

JULIAN TRAUTWEIN
Airbnb spokesman

centre of Berlin via Airbnb.

She believed that the city is making Berliners pay for its failed housing policy while serving the needs of the hotel industry.

The only impact, she argued, would be that some groups, especially families, will simply stay away.

She was especially angry about the request to turn in offenders, saying that “in Germany, of all places, maybe we should reconsider this kind of thing,” in

reference to the Nazi and former East German communist dictatorship in which denouncing others was common practice.

Airbnb Germany said, “Berliners want clear and simple rules for home sharing, so they can continue to share their own home with guests”.

The practice differs from other types of accommodation “and helps many Berliners pay their rent,” spokesman Julian Trautwein said in a statement.

“We will continue to encourage Berlin policy-makers to listen to their citizens and to follow the example of other big cities such as Paris, London, Amsterdam or Hamburg and create new, clear rules for normal people who are sharing their own homes.”

Wimdu has meanwhile filed a suit, arguing the law breaches the constitution of the city-state of Berlin.

And the owners of start-up 9Flats said they had sold the brand to a Singapore company.

“We face a law in Berlin that would drive us into bankruptcy,” its boss Roman Bach told the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. — AFP

PALM OIL BAN

Indonesia takes aim at palm oil operations after forest fires

Indonesia is pushing to ban new palm oil operations after last year’s haze-belching forest fires were partly blamed on the industry’s expansion, but producers are warning the move could hit the economy and green groups are sceptical.

President Joko Widodo in April proposed a halt on granting new land for palm oil plantations in the world’s top producer of the edible vegetable oil, a key ingredient in many everyday goods, from biscuits to shampoo and make-up.

In a statement, he said that “palm oil concessions available at the moment are already adequate” and urged producers to concentrate on using better seeds to increase their yields.

Plantations on Sumatra island and the Indonesian part of Borneo have expanded in recent years as demand for palm oil has skyrocketed, bringing huge profits to companies and healthy tax revenues to the government.

But the rapid growth has been blamed for the destruction of tropical forests that are home to many endangered species, and forest fires that occur every year during the dry season due to illegal slash-and-burn clearance. The 2015 blazes were the most serious for some years, worsened by dry weather caused by an El Nino phenomenon, and cloaked large stretches of Southeast Asia in toxic smog for weeks, causing hundreds of thousands to fall ill, disrupting air travel and fuelling anger at Jakarta.



The proposed moratorium on new concessions is the latest move by Widodo aimed at reducing environmental destruction caused by the industry and halting the annual smog outbreaks.

But the Indonesian Palm Oil Association warned that the ban could damage a mainstay of Southeast Asia’s biggest economy that supports 24 million jobs, directly or indirectly. “Palm oil is a strategic sector which contributed \$19 billion in exports in 2015,” said Tofan Madji, a spokesman for the group, which represents some 650 companies.

“It contributes to economic growth, especially in remote areas.” Activists were cautious about the proposal, with Greenpeace Indonesia warning it would not be effective unless the government introduces a tough regulation, rather than just a weaker “presidential instruction”.

The details of the proposed moratorium are still being discussed, and it is not yet clear when it will be adopted, the environment ministry said. Kiki Taufik, Greenpeace Indonesia forest campaigner, also warned of implementation problems as various parts of government would need to work together for a ban to operate smoothly.

“This is probably one of the hardest parts. Lack of coordination among officials is common and it often leads to bad implementation of regulations,” Taufik said.

Implementation of laws is also difficult due to heavily decentralisation of power across the archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, with rules set in Jakarta often flouted by local administrations. — AFP

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GIS analyst 8 years experience, MSc geoinformatics seeks suitable placement in telecommunication, construction, utility mapping, oil and gas, cartography and survey presently on visit visa. ☎92952486, 92527897.

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.....

INDIAN male 23, B.Com, IATA (Cargo), 1 year experience, good computer skills, looking for suitable position in cargo/ admin/accounts/back office job. ☎97826180, nihalsiddheque@gmail.com

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INDIAN male (male 26), 3 years experience in Noor Islamic Bank (UAE), 1 year HR Coordinator looking for suitable placement. ☎901462412, mabeenkottakaran@gmail.com

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GULF experienced Indian graphic designer, familiar in Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Coral Draw looking for immediate placement. Contact ☎96397486, www.karloanthony.portfoliobox.net

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INDIAN male 25, 2 years experience in UAE. B.Com, good computer skills, looking for suitable position in auto spare parts/sales. Knows all catalogues like Toyota, Nissan, Suzuki etc. Currently on visit. ☎909694804. e-mail: fahu.fahadk56@gmail.com

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INDIAN Commerce graduate with MBA Finance, having 9 years experience seeks suitable placement. Contact ☎0096893655079, 00919916317946

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INDIAN male, 29 years, BSc graduate with Omani driving licence and 7 years of sales experience in home appliances, IT products, mobile and traffic safety equipment. Currently working on employment visa, NOC available, seeking for suitable placement immediately. ☎97890607. Email: ashrafambar@gmail.com

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AN MBA with more than 10 years of sales & marketing experience in Gulf and 1.6 years in Oman in electronics & appliances division. Having Omani driving licence, NOC available. ☎91298641

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INDIAN female, IT graduate, BE (Hons) Systems Administration with 2 years experience in teaching, seeks suitable position in education/training industry, communication. ☎96447091. fatimahaq24@outlook.com

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ACCOUNTANT (Indian female, 30 years), well experienced, B.Com with computerised accounting packages, presently on family visa, looking for a job in Salalah. ☎99087175.

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INDIAN male, 22 years, mechanical engineer, fresher, looking for a placement in any mechanical field. Contact ☎95020044.

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BATCHING Plant Operator, 15 years experience in UAE and Qatar, seeks immediate placement in Oman. Contact for details: ☎99264294 Mohanan.

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ASSISTANT purchase manager, 9 years experience in Oman in construction companies. Computer skills driving licence marketing experience. ☎98894178.

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INDIAN male (23) commerce graduate, 1 year experience holding Omani licence, looking for suitable placement in marketing, sales, admin and accountant. ☎97433177, 99723207. Email: agharakv@gmail.com

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INDIAN male, 26 years accountant, 3 years experience in Oman with Omani driving licence, NOC available seeking for suitable position. ☎94282980. E-mail: msjob4578@gmail.com

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INDIAN female, MBA (25) seeking job in marketing, finance, administration, knowledge of Tally ERP 9, having 1 year marketing experience. Contact ☎95910427. E-mail: ritashivprasad111@gmail.com

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B Tech Mechanical Engineer having 3 years experience in maintenance and commissioning in an engineering services company. On visit visa looking for suitable placement. ☎91106765. E-mail: tamooraslam123@yahoo.com

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Threat of \$227 bn power market breakup is pain for traders



Contested Power Market

April 2015: Polish, Czech regulator seeks European energy regulator ACER's opinion on trading limits between Germany, Austria, which results in unplanned flows through Poland, Czech Republic increasing costs, blackout risks.
May 2015: German regulator uses market split scenario in reserve plant forecast.
Sept 2015: ACER backs breakup of German-Austria market zone with non-binding recommendation
Dec 2015: Austrian regulator E-Control's appeal against recommendation by ACER dismissed
Jan 2016: Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria decide on more remedies to curb unplanned flows, but can't agree on market split
March 2016: Germany, Austria fail to sign agreement to limit trading at their border

FRANKFURT: Germany and Austria's prospective breakup of their shared 200 billion euro (\$227 billion) power market is vexing traders and companies that say splitting the union will push up manufacturing costs and drive away investment.

Lechwerke AG, a German utility, is resisting supplying its Austrian clients with longer-dated power contracts because it doesn't know how much to charge them if the 14-year-old market disappears, according to Thomas Reitemann, the head of power procurement at the Augsburg-based company. Mondi Plc, a paper maker with production in Austria, estimates a split will push up the country's power prices by as much as 15 per cent and

stifle competitiveness.

Today, prices are the same in both countries and electricity flows freely across the border. On gusty days, supplies from German wind farms to Austrian users can be more than their cables can handle, forcing power to take indirect routes through neighbouring countries and risking blackouts. Germany says splitting the market will help reduce the 1 billion euros the nation's grid companies spent keeping their networks balanced last year.

"A power market split would be an additional burden for Austria as an industry location," said Stefan Doboczkzy, the Chief Executive Officer of Lenzing AG, an Austrian cellulose-

fibre maker. "This influences decisions about where we will make further investments — in Austria or abroad."

By controlling cross-border trade, German regulator Bundesnetzagentur estimates that network operators would only need about a third of the 6.1 gigawatts of power plant capacity they keep on standby for balancing the grid. The total cost of keeping the nation's network safe may exceed 1.5 billion euros in the coming years, according to the country's economy ministry.

Bundesnetzagentur is to publish a report on Monday detailing how a split from 2018 will reduce costs and increase grid stability, the watchdog said by email, without providing details.

Germany wants to reduce trading to what can be physically transported over the network, which is the case with most other European borders, Katharina Dubel, a spokeswoman at the German economy ministry, said by email. For more than a decade, Austrian traders have bought German electricity when it's cheap to sell to other countries at higher prices.

The nations failed to agree on a proposal favoured by Germany to limit the amount of traded capacity at the border in March. Bundesnetzagentur is still seeking a common solution with Austria, it has said.

No Limits

The Austrian regulator doesn't see trading limits as the "most efficient

and effective solution," Bettina Ometzberger, a spokeswoman at E-Control in Vienna, said by e-mail. She declined to comment on the negotiations, which are still going on.

Without unlimited access to cheap electricity from Germany, Austrian households and companies may have to pay an extra 300 million euros a year in power costs, according to an estimate by consultants Frontier Economics and Consentec, which also see Austrian wholesale prices rising about 15 per cent on a split.

More than 200 billion euros of contracts for delivery into the German-Austrian market were traded on exchanges and through brokers last year, making it Europe's biggest

electricity market, and making it the benchmark price for power in the region.

Utilities are already trying to include clauses in customer contracts that pass on any extra costs that arise from a market breakup, according to Rene Stadler, head of energy at Mondi in Vienna.

The split runs counter to European Union's vision of a single power market, with improved cross-border connections, better integration of renewable supplies and investment in energy infrastructure. "Only a few utilities profit from the regional nature of markets, while many customers can benefit from a European energy market," Stadler said. — **Bloomberg**

Oil delivery start-ups want to fill up your car anywhere. Is that allowed?

SAN FRANCISCO: A new crop of start-ups are trying to make gas stations obsolete. Tap an app, and they'll bring the gas to you, filling up your car while you're at work, eating breakfast, or watching Netflix. Fild, WeFuel, Yoshi, Purple and Booster Fuels have started operating in a few cities including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Palo Alto, Nashville, Tennessee, Atlanta and Georgia. But officials in some of those cities say that driving around in a pick-up truck with hundreds of gallons of gasoline might not be safe.

"It is not permitted," said Lt Jonathan Baxter, a spokesman for the San Francisco fire department. Baxter said if San Francisco residents see any companies fuelling vehicles in the city, they should call the fire department.

Yoshi, which operates in San Francisco, was surprised to hear Baxter's concerns. "We haven't talked to me. I don't know about that. It's news to me," said co-founder Nick Alexander. The next day, he said he believed Yoshi was following the law and that it had been careful to limit the size of their gas tanks to stay under limits outlined in the International Fire Code, a guideline followed by many US states.

Fild, an 18-month-old start-up with thousands of customers in Silicon Valley, plans to start service in San Francisco on Monday, deploying three delivery trucks at 1 pm. "You can never ask for permission because no one will give it," said Chris Aubuchon, the Chief Executive Officer at Fild.

The Los Angeles Fire Department said it's drafting a policy around gasoline delivery. "Our current fire code does not allow this process; however, we are exploring a way this could be allowed with some restrictions," said Capt Daniel Curry, a spokesman for the city's fire department. "It's just one of these things that nobody has really thought about before — kind of



COO and Co-founder Scott Hempy of Fild, a start-up that brings on demand gasoline delivery directly to customers, fills up a customer's tank in the parking lot of the Sunnyvale CalTrain station in Sunnyvale, California. — **Bloomberg**

like how Uber popped up out of nowhere." But he said it's not a gray area: "All I can tell you at this time is it's not allowed as per our current fire code."

Bruno Uzzan, the CEO of Los Angeles-based Purple, said his company is in discussions with the fire department. "I don't know that guy," he said of Curry. When asked if Purple would stop delivering gas, he replied, "No. Why should we?" Later, Bruno said, "The way we currently operate is permitted by the code."

In the San Francisco Bay Area, Booster Fuels told customers in February that it was halting fuel delivery there at the behest of the Santa Clara Fire Department. The company said the city is reviewing its permit application. Fild's Aubuchon said that fire department also told his company

to cease operations in the county. But Fild has continued operating. "We basically said, 'We strive to be safe in every way to the consumer, and this is exactly what we do, and we welcome dialog,'" he said. "If it was illegal, they would have and should have told us many months ago."

On a recent Monday morning, about 40 miles south of San Francisco, Aubuchon carefully drove a Ford F-250 pick-up truck with 324 gallons of gasoline into a hospital parking garage in Palo Alto. The truck — also loaded with a gas pump, two fire extinguishers, a bucket of chalk to absorb spills, two orange traffic cones and a receipt printer — nearly grazed the ceiling of the garage as its radio antenna whipped around. Aubuchon was looking for a silver Mini Cooper.

After a few wrong turns, he found it. The tiny car's gas flap was, to his relief, open. Aubuchon unrolled the gas hose from a spindle in the truck bed, clutched the handle of the fuel nozzle, stuck it in the car's tank and began filling the Mini Cooper. After six gallons, the car's tank clicked. A printer in truck's cab spit out a paper receipt, and he transmitted an electronic receipt to the owner of the Mini Cooper. Then he packed up his supplies and drove away.

Construction companies, farmers and even some isolated homes have been paying fuel delivery companies to deliver large quantities of diesel fuel and sometimes gasoline for years. But lugging hundreds of gallons of gas through residential neighbourhoods to fill up people's cars while they sleep is new. — **Bloomberg**



ECB deep freeze on 500 euro note risks German cold shoulder

FRANKFURT: When European Central Bank policy makers discuss the fate of the 500 euro note this week, they may want to consider the case of Fabio Rizzo.

After the local politician in the Italian region of Lombardy was arrested on corruption charges in February, police found more than 17,000 euros (\$19,500) including 500- and 200-euro bank notes stashed in his home, according to the arrest warrant. Some of the cash had been hidden in Rizzo's freezer, press reports confirmed by his lawyer Monica Alberti said.

While holding large amounts of cash is itself not a crime and Rizzo has not yet been convicted of one, the case strengthens the image already present in policy circles that large-denomination notes are used only by those up to no good. The European Central Bank may decide as soon as Wednesday to start phasing the 500 out, even though it faces suspicion in German-speaking countries that by doing so officials are trying to abolish cash altogether.

"The whole debate has a certain taste to it. The argument that it is used in the shadow economy won't cut it, as you can easily find substitutes," said Stefan Schneider, Chief International Economist at Deutsche Bank AG in Frankfurt. "And in Germany, at a time when trust in the ECB is at record lows, it will certainly be seen as a further step in the direction of the removal of cash."

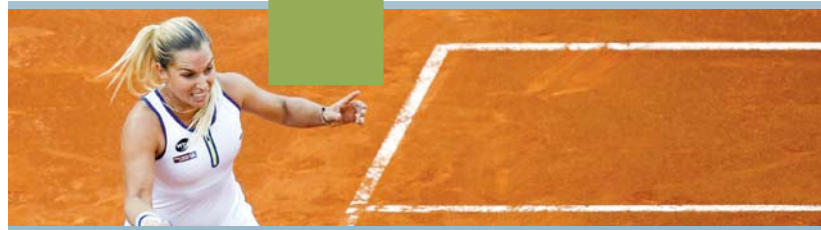
Reasons for the unease over changes to the composition of cash in Germany, Austria and Luxembourg range from a simple preference for an anonymous payment method to the fear that if cash is abolished altogether, central bankers can drive interest rates on bank deposits further below zero. Without adequate denominations of physical money, it's more difficult for the public to withdraw their savings in defence.

That said, most Europeans would hardly notice if the bank note were to disappear. The 500 euro is rarely used in daily transactions; in Spain it has even been nicknamed "Bin Laden" for its elusiveness. Cashing in 500 euro notes "is a mess," an acquaintance complains to Rizzo according to the document. Bank clerks "complain about 200 euro notes. What do you do with the 500 euro big bills you have upstairs?"

Bank of Italy data show that 500 euro notes circulate in the country's economy only infrequently. — **Bloomberg**



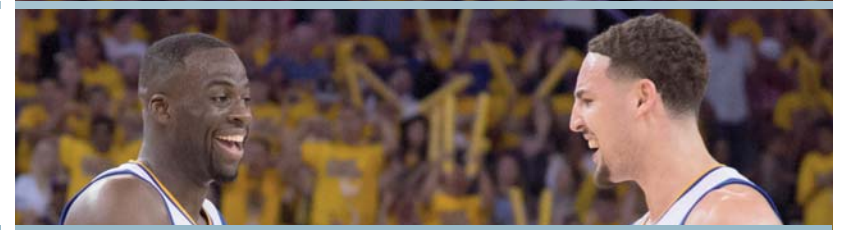
SPORT



CIBULKOVA, STRYCOVA UPSET TOP SEEDS P26



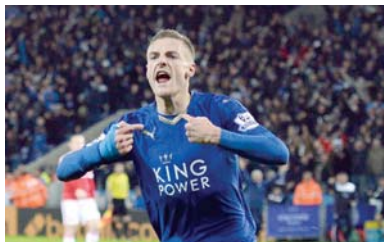
ROHIT, BOWLERS EARN THIRD STRAIGHT WIN FOR MI P27



WARRIORS KEEP CRUISING P28

SPORT BRIEFS

Leicester's Vardy gets top award



LONDON: Leicester City forward Jamie Vardy has been voted the 2016 Footballer of the Year by the Football Writers' Association (FWA), it was announced on Monday.

The 29-year-old striker took the award as a clear winner ahead of team-mates Riyad Mahrez, who had already taken the Player of the Year award voted on by his fellow professionals, and N'Golo Kante.

Vardy has scored 24 goals for club and country so far this season as the Foxes close in on what would be a remarkable Premier League title triumph. Vardy will be honoured with the prestigious FWA accolade, which has been running since 1948, at a gala dinner in London on May 12.

Other players to receive votes from FWA members were Tottenham striker Harry Kane, West Ham playmaker Dimitri Payet, Manchester City duo Sergio Agüero and Kevin de Bruyne as well as Spurs midfielder Dele Alli. Vardy said: "It's a great honour to win such a prestigious award and to have my name added to a list of previous winners that includes some unbelievable players."

The England striker added: "We're all totally focused on getting over the line in the final two weeks of the season and turning a great season into one we'll never forget." — AFP

Benatia threatens to quit if Bayern sign Hummels

BERLIN: Morocco captain Mehdi Benatia has threatened to leave Bayern Munich if they sign fellow centre-back Mats Hummels from rivals Borussia Dortmund for next season.

Hummels, 27, has told Dortmund he wants to leave with a year left on his contract and Bayern have confirmed they are negotiating to bring the Germany star to Munich.

But Benatia, 29, is unimpressed by the prospect of having to battle with Hummels for one of the centre-back berths at Bayern and has criticised the Bavarian giants.

"Bayern are negotiating with Hummels. If I should go, then I'll go," Benatia told Sky Italia. — AFP

Kvyat future in doubt after Sochi 'disaster'



Red Bull driver Daniil Kvyat of Russia drives during the Russian Grand Prix in Sochi. — Reuters

SOCHI, Russia: Daniil Kvyat's future with Red Bull was cast into doubt on Monday when the team said they would summon him for talks on his role in the multiple-collision that wrecked their ambitions in Sunday's Russian Grand Prix.

The Russian racer rammed into the Ferrari of former Red Bull hero, four-time world champion German Sebastian Vettel, twice on the opening lap of an eventful race won by Nico Rosberg of Mercedes. Vettel and two other drivers were forced to retire on the opening lap and both Kvyat and his Red Bull team-mate Australian Daniel Ricciardo's cars suffered severe damage.

They continued, but finished out of the points adrift of victorious German Nico Rosberg who won ahead of his Mercedes team-mate defending champion Briton Lewis Hamilton. Rosberg now leads Hamilton by 43 points in the title race.

It was Rosberg's fourth straight win this season and seventh in succession, including three last year, and was a disastrous day for the chasing pack including the Ferrari and Red Bull teams.

Red Bull boss Christian Horner apologised to Vettel and Ferrari for Kvyat's impetuous driving in Turns



Cars of Ferrari driver Sebastian Vettel of Germany and Force India driver Nico Hulkenberg of Germany are pictured after the crash. — Reuters

Two and Three and the Russian afterwards apologised to Vettel and 'everyone involved' for his reckless moves.

After the race, Red Bull's motorsport advisor Austrian Helmut Marko, the hard-headed consultant who oversees the team for Red Bull owner Dieter Mateschitz, made clear his displeasure.

"Let's put it this way," he said. "Kvyat was over-motivated. Braking too late once and hitting another car would be acceptable in front of his home crowd, but this doesn't apply for the second crash."

"It's a pity because he not only ruined Vettel's race — and Ricciardo's race — but also his own race. He had to do an extra stop. It was a day of disaster for Red Bull."

It was the second successive race in which Kvyat had crashed into Vettel, having angered the German by careering into his car the start of the Chinese Grand Prix two weeks earlier.

Marko added that, contrary to the collision in Shanghai where he felt Kvyat's aggression had been acceptable, he said: "This time, in contrast to Shanghai, I understand him (Vettel) completely—he is right to be so angry."

He said the team did not want to discuss the matter in detail in Sochi because emotions were too high. Ricciardo had demanded an apology from Kvyat after the race and the Russian said he spoke to Vettel by phone. "Let's cool down a bit," said Marko. "During the week, we will talk about this."

Although Finn Kimi Raikkonen finished third for Ferrari, it was only a consolation to the team after the loss of Vettel in an atmosphere of rising pressure as they labour to keep pace with Mercedes.

Red Bull have also made clear they have ambitions to close the gap and revive their former glories and have hinted that driver changes are likely.

The huge potential of Dutch teenager Max Verstappen and his team-mate Spaniard Carlos Sainz at the Red Bull 'sister' and 'feeder' team Toro Rosso are under close observation with a view to one of them stepping up — as both Ricciardo and Kvyat did.

The competitive tensions between all four drivers are intense and have become so strong at Toro Rosso that the team recruited the vastly-experienced former Manor team boss John Booth to assist in their management as a consultant director of racing.

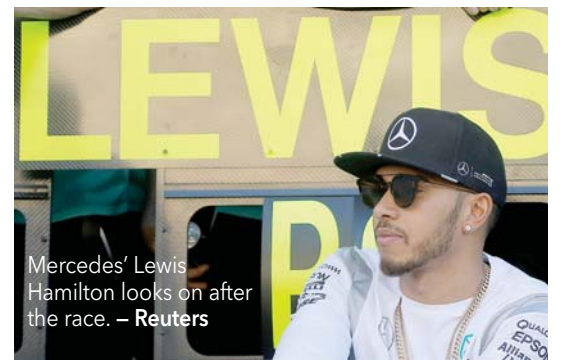
Verstappen, 18, has been linked with Ferrari while Sainz, 21, is also regarded as a 'hot shoe' with a big future ahead of him.

Both are the sons of former racing drivers — Verstappen's father Jos raced in F1 while Sainz's father Carlos was a two-time world champion rally driver.

— AFP

FORMULA ONE

Engine failures, reprimands add to Hamilton woes



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton looks on after the race. — Reuters

SOCHI, Russia: As if Lewis Hamilton did not have enough on his plate already, with two successive engine failures and Mercedes team mate Nico Rosberg on a seven-race winning streak, the Formula One champion now has the stewards to worry about as well.

The Briton, 43 points behind Rosberg after four races, collected his second reprimand of the season at the Russian Grand Prix.

Three would trigger an automatic penalty on the starting grid and, with 17 races still to come, Hamilton saw trouble ahead.

"I am just aware that there is most likely going to be at least one 10 place penalty in the future because I have got one more reprimand to go," he told reporters after fighting from 10th on the grid to second on Sunday. "When I was in karting there was one steward, he was just there to make everyone's weekend a bad weekend. Families would turn up and spend so much money to be there ... and he was just there to ruin people's weekends. I've started to see signs of him."

The triple champion collected his first reprimand in Bahrain, the second race, for reversing in the pitlane when he parked up in the wrong place after qualifying on pole.

The punishment was seen by some as excessive, given that the session was over and he was merely repositioning the car a matter of centimetres.

The second came in Sochi during the first phase of qualifying when he ran slightly wide and rejoined the track incorrectly, failing to go round a bollard.

Hamilton said that reprimand, after he had been to see stewards to argue his case, was "ridiculous".

The Briton has not won a race since October, when he took his third title in Texas, while Rosberg has started the year with four straight victories.

The German has also had a reliable car whereas Hamilton had to start from the rear in China after a power unit failure in qualifying.

In Russia, another failure meant he missed the final phase of qualifying. Mercedes had to fly parts out overnight to ensure he did not start from the pit lane.

Drivers have five power units each to last a season, and exceeding that allocation incurs automatic penalties. The recent setbacks mean Hamilton is at a disadvantage to Rosberg there as well. "I'm running out of engines. That's in my mind," he said. — Reuters

Iran's Tractorsazi Tabriz have already sealed top spot in Group C to make it to the AFC Champions League knockout stage

Donis hopes Al Hilal can bounce back from King's Cup loss



Al Hilal coach Georgios Donis (right) attends the pre-match press conference in Muscat.

MUSCAT: Al Hilal coach Georgios Donis is hoping his side can bounce back from losing in the semifinals of Saudi Arabia's King's Cup to qualify for the knockout phase of the AFC Champions League when they meet Iran's Tractorsazi Tabriz at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat on Tuesday.

Donis' team lost 3-2 to Jeddah's Al Ahli on Friday in the domestic competition and must win against Tractorsazi — who have already sealed top spot in Group C — to be certain of playing in the last 16 of the 2016 continental club championship.

Al Hilal have eight points from five games, one more than Pakhtakor, who face bottom-of-the-table Al Jazira in the day's other game in the group, with the Uzbeks waiting to pounce on any slip ups by the

two-time Asian champions.

"We are ready to fight in the match against Tractorsazi. It's very important for us as we must get the three points if we want to qualify to the knockout stage of the competition," said the former Greece international.

"We are going through a difficult period as our performances in recent matches have not been good."

"We have made several defensive mistakes in our recent matches and hopefully we can fix these before the game tomorrow. The heavy schedule that we have had has affected us and we have missed several players in recent matches."

The teams met on Matchday Five with Tractorsazi's 2-0 win — thanks to goals from Aloys Nong and Farzad Hatami — ensuring



We are ready to fight in the match against Tractorsazi. It's very important for us as we must get the three points if we want to qualify to the knockout stage of the competitions

GEORGIOS DONIS
Al Hilal coach

Amir Ghalehnoy's side booked their place in the next phase of the competition as

group winners.

Despite having already qualified for the Round of 16, the former Iran national team coach insisted his team are looking to secure another win, even as he looks to make some alterations to his line-up.

"The match is very important for us because it is against one of the best teams in Saudi Arabia and we respect them because they are a good side," he said. "We might make some tactical changes in order to rest some players and give the chance for other players to start the match."

"However, this doesn't mean that we will not playing with the best squad that we have and our ambition will only be to win and get the three points. We are focused on the importance of winning the and hopefully the players will give their best tomorrow."

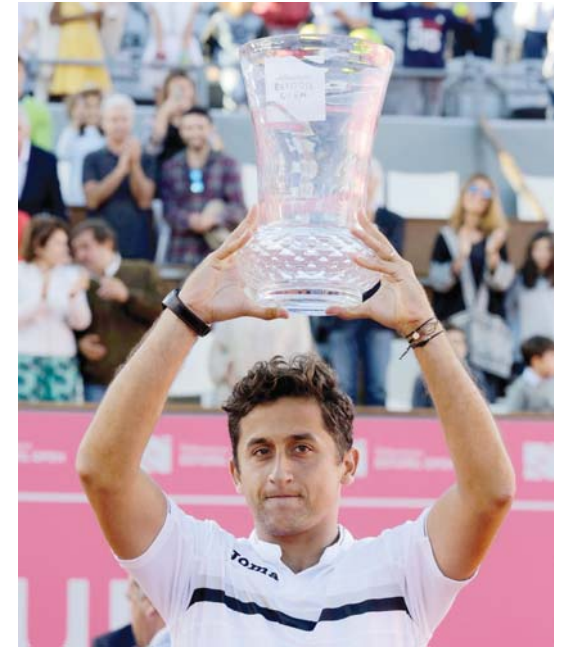
Moore turns down offer to coach Pakistan

Former England coach Peter Moore has turned down an opportunity to succeed Waqar Younis as the new Pakistan coach, the 53-year-old Englishman said. "I was hugely flattered to be approached," Moore, currently a consultant with Nottinghamshire, told ESPNcricinfo. "And I was very tempted by such a prestigious role with an exciting team."



ESTORIL OPEN

Almagro ends four-year title drought



Spanish player Nicolas Almagro poses with the trophy after victory over his compatriot Pablo Carreno Busta at the Estoril Open in Estoril, Portugal. — AFP

ESTORIL, Portugal: Nicolas Almagro ended a title drought lasting four years on Sunday when the experienced Spanish clay-courtier defeated younger compatriot Pablo Carreno Busta 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to win the Estoril Open.

The victory in nearly three hours of struggle, marked the first title for the 30-year-old Almagro since winning Nice on clay in May, 2012.

The world number 71 has spent much of the last few seasons coming back from injury but he boosted his growing confidence with the approach of Roland Garros by lifting the 13th trophy of his career.

"Every event is tough, with Roland Garros coming up, things are really tight. Everyone wants to be ready for the French Open," said the winner.

"It's great to win a title after so long, it was a battle today with Pablo, who was playing really well.

"I've improved during the week, I've been losing a lot of matches that I should have won. I'm looking for my tennis again. But I'm gaining more confidence with my game."

Almagro made life difficult for himself throughout each of the first two sets, lasting a total of two hours.

He finally took command with a break early in the final set and escaped for victory on a third match point with the 13th trophy of his career. — AFP

TEAM SHUFFLE

Pakistan drop Afridi, Shehzad



LAHORE, Pakistan: Pakistan's new selectors on Monday dropped star players Shahid Afridi, Ahmed Shehzad and Umar Akmal from next month's tour of England, stressing there would be no compromises after the country's disastrous exit from the World Twenty20 in India.

Former Afghanistan coach Inzamam-ul-Haq, who is heading up the newly formed selection committee as part of wholesale changes following last month's tournament humiliation, announced 35 players would attend boot camp starting in Kakul from May 14 to June 4.

He said Afridi — who announced he would continue playing the Twenty20 format after resigning as captain in the wake of the event — needed to perform in domestic matches. "Since we are playing only four Twenty20 matches this year we want to give new players a chance, and that will also allow Afridi to rest and perform in domestic matches," Inzamam said at a news conference in Lahore.

As for Shehzad and Umar, he said, "the selection committee will not compromise on discipline."

Shehzad was declared best batsman of the Pakistan Cup one-day tournament which ended on Sunday, scoring 372 runs, but along with Umar has been involved in various disciplinary breaches.

Former Pakistan head coach Waqar Younis — who resigned in early April — had also recommended dropping Shehzad and Umar.

Spot-fixing convict Salman Butt was also not selected. — AFP



Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia plays a return to Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland at the Madrid Open. — Reuters

EARLY FALL: No 1 seed Radwanska and second seed Kerber crash out in Madrid

CIBULKOVA, STRYCOVA UPSET TOP SEEDS

MADRID: Top seeds Agnieszka Radwanska and Australian Open champion Angelique Kerber crashed out of the Madrid Open in the first round on Sunday in major setbacks ahead of Roland Garros.

Poland's Radwanska, the number one seed in the absence of Serena Williams, lost 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3 to the rejuvenated Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia.

Radwanska, a semifinalist in 2012 and 2014 in the Spanish capital, already knew the dangers posed by Cibulkova after her opponent came within a point of victory in their last meeting at Indian Wells in March.

Cibulkova, a former world number 10 and Australian Open runner-up, was always going to be a dangerous floater having won her fifth career title last time out in Katowice three weeks ago.

Second-seeded German Kerber was dumped out by the Czech Republic's Barbora Strycova 6-4, 6-2 with her defeat coming just a week after she had retained her title in Stuttgart.

However, Kerber was outplayed by world number 33 Strycova, who she had beaten 6-1, 6-1 in Miami back in March.

"I'd win four games in the matches we played before," said Strycova. "I went into this match thinking I had nothing to lose. I mean, it can't be worse than Miami."

Losses for Radwanska and Kerber mean Garbine Muguruza is the highest seed left at the key clay-court event and the fourth-ranked Spaniard sealed her place in round two with a 6-2, 7-5 win over Anna Schmiedlova.

"Of course I was a little bit nervous and tense because the first matches are always complicated," said Muguruza, who is aiming to be the first Spanish woman to win the title in Madrid. "In Madrid we have this extra pressure because I'm here at home. Perhaps you're a little bit more nervous because of that, but my first feeling is that I'm satisfied for winning the match."

AZARENKA EXTENDS RUN

Former world number one Victoria Azarenka stretched her winning streak to 15



Of course I was a little bit nervous and tense because the first matches are always complicated

GARBINE MUGURUZA, Spanish fourth seed

matches after winning in Indian Wells and Miami as she overcame some stiff first set resistance from Britain's Laura Robson to win 6-4, 6-2.

Azarenka could meet defending champion and fifth seed Petra Kvitova in the quarterfinals as the Czech had no trouble in disposing of Lara Arrubarrera 6-3, 6-2.

US Open finalist Roberta Vinci, the seventh seed, is out after losing in straight sets to Montenegrin Danka Kovinic 6-4, 6-2.

German Laura Siegemund continued her

great start to the clay season after reaching the Stuttgart final as a qualifier as she dumped out ninth seed Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-0, 3-6, 6-3.

Eighth seed Carla Suarez Navarro came from a set down to beat Hungary's Tímea Babos 3-6, 6-2, 6-3.

Ana Ivanovic also had to go the distance to see off Katerina Siniakova 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 while 2014 French Open runner-up Simona Halep, the sixth-seeded Romanian, swept past Japan's Misaki Doi 6-0, 6-3.

There was also a notable win for Swiss 10th seed Tímea Bacsinszky who saw off Germany's Andrea Petkovic 6-4, 2-6, 6-3 despite only arriving in Spain at midnight having won the Rabat title on Saturday.

Also shrugging off jet-lag was Czech 11th seed Lucie Safarova, the champion in Prague on Saturday, who beat Coco Vandeweghe 7-6 (7/4), 6-1.

Australia's Samantha Stosur, beaten by Safarova in the Czech final 24 hours earlier, was also a winner, seeing off home player Sara Sorribes 6-1, 6-3. — AFP

Back injury forces Federer to pull out of Madrid

MADRID: Seventeen-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer withdrew from the Madrid Masters on Monday citing a back injury.

However, the world number three remains hopeful that he will be fit to play in the Rome Masters next week as part of his preparation for the French Open later this month.

"There's no feeling that I can practise so at this point I don't want to take more chances, as I know I won't be fully ready for Wednesday," said Federer.

"I want to play it safe, rest up and get ready for Rome, that's the schedule now."

Federer had taken a late decision to play in Madrid after missing nearly three months of the season due to knee surgery.

"I'm very disappointed, to say the least. I was hoping to play. I changed my schedule around and practised well in Switzerland before coming here," he added.

"It's been a tough year, so I hope it gets better from here."

However, he said he is reassured that it is a recurring back issue rather than further knee problems that have forced his latest withdrawal.

"This is normal back things I've had in the past, which I guess is good because I know how to handle it. I know how long it can take."

"Clearly it's not a help. Nevertheless, I've been able to practise as much as I've wanted to. I came back on tour quicker than I thought I would, so in terms of schedule, I guess I still am still somewhat on par."

The 34-year-old had initially planned to skip Madrid to reserve his energy for the three remaining Grand Slams and Rio Olympics later in the year. — AFP

Oman Air take second in China

QINGDAO, China: A win for Oman Air in the last double points race on a foggy Fushan Bay closed the gap at the top of the Qingdao leaderboard and placed them second at Extreme Sailing Series Act 2 to maintain the overall series lead.

When Morgan Larson and his team crossed the finish line in Race 18, a further race was scheduled offering an opportunity to add points and finish above Alinghi in Act 2, but the thick fog grew increasingly unsafe for the crews and Race Director Phil Lawrence was forced to abandon the competition.

A second place, coming in just six points behind the winners Alinghi, added 11 points to Oman Air's haul for the series which means a two-point advantage over the Swiss team when the fleet returns to action in Cardiff in June for Act 3.

According to Larson, there was more than fog and a shifty breeze to contend with on the final day with a jib breaking on Oman Air which slowed them right down.

"We tore a jib in the third and final race and we were in a nice spot, but it got stuck in the spreader and we were in irons for a period which put us on the back foot.

"But the guys on this team come back fighting and this is what they did so we were looking forward to the last race because we knew we had a shot at winning overall."

It was a fantastic event in challenging conditions against top opposition, added Larson who was previously skipper of Alinghi before switching to Oman Air for the 2016 season. "Hats off to Alinghi. They are a great team and any chance you get to beat a team like that you go for it but they were superior all week and we will have to find a way of closing the gap, but that gap is not so big.

"There were a couple of things that happened today that haven't in the past — so we have to take some notes and come back stronger."

A total of six races were completed on the final day in winds that ranged between 5 and 10 knots. Oman Air took victory in the first race of



Oman Air compete at the Extreme Sailing Series Act 2 in Qingdao, China.



A second place, coming in just six points behind the winners Alinghi, added 11 points to Oman Air's haul for the series which means a two-point advantage over the Swiss team when the fleet returns to action in Cardiff in June for Act 3

the day and in the last but Alinghi posted three wins to snatch the China title.

The contest has set up the rest of the series

nically with the long running rivalry between Oman Air and Alinghi set to continue, said Omani bowman Nasser al Mashari.

"We remain confident for the future because we are a strong team. We need to figure out a few little things but we think it will be a great season of racing.

"We did pretty well so we are happy with second place. There are still six more events and we are looking forward to that especially the next one in Cardiff. To have won would have been great, but the fleet is very strong and Alinghi are hard to beat so we are very happy with our performance."

The Extreme Sailing Series Act 3 moves to Cardiff, UK, where the action starts on June 23 and continues through to June 26.



Voges taken to hospital after hit by ball

Australia batsman Adam Voges was taken to hospital after being struck in the head by a ball while fielding during a county game in England. The Middlesex captain was hit in the back of the head by a ball thrown to the stumps by a substitute fielder and missed by wicketkeeper John Simpson during the match against Hampshire at Southampton's Rose Bowl.

Rohit, bowlers earn third straight win

IN HOT FORM: The Mumbai captain's unbeaten 85 off 60 balls was his fifth half-century of the season

ANKUR DHAWAN
IPL REPORTER

PUNE: A combination of Rohit Sharma's Bradmanesque form batting second and a rearguard recovery with the ball orchestrated a thorough routing of Rising Pune Supergiants (RPS). The win by eight wickets was Mumbai Indians' (MI) third on the bounce. Rohit's unbeaten 85 off 60 balls was his fifth half-century of the season, of which four have come in successful run-chases.

Yet, all was not dandy to begin with. Steven Smith and Saurabh Tiwary had threatened to take the match away from MI in the first 45 minutes but MI's incorrigible knack to pull things back in the death overs came to their rescue. A flurry of outrageous strokes from Smith, stand and deliver hitting from Tiwary and fielding lapses left MI a little discombobulated. The frustration found an outlet in a heated altercation between Harbhajan Singh and Ambati Rayudu after the latter's diving attempt on the boundary to the off-spinner's bowling went in vain. Although, the duo seemed to have reconciled after wickets began to tumble.

Catching was a problem area for MI against Kolkata Knight Riders. It returned to nag them again as Smith survived a low chance to Parthiv Patel off an inside edge when he was on one, before Tiwary was put down by Bumrah at mid-on.

However, the two culprits combined to provide a match changing moment in the 10th over. Bowling his second over, Bumrah got one to straighten off a length which induced an edge from Smith,



Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma plays a shot as Rising Pune Supergiants captain MS Dhoni watches during the IPL 2016 at the Maharashtra Cricket Association's International Stadium, Pune. — IPL

ROHIT POWERPLAY

125.92 Rising Pune Supergiants' openers' strike-rate in IPL 2016 - only Kings XI Punjab openers have scored runs at a slower rate in this edition.

66 Runs scored by Rising Pune Supergiants in the last 10 overs. They had made 93 in the first 10.

30.83 Difference in Rohit Sharma's batting average as captain this season compared to previous seasons. Till last season Rohit had averaged 33.00 as captain. This season he is averaging 63.83.

5 Number of fifties made by Rohit Sharma in chases in IPL 2016 - most by any batsman in a single edition of IPL while batting second. Shaun Marsh (2008), Chris Gayle (2012) and David Warner (2016) scored four fifties.

2 Number of Indian batsmen to aggregate 6,000 runs in T20 cricket, with Rohit Sharma emulating Suresh Raina. Overall he is the seventh batsman to accomplish this feat.

0 Number of matches won by Rising Pune Supergiants at home ground. They have now lost all four.

13 Number of times Rohit has gone past fifty in IPL - most such scores for a Mumbai Indians captain. Sachin Tendulkar had 12 scores of fifty or more as captain.

before being pounced by a diving Parthiv. Smith's dismissal for 45 off 23 balls triggered RPS' nosedive. RPS could add only 67 runs in the remaining 64 deliveries. A paltry

18 of those came in boundaries as opposed to the 58 during the 84-run stand between Smith and Tiwary. A promising innings had frazzled like a sprinter in the first 100 metres of a

marathon. Thereafter, Peter Handscomb laboured his way to 6 off 12 balls before his misery was ended by Harbhajan. Tiwary struggled for

timing and fitness and rarely got the ball off the square. Perhaps in the most defining phase of the match, Bumrah, Mitchell McClenaghan and Tim Southee starved MS Dhoni's scoring options, bowling short with clever changes of pace into his body. Later, Dhoni was candid in his self-analysis saying, "We did not bat well after the first 10 overs, that includes me also. On a wicket like that 24 off 24 balls does not help the team."

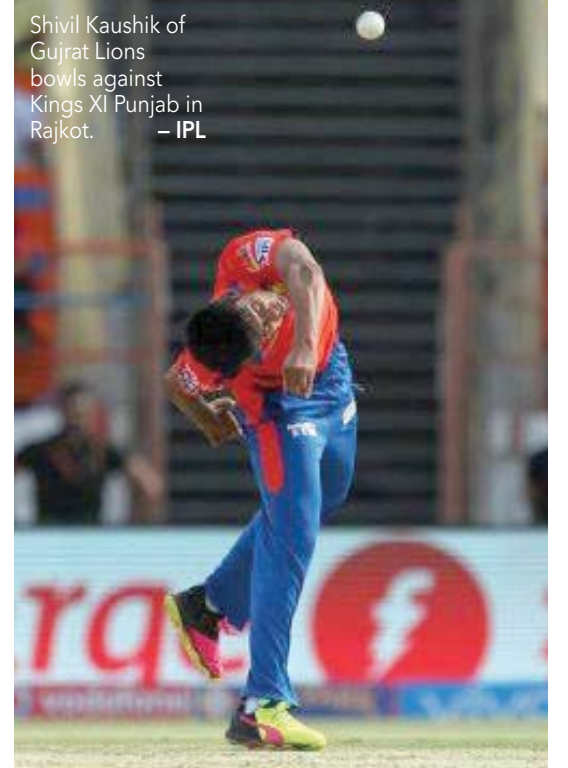
Having slumped from 92 for one to a below-par 159 for five, RPS needed a special effort from a pedestrian bowling attack. The tell-tale signs were ominous when Rohit clobbered Thisara Perera for 16 in just the third over of the run-chase. Parthiv too joined in the fun with a hat-trick of fours before he was brilliantly caught by a diving Dhoni off Ashok Dinda for 21.

Rohit and Rayudu though continued in the same vein, ticking the score over with the odd boundary to boot. Rayudu was dismissed for 22 after he attempted to deposit Ravichandran Ashwin into the stands for the second time, succeeding at first but then holing out at long-on.

At 91 for two in the 12th over MI were in a similar position as RPS, in fact having consumed two overs extra. But none of that was enough to burst Rohit's bubble of confidence that he seems to inhabit every time MI chase. In partnership with Jos Buttler, Rohit shrugged off the remaining 69 runs in less than seven overs.

BRIEF SCORES: Rising Pune Supergiants 159 for 5 in 20 overs (Saurabh Tiwary 57, Steven Smith 45; Jasprit Bumrah 3 for 29) lost to Mumbai Indians 161 for 2 in 18.3 overs (Rohit Sharma 85 n.o., Jos Buttler 27 n.o.; Ravichandran Ashwin 1 for 21) by 8 wickets

INDIAN ADAMS



Shivil Kaushik of Gujarat Lions bowls against Kings XI Punjab in Rajkot. — IPL

Kaushik reprises Adams' frog-in blender action

NEW DELHI: When Paul Adams burst onto the scene with his bizarre way of delivering the ball, many were convinced they would never see anything like it again.

Two decades later, India's Shivil Kaushik has emerged as the proud heir to the South African spinner's "frog-in-a-blender" action.

Heads, including Kaushik's own, turned at Pune's Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium when the left-arm chinaman bowler made his Indian Premier League (IPL) debut for Gujarat Lions on Friday.

Pressed into attack in the eighth over, the 20-year-old ambled slightly wide of the crease when a spirit seemed to enter his body as he bent his knees, twisted his torso and sent down the ball rotating his left-arm around his head.

"Shivil Kaushik. Wow!! Wouldn't have thought we'd ever see that action again. #Gogga #PaulAdams #FrogInABlender," tweeted former Zimbabwe cricketer Pommie Mbangwa.

Adams, now coaching Cape Cobras, himself appeared amused. "Remind you of someone! Wow #Kaushik !

Great to see the art of #Chinaman bowling alive," tweeted Gogga, who played 45 Tests and 24 one-day internationals for South Africa between 1995-2004.

Kaushik thanked all his coaches for not forcing him to dump the action, however weird it may be.

"I was eight-years old when I started playing cricket and the first ball I bowled was this way and I have not changed," the spinner said after claiming 3-20 against Kings XI Punjab on Sunday.

"Batsmen found it a bit difficult because my action was a bit different. I got a lot of support from all my coaches. They've not tinkered my action and been backing me."

SPINNER-CONTORTIONIST

Seeing him bowl is like watching a contortionist perform — straining every muscle in his torso but the spinner assures his body can cope with it.

"It's something which comes naturally to me so my body doesn't take much of a load."

Kaushik went wicketless in his IPL debut but bounced back against Punjab, dismissing rival skipper Murali Vijay and the Australian duo of Shaun Marsh and Glenn Maxwell.

"The first three balls, I didn't understand what was happening," Vijay, who opens for India in Tests, said with a smile.

"It was very difficult for me to pick whether it's going in or coming out. I did my video analysis before the game and I saw a bit of his bowling, but it was still difficult." — Reuters

Axar, Mohit help Punjab bag second win

RAJKOT: Axar Patel (4-21) and Mohit Sharma (3-32) helped Kings XI Punjab register their only second win in seven Indian Premier League (IPL) games as they overcame table-toppers Gujarat Lions by 23 runs here on Sunday.

Chasing 155, Gujarat were reduced to 34-2 in five overs after right-arm pacer Mohit disturbed the stumps of Brendon McCullum (1) and Suresh Raina (18). Then Axar broke Punjab's back in the seventh over, removing West Indian Dwayne Smith (15), Dinesh Karthik (2) and Dwayne Bravo (0) — the final two wickets fell in the fifth and sixth deliveries.

Then, after a bowling change, Axar was brought back into the attack in the 11th over. On the first ball, he sent Ravindra Jadeja (11) packing, taking the first hat-trick of the edition — 14th overall in IPL's history.

Gujarat were then reeling at 57-6 and were in desperate need of a partnership. Ishan Kishan (27) and James Faulkner (32) infused hopes in the home team's camp. But the job was too stiff, as they fell short by 23 runs.

Despite the loss at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium, Gujarat remain on top of the points table with six wins. Meanwhile, Punjab were also stranded at the last



Akshar Patel of Kings XI Punjab celebrates bowling out Dwayne Bravo of Gujarat Lions in Rajkot. — IPL

place with four points — same as Rising Pune Supergiants and Royal Challengers Bangalore but behind on net run rate.

Earlier, asked to bat, new captain Murali Vijay played a key knock of 55 off 41 deliveries as the visitors recovered from a middle-order collapse to post 154 all out in 19.5 overs.

Punjab got off to a very good

start as Vijay and Stoinis (27 off 17) took the team's total to 59 in the powerplay (six) overs. Vijay looked in ominous touch, hitting medium pacer Praveen Kumar for four fours in the bowler's first two overs.

Punjab were sailing smoothly but young left-arm Chinaman bowler Shivil Kaushik's 3-20 helped the hosts gain a strong foothold in the match. Punjab lost four wickets

between seventh to ninth over and were reduced to 73-4.

Just when Stoinis was looking dangerous, left-arm spinner Jadeja broke the stand by having the Australian right-hander stumped by wicket-keeper Karthik in the fourth ball of the sixth over. Then, the visitors were 65-1 but afterwards they failed to capitalise on the good start. The next over, bowled by

Kaushik, saw Punjab lose two key wickets off successive deliveries. Left-hander Shaun Marsh (1) was caught by captain Suresh Raina at short mid-wicket, while Glenn Maxwell got out for a duck to a contentious caught-behind decision off a wide ball, leaving the Australian right-hander shaking his head in disbelief.

Another drama unfolded on the penultimate ball of the ninth over when new batsman Gurkeerat Singh Mann, coming into the side replacing Manan Vohra, attempted a cut towards James Faulkner at backward point. Gurkeerat was sent back in his attempt to take a single by Vijay and, on his return, he was found short of the crease.

With the side reeling at 73-4, Vijay and David Miller tried to resurrect the innings. Meanwhile, Vijay reached fifty — second in this edition — before being holed out at deep mid-wicket by Dwayne Bravo, giving Kaushik his third wicket.

Later, sacked skipper David Miller (31) and Wriddhiman Saha's cameo of 19-ball 33 helped Punjab get a respectable total which they managed to successfully defend, thanks to Mohit and Axar.

BRIEF SCORES: Kings XI Punjab: 154 in 19.5 overs (Murali Vijay 55, Wriddhiman Saha 33; Shivil Kaushik 3-20; Praveen Kumar 2-25; Dwayne Bravo 2-33) bt Gujarat Lions: 131-9 (James Faulkner 32; Axar Patel 4-21, Mohit Sharma 3-32).

LIONS LOSE FIRST CHASE

1 Gujarat Lions suffered their first loss in a chase in IPL 2016. They had won all five of their run-chases prior to this match.

4 Number of players to score a fifty in their first innings as captain in the IPL. Murali Vijay joined Adam Gilchrist, Gautam Gambhir and David Warner.

7 Number of batsmen who could not score more than one in Kings XI Punjab innings — a new record in IPL. The previous record was six for Mumbai Indians against Chennai Super Kings at the Wankhede in 2012.

9 Number of players to captain Kings XI Punjab in IPL, with Murali Vijay being the latest. The nine captains by Kings XI Punjab are the most any side has used in the IPL (Delhi Daredevils have also employed nine captains).

14 Number of hat-tricks in IPL. Axar Patel provided the first hat-trick in IPL 2016. It was also the third hat-trick by a Kings XI Punjab player. The other two were registered by Yuvraj Singh in the 2009 edition. Interestingly these three are the only hat-tricks taken by left-arm bowlers in the IPL!

17 Number of times Dwayne Bravo has dismissed a batsman for a duck in the IPL - joint second-most by any bowler. Bravo equalled his fellow team-mate Praveen Kumar's tally. Now only Lasith Malinga with 32 duck-dismissals is ahead of him.

147 Number of balls bowled by Praveen Kumar for his first wicket in IPL 2016. Praveen himself had bowled 159 balls for his first wicket in the 2012 edition of the IPL. Interestingly that was also the Match 28 of the season and after picking a wicket. Praveen claimed another in the same over that time too!

Murali Vijay, captain of Kings XI Punjab, in action against the Gujarat Lions. — IPL

IPL 2016 POINTS TABLE

Pos	Team	Mat	Won	Lost	Tied	N/R	Net RR
1	GL	8	6	2	0	0	-0.115
2	MI	9	5	4	0	0	-0.009
3	DD	6	4	2	0	0	+0.441
4	KKR	7	4	3	0	0	+0.322
5	SRH	7	4	3	0	0	+0.060
6	RPS	8	2	6	0	0	+0.130
7	RCB	6	2	4	0	0	+0.065
8	KXIP	7	2	5	0	0	-0.811

Raonic into top 10 at Gasquet's expense

Canadian Milos Raonic has moved back into the world's top 10 in the latest ATP rankings released on Monday, after Richard Gasquet opted not to defend his title in Estoril last week. Novak Djokovic retains his massive lead at the top from Andy Murray ahead of his first match at the Madrid Masters.



WARRIORS
KEEP CRUISING

Golden State Warriors' Klay Thompson (left) shoots the ball against Portland Trail Blazers in game one of the second round of the NBA Play-offs. — USA Today Sports

EASTERN CONFERENCE SHOWDOWN: Miami Heat and Toronto Raptors book clash in play-off second round

LOS ANGELES: Klay Thompson and Draymond Green made sure the Golden State Warriors barely missed injured superstar Stephen Curry on Sunday in a 118-106 victory over Portland in the first game of their NBA Western Conference second-round play-off series.

Thompson scored 37 points and Green notched the first post-season triple-double of his career as the reigning champion Warriors leapt to a quick lead and never looked back on their home floor in Oakland, California. Thompson drained a three-pointer 17 seconds into the contest and the Warriors rolled from there.

Thompson scored 18 of his 37 points in the first quarter — when Portland scored just 17 points total.

The Warriors led 37-17 after the first frame, and the Trail Blazers never got the gap under nine points.

Australian big man Andrew Bogut delivered a double-double of 10 points

and 12 rebounds, as did Harrison Barnes.

Shaun Livingston, starting in place of Curry, chipped in 12 points and six assists. Curry watched from the sidelines, and indicated he'd like to be back on the floor by game three next Saturday.

Golden State coach Steve Kerr was making no promises about the return of Curry, who sprained a knee ligament in game four of the first-round series against Houston. But his Warriors are managing just fine without the NBA's reigning Most Valuable Player.

"It helped us to have to play most of the Houston series without Steph," Kerr said. "We just got into a good groove, and that carried over to tonight."

Our guys have an understanding of how we have to play without Steph."

Green said the Warriors won't expect Damian Lillard, CJ McCollum and the rest of the Trail Blazers to struggle so

much in every game. But he's confident the Warriors have what it takes to beat them, with or without Curry.

"Listen, we know they're not going to have games like this every night," Green added of a Blazers team whose five starters made just 23 of 75 attempts. "But if we can make them take tough shots... we think they'll wear down throughout the course of the series."

RAPTORS HOLD OFF PACERS

While the Warriors were setting a tone for the second round, the Toronto Raptors and Miami Heat finally wrapped up first-round series victories to set up an Eastern Conference semifinal showdown.

In Toronto, DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points and the Raptors held off the Indiana Pacers 89-84 to win their first-round series four games to three, while the Heat thumped the Charlotte Hornets 106-73 in game seven of their series.

Toronto's first post-season series

triumph since 2001 ended the longest active drought between play-off series wins. It was also the Raptors' first win in a seven-game series, rather than a five-game set.

"I think everybody wrote the Raptors off and gave us up for dead," Toronto coach Dwane Casey said of the reaction to the Raptors' failure to close out the series in game six. "But that locker room is full of fighters and scrappers."

The Raptors needed that fight in the fourth quarter, when a 16-point lead dwindled to three with 2:36 to play. The Pacers had the ball with 26.9 seconds remaining and the Raptors' lead still at three, but Toronto got a defensive stop.

DeRozan made two free throws to build the lead to five with 6.5 seconds remaining.

"We stunk it up in the fourth quarter," admitted Casey, who thought the emotion of the game might have added to his players' fatigue. "It wasn't pretty,

but our defence carried us down the stretch."

Slovenian point guard Goran Dragic was the star in Miami, scoring a game-high 25 points.

Britain's Luol Deng added 15, Dwyane Wade scored 12 points and Hassan Whiteside produced 10 points, 12 rebounds and five blocks for the Heat, who had trailed 3-2 in the series.

Hornets guard Kemba Walker meanwhile, was held to just nine points on three-of-16 shooting and had three turnovers. — AFP

NBA RESULTS

NBA PLAY-OFFS (SERIES BEST OF SEVEN):
Eastern Conference (first round)
At Miami: Miami 106 Charlotte Hornets 73 (Miami win series 4-3)
At Toronto: Toronto 89 Indiana 84 (Toronto win series 4-3)
Western Conference (second round)
At Oakland: Golden State 118 Portland 106 (Golden State lead series 1-0)

TEXAS SHOOTOUT

Shin breaks through for first win



LOS ANGELES: Jenny Shin became the third first time winner on the USLPGA Tour this year, coming from behind to close with a four-under 67 on Sunday and win the Texas Shootout tournament.

"I was really nervous on the last hole," said South Korea's Shin. "Right now I have nothing on my mind, I have absolutely nothing. I think it will hit me when everything is over and when I get on a plane and home to my mom."

It took the 23-year-old Shin 135 starts since turning pro in 2010 to record her first victory.

Her best showing prior to Sunday was finishing runner-up at the 2012 HSBC Women's Champions to Angela Stanford, who beat Shin in a play-off.

Shin played the final 43 holes at the Dallas-area Las Colinas Country Club bogey free as she finished at 14-under 270. She was two strokes in front of fellow South Koreans Amy Yang (71) and Hur Mi-Jung (71) as well as American Gerina Pillier — who led heading into the final round but closed with a two-over 73.

Asian players took nine of the top 12 spots on the final leaderboard, including seven South Koreans in that group. Shin joins compatriot Jang Hanna and Japan's Haru Nomura as first time winners in 2016 and will jump from 38th to 24 in the world rankings. Shin launched her 67 with three birdies in the first five holes, quickly whittling away at the four-shot deficit she faced at the start of the round.

"I was chasing the leader all week so looking at the leaderboard didn't get me nervous at all," Shin said. "I practiced a lot of three footers the first two days because I kept hitting it too far past, and I know that I've made almost every single one of them so that really helped me with my confidence and I had a lot of them coming down the last six holes. — AFP

Second spell of ladies' programme begins

It will witness 29 Omani ladies take golfing lessons from a Muscat Hills-designated coach

MUSCAT: After the phenomenal success of the Term I of the NBO-OGC Ladies' Programme in 2015 end, Term II got underway on April 17 at the Muscat Hills Golf and Country Club.

The second spell, dubbed as Term II, will span six weeks. It will witness 29 Omani ladies take golfing lessons from a Muscat Hills-designated coach. The event is initiated by the OGC (Oman Golf Committee) and supported by NBO.

The current term marks the first time ever that a large contingent of Omani ladies are taking to the golf course, which is part of the OGC's plans of producing Omani women golfing champions at the international in the years to come.

The number of Omani ladies participating has increased from Term I, in which 26 had taken part. A total of 19 ladies from Term I have graduated to Term II, which is now in progress at Muscat Hills.

They have been pooled in the Silver programme and have been joined by 10 new ladies, who form the new Bronze programme.

"The Silver term of the ladies' programme has continued to be a great success. The ladies seem to really be enjoying their lessons and playing



Participants of the OGC ladies programme during practice.

golf. A few ladies are showing some promise — Fatma al Maskiry, Raja al Hammadi and Aziza al Habsi are a few who stand out as having more talent than the others. Their understanding of the game and awareness is improving greatly," said programme coach Jade Lucas.

She added, "The Bronze term is also looking strong, with Iman in particular looking like she really could show a lot of potential. Maybe the most out of all of the ladies so far, and she is the youngest at just 13 years old. The greatest thing to come out of this programme, in my opinion, is the increase in junior participation."

Sameera al Zadjali, one of the

participants of the ladies' programme, said, "The course was amazing, it gave me the chance to learn and play golf, a game that my family is playing now, so now we have a game that we can all enjoy together. I am planning to continue playing this beautiful game and do more practice, put it in my weekly programme and enter competitions."

Maitha al Omeiri, another participant, believes the programme has helped her attain a whole new level. "The golf programme has made me discover myself on a different level and made me realise that I have capabilities outside my field and I am able to do more than what is expected

of myself. In the initial days, it was a surprise for me to be interested in golf, but now I understand the approach. You never know what you are capable of unless you try."

Interestingly, after the ladies completed the first term, they signed up 8 of their children to the OGC's Junior Programme — and 6 of them were girls. Following this development, more ladies have shown interest in enrolling their kids to the junior programme.

Participant Abeer al Zubaidi said, "My golf experience at Muscat Hills has been very interesting. I plan to continue with the game and hope to be a professional golfer one day. Also, I shall enrol my two daughters to join the junior programme."

Hailing the OGC's initiative, Dr Asma al Naamani, an avid participant, said, "I would like to express my appreciation for all the golf lessons. I found out about the NBO sponsorship for the programme and thought it was a great initiative."

"Being a mother and also engaged in a full-time job makes it stressful at times. Since I joined this programme, I learned that I could find a new thing that got me interested. I look forward each week to practice and learn new skills."

LOCAL FLAVOUR

FRIENDi mobile Summer Cup draw held



MUSCAT: The draw for the FRIENDi mobile Summer Cricket Cup organised by Jazz Boys Cricket Club was held on April 30 at the Palm Restaurant hall in Al Khuwair.

The tournament will be played among 16 teams (men) and 6 teams (ladies) who have registered early for the tournament. The draw was witnessed by the managers and captains of the respective teams followed by a briefing from the sponsors.

The guests of honour for the draw were Eugen Comendant, Marketing & Product Director, FRIENDi mobile, Joseph Rajan, Brand Manager, FRIENDi mobile, and Nishant Bhavsar, Director, Tile Marine.

With the IPL Twenty20 witnessing the battle of the best in the international cricket arena, Jazz Boys Cricket Club's eagerly awaited tournament will showcase the best of the clubs in Oman contest for the Summer Cup. The tournament is mainly sponsored by FRIENDi mobile, Al Hajjry Group, Strabag Oman, Khurshid Trading, Tile Marine and The Body Shop. This is the 19th edition that Jazz Boys is conducting the highly popular

tournament and the main sponsors FRIENDi mobile has announced very attractive prizes for the winning teams, best performers and supporters as well. This highly anticipated event promises huge competition for the cricket lovers.

Prizes are as follows: Champions trophy plus Gift Hampers for all players, Runners up Trophy plus Gift Hampers for all players, Best Batsman, Best Bowler, Best Fielder, Maximum Sixes, Best Catch takes away a FRIENDi mobile SIM Starter pack with free 1 year internet and high value recharge voucher, Best wicketkeeper and Best spectator award goes away with a gift hamper from Body Shop, Man of the Series — Home theatre from JBL, Best Dressed team — Colourful Trophy from FRIENDi Mobile.

SCHEDULE: Men first round matches (May 6)
 Khurshid Beatrice vs OEC (6.15am), BHR vs Royal Challengers (7am), Asfandyar XI vs Masters XI (8am), SS Friends vs Voltas XI (1pm), Sialkot Stallions vs Mangalore United (2pm), Rangers vs Future Oilfield (3pm), Rahil XI vs Klair XI (4pm), Cheers XI vs Rain Riders (5pm).
Ladies first round matches (May 6)
 Sohar Strikers vs ISG Green (9.30am), Sohar Challengers vs ISM Strikers (10am), Pitch Smashers vs Sohar Strikers (10.30am), ISG Blue vs Sohar Challengers (11am), ISG Green vs Pitch Smashers (11.30 am), ISM Strikers vs ISG Blue (12 pm).



University of Athens founded

This day in 1837, the University of Athens is founded in Athens, Greece. It has been in continuous operation since its establishment in 1837 and is the oldest higher education institution in the modern Greek state.

@artexhibit



● LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

It was a different kind of Wonderland — one that was seen through the eyes of Sharifa Marhuby. In this Wonderland, Sharifa played with glass and her masterful creativity yield fantastic work of art.

One of them is a blue structure, architecture of sort with silver white outlines highlighting the landscape. Then there were the horse and camel riders — men and women in their colourful clothing frozen in time. We would come to know that this was a scene in Barka. There is also the Sunset Stroll — a man in traditional Omani attire walking his camel made with paper thin glass, glass powder and bulls eye glass strips, 22 karat liquid gold mounted on canvas. All the images were like that. They were not painted on canvas but the glasses themselves were mounted on canvas.

Sharifa's Fused Glass Art has been on display at MuscArt Gallery with the title 'Seamless,' and will continue till May 4th. On this exhibit, the artist explored the versatility of glass, creating skilful one-of-a-kind collection of original work.

This has been her expertise. She fuses her glass paintings with her own kiln at high temperatures. Sharifa further uses powdered glass to produce various playful shapes and designs. She then gives the work either a smooth or a textured finish. To add elegance to well deserving pieces, she gives them a final touch of genuine liquid gold.

The painting on Ibra (Ibra Arch Remains I Glass powder relief on Bulls eye glass) is in rich blue and is highlighted with 22 karat liquid gold.

"This is my paternal grandfather's house. It is very special for me. It is falling apart but we go there often. I do value the place. My grandfather left the place to go to Africa when he was 15. But this is where he grew up. It is still standing although on the sides, it has started to collapse. So these are golden memories

and I value it greatly," Sharifa shared.

Her other work called 'Mountain View' is highlighted with liquid platinum. "Mountains represent minerals. They're not exactly but when you look at the mountains from far they are tall and you can see many shades. So I felt a little bit of platinum will give it an effect," she said.

Colourful clothing and intricate jewellery, typical of Omani culture and heritage, has been a great inspiration in Sharifa's choice of colours, patterns and motifs. Within just a short span of time, her work has succeeded in attracting buyers not only in Oman but as far as the United Arab Emirates and the UK.

Alexander Hoepfner, Manager of MuscArt Gallery said, "Sharifa has many techniques that she uses. You see traditional themes, solid pieces, tassels, small ones like Kumma and so on. They are very traditional theme yet the techniques she uses are unique. She might be one of the few Fused Glass artists in the GCC. We have not come across anyone else yet."

Sharifa also applies calligraphy with glass. "I discovered the technique accidentally. I was trying to work on something but the result was something else. But everyone who saw it wanted to know what was written. I tried again, this time, planning it and now the glass calligraphy features verses from the Holy Quran," Sharifa said.

Her enthusiasm in art started developing at a very young age whilst watching her two brothers churning out beautiful pieces of wall art. At the age of 12 she produced a remarkable portrait of a Head of State and proudly presented it to him. Greatly encouraged she made a portrait of yet another Head of State which was hung in the Primary School she was attending. Sharifa studied Msc Economics and has worked at Petroleum Development Oman for about 27 years and upon retirement in 2011, took up art training in UK to fulfil her childhood dream.



crossword

CRYPTIC PUZZLE

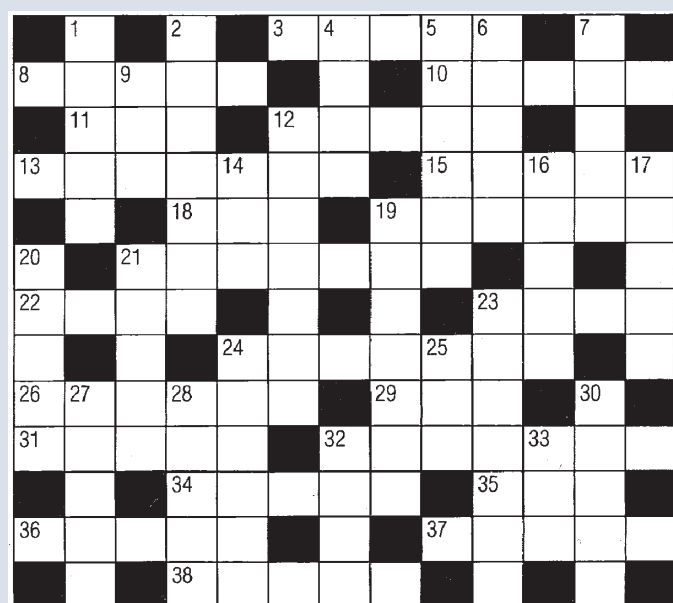
ACROSS

- 3 A fishy trick? (5)
- 8 Careful users of English don't smoke it (5)
- 10 Vagrants to possibly shoo out of central Wembley (5)
- 11 One half hour with a Yankee (3)
- 12 One home of athletic footballers (5)
- 13 Al departs from down under for the country (7)
- 15 Has a horror of noisy organs (5)
- 18 In time, one is transformed (3)
- 19 Very important pianist, perhaps? (3,3)
- 21 Related in a different version (7)
- 22 Spot a key agent (4)
- 23 Unpopular fellow's nasty suggestion (4)
- 24 Ridicule at takeoff? (7)
- 26 That persistent spout climber? (6)
- 29 One must do so or die in the attempt (3)
- 31 Stories least edited (5)
- 32 Manage with warm heart to dispel anger (7)

- 34 Assistants with fresh ideas (5)
- 35 To rub the wrong way is a natural thing (3)
- 36 Carol's new boy? (5)
- 37 Edward, dramatically fearless of Virginia Woolf (5)
- 38 The nose, to the Poles, is part of the foot! (5)

DOWN

- 1 Provide the cash for a rise? (3,2)
- 2 Sharply taking a short route to a cathedral city (7)
- 4 Octogenarian's song (4)
- 5 Fretted about Charlie being less than half fed (6)
- 6 It's sweet, darling (5)
- 7 Soft-hearted girl's source of coconut oil (5)
- 9 Lettuce produced by a firm at Ponders End (3)
- 12 Strange place for a prohibition on alcoholic drinks! (4,3)
- 14 Frothy rubbish? (3)
- 16 Jordan's morning fellow (5)
- 17 A slow, screw-headed fixing device (5)
- 19 At the wicket, they score no runs! (7)
- 20 Quick to accept a late finish to



- a great meal (5)
- 21 Annual trouble about public relations (5)
- 23 Significantly if not competently (7)
- 24 Injury caused by lions getting out of the cage rear? (6)
- 25 Outboard propeller (3)
- 27 Standard Anglo-Saxon soldiers, informally? (5)
- 28 Leads astray in transactions (5)
- 30 Concede that a bargee cannot possibly be big-headed (5)
- 32 Are such engines mostly for raising ore? (4)
- 33 Half Nubian, that's the point (3)

EASY PUZZLE

ACROSS

- 3 Symbol (5)
- 8 Stifled (5)
- 10 Asian country (5)
- 11 Distress call (3)
- 12 Warehouse (5)
- 13 Emergency workers (7)
- 15 Desires (5)
- 18 Devour (3)
- 19 Braggart (6)
- 21 Wail (7)
- 22 Insect (4)
- 23 Peruse (4)
- 24 Make precipitous (7)
- 26 Recreations (6)
- 29 Allow (3)
- 31 Wonderful (5)
- 32 Check (7)
- 34 Number (5)
- 35 Kernel (3)
- 36 Sharp (5)
- 37 Japanese bed (5)
- 38 Sharp pain (5)

DOWN

- 1 Organised sound (5)
- 2 Implore (7)
- 4 Honest (4)
- 5 Sufficient (6)
- 6 Underground (5)

- 7 Hell (5)
- 9 Hill (3)
- 12 Discovers (7)
- 14 Spoil (3)
- 16 Donated (5)
- 17 Room for quiet work (5)
- 19 Level of command (7)
- 20 Collect (5)
- 21 Bend (5)
- 23 Entourage (7)
- 24 Road (6)
- 25 Enclosure (3)
- 27 Hit (5)
- 28 Relaxes (5)
- 30 Engine (5)
- 32 Miserly (4)
- 33 Disapproving sound (3)

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTIC SOLUTIONS

- ACROSS: 9, Op-p-ortune 10, Opened up 12, Laid (rev) 13, Strain 14, Salti-re 15, Vigil-ante 17, Turning on 18, Related 20, Bust-up 21, O-wen (rev) 24, Love nest 26, End-orsed 28, Over 29, Age-nda 31, Has-tens 34, Getting on 36, Sup-porter 38, Stand-in 39, Tie-re-d 40, (Lohen)Grin 41, Pa-still-(win)e 42, Third-hand.
DOWN: 1, Bow-l over 2, Spring

YESTERDAY'S EASY SOLUTIONS

- ACROSS: 9, Alligator 10, Aquarius 12, Rank 13, Eraser 14, Haggard 15, Seclusion 17, Annulment 18, Evening 20, Grease 21, Fear 24, Oriental 26, Charades 28, Reef 29, Gossip 31, Startle 34, Godfather 36, Continent 38, Tractor 39, Kisses 40, Stem 41, Composer 42, Excellent.
DOWN: 1, Lacrosse 2, Clinic 3, Sterling 4, Prison 5, Carriage 6, Euthanasia 7, Fragile 8, Mutate 11, Editors 16, United 19, Eerie 20, Gel 22, Erect 23, Safari 25, Toothbrush 26, Cap 27, Frigate 30, Strikers 31, Sentence 32, Estimate 33, Laptops 35, Dragon 36, Cosset 37, Either.

This day in 1913, Raja Harishchandra, the first full-length Indian feature film is released, marking the beginning of the Indian film industry. Directed and produced by Dadasaheb Phalke, film was based on the legend of Raja Harishchandra, recounted in the Ramayana and Mahabharata.



@inconcert



Photos by Yelena Glukhovtseva

By any other name — A night at the proms

RAY PETERSEN
PHOTOS BY YELENA GLUKHOVTSEVA

The Fifth Concert of the Second Season of the Muscat Chamber Music Series of 2015-16 was, in all but name, a night at the proms! A festival evening of popular classical music, the proms have their origins in Belgium, in the mid 1980's, and presents the musical genre in a lighter vein, and usually with a distinctive twist. Certainly, the Horus Piano Duo and friends produced a light, talented and thoroughly appealing musical event at the ABA in Muscat recently, including an audience participant Dvorjak Slavonic Dance, which really was FUN!

The piano duo comprises husband and wife team

of Ahmed Abou-Zahra, Hungarian born Nora Emody, and their immensely talented offspring, violinists Amira aged 10, and Mariam, at only 7. Also appearing were the Muscat Combined School Choir, with soloists Dana and Malak Tamer, under the direction of Lisa Morgan, who also performed a vocal solo, while Omani musicians Nibras Yousef (Oud), Idris al Balushi (percussion) and bass guitarist Khalid al Rahbi showcased their inimitable musical talents.

The Horus duo, as an established duo should be, were balanced and comfortable. However, they did interact very well within their music in an almost balletic manner. There was gaiety yet grace, and they let the music tell its own tale generally, and especially at the delicate end of the piano keyboard, the "brushstrokes painted a sensitive picture." The two are comfortable in a number of musical

landscapes and certainly in Brahms Hungarian Dance No 5 the echoes of Eastern Europe were extremely vivid. This is the archetypal folk dance that everybody knows, if not by name, and its toe-tapping spontaneity was proof of its longevity.

They flowed into a Gershwin prelude selection with ease, the first taking you inescapably to Broadway, and the second was almost an ode to the Mississippi River, and certainly the deep South with its persistent, sultry, almost sullen melody. You could easily get lost in this music, except that an impression of the streets of New York, or maybe Chicago, complete with taxicabs, and news vendors shouting, "extra, extra, read all about it!" The traffic, the hustle and bustle of people going hither, thither and yon, was extraordinarily good.

The younger of the two violin prodigies appeared



first, and, as in all of their numbers, was accompanied by Emody. A Tarantella was Mariam's first, and I wrote in my programme, "what a stupidly talented kid," and I thought, "what's going on here? At her age I could barely tie my laces." And she wasn't just about pace and fun, racing through the complexity of the music, as her ability to deliver on an evocative level was proven in her treatment of Massenet's Thais Meditation. It certainly delivered as a reluctant farewell, true to its origins.

Amira opened with a Scheldrin piece that demonstrated, interestingly, more Russian than flamenco 'vibes.' Each crisp, clear, note spoke of the Russian steppes, of the reminiscences of a babushka, or grandmother. Bookending her siblings Massenet, Amira then flowed into a more complex tarantella inspired de Sarasate composition with the confidence of a veteran, demonstrating robust dexterity and empathy. There is a thoroughly delightful swagger about this young artiste that would "sell well if you could bottle it."

For their part the sisters combined for a deceptively simple duet with a difference, Mariam 'pitching' and Amira on the bow. It was clever and entertaining, and probably much more difficult than it was made to look. Their 'piece de resistance,' however, was Andrew Lloyd-

Weber's "Memory," from the hit show "cats." How good was this? It was so good you could hear Barbra Streisand, and yet she is all the way across the sea in Williamsburg, New York, 11,000 kilometres away. All the passion and feeling that Lloyd Weber, Streisand, Elaine Page and Celine Dion, among others, have invested in this classic were evident from the first note to the last.

The debut, or birth as Abou-Zahra put it, of the Muscat Combined Schools Choir should be seen as a positive experience, though there is sure to be concern at the low representation of males. Simultaneous smiles and grimaces were evidence of early nerves, during Al Yadi Yadi, a Popular Palestinian Folk Song, however the nerves receded as the foot stomping, toe-tapping, snap-your-fingers elements of the song took over, and it became a holistic music experience.

Marta Keen's "Homeward Bound" is the archetypal choral number, and it was treated with respect by the choir. They did express themselves quite vehemently though, in the world premiere of Egyptian, Mohammed Saad Basha and Fawzy Al Meligy's "Love and Piece," which Abou-Zahra explained was intended as a "message of peace from the Sultanate of Oman, and questions why the Palestinian children, in fact, any children in war zones,

must be the innocent victims of conflict."

Lisa Morgan 'belted out' an energetic celebration of the Sultanate with her own composition, "Oman is home to me." Now that's not intended to be disparaging, but to reflect the joy, emotion, and enthusiasm of the song, the first produced in the English language in Oman. The arrangement, by Maciej Sokolowski was simple but effective, and the introduction, performed by the Oriental Musicians trio was a haunting, yet faithful delight, all of its own.

There is no reason at all, why this celebratory composition could not achieve a place, as a promotional English language signature tune for tourism and publicity. It has an easy anthem ring to it!

It must be said, that the show-stopping Abou-Zahra children, are not your normal, ordinary, everyday, schoolkids. Mariam displays sensitivity, and a more serious demeanour than her sister, though is probably no less talented. Amira though, at 10, going on 20, is relaxed, graceful and elegant. She feels and portrays a visual feast of the absolute youthful joy of, and passion for, music.

In all respects, this was a concert for all ages, over 7 years that is, that was presented to entertain, and did exactly what it said on the label.



DR RAJAN PHILIPS
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Enhancing self-esteem

A person who felt he suffered low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence sought the assistance of a psychotherapist. The therapist advised him: 'Whenever you start some task, big or small, make sure you see it's finished. Don't give up mid-way. That will boost your self-confidence and you will achieve great things in due course.'

The man went home and duly finished consuming two large packets of potato chips and a chocolate cake. That was his style of implementing the advice of the psychotherapist

It was obviously a flippant application of a profound advice, but the issue of self-esteem is no laughing matter.

Self-esteem is all about how and what we think about ourselves. It gets expressed through our behaviour, our mood and our bearing that projects our real worth to others. Having a positive outlook to life, reinforced by high self-esteem improves emotional and mental well-being.

This enables us to come up with innovative solutions to problems, seize new opportunities, face new challenges firmly, get spurred into positive action and stay motivated over long periods, undeterred by failures and setbacks. We can handle social situations with ease, win people's trust and respect and experience an overall sense of accomplishment.

Several factors contribute to a person becoming a victim of low self-esteem. These include negative or humiliating experiences, abuse or neglect, particularly, in the childhood, including bullying at school or ill treatment at home. Youngsters may develop low self-esteem when upbraided for failing to meet the high expectations of parents, elders and teachers. Social and peer pressure compounds the issue. The damage done in the tender years of life is often irreparable.

Low self-esteem may result in mental and emotional health problems which in turn can adversely affect personal relationships, career progress, and the very quality of life. It might trigger phobias, and anxiety or depression, which in extreme cases may lead to suicides. Obviously, boosting one's self-esteem is an imperative for leading a wholesome life.

First, we ought to have the desire and courage to honestly recognize own strengths and weakness, harness our strengths and strive to overcome or modify the less favourable traits. For example, if we realize we are stubborn — we can work on it and convert it into a related allied positive quality — single-minded determination. Some behavioural scientists recommend that we regularly carry out positive-thinking exercises.

One such activity could be writing down the things we like about ourselves, our achievements, skills and talents, things we are grateful for, as well as our own acts of goodness and kindness to others.

This process will remind us that we have had a fairly decent life so far, with many elements to be truly proud of. That would do wonders to our self-esteem.

The company we keep matters a great deal. We need to spend more time with people who exude positive energy and make us feel good about us. We should strive to be life-long learners. We can also take up some interesting and engaging hobbies. We must set realistic goals in life. If we aim too high we may fail completely and our self-image may plummet. Even simple practical measures like being well groomed and well dressed, enhances our self-confidence. High self-esteem generates true self belief, and wins the approval and acceptance of others. We can do a good deal to boost our self-esteem. So why not give it a real shot and lead a more dynamic and purposeful life?

Quotes:

Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent. — Eleanor Roosevelt

Know yourself and you will win all battles. — Sun Tzu

Low self-esteem is like driving through life with your hand-break on. — Maxwell Maltz

@healthcheck



Diluted apple juice best to treat dehydration in kids

As the summer picks up the heat, kids suffering from mild gastroenteritis and dehydration should be given diluted apple juice instead of electrolyte drinks to replace fluid losses from diarrhoea and vomiting, researchers say.

The study, published in the journal JAMA, children from age six months to five years with gastroenteritis and minimal dehydration to receive diluted apple juice or apple-flavoured electrolyte maintenance solution. Among 647 randomised children, 644 completed the follow-up inspections. Only 2.5 per cent children who drink apple juice/preferred fluids received intravenous rehydration.

@artsale



Christie's fetes 250 years in business with major British art sale

From Joshua Reynolds to Lucian Freud, works spanning several centuries of British art will go under the hammer as part of a sale celebrating 250 years since auction house Christie's was founded.

The highlights are three major works, led by "Ib and her Husband", an intimate 1992 portrait by Freud of his pregnant daughter and her partner lying on a bed. The painting is estimated at around 18 million pounds (\$26.24 million).

Joining it is Reynolds' 1778 "Portrait

of Lucy Long, Mrs George Hardinge", which has never previously been publicly offered for sale and has been described as "one of the finest works by the artist to come to the market in a generation".

Said to be in "remarkable" condition, the portrait is estimated at around 2-3 million pounds.

The third major work is "Golden Hours", painted circa 1864 by Frederic Leighton, which goes to auction for the first time in 100 years and is estimated at 3-5 million pounds.

"All of the pictures are exemplary of their type," Orlando Rock, chairman of Christie's UK, said.

"I think from a quality point of view, they ... all epitomise the periods they were created in."

The works are set to go on tour at Christie's in New York and Hong Kong next month before the June "Defining British Art" sale, which will be launched alongside an exhibition of British art works handled by Christie's.

— Reuters



@sunprotection

What to look for when buying sunglasses

During the scorching summer, it is important to protect one's eyes from the heat and the glare. The sun's glare is strong enough to cause permanent retinal damage to the eyes which makes it extremely important for one to pick up sunglasses that have the ability to filter out the harmful UV rays, says an expert.

Narendra Kumar, creative director, Amazon Fashion, India, has listed a few steps to buy sunglasses.

*** UV Protection:** Do not confuse the shade of the lenses with their ability to filter rays. Polycarbonate lenses that provide comfort as well as optical clarity are 100 percent UV absorbent. They make a great choice to protect your eyes from the harsh UV rays this summer.

*** Fit:** Face fit as per the face shape is an equally important criteria while looking for a pair of sunglasses. If the sunglass does not cover the eyes appropriately and does not fit properly on the face, the rays can enter the eyes from different angles.

*** Polarised lenses:** A polarised lens allows only vertical light to pass through, versus regular sunglasses that filter all light that may be scattered and from

different directions, either vertically or horizontally. Polarised sunglasses provide the highest level of visual clarity, and significantly reduce glare. These reduce glare at the beach, in the snow, or out on the water.

*** Mirrored:** These are lenses that have a reflective coating, also called "flash coating" that makes the surface appear like a mirror. Mirrored sunglasses reduce the passage of light to a large extent. Right frame for your face shape: If we look at different celebrities and their choices, that might help you decide which ones are meant for your face type.

*** Round face:** Usually equal in width and length forming a circular shape without prominent features. Men and women with this face cut should aim at rectangular or square frames like Wayfarer and Square to add dimension and structure.

*** Square face:** This shape has edgier angles. Square faces are usually equal in length and width but with evident cheekbones and jawlines. With this face cut, aim at drawing away the attention from your jawline and try softening your angles with curved, thin or barely there frames like oval and round frames.

*** Oval face:** Rejoice! You are in luck because most sunglasses look great on you. You have the power to experiment with different styles, frames and colours of sunglasses like Clubmaster and Butterfly.

*** Heart Face:** This face shape has a slightly wider cheek area with a larger forehead and a pointed chin. People with this face shape should aim at flattering your face with thinner, slightly curved sunglasses such as Cat Eye and Aviator.

Avoid fake sunglasses: While buying sunglasses, one needs to be sure of the quality and whether the product is genuine or not. The market is flooded with cheap and fake quality of sunglasses that promise 100 percent UV protection or polarisation.

Therefore, it is important to buy branded products to ensure that you are protecting your eyes against the harmful rays. Also ensure that you read customer reviews below products, read seller details, and also look for brand details like warranty, etc. Examine the label and logo well, check for the model numbers as worldwide model numbers of products remain the same, and look for authorised sellers.



@classicalmusic

Copyright expires and Bolero belongs to the world



Almost 90 years after it was first performed in Paris, the copyright ran out on Sunday on one of the most popular and unique pieces of classical music, Ravel's "Bolero".

"We are accustomed to say that a performance of Bolero begins every 10 minutes in the world. As the work lasts 17 minutes, it is therefore playing at all times somewhere," said Laurent Petitgirard of France's Society of Authors, Composers and Music Publishers (SACEM).

"And it is likely that we will hear it even more now, in advertisements or in films." Written in 1928 and performed on November 22 of that year at Paris' Opera Garnier, the symphonic work, which grows steadily louder as it progresses, was originally a ballet piece ordered by Russian dancer Ida Rubinstein, a friend and sponsor of the French composer Maurice Ravel.

Immediately hailed by critics, it quickly became a worldwide success, even if the uniform melody and hypnotic, repetitive rhythm left some baffled.

"It is a simple and direct piece of writing without the slightest attempt at virtuosity," said the French composer, who died in 1937. Petitgirard described it as "an experimental piece, a precision mechanism and a demonstration of genius."

But a contemporary of Ravel's, the French composer Florent Schmitt, slammed the Bolero as a "only error" in the composer's career. Almost 90 years later, the work has been performed by some of the most prestigious orchestras in the world, under the baton of many of the top conductors, including Arturo Toscanini, Seiji Ozawa, Claudio Abbado and Pierre Boulez.

It also inspired a multitude of choreographic works, the best-known probably being one created by Maurice Bejart in 1961. It has been used in numerous ad campaigns, by British ice skaters Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean in their gold medal-winning performance at the Sarajevo Olympics in 1984 — and in Blake Edwards' film "10" By some estimates Bolero has generated around 50 million euros (\$57 million) in royalties since 1960, part of more than 400 million for all of Ravel's works.

Ravel died unmarried and childless in 1937. His only heir was his brother Edouard, who died in 1960, unleashing a bitter and complex legal battle over the right which at times has involved Edouard's nurse and her husband, great-nephews and even a legal director of SACEM. But on Sunday, the royalties ceased to be paid as Bolero entered the public domain — and belongs to the world. — AFP



features

By any other name —
A night at the proms



Joined by their immensely talented offspring and an army of brilliant talents, the Horus Piano Duo produced a light, talented, and thoroughly appealing musical event at the ABA in Muscat recently. In all respects, it was a concert for all ages... P30

watch a movie

now showing



CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

It might still be a little early but social media and even review sites rated this movie as fresh. Marvel's "Captain America: Civil War" finds Steve Rogers leading the newly formed team of Avengers in their continued efforts to safeguard humanity. But after another incident involving the Avengers results in collateral damage, political pressure mounts to install a system of accountability, headed by a governing body to oversee and direct the team. The new status quo fractures the Avengers. What's going to happen? We can't wait to see this!

Seen this movie? With 5 as the highest and 1 as the lowest, how would you rate this film? Send us your review at social@omanobserver.om and get a chance to see your feedback on this spot.

@editor's pick



A man covers his nose after sneezing as he walks past a bed of tulips while walking through Central Park in New York, US. — Reuters

aroundtown

happening soon



OMAN FRANCHISE EXPO AND CONFERENCE (OFEC2016)

MAY 9-11, 2016

Oman Franchise Expo & Conference is a four-day event to be held from May 9-11, 2016 at the Oman International Exhibition Centre in Muscat. This event showcases product from Franchising & Retailing industry and will tackle business friendly environment, growing population, improved purchasing powers and free trade agreements.