

Real estate deals hit RO 1.17 billion

The total value of property transactions in Oman by the end of June 2022 declined by 7.3 per cent to reach RO 1,179.3 million compared to the same period of 2021 when it stood at RO 1,272.8 million, according to the latest data by the NCSI. The total collected real estate transaction fees reached RO 30.4 million compared to RO 50.9 million. **DETAILS ON P13**



P10

OMAN SEPAK TAKRAW TEAM WIN THIRD PLACE IN THAILAND CHAMPIONSHIP



P13

RAKIZA FUND RECEIVES RO 115M IN CAPITAL COMMITMENT FROM SAUDI'S PIF



P20

KEEPING THE KHANJAR, MAKING TRADITION ALIVE IN A FAST CHANGING LANDSCAPE



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in reply to His Majesty the Sultan's cable of condolences on the death of Prince Turki bin Saud bin Turki al Saud. In his cable, King Salman expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's feelings and sincere prayers, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty the Sultan against all harms.

— ONA

HM THANKED BY KING OF BAHRAIN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Shaikha Mathayel bint Ali bin Isa al Khalifa. In his cable, King Hamad expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's feelings and sincere prayers, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty the Sultan against all harms.

— ONA

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INSIDE



IMRAN KHAN'S PARTY GOT ILLEGAL FUNDS

P6

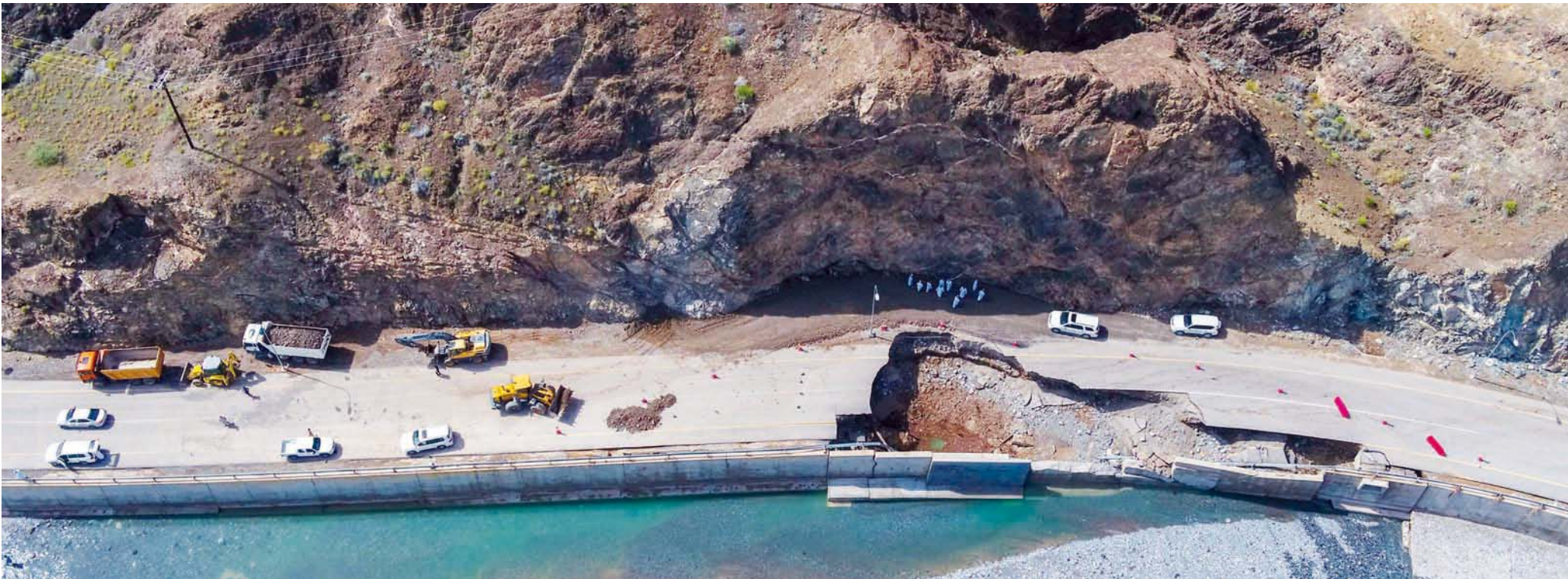


KENYA FACES A TEST IN ELECTION

P9

NO CASUALTIES REPORTED DURING MONDAY'S HEAVY RAINS

Precaution must as rains to intensify



ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zainabnassri](#)

A number of the wilayats witnessed heavy rains and the flow of wadis in the past few days, which caused material damage as a result of water entering into homes. Some families were reported to be stuck in their homes while some were stuck in their vehicles.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has said that no loss of life is reported on Monday, in the aftermath of heavy rains and overflowing of wadis. The authority has warned that it would take legal action against people who take risks (by braving wadis) or endanger the lives of others.

The teams of the authority in South Al Batinah Governorate are

currently working to open roads by removing debris and extending full support to citizens, residents and visitors.

The rescue teams acted on 12 reports of vehicles getting stuck in wadis in the governorates of North Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi. In the process, they rescued 13 people who were stranded in wadis and reported that all are in good health.

Cumulus clouds continue to overcast the skies of Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas on Tuesday, with chances of moderate to heavy rains causing wadis to overflow.

In South Al Batinah, especially the wilayats of Rustaq and Al Awabi, there is widespread damage to properties as a result

of water entering homes and farms, while a number of cars were washed away by the flow of wadis. Electricity, water and telephone services were also affected. However, the authorities concerned began early in the morning, on Tuesday, to restore basic services and the work is progressing at an accelerated pace.

RESCUE TEAMS

The rescue teams dealt with 12 reports regarding people getting stuck in vehicles in wadis in North Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi governorates, and 13 were rescued from wadis, and all are in good health.

On Tuesday, work is under way to restore services in the affected wilayats of Al Awabi and Rustaq

No direct relation to climate change

RAWAN AL NADABI
MUSCAT, AUG 2

The Oman Meteorology said that the climatic condition currently witnessed in the Sultanate of Oman is due to local cumulus clouds and has no direct relation to climate change. Talking to the Observer, the Met Office said that Oman has witnessed similar weather conditions in 1992, twenty years ago, in Al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah governorates.

in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, which witnessed heavy rains accompanied by strong winds for hours. The torrential rains and wadis caused damage to private property and roads, most notably cutting off Al Awabi and Nakhl road.

STATE OF ALERT

Col Mohammed bin Awad al Shanfari, Police Commander of South Al Batinah Governorate, said in a statement to ONA that the ROP and other key sectors concerned with emergency management in the Governorate of South Al Batinah have raised the state of alert and readiness, to reduce the damage caused by torrential wadis and their entry into the homes of some citizens.

TURN TO P3

Why some heatwaves prove deadlier than others?

LONDON: Europe's record-breaking heatwave last month saw England and Wales register nearly 1,700 extra deaths in just one week, early data shows, while Portugal and Spain counted another 1,700.

The figures, which will likely change as records are updated, give the first indication of heat-related deaths when temperatures from London to Madrid hit nearly 40 degrees Celsius or higher.

The data for England and Wales released on Tuesday by Britain's Office for National Statistics counts registered deaths during July 16-22 against what would be expected over the same period, based on 5-year



mortality averages.

The toll for the Iberian Peninsula from the World Health Organization is also provisional.

But the figures from July came nowhere near the 70,000 heat-

related deaths during a European heatwave in 2003.

Here are some of the factors that make some heatwaves deadlier than others. When and where a heatwave hits matters.

The 2003 heatwave hit in the first two weeks of August, closing businesses, wiping out crops and drying up rivers.

France's Paris region felt the effects most. Heatwaves are more intense in cities as concrete and asphalt absorb and retain heat.

The peak coincided with the traditional holiday period, when many children were out of school and families on holiday, in some cases leaving elderly relatives behind. — Reuters

US kills Al Qaeda chief in Afghan drone strike

KABUL: The United States killed Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri with a drone missile while he stood on a balcony at his home in downtown Kabul, Afghanistan, officials in Washington said, the biggest blow to the militants since Osama bin Laden was shot dead more than a decade ago.

Afghanistan's Taliban government has not confirmed the death of Zawahiri, an Egyptian surgeon who had a \$25 million bounty on his head and helped to coordinate the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States that killed nearly 3,000 people.

US officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said Zawahiri was killed when he



came out on the balcony of his safe house in Kabul on Sunday morning and was hit by Hellfire missiles from a US drone.

"Now justice has been delivered, and this terrorist leader is no more," US President Joe Biden said in remarks from the White House on Monday. "No matter how long it takes, no matter where you hide, if you are a threat to our people, the United States will find you and take you out." **SEE ALSO P6**



Avoid low-lying areas, CDAA urges people

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority (CDAA) has urged people to avoid low-lying areas and wadis just as the efforts to restore basic services damaged by the rains in the wilayats of Al Awabi and Rustaq entered the second day on Tuesday.

These two wilayats in the South Al Batinah Governorate suffered colossal damages as a result of heavy rain and the overflow of valleys.

“People should avoid low-lying areas as torrential rains bring in flash floods especially along the

geographically low-lying areas,” a spokesperson from the CDAA said, adding, “Venturing into the sea is dangerous as tidal waves can be harsh during the rains that will pose a challenge and using wadis during heavy rains is a criminal offence.”

Efforts are under way to restore the traffic movement to and from the state, electricity, water and telephone network and road network affected by the rains in a collective effort by the Royal Oman Police, CDAA, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and municipality employees.

“There were some damage

to some roads in the wilayats of Al Awabi and Rustaq, and the temporarily closed roads are currently being opened while shelter camps are active around the governorate,” said Eng Yousef bin Abdullah al Mujaini, Director of the Projects Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Several governorates of the Sultanate of Oman witnessed rainfall of varying intensity, accompanied by active winds, which led to the flow of a number of valleys and reefs.

Valleys overflowed in Nizwa in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate after

the torrential rains continued to wreak havoc and many valleys like Al Hijri, Al Musala, Al Rahba, Sumait, Al Suwehriya, Kuma and Wadi Al Mu’aidin overflowed. Jabal Al Akhdhar, Wadi Al Manakher and Wadi Seq witnessed the same, while Wadi Al Aq and Wadi Bani Rawaha in Wilayat of Samayil pose threat after overflowing since Monday.

The Royal Oman Police posted on its social media handle that a citizen was arrested for crossing a gushing wadi in the Wilayat of Al Hamra. He was rescued by the CDAA rescue team after his vehicle stopped in the middle of the wadi.





International tourism sees rebound in 2022: UNWTO



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The international tourism sector has recovered almost half (46 per cent) of pre-pandemic 2019 levels, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. International tourism saw a strong rebound in the first five months of 2022, with almost 250 million international arrivals recorded. This compares to 77 million arrivals from January to May 2021, the report said.

“The recovery of tourism has gathered pace in many parts of the world, weathering the challenges standing in its way,” said UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili. At the same time, he also advises caution in view of the “economic headwinds and geopolitical challenges which could impact the sector in the remainder of 2022 and beyond”.

The strong growth in the Middle East

(+157pc) and Africa (+156pc) remained 54 per cent and 50 per cent below 2019 levels respectively, and Asia and the Pacific almost doubled arrivals (+94pc), though numbers were 90 per cent below 2019, as some borders remained closed to non-essential travel.

Here, the recent easing of restrictions can be seen in improved results for April and May.

In Africa and the Middle East arrivals could reach about 50 per cent to 70 per cent of pre-pandemic levels, while in Asia and the Pacific they would remain at 30 per cent of 2019 levels in the best-case scenario, due to stricter policies and restrictions.

Speaking to the Observer recently, a top official of Oman Air said the airline operations are expected to reach the pre-pandemic levels by 2023.

According to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the overall reduction in international air capacity in

2022 will be limited to 20 per cent to 25 per cent of seats offered by airlines as compared to 2019. Such resilience is also reflected in hotel occupancy rates.

Based on data from the industry benchmarking firm STR, global occupancy rates climbed to 66 per cent in June 2022, from 43 per cent in January.

However, stronger than expected demand has created significant operational and workforce challenges, while the war in Ukraine, rising inflation and interest rates, as well as fears of an economic slowdown continue to pose a risk to recovery.

The International Monetary Fund points to a global economic slowdown from 6.1 per cent in 2021 to 3.2 per cent in 2022 and then to 2.9 per cent in 2023. At the same time, UNWTO continues to work closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) to monitor the pandemic as well as emerging public health emergencies and their potential impact on travel.

Precaution a must as rains to intensify

FROM PAGE 1

He pointed out that the police patrols alerted all visitors to move away from wadis as water levels rose. Traffic movement was cut off on the road linking the wilayats of Nakhl and Al Awabi due to the collapse of a part of the lanes of the road adjacent to the wadi stream in Falaj Bani Khuzir area. Coordination has been made with the General Directorate of Police Aviation to put helicopters on standby to deal with emergencies.

For his part, Hamoud bin Mohammed al Mantheri, coordinator of the relief and shelter sector in the National Committee for Emergency Management, confirmed that three shelter centres were kept ready in the wilayats of Al Awabi and Rustaq.

“Heavy rains and overflowing wadis caused some damage, including their entry into homes and some families were stuck in their homes. There are some areas which were affected like Falaj Bani Khuzir and Wadi Bani Kharus in the Wilayat of Al Awabi, and city centre and in Wadi Bani Ghafer in the Wilayat of Rustaq. Shelters are ready to receive citizens and residents,” he said.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information

Technology, accompanied by a number of officials from the ministry, visited the affected areas to ensure immediate rehabilitation of roads hit by heavy rains in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, to facilitate movement of vehicles.

A number of governorates in Oman witnessed rainfall of varying intensity, accompanied by active winds, which led to the flow of a number of wadis.

In Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, rainfall in the Wilayat of Nizwa led to the flow of many wadis such as Al Hijri, Al Musala, Al Rahba, Sumait, Al Suwehriya, Kuma and Wadi Al Mu'aidin.

In Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Wadi Al Manakher and Wadi Seq are overflowing. Heavy rains in the Wilayat of Samayil led to the flow of Wadi Al Aq and Wadi Bani Rawaha. The rains also led to the flow of Wadi Al Mahyol in the Wilayat of Manah.

The Wilayat of Al Hamra witnessed rains ranging from heavy to medium, concentrated on the mountain peaks of the eastern mountain, which led to the flow of Wadi Sha'ma, Al Madam, Wadi Gul and Wadi Al Nakhr.

Al Dhahirah Governorate witnessed moderate to heavy rains, accompanied by downward winds concentrated on the top of the mountains on a number of villages in the Wilayat of Dhank.

(With ONA inputs)

Al Saleel Natural Park: A safe home to Oman’s Arabian gazelle

TEXT & PHOTOS BY YAHYA
AL SALMANI

We have usually seen Arab deer in the documentaries shown on television and wildlife books and magazines, but we rarely see them in the prairies and in their natural habitats in which they live.

In addition to its social and economic importance, the gazelle has literary value for Arabs in particular. The Arabs describe it as elegant, beautiful and intelligent. It had an exceptional presence for hundreds of years in the Arabian Peninsula. Poets were inspired, and society still inherits the names of deer. Names such as: “Al Afra”, “Al Reem” and “Al Anoud” are nothing but the pride of the Arabs in the names of this animal. It should also be noted here that there are some places named after deer, and it is necessary to mention here the area of “Saih Al Dhab”, which is one of the parts of the Wilayat of Al Amerat in the Governorate of Muscat.

Deer are distinguished by their black eyes, soft body, which helps them to hide, and strong sense of smell, which helps them detect who is stalking them.

During the past decades, deer were subjected to over-hunting, and then their numbers began to decrease dramatically, and this has made experts in the field of nature conservation think about finding a mechanism to limit the decline in their numbers. After a series of discussions and meetings between various experts in the field of nature conservation, it was proposed to establish a nature reserve to



conserve these wild species and contribute to their reproduction in their natural environments. The result was the establishment of the Al Saleel National Park Reserve in 1997.

Al Saleel National Park, which has an area of 220 square kilometres, is in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi bordered to the north by a mountain range extending up to the Sea of Oman, a vast plain extending to Gehwan mountain within Gehwan Natural Reserve to the east and Wadi Al Bathaa and Rimal Al Sharqiya on the southern side.

This reserve has variegated physical natural components that gives it unique importance and hue. The presence of the reserve in the flooding fan of Wadi Bani Khalid has an effect on the soil of the region and therefore on the vegetation cover therein.



Moreover, the mountain range of the western Hajar Mountains extend in the northern part of the reserve where there are formations that include fossils indicating that

biodiversity in the ecological unit of the inner eastern plain. It has a wide spread of Al Samar (umbrella thorn acacia). The reserve contains more than 100 species of wild plants and trees such as; Al Salam (Acacia ehrenbergiana), Al Sidr (Thorn Jujube), Al Kanab (Blepharis ciliaris), Al Sarh (Maerua crassifolia) and other plants and trees.

The statistics issued by the Environment Authority said that around 57 species of birds have been recorded, including migratory and endemic birds. The birds in the reserve included bulbul, hoopoe, wild dove, sparrow, great grey shrike, pterocles, bald vulture and steppe eagle.

Moreover, the reserve has more than eight types of animals such as, Arabian Gazelle (Gazella Gazella), Arabian Ibex (Hemitragus jayakari), Red Fox (Vulpes),

Wilde Rabbit (Lepus capensis) and many small mammals. As for reptiles, eight types of reptiles were recorded in the reserve such as Sinai agama, Egyptian spiny and tailed lizard along with 166 insects.

The northern part of the reserve has ancient tombs of 3,000 years BC scattered in the plain and on the hilltops and mountain ranges. These tombs are circular, covered with domes of stones. These tombs extensively indicate the existence of old settlements that settled in the area or adjacent areas.

This reserve provides the opportunity to get to know this cute animal up close and their way of life. “Thanks to the efforts made by the management of the reserve represented by the observers of wildlife, and thanks to the cooperation of the local people, the poaching operations targeting the Arabian gazelle and the rest of the mammals living within the area of this reserve have diminished,” an environmentalist asserted.

Visitors are happy to see all these species live in their environment in the form of large herds, which confirms that the establishment of the nature reserve has achieved its goals set for more than twenty years.

To visit this nature reserve, the visitor is required to obtain an official permit from the Environment Agency. Obtaining permits to enter the reserve comes within the framework of the regulation pursued by the management of the reserve according to the requirements approved by the competent authorities.



PROS AND CONS OF RAIN, STORM

VINOD NAIR
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Rains are always welcome in the arid world and the sudden spur of low-pressure systems in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean have helped the region, including the Sultanate of Oman, to stay away from year-round drought.

The Sultanate of Oman with its linear coastline of nearly 3,000 km has been at the receiving end as well as the beneficiary of these tropical depressions as they are accompanied by moderate and heavy rains during the months of May and November.

While heavy rains help to bring down the temperature in summer, high-octane storms also cause heavy devastations that cause an equally heavy burden on the state

exchequers.

It is not just untimely rains that are causing havoc, the temperatures in the Middle East have risen far faster over the past three decades, which often leads to more use of air-conditioners in offices, homes, and even vehicles.

"In the last ten years, we have been getting heavy rains from tropical systems at least three times a year. It may be not an Oman-specific phenomenon but what is important to understand is its impact on the national economy. We must rebuild some major roads after every spell of rain, though human lives are saved due to timely weather updates and accurate forecasts," said a source in a leading infrastructure development company.

He added that it is necessary but future

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budgets will have to take these factors into account as rains and storms have become routine.

According to one Global Climate Risk Index, the Sultanate of Oman is among the countries at most at risk from climate change due to its proximity to major seas of the world.

As the region grows hotter and drier, the United Nations has warned that the Mideast's crop production can also drop 30 per cent by 2025.

The region is expected to lose six per cent to 14 per cent of its GDP by 2050 because of water scarcity, according to the World Bank.

According to the National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change of the Civil Aviation Authority,

urban areas of the Sultanate of Oman are more vulnerable to flash floods caused by heavy rains that can adversely affect insurance, real estate, telecommunications and infrastructure sectors of the government.

It may be also noted that the economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are still dependent on the production and sale of oil and gas.

A research paper on the impact of Covid-19 on climate policy said that Gulf countries have changed their perception of climate change over the past two decades with some countries adopting net-zero targets.

All GCC countries have included bold renewable energy targets as part of their plans to reduce emissions.



Oman Air launches flights to Trabzon

MUSCAT: The weekly three flights - Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday - was inaugurated by Oman Air's chief operating officer, Captain Nasser al Salmi, and the Deputy Head of Mission of the Republic of Turkey in Muscat, Orhan Ayraç.

The Tuesday flight from Muscat will depart at 9:50 am to arrive in Trabzon at 1 pm.

The flight from Trabzon will depart at 2 pm and arrive in Muscat at 7:05 pm.

The Thursday and Saturday flights from Muscat will depart at 8:30 am and arrive in Trabzon at 11:40 pm.

The flight from Trabzon will depart at 12:40 pm and arrive in



Muscat at 5:45 pm.

Economy class starts at RO 155 and Business Class starts at RO 680.

“Guests travelling to Muscat and Trabzon should ensure they

are aware of official requirements to enter or transit through the country. Guests can also book a customised Trabzon holiday package through Oman Air Holidays,” the airline said.

Two die in road accident near Haima

MUSCAT: Two people died in a road accident on the road leading to Salalah, near Haima.

The emergency department of Haima Hospital received eight injured people following a road accident, including two dead, one critically injured and five others with minor injuries, the Directorate-General of Health Services in Al Wusta Governorate reported.

On July 31, the emergency department at Haima Hospital received six patients following a road accident in the wee hours. Of these three were critically injured, while two others suffered minor injuries.

Only July 26, seven people were injured in a road accident that took place in the same region. On July 20, one person died, and five others of an Asian nationality were injured after the tyres of their vehicle burst on Adam-Thamrait road.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has deployed special checkpoints and patrol teams on the roads leading to Dhofar Governorate.

Col Faisal bin Salim al Hajri said: “We have enhanced police presence on the densely populated areas on the roads leading to Salalah on Adam-Thamrait road. Air ambulances have been placed at Haima to help take patients to hospitals in the event



of any emergencies.” Not minding the resources required for the deployment of such a scale, ROP has said that no efforts will be spared to save human lives.

Not ignoring the accidents which continue to be reported, Col Al Hajri said road accidents, however, have decreased compared to the past years due to an increase in police patrols on the highways. Col Al Hajri said: “We have noticed that while travellers are aware of precautionary measures to be taken on the roads, they still need to be wary of the natural desert climate conditions such as low visibility, strong winds and accumulation of sand on roads.”

Pact to develop leadership skills

MUSCAT: Leaders Private School has signed a partnership with FranklinCovey Education to establish the LeaderinMe programme in the school.

The signing of the cooperation contract was attended by the representatives of the Leaders Private School, Ahmed al Jabri and the Regional Director for the Middle East, Ahmed Shawky.

This educational model is an evidence-based comprehensive model that aims to build leadership and life skills, create high-trust school culture as well as lay the foundation for sustained academic achievements.

Around the world, there are over 5,000 schools in 50 countries that apply LeaderinMe.

Leaders Private School is one of the pioneering schools in building young leaders, as it focuses on growing leadership habits and values, and creating a space for students to unleash their creativity.



The National Museum Auction Notice

The National Museum hereby announce the following Auction:

Auction No.	Description	Document Price (RO)	Dates for Site inspection	Last date purchase Auction document	Bid submission date
(1/2022)	Interior supplies of the National Museum's Restaurant and coffee shop	(25/-) Twenty-Five Omani Riyal (nonrefundable)	14-15/8/2022	10/8/2022	15/9/2022

1- Companies who are interested in participating in the above Auction shall collect the Auction documents from the National Museum, al-Saiydia Street, Muscat, opposite Qasr al-Alam Palace.

2- Bids shall be submitted in closed envelopes, sealed with red wax and addressed to: His Excellency the Chairman of the Internal Tender Board Committee, the National Museum, Sultanate of Oman.

3- The tender number and the name of the tender shall be mentioned on the tender document. It is not accepted to indicate the Bidder's identity, name and/or its logo on the envelope.

4- The Bids should enclose a Bank Guarantee or a certified cheque certified by locally registered banks in the sum of (1%) of the tender value. Any Bids not enclosed with a Bank Guarantee will not be considered.

5- The Tender submission must be placed inside the Tender Case at the General Directorate of Administrative and Financial Affairs before 10:00 am of the mentioned above date.

6- For more information please contact on Tel: 22081598/ 96093741 e-mail: karthik.prasad@aspireoman.com





SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2022/1675	Carry out the construction of delivery suit expansion new offices and maintenance inside hospital as per attached drawings and specification in Sinaw Hospital	Before 10 am Thursday 11/August/2022	Before 10 am on Sunday 11/September/2022	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board Fourth degree	R.O 25 Per set
2022/1706	Maintenance works in Dental Clinic Building, IT, Psychiatric Dept, Finance Dept and Dermatology Dept in Sinaw Hospital	Before 10 am Monday 15/August/2022	Before 10 am on Sunday 11/September/2022	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board Fourth degree	R.O 25 Per set
2022/1715	Maintenance works at Sinaw Accommodation Building in Sinaw Hospital	Before 9 am Monday 15/August/2022	Before 10 am on Thursday 15/September/2022	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board Fourth degree	R.O 25 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om



جامعة البريمي

UNIVERSITY OF BURAIMI

VACANCY

The University of Buraimi in the Sultanate of Oman invites highly qualified and dynamic candidates to apply for the following position: **Vice Chancellor**
★Priority will be given to Omani applicants.

Minimum requirements:

- A PhD from a reputable Western University
- An Associate Professor rank
- Excellent English Language skills
- Five-year experience in leadership role as Pro / deputy Vice chancellor for academic affairs/ research or College Dean in a reputable university
- Ten-year academic experience, including teaching, student academic advising, and curriculum and program development
- Experience in research projects, supervision of postgraduate students, and community service
- Publications in reputable scientific journals
- Excellent interpersonal, verbal and written communication skills
- Experience in national or international academic accreditation
- Experience in the development and implementation of academic and administrative policies, strategic and operational plans

Preferred Requirements:

- Arabic language proficiency
- Work experience in the GCC countries
- Experience in fostering and building internal and external collaborative relationships including community engagement, cooperation with educational business and industry, and building international partnerships
- Demonstrated experience in information technology and e-learning in support of teaching, research, community service and administration
- Ability to inspire and motivate students in a learner centered environment
- Ability to motivate staff, and support their professional development
- Experience in understanding and commitment to academic staff governance
- Demonstrated capacity for sound judgment and effectiveness in academic matters, and strong problem solving skills
- Experience in financial management, and related policy- development and implementation
- Ability to take risks and exploit new opportunities
- Ability to innovate, encourage innovative thinking, and promote an environment of creativity and innovation within the institution
- Ability to operate within diverse internal and external environments at the highest levels
- Ability to adopt a consultative approach, as well as to be decisive and to carry through difficult decisions
- Confidence- both at personal level and in representing the interests of the university

Interested candidates are kindly requested to send their updated CV/resume along with a recent photo and a cover letter explaining how their qualifications, skills and experience match the requirements of the position in question.

To: recruitments@uob.edu.om

Deadline: 25/08/2022

Applications that do not meet the minimum requirements, or that are sent after the closing date, will not be considered.

Key responsibilities and duties of this position as defined by the University executive bylaws can be found at the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/6e742n94>

For more information about the University of Buraimi, please visit our website:



US kills Al Qaeda chief in drone strike

KABUL: A United States drone strike killed Al Qaeda chief Ayman al Zawahiri at a hideout in Kabul, President Joe Biden said on Monday, declaring “justice had been delivered” to the families of the 9/11 attacks.

Zawahiri’s assassination is the biggest blow to Al Qaeda since US special forces killed Osama bin Laden in 2011, and calls into question the Taliban’s promise not to harbour militant groups.

It was the first known over-the-horizon strike by the US on a target in Afghanistan since Washington withdrew its forces from the country on August 31 last year, days after the Taliban swept back to power.

The Taliban condemned the drone strike on Tuesday, but made no mention of casualties nor did they name Zawahiri.

“Justice has been delivered and this terrorist leader is no more,” Biden said in a sombre televised address, adding he hoped Zawahiri’s death would bring “closure” to families of the 3,000 people killed in the US on September 11, 2001.

Zawahiri was believed to be the mastermind who steered Al Qaeda’s operations — including the 9/11 attacks — as well as Bin Laden’s personal doctor.

A senior administration official said the 71-year-old Egyptian was on the balcony of a three-storey house in the Afghan capital when targeted with two Hellfire missiles after dawn on Sunday.

“We identified Zawahiri on multiple occasions for sustained periods of time on the balcony where he was ultimately struck,” the official said.

The house is in Sherpur, one of Kabul’s most affluent neighbourhoods, with several villas occupied by high-ranking Taliban officials and commanders.

The Taliban’s interior ministry



In this photograph taken on July 31, smoke rises from a house following a US drone strike in the Sherpur area of Kabul. – AFP

previously denied reports circulating on social media of a drone strike, telling AFP a rocket struck “an empty house” in Kabul, causing no casualties.

Early on Tuesday, however, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that an “aerial attack” was carried out.

“The nature of the incident was not revealed at first,” he said.

“The security and intelligence agencies of the Islamic Emirate investigated the incident and found in their preliminary investigations that the attack was carried out by American drones.”

‘GROSSLY VIOLATED’

Although Biden did not mention the Taliban in his televised address, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said “by hosting and sheltering” Zawahiri, the hardline group had “grossly

violated the Doha Agreement” which paved the way for America’s withdrawal.

Zabihullah, in turn, accused Washington of breaking the 2020 deal.

“Such actions are a repetition of the failed experiences of the past 20 years and are against the interests of the United States of America, Afghanistan, and the region,” he said.

Zawahiri, who grew up in a comfortable Cairo household before turning to violent radicalism, had been on the run since the 9/11 attacks.

He took over Al Qaeda after Bin Laden was killed, and had a \$25 million US bounty on his head.

News of his death comes a month before the first anniversary of the final withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, leaving

the country in the hands of the Taliban insurgency that fought Western forces for two decades.

Under the Doha deal, the Taliban promised not to allow Afghanistan to be used again as a launchpad for international militancy, but experts believe the group never broke ties with Al Qaeda.

“What we know is that the senior Haqqani Taliban were aware of his presence in Kabul,” the senior US official said.

Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani also heads the feared Haqqani Network, a brutal subset of the Taliban blamed for some of the worst violence of the past 20 years and which has been described by US officials as a “veritable arm” of Pakistani intelligence.

In Sherpur, locals said they long thought the targeted house

Ayman al-Zawahiri

Al-Qaeda leader



Key ideologue behind the global terror network for several decades

- ▶ Born in Egypt in 1951
- ▶ Studied medicine in Cairo, becoming an eye surgeon
- ▶ Became involved with Egypt’s radical community at a young age
- ▶ Later linked up with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, becoming Al-Qaeda’s main strategist

Had central roles in Al-Qaeda’s 1998 attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the Sept 11, 2001 attack on the US

Took command of Al-Qaeda after bin Laden’s death in 2011

July 31, 2022
Killed in a US high-precision drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan

AFP

Griner’s Russian trial should be over ‘very soon,’ says lawyer

KHIMKI, Russia: The Russian drugs trial of US basketball star Brittney Griner should be over “very soon”, her lawyer said on Tuesday, as the Kremlin warned the United States that megaphone diplomacy would not secure a prisoner swap for the 31-year-old Texan.

Griner, a two-time Olympic gold medalist and a Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) star, was detained at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport on February 17 with vape cartridges containing hashish oil in her luggage.

She has pleaded guilty to the drugs charges against her but has denied that she intended to break Russian law. She faces up to 10 years in prison.

Lawyer Maria Blagovolina, partner at Rybalkin, Gortsunyan, Dyakin and Partners law firm, said a verdict in the case was expected “very soon.” The defence and prosecution are expected to deliver their closing arguments on Thursday. —Reuters



US basketball player Brittney Griner is escorted by police before a hearing during her trial on charges of drug smuggling, in Khimki, outside Moscow on Tuesday. – AFP

Pakistan election agency rules Khan’s party got illegal funds

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s election commission ruled on Tuesday that former prime minister Imran Khan’s political party received millions of dollars in illegal funds from foreign countries, including the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the UK and Australia.

The decision could lead to a ban on Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which rose to prominence on an anti-corruption drive.

Khan, who analysts say had fallen out with military powers over the appointment

of a spy chief in the run up to his ouster earlier this year, was not immediately available for comment. A spokesman for the PTI party denied any wrongdoing.

The commission’s ruling is a major setback for the former cricket star who has been leading a campaign against the new government.

The case, filed in 2014 by Akbar S Khan, a PTI founding member, accused the party of receiving illegal funds from abroad.

“The commission is satisfied that the contributions and



donations have been received by the respondent party from prohibited sources,” the ruling,

which has been seen by Reuters, said.

The commission said the party also hid 13 accounts, adding that the declaration submitted to the commission about the party finances by Khan as its chairman from 2008 to 2013 were “found to be grossly inaccurate.”

It said the PTI received funds from different people and companies abroad, including business tycoon Arif Naqvi, owner of a Dubai-based equity group, who is among several people charged by US prosecutors

with being part of an international scheme to defraud investors, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Naqvi has denied the charges. The commission said the party was “willing recipient of prohibited money” amounting to \$2.1 million from Naqvi’s Wootton Cricket Limited, which is registered in the Cayman Islands.

It also identified several other foreign accounts in the United States, Britain, Australia, UAE, Canada, Switzerland and other countries, which made transaction

to Khan’s party accounts. The election commission ruling has been referred to the Pakistan government, which could seek a Supreme Court ban on Khan and his party from politics, according to legal experts. The court ordered the commission in 2017 to scrutinise the party’s accounts. “We will challenge this ruling,” Khan’s party spokesman, Fawad Chaudhry, told reporters. He said the funds were received from Pakistani nationals living overseas, which is not illegal. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ISLAMABAD

Top army commander among six killed

Six Pakistan servicemen including a senior commander were killed in a helicopter crash during flood relief operations in southwestern Pakistan, the military confirmed on Tuesday. Civilian authorities in Pakistan depend heavily on the army during natural calamities such as the floods which have swamped parts of the country this monsoon season. A helicopter on relief operation in Balochistan was reported missing on Monday night with six



passengers and crew — including one of the army’s top commanders, Lieutenant-General Sarfraz Ali. The military said all aboard had died in a crash they attributed to bad weather.

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka brushes aside Indian concerns

Sri Lanka on Tuesday brushed aside Indian concerns over a scheduled visit by a Chinese ship, saying it was coming only to refuel and replenish supplies.

The research and survey ship Yuan Wang 5 is due to dock in the Chinese-run Hambantota Port in southern Sri Lanka on August 11, according to analytics website MarineTraffic.

Indian media reports said that New Delhi was worried the vessel would be used to spy on its activities and that it had lodged a complaint



with Colombo. It is a dual-use spy vessel, employed for space and satellite tracking and with specific usage in intercontinental ballistic missile launches, according to Indian broadcaster CNN-News18.

HONG KONG

Age for Sinovac jab lowered to six months

Hong Kong on Tuesday reduced the minimum age for getting vaccinated with China’s Sinovac Covid-19 shot to six months from three years after several young children became infected with the virus.

Adults and children in the Asian financial hub, which retains some of the world’s toughest Covid precautions, are required to have at least three coronavirus vaccine shots.

“Recently a series of young children have been infected



with the new coronavirus. The situation of severe illness and even death is of great concern,” the government said in a statement announcing the reduction in age.



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In brief

■ TEHRAN



RAISI PLANS TO ADDRESS UN DESPITE US SANCTIONS

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi plans to travel to New York for the United Nations General Assembly next month despite US sanctions against him, the government's spokesman said on Tuesday.

"The preliminary planning has been done for the president's attendance at the UN General Assembly session," Ali Bahadori-Jahromi told a weekly press briefing.

Raisi, who has been under US sanctions since November 2019, missed last year's General Assembly because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A pre-recorded video of his address was played to the meeting instead.

■ KUWAIT



KUWAIT FORMALLY DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT

Kuwait formally dissolved parliament in a decree issued on Tuesday, state news agency KUNA said, as the crown prince moved to resolve a standoff between the government and elected parliament. Last month, Crown Prince Shaikh Meshal Al Ahmad al Sabah said he was dissolving parliament and would call for early polls. On Monday, he approved a cabinet headed by a new prime minister. "To rectify the political scene, the lack of harmony and cooperation... and behaviour that undermines national unity, it was necessary to resort to the people... to rectify the path," Shaikh Meshal said in the decree dissolving parliament.

■ MOGADISHU



FORMER AL SHABAAB LEADER MADE RELIGION MINISTER

Somalia has appointed the former deputy leader and spokesman for the Al Shabaab hardline group as religion minister, Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre said on Tuesday.

The announcement marks a sharp reversal of fortune for Muktar Robow, who has spent the last four years under house arrest after a falling-out with ex-president Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, better known as Farmajo.

Robow, 53, publicly defected from the Al Qaeda-linked militants in August 2017, with the United States government at one point offering a \$5-million bounty for his capture.

UN experts slam Israel's 'harassment' of human rights defenders in West Bank

GENEVA/JENIN: UN experts on Tuesday slammed Israel's "harassment" of human rights defenders and humanitarian workers in the occupied West Bank's Masafer Yatta villages, where Israel has a military zone.

The special rapporteurs insisted such harassment must stop, and said residents continue to be threatened by the risk of forcible transfer, including mass forced evictions and arbitrary displacement.

"Israeli authorities' hubris is proving without limits. They are even harassing human rights defenders and humanitarian workers seeking to support and protect people facing grave human rights violations in Masafer Yatta," the four experts said in a joint statement.

"This is a direct assault on the core of human rights and international humanitarian law... this also confirms that impunity over abuse of power fosters power to abuse."

The case of Masafer Yatta -- or Firing Zone 918 -- an agricultural area near Hebron, has been one of Israel's longest running legal battles.

In the early 1980s, the army declared the 30-square-kilometre territory a restricted military area and claimed it was uninhabited.

Residents of eight villages had been in court for around 20 years fighting Israeli government efforts to evict them.

But in May this year, Israel's High Court approved the eviction



A Palestinian demonstrator holds a flag as people clash with Israeli forces during a protest against Israeli settlement activity in Beit Dajan, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Tuesday. — Reuters

of Palestinian villagers to make way for a military training zone.

"The tragic implications of that decision are now before our eyes: roughly 1,200 Palestinian residents in Masafer Yatta are left defenceless in front of the threat of forced eviction and arbitrary displacement," said the experts, who do not speak for the United Nations but are mandated to report their findings to it.

The statement was penned by a special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory as well as rapporteurs on internally displaced persons,

adequate housing, and the situation of human rights defenders. They voiced dismay at reports that human rights defenders and humanitarian workers have been harassed by the Israeli military in Masafer Yatta.

"They have been stopped and detained for several hours at checkpoints and had their identification documents or cars confiscated, often on grounds that they had entered a closed military site without permission," their statement said.

The experts expressed particular concern for Sami

Hureini, a prominent human rights defender and member of the "Youth of Sumud" activist group "engaged in peaceful resistance against illegal settlements in the southern Hebron hills".

On June 28, he was reportedly arrested at a checkpoint in Masafer Yatta and detained by the military for several hours, the experts said.

"He is currently being tried in the Ofer Military Court for allegedly obstructing and assaulting a soldier and entering a closed military zone, following his participation in a peaceful demonstration on 8 January

The special rapporteurs insisted such harassment must stop, and said residents continue to be threatened by the risk of forcible transfer, including mass forced evictions and arbitrary displacement

2021," they said.

Hureini's attorney, Riham Nasra, said her legal team has presented "hundreds of photos and videos" to disprove the allegations against her client.

"Five activists who were near Sami during the protest testified that at no point did Sami resort to violence," Nasra said in a statement.

BORDER AREAS CLOSED

Israel's army closed areas near the Gaza border to civilians on Tuesday, citing a risk of reprisals, following the overnight arrest of two senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad members, the military and Palestinian sources said.

A 17-year-old Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli forces during a late Monday raid in the flashpoint West Bank district of Jenin.

Islamic Jihad identified the teenager as Dirar al Kafraayni, and said he was a member of the group and "our heroic martyr". —AFP

Russia accuses US of direct involvement in Ukraine war

ISTANBUL/LONDON: Russia on Tuesday accused the United States of direct involvement in the Ukraine war, while the first ship carrying Ukrainian grain to world markets since Moscow's attack continued its passage to Lebanon without problems.

Russia said it was responding to comments by Vadym Skibitsky, Ukraine's deputy head of military intelligence, about the way Kyiv used US-supplied long-range HIMARS rocket launch systems based on what he called excellent satellite imagery and real-time information.

Skibitsky told Britain's Telegraph newspaper there was consultation between US and Ukrainian intelligence officials before strikes and that Washington had an effective veto on intended targets, though he said US officials were not providing direct targeting information.

Russia's defence ministry, headed by a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, said the interview showed that Washington was directly involved despite repeated assertions that it was limiting its role in the conflict to arms supplies because it did not want a direct confrontation with Moscow.

"All this undeniably proves that Washington, contrary to White House and Pentagon claims, is directly involved in the conflict in Ukraine," the Russian defence ministry said in a statement.



A boy ride his scooter in front of the destroyed building of the city hall in the city of Ochtyrka, Sumy region amid the Russian attack on Ukraine. — AFP

"It is the Biden administration that is directly responsible for all Kyiv-approved rocket attacks on residential areas and civilian infrastructure in populated areas of Donbas and other regions, which have resulted in mass deaths of civilians," the defence ministry said.

There was no immediate reaction to the defence ministry's allegations from the White House or Pentagon.

SHIP'S SAFE PASSAGE

Russia's verbal attack on Washington came after Turkey said that the first ship carrying Ukrainian grain since Russia's attack blocked exports more than

five months ago was on track to safely arrive in Istanbul on Tuesday night.

The vessel's departure on Monday from the Ukrainian port of Odesa to Lebanon via Turkey under a safe passage deal has raised hopes of further such departures which could help ease a burgeoning global food crisis.

Turkey expects roughly one grain ship to leave Ukrainian ports each day as long as the safe passage agreement holds, a senior Turkish official, who asked to remain anonymous, said on Tuesday.

The United Nations has warned of the risk of multiple famines this year because of the war in Ukraine.

— Reuters

UK leadership favourite Truss U-turns on pay plan in first big misstep

LONDON: Britain's foreign minister Liz Truss, the frontrunner to replace Boris Johnson as prime minister, was forced to backtrack on one of her most striking pledges a day after announcing it following a backlash from fellow Conservatives and opposition parties.

In the first big misstep of her campaign, Truss set out plans to save billions of pounds a year in government spending in a pledge opponents said would require cutting the pay of public sector workers, including nurses and teachers, outside of the wealthy southeast of England.

Truss had said late on Monday she would introduce regional pay boards rather than having a national pay agreement, tailoring pay to the cost of living where people actually work.

But after criticism on Tuesday, Truss said: "I never had any intention of changing the terms and conditions of teachers and nurses. But what I want to be clear about is I will not be going ahead with the regional pay boards."

The U-turn came as a poll showed Truss with a smaller lead over her rival Rishi Sunak than previously thought.

A survey of 807 Conservative Party members by Italian data company Techné carried out July 19-27 found Truss was backed



by 48 per cent, compared with 43 per cent for former finance minister Sunak.

The result suggests a much tighter race than a previous poll of Conservative members carried out by YouGov on July 20-21, which gave Truss a 24-point lead over Sunak.

Truss's public sector pay plan had faced criticism from the main opposition Labour Party and some Conservative lawmakers.

The Conservatives won the biggest majority in three decades at the 2019 national election by upending conventional British politics and winning in more industrial areas in central and northern England with a pledge to reduce regional inequalities.

One Truss-supporting Conservative lawmaker said the miscalculation would damage the rest of the campaign.

—Reuters

Consistency is the key to success



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

The writer is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP practitioner based in Muscat

Learning a new skill is fantastic and much needed in order to grow. However, if you want to really succeed in the craft, mastering your competence is necessary.

The assured way to conquer your ability is to develop the habit of consistency in order to remain committed, on point and unfaltering to achieve the level of expertise required.

When you are disciplined in your approach and willing to make mistakes, you will naturally progress. The process of consistency is about adapting and evolving.

One needs to be consistent in ones' consistency in order to reap the benefits. The concept is easy. However, the practice of it is not.

Distractions and temptations are rife which make us lose our

focus, commitment and drive.

Impatience can set in as the road to success is long and most would rather avoid the journey, preferring instant gratifications which, as we know, unfortunately do not produce long term happiness.

We seek instantaneous satisfaction for our efforts and through that desire, we fail to acknowledge that long term results take time.

Often, when we don't acquire them immediately, we stop taking action. However, consistency is about maintaining incremental progress over a period of time.

When we do something regularly and with grit, feedback will ensue. This response helps us pivot when and if required.

Here are 8 reasons why

WE USUALLY SEEK INSTANTANEOUS SATISFACTION FOR OUR EFFORTS AND THROUGH THAT DESIRE, FAIL TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT LONG TERM RESULTS TAKE TIME

consistency is important:

1.Self-discipline. Patience, value and belief are three pillars to success and improvement. Having the fire in your belly with the foundation of self-drive and self-motivation will fuel your desire and success in self-discipline.

2.Self-control. Being in control of your emotions will teach you

about commitment. During tough times, this will motivate you to channel your energy to keep going.

3.Momentum. Perseverance keeps you committed to your cause. It builds passion, and continuation in your consistency to overcome obstacles and challenges. The more you do, the more you do.

4.Personality building. Discipline and hard work are great values. Consistency in these values contributes to a person's grit and success.

5.Accountability. Being consistent brings about a great degree of liability, reliability and responsibility - to yourself and others.

6.Sense of measurement. Through tirelessly testing, you are bound to come away with knowing

what works and what doesn't.

7.Builds trust. Integrity, owning up to your mistakes, rectifying them and making amends will denote people can rely on you in all situations.

8.Resiliency and overcoming challenges. You will face adversity with ardour not fear. Those who surmount setbacks are stronger people.

Consistency is about repeating the same actions, habits and rituals, over and over again. Gaining feedback from these acts and adjusting them accordingly will help you stay on track as you progress towards your goals.

The reliability, expectancy and habit building all encompass a consistent concoction to your long term mastery results.

Scientists call for more research into 'climate endgame'

PATRICK GALEY

The world must prepare for a "climate endgame" to better understand and plan for the potentially catastrophic impacts of global heating that governments have yet to consider, scientists warned on Tuesday.

Climate models that can predict the extent of global warming depending on greenhouse gas emissions are increasingly sophisticated and provide policymakers with an accurate trajectory of global temperature rises.

What is less well explored is the cascading impact of certain events, such as crop failures and infrastructure loss due to extreme weather events, which are made likelier to occur with every degree of warming.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) outlined what is currently known about "catastrophic outcomes" and found gaping knowledge gaps.

Writing in the journal the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, they proposed an international research agenda to help governments plan for "bad-to-worst cases".

These included four main areas of concern — what the authors termed the "four horseman" of climate change: famine and malnutrition, extreme weather, conflict, and vector-borne diseases.

"Irreversible and potentially catastrophic risks caused by human induced climate change must be factored into our planning and actions," said Johan Rockstrom, PIK director and a study co-author.

He said that the more research is done on Earth's climate tipping points — such as the irreversible melting of the ice caps or the Amazon rainforest turning from a carbon sink to source — showed the ever-greater need to factor in high-risk scenarios into climate modelling.

"Key is to do the math of disaster, in order to avoid it," he said. The authors pointed out that successive UN climate science reports have mainly focused on the predicted effects of 1.5C-2C of warming and largely discounted the possibility of more excessive temperature rises.

Government plans put Earth on course to rise as much as 2.7C this century, a far cry from the 1.5-C cap envisaged in the 2015 Paris climate accord.

The study suggested that a scientific disposition to "err on the side of least drama" led to a lack of focus on potential impacts at 3C of warming or higher."This caution is understandable, yet it is mismatched to the risks and potential damages posed by climate change," it said.— AFP



Jeffrey Gettleman

The writer is an American Pulitzer prize-winning journalist

The hunt is on for 'War Trophies' in Ukraine

When Ihor Sumliennyi, a young environmental activist, arrived at the site of a recent missile strike, the rubble had barely stopped smoking.

Police officers guarded the street. People who had lived in the smashed apartment building stared in disbelief, some making the sign of the cross next to him. He started poking around.

And then, bam! His eyes lit up. Right in front of him, lying near the sidewalk, was exactly what he was looking for: a mangled chunk of shrapnel, a piece of the actual Russian cruise missile that had slammed into the building.

He scooped it up, pricking himself in the process on the jagged steel edges, stuffed it in his backpack and briskly walked the hour home — "I didn't want the police to stop me and think I was a terrorist."

That ugly chunk of steel has now become the star of his "war trophies" collection, which spans everything from ammunition tins and a used rocket-propelled grenade shaft to a pair of black Russian boots he found in Bucha, a battered suburb of Kyiv.

"Those have really bad energy," he said.

It might seem eccentric, even macabre, to collect war debris like this. But Sumliennyi isn't the only

AUCTION HOUSES ARE MOVING DISCARDED PIECES OF WEAPONS AND OTHER BATTLEFIELD FINDS, RAISING THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FOR UKRAINIAN SOLDIERS. ONE WOMAN IS EVEN MAKING SCULPTURES FROM THE UNIFORMS OF DEAD RUSSIANS

one. Across Ukraine, many civilians and soldiers are foraging for shrapnel pieces, mortar fins, spent bullet casings and bits of bombs.

Ukrainian artists are weaving them into their work. Auction houses are moving discarded pieces of weapons and other battlefield finds, raising thousands of dollars for Ukrainian soldiers. One woman is even making sculptures from the uniforms of dead

Russians.

It clearly speaks to something bigger. So many Ukrainians want to be on the front lines — or to somehow feel connected to the cause even if they are far from the fighting or don't see themselves as cut out for combat. With patriotism cresting and their country's existence at stake, they are seeking out something tangible they can hold in their hands that represents this enormous, overwhelming moment. They crave their own little piece of history.

"Each piece has a story," said Serhii Petrov, a well-known artist working in Lviv, in western Ukraine. He's now incorporating spent bullet cartridges into the masks he makes.

As he handled one, he mused, "Maybe it was someone's last bullet."

At a charity auction in Lviv on Sunday, Valentyn Lapotkov, a computer programmer, paid more than \$500 for an empty missile tube that had been used, the auctioneers said, to blow up a Russian armoured personnel carrier. He said that when he touched it he felt "close to our heroes."

Memorialising the war, even when it's likely far from over, is a way to show solidarity with the soldiers and those who have suffered.

— New York Times



Environmental activist Ihor Sumliennyi, left, and friends, look for military artifacts at a site hit by a Russian cruise missile in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Let’s unite with our friends worldwide!



SAMUEL KUTTY
The writer is a journalist, author, and columnist

On July 30, we celebrated the International Day of Friendship, an initiative by the United Nations to enable countries and individuals to step back and thank each other in an attempt to promote and encourage peace, happiness, and unity.

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed,” the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization constitution reads.

First observed in 2011, the International Day of Friendship builds upon a 1997 UN resolution defining the Culture of Peace, which is “a set of values, attitudes, and behaviours that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by addressing their root causes with a view to solving problems.”

The world we live in today is full of miscommunications, mistreatment, lack of trust, discrimination, and cultural discord, prioritising peace seemingly has less of a presence in the global society.

To confront and overcome these crises and challenges, the main effort is to address the root causes by promoting and defending a shared spirit of human solidarity is friendship.

We should be able to foster friendships across borders by encouraging unity, equity, and respecting human rights. The actions to promote this culture of friendship will ultimately result in peace for all people regardless of sex, race, gender, or ethnicity.

LOOK AT THE CIVIL WAR DEATHS AS A RESULT OF THE CONFLICTS IN COUNTRIES LIKE AFGHANISTAN, SOUTH SUDAN, SYRIA, AND YEMEN OR THE WAR BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE OR THE RAGING CLIMATE EXTREMES, OR THE PROLONGED COVID-19 PANDEMIC — ALL ARE THREATENING PEACE, SECURITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND SOCIAL HARMONY OF THE WORLD

have a habit of spiralling and leading to unforeseen escalations and negative consequences. Peace underpins all that is good in our societies.

The word friendship is synonymous with bonding, and building it goes beyond sharing a trait, characteristic, or favourite pastime with another person or group, but also includes promoting a global commitment and understanding of diversity and inclusion.

According to Dr Hong, Tao-Tze, President of the Federation of World Peace and Love, friendships are established through serendipity, a word that represents an invisible and intangible thread that connects people across generations, time, and space and creates every opportunity for encounters and mutual influence between people.

“Each interaction has the potential to generate good karma as a result of an individual’s self-cultivation and good deeds. A friendship founded on virtue positively impacts the world, fostering a culture of conscience and peace for humanity to maintain global stability”, he advised on the occasion.

In personal life as well, friends hold a very special place and there is nobody who can replace their importance in our lives. In good or bad, we have always looked up to our friends for their constant support and love. It is also our friends who make life’s journey not only easy but also enjoyable and peaceful.

Even as the International Day of Friendship has passed off, we should remember the fact that the day stands to transform war and violence into a culture of peace and non-violence through friendship.

The world is a big family, and global citizens are brothers and sisters, so let us unite with our friends around the world to protect our common peaceful home!



ENDANGERED SPECIES

Environmentalist Argenis Pantoja checks a turtle hatchling of the endangered loggerhead (Caretta caretta) species before it is released into the ocean by conservationists who protect them from predators in a nursery on El Puerto beach, in the fishing village of La Sabana, La Guaira State, Venezuela. The Ministry of Popular Power for Eco-Socialism (Minec), together with volunteers and naturalists, are developing a sea turtle conservation project aimed at protecting endangered species by collecting their eggs to nest them in a hatchery and releasing them into the sea after birth. — AFP

Cool head in a rough region, Kenya faces test in election

NICK PERRY

In his final weeks as president, Uhuru Kenyatta has been busier than usual playing peacemaker in East Africa, thawing tensions with Somalia, intervening in Congo’s crisis, and hosting talks between Sudan and Ethiopia.

His enthusiasm for statesmanship has not gone unrecognised — Kenya’s departing leader was recently awarded the national order of Burundi, and gifted a resplendent sash from fellow presidents for his regional diplomacy.

But with Kenyatta leaving office after almost a decade, Kenya’s allies are anxiously wondering what is next for a country that has evolved into a trusted ally and democratic anchor in a troubled region.

The August 9 election to replace Kenyatta, who cannot run for a third term, has elevated tensions and evoked the spectre of instability that has plagued Kenya’s votes.

Diplomats and foreign observers say a peaceful transfer of power remains uncertain, and that Kenya’s coveted reputation as a reliable and stable partner faces a keen test as voters head to polling booths.

The frontrunners, William Ruto and Raila Odinga, have pledged to concede defeat if the election is free and fair.

But both candidates have been accused of inciting previous electoral violence, and the race is too close to call, raising jitters in Western capitals as the high-stakes transition draws near.

Foreign partners have increasingly relied on Kenya as a steady hand in East Africa, and fear an internal crisis would deprive the region of stability and leadership at a critical time. “Weak states, feuding states, can’t play the role of a diplomatic anchor,” said Cameron Hudson, a former US official now senior associate at CSIS Africa.

He said Kenya had surpassed Ethiopia as the region’s “new diplomatic powerhouse” since Kenyatta took office in 2013. This has seen Kenyatta personally intervene in crises where regional institutions such as the African Union and IGAD — both historically close to Addis Ababa — have been slow to act.

Late last year, as a rebel advance on Ethiopia’s capital provoked international alarm, Kenyatta flew unannounced to Addis Ababa to urge Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to find a peaceful solution.

The rebels from the northern Tigray region said in July that any potential ceasefire talks must be mediated by Kenyatta — not the African Union, which is headquartered in Addis Ababa.

In June, as eastern Congo spiralled

THE AUGUST 9 ELECTION TO REPLACE KENYATTA, WHO CANNOT RUN FOR A THIRD TERM, HAS ELEVATED TENSIONS AND EVOKED THE SPECTRE OF INSTABILITY THAT HAS PLAGUED KENYA’S VOTES

into violence, Kenyatta called East African leaders to his official residence, proposing that Kenya oversee a regional peacekeeping mission to the conflict zone.

Internationally, too, Kenya has sought to project greater influence and stand on its own.

In February, as other African states responded with equivocation, Kenya strongly condemned Russia’s aggression in Ukraine at the UN Security Council, where Nairobi sought and won a temporary seat two years earlier.

Such interventions have been warmly welcomed by foreign allies including the United States, which bases troops in Kenya, and needs its support countering violent militants in Somalia.

Washington valued Kenyatta as a trusted envoy in regional crises where they had made little headway, analysts said.

“He is probably the African leader the US president has spoken to the most,” Hudson said.

Washington is “investing a great deal to ensure that stability continues through these elections”, he added.

Ruto and Odinga flew to London and Washington earlier this year to assure policymakers that Nairobi would continue to play a pivotal role in the region. Diplomats say there is unlikely

to be major foreign policy changes under either candidate.

“But it will not be a priority,” said Macharia Munene, professor of history and international relations at the United States International University in Nairobi.

“I don’t think either Raila or Ruto have the passion for this sort of thing, whereas for Uhuru, it’s a passion.”

In any case, he said Kenyatta’s successor would have “bigger fish to fry” than dealing with regional headaches.

East Africa’s largest economy is saddled with debt and the next administration could be pressured by international lenders to slash populist subsidies despite having promised to bring down prices.

“We’re just concerned about how much time Kenya will be able to spend on foreign policy and regional mediation, if it’s grappling with so much at home,” said Meron Elias, an analyst at the International Crisis Group.

Kenya’s international standing couldn’t have been worse when Kenyatta took office in 2013 despite — or perhaps because of — being indicted by the International Criminal Court on crimes against humanity.

The new administration was accused of frustrating the investigation into Kenyatta and his deputy, Ruto, over their alleged role in orchestrating the 2007 post-election violence that left over 1,100 people dead.

The cases against the pair — who campaigned on a platform of nationalism and confronting the ICC — were dropped, with prosecutors citing a lack of evidence and relentless witness intimidation.

There are fears “the relationship which has improved in the last few years could go sideways again” depending how the transition plays out, said a US analyst and veteran observer of Kenyan elections who declined to be named.

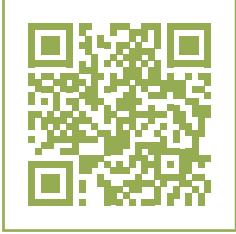
“Everybody is obviously nervous,” the analyst said. — AFP



Azimio La Umoja (One Kenya Coalition Party) supporters hold a banner during a rally in Kirigiti Stadium, Kiambu, Kenya, on Monday. — AFP

sport

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Oman Sepak takraw team win third place in Thailand championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 2

Oman national Sepak takraw team claimed third place at the 2022 Thailand King's Cup Sepak takraw World Championship which concluded recently in Bangkok. Oman team's accomplishment is registered in teams category (level 2). The event saw a large participation from a number of Asian and European teams. Oman's player Juma bin Salim al Sinani named as one of the best and youngest talented player in the tournament.

Oman's head of delegation Salim al Sinani said that this participation in the international event concluded with a thrilling accomplishment for the national team. "Attending this championship is a crucial step for the team to continue in their



development plan towards better achievements in near future. We managed to get bronze medal among top teams which took part in this championship. In spite of the team's long absence, the players managed to record

this achievement at this event. Taking part in this edition of the championship will help players gain more experience and get to know the level of competitions," he added.

As apart of the event, Oman's

delegation signed an agreement with International Sepak takraw Federation (ISTAF) to establish a training centre of sepak takraw in Muscat.

"After a series of meetings with the officials of the ISTAF, we

have agreed to establish a Middle East Centre for sepak takraw in Muscat. Launching of this training centre in the capital city of Oman will assist in spreading this sport in the Sultanate of Oman and GCC countries. Oman Sepak takraw, Kabaddi and Woodball Committee is very keen to provide such training opportunity for all interested people. A special thanks for the ISTAF officials for approving the opening of training centre in Muscat. We will begin the process of opening the centre during the coming period after obtaining required licences from the entities concerned," Al Sinani ended.

The agreement was signed by Salim al Sinani from Oman's delegation, while Dato Abdul Halim, Secretary-General, signed on behalf of ISTAF.



"That is the most important thing for me," he said. "Last week was a bit complicated but sometimes this is part of football." Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic spoke with Lewandowski during his brief visit and they cleared the air.

— Reuters

Jota signs new long-term contract with Liverpool

ENGLAND: Forward Diogo Jota has signed a new long-term contract with Liverpool, the Premier League club said on Tuesday.

Liverpool did not disclose the length of the deal but British media reported the Portugal international has signed a five-year extension, keeping him at Anfield until 2027.

Jota helped Liverpool win the FA Cup and League Cup last season, while they finished second in the Premier League just a point behind Manchester City and reached the Champions League final, which they lost to Real Madrid.

The 25-year-old arrived at



Anfield from Wolverhampton Wanderers in 2020 and has scored 34 goals in 85 appearances for the reds in all competitions.

"What Diogo has brought to this team and this club since he arrived is there for all to see, so it is really good news that he has signed a new contract,"

"I have said before that Diogo is the player we hoped he would be but also a little bit better, so long may this continue."

Jota joins team mates Mohamed Salah, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Jordan Henderson, Virgil van Dijk and Fabinho in committing his long-term future to the club.

He is currently recovering from a hamstring injury that has

curtailed his pre-season and is set to miss Liverpool's Premier League opener at promoted Fulham on Saturday.

"Unfortunately for me I had an upset in this pre-season because I got injured (in the) last game of the season playing with Portugal.

"So I was coming back in this pre-season, I felt it a little bit again. It will be a few more weeks, I would say.

"When you fight for everything, like we did last year, you just want to do it again and to do it better, because it's possible. That drive is in me and I know it's in my team-mates and... We have everything to fight for those titles out there."

— Reuters

England to play seven T20s on first Pakistan tour in 17 years

KARACHI: England will play seven Twenty20 internationals against Pakistan on their first visit to the country in 17 years, the Pakistan Cricket Board said on Tuesday.

England will arrive in mid-September and play four T20s in Karachi, with the other three matches in Lahore, and then return in December for three Tests.

England's last tour to the country was in 2005 before Pakistan were forced to play international matches at neutral venues in the UAE following a 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore.

International cricket gradually returned to Pakistan in 2015 but suffered another setback when New Zealand pulled out of a tour

minutes before a one-day international in September last year, citing security alerts.

A week later, England withdrew its men's and women's teams from tours to Pakistan.

Both tours were rescheduled after the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) gave assurances over security. Pakistan successfully hosted Australia for the first time since 1998 earlier this year.

"We demonstrated our event planning and operational skills in the highly successful series against Australia in March-April this year and I am confident we will be able to replicate these when England visit us," said PCB director of international cricket, Zakir Khan. — AFP



India and Pakistan to clash in Aug 28 Asia Cup humdinger

NEW DELHI: Arch-rivals India and Pakistan will clash in an Asia Cup Sunday blockbuster in Dubai on August 28, the organisers said on Tuesday.

Bilateral cricket remains suspended between the bitter neighbours who play each other

only in multi-team tournaments.

A day after Sri Lanka take on Afghanistan in the opener, India and Pakistan will lock horns in the tournament's most anticipated match.

The nine-team Twenty20 tournament was shifted to the

United Arab Emirates last month due to the political and economic crisis in Sri Lanka, who retain the hosts' honour.

Pakistan beat India by 10 wickets in a T20 World Cup match in Dubai last year in their previous encounter.

Dubai hosts 10 matches, including the September 11 final, while three will be played in Sharjah, ACC president Jay Shah, who is also the secretary of the Indian cricket board, said on Twitter.

— Reuters



England recall Robinson for first two South Africa Tests



LONDON: England have recalled Ollie Robinson into a 14-man squad for this month's first two Tests of a three-match series against South Africa.

Robinson has not played for England since the Ashes ended in January due to several fitness issues, mainly surrounding his back.

But the 28-year-old seamer took nine wickets in Sussex's recent County Championship match against Nottinghamshire before earning an England recall in place of the injured Jamie Overton.

Struggling opener Zak Crawley has retained his place in an otherwise unchanged squad.

Robinson will now look to add to an impressive tally of 39 wickets in nine Tests at 21.28 when England face South Africa in the first Test at Lord's starting on August 17.

He will have a chance to press his claim for a place in the Test XI by playing for the second-string England Lions in their four-day tour match against South Africa at Canterbury next week.

England have won all four of their Tests under a new leadership duo of captain Ben Stokes and red-ball head coach Brendon McCullum, including a 3-0 whitewash of world champions New Zealand.

"After an excellent start to the summer under Brendon McCullum and Ben Stokes, we're looking forward to an exciting Test series against a strong South Africa side," said Mo Bobat, men's performance director at the England and

Wales Cricket Board as the squad was announced on Tuesday.

"The selectors have picked a squad for the first two Tests at Lord's and Old Trafford with continuity in mind.

"It's good to get Ollie Robinson back in the mix after his recent injury. He will continue his progress by playing for the Lions against South Africa in a four-day match at Canterbury next week."

Following a poor Ashes series, where his approach to fitness was questioned in public by the England coaching staff, Robinson missed the subsequent tour of the West Indies with back spasms.

He was due to play for a County Select XI against New Zealand in May, only to miss out with a stiff back, before a bout of Covid-19 caused him to spend more time on the sidelines before he returned to action at Trent Bridge.

If Robinson proves his fitness with the Lions, he will be competing alongside James Anderson, Stuart Broad, Matthew Potts and Craig Overton for a place in England's pace attack at Lord's.

The remainder of the Lions squad is due to be announced on Friday.

England squad for the first two Tests against South Africa:

Ben Stokes (Durham, capt), James Anderson (Lancashire), Jonny Bairstow (Yorkshire), Stuart Broad (Nottinghamshire), Harry Brook (Yorkshire), Zak Crawley (Kent), Ben Foakes (Surrey, wkt), Jack Leach (Somerset), Alex Lees (Durham), Craig Overton (Somerset), Matthew Potts (Durham), Ollie Pope (Surrey), Ollie Robinson (Sussex), Joe Root (Yorkshire) — AFP

McKeon dazzles in Commonwealth pool as Kenny wins emotional cycling gold

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: Australian swim sensation Emma McKeon won a record-extending 12th gold medal at the Commonwealth Games on Monday as cycling star Laura Kenny finished her campaign with an emotional gold.

It was another night of domination in the Birmingham pool for Australia, who now have 16 golds at the Sandwell Aquatics Centre out of a possible 33.

McKeon, who powered home in the 50m butterfly, has now won four golds in Birmingham and has collected more overall gold medals than any other athlete in Commonwealth Games history.

The 28-year-old, who won seven medals at last year's Tokyo Olympics — including four golds — touched in 25.90sec.

"I love a challenge," said McKeon. "Just having this huge workload is preparing me for Paris (2024 Olympics) and even though it's hard workload physically, it's just training my mind to be able to do that many races back to back.

"I'm not going to have that many once I get to Paris. It's just building that self-belief."

Rising Canadian star Summer McIntosh, who is just 15, won her second gold of the Games, adding the women's 200m individual medley title to her 400m IM crown. 48-hour 'hell



Australia's Kyle Chalmers won the men's 100m freestyle final in 47.51sec after a 48-hour period that he described as "hell" as a result of intense speculation in the media over his relationships with

team members.

Reports suggested a rift with McKeon and Cody Simpson, who is reportedly dating McKeon, Chalmers's ex-girlfriend.

The 2016 Olympic champion

said: "The lies and false truths getting put out there — it's nowhere near the truth at all.

"We are great friends and have great support. I am just grateful to be a part of the team and sharing

that with every single team member."

Australian Olympic champion Kaylee McKeown destroyed the field to win the women's 200m backstroke and Australia rounded

off the night in style by winning the men's 4x200m freestyle relay.

Track gold

England's Kenny and Australian Matthew Glaetzer won gold medals in an uplifting final session of track cycling, which was being held in London.

New Zealand's Ellesse Andrews, in the women's keirin, and compatriot Aaron Gate, in the men's 40km points race, both won their third gold medals of the games.

Kenny, who has suffered a miscarriage and an ectopic pregnancy since competing at last year's Tokyo Olympics, admitted she had thought it was "going to be my last race".

However, she refocused and won the women's 10-kilometre scratch on the same track where 10 years ago, aged 20, she won double Olympic gold.

Kenny admitted her confidence had been shaken by a horrific crash on Sunday that had resulted in her team-mate, Matt Walls, being taken to hospital.

"I can't believe it. Honestly, I said to Jase (Jason Kenny, her husband) 'I think this is going to be my last race', the five-time Olympic gold medalist told the BBC.

"I've lost the spark, training doesn't come that easy. I have absolutely just lost motivation.

— AFP

Murray, Venus defeated in Washington openers

WASHINGTON: Three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray of Britain crashed out in the opening round of the ATP and WTA Washington Open on Monday, falling to Sweden's Mikael Ymer.

The 35-year-old Scotsman fell to 115th-ranked Ymer 7-6 (10/8), 4-6, 6-1 after two hours and 50 minutes at the US Open tuneup tournament.

"I'm excited," said Ymer, who saved four set points in the first set. "A lot left to do but it's a very good start of the American swing."

World number 50 Murray, the 2012 and 2016 Olympic champion, is trying to earn a seeding at the US Open, which he won a decade ago.

"It's still possible," Murray said. "I would just need to have a good run in Canada or Cincinnati really. It's pretty straightforward if I was to make a quarterfinal or a semifinal, which right now — after a loss like that — doesn't

seem realistic.

"I do feel like if I play very well that I could do that. But I'll need to certainly play better than I did today."

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams, playing her first singles match in nearly a year, was also eliminated in the opening round, falling to Canadian qualifier Rebecca Marino 4-6, 6-1, 6-4.

"It was nice to have the crowd behind me," Williams said. "Definitely a great experience. It's my first match so I didn't think I played well a lot of the times.

"Just trying to shake off some rust. That's just to be expected. All I can do is just play another tournament and play better."

Williams had not played a WTA singles match since falling to Taiwan's Hsieh Su-wei 49 weeks ago in Chicago.

Ymer, who lost his only career ATP final last August in Winston-Salem, will next face 15th seed Aslan Karatsev. — APP



OMAN SHOOTING FEDERATION ORGANISE OLYMPIC SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP



Oman Shooting Federation will organise the Olympic Shooting Championship (10m air pressure) for males, females and generals, at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher starting from 13 to 31 August. The competition will feature specific age groups including juniors from 2005 to 2008, the general from 1998 to 2004, as well for disabilities from 1985 to 2008.

Red Bull, Honda extend F1 technical support deal until 2025

AUSTRIAN: Red Bull have extended their power unit support agreement with Honda until the end of the 2025 season after the Japanese manufacturer's departure from Formula One, the team said in a statement on Tuesday.

Honda withdrew from F1 at the end of 2021 after powering Max Verstappen to his maiden world championship, winning a drivers' title for the first time since the late Brazilian triple champion Ayrton Senna triumphed with McLaren in 1991.

The Austrian outfit set up their own powertrain company to use



Honda's intellectual property to provide power units for their main Red Bull Racing Formula

One team and Italy-based sister team AlphaTauri.

The partnership was initially

intended to last until the end of 2023, with Red Bull set to take over the operation, but will now run until the end of 2025, when the sport introduces the next generation of power units.

Red Bull are currently leading both Formula One championships by a comfortable margin, with Dutch driver Verstappen heading for a second straight world title.

"We thank Honda for their positive response to working together. We are excited to continue our partnership in F1," Red Bull's team adviser Helmut Marko said.— Reuters

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Rakiza Fund receives RO 115m in capital commitment from Saudi's PIF

MUSCAT: Oman Infrastructure Investment Fund (Rakiza), a Muscat-based investment fund managed jointly by Oman Infrastructure Investment Management (OIIM) and London-based Equitix, has announced a capital commitment of SAR 1.125 billion, equivalent to RO 115 million, from the Saudi Public Investment Fund.

The newly created fund is a private equity fund and an investor in infrastructure projects, targeting investment in the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia, focusing on the

renewable energy, electricity, water and social services, communications, transport and logistics infrastructure sectors.

Muneer bin Ali al Muneeri, CEO of Oman Infrastructure Investment Management Company, said this partnership with the Saudi Public Investment Fund stems from the shared vision of Oman and Saudi Arabia in supporting the allocation of facilities and infrastructure. It is a key factor in the success of Rakiza's investment strategy to promote capital market growth, attract foreign direct investment

The newly created fund is a private equity fund and an investor in infrastructure projects, targeting investment in the Sultanate of Oman

and privatisation. He explained that this partnership will promote and maximise the strategic value of stakeholders and stakeholders.

Hugh Crossley, CEO and co-founder of Equitix, said this partnership with leading institutional investors contributes to the Fund's commitments to infrastructure development and is a significant addition and development in the fund's history, looking forward to further growth in the region.

The Public Investment Fund is one of the most important and influential sovereign wealth funds in the world and the main driver of Saudi Arabia's economic transformation efforts. (OIA)

Modest decline in real estate transactions during H1 2022

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 2

The total value of real estate transactions in the Sultanate of Oman during the first half of 2022 amounted to RO 1.179 billion, representing a 7.3 per cent decline compared to the transactions totalling RO 1.272 billion for the corresponding period of 2021.

Statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the total fees collected for all real estate transactions amounted to RO 30.400 million this year, which was down 40.4 per cent from the corresponding figure of RO 50.900 million in 2021.

The statistics indicated a decrease in the total number of property sales contracts by 18.2 per cent until June 2022, although the traded value of sales contracts increased by 2 per cent

compared to the same period in 2021.

As many as 116,234 ownership deeds were issued this year, compared to 129,149 ownership deeds for the same period in 2021, entailing a decline of 9.9 per cent. Ownership deeds issued to GCC nations totalled 353 this year.

Also, the number of sales contracts amounted to 35,978 contracts with a total value of more than RO 613.700 million, while the number of exchange contracts reached 677 contracts with a total value of more than RO 7.400 million.

The number of mortgage contracts grew by 3.1 per cent to reach 9,527 contracts, with a total value of more than RO 558.200 million this year, compared to 9,242 contracts with a total value of RO 659.800 million during the same period in 2021.



Ooredoo breaks ground on three new Data Centres

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 2

Ooredoo has begun construction on three new state-of-the-art Data Centres in Muscat, completing construction well ahead of schedule – a new record for Ooredoo. The centre was fully operational immediately and is a Tier 3 data centre with a power capacity of 2.5 Megawatts and guaranteeing availability of 99.982+ per cent, according to an internationally-recognised framework.

The Data Centre provides a local solution for hosting and data processing for both Ooredoo and data2cloud, allowing both organisations to deliver an outstanding experience to customers.

Each of the new Data Centres will be rated as Tier 3 and have a capacity of more than 500 racks, complementing the growing range of technical facilities operated by Ooredoo across the country.

The sites in Salalah and Barka will also provide cable landing facilities to '2Africa' (2AF), the longest subsea cable system ever deployed, and joining a global consortium of communications operators in connecting 33 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe with a submarine cable spanning 45,000 km.

Construction is expected to be ready to accept 2Africa equipment by the end of March 2023 and to be fully operational by the end of August 2023.

In March 2021 the company launched its new flagship Data Centre in Muscat, completing construction well ahead of schedule – a new record for Ooredoo. The centre was fully operational immediately and is a Tier 3 data centre with a power capacity of 2.5 Megawatts and guaranteeing availability of 99.982+ per cent, according to an internationally-recognised framework.

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Sohar Intl receives ‘Best Tourism Promotion Campaign’ Award

MUSCAT: Sohar International has been leading innovative campaigns geared at promoting the tourism sector in the country. In honour of its unfaltering efforts, the bank was conferred with the title of the ‘Best Campaign to Promote Tourism’ at the Second Arab Forum for Tourism and Heritage for the bank’s initiative in 2021 and 2022 titled ‘In Oman We Win’ and ‘Take It From Us’ respectively.

The bank won the award for its ‘In Oman We Win’ campaign in 2021, and the more recent ‘Take It From Us’ program in 2022.

Organised by the Arab Centre for Tourism Media, the Second Arab Forum for Tourism and Heritage was held on July 24, 25, 2022 at the Rotana Hotel, Salalah, and was inaugurated by His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and saw in attendance several key representatives from the public and private sectors.

Representing the bank, Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Sohar International, attended the event and received the award. The forum seeks to enhance the partnership between media institutions and the government and private sector establishments in the culture, heritage and tourism sector in an endeavour to catalyse the



marketing and promotional efforts in the field.

Commenting on the award, Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Sohar International, said, “Sohar International believes in taking a more holistic approach to its CSR campaigns and strategically integrates key focus areas of national interest and the country’s long-term goals into its initiatives.

Through the ‘In Oman We Win’ and ‘Take It From Us’ initiatives, the bank adopted a unique approach to highlighting the natural beauty, abundant resources and rich cultural heritage of Oman while

simultaneously promoting SMEs catering to this segment and hence creating a rewarding experience for all stakeholders.”

He further added saying, “We are indeed honoured to have received this award which will act as further inspiration for us to continue to conceptualise innovative campaigns and add value to the tourism sector. With Oman’s tourism sector showing immense potential, Sohar International will remain committed to supporting the country’s vision to position the Sultanate of Oman as a key tourism destination. This will also act as a key driver of socio-economic growth, job creation and

the development of industries.”

Passionate about creating a unique experience, Sohar International’s ‘In Oman We Win’ was a popular Prize Scheme in 2021 that took viewers on a tour through various touristic, cultural and historic locations from Musandam to Dhofar.

Meanwhile, the bank’s ongoing ‘Take It From Us’ campaign, which primarily focuses on spreading financial knowledge amongst the community, also seamlessly integrates into each episode, a special segment highlighting the unique adventure experience offered by SMEs and other local companies across various iconic locations in the country. Through well-conceived initiatives like these, Sohar International has reaffirmed its position as a premium bank that is invested in the socio-economic progress of the country.

Recently, Sohar International was ranked by the highly coveted Best Banks Survey as the ‘Fastest Growing Bank’ in the Large Banks Category and ‘Excellence in Digital Transformation’ at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards. In addition, Global Business Review Magazine Awards 2022 honoured Sohar International with the title of ‘Best Corporate Banking – Oman 2022’.



OAB launches Savings Basket with guaranteed returns

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) launched its newest scheme, the OAB Savings Basket, in line with its efforts to enhance financial returns for customers.

The scheme enables them to invest their savings and receive guaranteed returns at an interest rate of up to 5.75 per cent per annum.

“With the global macroeconomic challenges that have prevailed over the last few years, it is imperative that we offer schemes that have long-term benefits for our customers and their families.

The main objective of the launch of our Savings Basket is to enable customers to grow their savings with attractive returns on their investment. With this in mind, we would like to encourage our customers to take part in this limited-time opportunity that is catered to meeting their long-term aspirations, with an array of value-added benefits,” said Rashad al Shaikh, Head of the Retail Banking

Division at OAB.

With the OAB Savings Basket, customers can deposit a specified amount as a fixed deposit for a maximum period of three years, which will be subject to a guaranteed interest rate.

The minimum and maximum deposits for eligibility are RO 50,000 and RO 1,000,000, respectively. OAB will invest 70 per cent of the amount as a fixed deposit, with an interest rate of 5.5 per cent per annum for one year, 5.65 per cent per annum for two years and 5.75 per cent per annum for three years. Furthermore, the remaining 30 per cent of the deposited amount will be held in a cash margin account with added benefits, including a complimentary Elite Credit Card with a maximum limit of RO 20,000 and an Overdraft Facility with an upper limit of RO 50,000.

Customers can visit their nearest OAB branch to apply for this limited-time scheme or visit the OAB website for more information.



NBO welcomes new batch of young Omani interns

MUSCAT: Continuing to provide young people with opportunities to succeed, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has welcomed its latest batch of 35 interns. Having completed their orientation session, which familiarised them with NBO’s values, operations and other key information, they are now ready to embark on their work experience.

The internship programme

is designed to upskill Omani graduates and enhance their banking and financial experience, and will see them make their way through the bank’s different divisions and branches and, ultimately, equip them with the professional and social skills to confidently enter the job market. To date, NBO has welcomed 297 interns in 2022.

Aliya al Balushi, Assistant General Manager, Head of Talent

and Performance Management at NBO, said, “Internships are extremely useful for young people to build on their education with real life experience. By guiding and supporting our interns, and helping them to identify and secure new roles and opportunities, we are building a solid base of talent and supporting the building of a competitive and knowledge-based economy as per Oman’s 2040 Vision.”

Bank Muscat wins GTR Award for Best Trade Finance Bank in Oman

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has won the Best Trade Finance Bank in Oman Award from Global Trade Review (GTR) magazine for the fourth consecutive year.

With its strong global network of over 500 correspondent banks, Bank Muscat offers a number of customised solutions to meet the challenging demands of exporters, importers and local traders in the Oman and this year’s GTR award recognises the excellent services provided by the bank through its Global Trade Services division.

Speaking on the occasion, Fatma al Maskiry, Senior Assistant General Manager, Global Trade Services, Bank Muscat, said: “As one of the leading Trade Finance providers in the region, Bank



Fatma al Maskiry

Muscat has been facilitating trade and economic development both in Oman and the region. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Global Trade Review for recognising the bank’s efforts in supporting the corporate sector in Oman and in the region through a number of highly-customised solutions.”

The Global Trade Services team at Bank Muscat blends traditional financial solutions

with tailor-made packages for operations, ensuring prompt payments, managing liquidity and minimising exchange rate risk.

Bank Muscat offers a number of customised solutions to meet the challenging demands of exporters, importers and local traders in Oman.

The bank issues Letters of Credit, all types of Guarantees, Standby LCs, handles documents under collection, offers document checking services under export Letters of Credit, and confirms Letters of Credit.

It also provides various trade financing solutions including forfeiting, receivables finance, trust receipt financing and facilitates secured trade payments and receipts between buyers and sellers.

Make your mark in luxury with the Lexus IS with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Lexus enthusiasts wishing to own the IS can look forward to exclusive benefits like service 3 years/30,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and one year free registration.

Lexus IS with its aggressive stance, bold design and rewarding ownership experiences, stands out when it comes to luxury sedan experiences.

The IS’ impressive profile is due to its lower, wider proportions with muscular fenders. The sleek lines are also complemented with aggressive sharpness carved into the side and shoulder character lines.

The IS, is available in two

options. A 2.0-litre, turbocharged and intercooled inline four-cylinder engine delivers 241 hp and 35.7 kg.M of torque. The sophisticated 3.5-litre V6 engine produces 312 hp and 38.5 kg.M of torque. Both engines are paired to an eight-speed sport direct-shift automatic transmission that offers superb drivability, together with outstanding fuel efficiency and quietness even at high speed.

The interiors of the IS are thoughtfully planned. Passengers can indulge in fine moments with a range of advanced features for a refined cabin experience.

These include a new 10.3-inch touchscreen multimedia system



featuring Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility, a 4.2-inch colour multi-information display (MID), and a dual-zone automatic climate control system with touch-sensitive controls. The vehicle also offers SmartAccess

with push-button start, a 17-speaker Mark Levinson sound system, a power moonroof, power adjustable and ventilated front seats, as well as ample luggage space thanks to the 60:40 split-folding rear seats.

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The vehicle also includes comprehensive safety features designed to protect its occupants, such as all-round SRS airbags,

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For those seeking to experience the ultimate in thrilling responsiveness, the IS, is also available in an F Sport version. Engineered for exhilaration, the F brand DNA has trickled down from the legendary LFA, which represents the pinnacle of refined performance.

Yen set for biggest run of gains in 2 years before Pelosi visit

SAIKAT CHATTERJEE

The yen was on track for its biggest run of gains since the depths of the coronavirus crisis in March 2020, as rising US-China tensions over Taiwan and deepening worries about a global economic slowdown boosted the appeal of safe-haven assets.

The US dollar struggled broadly, extending a tough few trading sessions since the Federal Reserve raised interest rates last week amid signs that the US economy is cooling, with policymakers hinting at a slower pace of rate hikes in future.

Against the dollar, the Japanese currency was on track for a fifth consecutive session of gains on Tuesday, taking its cumulative increase to nearly 4.5 per cent in five trading sessions.

In London trading, the currency was up 0.6 per cent at 130.78 yen, just below a high of 130.40 yen, a level last seen in early June.

“With the yen already enjoying a mini revival on the back of narrowing yield spreads with Japanese government bonds, it is the clear winner from today’s risk-off episode, while the dollar is barely ticking higher against a basket of currencies,” said Raffi Boyadjian, investment analyst at XM.

Jitters about the impact of an impending visit to Taiwan by US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi weighed on stocks and sent investors scurrying into US Treasuries.

The benchmark 10-year Treasury yield fell to 2.516 per cent, its lowest since April, further narrowing the gap between ten-year US debt and equivalent Japanese bonds to 236 basis points (bps), the lowest since early April.

The US economy shrank for a second straight quarter, data released last week showed, intensifying a debate over whether the country is, or will soon be, in recession, with traders keenly watching for US jobs data on Friday.

“US data releases and the reaction in US yields through the end of this week will be critical as JPY momentum has built a considerable head of steam here,” said John Hardy, head of FX strategy at Saxo Bank.

Interest rate markets implied by Fed fund futures show US interest rates are set to peak in February 2023 at around 3.25 per cent. That compares with a peak rate pricing of more than 4 per cent in mid 2023 in early June, according to Refinitiv data. The Australian dollar fell nearly 1.5 per cent after the Reserve Bank of Australia raised rates by 50 bps to 1.85 per cent, in line with expectations. — Reuters

With the yen already enjoying a mini revival on the back of narrowing yield spreads with Japanese government bonds, it is the clear winner from today’s risk-off episode, while the dollar is barely ticking higher against a basket of currencies

RAFFI BOYADIJIAN
Investment analyst, XM



SHRIMPS ARE BACK

A vendor sells freshly caught shrimp at a fish market in Kuwait City. Shrimp fishing resumed in Kuwaiti waters after a seven-month break and begins September 1 in regional waters. — AFP

Brexit bill allows government checks on regulators



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our correspondent based in the UK

The long-awaited Financial Services and Markets Bill which was published on July 20 by the UK government brings in a new era of scrutiny for the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. In a reform package, the regulators have been given the power to repeal large parts of legacy European Union rules following Brexit.

However, the UK government is stepping up its oversight of them as a result, with a number of moves welcomed by the majority of respondents to a consultation on the framework published along with the bill.

Respondents “generally welcomed” giving the Treasury the power to force the regulator to review its rules when it thought it was in the public interest. Some thought it did not go far enough on forcing a rule change or when a review could be asked for.

However, they asked for more clarity on when it would be used. The bill confirms that the government can force the regulator to review rules if they have been in force for at least a year, and if it does not appear to the Treasury that the regulator is carrying out its own review. Powers to force through

changes to the rules themselves, a so-called ‘call-in’ from ministers, remain under consideration.

It was reported in the Financial Times previously that Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey has personal reservations about the use of ‘call-in’. The chancellor Nadeem Zahawi, recently appointed to replace Rishi Sunak who resigned early last month, confirmed that a call-in would not be introduced immediately, while he takes time to “consider all the arguments before making such an important decision.”

The regulators will be asked to pursue growth and international competitiveness in addition to their existing goals of safeguarding markets and consumers.

The government said a “significant majority” of respondents to its consultation also thought the new secondary objective would be the right balance with consumer protections and market integrity.

In addition, other respondents were equally divided between those who thought the competition objective would wipe out regulatory standards and those who said the competitiveness would have to be a “primary” objective to make any difference. The majority also backed government proposals to make regulators

consider how their rules would fit trade agreements with other countries, the Treasury said.

Some worried this could lower regulatory standards in order to preserve the trade agreements and questioned what would be prioritised in any conflict. The government has gone ahead, meaning the regulators will have to consult the Treasury on changes that could impact its work with overseas jurisdictions.

The Treasury committee of MPs already conducts regular questioning of FCA executives. However, the government has now made it a formal requirement for the FCA to notify the committee when it publishes any consultation and to respond should any parliamentary committee weigh in on any consultation.

The government is also forcing the FCA and PRA to publish the frameworks they use to conduct cost-benefit analysis on their rules as the idea was “strongly welcomed” by respondents.

The government will dictate what must be covered in these framework statements. The government will require the regulator to “have regard” to its commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 — a less important status for regulatory principles.

A new fiscal strategy for Germany

CHRISTIAN LINDNER AND LARS P FELD

The extraordinary shock of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine are reverberating throughout the German economy.

Sharp increases in the prices of energy and raw materials, as well as continued and new disruptions to global supply chains, are postponing economic recovery. Consumer and producer prices are rising at their fastest rate in a half-century, while forecasts for GDP growth are being revised downward.

In addition to these shocks, Germany is facing major medium-

and long-term challenges that could further dampen growth and contribute to higher inflation. For starters, productivity growth has fallen sharply since reunification in 1990 and has remained low since the 2008 global financial crisis. Higher productivity is key to longer-term economic growth, competitiveness, and price stability.

Moreover, demographic change in Germany will accelerate sharply, with the ratio of retirees to the working-age population set to rise markedly in the second half of this decade. This will put increasing pressures on social security systems and labor markets, where limited access to skilled workers, already a problem, will constrain the economy’s medium-term

growth prospects.

Future economic growth could also be markedly weaker if the necessary investments in decarbonisation fail to materialise or Germany’s transition toward climate neutrality turns out to be excessively disruptive. Higher fossil-fuel costs due to carbon pricing are essential incentives for developing renewable energy sources, but these intentional relative price changes risk driving up the overall price level.

Finally, Germany’s export-oriented economy is particularly dependent on the functioning and resilience of international supply chains, which since 2020 have proven to be fragile and vulnerable to persistent disruptions. Economic growth could be slower

and inflation higher if a partial reversal or reorganisation of global trade means that Germany cannot rely on the benefits of the international division of labour as it did in the past.

Against this backdrop, Germany requires an efficient, forward-looking, and proactive fiscal policy that boosts sustainable growth through supply-side measures without further stoking inflation, and thus counteracts current stagflation risks. At the same time, fiscal policy must take account of today’s global geo-strategic challenges and strengthen the private-sector forces required for economic modernisation, digitisation, and carbon-neutral transformation.

These principles are reflected

in the new fiscal strategy we recently presented at the Federal Ministry of Finance. The strategy rests on three pillars, and seeks to achieve a carefully calibrated balance between tackling the current crisis and preventing the build-up of further inflationary pressures.

The first pillar is a powerful and resolute response to exceptional events like the ongoing war in Ukraine. To this end, the government has already implemented two relief packages for households and firms that are suffering from the sharp increase in energy prices, including swift one-off payments to vulnerable households. It is also protecting hard-hit companies.

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#Living_with_COVID19

Keeping the khanjar-making tradition alive in a fast changing landscape

Yassir bin Nassir al Farsi is a silversmith who belongs to a family that has crafted khanjars for more than a century. Faced with modern challenges like knock-offs and the pandemic, Yassir continues to keep the tradition alive believing that it is an important part of the Omani culture that needed to be protected... **P20**

Beyonce sounds urgent call to dance on new album 'Renaissance'

BEYONCE, THE PARADIGM-SHIFTING music royal whose art has long established her as one of entertainment's seminal stars, on Friday released her hotly anticipated album "Renaissance," a house-tinged dance record primed for its summer needle drop.

Six years after she shook the culture with her powerful visual album "Lemonade," Beyonce's seventh solo studio work is a pulsating, sweaty collection of club tracks aimed at liberating a world consumed by ennui.

Eminently danceable and rife with nods to disco and EDM history —

Queen Bey interpolates Donna Summer and Giorgio Moroder along with James Brown and the archetypal synth line from "Show Me Love," the 1990s house smash by Robin S — the 16-song album is poised to reign over the season.

Prior to releasing her opus Beyonce had dropped "Break My Soul" to acclaim, setting the tone for her house revival that highlighted the Black, queer and working-class artists and communities who moulded the electronic dance genre, which first developed in Chicago in the 1980s.



The megastar has indicated that "Renaissance" is but the first act of three, in a project she said she recorded over the course of three years during the pandemic.

"Creating this album allowed me a place to dream and to find escape during a scary time for the world," Beyonce on her website.

"It allowed me to feel free and adventurous in a time when little else was moving," she continued. "My intention was to create a safe place, a place

without judgment. A place to be free of perfectionism and overthinking."

"A place to scream, release, feel freedom. It was a beautiful journey of exploration."

EXPANSIVE LISTENING JOURNEY

In the weeks preceding the release of "Renaissance" Beyonce teased the album with the steady stream of glossy, curated portraits of herself that over the past decade have become her signature.

But though she's received wide praise for keeping the world of music videos on the cutting edge, Beyonce put out her latest record sans visuals (they're promised at a later date.)

In a statement her label Parkwood Entertainment and Columbia Records lent insight into the decision, saying the artist "decided to lead without vis-

uals giving fans the opportunity to be limitless in their expansive listening journey."

Beyonce's soaring vocals have their place on "Renaissance" but it's the rhythmic, urgent call to the dance floor that stands out, with a tapestry of influences paying homage to pioneers of funk, soul, rap, house and disco.

"Unique / That's what you are / Stilettos kicking vintage crystal off the bar," she sings on "Alien Superstar," which samples Right Said Fred's "I'm Too Sexy" in a sonic ode to voguing, the stylised house dance that emerged from the Black LGBTQ ballroom culture of the 1960s.

That song closes by sampling a speech from Barbara Ann Teer, who founded Harlem's National Black Theatre.

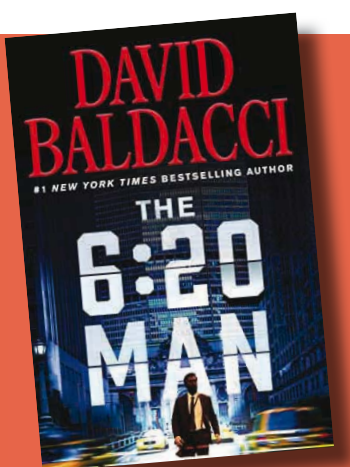
On "Virgo's Groove" Beyonce gets raunchy with an unabashed sex anthem, adding a titular nod to her star sign — the Virgo turns 41 on September 4.

Along with a smattering of deep house cuts as well as tributes to gospel, funk and soul, Beyonce's collaborators on "Renaissance" include Nile Rodgers, Skrillex, Nigerian singer Tems, Grace Jones, Pharrell and, of course, her rap mogul husband Jay-Z. — **AFP**

READ

THE 6:20 MAN BY DAVID BALDACCI

When his ex-girlfriend turns up dead in his office building, an entry-level investment analyst delves into the halls of economic power.



AVATAR IN CONCERT

After headlining a festival in the metaverse, virtual singer and influencer Polar has ambitions to perform in the real world — drawing inspiration from the avatar concerts pioneered by Swedish pop giants ABBA, the digital team behind her says. The creation of media company The Soul Publishing, Polar currently exists only in virtual world environments and on social media. — **Reuters**

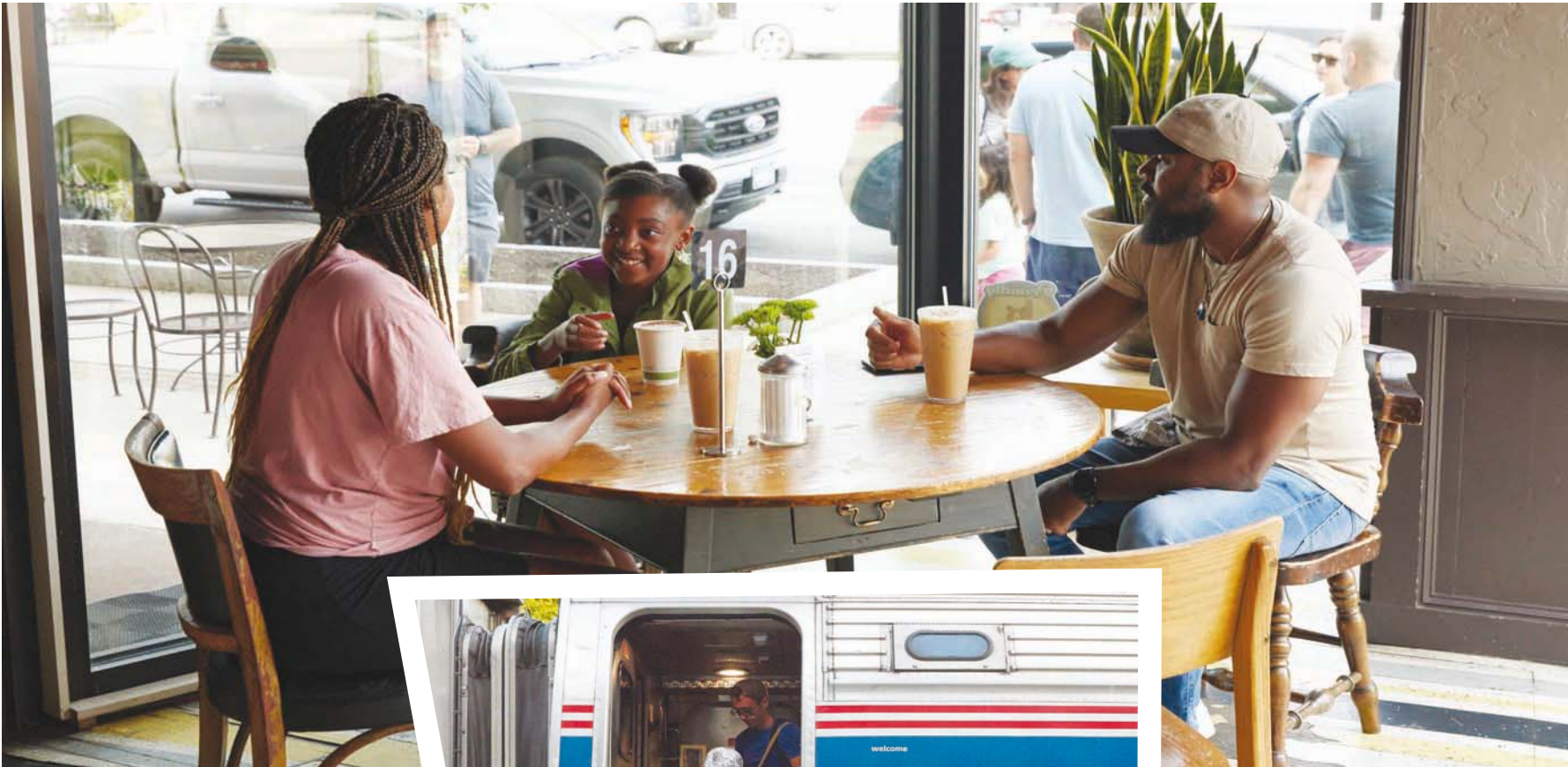


ROCK & ROLL

Italian rockers Maneskin, winners of the 2021 Eurovision song contest, will tour North America for the first time starting in October. The musicians' hit singles include "Beggin'", "I Want To Be Your Slave" and "Supermodel." One of a few guitar bands in the rock and roll mainstream, Maneskin have a fan base that includes Miley Cyrus, Angelina Jolie, Jared Leto and Keith Richards. — **Reuters**



Ditching the Car and Enjoying the View on a Trip to the Berkshires



EVAN GOTTESMAN and his fiancée, Gabrielle Kleyner, were meeting friends in the Berkshires one weekend in early July. The couple, who live in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, were trying to figure out how they would get to the rural region of western Massachusetts, which annually draws thousands of hikers, theatre lovers and music aficionados with its mountains, lakes and myriad cultural centres.

A friend told them about the Berkshire Flyer, a new Amtrak train between New York City and Pittsfield. The couple quickly booked tickets and jumped on the 3:15 pm sold-out train from the Moynihan Train Hall in Manhattan on July 8.

Without realising it, they had stepped onto the Flyer's maiden voyage, a milestone at least four years in the making and the result of countless e-mails, meetings and phone calls between Amtrak and state legislators and transportation officials, who have been eager for more direct rail lines between New York and Massachusetts.

When Gottesman and Kleyner arrived in Pittsfield that evening, they saw dozens of people on the platform cheering wildly and snapping pictures. State and city officials held a triumphant news conference. Someone popped a bottle of Champagne.

"It was the nicest welcome I'd ever gotten stepping off an Amtrak train," Gottesman, 27, said.

For the first time in 50 years, a passenger train from New York had arrived in Pittsfield, a city of more than 40,000 people that is often overlooked by tourists going to better-known parts of the county like Tanglewood in Lenox, the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, or the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams.

More than 60 people arrived that evening on the Berkshire Flyer, which runs only once on Friday and returns on Sunday afternoon. The number of passengers was modest but still encouraged business owners and state officials who are closely watching the pilot programme, which will run through Labor Day.

Also encouraging: the number of sold-out trains. After the inaugural journey, trains to Pittsfield continued to fill up regularly, and while northern-bound seats remain available in August, trains back to New York have a limited number of tickets, with some sold out through Labor Day weekend, according to Amtrak. Travelers should check back to see if seats have opened up since



there may be cancellations.

"It's in the beginning stages," said Lindsey Tuller, 42, a co-owner of the Berkshire General Store in Pittsfield, about two blocks from the train station. "But I think it could be a big deal."

IT 'STARTS WITH LOCAL INTEREST'

The Flyer is one of many new services and restored rail lines that Amtrak has announced in recent months.

On Friday, the Ethan Allen Express, a rail line from New York to Rutland, Vermont, was extended 66 miles northwest to Burlington as part of another new programme.

In Virginia, Amtrak has added more daily rides from Roanoke and Norfolk to Washington.

International routes that were shut down because of the pandemic are humming again, including the Maple Leaf train between New York and Toronto and the Cascades train between Seattle and Vancouver, which resumes in September.

In Jacksonville, North Carolina, a \$10 million bus depot opened in June to take passengers about 84 miles north to an Amtrak station in Wilson.

The project, which Jacksonville officials have been planning since 2010, was funded by the Federal Transit Administration, said Anthony Prinz, the city's transportation services director.

Similar projects are to be funded by the bipartisan infrastructure bill that President Joe Biden signed into law last year, particularly in states and communities that have begun planning, said Roger Harris, the president of Amtrak.

"It really starts with local interest," Harris said. "That's why it's important for local communities to get on their game and say, 'Yes, please, we want to get in on this.'"

Amtrak has created an expansive map that lays out a vision for how it could bring dozens more routes to more than 160 cities and towns across the country.

The new law, which sets aside \$66 billion for rail, comes at a time when travellers are looking for ways to save on fuel costs and get around the country more sustainably.

The funding also comes as Amtrak continues to recover from a decline in ridership caused by the pandemic. The rail service recorded nearly 16 million rides between October 2021 and June 2022, compared with about 24 million during the same time period in 2019, according to Amtrak. Nearly 20 per cent, or \$12 billion, of the total rail funding is set aside for service outside the Northeast, giving cities and towns that want to be part of the proposed expansion a big boost, according to Amtrak officials.

North Carolina already has plans in place. Its goal over the next decade is to work with Virginia to build a 110-mile, one-hour train route and draw millions of people away from congested highways, said Jason Orthner, the rail division director in North Carolina's Department of Transportation.

"It's definitely a different picture of life from the train than it is looking at it through the windshield on a multilane freeway," Orthner said. — **NYT**

CULTURE

Mystical water underworld of past empires reopens in Istanbul



JUSTINIAN THE GREAT would have been proud. The Basilica Cistern he built for the capital of his Eastern Roman Empire in modern-day Istanbul has reopened after a five-year makeover that has transformed the water storage site into a refreshingly cool haven of underground sound and light.

Built in AD 542 near the Hagia Sophia mosque — then a cathedral — the basilica was once part of a network of more than 100 cisterns begun by the Romans and completed by the Byzantines and Ottomans to supply the city and its palaces with running water.

Known in Turkey as Yerebatan Sarnici ("the cistern buried underground"), its rows of water-steeped columns gained fame on the silver screen when they featured in a scene from the 1963 James Bond film "From Russia With Love".

But the city had to partially close the site for restoration in 2017 over fears the basilica could crumble if the slightest tremor of an earthquake were to jolt Istanbul.

It has been completely shut since the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, allowing workers to strengthen and clean up the 138-metre by 65-metre (453-foot by 213-foot) water palace, said Aysen Kaya, deputy head of the municipality's heritage department.

Steel rods were stretched across the cornices of the 336 columns holding up the subterranean ceiling, arranged in 12 rows of 28.

The pink brick walls have also been cleared of traces of past, less elegant renovation efforts.

"By scraping off the added layers of cement, we brought the bricks up to date," said Kaya. She pointed to two pipes exposed by the latest work: one which brought water to the Hagia Sophia, and another to a palace that stood before the sultans built the Topkapi harem next door.

The Basilica Cistern could store nearly 80,000 litres (21,000 gallons) of water, which cascaded down aqueducts from mountains 19 kilometres to the north.

The feat helped protect the Byzantines from summer drought.



UPSIDE-DOWN MEDUSA

The renovation also includes a lower footbridge above the water, bringing tourists within half a metre of its surface. And with improved lighting, the floor is now visible for the first time.

Beyond the structural changes, the basilica has been infused with a mystical, almost spiritual feel with coloured lights that shift people's perspectives and reveal new details.

A famous Medusa head that adorns two of the corner pillars — carved, in accordance with legend, upside down so as not to turn people who lock gazes with it to stone — now looks even more vivid and terrifying.

At the heart of the 1,500-year-old structure, a triumph of the art and techniques of its time, modern works have been inserted for extra effect, such as a grasping hand emerging from the water.

A translucent jellyfish artwork seems to almost dance between the columns, lit up by the rainbow of colours illuminating the dark hall with a gentle glow.

"We wanted a light installation that takes nothing away from the mystical atmosphere of the place," Kaya said.

The queue of tourists snaking its way to the cistern's entrance under the hot Istanbul sun is a testament to the restoration's success.

"Absolutely incredible. I mean, totally unique," said 40-year-old British visitor Nick Alatti, struggling to express his amazement in words.

"I've never seen a place like this before, ever. And it will live with me for a very long time." — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

WILDLIFE

Baby boom: The endangered wildlife revival at Cambodia's Angkor Wat



THE MELODIC SONGS from families of endangered monkeys ring out over the jungle near Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple complex — a sign of ecological rejuvenation decades after hunting decimated wildlife at the site.

The first pair of rare pileated gibbons were released in 2013 as part of a joint programme between conservation group Wildlife Alliance, the forestry administration and the Apsara Authority — a government agency that manages the 12th-century ruins.

The gibbon duo, named Baray and Saranick, were born from parents rescued from the wildlife trade and produced offspring a year later.

"We have now released four different pairs of gibbons into their most beautiful cultural heritage." Globally, gibbons are one of the most threatened families of primates, while the pileated gibbon is listed as endangered.

"We are restoring Cambodia's natural heritage back into their most beautiful cultural heritage." Globally, gibbons are one of the most threatened families of primates, while the pileated gibbon is listed as endangered.

Marx says his team rescues some 2,000 animals a year and many more will soon call the Angkor jungle home.

There are hopes that once the baby gibbons reach sexual maturity in about five to eight years, they will also pair up and mate.

"What we are hoping for the future is to create a sustainable population of the animals... that we released here within the amazing Angkor forest," Marx said.

"Big victory" Cambodian authorities have hailed the gibbon baby boom that began in 2014.

"This means a big victory for our project," Chou Radina from the Apsara Authority said, adding that as well as gibbons, tourists could now see great hornbills flying over Angkor Wat.

The programme has released more than 40 other animals and birds

including silvered langurs, muntjac deers, smooth-coated otters, leopard cats, civets, wreathed hornbills, and green peafowl.

All were rescued from traffickers, donated or born in captivity at the Phnom Tamao wildlife sanctuary near Phnom Penh.

The Angkor Archaeological Park — which contains the ruins of various capitals of the Khmer Empire, dating from the ninth to 15th centuries — has some of the oldest rainforest in Cambodia.

It is also the kingdom's most popular tourist destination.

Since Angkor Wat became a world heritage site in 1992, its jungle, which covers more than 6,500 hectares, has benefited from increased legal and physical protections.

There are hopes that wildlife sightings will also spark interest in local and foreign tourists and boost conservation education efforts.

ONGOING THREATS

Rampant poaching, habitat loss from logging, agriculture and dam building has stripped much wildlife from Cambodian rainforests.

Last year, authorities removed 61,000 snare traps, environment ministry spokesman Neth Pheaktra said, adding that the government had launched a campaign to discourage hunting and eating of wildlife meat.

But widespread poverty even before the pandemic left many households without much choice but to continue hunting so their families could eat protein.

Animals are also hunted for traditional medicine and to be kept as pets.

According to Global Forest Watch, from 2001-2021 Cambodia lost 2.6 million hectares of tree cover, a 30-per cent decrease since 2000.

Commercial interests are trumping protection efforts in some quarters — the Phnom Tamao zoo and wildlife rescue centre is under threat from a shadowy rezoning development plan, Marx said. — **AFP**

CULTURE

Tunisia library races to preserve rich polyglot press archive



IN THE BASEMENT of the National Library of Tunis, conservator Hasna Gabsi combs through shelves of newspapers dating back to the mid-19th century to select the latest to digitise.

She picks out a yellowed copy of an Arabic language newspaper printed in the 1880s, then walks to the sections containing French, Italian, Maltese and Spanish-language newspapers published in Tunisia.

"The archive is a witness to an important, historical culture," Gabsi said under the flickering neon lights.

The library's collection includes some 16,000 titles printed in Tunisia — numbering hundreds of thousands of editions of newspapers and periodicals.

As part of a campaign to preserve the country's archives, the library staff have been working to digitise the documents.

Most of the newspapers are in Arabic, with the oldest from the mid-19th century when Tunisia was an Ottoman province.

After France occupied Tunisia in 1881, European settlers published periodicals in several languages, including French, Italian, Spanish and Maltese.

Some publications are

even in Judeo-Arabic, a local Arabic dialect written in the Hebrew alphabet.

Gabsi selects a copy of Voix d'Israel, a Hebrew-language newspaper printed by Tunisia's Jewish community, which numbered around 100,000 when the country gained independence from France in 1956.

Further along the shelves, she picks out L'Unione, published in 1886 by an Italian community that would number some 130,000 by the middle of the following century.

Nearby, technicians use huge scanners to digitise the newspapers and other documents, which have been made available to the public online since May.

The library's director Raja Ben Slama has brought together a team of around 20 employees to accelerate the process.

She said the importance

of preserving the newspapers was clear to her when she arrived in 2015.

"We are in a race against time with the elements against the deterioration of the periodicals," she said.

Some of them "can't be found anywhere else", she added.

Many of the publications have disappeared, particularly those published in Italian, Hebrew and Maltese.

Economic woes and tensions sparked by the Arab-Israeli conflict led to the departure of most of the country's Jewish community, while most Italians left in the years after independence.

For historian Abdessattar Amamou, the archives are rare in the region, reflecting the "mosaic" of different communities that were present in the North African country.

"At the dawn of independence, we were three million people — but with that came a huge richness on the level of the press," Amamou added. — **AFP**

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
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Games Played on Moonlit Nights

THE FOLLOWING is my English translation of excerpts from "A Soldier from Oman: Memory's Nectar" by (ret.) Inspector-General Said bin Rashid al Kalbani

SEEDAF INSECT SATISFIES OUR HUNGER

I remember whenever there was a lack of food, we would resort to a tree in the valley that would flower in the spring. We used to pluck its nail looking branches, named as dood*, because they resembled insects. We made food from them, adding to them Qashe, onion, lemon, Omani oil, a special type of plant, dhja' and wafers.

You can imagine how ironic it is that people these days have returned to this habit, calling it the "Seedaf" meal.

Bullet out of Happiness and for Cautioning from Water!

When it rained after a period of dryness, valleys flowed with water. We would go to the valleys and fire bullets both celebrating and announcing to the whole town that water had arrived. This was something of a habit all across Oman. Interestingly, bullets would also be fired to caution those in the valley, as rainfall during those days was rather strong. We would also try very hard to get out any cattle which might be in the valley.

TRADITIONAL GAMES

Time would seem too long if there were no forms of entertainment. Such was the case in our old days. We would, nonetheless, invent all forms of recreation. In addition to participating with adults in competitions and everyday affairs, we had fun in taking part in many famous traditional games such as Naera, Hawalees and Ghalla.

The general texture of all these games would be more or less the same, and all would be performed with no insignificant material: camels' waste!

Naera would be played by two players; it had 6 holes, called "homes". Similarly, Hawalees would be played by two, but it would have 28 homes, in which we would move camels' waste according to the rules of the game. Ghalla, with nine homes,

would be played by three. Added to that, there were games that would be played on moonlit nights, and others during daylight.

Children would occasionally compete in races involving donkeys. When someone fell down, a "grave" was dug for him, as a sign that he was dead, and as such, out of the game. Indeed he wouldn't be allowed in take part in all the other succeeding games. These pseudo-graves still exist in the plains in Miskan.

All these games are genuine and original heritage, and, as such, they should be preserved. They are a manifestation of a beautiful past we all experienced in our childhood and youth.

CRAFT INDUSTRIES

In those days, people made all their wares themselves from local materials. Men made many products known as safiyaat or khoslyyat from palm trees. One such product was somma. Brought from the valley banks, it would be used for collecting the khabaat dates, wheat and all sorts of everyday practicalities. People also made utensils such as makaba and khasafa used for storing dates, and making mats.

Women made madariyyat, a special type of soil, known as madar brought from Maqta'al Madra, a place that still exists today. Madar was used in making pottery pots like juror for preserving honey and oil; pots for cooking and preserving water.

Indeed, women were actively involved in our social life, especially the ones from the plains. They would weave goats' hair, from which we made all sorts of sacks and bags, raise cattle and bring them food as well as wood for cooking from the nearby valleys. It wasn't a strange scene at all to see a woman carrying her weaving device behind her sheep.

Everyone worked back then, everyone was productive, actively engaged in pursuing their needs. Nature was countless bountiful; it needed a mind that thought, a soul that was content.

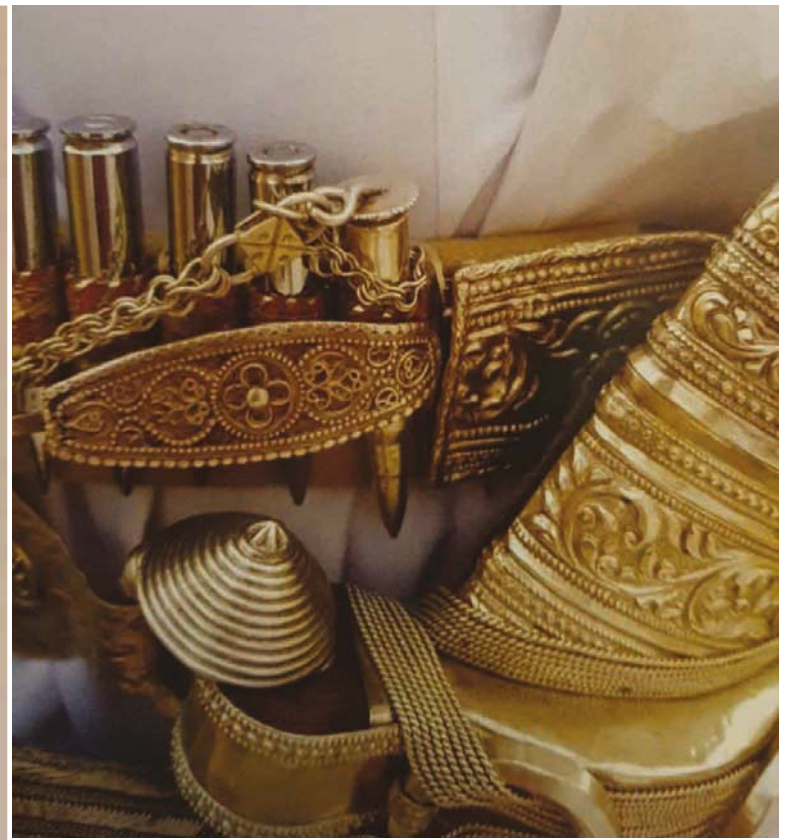
*The Arabic word for "insect" (the translator).

art & life

Local Scene

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WEDNESDAY | AUGUST 3 | 2022



Keeping the khanjar-making tradition alive in a fast changing landscape

By Mazid Akaak

Few items wholly embody the essence of Omani culture quite as the Khanjar does. For hundreds of years, this ornamental dagger has been a tool, a weapon, a craft, and a symbol of Oman.

Over the ages, culture and technology have evolved drastically, and yet the art of making Khanjars persisted. It is a craft which has been carried on by families for generations.

Yassir bin Nassir al Farsi is a silversmith who belongs to a family that has crafted khanjars for more

than a century.

"In our family, it started with three brothers, each with a different craft. One of them repaired weapons, another made gunpowder, and the third, my grandfather, worked with silver."

Yassir's grandfather, Abdullah bin Ismail al Farsi, first began crafting khanjars and jewellery more than a century ago in Sur. This skill was passed down to Nassir, Yassir's father, who moved to Salalah in 1970 and started his own workshop. Yassir would eventually take over the shop from his father and operate it to this day. The original shop in Sur is now run by Yassir's uncle, Mohammed bin

Abdullah. The family also has a third shop located in Muscat operated by one of Yassir's cousins.

"I started working with my father when I was around 14. In the beginning, I would just come with him to the shop and see how he would work, and I naturally started to learn," Yassir shared.

Although he learned the craft at a young age, Yassir only really picked up the family trade when he was in his mid-twenties.

"Because of studies and work, I didn't start properly working in the shop until I was around 25. At that time, I started to sell Khanjars that I made with my father."

KHANJAR-MAKING IN A FAST CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Yassir works with a variety of materials, most of which are locally sourced. He gets silver, wood, and leather all from Oman. Some other materials, like gemstones and sandalwood, he gets from international sources. He beats and shapes the silver by hand, making rings, bracelets, cuffs for canes, and ornate handles and cases for khanjars. He fashions belts for khanjars out of goat leather and woven fabric and carves the handles from wood and bone.

Yassir's uncle, Mohammed bin Abdullah wrote an entire book on khanjar discussing in depth how khanjars are made, what materials they are made from, what their history is, and their significance to Omani culture.

The tools, resources, and techniques

used to make khanjars and jewellery have changed greatly as the years have passed.

"Before, the work was harder because there were no machines and silver was hard to get. The machines made a huge difference. Also, we can now use gas fires to melt the silver. Before, they only used charcoal, and it was much more difficult," he said.

Since the tools and methods of the craft have changed, there is a natural concern for maintaining the integrity of the tradition.

Yassir said that "when these changes come, they definitely make a difference in the products," but that "one thing we need to be careful about is to not change the traditional way of the khanjar."

This is one reason why Yassir believes that it is important for Omanis to carry on this tradition.

Not only has the craft itself changed over the years, but the market for Khanjars, canes, and jewellery has changed as well.

"The 70s were like a golden age for the craft because when Sultan Qaboos came to power, the economy improved a lot, and more people could afford to get an authentic khanjar... At that time, there was not an Omani house that didn't have a khanjar in it."

A lot has changed since then, however.

"The market has changed a lot. The demand depends on the economy. If the economy is strong, people will have the money to buy our goods. Otherwise, they can't afford them."

More than just the economy, the craft has faced the additional challenge of needing to compete with shops that rent out khanjars and canes. "These shops have only been around for ten years or so, and they are having a big effect on us. Now, many people see no need to buy a khanjar, because they can rent one for ten Rial from one of these shops."

Despite all of this, Yassir said that he noticed a growing interest in the craft amongst youth in the past five years.

CHALLENGED BY THE PANDEMIC

Like many other trades, the khanjar business has been strongly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The pandemic has affected us in many ways. The price of silver has gone up a lot. It went from RO 170 per kilo to RO 390. Now it has come down a little, but it is still high." This trade has been especially impacted by the pandemic, as it is the trade of goods for special occasions, such as weddings and holidays. "For the past two years, the pandemic had everything shut down. No weddings or gatherings, and so people have not been buying things like khanjars... Now we are in the process of recovering, just making enough to get by and keep the business alive."

Yassir said that there has been a decline among Omani families getting into the khanjar-making business. With every generation, the number goes even lower.

"It is important that Omanis keep this tradition alive, because it is our culture, and we need to protect it."