

Tropical depression 900 km away

The monsoon trough located near Gujarat, India, has now become a tropical depression with low pressure on its surface which gives the system strength, which is why now it has been classified as a tropical system. Its direction continues to be the same as forecast before, said Mohammed al Mashayki, Meteorologist from the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre. "The depression is right now located north east of the Arabian Sea, around 900 km from the closest point in Oman." **DETAILS ON P3**



P12

ROVANPERA GRABS ESTONIA RALLY LEAD AS RIVALS SLIP AND SLIDE



P13

FOREIGN INVESTMENT INFLOWS RISE 6 PER CENT TO RO 22.5 BILLION



P20

FIVE BEST PLACES TO OBSERVE OMAN'S WILDLIFE



Jeddah Summit calls for cooperation in various fields

BIDEN PRAISES OMAN'S ROLE IN FINDING POLITICAL SOLUTION IN YEMEN

JEDDAH: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, participated in the Jeddah Summit for Security and Development which was held on Saturday in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in the presence of leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, US President Joe Biden, King Abdallah II of Jordan, President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of Egypt, and Mustafa al



Group photo of leaders ahead of the Jeddah Security and Development Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Saturday. – ONA

Kazemi, Prime Minister of Iraq. The summit — which brings together members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United States, Egypt and Iraq, as well as Jordan — discussed the latest regional and international developments, as well as means to expand cooperation among the participating countries, particularly in economic fields, as well as food security, energy and water. Prior to the meeting, Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and

Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, received HH Sayyid Asaad, and heads of the participating delegations at the summit. In his speech, Prince Salman stressed that the global economy is linked to stability of energy prices, calling for investment in clean energy. He added: The situation in Syria and Libya requires political solutions to stabilise the region, noting that Iraq is witnessing an improvement in security.

TURN TO P2

205 per cent rise in hotel revenues

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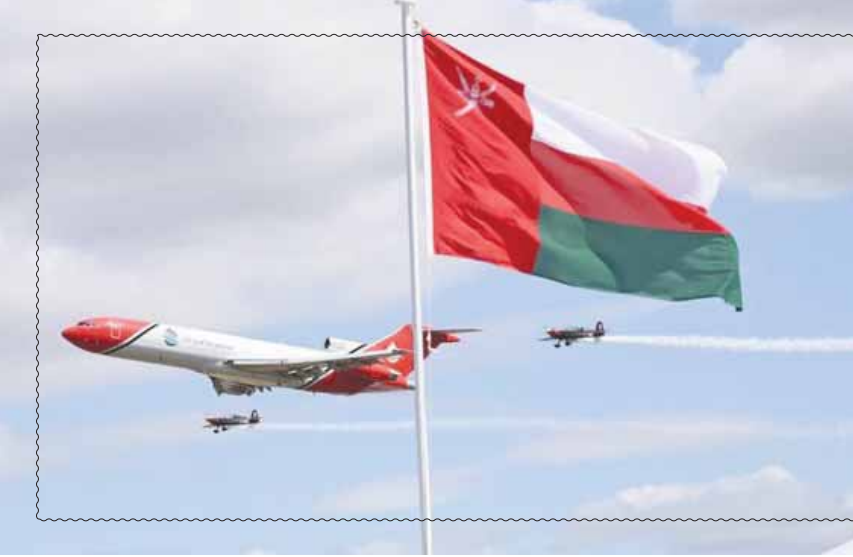
The hotel industry in the Sultanate of Oman is back on the track in the first five months of 2022 when revenues registered a massive 205 per cent rise in May thanks to the rise in the count of guests. The monthly statistical bulletin of tourism indicators issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information reveals that the revenues reached RO 13 million in May 2022 from RO 4 million in the corresponding month in 2021.

The hotel occupancy rate stood at 42.8 per cent of the capacity, the total number of guests reached 140,000 at a 105 per cent increase compared to 68,000 same month last year

Even as the hotel occupancy rate stood at 42.8 per cent of the capacity, the total number of guests reached 140,000 at a 105

per cent increase compared to 68,000 in the same month last year. While the number of Omani guests formed the highest number of 63,500, visitors from the Asian countries took to the top slot with a total of 21,716, GCC citizens came at the second position with 19,380 followed by Europeans numbering 18,317 in May 2022. The total revenues from three to five-star category hotels reached RO 73 million generated from 655,000 guests.

TURN TO P3



RAFO AT AIR SHOW

The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) is participating in the International Air Show held at Fairford Air Base in the United Kingdom, which is being held from July 15-17 this month. **DETAILS ON P4**

Russia resumes combat operations in Donbass

KIEV: Russia renewed its offensive in eastern Ukraine on Saturday, after a short break to regroup its forces, even though reports continued to come in of Russian attacks that came despite the pause. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu ordered a faster pace of attacks during an inspection of units involved in the war in Ukraine. "After hearing (the situation



A resident reacts next to a damaged building partially destroyed after a shelling in the city of Chuguiv, east of Kharkiv, on Saturday. – AFP

report), the head of the Russian Defence Ministry has given the necessary instructions to expand the activities of the army groups in all directions of attack in order to deprive the Kiev regime of the opportunity to continue conducting massive artillery and missile attacks on infrastructure and civilians in the Donbass and other regions", the ministry announced on Saturday. The general staff in Kiev said in its situation report that Ukraine has repelled Russian assault attempts in the direction of Bakhmut and near Donetsk in the past 24 hours. — dpa



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Jeddah Summit calls for cooperation



FROM PAGE 1

President Joe Biden said that the United States supports partnerships with countries which adopt an international system based on laws and are committed to providing assistance to countries experiencing food security crises, and that America's interests are linked to successes in the Middle East.

During his speech at the opening of the summit, Biden praised the role of the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia in finding a political solution in Yemen.

Jordanian King Abdallah II stressed that the stability of the region requires a solution to Palestinian issue, noting at the same time that Jordan hosts more than one million Syrian refugees.

In his speech, Egyptian President Sisi said that the Jeddah summit bears a clear indication of the renewal of the determination to work jointly between the Arab countries and the United States, calling for concerted efforts to put an end to conflicts and wars in the region and effective cooperation between countries to stabilise markets.

The Egyptian president stressed the necessity of establishing an independent Palestinian state as per the 1967 borders and reaching a final and irreversible solution.

For his part, Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa called for a permanent and just solution to the Palestinian issue in accordance with the Arab initiative, pointing out that the Arab region has suffered for many years from very serious challenges and effective cooperation must be taken to confront them.

Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, pointed out that crises and conflicts in any region affect the entire world, and that the United Nations Charter provides opportunities for resolving them, indicating that Gulf and Arab relations with the United States have an active role in the Middle East and the world.

At the conclusion of his speech, the Emir of Qatar affirmed the right of the countries in the region to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in accordance with international rules.

Mustafa al Kazemi, Prime Minister of Iraq, called for the development of a comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism and dry up its sources of funding, stressing that his country supports international and regional efforts to end the crisis in Syria and Lebanon.

And Shaikh Mishaal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, indicated in his speech that the Gulf-US relations have witnessed great achievements and that the challenges the region is going through require more consultation and cooperation to confront them, calling for unity and renunciation of differences and overcoming the dangers surrounding the region.

It is noteworthy that the joint summit aims to confirm the historical partnership between these countries, the importance of close cooperation and common visions regarding a number of issues and situations in the region, deepening joint cooperation in various fields and the importance of developing ways of cooperation and integration among them.

— ONA



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TROPICAL DEPRESSION NEARS OMAN

Heavy rains likely in northern governorates including Muscat

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The monsoon trough located near Gujarat, India has now become a tropical depression with low pressure on its surface that gives the system strength, which is why now it has been classified as a tropical system.

Its direction continues to be the same as forecast before said Mohammed al Mashayki, Meteorologist from the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre, "It is expected to move north west in the coming hours or days. The depression is right now located north east of the Arabian Sea, around 900 km from the closest point in Sultanate of Oman. This is the centre of the depression, but the closest convective cloud around the depression is 500 km from the closest point in Oman."

The impact is expected to

be experienced in the northern governorates of Oman — South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Hajr Mountains, Muscat, South Al Batinah, North Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah as well as some parts of Al Wusta.

"On Sunday we are expecting this system to have an affect on South and North Al Sharqiyah and Muscat. We are expecting anytime on Sunday midnight or early morning on Monday in South Al Sharqiyah. More details will be issued by the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre", explained Al Mashayki.

A special request to the public is to stay clear from low lying areas as wadis are expected to flow and follow weather bulletins from Oman Met Office.

On Saturday morning the flow of high and medium clouds were observed over the atmosphere of the Sultanate of Oman, with



chances of rain over the Hajar Mountains during the afternoon and evening.

While the high and medium clouds associated with the tropical depression were present on the coasts of the Sea of Oman and

parts of the governorates of North and South Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Al Dakhiliyah; by afternoon the summer rain was also being developed with the beginning of the formation of local clouds over parts of the Western and

CDAА calls for safety of children

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The search operations are still continuing to find the missing persons who were swept away in strong tidal waves at Al Mughsayl beach in Salalah.

With tourists flocking to Salalah, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said that protecting children is the responsibility of parents as they cannot perceive the danger. The Dhofar Governorate

Police allowed the movement of tourists provided they adhere to public safety guidelines, including taking note of the rising water levels.

Meanwhile, Major Saud al Maamari of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said the concerned authorities have been evaluating the accident site at Al Mughsayl.

He said safety barriers at the location will be changed to prevent visitors from crossing them at any point time.

Haj Mission returns home

MUSCAT: The Oman Haj Mission returned home on Friday after it successfully concluded its services for pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman in the Holy Land. The mission was headed by Sultan bin Said al Hinai.

Upon their arrival at Muscat International Airport, the members of the mission were received by of Shaikh Ahmed bin Saud al Siyabi, Secretary-General at the office of the Sultanate of Oman's grand mufti, and a number of officials at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The mission comprised the Ifta and religious guidance delegation, the



administrative and financial delegation, the delegation supervising on Haj

companies, the medical delegation, SAI delegation, Royal Oman Police (ROP) delegation, the media delegation and the scouts' delegation.

The number of Hajis (pilgrims) of the Sultanate of Oman for this year amounted to 8,338 including 200 residents and the number of companies authorised to organise Haj tours stood at 96 companies.

The Haj mission left the Sultanate of Oman on June 25, and during its presence in Mecca, Madinah and the holy sites, it served the Omani pilgrims and guests of Allah and supervised their performance of the rituals with ease. — ONA

205 per cent rise in hotel revenues

FROM PAGE 1

"The hospitality sector has been among the most affected industries since the Covid-19 pandemic merged worldwide. In Oman, the sector is on the path of recovery with a rise in the number of visitors arriving in the country", said Fadi Abubaker, a marketing executive with an international hotel brand. Gradual recovery of the hotel market in Muscat is forecast between 2021 and 2023, and the hotel market is expected

to stabilise in 2024.

The Asian and European markets have once again started delivering a good number of international visitors to Oman as the government increases its marketing efforts in these countries.

While the number of visitors arriving in Oman reached 794,000 by the end of May this year the number of outbound visitors reached 1.5 million visitors during the period.

According to statistics provided by the state-run agency, the number of Omanis who went abroad during May 2022 reached 184,000 forming 61.5 per cent of a total of 217,250 outbound visitors.

The total number of inbound visitors increased by more than 35 times compared to the inbound visitors in May 2021, which amounted to 6,000 visitors. The percentage of Gulf visitors formed 54.5 per cent of the total visitors during May this year.

SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers to the following tenders:

No	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee RO
1	SIPC 2022/065	Construction Works for Fire Fighting Station at SOHAR Port	262.500
2	SIPC 2022/070	Consultancy Services for Continuous Improvement (Lean Training & Implementation) at SOHAR Port and Freezone	26.250
3	SIPC 2022/073	SOHAR Port and Freezone Video Commercial 2022	Free of Charge

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00am Sunday, 17/07/2022 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 28/07/2022.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIFT	OMABOMRUXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:

- A request for the electronic tender documents
- Scanned bank transfer
- The firm's commercial registration documents
- All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address: sipc_procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic Tender Document by e-mail.

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
- All SMEs are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to: sipc_procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

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RAFO takes part in international airshow

LONDON: The Royal Air Force of Oman is participating in the International Air Show being held at Fairford Air Base in the United Kingdom from July 15 to 17. Royal Air Force of Oman's pavilion is displaying aircraft models, phases of development and modernisation in the Royal Air Force of Oman, photos of Omani-British aviation relations, and a model of an Omani tent that reflects civilisational heritage and the history of the Sultanate of Oman. The visitors to the pavilion will also get to see the performance of military band of Royal Air Force of Oman.

Brigadier General Yaqoub bin Rashid al Maamari said: "This is one of the most important international exhibitions in the world because it features advanced technology and participation from air forces of various countries. It is an opportunity to benefit from the experiences of others, in addition to strengthening Omani-British relations."

It is worth noting that the International Air Show is one of the largest military air exhibitions in the world, in terms of the number of aircraft and participating countries, and includes a group of participating military aircraft from different countries of the world, and more than 170,000 visitors participate in this event.

Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, toured the Oman pavilion on Saturday. He was briefed on the latest developments in the field of aviation and exchange of experiences with the participating countries. He praised the efforts made by the organisers to highlight Sultanate of Oman in various international forums.

He was accompanied during his visit to the exhibition by Brigadier General Ahmed bin Ibrahim Ambosaidi, Military Attaché at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in London, and British Defence Attache in Muscat. — ONA



SHABAB OMAN II WINS DUTCH AWARD

MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman ship 'Shabab Oman II' won the award for the best ship in Harlingen Port in the Kingdom of Netherlands on Saturday after the conclusion of the first stage of the 2022 tall ship races. Shabab Oman II was crowned with the award for the best ship based on the votes of visitors of Esbjerg Tall Ship Festival in the Danish city of Esbjerg. The ship continues to participate in international maritime festivals and races, as part of its international voyage this year to the European continent, bearing the slogan Oman, the Land of Peace.

Rains fill Wadi Al Hoqain and minds of farmers

TEXT & PHOTO BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Wadi Al Hoqain in the Wilayat of Rustaq is in its full glory thanks to the recent heavy rains brought by the low pressure over Arabian sea. About a 2 hour drive away from Muscat, Wadi Al Hoqain is popular among the people for its cascading cool waters. If you are driving from the capital, Muscat, then you need to take a left turn at Al Suwaiq roundabout to Al Rustaq City, where there is Rustaq Fort, Wadi Bani Awf, and Qasra Museum.

On your way, you will pass by Royal Oman Air force base as well. Wadi Al Hoqain is distinguished by its rock formations that can store and conserve water for long periods.

After the recent rains, many people headed to the site for a refreshing dip and photography, and some families also put up camps on the banks of the wadi for barbecue.

Wadi Al Hoqain attracts tourists throughout the year due



to the perennial flow of water.

"It is necessary to improve the quality of services in this Wadi due to the large number of tourists from different countries of the world," locals told the *Observer*.

The competent authorities have set up a number of sign boards on maintaining cleanliness of this tourist site.

The guiding panels also advise the importance of observing safety procedures while swimming to avoid any accidents. These waterfalls feed Aflaj, the aqueducts

that can transport water over long distances.

"We are happy with the amount of rain during the past days. This water will reduce the severity of the drought that the region is suffering from. The continuous flow of the Aflaj helps us in getting good agricultural crop during this season," they said.

Farmers in the area sought a dam to conserve rainwater which otherwise ends up in the sea. This would help agriculture and thereby enhance crop yields.



■ AGREEMENT ON ADVENTURE TOURISM AT AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR



AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The Ministry of Defence, represented by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism signed an agreement last week on training in the field of adventure tourism at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (The Green Mountain). The agreement was signed at the Combat Training Centre in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, by Brig Abdullah bin Mohammed al Badi, Director-General of Training and Inspection at the RAO Command; and Said bin Harib al Obaidani, Director-General of Tourism Development, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The agreement deals with cooperation in the fields of auditing and training on adventure activities. The Combat Training Centre will do with auditing and training on security and safety systems related to adventure tourism activities in a professional and secure manner. The signing ceremony was attended by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of RAO; Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism ; and Brig Said bin Zayed al Habsi, Commandant of the RAO Academy; and other officers.

Royal Decree boosts OCCI role as voice of private sector

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The new system of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) promulgated pursuant to Royal Decree No (56/2022) constitutes a quantum leap in enabling the Chamber to play its role as a representative of the private sector in the Sultanate of Oman. It empowers the Chamber to assume its responsibility and communicate the voice, views and suggestions of the private sector to the competent authorities and enhances the Chamber's independence. Economists and business people expressed their optimism about the new system that came at this important stage of the Omani blessed renaissance to keep pace with the aspirations and goals of Oman Vision 2040.



Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the OCCI

This vision seeks to empower a national economy driven and supported by the private sector. Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the OCCI, said: "The new system of the OCCI goes in line with the nature of the current stage of the renewed renaissance led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, May Allah keep and

protect him. This stage requires providing the private sector with all possible incentives as Oman Vision 2040 relies upon it in an attempt to establish a competitive national economy that keeps abreast with the global economy. This has a great significance as the system empowers the private sector and leads to the expansion of economic sectors." Al Saleh pointed out that the amendments contained in the new system enable the private sector to express its opinion on the economic laws related to the private sector and empower the sector to submit suggestions for amending the applicable laws. This is considered as a significant qualitative development that would enhance the role of the OCCI in developing the legislations related to economic affairs that affect the

activities of the private sector. These economic legislations related to the private sector will be presented to the Chamber before its issuance. Al Saleh noted that this development will enable the private sector to amend some laws and provide his views to the legislator in the Sultanate of Oman. Al Saleh also indicated that the system abolished the supervision of the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. It granted the OCCI the power to classify companies into categories, which gives various authorities a true picture of the business environment in the Sultanate of Oman. He emphasised that the new system seeks to enable the Chamber to contribute to developing performance in various commercial, industrial and economic sectors.

MoU for training Omani students

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The Australian Business Group Oman (ABGO) together with the Ambassador of Australia to Oman, Mark Donovan welcomed a business delegation from Australia recently. One of the key focuses of the delegation was education, and in particular, vocational training. TAFE Queensland (TAFE) is an internationally recognised leader in vocational training. The TAFE delegation was led by Russell McKay, Executive Director, International Development. During the visit to Oman, TAFE signed a MoU with Tamara Overseas to provide contextualised training to the



Omani students and workforce with the added goal of securing permanent employment for TAFE graduates. The accredited training TAFE will be provided to the Omani community and will be based on market demand in existing and emerging industries. During the visit TAFE met with senior ministry officials

and key industry bodies. A highlight of the visit was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Tamara Overseas LLC. One of the chief objectives of the MoU is for TAFE to provide contextualised training to the Omani students and workforce with the added goal of securing employment for TAFE graduates.

Pars Air to launch flights from Thursday

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Muscat International Airport will receive the first weekly flights of Pars Air from Rasht International Airport in northern Iran on Thursday. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) recently issued approval for the company

to operate from Muscat International Airport. Ibrahim bin Abdul Karim al Raisi, regional director of Iranian Pars Air in Muscat, said that Rasht is the second Iranian station operated by the company to Muscat International Airport after Shiraz. The company will use a Canadian-made CRJ200 plane in the sector. He added that at the end of July, the company will operate a direct weekly flight from the Iranian city of Chabahar to Muscat Airport, which will be linked to domestic routes in Iran. Al Raisi said the Iranian Pars Air airline services to Muscat Airport will stimulate travel between Oman and Iran. Rasht is the largest city on Iran's Caspian Sea coast. It is a major trade centre between Caucasia, Russia, and Iran using the port of Bandar-e Anzali.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) member of Nama Group is a government owned company acting as the single buyer of power and water from all Independent Power Projects, Independent Power and Water Projects, and Independent Water Project (IPP/WPP/ IWP) within the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour is currently seeking to recruit Omani graduates for its Graduates Development Program.

Successful candidates will be expected to have the following minimum qualifications:

Degree and Specialization	Required GPA - (Equivalent or above) from an accelerated academic institution
Bachelor's degree in: - Engineering - Economics - Information Systems, or Computer Science	2.5
Bachelor's degree in Law	3
Bachelor's degree in Accounting Finance	3

Interested candidates are requested to apply through OPWP Careers website www.omanpwp.om not later than **24 July 2022**.

You can also access OPWP careers page via:

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Public Auction No. (22 /2022)

Muscat Municipality, represented by the auction committee, announces a bid (with closed envelopes) for the sale of (Materials - Movables - Iron Scraps) as per the following details:

S No.	Movables to be Sold.	Location	Contact
1	Lighting Lanterns	Landfill Area, Snib, Bausher	Inthiqab - 99645804
2	Different Movables (Steel Scrap - Furniture - Steel Structures for Children's Playground Constructions)	Auction Square Mutrah - Al Wadi Al Kabir	Yusaf AL Boloshi - 98070900
3	Boats - Water Tank		
4	Different Movables (Generators - Cooling Tanks - Air Condition - Water Coolers Refrigerators)		
5	Caravan Structures (Mobile Home)		
6	Parking Meter Structures	Labor Camp in Seeb	Kaifan AL Siaby - 99657678
7	Various Devices (Printers - Photo Copy Machine - Electricity Meters)		
8	Various Materials (Scrap Iron, Metal Plate)		

Interested individuals for this Auction must comply with the conditions set out here under:

- Bids shall be submitted in closed envelopes sealed with red wax, addressed with the name (Chairman of the organizing committee sale by auction) and written on them the name and number of the auction from the outside so that the name of owner of the bid or what he refers to are not written on it.
- Those wishing to enter the auction must pay a fee and its amount (2/= OMR) (Two Omani Rials) is not refundable, as it required to pay it electronically to the collector of the committee in the directors the general financial affairs at municipal presidency building Darsait.
- Movable are sold in their current condition, and the Muscat Municipality is not responsible for the loss or damage of part of it once its value is paid, nor does it guarantee the validity of the material and movables offered for sale or the safety of their technical condition those wishing to participate in the bidding will inspect the movable on the specified days therefore.
- The material and movable sold are not returned or reduced in value, and any petition submitted in this regard will not be accepted.
- The buyer is obligated to transfer, dismantle and load the material that have been awarded to him after paying their full value within a period not exceeding one week from the date of purchase, and he bears full responsibility for the movables that were not transported within the specified period, and in the event that they are not transferred within the specified period, the municipality may resell the sale at its own expenses.
- The date and location set for inspecting the movables and awarding the bid are specified as follows:

Location	As stated here above.
Inspection Date	From 17/7/2022 * - 21/7/2022 *
Inspection Time	From 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM
For Further enquiries and coordination	Communicate with the specialists whose details are shown in the bidding.
Bid submission Date	24/7/2022 * - 28/7/2022 *
Place where bids are submitted	Bidding Box in Muscat Municipality Head Office Darsait.

Other conditions

- The materials shall be sold at wholesale level not retail level and as per the quantity specified on the site.
- The VAT specified in the law will be applied to successful bidder.
- A bid that does not meet the required advance payment guarantee will not be considered
- Payment of the brokerage fees shall be 3% of the purchases value.
- The payment receipt shall be enclosed to the bidding documents.
- Muscat Municipality may cancel or defer the sale without providing any justification.
- The security deposit will not be refunded in cases:-
 - If he does not pay the value of the movables.
 - If he does not transfer the movables from the site within the specified period.



A general view of the destruction following an Israeli airstrike in Gaza city on Saturday. – AFP

Israel strikes Gaza Strip after rocket fire: Army

GAZA CITY: Israel hit the Gaza Strip before dawn on Saturday in what it said was a retaliatory strike for rocket fire from the Palestinian territory controlled by Hamas.

The exchange of fire came hours after US President Joe Biden visited Israel and the occupied West Bank.

A short while ago, IDF fighter jets struck a military site in the central Gaza Strip belonging to the Hamas organisation, a statement from the Israel Defence Forces said.

“The military site consists of an underground complex containing raw materials used for the manufacturing of rockets”, it said, describing the facility as “one of the most significant” of its kind in the territory.

“The strike on this site will significantly impede and undermine Hamas’ force-building capabilities”, it said, adding that Israel was responding to “attacks from the Gaza Strip on Israeli territory”.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem denounced the strikes, which the official Palestinian news agency WAFA said caused

no injuries.

WAFA said Israeli missiles were fired at two locations, one “near a tourist resort” where nearby houses were severely damaged.

Balls of fire lit up the night sky over Gaza City after the strikes, which at one location left a hole in the earth beneath dislodged paving stones in front of a low-rise building.

A man later swept up shattered glass in front of what appeared to be an office.

During the night there had been two separate launches, each of two rockets, towards Israeli territory, the military said.

Warning sirens alerting residents to the rocket fire had sounded during the night in the city of Ashkelon and elsewhere in Israel’s south.

Israel’s military said one of the rockets had been intercepted while the other three fell on empty land. Impoverished Gaza, home to 2.3 million Palestinians, has been under Israeli blockade since 2007 when Hamas seized power from the secular Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

— AFP

Wildfires rage in France and Spain as heatwaves sweep Europe

PARIS/LISBON: Wildfires raged in southwestern France and Spain on Saturday, forcing thousands of people to be evacuated from their homes as blistering summer temperatures put authorities on alert in parts of Europe.

More than 12,200 people had been evacuated from France’s Gironde region by Saturday morning as more than 1,000 firefighters battled to bring the flames under control, regional authorities said in a statement.

“We have a fire that will continue to spread as long as it is not stabilised”, Vincent Ferrier, deputy prefect for Langon in Gironde, told a news conference.

Wildfires have torn through France in recent weeks, as well as in other European countries including Portugal and Spain, and nearly 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of land was on fire in the Gironde region on Saturday, up from 7,300 hectares on Friday.

In neighbouring Spain, firefighters were battling a series of blazes on Saturday after days of unusually high temperatures which reached up to 45.7 degrees Celsius (114 degrees Fahrenheit).

The nearly week-long heatwave has caused 360 heat-related deaths, according to figures from the Carlos III Health Institute.

More than 3,000 people have now been evacuated from homes due to a large wildfire near Mijas, a town in the province of Malaga that is popular with northern European tourists, the region’s emergency services said in a tweet early on Saturday.

Many were taken to shelter in a provincial sports centre.

“The police drove up and down the road with their sirens on and everyone was told to leave. Just leave. No instructions where to go,”



A helicopter is pictured from Alhaurin de la Torre as it drops water over a wildfire in Sierra de Mijas mountain range in Malaga province of Spain. – AFP

Heat-related illnesses

Most common health effects caused by extreme heat

HEAT CRAMPS

MAIN SYMPTOMS
Painful muscle cramps or spasms (often in abdomen, arms, calves), heavy sweating

CAUSE Prolonged exposure to extreme heat, combined with dehydration

HEAT EXHAUSTION

Heavy sweating, fatigue, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, thirst, fainting, headache, irritability

Exposure to extreme heat over extended period (usually several days), combined with dehydration

Severe illness, requires emergency medical treatment

HEATSTROKE

High temperatures, profuse sweating, fast heart rate, severe vomiting or diarrhea, hot/flushed skin, unconsciousness, difficulty breathing, altered mental state

Prolonged exposure to, or physical exertion in, high temperatures. Body fails to regulate its temperature, 40 °C (104 °F) or higher

Most serious medical condition, requires emergency treatment. Can result in death

Sources: US CDC/Red Cross/St. John Ambulance/Canada health authorities

AFP

said British pensioner John Pretty, 83. “It’s frightening... because you don’t know what’s happening”, said Belgian resident Jean-Marie Vandelanotte, 68.

Elsewhere in Spain, fires burned in parts of the Extremadura region, close to the Portuguese border, where members of

Spain’s Military Emergency Unit were deployed to help tackle the flames, and in the central Castille and Leon region.

There was some respite for firefighters in Portugal, where temperatures dropped across most of the country on Saturday after reaching about 40°C (104 F)

in recent days.

“We have had big fires and we don’t want them to be reactivated again... We will keep extreme vigilance this weekend”, Emergency and Civil Protection Authority Commander Andre Fernandes told reporters.

— Reuters

Gotabaya says he ‘took all possible steps’ to prevent crisis

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s ousted president, who fled overseas this week to escape a popular uprising against his government, has said he took “all possible steps” to avert the economic crisis that has engulfed the island nation.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s resignation was accepted by parliament on Friday. He flew to the Maldives and then Singapore after hundreds of thousands of anti-government protesters came out onto the streets of Colombo a week ago and occupied his official residence and offices.

Sri Lanka’s parliament met on Saturday to begin the process of electing a new president, and a shipment of fuel arrived to provide some relief to the crisis-hit nation.

Dhammika Dasanayake, the secretary general of Sri Lanka’s parliament, formally read out Rajapaksa’s resignation letter, the contents of which had not previously been made public.

In the letter, Rajapaksa said Sri Lanka’s financial crisis was rooted in years of economic mismanagement that pre-dated



A Special Task Force cadet stands guard in front of Sri Lankan parliament building in Colombo on Saturday. – AFP

his presidency and in the Covid-19 pandemic that drastically reduced Sri Lanka’s tourist arrivals and remittances from foreign workers.

“It is my personal belief that I took all possible steps to address this crisis, including inviting parliamentarians to form an all-party or unity government”, the letter said.

Parliament will next meet on Tuesday to accept nominations for the post of the president. A vote to decide the country’s leader is set to take place on Wednesday. Prime minister Ranil

Wickremesinghe, an ally of Rajapaksa who is the sole representative of his party in parliament, has been sworn in as acting president until then.

Wickremesinghe is one of the top contenders to take on the role full-time but protesters also want him gone, leading to the prospect of further unrest should he be elected.

The opposition’s presidential nominee is Sajith Premadasa. The potential dark horse is senior ruling party lawmaker Dulas Alahapperuma. — Reuters

KYIV

Russia says it is stepping up operations

Russia has ordered its forces in Ukraine to step up operations, its defence ministry said on Saturday, as rockets and missiles pounded the country in the latest of a series of bombardments that Kyiv says have killed dozens of people in recent days.

In the latest strikes, missiles hit the northeastern town of Chuhuiv in Kharkiv region, killing three people including a 70-year-old woman, and wounding three more, the Regional Governor Oleh

KHARTOUM

Curfew in Sudan towns as 31 die in clashes

Sudanese authorities have declared an overnight curfew in two towns in southeastern Blue Nile state, close to the border with Ethiopia, after several days of tribal clashes that they said had left 31 people dead and 39 injured.

Clashes spread in several towns from Wednesday after the killing of a farmer, before security forces made arrests and brought the situation under control.

The statement said 16 shops had been destroyed and a night

JAYAPURA

Ambush leaves 10 dead in Indonesia’s Papua

Ten people were shot dead in Indonesia’s restive eastern province Papua on Saturday in an ambush police attributed to rebels. Two others were also seriously injured in the shooting, which police said took place in a remote highland area when about 20 people attacked a truck full of civilians.

Some of the victims were traders transporting their goods to another village, police said.

Papua’s ongoing insurgency aims to gain independence from

Indonesia, which took control of the former Dutch colony in the 1960s. Saturday’s attack was the deadliest since March when eight telecommunications workers were shot dead.

Putin aims to shape a new generation of supporters — through schools



Anton Troianovski

Starting in first grade, students across Russia will soon sit through weekly classes featuring war movies and virtual tours through Crimea. They will be given a steady dose of lectures on topics like “the geopolitical situation” and “traditional values.” In addition to a regular flag-raising ceremony, they will be introduced to lessons celebrating Russia’s “rebirth” under President Vladimir Putin.

And, according to legislation signed into law by Putin on Thursday, all Russian children will be encouraged to join a new patriotic youth movement in the likeness of the Soviet Union’s red-cravatted “Pioneers” — presided over by the president himself.

Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian government’s attempts at imparting a state ideology to schoolchildren have proved unsuccessful, a senior Kremlin bureaucrat, Sergei Novikov, recently told thousands of Russian schoolteachers in an online workshop. But now, amid the war in Ukraine, Putin has made it clear that this needed to change, he said.

“We need to know how to infect them with our ideology,” Novikov said. “Our ideological work is aimed at changing consciousness.”

As the war in Ukraine approaches the five-month mark, the vast ambitions of his plans for the home front are coming into focus: A wholesale reprogramming of Russian society to end 30 years of openness to the West.

The Kremlin has already jailed or forced into exile just about all activists speaking out against the war; it has criminalised what remained of Russia’s independent journalism; it has cracked down on academics, bloggers and even a hockey player with suspect loyalties.

But nowhere are these ambitions clearer than in the Kremlin’s race to overhaul how children are taught at Russia’s 40,000 public schools.

The nationwide education initiatives, which start in September, are part of the Russian government’s scramble to indoctrinate children with Putin’s militarised and anti-Western version of patriotism, illustrating the reach of his campaign to use the war to further mobilise Russian society and eliminate any potential dissent.

While some experts are skeptical that the Kremlin’s grand plans will quickly bear fruit, even before the new school year the potency of its propaganda in changing the minds of impressionable youngsters was already becoming apparent.

A ninth grader, Irina, said that a computer class in Moscow in March, for instance, was replaced by the viewing of a state television report on Ukrainians surrendering to Russian troops and a lecture explaining that only information from official Russian sources was to be trusted.

She soon noticed a transformation among some friends who had been initially scared or confused by the war.

“They suddenly started repeating everything after the television,” Irina said in a phone interview alongside her mother, Lyubov Ten. “They suddenly started saying that this is all deserved, that this had to happen. They couldn’t even attempt to explain this to me.”

Irina said that when she challenged her friends about Russian war crimes in Bucha, they shot back: “It’s all propaganda.”

Ten and her husband, driven in part by their refusal to raise their children in an increasingly militarised



Visitors drive a model of a Soviet era T-34 tank at the Tankodrom children’s adventure attraction at Patriot Park outside the Cathedral of Russian Armed Forces in Kubinka, Russia.

environment, left for Poland this spring.

Teachers are also noticing a change. In the city of Pskov near the Estonian border, an English teacher, Irina Milyutina, said that the children at her school at first vigorously argued about whether Russia was right or wrong to invade Ukraine, and sometimes even came to blows.

But soon the voices of dissent evaporated. The children scrawled Z’s and V’s — symbols of support for the war, after the identifying markings on invading Russian armour — on chalkboards, desks and even the floors.

At recess, fifth and sixth graders pretended to be Russian soldiers, Milyutina said, “and those whom they don’t like very much they call Ukrainians.”

Schools across the country received such orders, according to activists and Russian news reports. Daniil Ken, the head of an independent teachers’ union, shared with ‘The New York Times’ some directives that he said teachers had passed along to him.

In one class, students are taught about “hybrid conflicts being carried out against Russia”, with a BBC report about a Russian attack in Ukraine and a statement by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy presented as examples of “fakes” meant to sow discord in Russian society. An accompanying quiz teaches students to distrust any opposition activists in their own communities.

“One of the effective measures of hybrid conflict is the promotion of agents of influence in the local population”, a true-or-false challenge says.

The correct answer, of course, is “true.”

The new push represents an intensification of Putin’s years long effort to militarise Russian society, building on

officials’ ad hoc efforts after the invasion to convince young people that the war was justified.

Novikov, the head of the Kremlin’s “public projects” directorate, said that with the invasion of Ukraine in February, teachers faced “a rather urgent task”: To “carry out explanatory work” and answer students’ “difficult questions.”

“While everything is more or less controllable with the younger ones, the older students receive information through a wide variety of channels”, he said, acknowledging the government’s fears about the Internet swaying young people’s views. A poll last month by the independent Levada Center found that 36% of Russians ages 18 to 24 opposed the war in Ukraine, compared with just 20% of all adults.

Ahead of the next school year, the Kremlin is working to codify its educational ambitions. A proposed decree published by the education ministry last month shows that Putin’s two decades in power are set to be enshrined in the standard curriculum as a historical turning point, while the teaching of history itself will become more doctrinal.

The decree says that Russian history classes will be required to include several new topics like “the rebirth of Russia as a great power in the 21st century”, “reunification with Crimea”, and “the special military operation in Ukraine.”

And while Russia’s existing educational standard says students should be able to evaluate “various versions of history”, the new proposal says they should learn to “defend historical truth” and “uncover falsifications in the Fatherland’s history.”

We need to know how to infect them with our ideology... Our ideological work is aimed at changing consciousness

SERGEI NOVIKOV
Kremlin bureaucrat

Jan 6 panel to dissect Trump’s 187 minutes of inaction



Luke Broadwater

The House committee investigating the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol is planning to return to prime time on Thursday for what could be the finale of its summer hearing schedule: A session focused on then-president Donald Trump’s 187 minutes of inaction as a mob

of his supporters assaulted Congress. The hearing, scheduled to start at 8 pm Eastern time, is expected to give a detailed account of how Trump resisted multiple entreaties from staffers, lawyers and even his own family to call off the attack, which raged for hours in the early afternoon of January 6, 2021.

Reps. Elaine Luria, D-Va, and Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill, are expected to play leading roles in the hearing.

One witness the panel could hear from is Sarah Matthews, a former White House press aide who resigned in the aftermath of January 6. She has told the committee that a tweet Trump sent attacking then-Vice president Mike Pence while the riot was under way was like “pouring gasoline on the fire.”

Trump had tried unsuccessfully to pressure Pence to reject Congress’ official count of electoral votes to confirm Joe Biden as the president-elect and was inside the Capitol as rioters breached the building chanting, “Hang Mike Pence.”

The committee is also likely to play clips of the testimony of other witnesses who attempted to intervene with Trump during those more than three hours, including Pat Cipollone, the White House counsel. The committee has also said it received testimony from Keith Kellogg, a retired lieutenant general who was Pence’s national security adviser, about Trump’s refusal to condemn the violence as



Video of testimony by former White House Counsel Pat Cipollone is played during a January 6 committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, on July 12.

the mob engulfed the Capitol. Kellogg said Ivanka Trump, Trump’s eldest daughter, urged her father at least twice to call off the violence, as did Mark Meadows, the chief of staff and Kayleigh McEnany, the White House press secretary. The panel has already heard testimony from witnesses about unsuccessful attempts to get Trump to call for peace. Most memorably, former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson described to the committee how Trump sided with the mob and sympathised with their chants for the execution of Pence. The hearing was initially planned to be the last in a series of summer sessions in which the panel would reveal its findings. But the committee has continued to collect new evidence and lawmakers have hinted that they could add more hearings to the schedule.

Moving on after a toxic relationship



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

As humans we all need to feel loved and appreciated by others, like our parents, friends and partners. Such relationships may be far from perfect so it's normal to argue from time to time but you discuss your problems together and overall enjoy being together.

In a toxic relationship, arguments are the norm and you end up feeling drained and unappreciated, you may both have feelings for each other but negative emotions such as envy, jealousy, feeling unsupported and resentment seems to dominate.

Toxic relationships come in different forms, it could be between a husband and a wife or a very close friend whom you consider a soulmate. The other person often makes you feel special and may trigger certain unfulfilled needs like needing to be loved and cared for or needing to be needed.

They become the centre of your universe and may isolate you from your other friends because of their jealousy or fear of being abandoned. You may fail to notice their harmful behaviour and try to find excuses for them so you can stay with them.

When such a relationship ends you may start blaming yourself asking what have you done to push the other person away, or how come you never saw the toxic signs. You may find it difficult to move on either because you fear being wounded again or you have idealised the previous person to the point that you can't accept being with anyone else.

Sometimes it's you who decided to end it because you had enough.

When you realise that all the love and caring was never reciprocated and all this time you have been the giver expecting little

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS COME IN DIFFERENT FORMS, IT COULD BE BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND A WIFE OR A VERY CLOSE FRIEND WHOM YOU CONSIDER A SOULMATE

or even nothing back. So how can you manage your emotions when a toxic relationship ends?

Let's first agree that ending a relationship is often very difficult, painful and confusing so it is important to acknowledge your emotions instead of denying them. It is OK to cry and feel angry and upset.

Some people would try to contact an old friend or partner to check on them or create fake social media accounts to see how they are

reacting. Avoid doing that as it may be tempting to go back.

Some people would justify to themselves that they can still be friends but if the relationship was toxic and harmful to both of you it's better to have zero contact.

You may find yourself wanting to keep a line of communication hoping for closure when the other person would apologise.

This waiting for a sincere apology can be exhausting and prolong your false hopes. Make sure you surround yourself with positive people who would support you and prevent you from going back to the toxic relationship especially when you feel lonely.

If you feel comfortable writing your thoughts in a journal then that would be a chance to process your thoughts and reflect on what happened, you may wish to share

it with a trusted friend or a family member.

Toxic relationships often consume time and energy and you may find yourself neglecting your own well-being, after the end of the relationship spend time looking after yourself. Take a holiday, learn a new hobby or buy yourself a gift. Reconnect with other friends and make peace with yourself.

When you are ready, have an honest reflection with yourself. Ask yourself what causes you to fall for a toxic relationship and keep you trapped? What can you change to avoid a similar situation in your future relationships? If you need professional help then do not hesitate to seek counselling from a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

Remember, it's your life and you need to sort out relationship problems before they destroy you.

UK's Truss under pressure as Tories gird for TV battle

JITENDRA JOSHI

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss's camp last week urged Conservative right-wingers to unite behind her lagging leadership campaign, as the five remaining contenders prepared to battle each other in their first televised debate. Truss came third in the latest ballot of Tory MPs on Thursday, in an initial process designed to whittle the race down to two finalists by the middle of next week.

They will then present their case to the party's rank-and-file members until a winner is announced September 5.

Former finance minister Rishi Sunak again came first, followed by Penny Mordaunt, who has emerged as the surprise bookmakers' favourite.

The Royal Navy reservist, who was briefly Britain's first woman defence secretary, polls well with the members but is now under scathing attack from colleagues for her inexperience, stance on transgender rights and alleged incompetence in government jobs.

"People obviously are trying to stop me getting into the final because they don't want to run against me," she told Sky News, while condemning "black ops" from rival camps.

Long-shot candidate Tom Tugendhat decried the worsening acrimony as "a knife fight in a phone box", urging the party to focus instead on governing and taking the fight to the opposition Labour party.

The candidates took part in an online hustings, laying out their policy priorities along with warm words aimed at the Tory base.

"Not only do we need to restore trust, rebuild our economy and reunite our country," frontrunner Sunak said, drawing a pointed contrast to scandal-plagued Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

"We also need to do something that's never been done before in British political history, and that's win a historic fifth term."

Truss has backing from prominent loyalists of Johnson, who was forced last week to announce his resignation as Tory leader after a cabinet insurrection led partly by Sunak, following months of controversies.

While Johnson says he will stay above the fray, his supporters have spoken acidly against Sunak and point to Truss as the most experienced contender left from the party's right wing.

But she now faces a challenge from Mordaunt just to reach the final two, and has talked up her experience across various government departments. "You've got to walk the walk, as well as talk the talk, and that I think is what I've shown I've done in the jobs I've held," she said.

Attorney General Suella Braverman was eliminated and threw her support behind Truss, accusing Mordaunt of failing to "stand up for women". — AFP

Denied clean victory, Sri Lanka's protesters scramble to contain chaos



Mujib Mashal

The writer is the South Asia Bureau Chief at NYT



Emily Schmall

The writer is the NYT correspondent in India

In one corner of Sri Lanka's capital, the protest movement that forced out the island nation's powerful political dynasty over the country's financial ruin continued as it has for months. Speeches and music blared from the main stage, while protesters strategized in tents dotting the scenic seaside.

In another corner, tempers flared. A large number of protesters clashed with security forces overnight, seizing the weapons of at least two soldiers, as they tried to force their way into the Parliament, the focus for what appears to be a protracted political crisis.

Activists were struggling to keep things calm and ensure that a mass citizens' movement does not help tip a country still grappling with the legacy of a decades-long civil war into outright anarchy. Over the three months of protest, they have doggedly protected their reputation as a peaceful movement. But the political elite's infighting over the vacuum of power left by the fleeing of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa now tests their patience.

In an effort to reduce tensions, protest organisers on Thursday announced that they were pulling out of most government buildings that they had occupied, including the presidential mansion. They have taken care to keep the historic buildings intact, assigning volunteers to clean up after the hordes of visitors and discouraging rowdy youngsters from climbing the mango trees in the garden or damaging the antique furniture.

"We are moving out of the occupied buildings because we want to preserve these places, and we don't want people to vandalise these places, nor do we want the state or other actors using vandalism as a reason to vilify us and the movement," said Buwanaka Perera, an organizer of the protest camp that has operated for more than three months in an oceanside park.

"So it's better to hand it over to the state," Perera said.

"The state of Sri Lanka, not the president, not the prime minister, but the state."

Rajapaksa, who fled on a military plane to the Maldives in the early

hours on Wednesday, refused an orderly transition of power in the face of mounting protests, handing over the reins to the deeply unpopular Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Succession plans have been complicated by the fact that Rajapaksa still has not sent his promised resignation, which

ACTIVISTS WERE STRUGGLING TO KEEP THINGS CALM AND ENSURE THAT A MASS CITIZENS' MOVEMENT DOES NOT HELP TIP A COUNTRY STILL GRAPPLING WITH THE LEGACY OF A DECADES-LONG CIVIL WAR INTO OUTRIGHT ANARCHY

would end his time in office.

Protesters blame the Rajapaksa dynasty for the mismanagement of the country's economy, which is essentially out of money and running low on fuel, food and essential medicine.

Protests followed Rajapaksa to the Maldives as well.

In the capital, Malé, around 100 Sri Lankan migrant workers gathered, carrying signs and placards urging officials not to protect him. "Dear Maldivian friends, please urge your government not to safeguard criminals," read one banner. "Throw him out of here," read another.

Officials in the Maldives confirmed that Rajapaksa had departed around noon on a Saudi airline flight to Singapore, a regular commercial flight between the two countries that transits through the Maldives. They could not say whether Rajapaksa's final destination was Singapore or Saudi Arabia.

Singapore's foreign ministry confirmed that Rajapaksa had been allowed entry into Singapore on a private visit.

It said he had neither been granted nor had asked for asylum, and that this is a request that Singapore seldom grants.

Either destination — one the location of Islam's holiest site, and the other an economic powerhouse — proves uncomfortable for Rajapaksa, social media users were quick to point out. He was accused of bad policies during his time in office, while he fell far short of turning Sri Lanka into another Singapore, a goal he had mentioned in speeches.

— The New York Times



Protesters celebrate after storming the building housing the office of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo.

Cinderella, the fairy tale, and the real glass slipper



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The writer is a media consultant

tale is all of that, but its beginnings lie even further back in history. In fact, all the way back to 2,800 years ago, to when the Greek, Herodotus, who wrote a story about a slave girl who achieved freedom in the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

The story was rehashed 500 years later by Strabo, whose version was that while ‘Rhodopis’ was swimming, an eagle took her sandal and dropped it in the lap of a King. He, being entranced by its petite elegance, couldn’t get the thought of its wearer out of his head, and searched until he found and married the girl, making her his Queen.

Soon after, Aeolian’s ‘Varia Storia’ featured ‘Aspasia of Phocaea,’ who was beautiful, but poor, with an unsightly birthmark. She dreamed of meeting a handsome man, and how to remove the blemish, awoke and found herself invited to a feast where she met, and fell for the King, ‘Cyrus the Younger,’ who married her... and they lived happily ever after!

The 12th Century Maltese version is ‘Cicklemfusa,’ who turned from a poor, homely girl, into a beautiful princess for a Royal Ball, she entranced the King, but when the spell was broken she ran away. She was

AND I’LL TELL YOU SOMETHING MORE, THAT AMAZING, ROMANTIC, FEEL GOOD FAIRY TALE IS ALL OF THAT, BUT ITS BEGINNINGS LIE EVEN FURTHER BACK IN HISTORY

What about that Cinderella story? Though we mostly know it as that, in fact the English language version is of a Brothers Grimm written tale of the ‘Little Ash Girl,’ or ‘Aschenputtel’ in their native German language, which translates to ‘Cinderella’ in English.

Tell the truth... How many of you knew that? And I’ll tell you something more, that amazing, romantic, feel good fairy

revealed for whom she truly was, but the King fell for her anyway, and married her. Across Asia, versions emerged in Korea, ‘Tam and Cam,’ Cambodia had ‘Neang Kantoc,’ and other South East Asian versions featured ‘Hulek et Kjong,’ and the Japanese ‘Ubagawa.’

In literature, the first real ‘Cinderella,’ was ‘Cenerentola,’ by Gianbattista Basile, published posthumously

in 1634 and featuring the original wicked stepmother, a missing slipper, and a frantic search by a handsome prince, while Perault, thirty years later, added a pumpkin, mice, glass slippers, and the now ubiquitous Fairy Godmother, and ‘Cinders was never the same again, especially when the Brothers Grimm got a hold of it!

Of course, Omanis will know the tale as one of several iterations from One Thousand and One Arabian Nights. Maybe ‘The Second Shaykh’s Story,’ ‘The Anklet,’ ‘The Eldest Lady’s Tale,’ ‘Judar and His Brethren,’ or Abdullah Ibn Fadil and His Brothers.’ These range from romance to intrigue, to murder, to redemption, beauty to ugliness, transformations and everything in between. But I did find my glass slipper... in this beautiful poetry by Laila al Awa, from 2013...

reproduced here as a text: “I always felt as though my life, my being, my very self were forevermore saddled with the very expectations of generations before me, dusty individuals, their fervent whispers carrying, moving, travelling, across centuries of near-still air, air rippled only with the occasional revolution, scented softly with rosewater and hot Arabic coffee, that their unfulfilled wishes, needs and every desire, were now mine, like a sort of modern-day Cinderella wish. Upon turning sixteen years of age, a welcome to the world of a dissatisfied life, one in which you try your very hardest but never get anywhere, where you put your very best in, but only the worst comes out, a tired life. It was one bestowed upon me, and one I tried to shake off, a cloak of heavy, dull satin, pinned tight about my neck, a stranglehold. Countless attempts. So much of my being put in to making that cloak shine, making it glow, failed efforts heavy with the stench of mis-intention, a slew of sins. Dissatisfaction. I began to feel uncomfortable, tears springing to my eyes as I contemplated the heavy, deep fastenings of the cloak, only unfastened through true lawlessness or truthful intention. I stumbled about with the heavy cloak until one day one morning, fresh, calm and cool, the birds alight with their trills, I faced towards the Kaabah and felt the true cool of the deen surrounding me and transforming the cloak of dull expectations into one of shining possibilities, open and airy and effervescent, a garb of intentions, open worlds, a refuge of Islam.”



SHOOTING THE CLOUDS

A boy takes pictures of his friend against the backdrop of monsoon clouds in New Delhi, India, on Saturday. – AFP

No net zero without nature

MAHMOUD MOHIELDIN, NIGEL TOPPING

Businesses, investors, and governments that are serious about fulfilling net-zero emissions pledges before 2050 should be rushing to protect, conserve, and regenerate the natural resources and ecosystems that support our economic growth, food security, health, and climate. Yet there appear to be worryingly few trailblazers out there.

Worse, we are quickly running out of time. The science makes clear that to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change and to build resilience against the effects that are already inevitable, we must end biodiversity loss before 2030. That means establishing lasting conservation for at least 30 per cent of land and sea areas within eight years, and then charting a course towards living in harmony with nature by 2050.

Though the challenge is massive, ignoring it makes no sense from a business perspective. A World Economic Forum white paper estimates that nature-positive policies “could generate an estimated \$10 trillion in new annual business value and create 395 million jobs by 2030.” Among other things, such policies would use precision-agriculture technologies to improve crop yields — diversifying diets with more fruit and vegetables in the process — and boost agroforestry and peatland restoration.

A nature-positive approach can also be more cost-effective. For example, the Dasgupta Review (the Final Report of the United Kingdom’s Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity) finds that green infrastructure like salt marshes and mangroves are 2-5 times cheaper than grey infrastructure such as breakwaters.

Nonetheless, private-sector action is lagging, including in economic sectors where the health of value chains is closely tied to that of nature. That is one key finding from an analysis just released by the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions, Global Canopy, Rainforest Alliance, and others.

Out of 148 major companies assessed, only nine — or 6 per cent — are making strong progress to end deforestation. Among them are the Brazilian paper and pulp producer Suzano and five of the largest consumer goods companies: Nestlé, PepsiCo, Unilever, Mars, and Colgate-Palmolive.

Unilever, for example, is committed to a deforestation-free supply chain by 2023, and thus is focusing on palm oil, paper and board, tea, soy, and cocoa, as these contribute to more than 65 per cent of its impact on land. Nestlé has now made over 97 per cent of its primary meat, palm oil, pulp and paper, soy, and sugar supply chains deforestation-free. And PepsiCo aims to implement regenerative farming across the equivalent of its

agricultural footprint by 2030, and to end deforestation and development on peat.

These are positive steps, but they represent exceptions, rather than any new normal. Moreover, the financial sector has also been slow to turn nature-positive. Since the COP26 climate-change conference in Glasgow last year, only 35 financial firms have committed to tackle agricultural commodity-driven deforestation by 2025. The hope now is that more firms will join the deforestation commitment by COP27 this November. Under the umbrella of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, 500 financial firms (representing \$135 trillion in assets) have committed to halving their portfolios’ emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050. And now, the Alliance has issued new net-zero

PRESERVING NATURE IS A KEY ELEMENT IN THE WORLD’S EFFORT BOTH TO MITIGATE AND ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE, AND IT ALSO HAPPENS TO BE GOOD FOR BUSINESS. BUT NEW FINDINGS SHOW THAT MUCH OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR CONTINUES TO LAG FAR BEHIND IN TACKLING DEFORESTATION AND PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

guidance that includes recommended policies for addressing deforestation.

Nature functions as a kind of global capital, and protecting it should be a no-brainer for businesses, investors, and governments. The World Economic Forum finds that “\$44 trillion of economic value generation — over half the world’s total GDP — is moderately or highly

dependent on nature and its services.” But this profound source of value is increasingly at risk, as demonstrated by the current food crisis, which is driven not just by the war in Ukraine but also by climate-related disasters such as drought and India’s extreme heatwave, locust swarms in East Africa, and floods in China.

Businesses increasingly have the tools to start addressing these kinds of problems. Recently, the Science Based Targets initiative released a methodology for targeting emissions related to food, land, and agriculture. Capital for Climate’s Nature-Based Solutions Investment platform helps financiers identify opportunities to invest in nature with competitive returns. And the Business for Nature coalition is exploring additional moves the private sector can make.

Governments have also taken steps in the right direction. At COP26, countries accounting for over 90 per cent of the world’s forests endorsed a leaders’ declaration to halt forest loss and land degradation by 2030. And a dozen countries pledged to provide \$12 billion in public finance for forests by 2025, and to do more to leverage private finance for the same purpose. They can now start meeting those commitments ahead of COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, by enacting the necessary policies, establishing the right incentives, and delivering on their financial promises.

Meanwhile, the UN-backed Race to Zero and Race to Resilience campaigns will continue working in parallel, helping businesses, investors, cities, and regions put conservation of nature at the heart of their work to decarbonise and build resilience. The five strong corporate performers on deforestation are in the Race to Zero, and the campaign’s recently strengthened criteria will pressure other members to do more to use biodiversity sustainably and align their activities and financing with climate-resilient development.

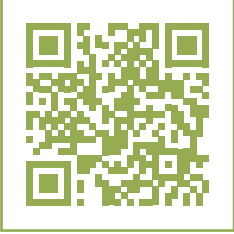
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Though the challenge is massive, ignoring it makes no sense from a business perspective.

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Oman’s Salim al Yarubi wraps up World Athletics Championships participation

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Oman national athlete Salim bin Saleh al Yarubi concluded his participation at the ongoing World Athletics Championships in Oregon, USA.

Al Yarubi took part at the qualification of long jump competitions and he ended in the 15th position with a mark of 7.43M.

He had three attempts including the initial one which did not end on a successful note. The second attempt was the best as he recorded 7.43 while in the third attempt, he registered 7.29. Oman’s Salim al Yarubi holds the best national record of 7.80.

Japan’s Yuki Hashikoa clinched the first place in Group A qualification as he cleared 8.18 while Marquis Dendy from USA came in second place with a mark of 8.16.

Swedish athlete Thobias Montler claimed the third place and advanced to the next stage as he recorded 8.10. As many as 12 athletes competed in the finals of Men’s long jump later on Saturday.

The top athletics event, which will conclude on July 25, witnessed participation of more than 1,900 athletes from 192 countries, including 42 Olympic champions who won individual gold medals.

Oman’s delegation to the World Athletics Championships was headed by Mohammed al Balushi, national team in charge, Emad Saraj, head coach and the athlete Salim al Yarubi.

On the other hand, Oman’s athletics team concluded their latest journey at West Asian Youth Championships in Lebanon on successful note. The team captured ten medals including three gold medals, three silver medals and four bronze medals.



Malaysia defeat Laos to clinch title



JAKARTA: Malaysia emerged champions of the AFF U19 Championship 2022 with a 2-0 win over Laos in the final on Friday.

Goals by Muhammad Faiz Runnizar and Muhammad Alif Yusian secured Malaysia the title as they exacted revenge over a Laos side who had beaten

them in their group stage encounter.

Malaysia, who defeated Vietnam 3-0 in the semifinals, enjoyed a dream start with Muhammad Faiz giving them the lead in the 14th minute.

Laos, who were equally impressive in their 2-0 win over Thailand in their semifinal,

fought back but couldn’t find a way past the resilient Malaysian defence. Muhammad Alif then confirmed victory for Hassan Sazali Waras’ side with his 77th minute effort.

Vietnam finished third after defeating Thailand 5-3 on penalties after the play-off ended 1-1. — AFC

Ibri, Seeb juniors led first leg league of Oman Clubs TT championships

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Ibri and Seeb clubs led the tables of first leg league of the Oman clubs Table Tennis Championships for junior category, which concluded on Friday night at the main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

As many as seven clubs took part in the domestic event including Seeb, Ibri, Saham, Qurayat, Masirah, Salalah and Yanqul.

The seven teams distributed into two groups as the first group featured Seeb, Salalah and Qurayat clubs. The second group comprised of Ibri, Saham, Masirah and Yanqul.

Seeb managed to take the topper of Group A after their victory over Salalah and Qurayat by 3-0.

Salalah came in second place with three points from one triumph against Qurayat. Ibri clinched the first place in the second group as they posted three crucial wins over Saham (3-1), Masirah and Yanqul (3-0).

The second leg matches will be held later this year and dates will be confirmed later. The owner of first and second place from both groups after completion of



the second leg will advance to semifinals. The winner of semis will compete on the title.

The officials at Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) preferred to hold this domestic junior championship at two stages

to allow the paddlers to play more games in the season.

It will be a great environment for the players to develop their technical skills and compete on representing the national team squad.

Felix wins 19th world medal, Kerley on fire

EUGENE: American veteran Allyson Felix will hang up her spikes having sealed a remarkable 19th world medal on Friday, while Fred Kerley laid down an impressive marker in the heats for the 100m in Oregon.

Was it the perfect swansong for Felix? Not quite, as she and Kennedy Simon were both reeled in on their respective legs, leaving the Dominican Republic to take victory in the 4x400m mixed relay, the Dutch quartet edging the US for silver.

Her bronze is Felix's 19th at world champs in a career that started almost two decades ago and also included 11 Olympic medals.

"It was very special to be able to run in front of a home crowd for my last race," said Felix.

"It was so cool. My daughter was in the stands. It was a night I will cherish."

Felix added: "I've had such good memories. I know it is time and these guys will carry it on into the future."

"I am at peace stepping into this next stage and have tremendous gratitude for this sport."

Two-time Olympic shot put champion Ryan Crouser had high praise for his US team co-captain.

"She's done so much for the sport and especially for women athletes, attracting attention to some really important issues we have in the sport," Crouser said of Felix.

"She's a fantastic athlete, but also a fantastic person. She does stuff the right way, she is just a class act, and kind of the definition of



integrity."

In-form Kerley ran a sensational heat-winning 9.79 seconds in a warning to potential rivals for the 100m crown.

He advanced to Saturday's semifinals along with teammates Marvin Bracey, Trayvon Bromell and defending champion Christian Coleman, who missed the Tokyo Olympics after missing three doping tests.

"It's going to take something fast to win," predicted Canada's

reigning Olympic 200m champion Andre de Grasse, also twice a 100m bronze medallist.

Reigning Olympic champion Marcell Jacobs, a shock winner in Tokyo who has struggled with injury this season, acknowledged that he had struggled in his heat.

"I am not at my 100%," the Italian said. "Running 10.04 at half capacity of what I can run, I can say my physical shape is fine. I just need to get my legs ready."

- History for Peru -

There was a historic first ever world medal for Peru as Kimberly Garcia Leon won the women's 20km race walk, the first medal event at the Eugene worlds.

"This is the first medal for us at the world championships and I hope it won't be the last one," said the Peruvian, also entered into the 35km race walk.

The second medal event of the champs saw Toshikazu Yamanishi produce a brutal final kick to defend his world men's 20km race



(From L) Silver medallist Poland's Katarzyna Zdziebilo, gold medallist Peru's Kimberly Garcia Leon and bronze medallist China's Qieyang Shijie pose on the podium during the medal ceremony for the women's 20km race walk during the World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon on July 15, 2022. - AFP



Peru's Kimberly Garcia Leon crosses the finish line to win the women's 20km race walk final during the World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon. - AFP

walk title.

In a Japanese 1-2, compatriot Koki Ikeda took silver, seven seconds off the winning pace, in a repeat of the result at March's World Race Walking Team Championships in Muscat.

Home hopes of gold in the men's shot put were kept alive as world record holder Crouser qualified for Sunday's final with a 22.28m effort.

Dutch distance sensation Sifan Hassan is defending champion in the women's 1,500m, but she has

opted out of defending her title in Eugene.

She will instead concentrate on the 5,000-10,000m double, which she pulled off at last year's Tokyo Olympics.

Hassan also won bronze in the 1,500m in the Japanese capital, a race won by Kenya's Faith Kipyegon ahead of Briton Laura Muir.

Both Kipyegon and Muir qualified smoothly for Saturday's semifinal, with the final scheduled for Monday. - AFP

Italy's Bernardeschi signs for Toronto FC



TORONTO: Italy winger Federico Bernardeschi has signed a four-year deal with MLS side Toronto FC from Serie A giants Juventus, the Major League Soccer team announced on Saturday.

The 28-year-old former Fiorentina player spent five seasons with Juventus, winning seven trophies including three consecutive Serie A titles from 2018 to 2020.

Bernardeschi joins fellow Italy international Lorenzo Insigne in Toronto, the Napoli winger having also joined the Canadian club this summer.

"We think he's a great fit for what we're trying to build here at TFC and look forward to getting him on the field," said Toronto FC Head Coach and Sporting Director Bob Bradley.

"He's an attacking player who is also known for working hard for the team."

Capped 39 times for Italy, Bernardeschi won the European championship last year. - AFP

Tamberi through to high jump final after mighty scare

EUGENE: Italy's joint Olympic champion Gianmarco Tamberi advanced to the high jump final at the World Athletics Championships on Friday but only after twice flirting with disaster in the qualifying round.

Tamberi, who famously asked an official if he could share gold in Tokyo with Qatar's Mutaz Barshim, failed twice at the relatively modest height of 2.25 metres and left the bar wobbling as he scraped over with his third and final attempt.

The Italian, who cleared 2.37 in that Olympic final and has a season's best of 2.31, lay back on the landing pad with his arms outstretched in relief.

It was short-lived however as he then failed his first two attempts at 2.28 but, with elimination looming, he got over.

There were no such problems for Barshim as the Qatari began his bid for a third successive world title with an untroubled display to sail into Monday's final.

World indoor champion Woo Sang-hyeok of



Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi in action during the men's high jump qualification. - Reuters

Korea underlined his status as a strong medal hope as he also sailed through without any fails. Thirteen men will compete in the final. - Reuters

Americans Kupcho and Salas grab lead in LPGA pairs event

WASHINGTON: Americans Jennifer Kupcho and Lizette Salas combined to shoot a six-under par 64 and seize a four-stroke lead after Friday's third round of the LPGA Great Lakes Bay Invitational.

The US duo delivered the lowest score of the tournament in the alternate-short format to stand on 17-under 193 entering Saturday's final round at Midland (Michigan) Country Club.

"We made some really great shots and clutch putts," Salas said. "We really stayed patient and knew we were going to perform. We came down the stretch really strong and we're going to use that momentum tomorrow."

After playing alternate-shot format in the first and third rounds, the last round, like the second, will feature a four-ball (best ball) format.

"It's just being patient and knowing we'll be there for each other," said Kupcho of her final-day strategy. "There are going to be a lot of low scores for sure. No one is going to be out of it."

Malaysia's Kelly Tan and Finland's Matilda Castren fired a 67 to stand second on 197.

France's Pauline Roussin and Dutch team-mate Dewi Weber, an LPGA rookie duo who led by three strokes after 36 holes, shot 73 and fell to a share of third on 199 with South Korean Kang Hae-ji and Hong Kong's Tiffany Chan.

Kupcho and Salas turned a three-stroke deficit into a four-stroke lead with a bogey-free round.

They birdied the sixth, seventh and eighth then closed on a hot streak with birdies at the 14th, 15th and 17th holes.



Kupcho and Salas took a win and tie in four-ball and a foursomes victory together in last year's Solheim Cup loss to Europe.

"We create something really special out on the golf course," Salas said. "We don't have to think about it much."

Kupcho, 25, won her first major title in April at the Chevron Championship and took her second LPGA victory last month at the Meijer Classic.

Salas, 32, won her only LPGA title in 2014 at the Kingsmill Championship. She's a three-time major runner-up, including last year at the Women's British Open and Women's PGA Championship.

Tan, 28, has never won an LPGA title while 27-year-old Castren's only LPGA crown came at last year's Mediheal Championship.

- AFP



Murray ousted by Bublik at ATP Hall of Fame Open

NEWPORT: Britain's former world number one Andy Murray was knocked out of the ATP Hall of Fame Open, falling to Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik 7-5, 6-4 in a Friday quarterfinal.

World number 42 Bublik fired 12 aces against five double faults and won 80% of his first serve points to eliminate the 35-year-old Scotsman in the grass-court event and line up a semifinal clash with Australian Jason Kubler.

"It's great to be in the semifinals again", Bublik said. "I don't have any tournaments the next two or three weeks so I'm engaged. I want to get as many matches as I can."

Kubler, ranked 102nd in the world, beat fellow Australian James Duckworth 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) to reach his first ATP semifinal.

The victory ended Kubler's four-match losing streak to Duckworth, a day after Kubler notched his first win over a top-10 player with an upset of top-seeded Canadian Felix Auger-

Aliassime.

Americans John Isner and Maxime Cressy meet in Saturday's other semifinal.

Former world number one Murray is a three-time Grand Slam champion, winning the 2012 US Open and 2013 and 2016 Wimbledon titles as well as Olympic gold in 2012 and 2016.

Murray, ranked 52nd, was chasing a 47th career ATP crown while Bublik, 25, won his first ATP title at Montpellier in February.

Injury-nagged Murray has not won a title since the 2019 European Open but was runner-up in January at Sydney and last month in Stuttgart.

Bublik improved to 2-3 against Murray and has split their four meetings this year.

Murray's first double fault gave Bublik the match's first break point and he took advantage with a backhand winner to seize a 6-5 lead, then held on a service winner to claim the first set after 57 minutes. — AFP



England beat Australia 21-17 to win third Test and series

SYDNEY: Tries from Freddie Steward and Marcus Smith powered England to a come-from-behind 21-17 victory in the deciding third Test on Saturday to seal a bruising series at a sold-out Sydney Cricket Ground.

Eddie Jones's men slumped 10-3 behind, but bounced back with 18 unanswered points to take control and hold off a frantic late charge from the Wallabies.

England's fiercely tackling defence thwarted the Wallabies to claim the newly-minted Ella-Mobbs Cup with a 2-1 series victory. Jones's team became only the second England side to win a series in Australia after a historic whitewash in 2016.

The triumph is a much-needed tonic for Jones, who has been under increasing pressure ahead of next year's World Cup in France after an indifferent start to the year for England.

"We fought for each other, we have had a great four weeks here, really enjoyed ourselves", England captain Courtney Lawes said.

"The boys just stuck together and found a way to win and that's the big improvement, I think."

It was a bitter result for the Wallabies, who have been trying to usher a new era after a period in the wilderness.

Dave Rennie's men were hit hard through by injury and suspension, which tested their depth and resolve as they fell agonisingly short.

'IT HURTS'

"We created good opportunities tonight, but just not good enough to execute them", Wallabies captain Michael Hooper said.

"There were areas that hurt us, like right before half-time when they got that try. But also some pleasing elements, but it hurts."

Prior to their tense series opening win in Perth, Australia had lost eight straight games to England since the 2015 World Cup and were desperate to wrap up a series against their old rival.

— AFP

Rovanpera grabs Estonia Rally lead as rivals slip and slide

TARTU: Finn Kalle Rovanpera grabbed the Estonia Rally lead on Friday's final stage after his Welsh Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans lost time tangling with the undergrowth.

The Toyota pair dominated the day's eight stages. Evans won the first five to build a 19.9sec lead over Rovanpera, who was second in four of them.

Then the 21-year-old Finn hit back, winning the next two to enter the last stage of the day still 10.9sec behind.

He won that too as rain fell and Evans went off course on the narrow forest road and trailed in seventh, 22.6sec back.

"I think you can see what the story is", said Evans. "We were in the bushes right at the start, so after that it was a case of making sure we got through. There's nothing you can do when the conditions are like that."

Rovanpera, who won the race last year, leads the championship by 65 points from Belgian Thierry Neuville in a Hyundai.

The young Finn was pleased with his comeback in the day's later stages which gave him an 11.7sec lead.

"The afternoon was good", he said. "It will be interesting to see what happens to the guys behind."

Home driver Ott Tanak was third in his Hyundai 44 seconds back after a 10 second penalty and a mechanical problem on the last stage.

The Estonian incurred the penalty when he was caught switching out of electric mode on his hybrid Hyundai on the way to the start of the opening stage.

He then lost more than 23



seconds as he finished ninth on the last stage as the rain obscured his view.

"A pipe came off the heater and we had no visibility..." Tanak

complained to the WRC site, which ran a screen grab from inside the car showing co-driver Martin Jarveoja lifting his left leg to press a duct against the

windscreen.

Neuville finished the day fifth, more than 1 minute 10 seconds behind Rovanpera.

There are nine more special stages scheduled for Saturday, and four more on Sunday morning to close the seventh round of the season. Craig Breen, who won stage one on Thursday, was forced out for the day after crashing on stage 4 and damaging his steering. — AFP

STANDINGS:

1. Kalle Rovanpera/Jonne Halttunen (FIN/Toyota) 1hr 16min 19.7sec. 2. Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin (GBR/Toyota) at 11.7sec. 3. Ott Tanak/Martin Jarveoja (EST/Hyundai) 44.3. 4. Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (FIN/Toyota) 1:05.9. 5. Thierry Neuville/Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL/Hyundai) 1:12.9. 6. Adrien Fourmaux/Alexandre Coria (FRA/M-Sport Ford) 2:08.1. 7. Takamoto Katsuta/Aaron Johnston (JPN-IRL/Toyota) 2:10.9. 8. Gus Greensmith/Jonas Andersson (GBR-SWE/M-Sport Ford) 2:29.4. 9. Pierre-Louis Loubet/Vincent Landais (FRA/M-Sport Ford) 3:59.0. 10. Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen (NOR/Skoda) 4:57.4.

Danish double as Pedersen, Vingegaard turn up Tour de France heat

SAINT-ÉTIENNE: Mads Pedersen became the third Dane to win a stage on this year's Tour de France when an escape group beat the peloton to Saint-Etienne on a baking hot dash across the Rhone Valley on Friday as riders braced to face temperatures of up to 40 degrees this weekend.

His countryman Jonas Vingegaard retained the overall lead, which he claimed by winning stage 11, while Magnus Cort Nielsen won stage 10 in a Tour de France that had started with three days in Denmark.

A bunch sprint had been expected on this 193 km stage 13 run from the foot of the Alps but as the heavier built riders, who dominate the sprints, began to struggle in the searing temperatures, a seven-rider break began to dream of a stage win.

Australian sprinter Caleb Ewan fell when he appeared to lose focus and braked hard into a corner, tumbling alone near the head of the peloton.

Quick-Step sprinter Fabio Jakobsen was also dropped as the pack chased the escape and with no collective will to reel in the escape, the peloton then gave up the game 25km from Saint-Etienne.

Pedersen is clearly a man for



Trek-Segafredo team's Danish rider Mads Pedersen celebrates as he cycles to the finish line to win the 13th stage of the 109th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 192,6 km between Le Bourg d'Oisans in the French Alps, and Saint-Etienne in central France, on Friday. — AFP

the extremes as he won the 2019 world championship road race in freezing Yorkshire rain.

On Friday, he dealt with a heatwave with the same elan, whipping his rivals Hugo Houle and Fred Wright in the home straight.

"It was a bit of a gamble", the

26-year-old Pedersen said after his first ever Grand Tour win.

"I had a couple of good days in the mountains, my legs felt good, so when it came to the sprint I had enough."

'GREAT TO BE A DANE'

Vingegaard, Tadej Pogacar

and Geraint Thomas, the top three in the overall standings, all cruised over the line together.

"It's great to be a Dane right now, a third win for Denmark is incredible", said Vingegaard.

Pedersen said the Danish success was down to grass roots investment in a country where five times more journeys are made by bike than by car.

"All the good work from local and continental teams and investment in Danish cycling is paying off", he said. "We have a good mix of riders in Denmark, but it's crazy we got three wins in such a short time."

Pedersen said he had originally been deflated not to win on home soil when he came sixth on the opening day as he and Vingegaard were cheered around every metre of the 13.1 km route.

"I didn't get the win in Denmark that I had dreamed about, but now I got the win that the team had dreamed about", Pedersen said. "We had lots of support in Denmark, and even here we had lots of Danes here supporting us."

Much has been made of how Jumbo riders have been wearing cooling jackets ahead of the stages as the heatwave builds up.

They are the only team using such jackets. — AFP



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New container freight station to come up at Sohar Port

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

SOHAR Port and Freezone has partnered with Arkan Sohar Logistics to develop a port-based Container Freight Station (CFS) and logistics complex that will occupy 26,000 sq metres.

Through this agreement, Arkan Sohar Logistics will offer bonded and non-bonded facilities, ambient and covered storage, as well as temperature controlled, dry, chilled and frozen storage facilities. These facilities will also provide value added services such as cross stuffing for import, re-export and transshipment cargo, lashing, crating, staging, labelling, re-packing, kitting, and order processing. An Oman-based company, Arkan Sohar Logistics has become one of the fastest-growing logistics service providers in the region with a total investment of approximately RO 2.7 million.

The CFS will allow importers and exporters using SOHAR Port to securely store goods and products for consolidation and expedited shipping. Arkan Sohar Logistics' CFS services have become a landmark success for the company, offering state-of-the-art customs-bonded areas for cargo, a racked warehouse facility and custom-built dock levellers to facilitate easy access to trailers for safe and efficient loading and unloading.

Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi, CEO of SOHAR Freezone, DCEO SOHAR Port said, "As we continue to expand



and position Oman as a world-class logistics hub, it is important that we consolidate and de-consolidate shipments coming into SOHAR by offering CFS services within the port and in close proximity to the container terminal. This will speed up the clearance and processing functions in order to move goods and products on to their next destination efficiently. Arkan Sohar Logistics have a well-earned strong reputation as an excellent and dependable service partner and we are looking forward to welcoming them to SOHAR."

Ali al Muttawa, CEO of Arkan Sohar Logistics, said, "Our experience in operating CFS, and warehousing facilities for frozen commodities will benefit SOHAR Port's clients and ensure they can meet the needs of a growing consumer market by handling goods safely and securely and providing end-to-end logistics solutions. Our facilities can be customised to suit their requirements, and by maintaining shipping containers, we are able to increase cost efficiency and keep businesses moving without delays caused by damaged goods, during processing or transportation."

Foreign investment inflows rise 6 per cent to RO 22.5 billion

KEYTREND: The oil & gas sector's contribution to foreign investments amounted to RO 11.174 billion

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Total foreign investment inflows – direct and indirect - into the Sultanate of Oman rose 6 per cent to reach RO 22.500 billion by the end of 2020, up from RO 20.983 billion a year earlier, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) said in its latest bulletin.

The volume of foreign direct investment (FDI) into the Sultanate of Oman increased by 9.2 per cent to reach RO 15.761 billion in 2020, versus RO 14.432 billion in 2019, the Centre said. FDI accounted for 70.9 per cent of total investment inflows, it noted.

Total foreign investments accounted for 78.2 per cent of GDP in 2020, while FDI alone contributed a 55.4 per cent share of GDP. Foreign investments in 2020 alone amounted to RO 1.261 billion, representing a 24.5 per cent over the 2019 tally.

The Oil & Gas sector's contribution to foreign investments amounted to RO 11.174 billion at the end of 2020, representing a growth of 50.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2019. This was followed by the



financial intermediation sector with investments amounting to RO 6.006 billion (which was 27 per cent higher than the corresponding figure for 2019). The manufacturing sector's share was RO 2.013 billion.

Significantly, the United Kingdom was the largest source of foreign direct investment into the Sultanate of Oman with a contribution totalling RO 7.112 billion as of 2020-end. In second place was the United States with RO 2.045 billion, followed by the United Arab Emirates with RO 998 million.

The FDI Bulletin of the NCSI aims to provide an accurate account of foreign investment inflows into the Sultanate of Oman to enable investors and decision makers to make informed decisions. It provides a standardised account in line with international standards, and also highlights the important role that foreign investments play in the current and future development of the national economy.

Oman's ship repair yard posts first-ever net profit

STRONG GROWTH: Asyad Shipping generates record revenues of RO 41m in 2021

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Asyad Dry Dock (formerly known as Oman Dry-Dock Company) has turned a first-ever profit since its establishment just over a decade ago as the country's first ship repair and maintenance yard

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the investment arm of the Omani government, made the announcement in its newly published Annual Report for the June 2020 – December 2021 period. Asyad Dry Dock is a subsidiary of Asyad Group, the government's logistics and supply chain business, which in turn is affiliated to OIA.

"Asyad Dry Dock registered net profits for the first time since its incorporation in 2011 as a result

of establishing new sources of income, rationalising spending, increasing productivity, and targeting projects with high-profit margins," said OIA in its Annual Report.

Established within Port of Duqm, Asyad Dry Dock offers an expanding suite of services encompassing ship repair, ship conversion, mega yacht repair, offshore rig repair, shipbuilding, and industrial fabrication. Equipped with a 2,800-metre quay and two graving docks, the yard can handle vessels up to 600,000 DWT.

Since the commencement of operations in 2011, Asyad Dry Dock has handled over 1,100 vessels. In 2021, the yard received a total of 163 vessels, representing a 21 per cent increase over corresponding figures for 2020.

Also in 2021, the yard set a record by accommodating 23 ships simultaneously. It also announced a landmark foray into shipbuilding services for the first time, with



a focus on small and medium size vessels. The first craft built at the Duqm facility was delivered earlier this year, with several local and regional shipbuilding projects in the pipeline, according to the company.

Meanwhile, Asyad Group, the parent holding company, posted a net profit of RO 47.4 million in 2021, down from RO 52.4 million a year earlier, Oman Investment Authority stated in its report.

"(Asyad Group) recorded

positive growth of 5 per cent in the volume of containers handled in the ports run by the group in 2020, and positive growth of 2 per cent in 2021. (It) contributed to the management of the Covid-19 crisis by ensuring continuity of port operations and the smooth commercial movement and transport of main consumer commodities," the Authority stated.

Also contributing to the group's performance was the restructuring

of its asset portfolio "through integration and merger of the group's subsidiaries, privatisation, or cancellation and transfer of non-core activities to the competent entities", it further noted.

In particular, the restructuring and transfer of the International Maritime College Oman (IMCO) to a private Omani university has contributed to an annual saving of around RO 500K. Additionally, the Group restructured the postal network and closed 14 "unprofitable" branches, leading to financial savings. It also exited the Oman International Container Terminal (OICT) at Sohar Port in a move that "generated good returns from the transaction", the Authority noted.

Significantly, Asyad Shipping (formerly Oman Shipping Company) generated "record revenues" totalling RO 41 million last year. The Authority attributed this outcome to the "improved performance of the containers sector, and expansion of the

company's commercial operations and shipping network".

Listing other achievements by Asyad Group subsidiaries during the past year, the Authority noted in particular the classification of Omani ports as "the fastest handler of containerships in the world" – a citation made by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Additionally, Asyad affiliates successfully expanded their network of container shipping lines and inaugurated the first direct shipping line between the Sultanate of Oman and Arabian Gulf ports (Gulf Express Line).

Port of Duqm has been a key focus of Asyad Group's operations during the past year.

It launched marine services at the maritime gateway, and also introduced operations at the General Cargo Terminal at the port. Furthermore, the Group floated a tender for the management and operation of the port's new Container Terminal.

GSK spin-off to create consumer healthcare giant



LONDON: British drugs giant GlaxoSmithKline on Monday demerges its newly-named consumer healthcare unit Haleon, resulting in what is set to be London's largest new stock market listing in more than a decade.

The new company — owning brands including Sensodyne toothpaste, pain relief drug Panadol and cold treatment Theraflu — is set for a valuation of about £40 billion when it begins trading on the London stock market, according to Bloomberg.

The major strategy shift by GSK Chief Executive Emma Walmsley comes after she has faced intense activist shareholder pressure over the company's delays in producing Covid jabs and treatments.

"This will be the largest London stock market listing in a decade, with the new company becoming a big beast with a new skin in the consumer goods world", said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown.

It is set to be the capital's biggest listing since Swiss mining giant Glencore was valued at £38 billion on entry in 2011.

GSK, which owns 68 per cent of Haleon, plans to retain six percent of the group following the spin-off.

US pharmaceutical titan Pfizer has said it plans to sell its 32-per cent minority stake.

Walmsley, who had led the consumer unit prior to her promotion as head of GSK in 2017, has described the demerger as the group's most significant corporate change in 20 years.

The split sees GSK "parcelling off a considerable quantity of its sizeable debt pile into Haleon, expected to be around £10 billion", Streeter said.

Haleon could join London's top-tier FTSE 100 depending on its market valuation.

Walmsley, part of a group of less than 10 women chief executives running companies on the benchmark index, sees more long-term value in the demerger than a sale.

GSK at the start of the year rejected a £50 billion bid for the unit from consumer goods titan Unilever.

Alongside the demerger, GSK is expanding further into the field of vaccines, having in May snapped up US biopharmaceutical firm Affinivax for up to \$3.3 billion.

Also this year, the British company spent \$1.9 billion on US group Sierra Oncology, a specialist in medicines for rare forms of cancer.

Keith Bowman, analyst at Interactive Investor, said the demerger was aimed at giving GSK "increased management focus to each respective business".

This was the case "particularly for its pharma business which has underperformed rivals such as (Covid vaccine-maker) AstraZeneca over recent years", he said. GSK is set to receive £7 billion in dividends at separation.

The consumer healthcare division, whose portfolio of products includes also Centrum multivitamins and anti-inflammatory Voltaren, generates annual sales of about £10 billion.

Haleon will be headquartered in Weybridge, southwest of London. "The idea is that a more focused consumer business will help boost sales", said Streeter.

"There will be no change at the top... which is a vote of confidence in Brian McNamara, a former Procter & Gamble executive who has led the division for eight years." — AFP

Bank Muscat posts net profit of RO 99.26m for 6 months ended June 30

Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its preliminary unaudited results for the six months ended June 30, 2022. The bank posted a net profit of RO 99.26 million for the period compared to RO 94.65 million reported during the same period in 2021, an increase of 4.9 per cent.

The key highlights of the results for the period are as follows:

1) Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 166.25 million for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 compared to RO 168.44 million for the same period in 2021, a decrease of 1.3 per cent due to higher interest expenses.

2) Non-interest income was RO 81.44 million for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 as compared to RO 74.70 million for the same period in 2021, mainly due to higher income from sale of investments.

3) Operating expenses for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 was RO 102.71 million as compared to RO 95.12 million for the same period in 2021, an increase of 8.0 per cent.

4) Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 was RO 28.40 million as against RO 35.33 million for the same period



Key highlights of preliminary unaudited results

Particulars (RO millions)	30 Jun 2022	30 Jun 2021	Change (%)
For the period ended	2022	2021	Change (%)
Net interest income & Islamic financing income	166.25	168.44	-1.3%
Other operating income	81.44	74.70	9.0%
Operating expenses	102.71	95.12	8.0%
Operating profit	144.98	148.02	-2.1%
Net profit	99.26	94.65	4.9%
Particulars (RO millions) as at	30 Jun 2022	30 Jun 2021	Change (%)
Total Assets	12,860	12,886	-0.2%
Net loans and Islamic financing	9,003	9,238	-2.5%
- Conventional loans and advances	7,577	7,897	-4.1%
- Islamic financing receivables	1,426	1,341	6.3%
Customer deposits and Islamic deposits	8,834	8,670	1.9%
- Conventional customer deposits	7,621	7,518	1.4%
- Islamic customer deposits	1,213	1,152	5.3%
Total Equity attributable to equity holders	1,999	1,924	3.9%

in 2021.

The decrease is mainly attributed to the precautionary and collective provisions created

by the bank during the first half of 2021, due to the ongoing pandemic situation and the improving global crude oil prices.

5) Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables decreased by 2.5 per cent to RO 9,003 million as against RO 9,238 million as at June 30, 2021, due to certain large repayments.

6) Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 1.9 per cent to RO 8,834 million as against RO 8,670 million as at June 30, 2021.

The full results for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the Bank at its meeting scheduled later during July 2022.

Pakistan to get \$4 bn to shore up reserves: FM

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is likely to get \$4 billion from friendly countries this month to bridge a gap in foreign reserves highlighted by the International Monetary Fund, the country's finance minister said, two days after sealing a deal with the lender.

The IMF has reached a staff level agreement with Pakistan that would pave the way for a disbursement of \$1.17 billion. The board is also considering adding \$1 billion to a \$6 billion

programme agreed in 2019.

"As per the IMF, there is a \$4 billion gap", the minister, Miftah Ismail, told a news conference in Islamabad, referring to the shortfall in foreign reserves.

"We will, God willing, fill this gap in the month of July", he said. "We think that we will get \$1.2 billion in deferred oil payment from a friendly country. We think that a foreign country will invest between \$1.5 to \$2 billion in stocks on a G2G (government-to-

government) basis, and another friendly country will perhaps give us gas on deferred payment and another friendly country will make some deposits."

Depleting reserves, a widening current account deficit and the depreciation of the Pakistani rupee against the US dollar have left the South Asian nation facing a balance of payment crisis.

Without the IMF deal, which should open up other avenues for external finance, Ismail said

the country could have headed towards default.

He said the country will also get around \$6 billion from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in FY2022-2023.

Pakistan secured a \$6 billion IMF programme in 2019, but less than half of that amount has been disbursed to date.

Pakistan's central bank has hiked its key interest rate to 15% to curb inflation, which hit 21.3 per cent in June. — Reuters

Ransomware attacks on education institutions increase: Report

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

A new survey by Sophos, a global leader in next-generation cybersecurity, has revealed that education institutions — both higher and lower education — are increasingly being hit with ransomware, with 60 per cent suffering attacks in 2021 compared to 44 per cent in 2020. Education institutions faced the highest data encryption rate (73 per cent) compared to other sectors (65 per cent), and the longest recovery time, with 7 per cent taking at least three months to recover — almost double the average time for other sectors (4 per cent).

Key findings from the survey report, titled "The State of Ransomware in Education 2022":

- Education institutions report the highest propensity

to experience operational and commercial impacts from ransomware attacks compared to other sectors; 97 per cent of higher education and 94 per cent of lower education respondents say attacks impacted their ability to operate, while 96 per cent of higher education and 92 per cent of lower education respondents in the private sector further report business and revenue loss

- Only 2 per cent of education institutions recovered all of their encrypted data after paying a ransom (down from 4 per cent in 2020); schools, on average, were able to recover 62 per cent of encrypted data after paying ransoms (down from 68 per cent in 2020)

- Higher education institutions in particular report the longest ransomware recovery time; while 40 per cent say it takes at least one



month to recover (20 per cent for other sectors), 9 per cent report it takes three to six months

"Schools are among those being hit the hardest by ransomware. They're prime targets for attackers because of their overall lack of strong cybersecurity defences and

the goldmine of personal data they hold", said Chester Wisniewski, principal research scientist at Sophos.

"Education institutions are less likely than others to detect in-progress attacks, which naturally leads to higher attack success and

encryption rates. Considering the encrypted data is most likely confidential student records, the impact is far greater than what most industries would experience. Even if a portion of the data is restored, there is no guarantee what data the attackers will return, and, even then, the damage is already done, further burdening the victimised schools with high recovery costs and sometimes even bankruptcy. Unfortunately, these attacks are not going to stop, so the only way to get ahead is to prioritise building up anti-ransomware defences to identify and mitigate attacks before encryption is possible."

Interestingly, education institutions report the highest rate of cyber insurance payout on ransomware claims (100 per cent higher education, 99 per cent lower education). However, as a

whole, the sector has one of the lowest rates of cyber insurance coverage against ransomware (78 per cent compared to 83 per cent for other sectors).

"Four out of 10 schools say fewer insurance providers are offering them coverage, while nearly half (49 per cent) report that the level of cybersecurity they need to qualify for coverage has gone up", said Wisniewski.

"Cyber insurance providers are becoming more selective when it comes to accepting customers, and education organisations need help to meet these higher standards. With limited budgets, schools should work closely with trusted security professionals to ensure that resources are being allocated towards the right solutions that will deliver the best security outcomes and also help meet insurance standards."

G20 finance chiefs resolved on food security

FRANSISKA NANGOY AND
ANDREA SHALAL

The Group of 20 major economies' finance chiefs on Saturday pledged to address global food insecurity and rising debt, but made few policy breakthroughs amid divisions over Russia's war in Ukraine at a two-day meeting in Indonesia.

With questions growing about the effectiveness of the G20 in tackling the world's major problems, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the differences had prevented the finance ministers and central bankers from issuing a formal communique but that the group had "strong consensus" on the need to address a worsening food security crisis.

Host Indonesia will issue a chair's statement instead. Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said most topics were agreed by all members except for particular statements about the war in Ukraine. She described it as the "best result" the group could have achieved at this meeting.

Western countries have enforced strict sanctions against Russia, which says it is conducting a "special military operation" in Ukraine. Other G20 nations, including China, India and South Africa, have been more muted in their response.

"This is a challenging time because Russia is part of the G20 and doesn't agree with the rest of us on how to characterise the war", Yellen said, but stressed the disagreement should not prevent progress on pressing global issues.

Russia's finance minister attended the meeting virtually while his deputy attended in person. Ukraine's finance minister addressed the session virtually where he called for "more severe targeted sanctions".

Indonesia's Sri Mulyani said while chairing a fractured G20 has been "quite overwhelming" due to the war in Ukraine, all members agreed that food insecurity requires special attention and she called for removal of trade protections that prevented flow of food supplies.

The G20 will set up a joint forum between finance and agriculture ministers to address food and fertilise supply issue. A similar forum has been set up for finance and health ministers for pandemic preparedness. — Reuters

This is a challenging time because Russia is part of the G20 and doesn't agree with the rest of us on how to characterise the war

JANET YELLEN
US Treasury Secretary



G20 MEETINGS
AT BALI
RESORT

South Korea Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance Choo Kyung-Ho (L) walks with International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva before their bilateral meeting attending the G20 Finance Ministers Meeting in Nusa Dua, on Indonesia resort island of Bali. — AFP

Behind the scene of a VC decision making



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The writer is a member of the International Press Association

Three months ago I joined an investment firm, which could be loosely categorised as a Venture Capital. Without going too much into technicalities, Venture Capital is money deployed to support the growth of a start-up at any stage.

In our case, we mostly invest in web3 related early-stage start-ups that are aiming to list their blockchain tokens on an exchange.

Although the field is not new to me, sitting on the other side at the negotiation table has been quite interesting.

For most of my career in start-ups, I "chased" investors looking for funds to grow my business. Now, I am "chased" to invest in other people's projects.

Many ask me what are our decision making criteria when we look into a project. I would love to say that there is a single answer to this very complex question, but the truth is that there are too many factors to keep into consideration. In this article I will highlight those that are usually core to our decision making process.

First of all, we have divided into teams. This might not be the case across all VCs, but in our case it works well. The first team is the one looking into the project on a

AT THE MOMENT WE ARE APPROVING ABOUT 5 INVESTMENTS A MONTH AND DURING EACH INVESTMENT COMMITTEE WE EVALUATE 3 TO 5 PROJECTS

surface level.

This team has some knowledge of the market and a good feeling of the market's sentiment. They run through essential information, such as: The team, the market, the product, the tech used, the list of other investors (existing or in talks). Then, 3 times a week we have our Investment Committee calls, during which this first team presents the opportunities that they have evaluated.

The second team is more experienced in investment specifically, having in it first-hand investors. They have more "grey hair" than the first team, both in terms of age and experience. I must admit that it is always amusing to see the incredible amount of connections that this team has. It is not an exaggeration to say that they almost know everyone in the industry.

Sometimes, it could be the case that the first team might support a project, but the second team has some insights that point in the opposite direction. That might result in a rejection, or in more facts-finding needed. That is when the third team comes into the picture.

The third team is very technical and data-driven. They have developed internally a decision making engine that is proprietor to our VC, so I cannot expand too much in terms of what we factor in.

The third team is there to provide the data that was not available on the surface or through insider's knowledge. Their research however, is also kept in consideration before any decision to invest, even when all teams are in agreement. It is like a rational safety net.

Eventually, we present all information found to our Managing Partner, who has the last word on the decision making. At the moment we are approving about 5 investments a month. During each Investment Committee we are evaluating 3 to 5 projects.

What I described might be unique to our VC, but in general, as an advice to those "chasing" me, be ready to have your project scrutinised in depth before attracting your next investment.

Aiding the digital revolution in global financial inclusion



DAVID MALPASS

The writer is an American economic analyst and former government official serving as President of the World Bank Group since 2019

Around the world, high inflation, slow economic growth and food shortages are hurting the poor the most. Coming on top of the unequal effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, today's multiple crises have already caused dramatic reversals in development and led to a substantial increase in global poverty.

On the positive side, the Covid-19 crisis spurred unprecedented change, especially in industries with a large digital component. This digital revolution has catalysed increases in access to and use of financial services in developing economies, transforming how people make and receive payments, borrow and save. These changes are strikingly evident in the latest edition of the Global Findex database, compiled from a survey of more than 125,000 adults in 123 economies, covering use of financial

services throughout 2021.

The survey found that 71 per cent of adults in developing economies now have a formal financial account — whether with a bank, another regulated institution such as a credit union or microfinance lender, or a mobile money service provider — compared to 42 per cent when the first edition of the database was published a decade ago. In addition, the difference in the share of men and women in developing economies who own an account has fallen for the first time, from nine percentage points to six.

This digital transformation makes it easier, cheaper and safer for people to receive wages from employers, send remittances to family members, and pay for goods and services. Mobile money accounts can better handle high-volume, small-denomination transactions, which help users to access financial services and save in order to cope better with crises.

Individual accounts also give women more privacy, security and control over their money.

The share of adults in developing economies who make or receive digital payments grew from 35 per cent in 2014 to 57 per cent in 2021. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 39 per cent of mobile money account holders now use their accounts to save. And more than one-third of people in low- and middle-income countries who paid a utility bill from an account did so for the first time after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Importantly, the digital revolution also serves as a powerful anti-corruption tool, because it helps to increase transparency as money flows from a government's budget to public agencies to citizens. Government social programmes can now reduce delays and leakage by channeling transfers directly to their beneficiaries' mobile phones. Millions of people in developing countries received payments in this

way during the pandemic, helping to cushion the impact of Covid-19 on livelihoods.

Building on these encouraging trends is crucial, especially given the current economic headwinds. Expanding people's access to finance, reducing the cost of digital transactions, and channelling wage payments and social transfers through financial accounts will be vital to mitigating development setbacks resulting from the ongoing turbulence.

Governments and the private sector can help further this transformation in several critical areas. First, they need to create a favorable operating and policy environment. For example, enabling the interoperability of systems allows for payments across different types of financial institutions and between mobile money service providers. Improving access to finance depends much more on the mobile-phone system than on the

physical banking system. Cheap and functional mobile phones and affordable internet access are prerequisites for expanding digital finance. Consumer protections and stable regulations are also needed to foster safe and fair practices that bolster trust in the financial system.

Establishing digital-identification systems also is essential, because lack of verifiable identity is one of the main reasons why some adults remain excluded from financial services. We know from the experiences of countries such as India and the Philippines that government identification programmes and financial-inclusion programmes can work in tandem to equip hard-to-reach populations with official identification documents and financial accounts. India, for example, has pioneered an accessible digital ID system that pays due attention to safety and privacy.

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#Living_with_COVID19

Five best places to observe Oman's wildlife

Oman has some of the best collections of wildlife — some found only in the country while others passing through in their journey as seasons change. These are some of the best places to see some of Oman's wildlife treasures... **P20**

Typewriter artist hopes to give machine 'second life' with record

A **TYPEWRITER ARTIST** has set his sights on a new Guinness World Record with a 2-metre drawing of the London skyline as he hopes to encourage others to give the machine "a second life."

James Cook, 25, from Braintree, Essex, hopes to achieve the Guinness World Record for the largest drawing made using a typewriter, a record which is the first of its kind and one he made a custom application for.

The piece, which was completed by June 17, took roughly two months — which equates to about 300 hours — of typing.

Cook told the PA news agency that the Guinness World Record attempt came

about through a commission for a couple who wanted him to complete a panoramic drawing of the London skyline.

"I said this is going to be a real challenge because this is going to be my largest picture to date," he said.

"If I'm going to do something this scale, then it makes sense to try and see if there's a record that stands currently for something as left-wing and niche as typewriter art."

He submitted a custom application to Guinness World Records (GWR) on May 12 and was given a pending date on attempted verification of August 10.

Cook said he searched largest typewriter drawing and "nothing came up," so



he submitted an application on the GWR website, where he suggested the record title of 'largest drawing made using a typewriter' and included details of what the art would look like, how long it would take to make and some background on his typewriting credentials.

"I'm coming to them with something that has probably never been adjudicated

before and they will probably want to visit in person to determine if it can get that record," he added.

He said there have been some logistical issues along the way because of the image's size.

"I've had to hire a van to actually go and pick the drawing up from the framers who are framing it, as it won't fit in an

ordinary car," he said.

"We don't even know yet if it will go in the lift to give to the customer who lives on the 27th storey of an apartment."

Cook added that his work contains half a million typewritten marks, which people enjoy playing puzzle Where's Wally with.

"People enjoy almost playing Where's Wally with the typed artwork, spending a good five to 10 minutes just kind of looking for every possible piece of information they can find in the art and that's quite a rare thing to find in contemporary art," he said.

He said that he downloaded a sound recording app to find out how many type marks were made, which "worked up until 175,000 marks, the app crashed on me and timed out."

He has encouraged budding typewriter artists to "speak to grandparents," who may possibly have a typewriter lying around.

"The odds are that if they have a typewriter, it's just sitting around collecting dust and you can give it a second life," he added.

Cook will be showing off his Guinness World Record attempt at his exhibit from July 15 to August 7 at two venues — the Wonky Wheel Gallery in Finchingfield and The Moot Hall in Maldon, both in Essex.

— PA Media/dpa

READ

RISING TIGER BY BRAD THOR

The 21st book in the Scot Harvath series. The American spy faces dangers on a mission in an unfamiliar culture.



DEADLY FLOOD

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (2ndL) and Rhineland-Palatinate's State Premier Malu Dreyer (R) look at photos taken during the floods which have been attached on a grid during their visit to the vineyard Meyer-Nakel in Dernau, Rhineland-Palatinate, western Germany on July 14, 2022, during commemorations marking the first anniversary of the deadly flood disaster. The dramatic floods of July 14 and 15, 2021 killed more than 220 people in Europe, leaving a trail of destruction in Germany and Belgium, and damage in the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland. — AFP



FLAIR FOR DRAMA

A model presents a creation from the fall-winter collection by Mexican designer Yoemor Brand, during the 77th edition of Intermoda in Guadalajara, Jalisco state, Mexico. — AFP





Remote repast: Dining at the world's northernmost Michelin restaurant

YOU CAN ONLY get there by boat or helicopter, but Michelin-starred chef Poul Andrias Ziska hopes his restaurant in remote Greenland, far above the Arctic Circle, is worth the journey.

The 30-year-old chef relocated his restaurant KOKS from the Faroe Islands in mid-June, leaving behind his relatively accessible address for Ilimanaq, a hamlet of 50 inhabitants hidden behind icebergs on the 69th parallel north.

Housed in a narrow black wooden house, one of the oldest in Greenland, the restaurant can only accommodate about 20 people per service and experiments with local produce, including whale and seaweed, with fresh produce almost impossible to find in the harsh climate.

"We try to focus on as much Greenlandic products as possible, so everything from Greenland halibut to snow crabs to musk ox to Ptarmigan, different herbs and different berries", the tousled-haired, bearded chef tells AFP.

The young chef previously ran KOKS at home in the remote Faroe Islands, where he won his first star in 2017, his second in 2019, and the title of the world's most isolated Michelin restaurant.

He plans to return there for a permanent installation, but explains he had always wanted to stretch his gastronomical legs in another territory in the far north, like Iceland, Greenland or even Svalbard.

He finally chose Ilimanaq, located an hour's boat trip from Ilulissat, the third-largest town in Greenland and famous for its huge glacier.

LOCAL PRODUCTS

"We just found it more suitable, more fun to do something completely different before we move back in our permanent restaurant", he tells AFP from his kitchen, set up in a trailer outside the house with the dining area.

With 20 courses, the extensive tasting menu will delight the taste buds for some 2,100 kroner (\$280), excluding wine and drinks.

"The menu is exquisite and sends you to the far north and back", Devid Gualandris, a charmed visitor, tells AFP.

"From the whale bites to the wines, from the freshly caught fish and shellfish to the curated desserts, everything is bursting with flavour."

While whale meat is a staple food in Greenland and Ziska's native Faroe Islands, whaling is banned in most of the world and activists have called for an end



to the practice.

An unlikely locale for a gourmet restaurant, Ilimanaq — Greenlandic for "place of hope" — is home to a small community living in picturesque wooden houses, next to hiking trails and more fittingly a luxury hotel, making it an ideal stopover for wealthy tourists seeking to explore new frontiers.

For Ziska, the customers in Greenland are different.

"There are a lot of people for which the number one priority is to visit Greenland and then they come to our restaurant", he says.

"In the Faroe Islands we had mainly people interested in coming and eating at our restaurant and then obviously also visiting the Faroe Islands", the chef explains.

In addition to the adventurers who

have already been lured by the Arctic landscape, the Greenlandic Tourist Board hopes the restaurant will also help attract gourmet travellers.

"The unique combination of high-level gastronomy, the inherent sustainability of the North Atlantic cuisine and the characteristic nature and resources of the Disko Bay, speaks to all our senses", Visit Greenland's director, Hjortur Smarason, said when announcing the arrival of KOKS. A long-overlooked destination, Greenland — an Arctic island territory nine times the size of the UK — welcomed more than 100,000 tourists in 2019, nearly double its population, before Covid cut the momentum.

Smarason said the presence of KOKS "is exactly what we strive for in our effort to reach a certain distinguished kind of guests". — AFP

MOVIE GUIDE

Pet hate: Dogs and cats confront division in 'Paws of Fury'



DOGS AND CATS must put their rivalry aside to save a village — and offer audiences a lesson in inclusion and diversity — in the new animated film "Paws of Fury: The Legend of Hank."

The film, out in US theatres on Friday, features a stellar voice cast including Samuel L. Jackson, Ricky Gervais, Michael Cera, George Takei, Mel Brooks and Michelle Yeoh.

It tells the story of Hank (Cera), an underestimated beagle who dreams of becoming a samurai, but ends up in a small village dominated by cats.

The lonely dog — who makes up for a lack of martial arts training with his sheer persistence — must learn to win the hearts of the cats of Kakamuchō, who distrust him for being different.

The film draws inspirations from Brooks' 1974 race satire "Blazing Saddles," using humor to address social prejudice.

"I think that's a message that is always, always relevant and always needed", Cera told AFP.

"Art is a way to bring those messages across in a way that you feel, and not just telling people what to think... going on this journey with this character, and seeing what he goes through and

'DIVIDED'

Takei, who voices Ohga — the villain's right-hand cat — said the film teaches that "differences might be an asset... filling out the weakness in your society."

The 85-year-old actor, known for his political and social activism, told AFP the film's "good message" comes at a key time.

"We live in a fractured society today. Every head-



line in the paper or every breaking news on TV, it is a divided society that we live in", he said.

For Takei, the project's timing is also significant because family audiences have not had many chances to laugh together in movie theatres since Covid-19 arrived.

Family animation, more than any other genre, has



experiencing the emotions."

"Especially for little children who can really digest that and extend their empathy", he added.

Ika Chu, voiced by Gervais, is the story's villain — a Somali cat seeking to destroy the village for his own greed, and trying to sow prejudice to further his evil plan.

"What kind of a world do we live in, where good and upright citizens can't be counted on to kill someone just because they look different?" he purrs.

suffered in theaters during the pandemic, although the recent success of "Minions: The Rise of Gru" could signal a change.

"I think it's so exciting and I can't wait to go see a movie in the theater myself", added Cera, who said he has recently recovered from Covid-19.

"I missed that experience. And I think I think everybody does.

"I'm excited that on the other side of that now, we can we can get that back again." — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Gosling says he felt 'seen' donning Ken Doll look in new Barbie film



RYAN GOSLING has said he felt "seen" donning the bleached blond and washed-out denim look of Ken Doll for the upcoming live-action "Barbie" film.

The Hollywood actor, 41, will star as the companion of the world-famous doll who will be played by Margot Robbie in the movie directed by Oscar-nominated film-maker Greta Gerwig.

Last month, Gosling caused a stir when the first-look images of him as Ken were released showing him wearing an unbuttoned denim jacket showing off his tanned stomach underneath.

The actor also wore matching jeans with the top of his white pants showing the word "Ken" while sporting a bleached blond hairstyle.

Gosling told US outlet Variety that the first thing he thought when he saw his Ken attire was: "Finally, it's happening. This has been coming my whole life."

The actor joked that the vibrant look made him feel represented and he hoped the role would allow the other Kens of the world to feel this way.

He said: "I felt like I was seeing myself. I felt seen. I think a lot of Kens will feel seen when they see this."

"Gotta do it for the Kens. Nobody plays with the Kens."

Gosling has starred in a host of top-billed films including "The Notebook," "Drive" and "La La Land," which landed him an Oscar nomination for best actor.

The new "Barbie" film is a joint project between Warner Bros and the doll's manufacturer Mattel.

Acclaimed actress and director Gerwig, 37, co-wrote the script with her partner Noah Baumbach.

She was nominated for the best director and best original screenplay Oscars for 2017's coming-of-age drama "Lady Bird," and scored a nod for best adapted screenplay with 2019's "Little Women."

The live-action "Barbie" film is due to be released on July 21, 2023. — PA Media/dpa

CHANGING WORLD

'Everywhere they dig': Looters hunt Albanian antiques



SHARDS OF CERAMICS litter the fields of an ancient city in south-eastern Albania, where looters have raided the area's highlands in search of antiquities to sell to international traffickers.

Illicit treasure hunters operate with near impunity in the country, stirring outrage among archaeologists over the theft of priceless national heritage that feeds a global black market.

The government says it is working on measures to protect and preserve the sites looters prey on, but so far to little avail — even though removing archaeological artifacts is a crime, as in most countries.

Now covered in wild vegetation, the region near present-day Korce was once home to the city of Hija e Korbit, or the "Shadow of the Raven".

The site, nestled against a hillside, has been ravaged in recent years by looters armed with shovels and backhoes searching for rare metals and artefacts.

"There are people from all regions who rush to these places," says Axhem Lageshtari, 60, a local resident.

"Everywhere they dig. They search in the hope of finding gold, silver or other valuables."

The area gained notoriety after the 1980s discovery of more than 600 silver coins — including some dating back centuries to the rule of Alexander the Great.

Experts tell AFP that illegal excavations have been detected at almost every important archaeological site in the region, which is home to historic necropolises, forts and other remains dating from the Bronze Age to the early Middle Ages.

"The problem is particularly worrying in Hija e Korbit, an important archaeological city that has not yet been explored by archaeologists," laments Roven

Kurti, the head of the department of prehistory at the Tirana Institute of Archaeology.

"They damage the site and plunder the heritage," adds Kurti.

'POWERLESS'

The scavengers often destroy scientific data and remove objects from their environmental context which is needed for

ing she hopes the assailants "will be chased by misfortune".

Experts say not enough is being done legally to stop the looting.

Albania's ministry of culture told AFP that efforts are under way to fight the "illicit trafficking of cultural property", including a national action plan unveiled in 2018 along with initiatives to improve coordination with international organisations.



'A BLIND EYE'

There are no official estimates of the market value of the objects taken from Albania.

But researchers are certain that some of the artefacts have fallen into the hands of international traffickers and then been sold in auctions to museums and private collections abroad.

"It is a fight that Albania cannot lead alone, the responsibility also falls on the authorities of other countries who turn a blind eye when these objects are displayed in their museums," said Neritan Ceka, an archaeologist and art historian.

The recent indictment of Jean-Luc Martinez — the former head of the Louvre in Paris who was charged with conspiring to hide the origin of archaeological treasures — highlighted the extent of the illegal trade in antiquities.

French archaeologist Pascal Darque said the problem was widespread and that museums often do not take seriously the process of vetting objects for sale and their origins.

"Their sale must be blocked and if their geographical origin can be established, the object must be returned," Darque said. — AFP

FASHION

Dior withdraws Valentino compensation demand over glitzy Rome show, source says



LVMH-owned Dior has withdrawn a request for 100,000 euros in compensation from rival fashion label Valentino for allegedly blocking access to its Rome store with a celebrity-packed runway show on the city's Spanish Steps, a source told Reuters.

Citing a letter from Dior, the source familiar with the matter said the French label was backing down "in light of

show on July 8, sending models down the broad staircase, a major tourist hotspot, at dusk in sheer, shimmering gowns.

The performance lit up social networks around the globe, drawing praise from fans — and apparently frustration from Dior.

The source said Dior had fired off a first letter to Valentino shortly after the



the friendly relationship between the two Maisons'.

Valentino designer Pierpaolo Piccioli drew a

show, saying that clients were blocked from reaching the store, keeping it empty on a normally bustling Friday



crowd of movie stars and fashion figures including Anne Hathaway, Anna Wintour, Naomi Campbell, Andrew Garfield and Kate Hudson with a haute couture

afternoon, but had now written the second note.

Valentino declined to comment. Dior did not immediately respond to a request for comment. — Reuters



art & life

Local Scene

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Five best places to observe Oman's wildlife



By Titash Chakraborty

Oman is at the crossroad of the world's important wildlife highway. Every year, millions of birds make a stopover in the country not only to escape changing weather from their home countries but also to lavish in the country's natural offerings. It's not just the birds however that find their way to the Sultanate of Oman. From the gentle giants of the oceans to sea turtles, Oman is rich in biodiversity. Here are five of the country's best locations if you want to enjoy seeing Oman's wildlife.

JABAL SAMHAN RESERVE
Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve is a nature reserve in the area of Jabal Samhan in Dhofar. It has an area of 4,500 square kilometres

and has no permanent population. It is one of the last known homes of the Arabian leopard. The reserve is also home to several animal species, including the Arabian gazelle, the fox, the Indian crested porcupine, the Cape hare, the rock hyrax, the Nubian goat, the desert hedgehog, the Arabian wolf, and several bird species, as well as plants including the frankincense tree and acacia. Special permission is required to visit the Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve.

AS SALEEL NATURE PARK
Covering an area of 220 sq kilometres, As Saleel Nature Park is located in the Al Sharqiyah region in eastern Oman. It is located to the north of Al Kamil W'al Wafi Wilayat and 57 km from Sur. It consists of three basic geographical types. It is located to the north of Al Kamil W'al Wafi Wilayat and is 57 km from Sur. It consists of three basic geograph-

ical types. The first is the alluvial plain and has a wide yard of acacia and gum Arabic trees, the second is the valleys that split the mountains and the third is the broad hills of these mountains. This Park is home to the Arabian gazelle, wild cats, Arabian wolves, red fox and Egyptian eagle, along with a variety of turtles and birds.

AL WUSTA WILDLIFE RESERVE
Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve is located in the city of Haima in Al Wusta, which is the middle region of Oman. It covers an area of 2,824 sq kilometres and is home to the Arabian oryx, the Arabian gazelle, hares and ibexes. In the middle of a spectacular desert escarpment, this reserve is home to a small herd of reintroduced oryx. It offers a rare chance to see this magnificent desert antelope up close as there is a large herd of over 600 animals in the reserve's breeding

centre. The reserve, access to which is by 4WD with prior permit only, is 50 km off the Haima-Duqm road on a graded track marked 'Habab.'

FJORDS OF MUSANDAM
Musandam is the northernmost governorate in Oman. It is separated from the rest of the country by a piece of land from the United Arab Emirates, while its coastline is distinguished by rocky edges that form unique fjords. The most famous animals that live in the waters of Musandam are dolphins, especially Humpback dolphins and Bottlenose dolphins. Visitors can enjoy watching the dolphins on the local Omani Dhow in the waters of Musandam.

WADI SIREEN RESERVE
Wadi Sireen Reserve is located in the eastern Al Hajar Mountains

Range some 45 km south of Muscat Governorate in the centre of Oman. The Reserve is home to one of the rarest and most timid mammals in the world known as the Arabian Tahr, due to the wadi having the perfect environment for Tahr to live such as mountain cliffs and rocky slopes. The Arabian tahr is a very rare animal that has a short body, hooked horns, a dark line that extends along the back and reddish-brown hair. There are many other animals which share wadi Sireen's hospitality with the Arabian Tahr such as the Arabian gazelle, Arabian wolf, Blanford's fox, Red fox, Hedgehog, Deer, Jayakar's Oman lizard, common Kestrel, Egyptian vulture, Sand partridge, Oman saw-scaled viper and some kind of birds, in addition to many reptiles and invertebrates. The animals are found alone or in small family-like groups.