

UN hails Oman’s role in region

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Diplomatic Affairs Under-Secretary at the Foreign Ministry, held a meeting with Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), on the sidelines of the political ministerial forum on sustainable development that kicked off on Wednesday. Guterres lauded Oman’s leading role in enhancing regional security and stability. He expressed gratitude to the Omani government for its constant cooperation with the UN, notably on the Yemeni cause. **SEE ALSO P5**



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OMAN SAIL SQUADS GAIN VALUABLE COMPETITION EXPERIENCE



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RO 290 MILLION PAID OUT IN INSURANCE CLAIMS IN 2021



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MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO FRENCH PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Macron. His Majesty also wished the people of France further progress and prosperity. — ONA

AIRPORTS RECORD GROWTH OF 100%

The number of passengers arriving through various airports in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a remarkable growth of 100 per cent by the end of April 2022. The number of passengers departing also increased by 69 per cent during the same period. The number of passengers stood at 2,324,007. According to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the number of international flights through Muscat, Suhar and Salalah airports recorded a rise of 89 per cent during April 2022 to reach 15,261. **DETAILS ON P5**



HIS MAJESTY ARRIVES IN GERMANY

VISIT TO EXPLORE AREAS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES

BERLIN: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the Federal Republic of Germany on Wednesday evening on an official visit lasting three days.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will meet with German President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

His Majesty is accompanied by an official delegation comprising Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Oufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Sayyid Dr Sultan bin Yarub al Busaidy, Adviser at the Private Office.

The visit will explore areas of cooperation between the two sides in a manner that serves aspirations of both countries, in addition to exchanging views on a set of regional and international topics of mutual interest. — ONA



Oman, Germany foster relations in many areas

The Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations 50 years ago, and their cooperation covered a wide range of areas.

During his official visit to Germany, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will hold a round of official talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The meeting will enhance existing cooperation and maximise exchanged benefits in economic, scientific, technical and technological spheres.

External trade statistics show that the volume of commercial exchange between Oman and Germany stood at about RO 201.8 million by the end of 2021. German imports to Oman reached RO 172.9 million, while Omani exports to Germany stood at RO 28.8 million.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate that commercial exchange between the two countries as at the end of March 2022 stood at RO 53 million. Key Omani exports to Germany included electronic equipment, tuna and pharmaceutical, medical, mining and plastic products. This is in addition to polyethylene products and electrical cables.

Germany’s imports to Oman included machinery and chemical, pharmaceutical products, as well as vehicles. **SEE ALSO P2 AND 3**

Majlis concludes 3rd annual sitting

MUSCAT: Upon the orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Majlis Ashshura will end the third annual sitting (2021-2022) of the 9th Term (2019-2023) on Thursday (July 14).

The directives stem from the provisions of Article (38) of Council of Oman Law (7/2021), which provides that “The Council of Oman shall have an annual sitting of not less than 8 months a year and convenes at the invitation of His Majesty the Sultan during November every year”, while Article (14) states that the Council of Oman’s sitting concludes its sessions at the behest of His Majesty the Sultan”.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ashshura, said that during the third annual sitting, the council discussed various draft

laws and decisions and studied five ministerial statements. The council also approved 10 draft laws and agreements forwarded by the government, among them the State Budget for fiscal year 2022, the Securities Law, amendment of provisions of the Law on Records and Archives and the Notary Public Law provisions.

Shaikh Al Nadabi said that the Majlis held two meetings with the Council of Ministers, noting that the two sides reviewed the government’s plans for the diversification of sources of income and augmentation of production to help support the national economy.

During the sitting, the Majlis participated in 12 parliamentary meetings worldwide and asserted Oman’s stands on global issues and its foreign policy visions. — ONA

16 CONFIRMED DEAD AND 4 MISSING IN RAINS

Legal action against those who endanger lives



MUSCAT: The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has affirmed that legal action will be taken against any person who takes a risk or endangers the life of other people, either by jumping or swimming into flood waters or crossing wadis during floods or standing or parking on steep slopes or cliffs.

Search and rescue teams of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) are still looking for four people who went missing in the Governorate of Dhofar during the recent climatic condition.

Brig Mohammed bin Nasser al Kindi, Director General of

Operations at the ROP, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that two bodies were recovered at Al Mughsayl beach, while search is still on for four more people who went missing in the area.

“The Unified Operations Centre at Dohfar Governorate’s Police Command set out on a search mission at Al Mughsayl and Raysut, using diving equipment and advanced search apparatus, while the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) and drones were operated in inaccessible terrain”, Brig Al Kindi said.

He added that different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman experienced heavy rains from July 7-12 during which 40 people were rescued, 16 were confirmed dead and 4 missing. The missions saw the participation of the ROP and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, he said.

The Director General of Operations urged citizens and residents to stick to safety instructions and avoid approaching perilous sites or steep or slippery slopes. All were equally warned against swimming in beaches that experience high waves and pay attention to their children when visiting tourist areas or coming in the vicinity of inundated areas.

Earlier, Col Abdullah bin Saleh al Najashi, Director General of Civil Defence at the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, told the Oman News Agency, “The number of communications that the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has dealt with in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman has reached 386 since the beginning of the weather situation last week.” **TURN TO P5**



OMAN, GERMANY

ENJOY STRONG BILATERAL BONDS

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyvp](#)

The relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany have traditionally been close and friendly since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1972.

The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Germany coincides with the 50th year of this relationship which is based on strong political, diplomatic, economic, and cultural fields and characterised by mutual respect.

According to a statement from the Diwan of Royal Court, “the visit of His Majesty comes within the context of the good relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany and for further enhancement in the fields of cooperation of common concern”.

This, adds the statement, “is aimed at achieving the aspirations of the two countries and for review of current issues of common concern in the regional and international arena”.

Oman and Germany share a common vision of a rules-based international order, seeking peace and understanding between peoples and nations.

“Germany and Oman are reliable partners – bilaterally and on international fora”, wrote Thomas F Schneider, German Ambassador to Oman in a report published recently by the Observer.

The first German Embassy in Muscat was opened in 1976. German Federal Presidents Richard von Weizsäcker and Christian Wulff visited Oman in 1993 and 2011, as well as Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in 2005.

In 2017, the diplomatic staff moved to a new and larger embassy in Al Khuwair, designed by a team of Omani and German architects – a visible investment into the future of Omani-German relations.

A celebration marking the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the

Federal Republic of Germany was held at the Foreign Ministry in May last.

During the ceremony, a memorial logo was launched, symbolising the depth and strength of relations between the two friendly countries.

Bilateral and people-to-people contacts have been regular through economic, tourist and healthcare visits and exchange programmes.

Since the 1960s, German companies in Oman have successfully contributed to building a robust infrastructure in Oman. Germany is one of Oman’s key economic partners in the non-oil sector.

In 2020, Oman reported to have imported German goods worth RO 300 million while exports from Oman to Germany have been about RO 14 million.

Germany has also been closely working together on renewable energies and hydrogen, jointly shaping the energy market of the future.

Not only renowned German

carmakers but also global players such as Siemens, DBSchenker or DHL, as well as numerous small and medium businesses are well positioned in the Omani market, jointly with their Omani partners.

Beyond the trade and political ties, Oman and Germany have been steadfast partners for many years in the area of culture and education. Both countries focus on cooperation in science and technology, particularly in higher education where many cooperation schemes are in place.

The German-Omani Association, which was founded in 1992, seeks to develop friendly relations between the two countries and promote cooperation in culture, business, science, academia and sports. On the Omani side, the Omani-German-Friendship Association is active primarily in the business sector.

Since 2007, the German University of Technology (GUTech) in Halban, in close cooperation with RWTH Aachen

University in Germany, has become the flagship of bilateral cooperation in higher education.

In 2014, Germany and Oman signed a declaration of intent on cooperation in culture, education, science and research.

On June 30, 2022, GUTech and TÜV SÜD Middle East LLC signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate on knowledge sharing along with developing and delivering sustainability solutions through training, advisory and certification in collaboration with the Technology Transfer Office and Oman Hydrogen Centre units in GUTech to support achieving the net-zero goal and hydrogen economy in Oman.

At the Goethe-Institut Muscat, the German Language Centre in Oman one can take German classes of all levels and appear for exams. The German language is also taught at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman Tourism College, Nizwa University and also at several Omani public schools.

The focus on the German tourism market in the Omani tourism sector is growing increasingly. Frankfurt and Munich are two of the favourite destinations among Omani tourists. German tourists who look for authenticity of the region, Oman is the destination because of its true oriental and Arab culture.

According to Oman National Centre for Statistics and Information, 23,289 visitors from Germany arrived in Oman till the end of May this year.

“Of course, every year, a shared love for spectacular nature, fascinating history, and rich cultural heritage draws German tourists to Oman and Omani tourists to Germany in great numbers”, the German Ambassador wrote in his report.

The world has changed over the last 50 years, so have Germany and Oman. However, German-Omani friendship has proven to be solid and lasting. May this friendship persist and grow over the next 50 years, he added.

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WIDENING VISTAS OF COOPERATION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations 50 years ago, and their cooperation covered a wide range of areas.

During his official visit to Germany, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will hold a round of official talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The meeting will enhance existing cooperation and maximise exchanged benefits in economic, scientific, technical and technological spheres.

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Germany's imports to Oman included machinery and chemical, pharmaceutical and products, as well as vehicles.

Oman Investment Authority (OIA)'s investments undertaken with Germany cover a range of projects, including Hilton Dusseldorf Hotel (of which OIA owns 90%), Advorio, a company

tasked with operating Sohar Industrial Port terminal (an investment worth \$27 million) and OQ chemical industries and products marketing firm, OXO — an investment worth \$1.8 billion.

VISTAS OF COOPERATION

The Royal visit of His Majesty the Sultan to Germany will open up vistas for cooperation in clean energy, making use of Oman's natural resources that attracted global attention to the country, like hydrogen, solar power, wind power and vast open areas.

Royal directives issued in March last focused on speeding up procedures to regulate the green hydrogen sector and establishing a company to develop this sector, with emphasis on creating an

attractive investment climate, which paved the way for green hydrogen production projects, among them Hyport Duqm.

The Omani-German Joint Committee is taking tangible steps to implement an agreement for the mutual protection of investments. Major partnerships undertaken by the two sides under this agreement include a pact signed by OIA and a Germany company (Uniper) in the field of power generation and energy marketing. A second partnership pact brings together companies operating in green hydrogen techniques, while a third partnership sees the cooperation of Sohar Port and Free Zone and Hydrogen Rise company of Germany to support output at Jindal Shadeed's low-

carbon steel plant.

BOOST TO TOURISM

As many as 23,289 German tourists visited the Sultanate of Oman over the first five months of this year (2022).

Oman and Germany decided key priorities for joint cooperation. These include the development of small and medium enterprises, research, tourism, healthcare and environment conservation. Many agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) were signed within this context on ways to develop economic and industrial cooperation and regulate air transport. Oman and the European Union (EU) finalised steps towards a comprehensive air transport agreement and an

MoU between the Civil Aviation Authority and the German air navigation company.

Omani-German relations are set up on grounds of respect, good intention and mutual confidence in handling international issues. Principles of peaceful dialogue and respect for the International Law brought the two countries closer on the regional and global arenas and enabled them to operate better as partners in establishing international security and peace.

50 YEARS OF TIES

Last May (2022), the two countries commemorated, in Muscat, the anniversary of 50 years of diplomatic relations and inaugurated an emblem marking

this occasion.

In the cultural field, the two countries celebrated their distinguished bilateral relations by organising the Omani Cultural Week in Berlin (first held in 2008) and the Message of Peace exhibition (which focused on religious tolerance and whose theme was taught in three German schools) — and this was reflected in the 'Shabab Oman' vessel's "Friendship and Peace Pageant" that toured various international ports and participated in the Port of Kiel Week, Germany, last June (2022).

German cultural activities were manifest through the participation of Reinsberg and Opera Cologne bands, which performed at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

Meanwhile, the two countries signed many agreements in the fields of education, higher education and scholarly innovation. Alongside Oman, Germany acts as member to the Middle East Desalination Research Centre, which seeks to establish peace and stability and enhance water desalination technologies to meet the needs of the region.

A number of Germans join colleges and institutions in Oman to learn Arabic at institutions like the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to non-Native Speakers. Seventeen German learners joined the programme between 2012 and 2020. As many as 89 Omanis registered as students in the Republic of Germany during the academic year 2021-2022, while 5 German students studied in Oman during the same year. — ONA





16 dead, 40 rescued during rains since July 7

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Royal Oman Police on Wednesday said that 16 people lost their lives and 40 were rescued in different governorates during the rains that resulted from the trough from the monsoon impact over the Arabian Sea, which enhanced the local cloud development over Al Hajar Mountains since July 7.

The search and rescue teams are continuing their efforts to search for the remaining three people from the missing family in the Al Mughsayl area in addition to one of the missing expatriate workers in the Raysut area in the Dhofar Governorate.

The Royal Air Force of Oman aviation is supporting the search and rescue teams in the process of covering the beaches of the Al Mughsayl area to search for the missing after they were swept into the sea.

Due to the heavy rains and non-adherence to instructions, directives, and warnings, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority had also decided to close all tourist destinations in Oman until this weather condition ends.

Wadi crossings, even though it is a punishable offence, have also been a major hassle for the authorities during the week that had seen the influence of the trough from low pressure area that was located north of India. The rescue operations also saw bringing to safety individuals and families who were stranded in their homes

as their areas experienced heavy rainfall and strong flow of wadis.

The authorities have urged parents to keep children away from water spots.

DEPRESSION NOT TO HIT OMAN

On Wednesday, the Met Office said latest analysis of National Multi Hazard Early Warning Center indicates probability of tropical depression formation over North-East of Arabian Sea nearby coasts of Gujarat during coming Friday and Saturday with no direct impact over Sultanate of Oman.

According to Oman Met Office, clear to partly cloudy to cloudy skies are expected over all of the governorates with chances of isolated rain. There are also chances for convective clouds development and isolated rain occasionally thundershowers associated with downdraft winds and hail over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas towards afternoon. Cloudy to Partly cloudy skies along the coastal areas of Dhofar governorates and adjoining mountains with chance of drizzle and isolated rain may extend to the desert areas. There is also a forecast of blowing dust over desert and open areas due to fresh winds.

The teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority have been dealing with the number 386 for communications since the beginning of the weather situation, and efforts are still continuing.



Kakai is here: Jackfruit grows on Al Hajar mountains too

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Explore deep into the agricultural oases located along the valleys of the Al Hajar mountains, and you will find the splendour of nature, peculiar to the Sultanate of Oman. Although reaching these rugged terrains requires determination, physical fitness and patience, a visitor will forget all the fatigue and exhaustion the moment he sees the agricultural oases that hide behind the high mountains.

The jackfruit is one of the rare trees that can be found on the Al Hajar Mountains in the northern part of Oman. The fruit, which is called Kakai in local parlance, attracts everyone's attention because of its big size.

In agricultural science, it has been classified as a tropical fruit with the scientific name *Artocarpus heterophyllus*. Also, it belongs to the mulberry family *Fam Moraceae*.

The fruit is characterised by its sweet taste and special flavour -- similar to a mixture of mango, pineapple and banana. Recognised as the largest fruit in the world, the average weight of a single fruit is approximately 3.5 kg with a length of about 90 cm and diameter of approximately 1/2 m. The jack trees growing in its natural habitats could bear big fruits weighing



around 25 kg.

The region of South and Southeast Asia is the original home of this delicious fruit, as it largely grows in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the

Malay Archipelago. It also grows in other tropical regions such as Jamaica and Brazil, besides some Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia (Jazan region). The jack tree is found widely in the Dhofar



Governorate.

This evergreen tree, which reaches a height of around 60 feet, has smooth trunks and branches and oval-shaped leaves with a dark green and shiny colour.

The jackfruit contains many important nutrients such as Vitamin A, Vitamin C, calcium, potassium, iron and magnesium among many others. What distinguishes this fruit is its high

content of dietary fibre. In addition to being a source of minerals and vitamins, it is a storehouse of carbohydrates and sugars.

One of its most important health benefits is that it does not contain cholesterol, which makes it a healthy and beneficial food for the body. It also helps in raising immunity and regulates blood pressure levels because it contains an appropriate amount of potassium. The fruit can bring down high blood pressure, and thus reduce the risk of stroke and heart attacks. Moreover, the fruit facilitates digestion because it contains a good amount of dietary fibre, which acts as an effective laxative to regulate digestion and prevent constipation.

Some medical studies indicate that this fruit fights colon cancer, as the fats in it clean toxins from the colon and reduce their harmful effects. It has been found that consumption of the fruit strengthens eyesight because the fruit is rich in Vitamin A. The wood of the tree is used in making furniture items and its roots are used in the treatment of many skin diseases.

Researchers in the field of agricultural development confirm the rare presence of this tree in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq, Al Awabi, and a number of agricultural oases in the Al Hajar Mountains in the north of Oman. Its presence is abundant in Dhofar Governorate due to the tropical climate.



Passenger traffic through Oman airports records 100% growth



MUSCAT: The number of arriving passengers through various airports of the Sultanate of Oman recorded a remarkable growth of 100 per cent by the end of April 2022.

The number of departing passengers also increased by 69 per cent during the same period. The number of passengers (arriving, departing and transit) stood at 2,324,007.

According to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of international arriving and departing flights through Muscat, Sohar and Salalah airports recorded a rise of 89 per cent during April 2022 to reach 15,261, compared to 8,075 during the same period in 2021.

The number of domestic arriving and departing flights through Muscat, Sohar and Salalah airports also recorded a rise of 25 per cent during April

The number of departing passengers also increased by 69 per cent during the same period. The number of passengers (arriving, departing and transit) stood at 2,324,007

2022 to reach 3,778, compared to 3,026 during the same period in 2021.

The international flights through Muscat International Airport registered a growth of 82.3 per cent as the number of passengers (arriving, departing and transit) rose by 91.4 per cent to stand at 1,723,632 passengers at the end of April 2022, compared

to 900,707 in April 2021.

Meanwhile, Salalah Airport registered a rise in the number of flights by 58.7 per cent. The number of incoming and outgoing international flights through the airport reached 962 by the end of April 2022, recording an increase of 150.5 per cent. The number of domestic flights through Salalah Airport increased by 22.9 per cent to reach 1,209 flights, compared to 984 flights during the same period in 2021. The number of passengers on domestic flights (incoming and outgoing) through Salalah Airport increased by 45.7 per cent by the end of April 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

The number of international flights (departing and arriving) from Sohar Airport reached 276 by the end of April 2022, while the number of passengers on international flights (incoming

and outgoing) reached 25,065.

As for Duqm Airport, it recorded an increase of 9.7 per cent in the number of domestic flights (departing and arriving) to reach 226 flights at the end of April 2022, compared to 206 flights at the end of April 2021. The number of passengers increased by 32 per cent from 15,943 passengers at the end of April 2021 to 21,051 passengers by the end of April 2022.

With regard to the most nationalities using Muscat International Airport, the Indian nationality topped the list of passengers on departing and arriving flights through the airport, with a total of 111,226 passengers at the end of April 2022, followed by the Bangladeshi nationality with a total of 42,145 passengers, and then the Pakistani nationality with a total of 29,228 passengers.

— ONA

Legal action against those who endanger lives

FROM PAGE 1

He added that the authority's teams dealt with 34 reports of people stuck in vehicles as a result of crossing wadis, in addition to getting stuck in homes due to high level of rainwater, and 12 drowning incidents in wadis, water ponds and beaches, and it was able to rescue 40 people from wadis.

He said that the number of fire accidents in all governorates stood at 74, while the rescue teams dealt with 12 reports, most of them are people getting stuck in vehicles due to road accidents, in addition to 254 reports that ambulance teams dealt with by providing emergency medical care and then transportation to hospitals.

The Director General of Civil Defence indicated that since the authorities announced the weather situation, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has activated operational plans and reinforced them in governorates with necessary manpower, equipment and vehicles for evacuation, search and rescue operations, to deal with the situation arising due to the weather condition.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority called upon citizens and residents to abide by safety guidelines and not to risk by crossing wadis, to stay away from dangerous places, heights and the edges of streams, to cooperate with the authorities and to abide by instructions issued by it for the safety of their lives. — ONA

Steps to ensure availability of consumer goods during khareef season

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is working during the khareef season, in cooperation with a number of government agencies, to ensure the availability of consumer goods in the markets during the season.

In this context, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, held a meeting in the Governorate of Dhofar, in the presence of representatives from Consumer Protection, Dhofar Municipality, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Royal Oman Police, Central Bank and a number of Ministry officials to discuss the availability of consumer goods and essential services.

During the meeting, the efforts made by the ministry in coordination with government and private agencies and the facilities provided by the ministry to ensure the availability of basic commodities were reviewed. In addition, the meeting also discussed



follow-up on the availability of fuel and public utilities at gas stations

and coordinating with officials of commercial banks in the governorate

to ensure the continued provision of cash flow without interruption.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan indicated that the ministry seeks to ensure the continuation of the facilities provided by the relevant government and private agencies during the tourist season to facilitate the arrival of foodstuffs and consumer goods to the centres and shops and to monitor the markets.

The under-secretary visited a number of large commercial markets to discuss the challenges they face and to help them overcome the difficulties by providing all consumer goods in the required quantities during the peak of khareef season. — ONA

UN chief lauds Oman's role in regional peace



NEW YORK: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Diplomatic Affairs Under-Secretary at the Foreign Ministry, held a meeting with Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, on the sidelines of the political ministerial forum on sustainable development that kicked off here on

Wednesday. The meeting touched on key regional and international issues.

Guterres lauded Oman's leading role in enhancing regional security and stability. He expressed gratitude to the Omani government for its constant cooperation with the UN, notably on the Yemeni cause. — ONA

TRA unveils contingency management plan



MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), has issued Decision No 107 setting out regulations for the management of emergency cases.

The guide deals with the obligations of Segment 1 and Segment 2 personnel tasked with handling contingencies. It helps achieve quick response and maintain the sustainability of basic communications in emergency conditions. It also provides for integration

among the departments concerned to realise the unification of efforts and the restoration of services in the shortest possible time.

The guide also deals with the supply of necessary equipment and human resources at emergency operation centres.

During emergency cases, the Telecommunications Sector joins hands with the National Committee for Management of Emergencies — a standard measure to tackle any probable negative impacts. — ONA



Lankan president flees, protesters storm PM’s office

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country on Wednesday and hundreds of protesters stormed the prime minister’s office demanding his ouster, as a people’s uprising over a devastating economic crisis overwhelmed security forces.

Rajapaksa called the speaker of parliament to say he would resign later in the day and that his ally Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe should be interim president, infuriating Sri Lankans struggling with months-long shortages of food, fuel and power.

The president’s flight brought an end to the rule of the powerful Rajapaksa clan that has dominated politics in the South Asian country for the last two decades.

Wickremesinghe’s office declared a state of emergency and a curfew with immediate effect, but then cancelled them. His office said the moves would be announced again later.

“Protesters have no reason to storm the prime minister’s office”, Wickremesinghe said in a statement.

“They want to stop the parliamentary process. But we must respect the Constitution. So security forces have advised me to impose an emergency and a curfew. I’m working to do that.”

Police stationed outside the prime minister’s office fired several rounds of tear gas and a military helicopter briefly circled overhead, but protesters appeared undeterred and finally surged into



Demonstrators shout slogans and wave Sri Lankan flags during an anti-government protest inside the office building of prime minister in Colombo. — AFP

the compound. Wickremesinghe’s team declined to reveal his whereabouts.

“It feels pretty marvellous, people were trying to take this place for about three hours”, said college student Sanchuka Kavinda, 25, standing next to a mangled, open gate of the prime minister’s office.

“No matter what, everyone in this crowd will be here until Ranil also steps down.”

In a video statement, the parliament speaker, Mahinda

Yapa Abeywardena, said: “The president got in touch with me over the phone and said that he will ensure that his resignation letter will be received by me today.”

“I appeal to the public to have confidence in the parliamentary process we have outlined to appoint a new president on the 20th and be peaceful”

State-run TV station Rupavahini briefly suspended transmission after protesters entered the premises. A second government-run TV station,

Independent Television Network, also stopped their broadcast, though the cause was not immediately clear.

Protests were also against the economic crisis have simmered for months and came to a head last weekend when hundreds of thousands of people took over key government buildings in Colombo, blaming the Rajapaksas and their allies for runaway inflation, corruption and a severe lack of fuel and medicines.

Government sources and aides

PM declares emergency, rolls back soon after as protesters demand ouster of Wickremesinghe

said the president’s brothers, former president and prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and former finance minister Basil Rajapaksa, were still in Sri Lanka.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, his wife and two bodyguards left the main international airport near Colombo aboard a Sri Lankan Air Force plane early on Wednesday, the air force said in a statement.

A government source and a person close to Rajapaksa said he was in Male, the capital of the Maldives.

The president would most likely proceed to another Asian country from there, the government source said.

Wickremesinghe, whose private residence in Colombo was set ablaze on Saturday, had offered to resign as prime minister but did not repeat that offer after he became acting president on Wednesday.

If he does go, the speaker would be acting president until a new president is elected on July 20 as scheduled.

Protest leaders say the prime minister is allied to the Rajapaksas and have warned of a “decisive fight” if he does not resign.

“We are strongly against the Gota-Ranil government. Both have to go”, said Buddhhi Prabodha Karunaratne, one of the organisers of recent protests.

Amid the economic and

political chaos, Sri Lanka’s sovereign bond prices hit fresh record lows on Wednesday.

The US Embassy in Colombo, which is in the central district of the city, said it was cancelling consular services for the afternoon and for Thursday as a precautionary measure.

The island nation’s tourism-dependent economy was hammered first by the Covid-19 pandemic and then suffered from a fall in remittances from overseas Sri Lankans.

A ban on chemical fertilisers hit output although the ban was later reversed.

The Rajapaksas implemented populist tax cuts in 2019 that affected government finances while shrinking foreign reserves curtailed imports of fuel, food and medicines.

Petrol has been severely rationed and long lines have formed in front of shops selling cooking gas.

Headline inflation hit 54.6% last month and the central bank has warned that it could rise to 70 per cent in coming months.

Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned as prime minister in May after protests against the family turned violent.

He remained in hiding at a military base in the east of the country for some days before returning to Colombo.— AFP

Harris launches major Pacific push with two new embassies, envoy

SUVA: The United States launched a major push into the Pacific on Wednesday as it seeks to hold off China’s advances in the region, with Vice- President Kamala Harris announcing the opening of two new embassies at a key regional summit.

Washington will open missions in Tonga and Kiribati and also appoint its first-ever Pacific regional envoy, Harris said as she pledged \$600 million in funding for the region in her address to the Pacific Islands Forum in Fiji.

The video-link appearance was a diplomatic coup for the United States, with China’s attempts to secure a meeting on the sidelines of the summit rebuffed.

The forum marks the first time Pacific leaders have met since the Solomon Islands signed a controversial security



Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama presents Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (R) with a Wau war club during a bilateral meeting in Suva. — AFP

pact with China earlier this year. And the mounting US-China rivalry in the Pacific has directed intense interest towards this year’s meeting, which brings together leaders from across the strategically important region.

Tongan Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni said his country was “really happy that the US will be opening an embassy in Tonga, it will be the first time”.

“It is a big milestone. We are very happy we are finally having

a US presence in Tonga”, he said.

Forum Secretary General Henry Puna also welcomed Harris’ announcements, calling them “a breath of fresh air”. “We have a long history of association and friendship with the US. But in recent years, they’ve gone missing from the region”, he said.

At least one official from the local Chinese Embassy was in the room for the vice-president’s address and was asked to move from an area reserved for media, causing a stir among organisers.

Harris said she and President Joe Biden acknowledged the Pacific may not have previously received enough attention or support in the past. “We are going to change that”, she promised, adding the US wanted to “significantly deepen our presence in the Pacific region”. — AFP

South Korea vows probe of 2019 North Korean repatriations

SEOUL: The South Korean government on Wednesday slammed the controversial 2019 repatriation of two North Koreans, after releasing photos that appeared to show one of them resisting the handover.

Then-president Moon Jae-In’s administration had expelled the men after investigators said the pair murdered 16 crewmates before taking their fishing boat to South Korean waters.

The government said at the time that the men — described by officials as “dangerous criminals” — had no intent to defect. At least two officials said the pair did not want to stay in South Korea.

But images of their transfer at the truce village of Panmunjom, released on Tuesday by the new, conservative government,

showed one man desperately resisting the handover.

If they were “forcibly sent” to North Korea, it would be “a crime against humanity that violates both international law and the Constitution”, President Yoon Suk-Yeol’s spokeswoman Kang In-Sun told reporters.

One image showed a man collapsed on the ground, with officials apparently dragging him to the Military Demarcation Line between the two Koreas.

In other photos, the two men appeared tied with ropes and blindfolded before their repatriation.

Rights groups have said in the past that the transfer was a violation of international law because of the likelihood of the men being tortured or worse in North Korea. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

GAZA

US calls for ‘accountability’ in Abu Akleh case

The United States called for “accountability” over the death of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, whose killing during an Israeli West Bank raid is expected to be a major issue during President Joe Biden’s Middle East visit.

Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American journalist working for the Al Jazeera network, was shot in the head on May 11 while reporting on an Israeli raid in the town of Jenin in the occupied West Bank. Palestinians believe



she was killed deliberately by Israeli troops. Israel denies its soldiers shot her on purpose and say she may have been killed either by errant army fire or a shot fired by a Palestinian gunman. — AFP

TEHRAN

Iran says its demands in nuclear talks ‘reasonable’

Iran’s president said his country’s demands were “reasonable” during negotiations to restore its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

“Iran has always acted completely rationally and put on the table reasonable demands”, President Ebrahim Raisi said during a cabinet meeting, according to his official website.

He added that all of Iran’s demands were made within the framework of the 2015 agreement, known formally as the



Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

Talks to revive the deal, following the withdrawal of the United States in 2018, began in Vienna in April 2021.— AFP

ANKARA

Strong winds fan forest fire in Turkey

Firefighters tackled a forest fire which broke out near the tourist town of Datca in southwestern Turkey, where the Aegean and Mediterranean seas meet, local authorities and media reported. Nine helicopters, five aircraft and several other firefighting vehicles were sent to the region, the Mugla provincial governor’s office said in a statement, adding that the fire was spreading due to strong winds.

Television images showed smoke billowing from trees and



helicopters dousing water on the blaze as it spread through woodland in the touristic area. “A large number of air and ground crews have been directed to the region. — Reuters



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In brief

■ LONDON



UK RAIL WORKERS TO STRIKE ON JULY 27 OVER PAY DISPUTE

Workers at British rail operators and Network Rail will strike on July 27 following a “paltry” pay offer, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers said. Last month Britain’s rail network was brought close to a standstill as tens of thousands of rail workers walked out in what unions said was the biggest rail strike in 30 years. The RMT said Network Rail, the owner and infrastructure manager of most of the rail network in Britain, had made an offer of 4%, followed by a possible 4 per cent the following year dependent on staff accepting changes to their terms and conditions.— **Reuters**

■ ROME



POPE APPOINTS WOMEN TO IMPORTANT VATICAN POSTS

Pope Francis appointed three women to the authority in the Vatican that ordains bishops in a historic step. The two nuns Raffaella Petrini and Yvonne Reungoat, as well as MariaLia Zervino have been appointed to the Dicastery for Bishops, the papacy announced. 53-year-old Petrini has already held the position of general secretary since last November making her the second-highest ranking official in the Vatican. Reungoat is the former superior general of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco, while Zervino was the president of the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations.— **dpa**

■ BORDEAUX



WESTERN EUROPE WILTS UNDER HEATWAVE

France and Britain suffered soaring temperatures edging closer to the blistering heat already engulfing Spain and Portugal as wildfires destroyed vast stretches of Western European forestland. Large parts of the Iberian Peninsula have seen temperatures surpassing 40 degrees Celsius this week. In southwestern France a wildfire raging since Tuesday had ripped through 1,000 hectares of pine trees just south of Bordeaux, prompting the evacuation of 150 residents from their homes. Near the Dune of Pilat — Europe’s tallest sand dune — another fire consumed about 700 hectares of old pine trees, authorities said.— **AFP**

UKRAINE TARGETS GRAIN EXPORTS BREAKTHROUGH AT TALKS



Russian, Ukrainian and Turkish military delegations meet with UN officials in Istanbul. — **Reuters**

ISTANBUL: Ukraine said on Wednesday that an agreement to resume grain exports blocked by Russia appeared close as Turkey hosted four-way talks, raising hopes of an end to a standoff that has exposed millions to the risk of starvation.

Kyiv believed a deal was just “two steps away”, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was quoted as saying before the talks began, though other participants seemed less optimistic and Turkey’s defence ministry gave no details of the meeting’s outcome after announcing it had ended.

Several Ukrainian cities meanwhile reported heavy Russian shelling and, while not linking a grain deal to progress in talks to end the war, Kuleba was downbeat on prospects for peace.

More than 20 million tonnes of

Ukrainian grain are stuck in silos at the Black Sea port of Odesa and dozens of ships have been stranded due to Russia’s blockade, part of what Moscow calls its “special military operation” in Ukraine but which Kyiv and the West say is an unjustified war of aggression.

The talks, in Istanbul between Ukrainian, Russian, Turkish and UN officials, took place behind closed doors at an undisclosed location.

Kuleba told Spanish newspaper ‘El Pais’ ahead of their resumption: “We are two steps away from a deal with Russia. We are in the final phase and now everything depends on Russia.”

Igor Konashenkov, a spokesperson for Russia’s defence ministry, said Moscow had put forward proposals to resolve the grain issue as soon as possible.

Talks end with outcome unknown as Russia says it has worries on arms smuggling

Turkey published a photograph of the meeting showing the Russian and Ukrainian delegations sitting opposite each other looking stony-faced.

Ukraine and Russia are major global wheat suppliers. Russia is also a large fertiliser exporter and Ukraine a significant producer of corn and sunflower oil, so clinching a deal to unblock exports is seen as vital for food security, notably among developing nations and for stabilising markets.

The talks took place as Ukrainian cities reported sustained Russian shelling, including across the Donetsk region, which Moscow aims to capture to complete its seizure of the industrialised Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, much of which was controlled by separatists — labelled Russian puppets by Kyiv — before the war.

Russia also struck 28 settlements in the Mykolaiv region bordering the Black Sea, killing at least five civilians, according to Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of Ukraine’s presidential office.

Russia, which says it does not target civilians, said on Wednesday it had shot down four Ukrainian military jets, an assertion the Ukrainian air force dismissed as propaganda.

Reuters could not independently verify the battlefield accounts.

As the Istanbul talks got under way, Foreign Minister Kuleba told a briefing that Ukraine’s overall stance on the war had not changed.

He confirmed there were still no peace talks taking place between Moscow and Kyiv and ruled out ceding territory to Russia as part of any future deal.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy told a conference in Asia via videolink that Russia had launched 2,960 missiles on Ukraine’s cities so far.

“Of course this is Russia’s tactic... directed at chasing people out of our cities, and so that every Ukrainian feels fear”, he said.

Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of exacerbating a global food crisis by complicating attempts to supply poorer nations with grain and of fuelling inflation.— **Reuters**

Biden to ‘minimise contact’ on Middle East visit due to Covid-19

TEL AVIV: The White House said on Wednesday that President Joe Biden would limit physical contact during his Middle East tour, citing coronavirus concerns, as he landed in Israel ahead of a delicate trip to Saudi Arabia.

Biden, 79, began his first regional visit as president by landing at Ben Gurion airport near the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv and he will fly to the Saudi city of Jeddah later.

But all eyes will be on his interaction with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. His administration has stepped substantially away as it lobbies Riyadh to pump more oil to reduce highly elevated prices of this commodity, a major factor in a recent surge in US inflation to 40 year highs.

But in the weeks ahead of Biden’s tour, the White

House was coy about any direct interaction between the US president and the crown prince during the Saudi leg of his visit.

Images of Biden shaking Prince Mohammed’s hand in Jeddah would likely draw intense media scrutiny.

Citing concerns about the spread of the coronavirus, Biden’s press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said, “it’s reasonable to expect (Biden) to take some additional precautions. “We’re trying to minimise contact as much as possible”, she told reporters on Air Force One.

“I wouldn’t say there’s a change” in health protocols, she replied when asked if the measures were aimed at preventing a handshake with Prince Mohammed.

Biden refrained from shaking hands with Israeli dignitaries who greeted him on the tarmac at Israel’s Ben Gurion airport on Wednesday.— **AFP**

Sunak tops first vote to be next UK prime minister

LONDON: Former British finance minister Rishi Sunak won the most votes in the first round of voting to succeed Boris Johnson as leader of the Conservative Party and prime minister, as two candidates were eliminated.

Sunak scored 88 votes, ahead of junior trade minister Penny Mordaunt on 67 and foreign Secretary Liz Truss on 50. Finance minister Nadhim Zahawi and former cabinet minister Jeremy Hunt were eliminated. Lawmaker Kemi Badenoch received 40 votes, Tom Tugendhat received 37 and Suella Braverman got 32.

Meanwhile, Conservative lawmakers voted on Wednesday to narrow the field of eight candidates hoping to succeed Boris Johnson as party leader and prime minister, in an increasingly fractious contest marked by the hopefuls trading barbs.

Three of the 11 initial challengers for the premiership fell away on Tuesday after failing to secure enough support from their colleagues, but the contest remains crowded.

Rishi Sunak, whose resignation



Britain’s Justice Secretary and deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab (L) leaves after speaking to endorse Rishi Sunak, during his campaign launch for his attempt to become the next Prime Minister in London.— **AFP**

as finance minister helped precipitate Johnson’s fall, is the bookmakers’ favourite and has the most public support among lawmakers.

Less familiar figures such as former equalities minister Kemi Badenoch and junior trade minister Penny Mordaunt have won notable support from other senior lawmakers and are popular with the party’s members, who will ultimately decide the winner.

A YouGov poll of 800 of the about 200,000 members found

Mordaunt, a former defence minister but less well-known among the public at large, would beat any of the others in a run-off and had a huge lead over Sunak who fared badly against almost all his rivals.

The remaining candidates will each have to secure 30 votes from the party’s 358 Members of Parliament (MPs) to get through to the next round of voting, while the candidate with the fewest backers will be eliminated regardless.— **Reuters**

Outcome based learning can start at home



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Literature, SQU

As the summer holidays stretch on and families settle down after the hectic Eid break in Oman, parents and caregivers are possibly wondering how to keep children occupied in the long summer days. The ever present smart phones are hardly doing any service to children who will benefit from sustained activities which will help them to seamlessly transfer to school when it opens.

A rising area of interest in education is outcome based learning and teaching. This is relevant to teachers and educationists, but it is equally relevant to parents who can stay involved with the education of their children.

Outcome based learning focuses on clearly identifying the requirements of a child. That

includes knowledge but also skills and capacities. The term was first coined by William Spady in 1988 who argued that education strategies must shift away from traditional forms of teaching by mapping, measuring and identifying educational goals.

All this may sound like it belongs to the school and higher educational settings. To a large extent, that may be true, but outcome based learning, or OBL, also belongs to the home.

Substantial research shows that parents typically feel that education is the responsibility of schools. Educational and socio-economic factors contribute to parents' unwillingness, or inability to participate in their children's education. However, an American

PARENTS MUST THINK OF TIME SPENT WITH CHILDREN AS AN INVESTMENT IN A CHILD'S FUTURE — AND THAT IS CLEARLY AN OUTCOME WORTH SPENDING TIME OVER

educational report suggests that parents "can help children achieve their full potential by spending some time talking and reading with them." Other studies also show that children whose caregivers aspired for them to complete secondary education or above are "three times more likely to continue schooling at age 19 than their counterparts".

In short, parents or caregivers are central to the education of their

children. How they can help can vary.

Firstly, identifying the immediate need of a child is helpful. Whether it is reading with them or to them, this is inarguably a useful time spent. Other requirements of a child could just be spending time with them to understand their interests, ambitions and plans.

A longer time goal could be to identify characteristics a parent would want to see in their child. This could include empathy, generosity, ambition or creativity. Not all these features may be finally found in a person, but that doesn't mean we stop trying.

Thirdly, the actual techniques of going about teaching these skills may vary from one child to another. In the same family,

children learn differently, grasp information at their own pace and even write or do math at different speeds. Recognising this difference is important and will keep a lot of stress away from parents and children.

Lastly, educationists suggest that working on these skills takes time, and patience is key. Children may take to some of the skills given at home, and give up on others. Recognising their strengths will not come overnight.

Often, personality traits only develop in the late teens. But meanwhile, parents or caregivers must think of time spent with children as an investment in a child's future — and that is clearly an outcome worth spending time over.

Ahead of Mali withdrawal, France prepares future Sahel strategy

JOHN IRISH

French officials head to Niger on Friday to redefine the country's strategy to fight fighters in the Sahel as thousands of troops complete a withdrawal from Mali and concerns mount over the growing threat to coastal West African states.

Coups in Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso have weakened France's alliances in its former colonies, emboldened fighters who control large swathes of desert and scrubland, and opened the door to greater Russian influence.

Concerns have grown that the exit of 2,400 French troops from Mali — the epicentre of violence in the Sahel region and strongholds of both Al Qaeda and IS affiliates — is worsening violence, destabilising neighbours and spurring migration.

With the withdrawal expected to be completed by the end of the summer, France's new Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu arrive in Niger on Friday to seal a regional redeployment.

Niger will become the hub for French troops, with some 1,000 soldiers based in the capital Niamey with fighter jets, drones and helicopters. Some 300-400 would be dispatched for special operations with Niger troops in the border regions with Burkina and Mali, French officials told reporters in a briefing.

Another 700-1,000 would be based in Chad with an undisclosed number of special forces operating elsewhere in the region.

French troops will no longer carry out missions or pursue fighters into Mali once the exit is complete, the officials said.

"Beyond Mali, the democratic decline in West Africa is extremely worrying with successive putsches in Mali twice, in Guinea in September 2021, in Burkina Faso in January of this year.

France will nevertheless continue despite these events, this withdrawal from Mali, to help West African armies fight against fighter groups", Colonna told a parliamentary hearing on Tuesday.

"We are currently consulting with our concerned partners to define with them, according to their requests and their needs, the nature of the support that we can provide them."

A French diplomatic source said the aim was to present a new strategy to President Emmanuel Macron in September.

French officials said the onus going forward would be on regional countries to lead on security, while also focusing more on development, good governance and education. — **Reuters**

Rivals vying to replace Johnson are diverse in background, not in plans



Mark Landler

Mark is the London bureau chief of *NYT* while Stephen is London correspondent of *NYT*



Stephen Castle

Four are women. Six have recent forebears hailing from far beyond Europe — India, Iraq, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria and Pakistan. Of the three white men, one is married to a Chinese woman while another holds a French passport.

On paper, the nearly dozen candidates vying to replace Boris Johnson as Conservative Party leader and prime minister are a kaleidoscopic tribute to Britain's rich diversity. In terms of policy proposals, however, the mosaic they create is resolutely monochromatic.

Nearly all the candidates are promising to cut taxes of one sort or another to cushion the blow of a spiralling cost-of-living crisis. Most favour legislation that reneges on an agreement with the European Union on trade in Northern Ireland. Many would continue to put migrants in the country illegally on planes to Rwanda.

The degree of continuity and uniformity is especially striking, given that the candidates are competing to replace a prime minister who was criticised for lurching wildly from crisis to crisis, running a government that is, by all accounts, drifting in the face of grave economic stress and deepening tensions with Brussels. Several had sat in the Cabinet that raised the taxes they now want to cut.

"There's just a bizarre disconnect from reality on the part of all of them", said Jonathan Portes, a professor of economics and public policy at Kings College London. "They're just off in this fantasy land, talking about tax cuts."

What they should be talking about, Portes said, is how Britain is going to

NEARLY ALL THE CANDIDATES ARE PROMISING TO CUT TAXES OF ONE SORT OR ANOTHER TO CUSHION THE BLOW OF A SPIRALLING COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

avert a full-blown crisis in its schools and hospitals in a few months, when surging inflation and budget cuts will hit teachers and nurses, prompting some to quit their jobs and others to strike. Tax cuts will not solve the cost-of-living squeeze, he said, but they will stoke inflation and deplete Britain's already shaky public finances.

To some extent, the untethered nature of the debate is a result of the size of the field, which leaves lots of people jockeying to break through. That will change quickly under new elections rules adopted on Monday evening by an influential committee of backbenchers in the Conservative Party, which oversees the leadership contest.

Under the rules, Conservative Party lawmakers will whittle down the list of contenders in successive rounds of voting, starting on Wednesday, with the support of 20 lawmakers needed to run in that first contest, and ending next week with a shortlist of two. One candidate will emerge victorious from a ballot of Conservative Party members

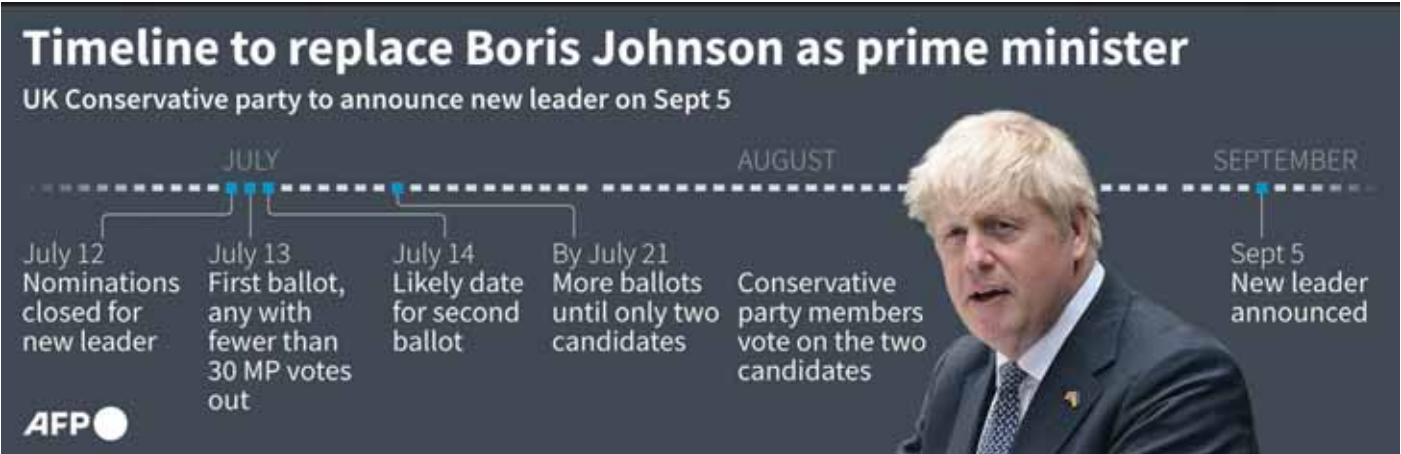
by September 5 and succeed Johnson as prime minister. In theory, a two-person race will sharpen the debate and surface more difficult issues.

But the uniformly right-leaning nature of the candidates' proposals also reflects the Conservative Party electorate. The party's centre of gravity has tilted to the right during its bitter battles over Brexit. Johnson purged more centrist lawmakers, like former Cabinet minister Rory Stewart.

The party's rank-and-file membership, which is largely made up of activists, also tends to be more right-wing than average voters (there were 160,000 eligible members during the last leader election in 2019, according to the party). The members may have swung even more right in recent months as the party lost popularity under the scandal-scarred Johnson, and less committed members drifted away.

Still, the multistage nature of the contest, some analysts said, could be a trap for the tax-cutting evangelists. While most Tory members of Parliament are attracted to lower taxes, party members were likely to be less positive, because they tend to be older and have more experience with publicly funded services.

For them, tax cuts financed by cuts to health care or other public programmes might not be an attractive proposition. Some candidates are emphasising tax cuts in the first phase of the contest to differentiate themselves from the early front-runner, Rishi Sunak, whose resignation as chancellor of the exchequer last week helped set in motion the events that brought down Johnson. — *New York Times*



Can EU law save children from harmful content online?

JOANNA GILL

A new EU law to rein in tech giants could serve as a benchmark for worldwide legislation to protect children online, as concern grows globally about the impact of social media on young people, children's rights campaigners say.

The bloc's Digital Services Act (DSA) includes a ban on targeted advertising aimed at children and prohibits the algorithmic promotion of content that could be harmful for minors such as videos related to eating disorders or self-harm. Jim Steyer, founder of Common Sense Media, a US nonprofit focused on children and tech, said the act signed by European lawmakers last week could help usher in similar rules for big tech companies elsewhere, including the United States.

"The DSA is a landmark legislation, and what you're going to see is it will also lead to similar legislation in the United States", Steyer said, adding that it could bolster various state-led efforts to regulate social media networks on issues ranging from child safety to political bias.

By stipulating hefty fines for firms that fail to remove illegal content — such as child abuse images — from their platforms, the DSA effectively ends an era of voluntary self-regulation

by the companies, campaigners said.

"The importance of this legislation is (to say): 'No, it's not voluntary, there's certain things you must do'", said Daniela Ligiero, co-founder of Brave Movement, a survivor-led organisation fighting to end childhood sexual violence.

"We believe it can not only help protect children in Europe, but then it can serve as an example... to the rest of the world", she added.

Between 2010 and 2020, there has been a 9,000 per cent jump in abuse images online, according to the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a nonprofit and Covid-19 lockdowns saw a surge in reports about online child abuse.

While detailed European Union regulations on child abuse material have yet to be drawn up, the DSA sets out fines of up to 6 per cent of global turnover for platforms that fail to remove illegal content. Survivors of child abuse or other online crimes say the resharing of videos or images online forces them to relive the abuse and can have a devastating impact on mental health.

Leading tech companies believe the new EU legislation brings "necessary clarity" and could help foster trust in the digital world, said Siada El Ramly, Director General at Dot Europe, a lobby group for tech giants including Apple and Google. She added, however, that tech companies still wanted clarity from regulators on how they should balance protecting users' privacy with demands for great transparency.

"We can't be pulled in both directions", she said.

Despite praise for the legislation from rights campaigners, there is concern about enforcement. The European Commission has set up a task-force, with about 80 officials expected to join up, which critics say is inadequate.

Some have pointed to the poor enforcement of the bloc's privacy rules governing big tech, known as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Four years after it came into force, the EU data protection watchdog lamented the stalled progress in long-running cases, and called for an EU watchdog, rather than national agencies to take on cross-border privacy cases.

But children's rights advocates say the speed with which the DSA was agreed shows policymakers are committed to accelerating measures designed to protect children using the Internet.

The legislation is "one piece of the puzzle", said Leanda Barrington-Leach, head of EU affairs at 5Rights, an advocacy group for children's online safety. It will set the tone for European regulations on areas of particular concern such as artificial intelligence (AI) and child abuse material, both of which are currently in the works at EU level.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



LIVE NEWS... STILL ALIVE

Palestinians walks past a mural depicting slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed while covering an Israeli army raid in Jenin in May, drawn along Israel's controversial separation barrier in the biblical city of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, ahead of the US president's arrival for an official visit. US President Joe Biden's administration has invited relatives of Shireen to Washington, an American official said. — AFP

Resuscitating the two-state solution in Middle East



Daoud Kuttab

The writer is a former journalism professor at Princeton University, is the founder and former director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al-Quds University in Ramallah

For decades, the defining conflict of the Middle East has revolved around a single piece of diplomatic jargon: The "two-state solution." Originally, this term referred to a concrete idea — the formation of a sovereign independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. But for most politicians, it has long since become an empty cliché, uttered out of habit, and without much interest in seeing it through.

Consider US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's recent call with Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas. According to the State Department readout, Blinken "stressed the US commitment to improving the quality of life of the Palestinian people in tangible ways and the (Biden) Administration's support for a negotiated two-state solution."

Such talk is nothing new. While the United States has formally recognised the state of Israel since 1948, it has yet to recognise the state of Palestine in accordance with the United Nations partition plan.

Moreover, both territories that the original UN resolution set aside for an Arab state are now occupied by Israel. While the US and most of the rest of the world have called on Israel to end its military rule over millions of Palestinians, they have done little to change the status quo.

Even though Palestine has been recognised as a non-member state by the UN and formally recognised by 139 UN member states, the US, the European Union, Japan and Australia still have not taken this critical step.

Given this, US officials' endless repetition of the phrase "two-state solution" means nothing.

But while few expect the US to sanction Israel or arm Palestinians (as it has done for the Ukrainians), there are still practical steps that both America and the international community could take to make the two-state solution more than an

THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION OF THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT HAS BECOME A MEANINGLESS PHRASE. THE LONGER ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES IS ALLOWED TO PROCEED, THE LESS REASON THERE IS TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THOSE — BEGINNING WITH US POLICYMAKERS — WHO CONTINUE TO PROFESS THEIR COMMITMENT TO IT

empty slogan.

And US could demand that Israel cease the daily violence committed against Palestinians and pursue justice for Shireen Abu Akleh, the slain Palestinian-American journalist whom US officials themselves believe was likely killed by an Israeli bullet.

America can also do more to help Palestinians build the state institutions they will need to end Israeli control of Palestinian land, water and air.

As matters stand, Israel restricts Palestinians' water usage and sets housing regulations in the occupied territories, where Palestinian homes are regularly demolished.

Palestinians are not even free to upgrade their cell-phone towers, owing to the Israeli towers that have been built illegally on occupied Palestinian lands.

Under these conditions, an independent Palestinian economy is an impossibility. But a strong push to help Palestinians engage economically with neighbouring Arab countries — especially Egypt and Jordan — could start the process of ending Palestinians' forced dependence on Israel. Palestinian police should be allowed a presence on the King Hussein Bridge

that connects Jordan and the West Bank and Palestinians should be granted safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza.

Israel committed itself to achieving both outcomes when it signed the Oslo Accords.

Recent political developments suggest that renewed progress on these issues is possible.

The centrist Israeli politician Yair Lapid has stepped in as a caretaker prime minister ahead of US President Joe Biden's visit in the region this month. Unlike the outgoing right-wing prime minister, Naftali Bennett, Lapid supports the two-state solution and advocates renewed negotiations with the Palestinian leadership.

However, Lapid's tenure will probably be short-lived, given that Israelis will go to the polls in November to elect a new government.

Once again, Palestinians are left waiting and hoping for a positive outcome in an Israeli election, an exercise that most now consider a waste of time.

The land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River either must be split into two sovereign states, or it must be shared between the Palestinian and Israeli people, with all citizens having equal rights.

Israeli and American leaders who profess to believe in the two-state solution must prove that they mean what they say.

At a minimum, the US must demand — wielding the threat of sanctions — that Israel not pursue any further action that impedes the realisation of a contiguous Palestinian state.

When Biden was vice-president, the Obama administration allowed for the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which declared all Israeli settlements in "Palestinian territories occupied since 1967" to be illegal, and which called on Israel to block the construction of additional settlements in the occupied territories.

But later this month (just after Biden leaves), Israeli officials will announce the approval of a controversial new settlement plan that will eliminate the remaining contiguity between the north and south of the West Bank.

Continued Israeli settlement activity makes a complete mockery of the two-state solution and any political leader who still claims to support it.

Are world leaders — starting with Biden — serious when they talk about a democratic Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel? In the absence of meaningful policy changes, the "two-state solution" will continue to ring hollow.



Continued Israeli settlement activity makes a complete mockery of the two-state solution.

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OMAN SAIL SQUADS GAIN VALUABLE COMPETITION EXPERIENCE

MUSCAT: Oman Sail's elite sailing team and young Optimist squads have wrapped up campaigns in Europe, gaining valuable experience of high-level competition in new classes.

The team competing at the Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour 2022 in Italy had to contend with low wind and technical issues throughout the competition which impacted several stages, finishing tenth in a close-fought lower half of the fleet.

Meanwhile, the team of five Oman Sail Optimist sailors also encountered tough conditions in Bodrum, Türkiye, at the 2022 Arkas Optimist World Championships, finishing in the lower half of a very strong fleet.

The Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour squad of Akram

al Wahaibi, Ibtisam al Salmi, Sultan al Balushi, Ali al Balushi and Abdulmajeed al Hadhrami were on board the Beneteau Figaro 3 class of foil-assisted racing yacht for the very first time while also competing in wing foil and kite regattas simultaneously.

The Tour began in Genoa in Northern Italy and headed south, to Sicily and around the Mediterranean Coastline before heading north to Venice where racing concluded.

Ibtisam al Salmi said, "This has been a tough event but very enjoyable. We have learned a lot as a team and been able to gain experience on another new class. Despite the difficult weather and technical problems, we have enjoyed our time here and gained a great introduction to this type of



The team competing at the Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour 2022 in Italy had to contend with low wind and technical issues throughout the competition which impacted several stages, finishing tenth in a close-fought lower half of the fleet

race. Adding in the Wing Foil and Waszp for the first time made this an interesting tour for the whole team and we look forward to returning next year and continuing our journey."

The youth sailing team joined 286 sailors representing 62 countries at the B. B. Bodrum Sailing Club for the 2022 Arkas Optimist World Championships. Early races were challenging due shifting winds and the team struggled to recover after a slow start while the leaders also toiled in low wind.

Mohammed Abdullatif finished highest overall, placing 50th in the last race. The rest of Oman Sail's sailors found themselves in the Emerald Fleet for the final races where Tamim al Balushi finished 38th, Firas Said finished 49th,

Abdulrahman al Hadi finished 59th and Hasan al Wahaibi ended the championships in 60th.

Mohsin al Busaidy, Oman Sail's Head of Youth Sailing Pathway, said, "This was a tough competition for our team against some of the very best Optimist sailors in the world. Together with coach Suhail al Mayahi and team lead Abdulaziz al Shidi, we have worked with the team to prepare for the championships and will continue our work with more competitions on the horizon. This has been a valuable learning experience for us all and will help us to perform at a higher level in the future."

The team now moves on to Sonderborg, Denmark, for the Optimist European Championships from 30 July-6 August.



Murray breezes into last 16 at ATP Hall of Fame Open

NEWPORT, US: Britain's Andy Murray cruised into the second round of the ATP Hall of Fame Open on Tuesday with a 6-2, 6-0 romp over American Sam Querrey.

In windy conditions, the 35-year-old Scotsman captured the last 10 games, taking advantage of all six of his break-point chances to advance in 54 minutes over 281st-ranked Querrey.

"It was really awful conditions to play tennis in, to play well, so breezy and difficult," Murray said.

"I'm sorry maybe the tennis wasn't that much fun to watch but we're doing the best we can given

the conditions."

Sixth seed Murray next plays for a quarter-final berth in the grass-court event against 202nd-ranked Australian wild card Max Purcell, who ousted France's Adrian Mannarino 6-3, 1-6, 7-5.

World number 52 Murray improved to 8-2 all-time against Querrey, who had won their most recent prior meeting in a five-set 2017 Wimbledon quarter-final.

Murray won their first meeting as a 19-year-old in the second round at Newport in 2006.

"It's amazing to be back here and playing on this court again



after 16 years," Murray said.

"A lot has happened in that time, four kids and married and all that stuff."

That "stuff" includes winning the 2012 US Open, the 2013 and 2016 Wimbledon titles and Olympic gold in 2012 and 2016.

"You never know how close you are to the end but I'm aware I'm getting toward the end of my career," said Murray.

"So I want to make the most of every match in every tournament I get to play."

After an opening exchange of breaks, Murray broke Querrey

again for a 4-2 edge then held and broke again when Querrey sent a backhand wide to take the first set after 31 minutes before dominating the second. Murray hopes to play well enough in upcoming events to grab a seeded spot at the US Open.

"That's a big goal of mine these next few weeks," Murray said.

"I've been playing better the last few months. But if you want to have deep runs in the biggest tournaments it does help to have a seeding so I'll try my best to do that. "One match closer today. Hoping for a good run here."

— AFP

■ AL YARUBI TO PARTICIPATE IN
ATHLETICS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS



Oman national athletics player Salem al Yarubi will participate in the long jump competitions at the World Athletics Championships, hosted by Oregon, USA, from July 15-25 with the participation of more than 1,900 athletes from 192 countries, including 42 Olympic champions who won individual gold medals. Al Yarubi had also participated at the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2021, along with the participation of the oldest woman athlete, the 49-year-old sprinter Kelly Roddick as well as the American Alison Felix, the most decorated player in the history of the world championships, winning 18 medals, including 13 gold, 3 silver and 2 bronze.

Djokovic to open tennis courts at Bosnian 'pyramids'

VISOKO, BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA: Recently-crowned Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic arrived in Bosnia on Wednesday to inaugurate tennis courts at a 'pyramid park' that he regularly visits to recharge his batteries.

The tennis star, known for his new-age spiritual interests, is fond of a hill town of Visoko, where thousands flock every year to what some believe are an ancient man-made pyramid complex with healing powers — a claim rejected by scientists.

The 35-year-old Serb, who claimed his 21st Grand Slam title on Sunday, visited the site for the first time in 2020 and called it a "paradise on earth".

He has returned to the "Bosnian Pyramids of the Sun" complex at least four times, either alone or with his family, to be always warmly welcomed by its founder Semir Osmanagic.

Bosnian businessman and ancient civilisation aficionado Osmanagic said the idea to construct a regional tennis training centre was born during Djokovic's last visit in March.

"We have agreed to build in our park two courts for training of the top level players, one hard-court and another one with clay surface" Osmanagic told reporters recently.

The idea is to offer players and Djokovic's friends the chance to train and have free accommodation, he explained.

"We also want to organise here a Pyramid Cup for players from the region and want notably to motivate youngsters to play tennis and other sports".

The inauguration will be marked by all-day events with several exhibition matches, notably by Djokovic and Croatian Ivan Dodig, world number 17.



Britain's Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge presents the trophy to Serbia's Novak Djokovic after he won the Wimbledon final. — Reuters

Upon the arrival, Djokovic visited the new courts and went for a walk into a pine forest, which is a part of the park, with his host, according to an AFP journalist.

Osmanagic, a self-styled archaeologist, has been claiming for the past two decades that he has discovered several pyramids built by a mysterious civilisation close to Visoko.

For the past few years his teams have been also clearing underground tunnels near the "Pyramids of the Sun" and he boasts of its beneficial effects on the health of visitors.

Djokovic has meditated at

The tennis star, known for his new-age spiritual interests, is fond of a hill town of Visoko, where thousands flock every year to what some believe are an ancient man-made pyramid complex with healing powers — a claim rejected by scientists

the site and during each visit walked kilometres of "energy" tunnels, which are according to archaeologists, an ancient gold mine.

In 2020, Djokovic told AFP he felt "regenerated" after the visit.

"I know there are many doubts and dilemmas about the authenticity" of the place, he said.

But "in order to fully understand what is going on here... you have to come".

Djokovic said on Monday it was unlikely he will feature in this year's US Open as he continues to refuse to be vaccinated against coronavirus. — AFP

Oman athletics team clinches 10 medals at West Asian Youth meet



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

The Oman national teams won 10 medals including three gold, three silver and four bronze after strong performances in the second edition of the West Asian Youth Championship in Lebanon.

The Oman national team star Mobin al Kindi won the gold medal in the hammer throwing competition, while Alia al Mughiriyah won the gold in long jump.

Also, she added a silver medal in the high jump. The player Namir

al Busaidy won the silver medal in the high jump competition, the runner Alaa al Zadjali won the bronze medal in the 100 metres race, while the national walking team player Khaled al Siyabi won the bronze medal in the 1000 metres race in his first overseas participation. While the player Maryam al Shukailiya, won the gold for overthrowing the hammer, and the player Afnan al Balushi won the silver medal in the same competition.

As for the runner Ahmed al Abdulsalam won the bronze in the 200-metre race, the relay team

settled for the bronze medal in the 4x400M relay race.

OMAN PARTICIPATION

On the other hand, the Oman national team participated in the speed, throw and jump competitions, where Khaled al Siyabi participated in 10,000m race, Ahmed al Abdulsalam participated in the 110 metre hurdles, the runners Muayyad al Salameen and Ahmed al Abdulsalam participated in the 200 metre race.

The runners Muayyad al Salami and Hamza al Jabri participated

in the 400 metre race, and in the 800 metre race Abdulaziz al Habsi participated.

In the 1,500 metre race was the runner Adnan al Shezawi, also in the high jump competition, Namir al Busaidy and Ayham al Hosani, while in the hammer throwing contest, was the thrower Mubeen al Kindi. As for the 4x400 metre race were the team, including runners Hamza al Jabri, Muayyad al Salami, Abdulaziz al Habsi, Adnan al Shezawi and Ahmed al Abdulsalam.

As for the women team participants, runners Alaa al

Zadjalya and Sheikha al Hina'a participated in the 100 metre race and Alaa al Zadjali in the 200 metre competition.

In the long and high jump competition were Alia al Mughiriyah and Sheikha al Hina, and in the hammer throw competition, the two shooters Afnan al Balushi and Maryam al Shukaili. At the end of the tournament, Syria won first place with 21 medals, 9 gold, 7 silver and 5 bronze, while Qatar came in runner-up with 19 medals 8 gold, 6 silver and 5 bronze. While Iraq came third with 25 medals,

seven gold, 12 silver and six bronze, while Kuwait was ranked fourth with 18 medals, six gold, six silver and six bronze. Lebanon was ranked fifth with 20 medals including 6 gold, 4 silver and 10 bronze, while Jordan was ranked sixth with 8 medals 5 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze.

Meanwhile, Oman was ranked seventh with 10 medals including 3 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze, while Yemen came in eighth place with 5 medals including 1 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze and Palestine was ranked ninth and last with only one silver medal.



India blow away England after Bumrah blitz



England's Jason Roy walks after losing his wicket off the bowling of India's Jasprit Bumrah. – Reuters

ANDY JALIL AT THE OVAL
LONDON, JULY 13

Rohit Sharma, in imperious form, led India to an overwhelming 10-wicket victory in the first of three one-day internationals (ODI) and the outstanding Jasprit Bumrah, the Player of the Match, claimed six wickets for 19 in 7.2 overs in a marvellous display of pace bowling, achieving ball movement and bounce, which gave him career best ODI figures, and the best by an Indian fast bowler in ODIs in England.

The England batting was totally ripped apart by Bumrah as they were dismissed for 110 in just 25.2 overs with four of the specialist batsmen failing to score under the relentless pressure exerted by India's opening bowlers in which

Mohammad Shami claimed three for 31.

In India's reply, Sharma remained unbeaten on 76 from 58 balls and Shikhar Dhawan was not out with 31 as the two made the England bowling look quite innocuous. In addition to his seven fours, the India captain helped himself to five sixes, two of which were in one over off fast bowler Brydon Carse and then another over long leg in the bowler's last over before he completed the win with a four to deep point.

Dhawan gave excellent support to the more aggressive Sharma but played some beautiful shots that brought him four fours. England tried as many as six bowlers during the 79 minutes of India's rampage but none made

The England batting was totally ripped apart by Bumrah as they were dismissed for 110 in just 25.2 overs with four of the specialist batsmen failing to score under the relentless pressure exerted by India's opening bowlers in which Mohammad Shami claimed three for 31

an impression on either Sharma or Dhawan as they took the game ruthlessly away from England.

Earlier, after being asked to bat first on a grassy pitch and in muggy conditions, England couldn't have got off to a worse start losing the first two wickets in the second over of the innings bowled by Bumrah. Jason Roy was the first to depart, inside-edging on to his stumps and two balls later Joe Root was held behind. Rishabh Pant took a fine

right-handed diving catch.

It got worse for England a run later with Shami claiming Ben Stokes' wicket and he too fell for a duck as Pant took another right-handed diving catch. Shami had switched around the wicket and had brought the ball sharply into Stokes who played at it hurriedly without much foot movement.

While Jonny Bairstow was still in and after his phenomenal batting in the Test match last week, England had some hope

of making a recovery but India had other ideas. Bumrah was far from finished, he had Bairstow held, this time Pant took the catch diving in front of first slip and England had lost four for 17 in 5.3 overs. Liam Livingstone was bowled around his legs as he tried to drive Bumrah to the leg side and half of the England side had gone for 26.

Shami, in a new spell, got back among the wickets claiming the next two after Prasidh Krishna had taken a low return catch from Moeen Ali for 14.

Buttler, having top-scored with 30 from 32 balls, pulled Shami for a catch at square leg and nine runs later Shami bowled Craig Overton through the gate to reduce England to 68 for eight. Finally, Bumrah yorked Carse for 15 and

bowled David Willey for 21.

India captain Sharma said: "We never really worry too much about the conditions because we've got guys who can come in and exploit whatever the condition. Today was more suitable for the fast bowlers. We exploited those conditions pretty well."

England captain, Jos Buttler said: It's a really disappointing day and a tough loss to take. We must look at managing our batting better, especially not losing so many early wickets. But it's not a time to panic or try to find too many faults. Batting has been our super-strength over the last five years or so."

BRIEF SCORES: England: 110 all out in 25.2 overs (J Bumrah 6-19, M Shami 3-31) It to India: 114-0 in 18.4 overs (R Sharma 76 n.o.)

South Africa pull out of Australia ODI series

MELBOURNE: South Africa have withdrawn from the one-day international series with Australia in January after host board Cricket Australia (CA) was unable to accommodate a request to reschedule.

Cricket South Africa (CSA) had asked to shift the series, which was scheduled for Hobart (Jan 12), Sydney (Jan 14) and Perth (Jan 17), as it clashes with their new domestic Twenty20

competition.

"Unfortunately, due to the congested international schedule including the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, there are no alternative dates available", CA said in a statement on Wednesday.

CA said South Africa had agreed that Australia would be awarded the competition points, pending approval from the International Cricket Council.

"CSA offered four options (for new dates). Unfortunately, and to our disappointment, none of these were acceptable to Cricket Australia", CSA Chief Executive Officer Pholetsi Moseki said in a statement on Wednesday.

"As difficult as this decision has been, the long-term sustainability of our new T20 League is reliant on having all our domestic players available."

South Africa's forfeit could



affect their chances of qualifying directly for next year's one-day World Cup in India.

The Proteas are 11th in the World Cup Super League standings, with only the top seven teams apart from hosts India to qualify directly for the 10-team tournament.

"We are confident that our inform Proteas team will garner the requisite points through the remaining games to secure

automatic qualification", Moseki said.

South Africa's test team are scheduled to tour Australia for a three-match series starting in Brisbane on December 17.

Australia pulled out of their test tour of South Africa last year citing health risks amid the Covid-19 pandemic, a decision greeted by disappointment and frustration by Cricket South Africa. — Reuters



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Fitch affirms OQ at ‘BB-’/Stable

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has affirmed OQ SAOC’s (OQ) Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at ‘BB-’ with ‘Stable Outlook’.

OQ — the integrated global energy group of the Sultanate of Oman — is fully owned by the government via Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and was established to strengthen and centralise Oman’s oil and gas industry.

“OQ’s IDR is equalised with that of Oman (BB-/Stable) to reflect Fitch’s view of strong links between OQ and the state. Under our Government-Related Entities (GRE) Rating Criteria we assess status, ownership and control, support track record and socio-political implications of default as ‘Strong’ while financial implications of default as ‘Very Strong’. This assessment results in a support score of 40 out of a maximum of 60”, Fitch stated on Tuesday.

“We have revised up OQ’s Standalone Credit Profile (SCP) to ‘b+’ from ‘b’ to reflect successful project execution in both the upstream and downstream segments, alongside stronger financial performance on higher oil and gas prices as well as refining and petrochemical margin

leading to lower net leverage expectations. OQ’s SCP also reflects its solid business profile with integrated operations spanning exploration and production (E&P), refining, marketing, chemical and petrochemical segments. OQ’s SCP continues to be constrained by its complex group structure”, it further added.

KEY RATING DRIVERS:

‘Strong’ Ownership and Control: OQ accounts for a substantial portion of assets transferred to OIA from the Ministry of Finance in 2020. The government exerts significant influence on OQ’s business and funding strategy via OIA. The government has no plans for OQ’s privatisation.

‘STRONG’ SUPPORT RECORD: OQ has received significant support from the government in the form of equity injections, asset transfers, shareholder loans and debt guarantees. Fitch believes large-scale support in the form of investment-project funding or debt refinancing would be difficult to obtain due to the potential budgetary constraints on the Omani government, but support for OQ’s short-term liquidity and interest payments would be provided, if needed.

TO PAGE 15

OIA posts 10.3pc average annual return on investments in 40 nations

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) issued its first annual report covering its operations and investments since its establishment on June 4, 2020, pursuant to the Royal Decree No 61/2020, until the December 31, 2021.

This step came in line with Oman Vision 2040 and its pillar concerning governance and institutional performance, which has been developed with a keen focus on promoting access to information and transparency, and in line with OIA’s goals and mandate stipulated in Royal Decree No 57/2021 promulgating the System of Oman Investment Authority.

In the report’s opening remarks, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, (pictured) Minister of Finance and OIA’s Chairman commented that despite the challenges and events witnessed during the period covered by the report, development efforts have remained on track with a clear focus on goals.

He noted that, on the contrary, opportunities have emerged and were leveraged to the maximum.

He added that everybody is satisfied with the achievements made by OIA within this short period, a result of the dedicated focus on contributing to the GDP, maximising returns on investments and improving governance of the state-owned companies.

In his opening remarks, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, OIA’s Chairman, said that OIA’s key achievements from June 2020 to December 2021 are represented by an average annual return of 10.3 per cent since the



Sultan al Habsi

establishment of OIA.

Moreover, the addition of 35 new investments to OIA’s investment portfolio in private equity markets, in addition to exiting other investments with profitable returns.

The report sheds light on OIA’s key performance overview, including the restructuring of the Boards of Directors of OIA companies and the appointment of national experts and specialists

from various public and private sectors as chairpersons.

Additionally, the establishment of Rawabet Programme for OIA companies in September 2020, the launch of the Code of Governance for OIA Entities, drafted in line with the best local and international practices, and the recruitment of Omani talents to have a total workforce of 271 employees.

The report also highlighted the addition of new investments to OIA’s portfolio, which now spans geographically in 40 countries worldwide.

These new investments include investment in SpaceX, a US company specialising in space exploration technologies, the establishment of an investment fund with China Merchant Bank International (CMBI) with a focus on future technologies, the establishment of Muscat Stock Exchange pursuant to the

Royal Decree No 5/2021 and the investment in Mycotechnology, a US company specialised in alternative food using the latest technologies.

The report also featured the profitable returns OIA was able to achieve from certain exits, including its complete exit from Cognate BioServices, a US company operating in the manufacturing of medical equipment, achieving 3.15x returns with an IRR of 42 per cent, complete exit from Migros Stores in Turkey where the returns on investment increased by 1.11x, with an IRR of 1.6 per cent, complete exit from RAK Ceramics in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and with 1.13x returns on investment and an IRR of 2.1 per cent, partial exit from US information technology firm First Data with 1.34x returns on investment and an IRR of 2.6 per cent.

TO PAGE 15

RO 290 million paid out in insurance claims in 2021

KEY TREND: Assets of insurance companies Increased by 7.5pc to RO 1.2 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

The total assets of licensed insurance companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman rose 7.5 per cent to reach a value of RO 1.197 billion at the end of 2021, up from RO 1.114 billion in 2020, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) announced here on Wednesday.

Of this total, the share of general insurance was RO 767.64 million (RO 787.54m in 2020), life insurance RO 219.97 million

(RO 326.33m for life insurance/family Takaful in 2020) and health insurance RO 209.95 million. The assets of national insurance companies accounted for a 72.8 per cent share at RO 872.48 million, while foreign insurance companies accounted for 27.2 per cent of the total assets, with an estimated value of about RO 325.07 million.

The audited financial statements of the insurance sector for the year 2021 show that the capital of insurance companies was RO 274.66 million in 2021 compared to RO 274.73 million in 2020, a decrease of 0.03 per cent, as the capital of national companies was RO 125.36 million in 2021 compared to RO 125.36 million in 2020, unchanged. The capital



of foreign insurance companies was RO 149.31 million in 2021 compared to RO 149.38 million in 2020 a decrease of 0.05 per cent.

The total net profits of insurance companies were RO 25.760 million in 2021 compared to RO 48.539 million in 2020, a decrease of 47 per cent. The profits of

foreign insurance companies were about RO 8.073 million in 2021 compared to RO 14.938 million in 2020, a decrease of 46 per cent.

Gross direct written premiums: Gross direct premiums of insurance companies operating in the Sultanate increased by 3 per cent in 2021 to reach RO 479.857

million compared to about RO 465.895 million in 2020, whereas gross direct premiums of general insurance increased by 0.7 per cent to RO 258.670 million in the year 2021 compared to RO 256.951 million in 2020. This was also accompanied by an increase in the gross direct premiums of life insurance/family Takaful by 6.6 per cent to RO 57.321 million in the year 2021 compared to RO 53.752 million 2020. Gross direct premiums for health insurance increased by 5.6 per cent to RO 163.866 million in the year 2021 compared to RO 155.193 million in 2020.

Total paid indemnities: Compensation paid by insurance companies in the year 2021

increased by 0.1 per cent compared to the year 2020. Total compensations paid by insurance companies were RO 289.834 million in the year 2021 compared to RO 289.601 million in 2020.

The audited financial statements indicate a decrease in the total compensations paid for general insurance by 8.4 per cent to RO 125.522 million in 2021 compared to 136.975 million in 2020. Compensations paid to life insurance/family Takaful recorded an increase at 38.6 per cent in the year 2021 compared to the previous year. As for the compensations paid for health insurance, they recorded a decrease of 0.5 per cent compared to the year 2020, to RO 120.123 million. TO PAGE 15

Consumer violations net RO 140K in fines, refunds

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Consumer fines and recoveries netted the Directorate General of Consumer Protection (North Al Batinah) revenues totalling RO 140K in the first half of this year, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) said in a statement.

Of this total, fines and penalties amounted to RO 7,178 while refunds accruing to aggrieved

consumers totalled around RO 133K, the Authority said.

Significantly, automotive agencies and the services sector accounted for roughly half (RO 64K) of the total refunds and recoveries.

The lowest share (RO 180) was that of restaurants and cafes during this period.

In all, the Directorate General received 768 complaints and 174 reports distributed across a number of sectors falling within



the remit of the Authority.

A total of around RO 25,685 was recovered from manpower services firm, followed by contracting and building materials sector (RO 9,630), aluminium workshops, blacksmithing and carpentry sector (RO 9,041), vehicle spare parts sector (RO 4,731), and furniture and furnishings (RO 4,433). Recoveries from vehicle repair shops amounted to RO 4,386, while the electrical and

electronic appliances sector coughed up around RO 3918.

Other sectors found in breach of consumer guidelines included goods and services (RO 2,281), travel and tourism services (RO 1,246), Clothing, textiles and services (RO 1,181), kitchen utensils (RO 1,000), mobile phones and services (RO 768.7), watches, jewellery and accessories (RO 431), and tyre services (RO 400). Hairdressing services contributed around RO 353.)

NLGIC comes together with RSA to build multi-line insurance group



Martin Rueegg,
Regional Chief Executive Officer



Khalid Muhammad Al Zubair,
Chairman of OMINVEST and NLGIC



Adnan Bogary,
Chairman of RSA Middle East

Further to the signing of a sale and purchase agreement and a share swap agreement in April 2022, and after obtaining relevant approvals from the regulators and shareholders, National Life & General Insurance Company SAOG (NLGIC), a flagship insurance subsidiary of Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (OMINVEST), has completed the strategic transaction which has resulted in RSA Middle East becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of NLGIC, covering its operations in the GCC, including the Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kingdom of Bahrain.

The transaction has been executed in two parts: (i) purchasing 50.00002 per cent shareholding in RSA Middle East from Sun Alliance Insurance Overseas LTD (SAIO), a fully owned entity of Royal Sun Alliance Insurance Limited; and (ii) exchanging the remaining shares of RSA Middle East, owned by reputable Saudi shareholders, with new issued NLGIC's shares, making the Saudi shareholders collectively the second largest shareholders in NLGIC after OMINVEST.

NLGIC is headquartered in Oman with branches in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Kuwait.

“On behalf of the boards of OMINVEST and NLGIC, I would like to express the Group's sincere gratitude to the reputable regulators in the Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom

of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Kingdom of Bahrain for their exceptional support and understanding of the important positive potential of this transaction to the insurance landscape and market dynamics in the region”, said Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of OMINVEST and NLGIC.

He added, “As part of NLGIC's growth strategy, this transaction will not only help the company expand its customer reach in the region but will also bring together potential synergies between both companies in terms of resources and technologies to provide a wider range of insurance products and services to both individual and corporate customers, thus creating a well-diversified insurance player in the region”.

“The successful completion of this transaction brings NLGIC and RSA Middle East closer to forming a robust partnership that will help us expand our portfolio and position ourselves as a leading multi-line insurer in the area, poised for future growth”, said Adnan Bogary, Chairman of RSA Middle East.

It is worth mentioning that RSA Middle East is a leading provider of property and casualty insurance in the Middle East. It offers solutions for both commercial and retail clients, across a range of product lines, including motor, property, medical, SME as well as tailored solutions for large corporates.

It has operated in the region for over 60 years, bringing best-in-class international solutions

and expertise to the Middle East. RSA Middle has operations in the Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain. It operates as local publicly listed companies under Al Ahlia Insurance Company in Oman and Al Alamiya for Cooperative Insurance Company in Saudi Arabia.

OMINVEST is one of the highly successful and largest listed investment companies in the region. Founded in 1983, it has been consistently profitable and has an enviable track record of uninterrupted dividend payments to shareholders.

National Life & General Insurance Co. SAOG (NLGIC) is a subsidiary of Oman International Development and Investment Company (OMINVEST). Listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, NLGIC has been in the insurance industry for more than 25 years, offering a wide range of personal lines and group insurance solutions in Medical, Life and General Insurance segments with a successful track record of business performance across various financial parameters. The company is the market leader in Oman in the Motor and Health Insurance segments and one of the major players in the UAE and growing fast in its new markets including Kuwait.

RSA Middle East is a leading provider of property and casualty insurance in the Middle East with operations in Bahrain, UAE, Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Leading brand launches anti-counterfeiting drive in Oman



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Samsung Gulf Electronics has expanded its Anti-Counterfeit Programme (ACP) in the Sultanate of Oman, holding a dedicated workshop to advance anti-counterfeit solutions.

The workshop boasted 50 government employees from the Consumer Protection Authority, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Royal Oman Police (ROP), who gathered to discuss the risk of counterfeit items and the effect it has on the country's economy and its residents' safety in the presence of Kiran Tewari, Director and Head of Customer Service, Samsung Gulf Electronics.

Kiran Tewari said: “Counterfeiting affects every country in the world and fuels illegal activities. Fake goods are produced in very low quality, which shortens the life span of the items. I am delighted to be part of such an ambitious programme and service offering at Samsung and we are happy to support local governments in their efforts to eliminate counterfeit items from the market”

Under the social responsibility pillar, the ACP initiative will educate government officials in Oman on ways to protect consumers from the hazardous risks of using counterfeit products, in addition to incentivising recycling processes for counterfeit items.



Keld Christensen

New CEO for Port of Salalah

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Port of Salalah has announced the appointment of Keld Christensen as the new CEO with effect from September 1, 2022.

Christensen will replace incumbent CEO Mark Hardiman, who has chosen not to extend his employment contract for personal reasons, the company said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA). The Board of Directors has however decided to appoint Hardiman as Executive Adviser from September 1, 2022 to January 31, 2023, it stated.

Keld currently serves as Managing Director of Poti Sea Port Corporation in Georgia (owned and operated by APMT Terminals). Previously, he was CEO of ISS Norway AS in Oslo. Keld has held various leadership positions during more than 25 years of experience and holds a Master of Science degree in Air Transport Management from City University, London and Master of Laws degree from Aarhus University.

The Board also placed on record its appreciation for the significant contributions made by Hardiman towards the growth and development of the port.

Toyota Camry is style and fuel-efficiency

Toyota's stylish and fuel-efficient Camry is a perfect vehicle for making the most of every journey. Available with a choice of three powertrain options, including a new 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 243 nm of torque and is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift Multi-mode automatic transmission; a 3.5-litre V6 engine with D-4S fuel injection system that produces 298 hp and 356

nm of torque and is mated to an eight-speed multi-mode automatic transmission; and an electrified hybrid system, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors. The combined power of the two power sources is 208 hp. It is also paired with an Electrically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (ECVT), delivering heightened driving pleasure.

The Toyota Camry introduces a level of refinement that exceeds expectations. Thanks to Toyota



New Global Architecture, (TNGA), Camry offer a comfortable and stable ride with superior handling characteristics. A new front fascia incorporates a more defined lower-intake area, with grille bars extending dynamically to the sides creating a refined look that is enhanced by chrome-plated ornamentation for a premium feel.

The sportier grades wear a noticeably different body style than the premium grades, with a bold redesigned lower fascia shape

featuring a powerfully expressive gloss black mesh grille and larger side vents. This athletic look is further emphasised with new 18-inch bright machined-finish alloy wheels. A subtle rear spoiler lip is paired with a unique rear bumper with distinctive corner lines, as well as new-look combination lamps. The Camry's interior is stylish and impressive. The dash design has a sporty, cockpit-like feel, while treating both the driver and the front passenger to wider visibility.



Omani engineers receive training in operation of new Duqm Port cranes

BUSINESS REPORTER
DUQM, JULY 13

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), in cooperation with the Irish crane manufacturer Liebherr, organised a training programme for four young Omani engineers who will be part of a technical team operating a new set of cranes due to be installed at the Port of Duqm.

The team, which includes an Omani female engineer, holds diplomas and bachelor's degrees in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and related technical disciplines.

The training programme, spanning nine months, includes courses at an Irish university covering all the technical and practical skills linked to the handling, operation and maintenance of the crane equipment. Also as part of the



programme, the Omani team were given hands-on training at crane manufacturing sites in Ireland. The programme ends during the installation of the newly acquired cranes at Port of Duqm.

Commenting on this training programme, Eng Ahmed Akaak of OPAZ said the initiative is in line with the Authority's efforts to

support the upskilling of young Omanis in various technical fields and build the national competencies of Omani cadres in the efficient operation and management of assets falling within the jurisdiction of the Authority.

Nasra bint Salim al Majrafiyah (pictured), a member of the Omani team, said: "The training

programme was an enriching opportunity, as we were able to acquire many technical skills in various fields such as security, safety & programming, in addition to increasing our practical and personal skills in communication, time management, business, organising and arranging priorities, work ethics, problem-solving and crisis management skills at work."

Fellow trainee Ahmed bin Saeed al Maharbi appreciated the efforts made by both OPAZ and the Irish company to provide this training programme, which enabled the trainees to learn more about the technologies and technical specifications of the Rubber-Tyred Gantry cranes (RTG) and container cranes, their operation mechanisms and remote operation. He pointed out that they will undergo practical training upon the installation of the cranes at the Port of Duqm.

RO 290m paid out in insurance claims in 2021

FROM PG 13

Issued policies: The number of policies issued by insurance companies for general, life insurance / family Takaful and health Insurance in the financial year 2021 increased by 8.6 per cent to RO 1.782 million policies, including 1.569 million policies for general insurance, 189,636 policies for life insurance/ family Takaful and 22,939 policies for health insurance compared to the total number of policies issued in the year 2020, which were 1.640 million policies, including 1.496 million policies for general insurance, 131,676 policies for life insurance / family Takaful and 12,234 policies for health insurance.

Retention ratio: Retention ratio of insurance companies in the year 2021 was about 55.5 per cent a decrease from 56.5 per cent compared to 2020. The audited financial statements for the year 2021 indicate that the retention ratio of national insurance companies was 55.4 per cent in the year 2021 compared to 55.2 per cent in 2020, and the retention ratio of foreign companies decreased from 62.8 per cent in the year 2020 to 55.9 per cent in 2021. Motor insurance (comprehensive and third party) constituted the highest ratio compared to other insurances for national companies at 89.6 per cent and 91.5 per cent, respectively, the same was for foreign companies, where motor insurance (comprehensive and third party) constituted the highest ratio at 95.7 per cent and 95.1 per cent respectively.

Takaful activity: Gross direct premiums for Takaful companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 9.1 per cent to RO 70.779 million in the year 2021 compared to RO 64.848 million in 2020, which represents approximately 15 per cent of the gross direct premiums of insurance companies, whereas it is noted that the gross direct premiums of Takaful companies for general insurance have increased to RO 44.160 million in 2021 compared to RO 41.419 million in 2020. Takaful represented 17 per cent of the total general insurance of all the

sectors' companies. Gross direct premiums of family Takaful increased by 10.8 per cent to RO 13.471 million in the year 2021 compared to RO 12.158 million in 2020. Family Takaful constituted 24 per cent of the total life/ family insurance of all the companies in the sector. Gross direct premiums of Takaful companies for health activity increased by 16.7 per cent to RO 13.148 million in 2021 compared to RO 11.271 million in 2020.

Health Takaful represented 8 per cent of the total health insurance of all the companies in the sector.

The audited financial statements for the year 2021 indicate that the total

Health Takaful represented 8 per cent of the total health insurance of all the companies in the sector. Retention ratio of insurance companies in 2021 was about 55.5 per cent a decrease from 56.5 pc compared to 2020

compensations paid for Takaful activity increased by 13.7 per cent to RO 38.392 million in the year compared to RO 33.777 million in 2020, which constitutes 13 per cent of the total compensations paid by insurance companies. Total compensations paid to the Takaful activities for general insurance increased by 1.4 per cent to RO 19.886 million in 2021 compared to RO 19.609 million in 2020.

Total compensations paid to family Takaful activity increased by 77.7 per cent to RO 9.900 million in 2021 compared to RO 5.572 million in 2020. A very slight increase in the total compensations paid to health Takaful activity was recorded at 0.1 per cent to RO 8.606 million in 2021 compared to RO 8.595 million in 2020.

Takaful policies in 2021 were 218,611 policies, including 195,361 policies for the general Takaful, 21,916 policies for the family Takaful activity and 1,334 policies for the health Takaful activity.

Fitch affirms OQ at 'BB-' / Stable

FROM PAGE 13

'Strong' Socio-Political Implication of Default: OQ's consolidated revenue accounted for 26 per cent of Oman's 2021 GDP. OQ is the main downstream company owning all domestic refining assets producing all transport fuels for the Omani market and is tasked with increasing the value per barrel of extracted oil by further expanding refining and petrochemical assets. It is also the exclusive operator of Oman's domestic natural gas transportation infrastructure.

Key Investments: OQ completed construction of a \$6.9 billion LPIC in 2021 that will annually produce 880,000 tonnes polyethylene and 300,000 tonnes polypropylene. Other key OQ downstream projects include the \$8.3 billion Duqm refinery with 230,000 barrels per day, a 50:50 JV with Kuwait Petroleum (Europe) BV that is expected to be commissioned in 2023 (over 90 per cent completed). OQ plans to focus on investment projects already in the pipeline and has suspended some planned large investments, such as a petrochemical plant at the Duqm refinery.

OIA posts 10.3pc average annual return on investments in 40 countries

FROM PAGE 1

In regards to joint investments established in partnership with several friendly nations, Vietnam-Oman Investment (VOI) entered a new investment agreement with CMES Company, a significant player in the renewable energy market, developing rooftop solar power systems.

Moreover, VOI fully exited from Van Lang University with an IRR of 47 per cent and 18 per cent successively and partially exited from one investment with an IRR of 25 per cent and 65 per cent returns from the invested capital.

Oman Brunei Investment Company succeeded in increasing its capital to \$200 million by utilising available opportunities and expanding its existing investments in Brunei and succeeded in obtaining the Board of Directors' approval to establish a private school in Muscat in partnership with Amity Group, which is a renowned educational services institution.

Additionally, Oman Spain Fund for Private Equity launched a new investment in Symborg, an international firm engaging in agricultural biotechnology.

The publication of OIA's

annual report comes in realisation of Oman Vision 2040's focus on sound governance of the State's administrative apparatus, national resources, and projects.

The report comes in 88 pages and features a variety of topics, including OIA's investment strategy, the performance of OIA's investment portfolios, joint strategic projects, and local investments represented in OIA companies, in addition to other critical themes such as governance, transparency, the internal operational activities of OIA and Rawabet Programme.

— ONA

Bosch to invest \$3 bn in semiconductor business

DRESDEN: German industrial giant Bosch plans to invest \$3 billion in its semiconductor business by 2026.

"We are arming ourselves in the interest of our customers for an undiminished growth in chip demand. For us, there is big business in the smallest components," Stefan Hartung, chairman of the Bosch board of management, said in Dresden on Wednesday. New semiconductor development centres are to be built in the cities Reutlingen and Dresden at a combined cost of more than \$170 million.

No figures were given on



Bosch Stefan Hartung addresses media at the Bosch semiconductor manufacturing plant in Dresden, eastern Germany, during the company's 'TechDay'. — AFP

the share of subsidies in the investment sum. Hartung emphasised that all chip factories

worldwide received subsidies, without giving further details.

With its investments in microelectronics, Bosch says it wants to open up new fields of innovation. Among other things, this includes radar sensors, as they are needed for the 360-degree detection of a vehicle's surroundings, for example in automated driving.

Another focus is on new semiconductor technologies. Since the end of 2021, silicon carbide chips, which are used in the electronics of electric and hybrid cars, have been produced in Reutlingen. — dpa

Euro pierces parity, Wall Street gulps as US inflation tops 9pc

LONDON: The euro touched 1-to-1 versus the dollar for the first time in 20 years and stock markets skidded on Wednesday, after a 9.1 per cent US inflation reading - the highest since 1981 - bolstered the case for more supersized Fed rate hikes.

Recession worries meant Europe's bourses had already been stumbling, but the eye watering headline CPI number had been even higher than most economists had feared to forecast.

Wall Street's gasps that another 75 basis point Fed hike could be

Highest US inflation since 1981 takes euro to parity as stocks drop, copper at 20-month low on recession concerns

on the cards immediately shoved what had been slightly higher S&P 500 futures ESv1 down 1.5 per cent and then the spot market down 2 per cent as it opened.

The euro only briefly brushed parity but it was enough. Germany's DAX and France's

CAC40 nearly doubled their morning losses to 1.5 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively. London's FTSE wasn't far behind as another 4 per cent rise in gas prices added to the pressures.

"CPI of 9.1 per cent is the highest number in 40 odd years, the only piece of good news is that core inflation is slightly lower," said Close Brothers Asset Management Chief Investment Officer Robert Alster.

"And euro parity - well, European economic prospects continue to get worse, especially



An electronic board shows the negative moves of the market above the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. - Reuters File

if the Russian gas doesn't start coming come through again."

Concerns that rising US interest rates will now bring the global economy to a standstill were evident far and wide. Copper, which is attuned to global growth, hit a 20-month low and has now slumped 30 per cent since April.

Korea and New Zealand had jacked up their rates too overnight. UK economic growth data did deliver an unexpected rise but investors were far more focused on how fast and furiously the Fed now moves. — Reuters

Islanders sue cement giant Holcim over climate damage

Residents of Pulau Pari, an Indonesian island threatened by rising sea levels, are suing cement giant Holcim over its carbon dioxide emissions, a Swiss charity said on Tuesday.

“Holcim... bears a significant share of the responsibility for the climate crisis as well as for the situation on... Pari,” Yvan Maillard Ardent, climate expert at Swiss Church Aid (HEKS), said on the charity’s website.

The complaint was lodged on Monday with a conciliation authority in Zug, Switzerland, where Holcim’s headquarters are located.

The four plaintiffs told German TV channel RTL on Monday they were seeking compensation from Holcim for damage already caused to their island by climate change, money for flood defences and a rapid reduction in the company’s carbon emissions.

“Holcim is globally the leading manufacturer of cement, the basic material for concrete, and one of the 50 biggest CO2 emitters out of all companies worldwide,” HEKS said. This is in line with the 2021 greenhouse polluters index compiled by the University of Massachusetts Amherst, which ranks “LafargeHolcim” 47th among the top 100 emitters of climate-heating gases.

Contacted by AFP, Holcim, which merged with France’s Lafarge in 2015, declined to comment on the legal case but said it “takes climate action very seriously”.

“This is the first time that a Swiss company will be held legally accountable for its role in climate change,” HEKS said.

The Swiss NGO is backing the islanders’ campaign alongside the Berlin-based rights group ECCHR and Indonesian environmental pressure group WALHI.

They point out that countries of the South are bearing the brunt of a climate emergency mainly created by the rich countries of the North.

Large portions of Pari, which depends on fishing and tourism, were likely to be under seawater in 30 years, HEKS said.

Holcim sold its Indonesian activities to local cement maker Semen Indonesia in 2019. But globally, it emitted more than seven billion tonnes of CO2 emissions between 1950 and 2021, according to a new study from the US-based Climate Accountability Institute. — AFP



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COOL BUSINESS

Canada’s Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Canada’s Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Marie-Claude Bibeau react as they hold ice creams during a visit to the Laiterie de Coaticook, a dairy products business, in Coaticook, Quebec, Canada. - Reuters

Green bonds can advance climate sustainability



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

Environmental experts believe that it has become necessary to have a map for economic activities concerning climatic, environmental and social goals. From this point of view, some countries of the world tend to find financing institutions for the purpose of directing their financial capabilities to environmental causes with the goal of mitigating any adverse impacts. One of those institutions concerned with the environment is the European Investment Bank (EIB), which has specialised in issuing climate-awareness bonds since 2007. These green bonds have become increasingly important in directing capital towards sustainable economic activities at a time the European governments are working to issue legislations related to the sustainable financing of these bonds.

Data released by the bank indicates that the total issuance of green and social bonds for sustainability has amounted to about 2.2 trillion euros globally since the initiative first emerged about 15 years ago. EU legislation on sustainable finance is committed to supporting the further growth of environmental issues on the ground.

The world’s first climate awareness bond was issued on July 5, 2007. According to the bank’s data, these bonds, with the use of the proceeds earmarked, allow investors to track the flow of their money into a sustainable economy, thus enhancing transparency, accountability, reliability and comparability in sustainable finance. These funds contribute significantly to mitigating climate change, supporting the fields of renewable energy efficiency, and working to deal with innovative technologies that are characterised by low carbon-based activities. This contributes significantly to achieving environmental and social goals, including climate mitigation, pollution prevention, universal access to healthcare and clean and affordable water, as well as support for projects related to the Covid-19 control, education, housing and forestry programmes.

Today, the European Investment Bank is the multilateral development bank’s largest issuer of green bonds. Over the past few years from 2019 to 2022, the share of these bonds in the total EIB issuance has grown from 7 per cent to 27 per cent, spurred by investor demand for larger and more

liquid bonds. On the fifteenth anniversary of the issuance of the first green bond, the European Investment Bank announced in May the distribution of its first climate awareness dividend of €4 billion due on June 15, 2032.

The President of the European Investment Bank believes that financial markets play a key role in addressing climate change and achieving sustainable development goals, stressing that a low-carbon economy cannot be achieved without directing more money from public and private investors to clearly defined green projects. This issue is also linked in how to tackle poverty in all its forms if long-term financing for sustainable infrastructure is not provided. There is a link between sustainable finance and sustainable projects that turn investors’ money into a public good from dealing in the green, social and sustainability bond markets. Such a model can also be a paradigm for the Gulf region to consider in its own efforts to establish a similar financial institution with a mandate to contribute and finance environmental projects.

The upside of polarisation?



DARON ACEMOGLU

The author is a Turkish-born American economist and Professor of Economics at MIT

While there are no ironclad laws of politics, two tendencies in the United States – midterm swings against the incumbent party (the “midterm blues”) and the negative electoral effects of inflation and unemployment (“political business cycles”) – come pretty close. US President Joe Biden (whose approval rating has sunk for the past year) and the Democrats should not be surprised if they suffer a massive rout in the 2022 midterm elections.

But other long-accepted political truths have been discarded. For decades after World War II, two-party competition within a majoritarian system was thought to have a moderating effect.

According to the celebrated “median voter theorem,” originally proposed by the economist Duncan Black and then later by the political scientist Anthony Downs, if one party veered too far from the centre,

it would pay for it at the polls.

Imagine that the US electorate has a range of views about the appropriate level of the federal minimum wage. Some on the right think there should be no federal minimum wage at all, whereas some on the left think it should be at least \$18 per hour. Now suppose that the “median” of this distribution of voters points to a preferred minimum wage of \$12 per hour (the rate above and below which half the electorate falls).

In an election where the minimum wage is the main issue, if the Republican Party listens to its most vocal members and promises to abolish the minimum wage, the Democrats should be able to secure an easy victory by campaigning for a minimum wage of, say, \$13 per hour. It then follows that the Republicans will moderate their approach in the next election, disregarding their vocal base if necessary. And since a small amount of moderation (\$8 per hour, say) will not get them very far, they will have to move to where the

median voter is: \$12 per hour.

Downs’s observation was powerful, not just because of its theoretical elegance but also because it seemed to explain US electoral politics for quite a while. The parties became so close on most issues as to entrench a moderate “liberal consensus.” While some critics saw this as a “failure of democracy,” many others regarded it as a feature of the system, not a bug.

Still, cracks were apparent even in the median voter theorem’s heyday. Moderate policies require moderate candidates, but primaries require candidates first to win over the most animated and committed of the party’s base. Hence, Republicans nominated Barry Goldwater for the 1964 presidential election, even though his views were far to the right of the mainstream; and the Democrats then nominated the left-leaning George McGovern in 1972. Both lost, but their candidacies were signs of things to come.

More recent evidence indicates

that the median voter theorem no longer has much purchase on American politics. If it still applied, we would see politicians who are elected in close contests going on to maintain moderate positions in office. But research by economists David Lee, Enrico Moretti, and Matthew Butler shows that something quite different has been happening. Congressional Republicans and Democrats who were elected by only narrow margins still vote just like all other Republicans and Democrats, showing no signs of moderation.

The median voter theorem assumes that voters switch “fluidly” between candidates, depending on their policy platforms. But in the real world, voters tend to base their decisions on a mix of other factors. Which candidate seems more credible, competent, and authentic? Who would I want to be in charge during a national emergency? And party loyalty is deeply ingrained for many voters.

Suppose Republicans listen to their most extreme members and shift their platforms further to the right. In this scenario, Democrats could indeed gain by moving toward the middle, provided that they don’t compromise their own credibility. But the problem is that the dynamic playing out among Republicans is likely also to play out among Democrats, with their primary voters pushing them to the left. When the Republicans embrace extremism, many Democrats will conclude that they can pursue their favourite left-wing agenda items and still have a chance of winning.

Add to this the pernicious effects of corporate money and social-media filter bubbles (where extremist ideas get amplified), and you get something very different from self-moderating two-party competition. US politics today is characterised by deep polarisation, with Republicans moving further to the right, and Democrats further to the left. @Project Syndicate 2022

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#Living_with_COVID19

Venturing into the fascinating world of 3D printing

His venture into the 3D printing business was filled with challenges in the beginning but now Khalid bin Sabil al Raisi has finally found a unique purpose for his creative talent through the launching of his company the Khalid Projects which specialises in creating props, masks, fans arts, figurines, statues, helmets etc... **P20**

Can Fashion Still Shock?

WHAT'S SHOCKING NOW?

There are many possible answers to that question, though few of them, probably, have to do with fashion. Reality long ago overtook wardrobes as a source of perpetual astonishment.

Yet flying from the facade of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in the Louvre as the first full season of

couture shows since 2020 began, came a clarion call: "Shocking! The Surreal World of Elsa Schiaparelli."

It was an announcement of a new exhibition as well as a reminder that once upon a time, clothing had the ability to confound.

That once upon a time fashion could jolt viewers out of their torpor or cynicism; challenge convention; make them blink and blink again merely with a flash of flesh, an astounding construction, a seemingly absurd idea about the body and what goes on top.

Yet in a world of increasing extremes, where truth is a fungible concept and crisis is starting to seem like the norm, that time seems practically quaint: a museum piece, in more ways than one.

Even at the couture, that designer laboratory freed from commercial constraints because it is made to order for the very few.

So what's shocking now? Daniel Roseberry, the creative director of Schiaparelli, had an answer of



sorts: "beautiful things." Sometimes, in the face of overwhelming externalities and unrelenting grimness, he suggested, it's enough to dazzle with delight; to offer a reminder of the ability to dream. Even if it's a bit overinflated.

It's not about daywear, baby.

It's about a hat that looks like an entire field of golden wheat (but actually was burned ostrich feathers); a black velvet cocktail frock sprouting glittering tulips or swirling under a tempest of satin; a

dress composed entirely of bejewelled necklaces. It's about dialogue: with the designers that came before, such as Christian Lacroix, who first revived Schiaparelli back in 2013.

Dialogue! Fancy that. It's actually kind of a radical suggestion. (More radical, anyway, than the bared breasts Roseberry also sprinkled throughout his show, which seem at this point both banal and gratuitous.) And it's got to start somewhere.

That's escapism with a very subtle edge: not just for those who can buy it, but for those who can behold it — which now, thanks to the digital world, is pretty much everyone. Come for the visual fancy and stay for the reminder of the better angels of our nature.

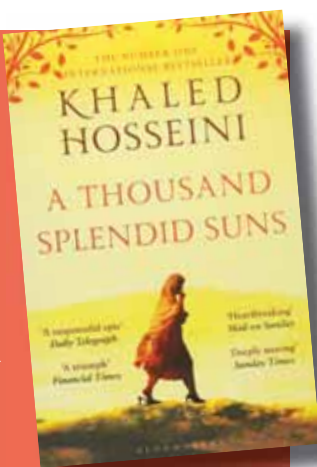
Even if, as with the feathers, frills and diamanté extravaganza of Giambattista Valli, which seemed to conjure up Elvis and Priscilla Presley dressing for a 1960s gala at the Villa Borghese in Rome, the expression sometimes doth froth a bit too much.

READ

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

BY KHALED HOSSEINI

Mariam, an illegitimate teenager from Herat, is forced to marry a shoemaker from Kabul after a family tragedy. Laila, born a generation later, lives a relatively privileged life, but her life intersects with Mariam's when a similar tragedy forces her to accept a marriage proposal from Mariam's husband.



ANCIENT BELIEF

People participate in a shamanic ritual during a spiritual retreat in Centelha Divina Temple in the Chapada dos Veadeiros nature reserve, Alto Paraíso municipality, Goiás State, Brazil, on June 17, 2022. Famous for its waterfalls and nature trails that for decades have attracted those seeking a break away from the big cities, Chapada dos Veadeiros, 230 kilometres from the country's capital, Brasília, is strengthening its mystical profile and experiencing a new boom in retreats in the wake of the pandemic. — AFP



FASHION TRENDS

A participant moves a piece while playing a game of chess during a chess tournament in Kandahar. — AFP





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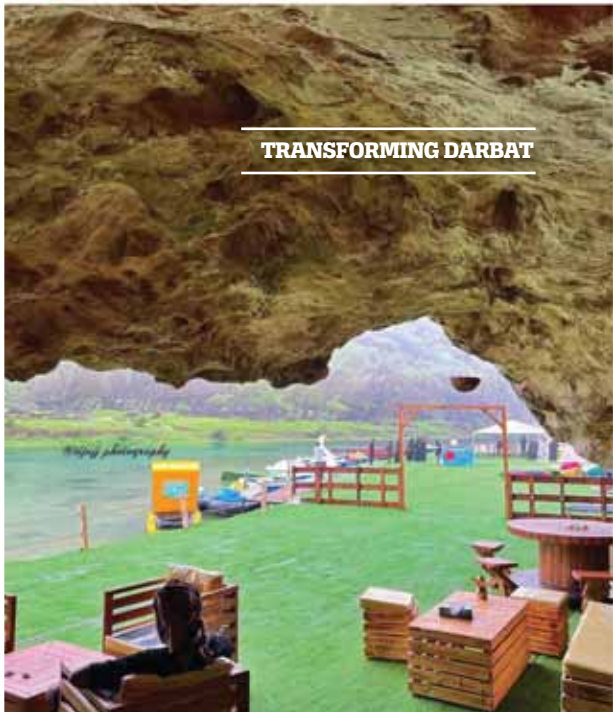
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AROUND THE WORLD

CULTURE

Indonesia school helps students recite Quran in sign language



CONCERNED ABOUT how Indonesian students with hearing impairments often miss out on religious education, cleric Abdul Kahfi founded an Islamic boarding school to help them study and recite scripture from the Koran using sign language.

Opened in 2019 in the city of Yogyakarta in central Java, the Darul A'shom school now has 12 staff and teaches 115 students aged between seven and 28 years from across the world's big-



gest Muslim-majority country.

Abdul hopes the school will make it easier for future generations to learn about Islam.

"Nowadays hearing-impaired adults barely know religion in depth because from school age they have never learned about it," said the cleric, noting how interest in his school had spread quickly.

In Indonesia, the curriculum in public schools provides limited religious teaching to children with special needs, starting at the age of eight or nine rather than at kindergarten as is the case for many other students.

Only three out of 10 children with disabilities in Indonesia are able to go to school, according to a survey by the United Nations children's agency (Unicef).

Hearing-impaired students typically take about five years to learn to recite and memorise the Koran at the school.

"Now I am able to read and memorise 30 juz (parts) of the Koran," said Muhammad Farhad, a 10-year-old student, who said he wanted to become a cleric one day so he can pass on his knowledge to others.

Indonesia has tens of thousands of Islamic boarding schools and other religious schools that often provide the only way for children from poorer families to get an education. — **Reuters**

ART

'Like a dream': Japanese grandpa draws in following as art YouTuber



HARUMICHI SHIBASAKI was nearly 70 when he began making YouTube art tutorials from his quiet home in the Japanese countryside. Five years on, he has 1.4 million subscribers.

Unlike the attention-grabbing antics of most top YouTubers, the grandfather has won hearts with his calm, soothing manner, which fans say makes them feel "warm and peaceful".

He has also built a global following thanks to the English subtitles on his videos demonstrating painting and sketch techniques, which sometimes feature his grandchildren and two cats.

"Hello. Shibasaki here. How's everyone doing?" the grey-haired art instructor with glasses and a moustache says in Japanese, pausing to smile and wave.

The 74-year-old films everything himself for his channel "Watercolor by Shibasaki" using tripods, lighting and a smartphone or DSLR camera.

He is also active on Instagram, TikTok and Twitter, and says being directly connected to the world is "like a dream".

"We didn't even have a TV at home when I was a child," Shibasaki said near his home in a rural part of Chiba, outside Tokyo, where birdsong fills the air.

"As someone from my generation, I didn't expect there would ever be a time like this."

His videos range from how to paint cherry blossoms to snapshots of daily life, such

as cooking bamboo shoots dug up from his garden.

Like many successful YouTubers, his clips are peppered with banner and video ads, while big fans can send cash during livestreams or pay to access members-only footage.

It was Shibasaki's son who first encouraged him to post on the site — a chance for the instructor with decades of

why," he laughed.

People tell him that his slow, relaxed delivery reassures them, and some even see Shibasaki — who has undergone heart surgery six times — as an agony uncle.

Because of his health scares, "death has become a concrete mental image," he said, meaning he can "truly understand" the problems people confide in him.

Shibasaki loved painting from a young age, but as the only son of a farming family in Chiba, he expected his parents to ask him to take over their land.

However, overcome with the desire to move to Tokyo and study art aged 18, he rushed to ask his parents' permission while they were hard at work.

"They looked back at me in the rice field and said I should go. I'm so grateful for that."

Shibasaki later became an art teacher and strived to make his advice easy to understand, just like in his videos.

"Painting is fun," he said. "It's a battle with myself to achieve perfection. It's interesting, and there's a sense of achievement."

Shibasaki wants to continue painting as long as possible. When artists get older, "their eyesight gets worse, their hands shake," he said.

"I'm going to turn 75, so I'll only be able to draw properly for another five years or so. But in the meantime, if I can make paintings to leave behind, that's what I want to do." — **AFP**

experience to reach a global audience.

"I like teaching, I like chatting with everyone. I can talk for five, six hours!" Shibasaki said.

KIND' VOICE

During the darkest days of the pandemic, Shibasaki's subscriber count soared.

In one April 2020 video he showed viewers how to sketch a smudgy, fluffy cat, saying he hoped drawing together would help them feel better while stuck at home.

A flood of comments in different languages called the video "calm and relaxing" and said Shibasaki's "kind" voice had left a "warm and peaceful" impression.

"Viewers say I have a really good voice, but I have no idea

ENTERTAINMENT

Review: 'The Rise and Fall of ... Jean Claude Van Damme' Revives an Action Hero



THE NEW YORK International Fringe Festival is no more, but its spirit lives on at a second-floor black box theatre on the edge of the garment district. There you will find "The Rise and Fall, Then Brief and Modest Rise Followed by a Relative Fall of ... Jean Claude Van Damme as Gleaned by a Single Reading of His Wikipedia Page Months Earlier," a new show whose descriptive title takes us right back to the heady days of such Fringe delights as "Theater of the Arcade: Five Classic Video Games Adapted for the Stage" and "Harvey Finkelstein's Sock Puppet Showgirls."

Although the show announces itself in an expansive manner, it is a minimalist affair: a low-cost approximate biography of a former B-movie action star told by just two men, using action figures that were sourced on Amazon and then jury-rigged into controllable puppets. Again: very Fringe.

It will come as little surprise to connoisseurs of stage exploitation — an expression I use with affection — that the writer is Timothy Haskell, "one of the great hustlers of downtown theatre," as The New York Times described him back in 2007. In the years after that review, Haskell and the company the Psycho Clan cemented their status as the emperors of immersive horror theatre, most famously with the "Nightmare" series of Halloween spook houses, which ran every fall for 14 seasons and returns in October after a hiatus. The Psycho Clan's exploration of shock tactics peaked with "This Is Real," in 2017, an escape experience in which audience members were "abducted" in Red Hook.

With "Rise and Fall," however, Haskell has returned to the lighter, goofier pop-subcultural vein that put him on the off-off-Broadway map in the early 2000s; during that period, he turned out productions like "Road House," a "fightsical" based on the film

in which Patrick Swayze played a bouncer, and "Fatal Attraction: A Greek Tragedy." In this show, actors Joe Cordaro (Jean-Claude Van Damme, plus a smattering of other roles) and John Harlacher (mostly as a narrator, and ending up in a painfully unforgiving costume) need only an hour to barrel through the life and oeuvre of the so-called Muscles from Brussels, who achieved peak popularity from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s.

Directed by Haskell, his brother Aaron and Paul Smithyman, the show tracks Van Damme from his childhood in Belgium to his early martial arts training and his eventual move to Hollywood, where he deployed balletic splits and athletic leaping kicks in such classics of the VHS era as "Universal Soldier," "Double Impact" and "Bloodsport." Cordaro and Harlacher deploy stick puppets to move the story along and pull up those action figures (customised by Aaron Haskell) for the fight sequences. Most of those have been dreamed up for the show, like a brawl between Van Damme and Steven Seagal that many 13-year boys would have loved to see in 1995.

As the show's title suggests, Haskell has little interest in digging beneath the surface to reveal the man behind the muscles. (For insights — sort of — viewers might want to check out the meta Van Damme film "JCVD," from 2008, which, we are told, "the author of this play didn't see because he was pissed about it.") But despite the gleefully juvenile humour, pathos bubbles up, as when Van Damme's career stalls and he is portrayed as grateful for a spot as a villain named Jean Vilain in "The Expendables 2." Recalling a childhood trauma, Haskell's Van Damme swears, "I would never be a laughing-stock again. But I am. Or was." No time to linger, though: There is always one more fight on the horizon. — **NYT**

art & life

Local Scene

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THURSDAY | JULY 14 | 2022

Venturing into the fascinating world of 3D printing

By Lama Al Rajhi

His earlier experiments included an anthropomorphic rendition of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos born out of his passion not just for 3D printing but also for the man who transformed Oman to be the country that it is today.

This was followed months later by his creation of an anthropomorphic rendition of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik which was not only well-received by his friends in the art and creative world but also by his social network.

That early beginning filled with challenges now comes with its unique rewards as Khalid bin Sabil al Raisi finally found a unique purpose for his creative talent through the launching of his company the Khalid Projects which specialises in creating props, masks, and fans arts, figurines, statues, helmets etc.

For Khalid, all the years of toiling and taking risks paid off as his stall at the recently concluded 968 Gamez by Ooredoo

was one of the most check out stalls in the gathering allowing him to showcase what he can do to different people whose interest leans toward his creative passion.

Khalid started 3d printing in 2019, with one printer, as a hobby.

"It was a way for me to be more productive and creative outside the work environment," he explained. Back then, 3D printing was an interesting new idea to him. When he decided to buy a machine, it was all to test it out and see how he can push the potential of the machine.

While everything started out okay upon his purchase of the machine, he was immediately thrown into issues when the machine malfunctioned.

"I was afraid at the beginning because fixing the printers was exhausting and I thought at times was it a wrong decision for me to get it," he said.

Khalid shared that when he decided to take on the endeavour, there was nobody in Oman who can fix the kind of machine he has.

"I had to understand the machine fully and learned how to fix it on my own the hard way," he said.

He didn't give in to the issues he faced but instead, pushed himself even more to learn everything including where to get the parts and partner with who could help him fix technical issues that were based out of Oman.

Today, Khalid now has seven printers, three for industrial use and a resin printer which is one of the newest in the country.

The process behind working in 3D printing needed many steps and sometimes it takes long process for Khalid to get the pieces done, some of the pieces take three months to finish.

"It's not just print and paint. It requires a lot of sanding to make the final project look smooth and nice and presentable," he said.

Describing his biggest projects, he shared, "I just finished weeks ago a model of Grendizer, which is about 195 cm of very heavy print".

He added, "I used a big printer, and it took me about 6 months to finish it starting from designing, printing to sanding and painting which was the hardest part for me."

The Grendizer model was presented at the 968 games event held in Muscat.

One of the biggest works that also took him a long time to execute was working on a model of Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque with its complete details.

"It took me 200 satellite images, a lot of site visits to ensure all small details in it, presenting it in a new modern way," he said.

When it comes to growing his business Khalid, described how visiting Comic-Con events each year has inspired him to be a part of its world and to build connections.

He said, "I used to go to Comic-Con as a visitor but the last time I went, I was the first Omani to be part of Comic-Con 2022. I was honoured to represent Oman."

He added, "It was amazing and overwhelming to see people's reactions to my projects and the pride they felt knowing it was an Omani business, as 3d printing is still not familiar in Oman."

As one of the participants in Oman's biggest pop-art event, Khalid explained "I went there not only to sell but I was thinking to network with more people to see if it is possible to do these things in Oman rather than order it online" he added.

"I have so many upcoming projects and I will be participating in Comic-Con Bahrain by the end of this year. I will also be representing Oman in Kuwait and there are so many other upcoming visits to GCC countries and hopefully the world," he shared.