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AGAINST SUDAN IN
ARABIAN GAMES



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RO 85 MILLION
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TRANSMISSION PROJECT
94% COMPLETE



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ADDRESSING THE
NEEDS OF VAN
LIFE ENTHUSIASTS
IN OMAN



HIJRA HOLIDAY ON JULY 20

MUSCAT: July 20 (Thursday) has been announced as an official holiday for employees of the public and private sectors on the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary and the advent of the new Hijri year 1445 AH. This was stated in a ministerial decision issued by the Ministry of Labour reading as follows: "On the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary and the new Hijri year 1445 AH, Thursday, 20 July 2023 has been set as an official holiday for employees of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other legal entities, as well as establishments of the private sector. The moonighting of the month of Muharram will be announced by the departments concerned. Employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday-if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work-provided they compensate the workers for the holiday'.

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Employees to get salary on time, online

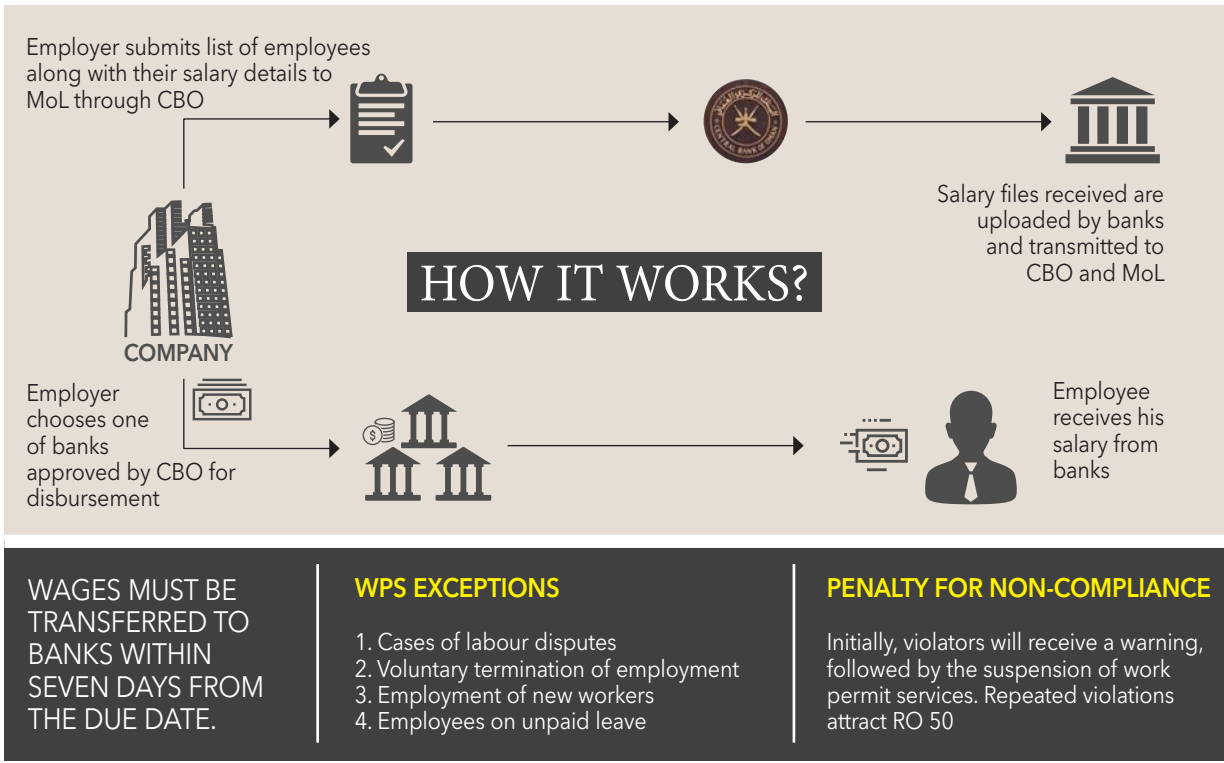
Companies must transfer pay to bank accounts within 7 days as per WPS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

To ensure timely disbursal of wages and protection of labour rights, employers are required to transfer employees' salary to authorised local banks within seven days from the due date.

This is the key provision of the government's newly new wage regulations to enhance transparency within the private sector. The government's actions, based on the Labour Law (Royal Decree 35/2003), the establishment of the Ministry of Labour (Royal Decree 89/2020), and relevant ministerial decisions (222/2013 and 541/2013), demonstrate its commitment to fostering a just and equitable work environment, said experts.

The introduction of the mandatory online Wage Protection System (WPS) is to secure and streamline wage disbursements. It enables private sector employees to receive their wages directly into their designated bank accounts. By ensuring timely and accurate payments, the system aligns with the terms specified in the employees' contracts, promoting financial stability and trust



between employers and workers.

This process is facilitated through the user-friendly salary information file of the WPS, simplifying and expediting wage disbursements.

To ensure effective implementation and compliance, the Inspection Department's Wages Protection Department will oversee the online system, monitoring wage disbursements

in the private sector. By diligently enforcing the regulations, this dedicated team aims to guarantee that employees receive their entitled earnings and that employers fulfill their payment obligations.

Employers are further obliged to promptly update the ministry of any changes to employees' wages, ensuring that the registered wages accurately reflect the actual amounts received.

While the WPS is mandatory, a few exceptions are recognized. These exceptions include cases of labour disputes leading to work cessation, voluntary termination of employment without legal justification, employment of new workers within the initial 30 days, and employees on unpaid leave.

Non-compliance with the newly implemented regulations may result in administrative

penalties. Initially, violators will receive a warning, followed by the suspension of services related to preliminary work permits. Repeated violations may incur an administrative fine of RO 50, with subsequent offenses facing doubled fines.

Financial and administrative expert Khaled al Suleimani emphasized the significance of the Wage Protection System (WPS), underscoring its role as a joint online platform between the Ministry of Labour and the Central Bank of Oman. With insights gained through the WPS, the Ministry of Labour will proactively addresses potential delays, ensure timely wage payments and reduce the likelihood of labour disputes and work stoppages, he said.

The introduction of the WPS is a notable advancement in Oman's ongoing efforts to safeguard workers' rights and establish an equitable workplace. By meticulously monitoring wage disbursements and imposing measures against non-compliant employers, the WPS plays a crucial role in fostering a stable and highly productive workforce, Al Suleimani said.

Over 15,000 citizens get job security benefit till May

MUSCAT: A total of 15,182 eligible citizens have availed of the job security benefit by the end of May this year, according to the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI).

Citizens entitled to the job security benefit who have completed 6 month since becoming eligible should update their data, PASI said, noting that the request for updating information stems from the Authority's constant keenness on data accuracy to ensure that they continue to be entitled to the benefit. PASI affirmed that the update process is available to all beneficiaries through the dedicated e-system from July 9 to 20.

Extending the payment of the benefit came as a response to the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to extend the disbursement of the job

security benefit for laid-off citizens at the private sector until the end of December 2023, PASI said.

Citizens eligible for the job security benefit may avail of the facilitations and support package provided by government institutions and the private sector partners through the electronic portal of the Public Authority for Social Insurance. The system is part of the developments and changes the social insurance system is witnessing in response to the economic and social conditions affecting laid-off citizens for reasons beyond their control.

Royal Decree No. 82 of 2020 created the new job security fund, which came into force on November 1, 2020.

PASI has the overall role of administering the funded by the PASI.

Tourists make a bee line to Darbat cottages

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

Visitors are flocking to cute cottages on the lush green banks of Wadi Darbat to fully savour khareef.

The start-up's picnic accommodation is sometimes fully booked, said the company founder Saeed al Maashani. Talking to *Observer*, he said the reason for choosing the location of the wooden huts is because of its proximity to the Wadi, which is a location preferred by many families for picnicking or short gatherings.

The prices of the huts range between RO 5 and RO7 based on the cost of operation.

Al Maashani claimed that there is not much profit from the project. But he is happy with the project as it is for his home country.

He also talked about some of the difficulties that he faced when implementing the project, such as the high cost of materials and labour, and the difficulty of implementing some governmental procedures. But he thanked Dhofar Municipality for its assistance in simplifying some of the necessary procedures.



He looks forward to reap more returns from the project in the coming years.

One of the major challenges that faced the project is that it is seasonal. The demand for the cottages is confined to the khareef season.

He hoped that the authorities will allow him to invest in the site beyond khareef in activities and events that interest young people in general.

Al Maashani also sought help from authorities in dismantling the cottages after the end of the khareef season.

The cottages are safe and secure. In case of emergency, services of Dhofar Municipality are available.

There are also safety instructions in all the huts, as well as the fence, and there are workers who monitor the conditions inside and outside the huts to ensure and preserve the safety of those in the valley.

Al Maashani urged Omani youths to invest in the hospitality sector and cash in on the various tourist seasons in Oman.

Darbat cottages are part of the growing options for khareef tourists to stay and enjoy the unique climate of Dhofar.



Significant increase in food prices

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

The recently released monthly statistical bulletin, which provides key insights into the economic landscape of Oman, saw inflation rates and changes in consumer prices.

The bulletin, sourced from the National Center For Statistics and Information (NCSI), indicated inflation rate holding steady at 0.91 per cent in May 2023 which remained stable.

This figure indicates a relatively controlled rise in prices across various sectors of the economy.

However, one noteworthy trend highlighted in the report is the increase in the foods and non-alcoholic beverages group. Comparing May 2023 to May 2022, this group experienced a significant rise of 2.73 per cent. This growth may be attributed to various factors such as changes in production costs, supply chain dynamics, or consumer demand patterns. This rise can be also be attributed to various factors, such as changes in the prices of bread and



cereals, meat, fish and seafood, milk and dairy products, oils and fats, fruits, vegetables, sugar, and food products.

The tobacco sector also experienced a notable increase of 1.76 per cent in May 2023. This rise could be attributed to factors such as changes in taxation or production costs.

Housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels witnessed a slight increase of 0.02 per cent in May

2023, indicating relatively stable prices in this essential category.

In regards to transport sector, there was a marginal decrease of -1.32 per cent in May 2023. This decline reflect factors such as changes in fuel prices or transportation services.

These figures offer valuable insights into the changing economic landscape of Oman, providing consumers and businesses with a deeper understanding of price

trends and their potential impact on various sectors.

The monthly statistical bulletin presents a comprehensive analysis of the economic indicators, serving as a valuable resource for policymakers, analysts, and individuals interested in tracking Oman's economic performance. By closely monitoring these statistics, stakeholders can make informed decisions and adapt to the evolving economic environment.

MV Logos Hope to visit Oman on July 13

KABEER YOUSUF
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Later, the book fair will sail to Salalah where it will call on at the Port of Salalah on July 27 and be stationed there until August 3 from where she will be heading to Seychelles from August 10 to 17 before heading to Mombasa in Kenya.

On an average, the book fair receives one million visitors on board every year with more than 5,000 titles on sale.

According to the statistics, the book fair has so far visited over 140 ports in more than 70 countries and sold more than 10,000,000 different books.

MV Logos Hope is a ship operated as a part of a faith based organisations by Gute Bücher für Alle. Built in 1973 as the ferry MV Gustav Vasa for service between Malmö and Travemünde and later operated as the MV Norröna providing a ferry service to the Faroe Islands, she was later converted into a moving book fair, the seafaring book fair is operated by the German non-profit group Good Books for All (GBA).

She has welcomed 49 million people from across 480 different ports in more than 150 countries. The nearly 350 crew and other staff from more than 65 different nationalities are all volunteers serving in their professional capacity and include from seamen to cooks and from engineers to nurses and electricians.

Entry in to the floating book fair is free of cost and people will be guided through various genres and groups of books onboard by the volunteers.



National Museum hosts 'Fab Tech' camp



MUSCAT: The National Museum, represented by the Learning Centre, in cooperation with Innotech, hosts the 'FabTech' mobile laboratory camp, which targets school students from 10-16 years during the period 9-27 July 2023.

This move reflects the museum's efforts to encourage students to innovate, spread the culture of manufacturing, and introduce them to the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution,

The laboratory aims to provide students with various skills through a series of workshops in the fields of manufacturing and the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution of programming, electronics and 3D printing. It also aims at developing problem-solving skills and creative thinking within the work team and enriching their scientific output and preparing them for the requirements of the modern era.

It is worth noting that the "FabTech" Mobile Laboratory is the first mobile manufacturing laboratory of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman. It is an educational initiative that aims to spread the culture of manufacturing and the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution in programming, electronics, design and 3D printing among academics, students and engineers. It is offered by Innotech under the umbrella of the Social Investment Program of BP Oman. — ONA

Workshop held on improving teacher preparation programmes



MUSCAT: A workshop was held on Sunday to discuss the project of improving the efficiency of teacher preparation programmes in public and private higher education establishments.

The workshop outlined the project's preparation phases, related challenges and international best practices for

improving such programmes.

The technical team of the project comprises representatives from various entities including the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Education, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Dhofar

University, the University of Nizwa, Sohar University and A'Sharqiyah University.

The workshop's opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

— ONA

Al Batinah North — an exciting hub for investment

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JULY 9

Al Batinah North Governorate has become a shining beacon for investors, offering a wealth of investment potential opportunities across sectors. Backed by a visionary approach and favourable regulations, Al Batinah North Governorate is the perfect destination for aspiring entrepreneurs and seasoned investors alike.

Strategically located near the Arabian Gulf and surrounded by regional partners, Al Batinah North Governorate has gained benefits from its prime geographical location. Its connection to global ports through the Port of Sohar further cements its status to play a major role in the investment landscape.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah said: "Al Batinah North Governorate is committed to developing essential infrastructure, making it a



frontrunner for investment opportunities. With its free zones, industrial areas, and commercial facilities, the governorate offers an ideal ecosystem for businesses to thrive."

In the last quarter of 2022, Al Batinah North Governorate witnessed remarkable progress. One notable achievement was the inauguration of the groundbreaking 400-kilovolt power transformer, an impressive engineering marvel created by

Voltamp Company in Sohar's industrial city. This transformative advancement positions the governorate at the forefront of technological innovation, not just in Oman, but across the entire Gulf region, the Arab world, and Africa.

Another significant milestone was reached with Sahar Titanium's comprehensive project in the Sohar Free Zone. As a subsidiary of Minerals Development Oman, the company has laid the foundation

for a cutting-edge facility dedicated to producing titanium dioxide.

Covering a vast area of 120,000 square metres, this ambitious project boasts an annual production capacity of 150,000 tonnes, making a significant contribution to Oman's industrial capabilities.

The Al Batinah North Governorate continues to attract a diverse range of investment projects that shape its dynamic investment landscape. From revolutionary initiatives in renewable energy

to advanced infrastructure developments, the region remains a hub of excitement and opportunity. As the year comes to a close, we eagerly await the unveiling of even more ventures that promise to shape the future of Al Batinah North Governorate.

Noteworthy to mention are a range of ongoing development projects in the governorate, a testament to its strong investment opportunities. These include the Sohar Industrial Port and Free Zone project, the Sohar Industrial City, Sohar Airport, Al Batinah Expressway, Al Batinah Coastal Road, and the ports of Suwaiq and Shinas. These initiatives reflect the vibrant investment activity and the strategic direction of the governorate in supporting the vision and goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Embracing innovation, fostering collaboration, and building a legacy of investment excellence, the governorate is set to leave an indelible mark on the investment world.



UPHOLDING ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES

Demolition of Dahwa Mosque

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

In response to growing concerns over practices that contradict Islamic values and principles, the decision was taken to demolish Dahwa Mosque situated in the suburb of Dahwa, Al Mohab village in the Wilayat of Saham.

The decision, Issued by Rashid bin Saeed bin Saif al Muzaini, the official of Al Mahab village, was due to the association of the Dahwa Mosque with acts and practices that are contrary to Islamic principles.

Released on July 4, the official statement reads, “The Dahwa suburb mosque has long been regarded as a historical landmark of the ancient village. However, due to the circulation of information about actions and practices within the mosque that contradict Islamic principles and other concerns, we have received a directive for its removal.”

The decision to demolish the mosque reflects Islamic values and the prohibition of practices contrary to Islamic teachings in Oman. While the mosque



is of historical importance and is considered a prominent cultural site, reported activities necessitated its removal.

Notably, various legends surrounding the Dahwa Mosque in Saham, suggesting supernatural phenomena such as that the

mosque built itself. speculations say that the people of the region hundreds of years ago found it suddenly in the morning and do not know its secret. Therefore, this mosque was sanctified and given great importance.

The decision to demolish the

mosque aligns with the principles of Islam, emphasising that success and sustenance come solely from God and not through intermediaries or supernatural entities.

Islam forbids such behaviour because success and sustenance are in the hands of God.

Namaa promotes growth, sustainability of SMEs in Dhofar

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@AfrahAlbalushia

With more than RO 2 million, Namaa Dhofar Services promotes the growth and sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Dhofar Governorate.

This came within the framework of partnership and integration between the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority and Namaa. The value of the amounts granted to small and medium enterprises in the first quarter of this year amounted to RO 2,492,692,74.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority attaches great importance to the In-Country Value through programmes, initiatives and partnerships aimed at promoting the growth of small and medium enterprises and contributing to empowering human capabilities and accelerating the pace of the



Omani economy by strengthening partnerships with government institutions and private sector

institutions and focusing on the most important specialised areas that contain business

opportunities to these institutions.

It also seeks to raise its efficiency and help in accessing the local and international markets, in addition to the authority's efforts through the Supplier Development Programme, which contributes to the development of small and medium enterprises by introducing them to the procedures, requirements and technical standards required in cooperation with the relevant authorities.

The number of institutions benefiting from business opportunities reached 272, which included several sectors: extension and connection works, network expansion, technical and technical services within the company, cleaning services, travel offices, car rental, and car maintenance and repair. This, in turn, reflects Namaa's commitment to its active role in sustaining the activity of small and medium enterprises and enhancing their contributions to the national economy.

Over 12m cyber threats thwarted in Oman in 2022

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A whopping number of three million attempted cyberattacks in the Sultanate of Oman were thwarted in 2022, according to an annual cybersecurity report which revealed a significant 55 per cent increase in global threat detections and a massive 242 per cent surge in blocked malicious files in the same year.

Out of the 12 million cyber-attack attempts, over 3 million (3,284,958) were email threats, 2.5 million (2,524,312) malicious URL victim attacks, and 20,488 URL hosts besides 4.8 million (4,895,508) malware attacks which were identified and stopped, according to the report released by Trend Micro solutions, a global player in cybersecurity.

The report titled 'Rethinking Tactics', which highlights concerning trends that have significant implications for the future of digital security further shed light on the fact that threat actors indiscriminately targeted both consumers and organisations across all sectors, making 2022 a challenging year for cybersecurity professionals.

Speaking to the Observer, Assad Arabi, Managing Director, Gulf and Emerging Markets at Trend Micro said that as technology continues to rapidly evolve, so does it present both opportunities and challenges for businesses.

“With the increasing complexity of the digital landscape comes a growing number of cyber threats that can compromise operations and data. To stay ahead of these risks, organisations need to take a proactive approach to cybersecurity and invest in the latest threat intelligence solutions,” Arabi added.

The report further points out an increase in failed patches adding extra time and money to corporate remediation efforts and exposing organisations to unnecessary cyber risks.

Webshells were the top-detected malware of the year, surging 103 per cent on 2021 figures, while ransomware groups rebranded and diversified, with LockBit and BlackCat being the top ransomware families of 2022.

“By understanding their vulnerabilities and implementing a comprehensive, multi-layered security strategy, businesses can effectively mitigate risks and future-proof their digital infrastructure. Oman-based companies should be occupied with the tools and expertise they need to navigate the ever-changing cybersecurity landscape and achieve their digital transformation goals in line with Oman Vision 2040,” Assad added.

The report further suggests that in order to address the current attack surface, organisations need to take a proactive approach by conducting thorough assessments and securing their digital infrastructure.



Wonders of geological traces along Qurayat-Sur highway

TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Along the coastal highway linking the Wilayat of Qurayat with the Wilayat of Sur, the road user may be preoccupied with the charming view of the sandy and rocky beaches on the eastern side. But whoever has the boldness and desire to explore may find what satisfies his or her curiosity on the opposite side of the coastal road.

Beautiful natural oases are not the only ones that attract adventure enthusiasts. On the slopes and hills of these mountains, there are rare and invaluable archaeological and geological sites. In villages such as Fins, Aumq Rabakh, Kabda, and Sakhrrat, there are remains of walls, towers, and tombs dating back thousands of years. A large part of these antiquities disappeared due to negligence and due to the impact of



erosion factors and climatic changes that the region witnesses from time to time.

One of the most important of these monuments is the Kibaykib tombs, which are located at an altitude of 2,000 meters above sea level. Visitors can find the archaeological tombs of Kibaykib which are known locally as (Burj Kibaykib) near the village of Qarran

above the Salmah plateau, which is Ancient tombs dating back to the Bronze Age, about 4,000 years ago.

The height of Buruj Kibaykib is between 4-5 meters, and these tombs were built in a cylindrical shape, and some of these tombs consist of two walls, between which there is a space filled with stones.

In the village of Fins and Kabda, there are archaeological sites that



can be seen clearly on the tops of the rocky plateaus. Those who do not dare to venture, cannot identify these natural treasures that hide among the high mountains, whose height ranges between 1000-2500 meters.

The way to reach these treasures first requires a good skill in driving a four-wheel drive vehicle. Secondly, it requires the adventurer

to have good fitness and high skills in hiking. Without these skills in driving a car and practicing walking in rough terrain, it is not possible to reach these exceptional sites.

Many adventurers enjoy photographing and documenting these sites after their arrival. “My arrival at this point is an achievement in itself. I did not expect what I saw. From now on, I will not hesitate to

participate in any scientific trip that will help me discover the natural and archaeological sites in the Sultanate of Oman. Access to these sites is worth the effort”, an Omani adventure told the Observer.

“What caught my eye was the site chosen to build such small towns. I still wonder by what means did man reach these very rugged areas? How were these sites identified? What tools were used in designing the site? How many workers were involved building these cities?” he added.

Many questions arise in the minds of visitors of these sites. “Unfortunately, we say that there are many sites that have not been documented until this moment, so it is necessary to prepare a national strategy aimed at studying and documenting these sites in the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman,” said a tourist.



KHAREEF DHOFEAR

STAY SAFE



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@AfrahAlBalushia

The Khareef atmosphere in Dhofar Governorate attract a large number of visitors from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. Therefore, for your safety and the safety of those with you during a trip to Dhofar, you must know and adhere to the information issued by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA).

Data issued by National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) revealed that most of those heading to Dhofar travel by land, and the journey takes very long hours hence CDAA issued an awareness booklet that includes a set of important tips in both Arabic and English for visitors to the Khareef Dhofar, which aims to deliver information aimed at everyone's safety.

Tips included starting from preparing for the trip, before departing for the trip and during

the trip. During the trip, you must conduct periodic inspection and maintenance of the vehicle and ensure the safety of its parts. Equip the vehicle with the necessary tools (stretch rope, water tank, lamp, charger, mobile phone), and prepare a first aid kit that contains medicines, necessary tools, and get training on how to use it. There is also a need to ensure the validity of the manual fire extinguisher in the vehicle and training on how to use it.

Before leaving for the trip, it is necessary to ensure the safety of the vehicle, and adhere to safety rules, including the specified load for the vehicle, and make sure that the electric current is disconnected from unnecessary devices, get rid of waste in the house, and keep pesticides and air fresheners away from direct sunlight.

During your trip and when driving the vehicle, be aware of the engine overheating by stopping the vehicle, adhering to security and safety measures while refuelling,

CDAA confirmed its readiness to provide firefighting, rescue and ambulance services to citizens, residents and visitors of Dhofar Governorate

not smoking inside the vehicle, not being busy with the phone while driving, in case of sudden weather change, slow down and adhere to safety measures while driving, and adhere to wearing a belt safety and placing children in the safety seat designated for them.

CDAA confirmed its readiness to provide firefighting, rescue and ambulance services to citizens, residents and visitors of Dhofar Governorate.

Colonel Mubarak bin Salem al Araiimi, General Director of Operations and Training and in charge of operations at CDAA, said, "The authority has approved its operational plans for the Khareef Dhofar season for the year 2023, as the plan includes strengthening its current centres and publishing other points on the roads leading to Dhofar Governorate in each of Governorates (Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, and Al Wusta) to deal with the communications that come to the points through

the police operations centre and the operations centres in the governorates."

"The authority is constantly seeking to raise the level of awareness among all segments of society by using its official platforms on social media and other media, distributing educational brochures, holding events, and deploying field teams in various locations for awareness and guidance, appreciating the great role played by various media in order to promote preventive awareness among different segments of society," he added.

Realising the importance of following safety instructions before travelling by land is a way to preserve your safety and the safety of others, and it should be at the forefront of your priorities while planning and preparing for your trip to the Dhofar Governorate to enjoy Khareef weather safely and securely, and enjoy all the moments of the trip.



Pope puts stamp on Church future with new cardinals

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Sunday announced that he would elevate 21 churchmen to the high rank of cardinal, again putting his mark on the group that will one day choose his successor after his death or resignation.

The ceremony to install them, known as a consistory, will be held on September 30, the 86-year-old Francis announced during his noon prayer to pilgrims and tourists in St. Peter's Square.

It will be the ninth consistory called by the pope since his election 10 years ago as the first

pontiff from Latin America.

The new cardinals come from countries including the United States, Italy, Argentina, Switzerland, South Africa, Spain, Colombia, South Sudan, Hong Kong, Poland, Malaysia, Tanzania, and Portugal.

Eighteen of the 21 are under 80 and will be able to enter an eventual secret conclave to choose the next pope. They are known as cardinal electors.

After the September consistory, there will be 137 cardinal electors, about 73 per cent of them chosen



Pope Francis waves as he addresses the crowd from the window of the apostolic palace overlooking St Peter's square during his Angelus prayer at the Vatican. — AFP

by Francis. This increases the possibility that the next pope will share his vision of a more progressive, inclusive Church.

Francis has also increased the possibility that the next pope will come from Asia or Africa, having consistently named cardinal electors from those continents and giving less importance than his predecessor to countries in Europe.

Francis spent nine days in hospital after surgery for an abdominal hernia last month. His recovery is going well and he is due

to visit Portugal from August 2 to 4 and Mongolia from August 31 to September 4.

The other three new cardinals, who are 80 or over and too old to vote in a conclave, were named to thank them for their long service to the Church.

All cardinals, regardless of their age, are allowed to take part in pre-conclave meetings, known as General Congregations, giving them a say in the type of person they think the younger cardinals should choose.

— Reuters

Contested Bosnian Serb laws go into force despite US warning

SARAJEVO: Two controversial laws signed by the Bosnian Serb president, which Washington says undermine the peace deal that ended Bosnia's 1990s war, entered into force on Sunday.

Kremlin ally President Milorad Dodik had signed legislation into law that effectively allow the Bosnian Serb entity to bypass or ignore decisions made by the top international envoy to Bosnia.

The latter, currently German diplomat Christian Schmidt, oversees the civilian aspects of the Dayton peace deal that ended the 1992-1995 war.

The international envoy has important executive powers notably to sack elected officials and impose laws.

A second piece of legislation signed into law by Dodik on Friday suspends the Bosnian Serb entity's recognition of rulings made by Bosnia's constitutional court.

On Sunday, both bills, that were approved by Bosnian Serb lawmakers last month, officially entered into force with their publication in the official Gazette of Republika Srpska (RS).



Bosnian Serb president Milorad Dodik

The RS along with the Muslim-Croat Federation makes up post-war Bosnia.

The two semi-autonomous entities are linked by a weak central government.

The Bosnian Serb entity's initiatives had provoked strong reactions particularly from Bosnian Muslim leaders, and have also been criticised by Washington, Paris and Berlin.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

on Saturday tweeted that Dodik's signing of a law rejecting the international envoy authority "violates the Bosnia and Herzegovina constitution and undermines the Dayton Accords".

Dodik signed the bills just days after Schmidt tried to head off the controversial moves by passing an executive order that deems them illegal and prevents their implementation.

Schmidt made the ruling last weekend when he also passed a new measure that would allow Bosnia's judiciary to prosecute politicians who oppose his orders and those of the constitutional court — with punishments running up to five years in jail.

Dodik has refused to recognise Schmidt's authority since the position lost the backing of the United Nations thanks to an intervention by Russia and Beijing.

Dodik — who remains a Moscow ally — has held enormous sway over the Bosnian Serb entity for years, repeatedly stoking ethnic tensions with his secessionist threats.

Earlier this week, Dodik vowed to continue to oppose the envoy. — AFP

North Korea slams IAEA for Fukushima water approval

SEOUL: North Korea on Sunday slammed the United Nations' nuclear watchdog for approving Japan's plan to discharge treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The International Atomic Energy Agency approved Tokyo's plan to release treated water from the tsunami-hit nuclear plant into the sea over the next few decades.

The plan has raised concerns in neighbouring countries, prompting China to ban some food imports and sparking protests in South Korea.

The release of the treated water will have a "fatal adverse impact on the human lives and security and ecological environment," an official from Pyongyang's environmental protection ministry said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

"What matters is the unreasonable behaviour of IAEA actively patronising and facilitating Japan's projected discharge of nuclear-polluted water, which is unimaginable," the statement added.

Some 1.33 million cubic metres of groundwater, rainwater and water used for cooling have accumulated at the Fukushima nuclear plant, where several reactors went into meltdown after the 2011 tsunami overwhelmed cooling systems.

The plant operator treats the water to remove almost all radioactive elements except tritium, and plans to dilute it before discharging it into the ocean over several decades.

The statement comes as IAEA head



S Korea's Democratic Party lawmaker Woo Won-shik (L) shows a list of proposed disposal methods for the Fukushima contaminated water, to Rafael Grossi (R), the director general of the IAEA, during their meeting at the National Assembly in Seoul. — AFP

Rafael Grossi is wrapping up his three-day visit to Seoul with a meeting with opposition lawmakers, who have criticised the planned release.

On Saturday, Grossi met with South Korean foreign minister Park Jin to brief him on his agency's findings, Seoul's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Park requested "active cooperation from the IAEA for safety verification and public reassurance," it added.

Following that meeting, Grossi said the IAEA will remain at the Fukushima plant to ensure safety "every step of the way", tweeting: "What starts now is even more

important than the work done so far — the continuous monitoring of the plan's implementation."

It is "absolutely logical" that Japan's plan to release treated radioactive water from its Fukushima nuclear plant is attracting great interest in the region, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, said on Sunday.

Grossi also said he understands concerns remain over the plan but added that a review by the IAEA released last week found it was "in conformity with international safety standards" if executed according to plan.

— Agencies



Sultanate of Oman The Supreme Judiciary Council

Re-Tender Announcement

The Supreme Judiciary Council announces its desire to
Submit the following re-tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
01/2023	Maintenance Works at Haima Primary Court	17/07/2023	10/08/2023	Fourth	RO 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below
website : (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit bid commitment letter in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Supreme Judiciary Council based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

1- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby re-announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
113/2023	Supplying machinery, equipment and raw materials for the protected rehabilitation workshops for females of the Vocational Assessment and Rehabilitation Center at Al Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of supplying electrical, mechanical and industrial machinery and equipment and spare parts and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Tuesday 25-7-2023 02:00 PM	Tuesday 8-8-2023 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Monday 10/7/2023**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om



Uzbekistan holds vote set to cement president’s rule

TASHKENT: Uzbekistan was holding a presidential election on Sunday that is set to hand incumbent Shavkat Mirziyoyev a third term as head of the gas-rich Central Asian state.

The 65-year-old Mirziyoyev has promised to open up his country, a tightly controlled former Soviet republic, to foreign investment and tourism.

He served as prime minister under his hardline predecessor Islam Karimov before winning his first term in 2016 and getting re-elected in 2021.

A constitutional referendum this year paved the way for him to serve two more presidential terms and increased the mandate from five years to seven, meaning he could stay in power until 2037.

“I hope the next president will be Shavkat (Mirziyoyev). I am expecting him to increase the fight against corruption and to notice the ecological problems we have,” said Nodira Khidoyatova, a 57-year-old company director, after casting her ballot.

All the Uzbeks, ahead of the election, said they would vote for Mirziyoyev, who is running against three largely unknown candidates.

“These are my first elections. I will be voting for Shavkat Mirziyoyev because I want there to be more opportunities for young people and places to study,” said 18-year-old Milana Yuldasheva. Abduali Nurmatov, 64, said he hoped the president would solve “problems with gas and electricity” as the town suffered repeated cuts during the last winter.

Around 20 million Uzbeks are eligible to vote in Central Asia’s most populous country, a landlocked nation which also borders Afghanistan.

Mirziyoyev portrays himself as a reformer creating a “New Uzbekistan”.

He has ended forced labour in Uzbekistan’s cotton fields and released political prisoners jailed during Karimov’s long rule.

— AFP



Members of a local election commission listen to the national anthem before polls open for Uzbekistan’s presidential election in Tashkent. — AFP

Yellen sees ‘progress’ in US-China ties, expects more communication

BEIJING: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said 10 hours of meetings with senior Chinese officials in recent days were “direct” and “productive”, helping stabilise the superpowers’ often rocky relationship as her four-day Beijing trip ended.

Before departing China on Sunday, Yellen said the United States and China remained at odds on a number of issues but expressed confidence that her visit had advanced efforts to put the relationship on “surer footing”.

“The US and China have significant disagreements,” Yellen told a press conference at the US Embassy in Beijing, citing Washington’s concerns about what she called “unfair economic practices” and recent punitive actions against US firms.

“But President Biden and I do not see the relationship between the US and China through the frame of great power conflict. We believe that the world is big enough for both of our countries to thrive.”

With US-China relations at a low over national security issues, including Taiwan, US export bans on advanced technologies and China’s state-led industrial policies, Washington has been trying to repair ties between the world’s two biggest economies.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Beijing last month, the first trip by the top US diplomat in Biden’s presidency. Climate envoy John Kerry is expected to visit this month.



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a press conference at the US Embassy in Beijing. — Reuters

The US diplomatic push comes ahead of a possible meeting between Biden and President Xi Jinping at September’s Group of 20 summit in New Delhi or a Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation gathering scheduled for November in San Francisco.

Yellen said her visit aimed to establish and deepen ties with China’s new economic team, reduce the risk of misunderstanding and pave the way for cooperation in

areas such as climate change and debt distress.

“I do think we’ve made some progress and I think we can have a healthy economic relationship that benefits both of us and the world,” she said, adding that she expected increased and more regular communications at the staff level.

Briefing reporters after the visit, a senior Treasury official said the trip as expected did not result in specific policy breakthroughs,

but was “very successful” in terms of “re-establishing contact” and building relationships.

She said Chinese officials raised concerns about an expected US executive order restricting outbound investment, but she assured them any such measure would be narrow in scope and enacted in a transparent way, through a rule-making process that would allow public input.

— Reuters

Netanyahu bristles at protests as Israel’s judicial reform edges ahead

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signalled impatience on Sunday with resurgent demonstrations against his plan to overhaul the justice system, summoning his attorney-general for a cabinet grilling about police counter-measures.

On Monday, Netanyahu’s religious-nationalist coalition is due to bring for its first ratification reading a bill that would limit “reasonableness” as a standard of judicial review — and which critics argue would open the door for abuses of power.

Critics say such reforms curb court independence. Netanyahu — who is on trial on graft charges he denies — says the aim is to restore balance among branches of government.

Compromise talks between the government and opposition stalled last month. Street protests that had subsided are flaring anew.

Protesters plan to converge on Israel’s main airport as parliament debates the “reasonableness” bill.

Netanyahu said it was “unthinkable” that the government would abridge the right to demonstrate or support any violence against protesters.

But he argued such freedom should not be extended to “violations of the law that harm the basic rights of millions of citizens and are taking place on an almost daily basis,” citing disruptions at Ben Gurion Airport, calls for disobedience within the military, main road closures and the heckling of elected officials.

He said Attorney-General Gali



Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attends the weekly cabinet meeting in his office in Jerusalem. — Reuters

Baharav-Miara must “give an accounting” at Sunday’s cabinet. As the meeting began, Israeli media carried leaked quotes of

some ministers calling for her to quit.

Baharav-Miara, according to a person briefed on the session,

said she hoped the government was not asking her to say a more aggressive crackdown was needed even if it was inconsistent with the

judgement of police commanders on the ground and prosecutors.

“I hope the government does not expect the law-enforcement apparatus to maintain ‘quotas’ of arrests or indictments of protesters,” she was quoted as saying.

Announcing the plan to shut all 24 of its malls on Tuesday, Big Shopping Centers called the “reasonableness” bill, if it passes its first reading, a “serious step on the way to clearly illegal governmental corruption, and another step on the way to dictatorship”.

“Such legislation would be a fatal blow to Israel’s business and economic certainty and would directly and immediately endanger our existence as a leading company in Israel,” it added in an open letter.

— Reuters

CAIRO

Egypt to host summit of Sudan’s neighbours

Egypt will host a summit of Sudan’s neighbours on July 13 to discuss ways to end a 12-week conflict between rival Sudanese military factions that has triggered a major humanitarian crisis, the Egyptian presidency said on Sunday.

The summit aims to “develop effective mechanisms” with neighbouring states to settle the conflict peacefully, in coordination with other regional or international efforts, the presidency said in a statement.



The fighting in Sudan has driven more than 2.9 million people from their homes, including almost 700,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries. — Reuters

LIBREVILLE

Gabon president runs for third term

Gabon’s President Ali Bongo Ondimba said on Sunday that he would seek a third term as the oil-rich African nation’s head of state.

“I officially announce today that I am a candidate,” he told a crowd of supporters in a speech broadcast live on his Facebook page. Bongo, 64, took over from his father, Omar Bongo Ondimba, the country’s ruler for 41 years, in 2009.

The president was narrowly re-elected in 2016, with just 5,500 more votes than rival Jean Ping



who claimed the election had been fixed. Bongo suffered a stroke in 2018 and spent months on the sidelines recovering, leaving the opposition to question his fitness to run the nation. — AFP

AMMAN

Security forces kill fugitives in desert

Jordanian forces have killed “three wanted terrorists” including two who had recently escaped jail in a raid near the kingdom’s border with Saudi Arabia, authorities said on Sunday.

Security forces raided the hideout of “three wanted terrorists near the kingdom’s southeastern border”, Public Security Directorate spokesman Amer Sartawi said in a statement.

The three suspects were killed in a firefight after they had opened fire at the security forces



with automatic weapons.

The men had used a stolen vehicle to travel through unpopulated “desert areas” to avoid being discovered, the statement said. — AFP



In brief

ROME



STRIKES TO HIT RAIL AND AIR NEXT WEEK

Strikes at Italian air and rail service providers are set to go ahead at the end of the coming week, a number of trade unions indicated over the weekend.

Workers at the Trenitalia national rail company and its private competitor Italo are to stop working at 3 am on Thursday for 23 hours.

The rail companies said many services would be cut, with long-distance travel hit hard. Passengers were advised to check connections shortly before travelling. Ground staff are set to strike for eight hours from 10 am at airports on Saturday.

Pilots at Malta Air, which operates Ryanair flights in Italy, are to strike for four hours from noon on Saturday. — dpa

LONDON



MORE THAN 700 FIREARMS SEIZED IN UK

More than 700 firearms have been seized in a five-year operation by the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) and Spain's Guardia Civil to prevent replica guns that can easily be converted into lethal weapons from entering Britain, the NCA said on Sunday.

The operation targeted forward-venting blank firearms (FVBF), which resemble guns such as Glock.

The weapons are traded lawfully in some parts of mainland Europe but are illegal to possess or import into Britain.

The operation has so far resulted in the seizure of 703 firearms, 74 arrests and 50 convictions. — Reuters

NEW DELHI



AT LEAST 15 DEAD IN MONSOON FLOODS

At least 15 people were killed in floods and landslides triggered by monsoon rains that battered northern India, with New Delhi receiving the most rainfall in decades, reports and officials said on Sunday.

Roads in several parts of the capital were submerged in knee-deep water as it was inundated with 153 millimetres of rain, the highest precipitation in a single day in July in 40 years.

Authorities have ordered schools shut in New Delhi on Monday.

The Press Trust of India news agency reported on Sunday that 15 people had been killed in the past 24 hours in six northern Indian states. — AFP



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Polish President Andrzej Duda commemorate victims of World War II at the Saint Peter and Paul Cathedral, in Lutsk, Ukraine. — Reuters

Ukraine, Poland jointly mark WWII massacres that strained ties

KYIV: The Ukrainian and Polish presidents jointly marked the anniversary on Sunday of World War Two-era massacres of Poles by Ukrainian nationalists, killings that have caused tension for generations between countries that are now close allies.

Warsaw has positioned itself as one of Kyiv's staunchest supporters since Russia attacked the country in 2022.

But the Volhynia massacres have continued to hang over ties between the two nations, particularly ahead of the July 11 anniversary of one of the bloodiest days of a series of killings that took place from 1943 to 1945.

Poland says around 100,000 Poles were killed in the massacres by Ukrainian nationalists. Thousands of Ukrainians also died in reprisal killings.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his Polish counterpart Andrzej Duda attended a church

service together in the western Ukrainian city of Lutsk, in memory of the victims.

"Together we pay tribute to all the innocent victims of Volhynia! Memory unites us!", Duda's office and Zelenskyy both wrote on Twitter. "Together we are stronger."

The service was attended by the heads of the largest Orthodox and Catholic churches in Ukraine and the head of the Polish Bishop's Conference, Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki.

The Ukrainian president's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, wrote on Telegram that Ukraine and Poland were "united against a common enemy who dreamed of dividing us".

Duda called the service "a testimony of friendship in the face of a difficult history".

Zelenskyy said he had a "brief but very substantive" discussion at the event with Duda about

the upcoming Nato summit in Vilnius, where Ukraine is hoping for decisions that will hasten its goal of membership in the alliance.

"We agreed to work together to get the best possible result for Ukraine," Zelenskyy wrote.

The head of Duda's office said the fact that the presidents were commemorating the victims together was "historic", but that more work was needed.

"This is not the end of this difficult road, explaining to our Ukrainian friends about the historical truth, it will of course be continued," Pawel Szrot told private broadcaster Polsat News.

The massacre caused an unusually public row between Poland and Ukraine earlier this year, after a Polish foreign ministry spokesman said that Zelenskyy should apologise and ask for forgiveness for the events in Volhynia. — Reuters

France protesters defy bans to rally against police violence

PARIS: Around 2,000 people defied a ban to join a memorial rally in central Paris on Saturday for a young black man who died in police custody, while marches took place throughout France to denounce police brutality, as tensions run high after days of rioting engulfed the country.

Nationwide, around 5,900 people took to the streets, according to the interior ministry.

Seven years after the death of Adama Traore, his sister had planned to lead an annual commemorative march north of Paris in Persan and Beaumont-sur-Oise.

But fearful of reigniting recent unrest sparked by the police killing of 17-year-old Nahel M at a traffic stop near Paris, a court ruled the chance of public disturbance was too high to allow the march to proceed.

In a video posted on Twitter, Assa Traore, Adama's older sister, denounced the decision.

"The government has decided to add fuel to the fire" and "not to respect the death of my little brother", she said.

She instead attended a rally in central Paris's Place de la Republique.

"We are marching for the youth to denounce police violence. They want to hide our deaths," she said.

While she said Interior

Minister Gerald Darmanin would give specifics, Borne announced a ban on the sale of fireworks, which had been used by rioters to target police.

The Paris rally for Traore had also been banned on the grounds that it could disrupt public order and a legal case has been opened against Assa Traore for organising the event, police said.

Youssef Traore, another of Assa Traore's brothers, was arrested and taken into custody on suspicion of violence against a person holding public authority, public prosecutors said.

"The march went off peacefully, it was a success, we don't understand his arrest," Assa Traore said.

Jean-Luc Melenchon, leader of the hard-left France Unbowed party, castigated the government.

"From prohibition to repression... the leader is taking France to a regime we have already seen. Danger. Danger," he tweeted, referring to the World War II regime of Vichy leader Philippe Petain.

Many at the rally shouted "Justice for Nahel" before calmly dispersing later in the afternoon.

Around 30 demonstrations against police violence also took place across France, including in the southern port city of Marseille and Strasbourg in the east. — AFP



French police officers stand in front of a police station, amid a gathering to demand release of demonstrators from police custody. — AFP

Biden begins three-nation tour with stop in London

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE: US President Joe Biden departed on Sunday on a three-nation trip that will be dominated by a Nato summit in Lithuania.

Biden's first stop will be in London, where he will meet British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak at 10 Downing Street on Monday and then travel to Windsor Castle for a visit with King Charles.

The talks with the king, expected to include climate initiatives, will give Biden a greater sense of the man who succeeded his mother, Queen Elizabeth, who died last September.

Biden will travel on to Vilnius, Lithuania, on Monday night and hold talks with Nato leaders there on Tuesday and Wednesday. Biden and the allies aim to show support for Ukraine and give President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a sense of what he will have to do to gain Nato membership at some point in the future. In an interview previewing his trip, Biden urged caution for now on Ukraine's drive to join



US President Joe Biden waves as he is escorted to Air Force One, before departing for Britain from Dover, Delaware, USA. — Reuters

Nato, saying the alliance could get drawn into the war with Russia due to Nato's mutual defence pact.

"I don't think there is unanimity in Nato about whether or not to

bring Ukraine into the Nato family now, at this moment, in the middle of a war," Biden said.

A centrepiece of Biden's visit to Lithuania will be a speech that he

will deliver at Vilnius University on Wednesday night.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters the speech will cover Biden's vision

of "a strong, confident America flanked by strong, confident allies and partners taking on the significant challenges of our time, from Russia's aggression in Ukraine to the climate crisis."

One of Biden's objectives on the trip is to show Americans back home the importance of continuing support for Ukraine as he faces re-election. Some of his Republican rivals in the race for the November 2024 presidential elections have voiced doubts about his strategy.

Solid majorities of Americans support providing weaponry to Ukraine to defend itself against Russia and believe that such aid demonstrates to China and other US rivals a will to protect US interests and allies, according to a Reuters/Ipsos survey late last month.

Biden's last stop will be in Helsinki for talks with the leaders of the newest Nato member, Finland, and to attend a summit of US and Nordic leaders. — Reuters

Time to get out of track

As the year has passed its first half, it is time to get out of track and have a refreshing break. The summer season is here and so are holidays. It marks the time to relax after the long and hectic first half of the year.

Many take a break to beat the heat. For many families it coincides with the school holiday too, so parents can enjoy the break with their children.

It is very natural for every human being that one needs a break in life every now and then; no matter how busy people are. We all need to be away from the every day's hustle and bustle, which sometimes makes us just like a controlled machine. Even machines undergo a regular maintenance schedule. A short break would refresh our memories, recharge our body and stimulate our spirits.

Actually, the summer season mirrors the different aspects of nature's beauty. Basically, each part of the world is distinguished with special natural, historical and cultural characteristics as well as other merits that make summer more enjoyable there. For this reason, there would be no excuse for people, but to enjoy summer in a way or another that could refresh them. Summer always offers various options for people to amuse themselves.

Accordingly, people's plans to enjoy the season differ depending on their interests and budgets. Some might be more interested in enjoying their time with



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

JUST GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK AND EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENCE IN YOUR FEELINGS, SPIRIT AND MEMORY.

the family. They prefer to tour around different tourist destinations within the country. It might be their limited budget that restricts them from flying abroad for holiday.

On the other hand, budget might not be a problem for those who would never enjoy their summer holiday without travelling overseas. Such people prefer to spend their holiday time or part of it in an external tourist destination. For them, being out of town is more refreshing as well as bringing a real thrill of enjoying the holiday. It is true as we sometimes need to think out of the box; we need to get out of the place to get our minds and spirits more refreshed.

As people are different in the way they think and behave; they are also different in the way they see and enjoy life. Each one of us has a different perception of life and what it means to everyone. What matters is that we should live the moment, enjoy life and take the experience. We have to live the moment with all its experiences. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

In order to enjoy life, we should balance life's necessities and having a break is a significant one. It is as important for all as maintenance for machines. You never know that a health breakdown might happen to people due to excess hard work, life stress and work pressure. Just give yourself a break and experience the difference in your feelings, spirit and memory. Have a refreshing summer break!

ARROWS SPECTACLE



The British Royal Air Force's (RAF) aerobatic team, the "Red Arrows", performs a fly-past prior to the Formula One British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit in Silverstone, England, on Sunday. – AFP

Far-right parties are rising to power around Europe. Is Spain next?

Last month, after Spain's conservative and hard-right parties crushed the left in local elections, the winners in Elche, a small southeastern town known for an ancient sculpture and shoe exports, signed an agreement with consequences for the future of Spain — and the rest of Europe.

The candidate from the conservative Popular Party had a chance to govern, but he needed the hard-right Vox party, which, in return for its support during council votes, received the deputy mayor position and a new administrative body to defend the traditional family. They inked their deal under the cross of the local church.

"This coalition model could be a good model for the whole of Spain," said Pablo Ruz Villanueva, Elche's new mayor, referring to upcoming national elections July 23, which most polls suggest will oust the liberal prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. The new deputy mayor from Vox, Aurora Rodil Martínez, went further: "My party will do everything that's necessary to make that happen." If Rodil's wish comes true, with Vox joining a coalition with more moderate conservatives, it would become the first right-wing party since the dictatorship of Francisco Franco to enter the national government.



Jason Horowitz

SOME ARGUE THAT THE HARD RIGHT NEEDS TO BE MARGINALISED. OTHERS FEAR THAT THE HARD RIGHT HAS GROWN TOO LARGE TO BE IGNORED AND THAT THE ONLY CHOICE IS TO BRING THEM INTO GOVERNING IN THE HOPES OF NORMALISING THEM.

The rise of Vox is part of an increasing trend of hard-right parties surging in popularity and, in some cases, gaining power by entering governments as junior partners.

The parties have differences but generally fear the economic ramifications of globalisation and say that their countries will lose their national identities to migration, often from non-Christian or nonwhite-majority countries, but also to an empowered European Union that they believe looks after only the elites. Their steady advances have added urgency to a now pressing debate among liberals over how to outflank a suddenly more influential right.

Some argue that the hard right needs to be marginalised, as was the case for more than a half-century after World War II. Others fear that the hard right has grown too large to be ignored and that the only choice is to bring them into governing in the hopes of normalising them.

In Sweden, the government now depends on the parliamentary votes of a party with neo-Nazi roots and has given it some sway in policymaking. In Finland, where the right has ascended

into the governing coalition, the nationalist Finns party has risked destabilising it, with a key minister from that far-right party resigning last month after it emerged that he had made "Heil Hitler" jokes.

On Friday, the Dutch government led by Mark Rutte, a conservative and the Netherlands' longest-serving prime minister, collapsed because more centrist parties in his coalition considered his efforts to curb migration too harsh. Rutte has had to guard his right flank against surging populists and a long-standing hard-right party.

In Italy, the far-right has taken power on its own. But so far, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, politically reared in parties born from the ashes of fascism and a close ally of Spain's Vox, has governed more moderately than many in Europe expected — bolstering some analysts' argument that the reality of governing can be a moderating force.

Elsewhere, hard-right parties are breaking through in countries where they had recently seemed contained. In France, the once fringe party of far-right leader Marine Le Pen has become an established force as entrenched anger against President Emmanuel

Macron has newly exploded over issues like pension changes and the integration and policing of the country's minority communities. He is not running again, and the election is years away, but liberals across Europe shuddered when she passed him in some recent polls.

And in Germany, where the right has long been taboo, economic uncertainty and a new surge in arrivals by asylum-seekers have helped resurrect the far-right Alternative for Germany party.

While the parties in different countries do not have identical proposals, they generally want to close the doors to and cut benefits off for migrants; hit the pause, or reverse, button when it comes to LGBTQ rights; and stake out more protectionist trade policies. Some are suspicious of Nato and dubious about climate change and sending arms to Ukraine.

In a seeming recognition that the continent's political complexion is changing, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said in Spain this past week that the EU needed to deliver tangible results in order to counter "extremist" forces.

In Spain, where the

conservative Popular Party has a good chance of finishing first in the coming election, Esteban González Pons, a leading party official, said that bringing hard-right parties, like Vox, into government was a way to neutralise them. For now, the situation is fluid, and there are indications that Sánchez and his leftist allies are gaining support. Vox also appears to be losing ground. Spain seemed in recent years to be a bright spot for liberals. Under Sánchez, Spain has kept inflation low, reduced tensions with separatists in Catalonia and increased the growth rate, pensions and the minimum wage. He is also generally popular in the EU. But the alliance between Sánchez and deeply polarising separatists and far-left forces has fed resentment among many voters.

"We have seen populism, supported by the center-right, grow in small towns," said Carlos González Serna, the former socialist mayor of Elche, who lost the election. He said that instead of cordoning off the extreme right, mainstream conservatives had given it an "umbilical cord" of legitimacy.

— The New York Times.

Sport

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Oman Racing team second in red-flag qualifying in Monza

MONZA, Italy: First year FIA World Endurance Championship racer Ahmad al Harthy produced one of his customary excellent qualifying performances at Monza in Italy on Saturday, to secure a front row start for the fifth round of the 2023 season.

Aiming to bid for a third successive GTE Am podium with Oman Racing with TF Sport teammates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood in today's 6 Hours of Monza, the squad will have a tough challenge to match the top speed of the rival Ferraris and Porsches. Al Harthy's stand-out qualifying though in the grid-determining run has brought a lot of positivity.

Starting off the Monza weekend steadily with the usual focus on delivering the best car possible for qualifying and the race, the Oman Racing entry was 11th fastest in the two free practice sessions on Friday, and was then an improved ninth in free practice three on Saturday morning.

Al Harthy took the reins of the No.25 Aston Martin Vantage for the subsequent 15-minute qualifying session and after the first flying laps

were in the book the Omani was fourth on the timesheets, an initial effort of 1m51.848s.

He then smashed that the next time around to shoot onto GTE Am pole with an excellent lap of 1m48.545 seconds, half a second clear of his closest challenger, and it proved a timely attempt as well with the session halted by a red flag stoppage mere moments later.

Qualifying resumed with just under eight minutes left on the clock and the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS supported racer set about trying to improve yet further on a new set of Michelin tyres.

On his first flying lap of the re-start Al Harthy circulated in 1m49.244 seconds, before then delivering a session best of 1m48.058 seconds on his penultimate run – moving him back up to second fastest and within 0.4 seconds of pole, where he would stay.

Ahead of the fifth race of the FIA WEC campaign, the Oman Racing drivers are second in the GTE Am Championship standings and the team itself is second in the Team



Championship. After a historic second place finish at last month's 24H Le Mans in France, and taking third in round three at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium prior to that, Oman Racing would relish the chance to keep the run going.

Ahmad al Harthy: "I'm really delighted with qualifying, it was the absolute best we could achieve as a package here at Monza. From FP1 we knew we didn't have the strongest package around this circuit, so to get P2 in qualifying is amazing. I'm really happy with my performance and equally happy with all the team work which has been put in for us to achieve this together.

"We worked a lot to find the best qualifying set-up and with the

session being interrupted with the red flag, it was a good strategy to take on new tyres then and go for it again. Thankfully we got a front row start, but it's going to be much, much tougher in the race. The speed of the Porsches and Ferraris is very, very strong so we will focus on our normal strategy and do the best we can."

All attention now turns to the big race, the 6 Hours of Monza, which will get under way at 12.30 local time today.

2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM DRIVER STANDINGS:
2nd Ahmad al Harthy / Michael Dinan / Charlie Eastwood, 59pts

2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM TEAM STANDINGS:
2nd Oman Racing with TF Sport, 59pts



Sultanate of Oman

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade in Tender Board Registration	Last Day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
7/2023	Services	MAINTENANCE, OPERATING & GARDENING SERVICES TO HORSE RIDING CENTRE AT BARKA FROM 01/01/2024 TO 31/12/2025	First Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
8/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE, OPERATING SERVICES TO SOHAR SPORTS (INCLUDING DIRECTOR OF CULTURE AT SOHAR) COMPLEX FROM 01/01/2024 TO 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
9/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE, OPERATING SERVICES TO NIZWA SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING NIZWA CULTURE CENTRE & SPORTS CENTRE AT IZKI) FROM 01/01/2024 TO 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
10/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE, OPERATING SERVICES TO RUSTAQ SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING SPORTS CENTRES AT NAKAL & AWABI AND BEACH GAME FACILITY AT MUSANNAH SPORTS CITY) FROM 01/01/2024 TO 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
11/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE, OPERATING SERVICES TO BURAIMI SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING ART ASSOCIATION AT BURAIMI & SPORTS CENTRE AT SUNAINA) FROM 01/01/2024 TO 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
12/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE, OPERATING SERVICES TO SUR SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING ANNEX SPORTS CENTRE AT SUR & SPORTS FACILITIES AT TIWI, KHALHAT AND RAS AL HAAD) FROM 01/01/2024 TO 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
13/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE, OPERATING SERVICES TO SAADAH SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING SPORTS CENTRES AT THUMRAIT, MUGHSHIN, & SADAH) DHOFAR GOVERNORATE FROM 01/01/2024 TO 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
14/2023	Supply	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENTS	Excellent & First Grade	15/07/2023	31/07/2023
15/2023	Supply	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION SPORT SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENTS	Excellent & First Grade	15/07/2023	31/07/2023
Re -Tender 19 /2022	Supply	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF FENCING & FLOODLIGHT FOR FOOTBALL PITCH TO AHLY SIDAB CLUB AT MUSCAT GOVERNORATE	Excellent & First Grade	15/07/2023	31/07/2023

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

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Oman suffer shock defeat against Sudan in Arabian Games

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

The Oman Olympic team suffered a shock defeat of 2-0 against Sudan earlier on Sunday, at the Mohammed Hamlaoui Stadium in Algeria, in the third and concluding Group A match of Arabian Sports Games.

Oman boys were looking for a draw and win to progress into the second round after they defeated Lebanon 1-0 and hold the hosts to a goalless draw in the opener. The loss ended Oman's boys dream to move into the semis round in football competitions of the Arabian Sports Games.

Sudan's goals were netted by Al Jazooli Nooh and Maisra Saad Allah. The triumph confirmed progression of African team Sudan to the semifinal round as they managed to earn six points from two victories against Lebanon (3-0) and against Oman (2-0) with one defeat against Algeria 2-1.

The hosts Algeria topped group A as they ended the group round with seven points. The Algerian team commenced



their campaign with a goalless draw against Oman before registering two consecutive wins against Sudan (2-1) and Lebanon (2-0).

Oman head coach Akram Habreesh, began the match with a balanced squad comprised from Mazin al Harrasi as a goalie.

Abdullah al Fulaiti placed in the defending line alongside to Khalid al Ghatrifi, Yousef

al Ghilani and Mohammed Abdul Hakeem.

The middle line was monitored by Said al Salami, Abdul Hafidh al Mukhaini. In the area closer to operation box, Abdul Majeed al Balushi, Nasser al Rawahi and Omar al Salti supported the striker Salim Abdul Salam who was as the striker in the forward line.

Sudan players entered the match strongly as they were

seeking for the opening goal. Al Jazooli Nooh broke the deadlock in early minutes of the first half to give his team the lead. Later on, Oman boys worked hard to score the equaliser through movements of Abdul Majeed al Balushi and Omar al Salti and Salim Abdul Salam but all the attempts did not end in the net.

In the following half, the coach Akram Habreesh did some substitutions to enter new fresh faces in the field. Oman's players focused towards the operation box of the rivals seeking for the first goal but the opponent took an advantage to snatch an essential goal and end the match at 2-0.

Syrian team defeated the Mauritanian team 4-2, the Saudi team defeated the Palestinian team 2-1, and the Algerian team beat Lebanon with two goals without a response.

Algeria will meet Saudi Arabia on Tuesday for the first match in the semifinal while Syria will meet Sudan in the other semis match on Wednesday. The final match and the third/fourth play off game will take place on Friday.

England beat Spain to win dramatic Under-21 Euro final



BATUMI: England won the under-21 European Championship for the first time since 1984 as Curtis Jones’ goal beat Spain 1-0 in Saturday’s final.

In a dramatic finale in Batumi, Spain captain Abel Ruiz had a 99th-minute penalty saved by Manchester City goalkeeper James Trafford to preserve England’s record of not conceding a goal all tournament.

“I told everyone this morning I was going to save a pen, and when it was a penalty I knew I was going to save it,” said Trafford, who has been strongly linked with a £19 million (\$24

million) move to Premier League newcomers Burnley.

“We are a very good team and we believe that no one can score against us and we showed it.”

Lee Carsley’s men won all six games in Georgia and Romania to continue a golden age for England’s youth sides.

The Three Lions are also reigning European champions at under-19 level and won the under-17 and under-20 World Cups back in 2017.

There was a hint of fortune about the only goal as the ball struck Jones from Cole Palmer’s free-kick in first-half stoppage time and looped into the far

corner. Spain did have the ball in net after the break when Ruiz headed home only to be denied by the offside flag.

The Braga striker had an even better opportunity 20 minutes from time when he headed wide with the goal gaping.

England could also have put the five-time winners away before an incredible ending as Arnau Tenas made fine saves to deny Jones and Noni Madueke a second.

But they needed Trafford to produce some heroics at the death.

He parried Ruiz’s spot-kick and a follow-up effort from

Aimar Oroz to spark wild celebrations among the England players and coaching staff.

The drama did not end there as Morgan Gibbs-White and Antonio Blanco, who had already been substituted, were both shown red cards.

Earlier, former Chelsea and Arsenal left-back Ashley Cole, who is part of the England coaching staff, had also been dismissed from the bench.

But in front of the watching Gareth Southgate, England held on to go one better than the senior side managed in losing the Euro 2020 final two years ago.

— AFP

Alcaraz survives Wimbledon test, Rybakina cruises

LONDON: Carlos Alcaraz reached the last 16 at Wimbledon on Saturday after a tough battle against Nicolas Jarry as defending women’s champion Elena Rybakina snuffed out the hopes of Britain’s final hope Katie Boulter.

Rain returned to the All England Club, meaning play on Centre Court started under the roof and later forced an early end to the action on the outside courts.

Top seed Alcaraz is seen as the biggest threat to Novak Djokovic, who is gunning for a record-equalling eighth men’s title and 24th Grand Slam crown overall.

But the Spaniard, who won the grass-court Queen’s tournament last month, was made to work hard for the win by his Chilean opponent, seeded 25th, before prevailing 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 7-5.

Alcaraz bounced back from losing his first set of the tournament to lead 2-1 but narrowly avoided going a double break down in the fourth set before rediscovering his mojo.

“I’m really happy with the level that I played to get through this really tough match,” said the relieved 20-year-old.

The US Open champion was playing his second match in two days after rain delays earlier in the week. Djokovic, by contrast, moved serenely into the last 16 late on Friday, beating Stan Wawrinka in straight sets.

Alcaraz will face big-serving Matteo Berrettini in the fourth round after the 2021 runner-up beat Alexander Zverev 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5).

Unseeded Berrettini feels he has a point to prove after missing last year’s tournament due to a bout of Covid.

“I love to play here,” said the Italian. “Last year I missed it and I still didn’t heal from that withdrawal. This tournament changed my career, my life and I’m really happy.”

- Rybakina crushes Boulter -

Last year’s surprise women’s champion Rybakina made short work of wild card Boulter, who was the only British player left in the tournament, romping to a 6-1, 6-1 win in just 57 minutes.



The Kazakh third seed had not previously hit her best form at Wimbledon but 89th-ranked Boulter had no answer to her opponent’s superior power.

Rybakina fired seven aces in her 20 winners, breaking her opponent five times.

Last year’s beaten finalist Ons Jabeur also progressed, thanking the rain for the part it played in her victory, interrupting the deciding set.

The Tunisian sixth seed lost the first set but battled back to beat Bianca Andreescu 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 and set up a last-16 clash with two-time champion Petra Kvitová.

“I’ve got to thank the rain a little bit for letting me speak to my coach and have a bit of perspective about the match,” she said. “I felt like I didn’t play my best tennis.”

Kvitová stayed on track for a third title by beating Serbian qualifier Natalija Stevanovic 6-3, 7-5 while Australian Open champion and second seed Aryna Sabalenka saw off Russia’s Anna Blinkova.

Men’s third seed Daniil Medvedev lost the first set against close friend Marton Fucsovics but recovered to win in four sets.

Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who beat Andy Murray in a five-set thriller over two days in the second round, eased past Serbia’s Laslo Djere in straight sets.

UNDERARM SURPRISE

Holger Rune saved two match points to defeat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, with the Spaniard left to regret deciding to serve underarm when he was just two points from winning.

The Danish sixth seed came through 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8) after Davidovich Fokina served underarm at 8/8 in the final-set tiebreaker.

Holger was quick to it, winning the point to go to match point, which he converted when the 31st seed netted a forehand.

“I didn’t expect the serve like that but I was fast to reach it,” said Rune after the four-hour clash.

He will face either US 10th seed Frances Tiafoe or former semi-finalist Grigor Dimitrov in the next round. — AFP

PSG sign France defender Hernandez from Bayern

PARIS: Paris St Germain have signed defender Lucas Hernandez from Bayern Munich on a five-year deal, the Ligue 1 champions said on Sunday.

The transfer fee has not been disclosed but French media reported that PSG had paid Bayern a fee of 40 million euros (\$43.87 million) plus add-ons for the 27-year-old.

“I’m really excited! I’ve been waiting to join PSG for a long time, and it’s finally happened. It’s a very special day for me and I’m very happy to be here,” Hernandez said in a statement.

Atletico Madrid, Hernandez’s



boyhood club, will also receive a significant fee, according to Spanish media reports.

The France international

made 107 appearances for the German league champions since his arrival in 2019 but played only seven league games last season after suffering a cruciate ligament rupture injury at the World Cup that kept him sidelined for the remainder of the season.

Hernandez, PSG’s fifth new signing, joins midfielders Manuel Ugarte and Lee Kang-in, central defender Milan Skriniar and forward Marco Asensio.

The club also sacked manager Christophe Galtier on Wednesday and replaced him with former Barcelona and Spain coach Luis Enrique.

— Reuters

Madushanka spearheads Sri Lanka victory over Dutch

HARARE: Sri Lanka won the duel between the two World Cup qualifiers on Sunday thrashing the Netherlands by 128 runs in the final of the tournament in Harare.

The Dutch did well to skittle the Sri Lankans out for just 233 inside 48 overs after Dutch captain Scott Edwards won the toss and put them into bat.

However, the Dutch were never in the hunt after being reduced to 39-3 — man of the match Dilshan Madushanka taking three of the wickets — as they collapsed to 105 all out in just over 23 overs.

Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood was beaming after his side achieved all the targets set for

them.

The 48-year-old Englishman said the confidence gained from the tournament would serve them well for the sport’s quadrennial showpiece which gets underway in India on October 5.

“First goal was to qualify and we did it,” he said.

“Second was winning the tournament and we have fortunately done that as well. We can go home happy.

“The confidence that we have shown in this tournament, we can take it into the World Cup.”

Edwards put the heavy defeat down to failing to cope with the Sri Lankan spinners but took



enormous pride in what they had achieved overall.

“It is obviously massive for our guys and for our supporters back home,” he said.

“The opportunity to play in a ten-team World Cup is massive for us.

“We will lap it up and hopefully put in a few good performances there (in India),” added the 26-year-old Tonga-born wicketkeeper.

It had all looked a lot rosier for the Dutch when they were in the field.

Edwards would have been especially happy with his side’s performance with the ball as Bas de Leede the star in the victory over Scotland, which clinched their World Cup spot, missed the game having returned to his English county club Durham.

Vikramjit Singh dismissed both Sri Lankan openers including the prized one of the in form Pathum

Nissanka, whose hopes of a third successive ton were dashed as he went for 23 caught by Aryan Dutt.

A fine 57 by Sahan Arahchige backed up by decent contributions from wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis (43) and Charith Asalanka (36) provided the backbone of their total.

Madushanka’s devastating spell had the Dutch reeling and opener Max O’Dowd had to watch from the other end as his partners came and went at regular intervals.

O’Dowd eventually went for a doughty 33 off 63 balls clean bowled by Maheesh Theekshana -- who cleaned up the tail and finished with 4-31. — AFP

VINGEGAARD HOLDS TOUR LEAD AS WOODS CLIMBS TO VICTORY ON VOLCANO



Michael Woods celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win stage 9. – Reuters

ORCINES: Jonas Vingegaard held on to the Tour de France overall lead on the Puy de Dome volcano on Sunday as Canada's Michael Woods took a prestigious stage win for his team.

France's Pierre Latour crossed in second place with Slovenian Matej Mohoric rounding out the podium as the attention switched to the key fight between the favourites several minutes down the steep slopes.

"I didn't think I could make it, it was so silent up there," said the 36-year-old Woods who overtook American Matteo Jorgenson in the home straight with the Movistar rider wilting.

Two-time Tour champion Tadej Pogacar launched an attack from 600m on the baking slopes but defending champion Vingegaard followed him over the summit finish line just seconds adrift.

Dane Vingegaard still leads ahead of Monday's rest day by 17 seconds as the expected fireworks never materialised on a hot July day.

An early escape raced over 16 minutes ahead of a peloton more concerned with how they could cope on the tough slopes than harbouring hopes of a win.

Pogacar was a full 8min 19sec slower than Woods at the finish of the 182km stage nine as he finished first from the main contenders. — AFP



Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates on the podium with the overall leader's yellow jersey after the 9th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 182,5 km between Saint-Leonard-de-Noblat and Puy de Dome, in the Massif Central volcanic mountains in central France, on Sunday. — AFP

Verstappen continues charge to third title at Silverstone

SILVERSTONE: Max Verstappen continued his relentless charge to a third Formula One world title on Sunday when he claimed his first British Grand Prix victory to deliver a record-equalling 11th consecutive win for his Red Bull team.

It was his sixth win in succession, his eighth in 10 races and the 43rd of his career as Red Bull matched the feat of McLaren who won 11 races in 1988.

The double world champion increased his lead ahead of team-mate Sergio Perez in the drivers' championship to 99 points.

In a race of attrition, interrupted by safety cars and influenced by tyre-wear, the Dutchman came home 3.7 seconds ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris, who held off Mercedes' seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in a thrilling finale.

Norris's McLaren team-mate Australian rookie Oscar Piastri finished fourth ahead of George Russell, Perez, two-time champion Fernand Alonso of Aston Martin and Williams' Alex Albon.



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates after winning the Formula One British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit in Silverstone, central England on Sunday. — AFP

FORMULA 1

11. British Grand Prix

Silverstone circuit

F1 23

July 9

1	Max Verstappen (NED)	1:25:16.938	Driver standings
	Red Bull		Max Verstappen (NED) 255
2	Lando Norris (GBR)	at 3.798	Sergio Perez (MEX) 156
	McLaren		Fernando Alonso (ESP) 137
3	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	at 6.783	Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 121
	Mercedes		Carlos Sainz (ESP) 83
4	Oscar Piastri (AUS)	at 7.776	Teams
	McLaren		Red Bull 411
5	George Russell (GBR)	at 11.206	Mercedes 203
	Mercedes		Aston Martin 181

AFP

Source: formula1.com

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz came home ninth and 10th, a disappointing result for the Italian team after they had started from fourth and fifth on the grid.

For Norris, who led the opening laps after beating Verstappen at the start, it was his best result since finishing second at the 2021 Italian Grand Prix

while for Hamilton, a record eight-time winner at his home race, it was a 14th British podium.

"Eleven in a row! That's pretty crazy. Well done everyone" said Verstappen.

"I was doing a bit of drifting on Thursday with marketing and today I felt like I was doing it again! We'll look into it as it wasn't very good and I had a bad

start too. Lando had a lot of pace today."

Norris was delighted. "That's pretty insane, pretty amazing!" he said. "The team did an amazing job, so big thanks to them, but the team put me on hard tyres at the pit stop. I don't know why - they're still beginners at some things!"

"They just wanted to give me a test I guess! That's what Zak (Brown, team boss)said and he probably called the shots on that one! I wanted the softs. It made more sense with the Safety Car, but I don't care. I am P2!"

Hamilton, who started his F1 career with McLaren in 2007, winning his first race with them and his first world championship, thanked the huge Silverstone crowd - estimated at 160,000 on the day and 480,000 for the weekend - for his pace and performance.

"I didn't do it," he said. "The crowd did it! A big thank you to everyone for supporting and the energy which I felt. That's the reason I got up there. Also, I want to say a big congratulations to Lando and McLaren." — AFP





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Oman exports 128 million oil barrels until end-May



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has exported a total of 128.070 million barrels of oil until end of May 2023. Oil exports accounted for 80 per cent of the total oil production in Oman, reaching 160.144 million oil barrels until end-May.

The preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the total production of crude oil increased by 0.7 per cent, to reach 125.757 million barrels while the total production of oil condensate increased by 5.6 per cent, recording 34.386 million.

The average daily production of oil is 1.060 million barrels until end of May 2023.

China topped the oil-importing countries from the Sultanate of Oman, with total exports of 117,120,500 barrels, followed by Japan with 4,783,500 barrels, then India with 2,716,200 barrels, while exports to other countries reached to 3,450,000 barrels.

On the other hand, the total domestic production and import of natural gas

CHINA TOPPED THE OIL-IMPORTING COUNTRIES FROM THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, WITH TOTAL EXPORTS OF 117,120,500 BARRELS, FOLLOWED BY JAPAN WITH 4,783,500 BARRELS, THEN INDIA WITH 2,716,200 BARRELS

reached to 21,833,100,000 cubic metres until end May 2023, an increase of 3.9 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, with 214,900,000 cubic metres.

The statistics showed that industrial projects accounted for 60.2 per cent of the uses of natural gas in the Sultanate of Oman until end May 2023, as uses for industrial projects amounted to 13,163,100,000 cubic metres.

The total use of natural gas for: oil fields 5,580,500,000 cubic metres, power plants 2,977,700,000 cubic metres, and industrial areas 111,800,000 cubic metres. The non-associated production of natural gas, including import, amounted to 17,469,900,000 cubic metres, while the associated production amounted to 4,363,100,000 cubic metres. — ONA

RO 85 million Barka-Suhar water transmission project 94% complete



MUSCAT: Work is underway on the strategic project to enhance the water transmission system between the Wilayats of Barka and Sohar, with completion reaching 94% and with a total cost of RO 85 million.

The project is considered one of the large and vital projects that are being implemented by Nama Water Services Company and is expected to feed all the wilayats of both South Al Batinah and North Al Batinah governorates

The project includes the construction of water tanks with a total storage capacity of 88,000 cubic meters, as well as the construction of five water pumping stations. The project is expected to be operational during the last quarter of 2023.

The scope of work for the project includes the implementation of all civil, mechanical and electrical works and control and monitoring systems, which include the construction of a pumping station with four pumps, each with a capacity of 3970 cubic meters per hour, from the new water pumping station in Barka towards the main reservoirs in the Oman Logistics Zone.

Moreover, the project comprises constructing a water transmission line with a diameter of 1800 mm and a length of 20 km from the water pumping station in Barka to the reservoirs of the Oman Logistics Area, as well as constructing a water transmission line with a diameter of 800 mm and a length of 900 meters linking the existing water transmission line in Barka with the existing Barka reservoir.

A new water reservoir capacity will be set up (50,000 cubic meters), in addition to a water pumping station with four pumps, each with a capacity of 3295 cubic meters per hour, to pump water towards the Al Suwaiq, Al Musannah and Al Hazm reservoirs.

Furthermore, three pumps, each with a capacity of 746 cubic meters / hour, will be installed to pump water towards the existing new Barka reservoir feeding the Wilayat of Wadi Al Maawil and Nakhal through the construction of a water transmission line with a diameter of 600 mm and a length of 800 meters from the water pumping station in the Oman Logistics Area.

Nama Water Services works to enhance water security by enhancing water production from the desalination plants and linking them to an integrated transmission system, enhancing interconnection between desalination plants and expanding service through extending water networks to meet the increasing demand for water. — ONA

Oman’s airport cities to unlock new investment opportunities

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 9

Plans are afoot to offer land available around airports in the Sultanate of Oman for investment and development to serve as new catalysts for socioeconomic growth, a key official has revealed.

Aimen bin Ahmed al Hosni, CEO – Oman Airports Group, said the initiative will help unlock new synergies for investment linked to their proximity to well-established seaports and logistics infrastructure.

“We have a new initiative to open up real estate development areas around the airports (similar

to) airport cities and city airports. What we are actually trying to do is build the city around all the airports that we have, to complement – and not compete – the city. The airports that we have selected in Oman (for this initiative) are near the seaports which we hope to leverage and complement each other to support sea-air cargo and vice versa.”

Speaking at a key conference on Wednesday, hosted by Bloomberg on the theme, ‘Foreign Direct Investment: Scaling New Heights’, Al Hosni said the presence of seaports within easy proximity of airports in Suhar, Salalah and Duqm boded well for the establishment of airport city



developments.

He credited the “wise vision” of Oman’s planning authorities for introducing this airport-seaport combination in major cities, thereby creating a “competitive

advantage” that the aviation sector now seeks to exploit.

Last year, Royal Decree 10/2022 promulgated a law establishing free zone developments at Muscat, Suhar and Salalah airports under the overall administrative auspices of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

Earlier this week, state-owned end-to-end transport and logistics group Asyad was granted a 50-year extension of its concession to operate the Free Zone at Muscat International Airport.

In his talk, Al Hosni also underlined the importance of Oman’s airports as drivers of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows. More than \$3 billion has been invested in the development of Oman’s airport infrastructure, he said.

“We have state-of-the-art buildings with Code F runways at all seven airports operated by Oman Airports. These investments by the government give Oman added competitiveness and connectivity with the rest of the world. And we make sure we welcome our guests in the best manner,” he stated.

Participating in the panel discussion alongside Al Hosni were Hashil al Mahrouqi, CEO – Omran Group, and Abdulrahman Nasser, Chief Commercial Officer – Oman Air.

Al Mouj Marina and United Finance announce new boat financing partnership

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Marina signed an agreement with United Finance for Oman’s leading finance and leasing services company to provide financing solutions for boat purchases at Al Mouj Muscat’s Gold Anchor marina.

The new partnership will make the process of boat ownership easier and more straightforward. Al Mouj Marina is one of Al Mouj Muscat’s prime leisure attractions and this latest initiative adds to the variety of bespoke boat ownership services already in place such as helping to find the right boat, arranging certification and insurance and providing advice and direction on general maintenance as well as water safety.

Through the new arrangement, anyone looking to buy a boat can benefit from United Finance’s attractive borrowing rates and the convenience of a single point of contact in place to help streamline



the process towards securing finance.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said: “Al Mouj Marina is a world-class amenity enjoyed by residents, visitors and tourists all year round and for boat owners and lovers of

the ocean it is where life can be lived and enjoyed at its very best.

“Al Mouj Muscat is proud of this new partnership which demonstrates our on-going commitment to providing services our community will value and is another way of opening up our

marina to more people so they may embrace the opportunity to sail in crystal clear water off the shores of our beautiful country.”

The agreement comes at a time when 33 more berths have been added to the world-class harbour which can accommodate vessels

of between 10 and 40 metres in length and where moorings include a number of benefits from 24-hour assistance and security to ample car parking and a boat fuelling station, changing rooms and shower facilities and an excellent on-water lounge.

United Finance was established in 1997 and commenting on the new collaboration, its CEO Nasser bin Salim bin Said al Rashdi says: “We are pleased to be working with Al Mouj Marina and as a non-banking financier, we are always looking to broaden our offer to customers which includes making financing and loans readily available to a wider group of people and to support different types of purchases.

It is particularly gratifying to know that through this new service we will be helping sailing enthusiasts to buy the boat they have probably always dreamed of.”

Al Ahlia Insurance introduces rewards programme for customers



MUSCAT: Committed to offer an exceptional insurance experience, Al Ahlia Insurance has introduced a wide range of special benefits and exclusive rewards for its loyal customers through the ‘Al Ahlia Rewards Programme’. These privileges are specially designed for Al Ahlia motor insurance policyholders to meet their aspirations and ever-changing needs.

As an Al Ahlia Insurance policyholder, customers receive superior discounts from the top brands, including discounts of up to 50% on a range of services offered by 360 Degree Care, upto 25% off on all Kitchenware equipment from any Toleen Kitchens branches, in addition to discounts ranging from 25% to 50% that can be redeemed at Dubai Optical.

By purchasing a motor insurance policy from Al Ahlia, customers will also receive exclusive benefits from Padel Avenue, where they can enjoy a one-hour free court booking on the first booking, and 1 RO off from the regular court booking rates for subsequent bookings.

Customers can also get a free vehicle checkup from ‘Abeer Garage (Wadi Kabir), Khimji Ramdas Garage (Ghala), and Ali Moosa Garage (Suhar).

Existing and new customers can enjoy these discounts instantly, as well as getting more benefits from any additional partners that Al Ahlia Insurance adds in the insurance period of their policy.

Commenting on the company’s efforts in delivering the best services and benefits, Bader al Lawati, Head of Digital and Marketing Communications at Al Ahlia said, “At Al Ahlia Insurance, we believe in providing an insurance policy that brings value to our customers.

We are proud to present Al Ahlia Rewards Programme, designed to give valuable discounts that exceed the value of the policy.

This programme comes as part of our dedication to focus on the company’s strategic objective of ‘customer first’ approach, while placing an emphasis on offering various rewards across multiple segments to serve our customers.”

“We are continuously expanding our rewards network to enable our customers to have access to even more rewards partners in the future. All our customers, whether new or existing customer, will always benefit from our programme as it grows and evolves. We have always been keen to gain our customers’ trust by placing them at the forefront of our priorities and delivering the real value to our customers’ journey,” he further added.

Bank Muscat offers a range of fund transfer options that are easy, fast and safe

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, is always keen to provide the latest features and services for an excellent banking experience and enable the completion of banking transactions from anywhere and anytime.

The bank is continuously working on updating its Digital platforms, as it allows customers to easily transfer money whether through Mobile Banking, Internet banking or the BM Remit App.

Also, the bank customers can benefit from money transfer services within the Sultanate of Oman through a wide network of more than 820 ATMs and CDMs across the Sultanate of Oman, knowing that fund transfers within the bank are completely free of charge.

In addition to transferring funds within Bank Muscat, customers can also transfer funds to accounts at other banks in Oman as well as in selected international currencies to about 70 countries around the world quickly and securely via the



SWIFT network. Additionally, customers can make Speed Transfers to bank accounts in India, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Egypt and Bangladesh.

Facility is also provided to make transfers to mobile wallets in Bangladesh as well as 16 Pakistan mobile wallet service providers, which certainly enhances customer experience in transferring funds easily and conveniently.

To further enhance the banking experience for customers, Bank Muscat also provides the facility to carry out Fund Transfers and Payments using Mobile Payments.

To do this, customers can just enter the mobile number, Alias or scan the QR code of the recipient. Payments to merchants can be made by scanning a dynamic QR code from a POS device or a static code available with the merchant.

Sohar International recognised as ‘Fastest Growing Retail Banking Bank Oman 2023’

MUSCAT: Recording commendable progress in the past year and staying committed to its growth trajectory, Sohar International has been awarded the ‘Fastest Growing Retail Banking Bank Oman 2023’ Award from the World Business Outlook Awards for its strong financial figures, exceptional performance, expanding customer base, innovative products and services, advanced digitalisation strategies, and unwavering commitment to customer-centricity.

Commenting on receiving the award, Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Sohar International, said, “In a dynamically evolving market, customer trust and loyalty become unique competitive advantages — ones that Sohar International has been able to leverage. This award is a testament to the same.

While focusing on attaining sustainable growth for our retail segment, we continue to adopt a customer-centric approach, enhance the digital experience for our clients, innovate our portfolio, and customise our offerings according to customer needs.

Through these strategies, Sohar International will remain steadfast in delivering an elevated retail banking experience.” Sohar International has achieved



remarkable success by prioritising service excellence and unwavering customer focus in an era of rapid digitalisation and innovation.

Through agility, creativity, and a relentless commitment to delivering exceptional experiences, the bank has emerged as a leader in transformation, offering unique propositions that enhance the lives of its customers.

The bank designs impactful experiences tailored to deliver superior customer satisfaction by cultivating strong relationships and understanding customer priorities.

The bank has also created comprehensive financial solutions

and a curated ecosystem of services, empowering customers at every stage of their lifestyles and lifecycles.

By embracing technological advancements and aligning with customer needs, Sohar International continues to progress as a forward-thinking bank, serving its customers with utmost dedication. Al Hedaifi added, saying, “Winning this award isn’t a culmination of our efforts — it is a source of inspiration to push the boundaries and set new benchmarks.

As an established leader in retail banking in the Sultanate of Oman, Sohar International, while charting new avenues for growth, will pioneer new developments in the banking industry and aid in the socio-economic progress of the nation.”

The awards, organised by World Business, place a strong emphasis on industry mastery, leadership capabilities, industry value or net worth, impeccable strategies for success, and potential on an international forum.

Each company is analysed on several parameters by an expert panel that undertakes rigorous research and data findings. The bank received the prestigious award.

BankDhofar inaugurates new branch in Khasab

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy — Governor of Musandam, and the presence of Abdul Hakeem bin Omar al Ojaili, CEO of BankDhofar, a new BankDhofar branch was inaugurated in Khasab, Oman. The opening ceremony was attended by esteemed guests, dignitaries, and senior officials marking another significant milestone in the bank’s commitment to providing convenient and accessible banking services to customers across the country.

BankDhofar has consistently demonstrated its dedication to



enhancing its services and reach, aligning with the Oman Vision

2040 for economic growth and financial inclusivity.

The new branch in Khasab reflects the bank’s strategy to expand its presence in key regions, bringing its comprehensive range of banking products and services closer to customers in Musandam.

As part of BankDhofar’s commitment to delivering exceptional customer experiences, the new branch in Khasab offers a full suite of banking services with experienced branch staff who are well-equipped to provide expert advice and assistance tailored to customers’ needs.

Speaking at the opening ceremony Abdul Hakeem bin

Omar al Ojaili, Chief Executive Officer of BankDhofar, emphasised on the bank’s commitment to contributing to the socioeconomic development of the region and empowering individuals and businesses with innovative financial solutions.

BankDhofar’s 96th branch in Khasab is open to serve customers and extend the bank’s support to the local community. Customers can visit the branch during its operating hours and explore the comprehensive range of banking solutions tailored to their financial goals.



Over 3,000 SMEs to benefit from OPAZ fee reductions

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JULY 9

Around 3,260 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) stand to benefit from last week's decision by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) setting fees for services provided under its jurisdiction.

SMEs will be eligible to 50 per cent fee reductions when the new measure comes into effect on August 1, 2023

In addition to the fee discounts, SMEs will also receive facilities for existing projects. For example, the cost of tourist permits has been reduced by 35%, from RO 5,000 to RO 3,000, for a period of five years. Investors can also choose the duration of their electronic licenses.



In total, OPAZ has identified 81 services that will have their fees

reduced by 50%. The fees of six other services have been cancelled

altogether, and 34 services have been merged with other services.

This brings the total number of services down from 101 to 61.

Additionally, six new services have been added. The duration of licenses and permits has also been increased from one year to three to five years. Licensing certificates and forms have been reduced from 101 to 36 certificates and 50 application forms each.

All of these certificates and permits will now be issued electronically. OPAZ says that the goal of this decision is to achieve stability, improve the business environment, and enhance economic competitiveness in the areas it supervises.

The authority believes that this decision will help to increase investments and SMEs in these

regions, and will also help to integrate them with current and future projects.

Ultimately, OPAZ hopes that this decision will help to achieve sustainable development in the special economic zones and free zones. OPAZ regularly reviews fees for services and activities provided in its affiliated areas. It makes adjustments as needed to develop the business environment and ensure the stability of projects.

The authority also seeks to achieve a balance between fees and quality of services, and to ensure that service fees are credible and transparent. Finally, OPAZ aims to provide comprehensive and accurate information to investors about applicable policies, procedures, and fees.

CMA suspends OIFC's merger decision



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 9

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued a decision to suspend the implementation of the resolutions made during the Extraordinary General Meeting of Oman Investment and Finance Company LLC (OIFC) held on June 21, 2023.

These resolutions involved the merger of OIFC with Dhofar International Development and Investment Holding Company through consolidation.

The suspension was prompted by objections raised by a group of shareholders who collectively own more than 5 per cent of the company's shares. The CMA, after careful evaluation of the objections and resolutions, issued Decision 46/2023 on July 9, 2023, to temporarily

suspend the decisions made during the Extraordinary General Meeting.

According to the Commercial Companies Law, the interested parties must now file a lawsuit with the appropriate court within five working days to request the annulment of the decisions.

Failure to do so, while notifying the competent authority, will render the suspension decision null and void.

The CMA has reiterated its commitment to protecting the interests of small shareholders and ensuring a safe investment environment within the companies under its supervision.

The regulatory framework governing the capital market aims to safeguard the rights of all stakeholders involved in stock exchange transactions.

Business leaders left in limbo by rate hike impact lag

AIX-EN-PROVENCE: An unusually long lag in the time interest rate hikes are taking to feed through to the economy has left corporate leaders guessing whether to prepare for a hard or soft landing.

Although central banks in the United States and Europe have raised interest rates at the fastest pace in decades in an effort to tame inflation, most economies have so far escaped the painful recessions triggered by previous tightening cycles.

For corporate leaders at a weekend economics conference in the southern French town of Aix-en-Provence, that delay has left them questioning when and how much higher borrowing costs will affect them, especially if central banks keep hiking.

"There's no real consensus at the moment about the increase in interest rates among economic actors," Jeremie Delecourt, chief operating officer at French private equity fund Ardian, said.

"The fact everyone is asking the question is interesting, there are those who are optimistic and others who are pessimistic," he added.

In the euro zone, the peak is near after a combined 4 percentage points rise in the past year, ECB



policymaker and French central bank governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau said on a panel at the conference.

But he also said that rates would be left high for as long as necessary to ensure that inflation is headed back to the European Central Bank's 2 per cent target by 2025.

The ECB raised interest rates to their highest level in 22 years last month and promised another hike this month, with possibly another in September.

Jean-Louis Giredolle, head Lazard in France, told a panel that there was a danger central banks would fight inflation with the same zeal they fought deflation

and go too far.

"The scenario that I fear is that we get the landing wrong, the opposite of 'whatever it takes', the of investment bank head said, referring to former ECB president Mario Draghi's 2012 pledge to steer the euro zone through its debt crisis.

The full impact of rate hikes is taking more time than usual because many households and companies entered the new era of higher borrowing costs with solid cash levels, the result of strong savings during the pandemic.

Additionally, labour markets are strong on both sides of the Atlantic and corporate profits

have so far held up, while housing markets are generally cooling but not in a tailspin.

"The transmission (of monetary policy) is coming late, but it's going to bite, I would say towards the end of this year," said Aylin Somersan Coqui, head of German export credit insurer Allianz Trade.

The pinch from higher borrowing costs would come just as corporate profits and the broader economy starts to falter, while elections in many countries next year would make it hard for governments to help struggling firms, she added.

"I see quite a bit of optimism in the short term, but I see a lot of downside risks if there is a policy mistake, especially from the central banks," she added.

Though corporate defaults are on the rise in many countries they remain below pre-pandemic levels as many firms' debt is in cheap, fixed-rate loans taken out when rates were ultra low.

While refinancing at much higher levels in the coming months could be a challenge for the weakest balance sheets, the increase in borrowing costs would come gradually for most firms, said Daniel Barneix, head of AFTE association for French corporate treasurers. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING

China sets rules for \$2.9 tn in investment funds

China published regulations on Sunday for the country's \$2.9 trillion private investment fund sector, seeking to better protect investors and promote innovation.

The new rules, signed by Premier Li Qiang and effective on September 1, create a chapter specifically for venture capital funds, as policymakers encourage investment into innovative technology start-ups, said a statement from China's securities regulator and the justice ministry.

The statement addressed media questions on the new rules. The wide-ranging rules apply to private investment funds with



different organisational forms such as contract, company and partnership.

Private investment funds in China can invest in private equity or publicly traded securities. Core rules cover the obligations of fund managers and custodians, fund raising, identifying risk levels, supervision of venture capital funds, and overall supervision and management. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON

Fed interest-rate hike seen a lock for July

The Federal Reserve will likely raise its benchmark interest rate later this month to a 5.25%-5.5% range, traders bet on Friday, even as they priced in a slightly lower chance of any further increase after a government report showed hiring slowed more than expected in June.

Traders now see about a 20% chance of a rate hike in September and a 40% chance of one by November, after what is nearly universally expected to be a quarter-point increase at the US central bank's late-July meeting.

Before the Labour Department report, they had seen a nearly even chance that rates would



get to a 5.5%-5.75% range by November.

The report, which showed employers hired 209,000 workers last month, is "consistent with steady and gradual slowing of the labour market," wrote analyst Karim Basta. While that's not enough to dissuade the Fed a July rate hike, he said, an increase in September is "very much an open question." — **Reuters**

MEXICO CITY

Pemex fire loss reaches 700,000 barrels of oil

Mexican oil company Pemex estimates that a deadly fire on a major offshore platform off the southern edge of the Gulf of Mexico has led to the loss of 700,000 barrels of crude oil production so far, while one person remains missing, the CEO of the state company, Octavio Romero, said on Saturday.

The fire started early on Friday on the Nohoch-A link platform of the company's Cantarell Field and later moved to a compression complex, killing two people.

The fire has since been controlled, the company said. "Today, 700,000 barrels of losses have been reflected (...) because we closed practically all the wells



in the area," Romero said via the company's Twitter account.

As of Saturday afternoon, 600,000 barrels of production had resumed, the executive added. The company said that searchers were still looking for the person who disappeared after the fire in Cantarell, an emblematic asset that produces some 170,000 barrels of oil per day. — **Reuters**

Accelerating growth: A guide to growth hacking for entrepreneurs and startups



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

Hello esteemed readers. Our exploration today dives into the compelling world of ‘growth hacking’, a concept that has created waves in the startup and entrepreneurial landscape.

Ever wondered how certain businesses rocket from relative obscurity to becoming household names in a remarkably short span? The key often lies in the strategic implementation of growth hacking.

Unravelling growth hacking

Growth hacking is a potent, budget-friendly marketing strategy primarily used by startups yearning for rapid growth within a compressed timeframe and budget.

The term, first introduced by Sean Ellis in 2010, defines a ‘growth hacker’ as someone whose “true north” is growth, succinctly capturing the ethos of growth

hacking—it’s about embracing unconventional, creative strategies to spur exponential business growth.

The essence of growth hacking

The strength of growth hacking lies in its emphasis on speed, flexibility, and creativity. Unlike traditional marketing that aims to enhance brand visibility, boost sales, and nurture customer loyalty, growth hacking focuses exclusively on growth.

It involves swift experimentation, testing, and fine-tuning of marketing techniques, all underpinned by data and innovation. This strategic approach can be transformative for startups aiming for exponential growth with a limited budget.

Proven growth hacking strategies

Growth hacking requires innovation, resilience, and an openness to take calculated risks. However, there are proven

strategies that can provide a roadmap for your growth hacking journey:

- 1. Product-Market Fit:** The first step towards successful growth hacking involves ensuring your product meets customer needs and taps into a substantial market demand.
- 2. Viral Acquisition:** Leverage your existing user base to spread the word about your product. Creating a viral referral system can trigger exponential user growth with minimal financial investment.
- 3. Data-Driven Decisions:** Harness the power of analytics to understand user behaviour, guide product development, and fine-tune your growth strategies.

Case Study: LinkedIn

LinkedIn, the global professional networking platform, offers an excellent example of growth hacking. In its early years, LinkedIn was struggling to attract

a significant number of users. In response to this challenge, they introduced the “public profile” feature that allowed users to have a public, searchable profile that served as a digital resume. This feature caused LinkedIn profiles to rank high in search engine results, driving an influx of new users.

Additionally, LinkedIn leveraged a unique approach by focusing on “networking gaps.” Users were incentivised to invite their contacts to join the platform to fill these gaps, leading to a significant increase in user registrations. Within a short span, LinkedIn’s user base expanded dramatically, marking a major victory for their growth hacking efforts.

Conclusion

In essence, growth hacking is a powerful tool in the hands of startups and entrepreneurs seeking rapid business expansion. It demands inventiveness,

data-driven decision-making, and a culture of constant experimentation. When executed adeptly, growth hacking can lead to phenomenal growth rates, propelling a startup from obscurity into the industry’s limelight.

As we conclude this series of five articles, each designed to arm entrepreneurs and startups with essential business knowledge, remember that the journey of learning never ceases. There’s always more to discover, more to understand, and more to apply.

Your relentless curiosity and unquenchable thirst for knowledge can be your most steadfast companions on the path to success. Thank you for your time and engagement with this series. We hope these insights will prove invaluable and practical in your entrepreneurial pursuits. Stay tuned for more illuminating insights, keep learning, and keep scaling new heights!

EU adds aluminium to its critical raw materials list

ANDY HOME

European Union (EU) countries have added aluminium to the list of minerals and metals covered by the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA).

The Act is the centrepiece of the EU’s strategy for ensuring it has the necessary inputs to compete with the United States and China in the global race to decarbonise.

The initial omission of aluminium from the CRMA was greeted with outrage from parts of the industry, the Federation of Aluminium Consumers in Europe lambasting EU policy-makers for “doing the opposite of what should be done”.

The last-minute inclusion of the metal, together with its upstream feeds of bauxite and alumina, attests both to the criticality of aluminium to the green revolution and Europe’s increasingly precarious security of supply.

Aluminium is already the second most widely used metal in modern society after steel thanks to its high strength-to-weight ratio.

Usage is expected to grow strongly over the coming years as the energy transition gathers pace.

The World Bank has identified aluminium as a “high-impact” and “cross-cutting” metal in all existing and potential green energy technologies from solar to geothermal.

Moreover, aluminium will play an important role in light-weighting electric vehicles, allowing automakers to get more mileage out of lithium-ion batteries.

Global demand is forecast by the International Aluminium Institute (IAI) to increase by almost 40 per cent to 119.5 million metric tonnes by 2030, meaning the aluminium sector needs to produce an extra 33.3 million metric tonnes of metal over the decade.

As things stand, Europe is going to struggle to lift primary production at all over that time-frame. Western European production has been sliding steadily over the last 15 years with run-rates dropping from over 4.5 million metric tonnes to a current 2.7 million.

The sector has been squeezed between high European energy prices and years of high Chinese exports, largely in the form of semi-fabricated products.

Aluminium smelters consume a lot of power and the sector has taken another hit from the energy crunch that has followed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Europe lost another 850,000 tonnes of primary smelter capacity between October 2021 and March 2022, according to the EU.

Some, such as Alcoa’s Spanish plant, will return after new, lower-carbon power supplies are secured. Some may well never return.

European aluminium consumption averaged just over 5.0 million metric tonnes per year over the 2016-2020 period, according to the EU.

Import reliance averaged 56 per cent over the same period, which is much lower than the bloc’s 89 per cent import reliance for bauxite and probably the reason why EU planners didn’t originally include aluminium in the CRMA.

However, the key difference is where Europe sources its bauxite and primary aluminium. — Reuters

Why China has a giant pile of debt



KEITH BRADSHER

The author is the Pulitzer Prize-winning Beijing bureau chief for The New York Times.

China, which has lent nearly \$1 trillion to some 150 developing countries, has been reluctant to cancel large debts owed by countries struggling to make ends meet. That is at least in part because China is facing a debt bomb at home: trillions of dollars owed by local governments, their mostly off-the-books financial affiliates, and real estate developers.

One of the main issues for Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen during her visit to Beijing this week is whether she can persuade China to cooperate more to address an evolving debt crisis facing lower-income countries.

But China’s state-controlled banking system is wary of accepting losses on foreign loans when it faces far greater losses on loans within China.

How much debt does China have?

It’s hard to know exactly because official data is scant. Researchers at JPMorgan Chase calculated last month that overall debt within China — including households, companies and the government — had reached 282% of the country’s annual economic output. That compares with an average of 256% in developed economies around the world and 257% in the United States.

What distinguishes China from most other countries is how fast that debt has accumulated relative to the size of its economy. By comparison, in the United States or even deeply indebted Japan, debt has risen less precipitously.

The steep increase in China’s debt, more than doubling compared



Chinese construction workers walk home from work at a development site in Colombo, Sri Lanka. — The New York Times

with the size of its economy since the global financial crisis 15 years ago, makes managing it harder.

China’s lending to developing countries is small relative to its domestic debt, representing less than 6% of China’s annual economic output.

But these loans are particularly sensitive politically. Despite heavy censorship, periodic complaints emerge on Chinese social media that banks should have lent the money to poor households and regions at home, not abroad. Accepting heavy losses on these loans would be very unpopular within China.

How did China get into such a deep debt hole?

It started with real estate, which suffers from overbuilding, falling prices and beleaguered potential buyers. In the past two years, several dozen real estate developers that borrowed money from overseas investors have defaulted on those debts, including two more in recent days.

Developers have struggled to continue paying far larger debts to banks inside China.

Compounding the problem has been borrowing by local governments. Over the past decade,

many cities and provinces set up special financing units that were lightly regulated and borrowed heavily. Officials used the money to cover daily expenses, including the interest on other loans, as well as the construction of roads, bridges, public parks and other infrastructure.

The real estate and government debt problems overlap. For many years, the main source of revenue for localities came from the sale to developers of long-term leases for state land. As many private-sector developers have run out of money to bid for land, this revenue has fallen.

The local financing affiliates have instead done the heavy borrowing to buy the land that such developers could no longer afford, at steep prices. As the real estate market continues to weaken, many of these financing affiliates are in trouble.

That debt has piled up. Fitch Ratings, the credit rating agency, estimates that local governments have debts equal to about 30% of China’s annual economic output.

Their affiliated financing units owe debt equal to an additional 40% to 50% of national output — although there may be some double-counting as local governments

borrow and then shift the debt to their financing units, Fitch said.

Why does this matter?

For any government or business, borrowing can make good economic sense if the money is used productively and efficiently. But borrowers who binge on debt that doesn’t generate sufficient returns can get into trouble and struggle to repay their lenders.

That’s what has happened in China. As its economy slows, a growing number of local governments and their financing units are unable to keep paying interest on their debts.

The ripple effect means many localities lack money to pay for public services, health care or pensions.

Debt troubles have also made it hard for banks in China to accept losses on their loans to lower-income countries. Yet many of these countries, like Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Suriname, now face considerable economic difficulties.

Almost two-thirds of the world’s developing economies depend on commodity exports. The World Bank forecast in April that commodity prices will be 21% lower this year than last year.

— The New York Times

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Hamoud bin Almuzai, and bin Khalifa bin Almuzai, took the oath of office at Al Rashid Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

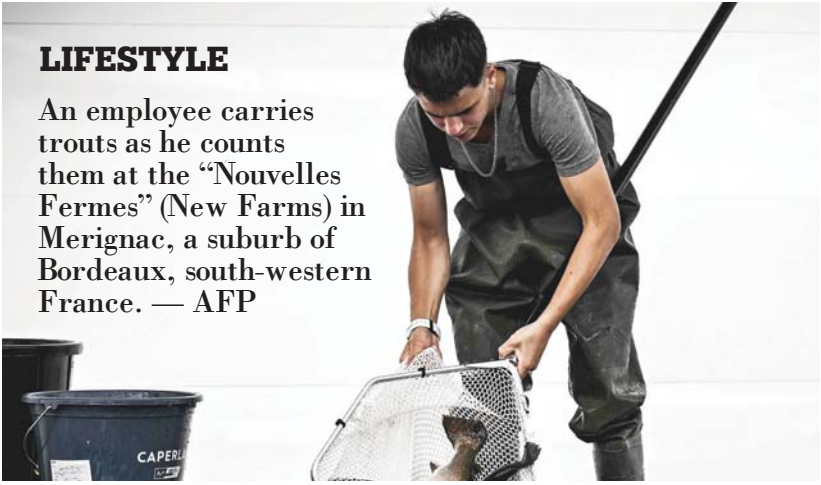
NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and to commemorate the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamed al Wubshi, who stepped his car to scare away a group of people at a highway in Sohar. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his view, Hamed said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4



LIFESTYLE

An employee carries trouts as he counts them at the “Nouvelles Fermes” (New Farms) in Merignac, a suburb of Bordeaux, south-western France. — AFP



CULTURE

A participant wears a Latvian folk crown during the Grand Finale Concert ‘Upward Together’ dress rehearsal as part of the Latvian XXVII Nationwide Song and XVII Dance Festival at the Mezaparks open-air stage in Riga, Latvia. — AFP



FILM

Iranian-British film director Babak Jalali delivers his speech after having been awarded with the Crystal Globe for best director for the film ‘Fremont’ during the closing ceremony at the 57th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF) in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by Gaurav Gupta during the Women’s Haute-Couture Fall/Winter 2023/2024 Fashion Week in Paris. — AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

A brown bear (Ursus arctos) looks for food in the Finnish taiga in Hukka jarvi area, Eastern Finland near Russian border. — AFP

art & life

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Addressing the needs of van life enthusiasts in Oman

Mohammed al Rashdi established Van Life Oman in 2019, a company that has gained prominence as one of the companies that specialise in renting, adjusting, and customising vans to suit a traveller's needs



ENTERTAINMENT

Bob Marley: One Love' trailer explores highs and lows of Reggae icon

A TRAILER RELEASED for the upcoming Bob Marley biopic looks at the highs and lows of the Jamaican singer's turbulent and short life. The reggae musician — who had hits including “I Shot The Sheriff” and “Buffalo Soldier” — died aged 36 in 1981, and is being portrayed in “Bob Marley: One Love” by British actor Kingsley Ben-Adir. The movie was filmed in England and Jamaica and is directed by King Richard film-maker Reinaldo Marcus Green.

It also stars “No Time To Die” star Lashana Lynch as the singer's wife Rita Marley, also a musician, and “Happy Valley” actor James Norton. In the teaser, released on Thursday, Ben-Adir is seen with Marley's dreadlocks speaking about reggae as a “people music” and playing to adoring crowds at the height of his fame. There is then a warning of a war coming before the clip depicts the assassination attempt on Marley in 1976 at his home in Kingston. A few days after the shooting,



Marley played the Smile Jamaica Concert, organised to defuse political tensions in the country. Ben-Adir, 37 — who has also portrayed Malcolm X in One Night In Miami... and stars in new Marvel series Secret Invasion — is seen saying: “My life is not important to me, my life is for people.”

The end of the teaser is interspersed with clips of Marley on stage, sitting with adoring fans, walking through riots, surrounded by police and in front of cheering crowds getting on a plane. Ben-Adir then says: “One love, one heart, one destiny,” referencing Marley's 1965 hit “One Love,”

which forms part of the film's name. Other Marley songs such as “Jamming” and “Exodus” also feature, and the film has been approved by the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee's family. His son Ziggy Marley, a musician and eight-time Grammy win-

ner, said in a statement on Instagram: “You've heard the music and you think you know the man but do you really understand what he went through and what moments shaped him into the person he became.” “Authenticity fills the screen with numerous Jamaican actors doing us proud in representing the culture.” Born in the rural Jamaican parish of Saint Ann in 1945, Marley moved with his mother to the poor neighbourhood of Trenchtown after his father died. In the early 1960s, he began recording music and became a Rastafarian — a religious group and social movement. Bob Marley And The Wailers had international success with “No Woman No Cry” and became not just a musician but a motivator for peace in his country. While touring, his cancer spread throughout his body and he died on May 11, 1981 and his posthumously released 1984 record “Legend” became one of the biggest selling albums of all time and spent 12 weeks topping the UK charts. “Bob Marley: One Love” is set for release next year. — PA Media/dpa



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Customising vans to fit a traveller's needs

By Esraa al Saadi

Van life in Oman not only allows travellers to explore nature but also provides an opportunity to immerse themselves in the country's rich cultural tapestry. Oman's diverse landscape offers an ever-changing canvas of natural wonders. Along the coastal regions, van lifers can park their homes on pristine beaches, waking up to the rhythmic sound of waves and exploring turquoise waters. One of the greatest advantages of van life in Oman is the ability to unlock the country's hidden gems. Unlike traditional travel itineraries, van lifers have the luxury of exploring off-the-beaten-path destinations and stumbling upon remarkable sites that are often missed by conventional tourists. Whether it's discovering hidden wadis (dry riverbeds) like Wadi Shab or camping under the starlit skies of Jebel Shams, van lifers in Oman can experience the country's untouched beauty from a unique perspective. Understanding the growing need and the emerging trends of travellers to the Sultanate of Oman, Mohammed al Rashdi decided to venture into this territory, hoping to create a different experience for a particular segment of society that might be new to Oman but has long been adored in Europe and the Americas. Al Rashdi established Van Life Oman in 2019, a company that has gained prominence as one of the companies that specialise in renting, adjusting, and customising vans to suit a traveller's needs. Mohammed shared that it all started as an idea, but slowly he worked his way to making it a reality. When he customised his first van, it was very limited, and he didn't have the right machines. "I learned fast that I needed to invest in cutting and welding machines, which are



essential when making customisations for a van," he shared. Having understood what he needed, he decided to open his own workshop that would enable him to work in a comfortable environment. His first workshop was located in Al Maabala Industrial Area, but as he added more specialists to the team like mechanics, carpenters, and electricians, he eventually moved his operations to Barka Industrial Area. "This project requires passion and dedication. There aren't a lot of companies in Oman that do this kind of thing, so we have to learn on our own and understand what is needed for our business," he shared. The company utilises both technology and brilliance in producing practical vans. For instance, it uses certain tech-

nologies to reduce water and electricity consumption, operates caravans efficiently using the solar system, and designs the vans in a way that makes use of the spaces as much as possible. The costs of Van Life Oman caravan designing services can vary from R03,500 to R07,000 or more, depending on the size of the van, the internal design, and the qualities and features the customer desires. Mohammed shared that there have been a few obstacles they have encountered, such as the lack of capital, the novelty of the project's idea to society, the competition between them and international companies, and the challenges of incorporating new technologies. However, he asserts that they have overcome most of those obstacles and gained a respectable and trustworthy reputation in the market. Mohammed claims that Van Life Oman's team not only aims to please their customers by fulfilling their needs but also provides them with more than they expected or imagined. As van life gains momentum as a top activity in Oman, Mohammed shared that they find satisfaction in being able to provide an option for those seeking to enjoy the country differently. Whether cruising along the coastline or navigating through the majestic mountains, Oman is the perfect location to unlock the spirit of adventure and savour the freedom of van life.

HERITAGE

Dutch to return colonial treasures to Indonesia, S.Lanka

THE NETHERLANDS SAID on Thursday it will hand back hundreds of colonial-era artifacts to Indonesia and Sri Lanka, including a haul of treasure and a gem-encrusted bronze cannon. The decision to return some 478 objects followed recommendations by a government-appointed commission last year looking into illegal Dutch colonial acquisitions now being displayed in museums in the Netherlands. "These recommendations are a milestone in dealing with collections from a colonial context," said Gunay Uslu, Dutch Deputy Minister for Culture, Education and Science. The commission was set up after a request by Indonesia for the return of some art pieces and natural history collections by its former colonial ruler



the Netherlands. Some of the items to be handed back include the so-called "Lombok treasure" of hundreds of golden and silver objects, looted by the Dutch colonial army after capturing the Cakranegara palace on Indonesia's Lombok island in 1894. It also included a bronze cannon decorated with silver, gold and precious gems including rubies. The 18th-century "Lewke's cannon" is believed to have been a gift by a Sri Lankan aristocrat called Lewke Disava to the king of Kandy around 1745-46. It is believed to have fallen into Dutch hands in 1765 when Dutch troops led by the governor of Ceylon Lubbert Jan van Eck attacked and conquered Kandy. After being displayed around the Netherlands, the cannon was eventually added to the Rijksmuseum's collection in Amsterdam. Rijksmuseum director Taco Dibbits said the "restitution as a positive step in cooperation with Sri Lanka." "The relationship and exchanges of knowledge built up between the two nations in the fields of research and common history constitute a strong foundation for the future," he added in a statement. The commission will hand down decisions about other artifacts in the future, public broadcaster NOS said. This included art from Nigeria as well as the Dubois collection which included the horse-riding reins of Prince Diponegoro, a Javanese royal who opposed Dutch colonial rule in the 19th century. The Netherlands has been wrestling with the legacy of its colonial past in recent years. Dutch King Willem-Alexander on Saturday issued a historic royal apology for the Netherlands' involvement in colonial-era slavery. —AFP

LIFESTYLE

Pink Macarons and empowerment: a day in the 'World of Barbie'

THE "WORLD OF BARBIE" is not directly linked to the film — out in US theaters on July 21 — but comes amid a blitz of Barbie-themed events, also including a Barbie-themed mansion listed on Airbnb in nearby Malibu. Rhonda, Lois and Felice, all in their 50s and friends since childhood, travelled to Los Angeles to meet up for a girls' weekend at "World of Barbie." "We're girls again," said Lois, posing for photos with her friends in front of the pool slide. ESCAPISM The two-story experience also contains a museum tracking Barbie's career since the first dolls — dressed up in heels and a black-and-white



bathing suit — arrived in stores in 1959, and the iconic Dreamhouse. "The Barbie Dreamhouse is such a staple in so many people's lives," said Treadway. "If you've been playing with it since you're a child, (or) maybe your sibling played with it... it still gives you that feeling of nostalgia." Another popular spot is a room full of human-size doll boxes, which visitors can enter to pose as movie director Barbie, skater Barbie, explorer Barbie, mermaid Barbie and Hollywood star Barbie. As well as providing Instagrammable moments, the interactive experience tries to impart an empowering message. Each box comes with a caption at the bottom, saying "You can be anything you want." "Barbie has been an inspiration over so many decades, and to really show people that you can be whatever you want," said Treadway. "Love who you are, don't be afraid of who you are, you can be anything — she was at the forefront of teaching that, and it stood the test of time." —AFP



CULTURE

Sweet success: Jordan's beekeepers busy as honey demand soars

JORDAN'S KEY TOURISM industry may have been hammered by Covid, but the pandemic gave a boost to another sector, keeping its beekeepers busy as demand for honey has soared.

The country's 4,000 apiarists have ramped up output of the sweet and sticky golden substance long praised for its anti-inflammatory and other health benefits. Even if there is no scientific consensus that honey helps fight Covid, many of those infected have used it to soothe symptoms such as sore throats.

"The Covid period in particular had a great, positive impact on us," said beekeeper Mutasim Hammad, 48, who retired 12 years ago from the public security directorate and turned his hobby into his main job.

"There was good demand for honey, and people got to know it," added Hammad, dressed in a white protective suit while checking on his 80 bee hive boxes on a property in Irbid 90 kilometres (60 miles) north of Amman.

"People have become more aware of the value of honey and are turning to the guaranteed locally produced honey," said Hammad, who sells about 400 kilograms (880 pounds) a year.

The kingdom of Jordan prides itself on its 19 different types of honey, including citrus, eucalyptus and maple varieties, depending on which plants the bees pollinate.

"We have about 2,500 flowering plants," said Mohammad Rababaa, head of the Jordan Beekeeping Association.

"This diversity distinguishes Jordanian honey and means that the therapeutic and nutritional value of this honey is expected to be better than other types."

Rababaa said the slightly bitter maple honey variety, for example, boasts "very high phenolic compounds and antioxidants compared to other types, which indicates that it has a higher value".

ECOSYSTEM SERVICE

Rababaa also said that, since the



Covid pandemic, "demand for locally produced honey has clearly increased".

He said the sector has a much bigger workforce than Jordan's official count of about 1,400 beekeepers.

"The reality is that the number of beekeepers is more than 4,000," said the professor of Natural Resources and Environment at the Jordan University of Science and Technology.

They produce about 700 to 800 tonnes annually, or about 70 per cent of Jordan's annual domestic needs, he said.

"We are very close to self-sufficiency," said Rababaa, adding that "imports must be stopped".

A fellow enthusiast, Mohammad Khatib, 49, also pointed to the pandemic and lockdown periods, saying it "helped me and gave me enough time to learn about bees and take good care of them".

A French language professor at Al-Bayt University, he now works about 15 bee boxes in his garden, which he said earns him a nice side income.

"People are looking for reliable honey" and some customers place their orders a year in advance, he said.

Jordanian honey sells for 15 to 30 dinars (\$21 to \$42) per kilogram, depending on the type.

Rababaa said the economic benefit "is not limited to honey as it also produces pollen, royal jelly, wax, propolis and bee venom, which is included in many therapeutic compounds".

Crucially, healthy populations of bees and other insects provide an almost immeasurable ecosystem service by pollinating plants. While the beekeeping sector generates about \$28 million a year, Rababaa said, "the indirect value of crop pollination exceeds \$100 million". — AFP



African-born director's new vision for Berlin cultural magnet

ONE OF THE rare African-born figures to head a German cultural institution, Bonaventure Ndikung is aiming to highlight post-colonial multiculturalism at a Berlin arts centre with its roots in Western hegemony.

The "Haus der Kulturen der Welt" (House of World Cultures), or HKW, was built by the Americans in 1956 during the Cold War for propaganda purposes, at a time when Germany was still divided.

New director Ndikung said it had been located "strategically" so that people on the other side of the Berlin Wall, in the then communist East, could see it.

This was "representing freedom" but "from the Western perspective", the 46-year-old told AFP.

Now Ndikung, born in Cameroon before coming to study in Germany 26 years ago, wants to transform it into a place filled with "different cultures of the world".

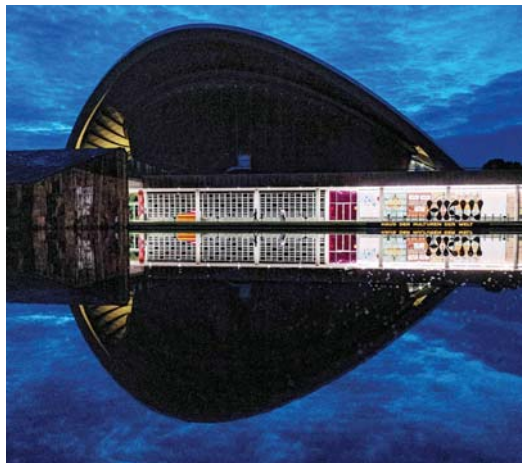
The centre, by the river Spree, is known locally as the "pregnant oyster" due to its sweeping, curved roof. It does not have its own collections but is home to exhibition rooms and a 1,000-seat auditorium.

It reopened in June after renovations, and Ndikung's first project "Quilombismo" fits in with his aims of expanding the centre's offerings.

The exhibition takes its name from the Brazilian term "Quilombo", referring to the communities formed in the 17th century by African slaves, who fled to remote parts of the South American country.

Throughout the summer, there will also be performances, concerts, films, discussions and an exhibition of contemporary art from post-colonial societies across Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania.

According to Ndikung, African slaves on planta-



tions sometimes plaited their hair in certain ways as a kind of coded message to those seeking to escape, showing them which direction to head.

His quest for aestheticism is reflected in his appearance: with a colourful suit and headgear, as well as huge rings on his fingers, he rarely goes unnoticed.

During his interview with AFP, Ndikung was wearing a green scarf and cap, a blue-ish jacket and big, sky-blue shoes.

With a doctorate in medical biology, he used to work as an engineer before devoting himself to art.

In 2010, he founded the Savvy gallery in Berlin, bringing together art from the West and elsewhere, and in 2017 was one of the curators of Documenta, a prestigious contemporary art event in the German city of Kassel. Convinced of the belief that history "has been written by a particular type of people, mostly white and men," Ndikung has had all the rooms in the HKW renamed after women.

These are figures who have "done something important in the advancement of the world" but were "erased" from history, he added.

Among them is Frenchwoman Paulette Nardal, born in Martinique in 1896.

She helped inspire the creation of the "negritude" movement, which aimed to develop black literary consciousness, and was the first black woman to study at the Sorbonne in Paris.

REASSESSING HISTORY

Ndikung's appointment at the HKW comes as awareness grows in Germany about its colonial past, which has long been overshadowed by the atrocities committed during the era of Adolf Hitler's Nazis.

Berlin has in recent years started returning looted objects to African countries which it occupied in the early 20th century — Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Namibia and Cameroon.

"It's long overdue," said Ndikung. He was born in Cameroon's capital, Yaounde, into an anglophone family.

The country is majority francophone but also home to an anglophone minority and has faced deadly unrest in English-speaking areas, where armed insurgents are fighting to establish an independent homeland.

One of his dreams is to open a museum in Cameroon "bringing together historical and contemporary objects" from different countries, he said.

He would love to locate it in Bamenda, the capital of Cameroon's restive Northwest region.

"But there is a war in Bamenda, so I can't," he says. — AFP