

SEP 2024

# ScandAsia



**BUSINESS:**

Swedish BTS Group acquires SEAC in Thailand

**INTERNATIONAL:**

Chinese ship damaged the Finnish-Estonian pipeline and cable

**COMMUNITY**

Norwegian DJ Alan Walker replaces stolen bike in Vietnam

**Jesper Ahrentz**  
found joy at the bottom  
of the sea and never looked back



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# Let's set up a Nordic-Asian summer vacation exchange

In all the countries in Asia and in all the Nordic countries there are many children with a dual nationality whether or not it is legally registered. Imagine if we helped these children a little bit in feeling more Nordic or feeling more Asian according to where they are growing up.

I would like to suggest setting up exchange visits between children of the same dual nationality who live in opposite countries. For example, a Thai Swedish child living in Thailand could have summer vacation in Sweden with a family with a Swedish Thai child. Next year, the Swedish Thai child would fly out for vacation in Thailand with the family of the Thai Swedish child.

Both children would grow up to be genuine and unique ambassadors for their second nationality in the country they eventually choose to live in.

Let's not look to our governments or embassies to create this exchange network but use our own private platforms like our social clubs, our chambers of commerce and our churches. We should have competence among ourselves to set up the required legal documents to be covered and we have always people going back and forth who could take care of unaccompanied children when they travel home or travel out.

At first we would have to identify a few families in the Nordic countries who would be happy to be hosts and would be happy to let their own child experience the uniqueness of living in their "other country" with a host family like themselves in Asia. Experience and obstacles would be recorded which would be useful for the next couple of exchange children.

The perspective is mind blowing. Over 20 years we would have created a strong dual nationality community covering a whole generation of Nordic-Asian children to the joy of the young people and to the benefit of all our countries.

If you read this, do you think this is something that you would like to have fun with helping to create?



**Gregers Moller**  
Editor in Chief

## ScandAsia

ScandAsia is a printed magazine and online media covering the people and businesses of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland living and working in China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

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# New berry trial begins: Olli Sorainen's trial begins amid bribery and human trafficking scandals



The trial against Olli Sorainen, an advisor at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, has begun. This trial is connected to the high-profile case against Jukka Kristo, the former CEO of the berry firm Polarica, and his Thai business partner, Kalyakorn Phongpit.

Sorainen faces accusations of bribery and misconduct in office, with the prosecution seeking a suspended prison sentence. The case centers on allegations that Sorainen received assistance from Kristo to purchase two violins. In 2019, Sorainen allegedly requested financial support from Kristo for a violin and bow, which Kristo covered with €5,000 from his own funds. A second violin was also reportedly paid for by Kristo.

Prosecutor Mari Mattila presented evidence claiming that the total bribe amounted to €7,500. Emails revealed that Sorainen sought sponsorship for a young musician and suggested reciprocal deals to avoid the appearance of a bribe. Mattila argued that Sorainen's actions influenced the allocation of berry pickers to benefit Polarica

under Kristo's leadership.

Sorainen has denied the accusations, with his lawyer asserting that the violins were purchased legitimately. He also claimed that Sorainen did not affect the distribution of pickers. Kristo, facing related bribery charges, contends that the payments were for supporting a musician, not bribes.

Also facing charges is Mari Onkamo, chair of Polarica's board, who is accused of facilitating the alleged bribes. Onkamo denies these claims. The trial is set to continue for five days.

Jukka Kristo is also facing 77 counts of aggravated human trafficking in the Lapland District Court concerning the treatment of Thai berry pickers. Kristo has denied these charges as well.

---

## Chinese webshop Temu's products fail Danish consumer test

The Danish Consumer Council has tested 38 products from the Chinese webshop Temu. Thirty of the products failed completely, and 11 out of 15 products for children had safety flaws, Jyllands-Posten writes.

Two experts from the Danish Consumer Council have tested the safety of 38 products from Temu. The verdict is that the products don't comply with European consumer legislation. Moreover, there are significant health and safety risks associated with the products, espe-

cially those intended for children.

Out of the 15 children's products tested, 11 had safety flaws such as small parts that children could choke on and long strings on the toys.

"It's really sad, and it confirms the warning we've previously issued: You should not buy products for children on Temu," says Helen Amundsen, senior advisor at the Danish Consumer Council, to Jyllands-Posten.

Among the tested products were cleaning supplies, sunscreens,

chargers, and cosmetics.

Last week, it was revealed that Temu is the second most popular webshop among Danish consumers, despite criticism from the Danish Consumer Council and the Minister for the Environment, Magnus Heunicke.

In a written statement, Temu says that all the products that the Danish Consumer Council found to be unsafe have been removed from sale as a precautionary measure while being investigated further.



# Globalskolen opens online Norwegian education

**G**lobalskolen provides an online education service in Norwegian, social studies, and KRLE (Christianity, Religion, Life Philosophy, and Ethics) for international primary school students. This service is tailored for families who want to stay connected with Norway and its primary education system.

Classes are held digitally, with students required to spend at least 90 minutes per submission. Each semester includes 15 submissions, totaling 30 lessons per school year. The program is approved by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and is part of the supplementary education scheme. It is also available to students who speak Norwegian as a second language.



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# Danish travel agencies report increased sales in trips to Thailand



Thailand has become an even more popular travel destination for the Danes. The Danish travel agency TUI reports that sales in trips to Thailand have increased by 73 percent, according to B.T.

When Mikkel Hansen, head of communication at TUI, is asked why the sales for warm destinations has gone up, the answer is clear:

“It’s moving very fast, and Danes are booking much earlier this year. The fluctuating summer weather has definitely played a role in the high number of bookings.”

## The Swedish embassy in Jakarta urges tourists to respect local culture and legislation

Tourists traveling to Indonesia, particularly Bali, should familiarize themselves with local laws and culture. This is requested by the Swedish Embassy in Jakarta in a post on the embassy’s Facebook page. The embassy has also shared a “do’s and don’ts” list on their page.

The list includes dressing appropriately when visiting cultural landmarks and refraining from driving without a Driver’s License among other things.

The Swedish embassy in Jakarta also urges foreign missions and international organizations to disseminate provisions to nationals visiting Bali Province.



# Danish Embassy in Philippines Warns About Volcano Smog

The Danish Embassy in the Philippines has issued a warning regarding volcanic smog on their Facebook site. The smog is affecting several areas, including Cavite, Las Piñas, Paranaque, and parts of Metro Manila. This advisory comes in response to increased sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from Taal Volcano, which began on August 19, 2024.

Residents in the affected regions are advised to take necessary precautions. The embassy recommends limiting outdoor activities and staying indoors to minimize exposure to volcanic smog. For those needing to go outside, wearing N95 masks is suggested, alongside regular hydration to alleviate throat irritation.



Sensitive individuals, especially those with pre-existing health conditions, are urged to closely monitor their health and seek medical attention if needed. Additionally, residents

should be aware of the potential for acid rain occurring during rainfall, which may pose risks to crops and could damage metal roofing.



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# Danish Dairy Board launches organic dairy campaign in Manila



**D**anish Dairy Board kicked off a new campaign at the Grand Hyatt Garden Pavilion in Manila, Philippines, presenting the world of organic dairy production in Europe.

Guests were treated to an array of dishes made with European organic dairy products, showcasing the rich flavors and high quality of these products.

As Denmark leads the organic dairy industry, the DDB's campaign—supported by the European Union—continues to promote the benefits of organic dairy products from Europe to a wider audience in the Philippines. Over the next several months, the campaign will expand its reach across Metro Manila and nearby provinces through a series of product sampling activities in leading supermarkets and grocery stores. These events, running from August

16, 2024, to January 2025, will allow Filipino consumers to experience the superior quality and taste of Danish organic dairy products.

In September 2024, the campaign will feature VIP Consumer Classes, which will blend fun and education. These sessions will cater especially to kids and families, offering interactive workshops, games, and tasting sessions to deepen participants' understanding of the benefits of choosing organic dairy.

Lars Witt Jensen, Senior Marketing Manager at the Danish Dairy Board, expressed his excitement about the campaign's continued success in the Philippines.

# Vietnam and Norway strengthen sustainable aquaculture partnership

**V**ietnam and Norway are strengthening their collaboration in marine aquaculture. That they are doing with a shared focus on sustainability and technological advancement. Norway, known for its expertise in the seafood industry, is sharing its knowledge to support Vietnam's efforts to enhance marine farming practices.

The collaboration aims to help Vietnam establish a robust legal framework, improve environmental sustainability, and boost the efficiency of its aquaculture sector. This partnership reflects the growing ties between the two nations and their commitment to sustainable marine resource management.

Norway's aquaculture sector, a significant contributor to its export income, is renowned for its stringent management practices and advanced technologies. Norwegian



techniques emphasize minimizing antibiotic use, safeguarding animal health, and ensuring high water quality. These practices include careful site selection, rigorous environmental monitoring, and proactive disease management.

Vietnam is developing its marine farming, especially in seaweed. This partnership with Norway will help improve the quality of Vietnam's seafood. It aligns with Viet-

nam's new plan for sustainable marine management.

Norway's plans to develop its coastal areas for marine use support this joint effort. This promises growth and sustainability for both countries' aquaculture sectors. The Vietnam International Fisheries Exhibition in Ho Chi Minh City will showcase these developments and strengthen business ties between the two nations.

# Ericsson celebrates 118 years of innovation in Thailand

Ericsson celebrates 118 years of technological advancement in Thailand this year. Since installing the nation's first public telephone exchange in 1906, Ericsson has played a pivotal role in Thailand's telecommunications history. As the first Swedish multinational to establish a presence in Thailand, Ericsson's journey began with modernizing Bangkok's phone network.

Notable achievements include introducing Thailand's initial Private Branch Exchange in 1952. In 1970, the company deployed the AXE switching system. Ericsson also pioneered the mobile network with Nordic Mobile Telephone (NMT) in 1986. The rollout of 2G, 3G, and 5G systems followed, with commercial



5G operations starting in 2020.

Looking ahead, Ericsson is committed to advancing Thailand's 5G capabilities. The company aims to support the country's Industry

4.0 goals. Leveraging its global expertise, Ericsson seeks to enhance network security and drive new technological developments across various sectors.



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## IB Career-Related Programme: Investigation, Preparation, Action

Andrew Roff, IB Coordinator, Bangkok Patana School

Bangkok Patana School has a long and proud association with the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO). Since 1994 we have had at the backbone of our Senior Studies curriculum the IB Diploma Programme. This wonderful programme of study prizes the IBO's aim to **develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.** It is a broad, balanced and rigorous course of study which prepares students brilliantly for the world of further education. But we recognise that for students who wish to commit to an area of specialism, this may not be the best curriculum fit...

At the beginning of academic year 2022-23 we identified a priority to research into curriculum provi-

sion for our students who are passionate about a particular element of their study, and ready to commit to it in a post 16 "deep-dive" as opposed to the broader offering of the IB Diploma. We were conscious of the needs of our community and the commitment that we make to our families when they charge us with the responsibility of providing an appropriately challenging educational pathway for their children until they graduate at age 18. It is of course our priority to make sure we prepare all our children for the huge, and ever increasing, number of opportunities that await them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (and beyond!)

The initial stages of our research led us to investigate a variety of programme offerings, through visits and consultation with colleague schools in Thailand and beyond. The International BTEC, which is offered

in a number of different subject areas (Art & Design; Business; Sport; Hospitality amongst others), impressed us as having great merit. It is a modular programme of study, which allows students to engage in practically focused extended project work in their chosen specialism. It is a programme, which is well established in the United Kingdom and recognised by universities around the world. Additionally, a number of our teachers are well acquainted with and experienced at teaching it. We were also very impressed with the IB's Career-related Programme, which is an exciting development of the IB's suite, aimed at 16- to 19-year-old students, which allows them to focus on a particular curriculum element whilst also embracing the ethos of the IB, which is so reflective of our own guiding statements.

Further research and discus-



sion with an active regional network of educators, and continued consultation within our own community led us to the conclusion that combining these two qualifications would be an excellent fit for Patana. The IB Career-related programme provides the overall structure for an exciting programme of study, built around the IBTEC as the Career-Related Study (CRS), and complimented with two IB Diploma Courses, and a core composed of four elements which act to glue the programme together; promoting student agency and well-being through exploration of diverse perspectives on real world issues and practical engagement with them.

Having identified the IBCP as the right programme for our community, we entered the preparation phase, to ensure our Career-related Programme would be “Patana Quality”, and ready for first teaching in August 2024. For this we needed Authorisation from the IBO, teachers ready to teach the different elements, and most importantly students ready and excited to study it.

In June 23, we engaged in a consultation meeting with students and parents from our Grad26 and Grad27 cohorts, which confirmed that there was certainly excitement and appetite for this proposed offering. Of the different IBTEC courses, the greatest initial interest was in Art and Design – and so this was identified as the first specialism that we planned to offer

Having investigated and identified the IBCP, we then moved into the preparation phase by declaring our candidacy for authorisation



to run the IBCP with the IBO and applying for authorisation to teach the IBTEC. This journey began in September 2023, whilst we continued to engage with our students (and families) in current Year 11, to ensure we went on the learning journey together. Our fantastic Art faculty, along with representatives from leadership undertook IBTEC training and certification followed quickly after.

As an established and high achieving IB World School, we are already well aligned with these principles through our Diploma Programme (evidenced in an excellent programme evaluation in early 2023) and have been able to carry them across to our Career-related Programme. The IB have recognised this, giving us commendations in each of the stages of our authorisation, and providing us final approval on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

As we move from the preparation to action phase of our IBCP implementation are keen for collab-

oration with expertise from within our wider community and are keen to hear from anyone who works within the Arts that may be able to offer our first cohort of student’s perspectives and experiences beyond the classroom.

Our process of development of the IBCP has followed well-articulated stages. This reflects a process that we are very intentionally using with our student led Community Engagement Teams in the Secondary School. As with all of our academic offerings at Bangkok Patana School we will continue to critically reflect on our IB Career-related Programme and use this to learn from our experiences as well as maintaining dialogue with an active network of schools across Asia who are all engaged in and at different stages of implementation. It is in this way that we can continue to sustain and grow the IBCP as part of our Senior Studies Curriculum.

# China's decline in births makes Arla rethink target groups

The Chinese are having fewer babies, and the population is getting older and older. This

affects the Danish dairy company Arla, who needs to switch their focus from babies to adults, according

to Fødevarerwatch.

In 2023, the birth rates hit a new low record: Only 6,4 births per thousand inhabitants. Simon, Chief Executive Director in Arla's international business says to Fødevarerwatch:

"There is no doubt that China's overall economic situation makes it necessary for us to seek out new growth categories, such as products designed for the older segment of the population."

Financial Times also wrote that the new tendency already has led international dairy companies to rethink their target groups and switch their focus from babies to adults.



---

# Norway co-organized energy meeting in Laos

Espen Barth Eide, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Hilde Solbakken, Ambassador Norway to Vietnam and Laos, and Kjell Tormod Pettersen, Ambassador Norway to ASEAN, all participated in a high level meeting in the ASEAN Climate Change and Energy Project Phase II (ACCEPT II) followed by a Regional Workshop in Vientiane Capital, Laos on 25 to 26 July 2024.

The meeting on "Leveraging the ASEAN Power Grid to Decarbonize the ASEAN Power Sector," was co-organized with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI).

The ASEAN Power Grid (APG) is one of the program areas under the ASEAN Plan of Action



for Energy Cooperation (APAEC). In his keynote address, Espen Barth Eide, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, stated:

"Norway is committed to supporting ASEAN's energy transition. The ASEAN Power Grid of-

fers significant potential for reducing carbon emissions and enhancing energy security through regional cooperation and the integration of hydropower and other renewable sources. ACCEPT II plays a vital role in driving these initiatives forward."



# President Marcos Jr. thanked outgoing Swedish Ambassador Annika Thunborg

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. expressed gratitude to Swedish Ambassador Annika Thunborg for her support of the Philippines during their meeting on August 6.

The outgoing envoy paid a farewell call on President Marcos on Tuesday at Malacañan Palace.

“Thank you very much for all that you have done — bringing our two countries closer together,” President Marcos said to Thunborg during the farewell call.

“I have to once again express our gratitude for the support that you’ve shown to the Philippines in terms of the problems and challenges that we are facing here,” President Marcos added.



Thunborg, for her part, reflected on her three wonderful years in the Philippines.

## Norway conducts oil and gas surveys in Indonesia

Norway’s energy data and intelligence provider, TGS, is busy with 2D seismic

survey assignments off the coast of Indonesia. While the firm has wrapped up one of these projects in

the Sumatra Basin, two more are ongoing—one in the Seram Basin and the other offshore East Java, writes the trade media Offshore Energy.

The media quotes Kristian Johansen, CEO of TGS, on delivering exceptional subsurface imaging and fostering strong partnerships with key stakeholders in the region.

“In the Seram Basin, we are focused on using high-quality acquisition and processing methods to improve imaging below the shallow carbonates in the Seram thrust belt, where there are clear indications of active petroleum systems,” Johansen says.





# Always evolving and not at all close to being done

For Elizabeth Romhild, her art, which was self-taught, quickly became a part of who she is. Today, she might not be making art in the same form as she used to, but she is still creating and continues to be inspired by her surroundings.

*By Lærke Kobberup*

**T**he door opens, and the colors almost consume you as you step into the atelier of Elizabeth Romhild. Her work is often praised for its vivid colors, and as her own pieces decorate almost every inch of the walls in the room I just entered, I can only agree. It is breathtaking. Elizabeth Romhild herself emerges from the other end of the room, immediately offering coffee and crackers as we settle down to talk about her life.

Elizabeth recently had a knee operation, so it has been a bit quiet in the atelier recently, she explains.

“Usually there is a bit more messy in here, you know with all my projects,” she says, pointing to a semi-clean desk.

Elizabeth Romhild isn't a formally educated artist, but at the age of 26, she started painting portraits. Since then, she has worked almost every day as an artist—working while raising children, exploring different media for her art, and the momentum is still strong. Today, Elizabeth is 64 years old, and she is far from done with her craft.

## Artistically Born from the Slums

Elizabeth Romhild is a recognized artist who has participated in exhibitions in multiple countries, including Denmark, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. She is Danish-Armenian and grew up in Iran. Throughout her life, she has lived in many countries and has settled in Bangkok since 1988.

She explains the vivid colors in her paintings as a heritage from her Armenian roots, but also as a result of the many colors in the countries she has lived in. Elizabeth was born in Denmark and has since lived in Iran, England, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Indonesia, and Thailand.

She never attended art school; instead, she taught herself, experimenting whenever she found something inspiring. Creativity has always been a joy of hers since she was a child, but she describes Indonesia as a tipping point:

“I was born as an artist when we lived in Indonesia. I started painting the slums and the characters I found there,” she says.

Elizabeth explains how the faces of the people she met in Indonesia inspired her to start drawing, trying to express the stories these faces told:

“Especially faces that were wrinkly, or when the person was missing a tooth, spoke to me. These characters were just so beautiful in their own way.”

Her art was very well received, and she quickly became a name that people knew. Her portraits and slum paintings in Indonesia earned her the nickname ‘The Slum Painter.’

## Never Standing Still

“Peter used to start a phone call by saying, ‘Are you sitting down?’ Then I knew, okay, we are moving,” Elizabeth says with a smile on her lips.

Elizabeth met her husband Peter in Iran when he was stationed there for his previous job at ØK, a former Danish trading company. Since then, he has not only been her love but also her ticket to living in different countries all over the globe. Together, they have lived in New York, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia. When she received a phone call from him in Indonesia, the new country they would move to was Thailand.



“

*I used to say that I would like to die with my palette in my hand.*

”



“

*I was born as an artist when we lived in Indonesia. I started painting the slums and the characters I found there.*

”

Elizabeth was born as an artist in Indonesia but took a pause when she moved to Thailand, as this was when she started to have children. They filled up a large portion of her life.

“However, I couldn’t completely stop making art. At this time, I started drawing with colored pencils. They were easier to put down when the children needed me,” she explains. “At the same time, the children also inspired me to be more bold and abstract in my painting style.”

This was Elizabeth’s everyday life for about five years. But then, Elizabeth had a moment in the lobby of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. A blue bowl with oranges. And with that sight, she got busy.

The distinctive color on several paintings becomes apparent as Elizabeth Romhild describes the blue bowl with oranges she saw in the lobby of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, which became the inspiration for multiple paintings.

“You can see it everywhere,” she says as she points to different paintings. “The blue color and the shape of the orange. It has become my signature.”

Elizabeth talks with as much passion and energy as her art contains.

This was the beginning of a new era in Elizabeth’s career as an artist. She became known for her exotic colors and erotic shapes—huge canvases filled with Picasso-like figures in orgies of colors.

She shakes her head as she thinks of this time in her life:





"It is amazing how much I have done. I was working, taking care of the children when they came home, and at the same time, we still went out socially quite often."

She then states a quote she had already mentioned when we spoke on the phone: "If you want something done, ask a busy person."

### A future with many outcomes

Today, the large canvases have become too big and demanding for Elizabeth to paint, but this hasn't slowed down her artistic desire.

First, she painted, then she designed porcelain tableware, followed by creating art covers for speakers, her own jewelry designs, and mosaic designs for interiors. Many different outlets for the same art:

"It just got too hard for my body to paint these giant paintings," Elizabeth explains. "Luckily, there is also something very exciting about seeing how your art speaks on different 'platforms,' so to say."

Elizabeth Romhild can barely contain herself when talking about her future projects, indicating that there is plenty more art to come.

"I used to say that I would like to die with my palette in my hand," she says with a smile.

As with many other artists, her art has become a part of who she is, so retirement doesn't appeal to her as it does to others.

### Many homes at once

With her childhood divided between Denmark and Iran, her young adulthood spent traveling around the globe, and her children growing up in Bangkok, Elizabeth Romhild has experienced many different cultures and everyday lives. This has led to a rather 'unconventional' relationship with her family. Or, it might be unconventional to some, but not to Elizabeth:

"I essentially did the same as my mom. She also moved away from her family with her husband, and so did I. Now my children are doing the same," she explains.

Of course, she misses her children and grandchildren, but she also appreciates that her children enjoy exploring new cultures.

Even though Elizabeth hasn't lived in Denmark, she still refers to it as home. She quickly went abroad as a young adult, and so have her children. Denmark is one of the places where they often get together with their children who are living in Denmark and the United States.

She shares that her husband and she have considered moving to Denmark many times, also to be closer to their daughter who lives in Copenhagen, but they just can't let go of Bangkok:

"For now, we have the best of both worlds. We have a small cottage in Jutland in Denmark and our lovely apartment in central Bangkok. So, as long as our health allows it, we would like to keep it this way," she says with a smile as she looks around her atelier with a proud look in her eyes.

# Jesper found joy at the bottom of the sea and never looked back

Danish Jesper Ahrentz started his own diving school, OceanSound, on the island of Koh Tao in Thailand ten years ago. He fell in love with diving the very first time he tried it and has since built a life around his hobby.

*By Charlotte Nike Albrechtsen*

Jesper Ahrentz felt the water all around his body. He concentrated on breathing air in through the tube in his mouth. Jesper felt weightless, just floating in the water. Bubbles rose to the surface when he exhaled, making a quiet sound as they passed his ears. The deafening sound of silence surrounded his weightless body.

At the bottom of an ordinary swimming pool, wearing a wetsuit, mask, and an oxygen tank on his back, Jesper was struck by a sudden passion and a burning wish for this not to be his last dive.

"I was completely amazed, and I hadn't even left the pool or seen any fish," Jesper said.

When he left the pool that day, he went up to the instructor immediately.

"What do I need to do to become a real diver? What are the steps I need to take?" he asked the diving instructor.

## Making memories

Jesper loves teaching other people how to dive. As a young teenager in Denmark, he used to work in a kindergarten, and he believes teaching adults and children is more similar than you'd think.

"I often think this because we really go back to basics. Teaching people how to put on the equipment is like teaching 4-year-olds how to put on shoes. You explain to them what will happen today, and then you take them for a swim. They look at the fish and point at the corals. Sometimes they say, 'Wow, look at this fish,'" Jesper said, laughing.

Jesper loves the personal connection he gets to have with his pupils, and he loves giving them a new and exciting memory to cherish. Even though he has had a lot of jobs in different countries, he believes there are few jobs with the same kind of personal contact as diving. Jesper believes that for a lot of people, their first dive is a memory they will remember for the rest of their lives.

"I think it sticks with them because we introduce them to a completely new world underwater, one they maybe didn't even know existed. Maybe it sounds like a cliché, but I think it's true," Jesper said.

"I have experienced multiple times that the pupils form a close bond with the people who taught them how to dive. I have a whole network across the world of people I have taught." Jesper went from being a hobby diver to a teacher, and now owns his own diving and yoga school, OceanSound, on Koh Tao.

The first time Jesper was on Koh Tao, he was a backpacker. He only stayed for two weeks, but Koh Tao always remained in the back of his mind as one of his favorite places.

Jesper was supposed to travel for six months. He was 17 years old, had just finished high school, and was ready to see the world. After the summer, he was supposed to return to his normal life and start studying ethnology at the university in Aarhus, Denmark. Everything was planned out, and he even had student accommodation waiting for his return.



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*Teaching people how to put on the equipment is like teaching 4-year-olds how to put on shoes.*

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*I have a whole network  
across the world  
of people I have taught.*  
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“I didn't really know what I wanted in life, but I thought it would be best to study something. I didn't really know what ethnography was about, but I figured it could be interesting to learn about different cultures,” Jesper said, reflecting on his 17-year-old mindset.

Jesper traveled from Denmark to Australia, and after six months of seeing the world, he realized he didn't have enough time to see everything he wanted to. He decided to postpone his return to Denmark by another year. But after one and a half years of traveling, Jesper realized he still wasn't done.

“There were so many things to see in this world, and I thought that I could always just return and start studying if I wanted to. One year didn't really seem to make that much of a difference,” Jesper said. Jesper decided to give up his spot at the university—he could always apply again later if he eventually wanted to study.

He traveled around Southeast Asia and Australia for the next two to three years. Every time he called home, his parents eagerly awaited his return, but his answer disappointed them—he was not ready yet.

After some years, his mindset shifted from “when will I return?” to “will I return?” It took Jesper three years to even step on Danish soil again, but he still wasn't done traveling.

“In the end, I was tired. Tired of the buses, the planes, and the new places. I needed a more stable base and some people I could spend time with for longer periods,” Jesper said.

Jesper's plan was not to have a plan. He wanted to go to Koh Tao to be a diving instructor for some time. Twenty years later, he still calls the small island his home.

## A life changing business

When Jesper and his partner Will started their own diving company 10 years ago, it began with a small website. But soon, more and more students booked courses, and the success of the business has exceeded their expectations.

“The diving school has changed our lives completely,” Jesper said.

Both divers had lived on the island for some time, and they wanted to create their own school.

“Koh Tao is a very busy island with big diving schools and a constant flow of visitors. It can feel a bit like a factory, where you produce as many divers as possible. The idea was to create something more personal and less fast-paced,” Jesper said.







On the island of Koh Tao, a two-hour boat ride from the shore of Thailand, a paradise for backpackers and divers reveals itself. White sandy beaches and colorful coral reefs attract tourists all year round. Jesper is one of the lucky ones able to call this paradise his home.

Jesper walks from his office to the beach. The air is warm, and the sun is bright. Jesper continues walking between the wooden huts surrounded by palm trees and bushes down to the beach. He says "sawadee krab" to the workers on the way and folds his hands in a "wai" in their direction.

On the beach, the water has been pulled back by the tide, revealing small white seashells and pointy rocks.

Two young people are sitting on a bench drinking water.

"Hi, how are you this morning?" Jesper says.

"I am feeling better now," the girl says with tired eyes.

The girl had gotten sick while diving and had been hospitalized for two nights to make sure it wasn't diver's sickness. He gives her some words of encouragement, and they discuss how she will return home the next day.

Aside from the connection with his pupils, one of

the main principles of the diving school is maintaining a healthy balance between work and time off. Jesper only works six months a year, and for the rest of the year, he can travel. His partner works the second half of the year. For Jesper, starting his own company meant creating a lifestyle around his passion for diving.

Most divers work long hours every week, as their work and their hobby flow together. The school operates seven days a week, but many of the divers tell him it doesn't feel like work.

"Sometimes the divers at our school tell me that they can't understand that they get money for this job. For many, it's their hobby and what they would love to do all the time anyway. Of course, there is also a downside because the lines between work and time off get blurry," Jesper said.

Jesper sees it as a privilege to be able to do something he loves every day, which is why he even goes on diving holidays in his spare time. According to Jesper, some of the divers even go diving on their day off, or they join others on their tours.

"I think there are few people who really look forward to their work every day," Jesper said.



*Maybe nowhere is home for me. But Koh Tao is more home than any other place.*



## The island family

Jesper's family back home in Grenaa had a hard time understanding why he never came back and how their son had drifted further and further away from a traditional Danish lifestyle.

"I think for a long time they believed I would come back to study, because it wasn't my plan to stay from the beginning; it just happened along the way. I think they hoped I would get an education and do something reasonable with my life. Get a public pension and focus on retirement savings," Jesper said and chuckled.

Jesper's life is currently a bit different from that, and it has been hard for his family to accept it at times.

"I know that they all want what is best for me. But I think their idea of what is best is just a bit different from mine. They want me to have more security and stability—things we have back in Denmark. My life is maybe a bit harder to fit into a specific frame," Jesper said.

It was mostly Jesper's mom who had a hard time with it, but with time it has gotten better. Jesper believes the concern also stems from them not understanding what he does for work on Koh Tao. His brother has visited a couple of times, but for Jesper's mother, Thailand is very far from Denmark.

When Jesper is in Thailand, he talks about Denmark as his home. But when he goes to Denmark every two to three years, he feels like a stranger. He feels like he doesn't know what's going on in Danish society.

"Sometimes it is very basic things that I simply don't know, like all sorts of things about culture, society, and politics. I don't know who the important people are anymore," Jesper said.

Jesper has built a second family on Koh Tao; they call it an island family.

"People who come to Koh Tao for longer get intrigued by the lifestyle. It is a great atmosphere, and because the island is small, everyone knows each other. Koh Tao is like a magnet," Jesper said.

But even though Jesper has lived on Koh Tao for more than 20 years, he still doesn't feel like a completely

integrated member of Thai society.

"I know people who are married with a Thai spouse, have children, and maybe even a business. But they still don't feel like a member of Thai society. Maybe it will always be like that," said Jesper.

But he has found his peace with being a person who belongs in multiple places rather than one.

"Maybe nowhere is home for me. But Koh Tao is more home than any other place," Jesper said.

## The happiest country in the world

Living in Thailand has given Jesper new perspectives on life back in Denmark. He has especially noticed the gratitude of the people on Koh Tao and in Thailand in general.

"Life here can be simple but good. People don't have much on Koh Tao, and they don't care about materialistic things, but people still live a good life and are grateful for the lives they have," said Jesper.

When he visits Denmark, he notices how much of a rush the Danes are in.

"People are always busy, and they don't have time to meet because they are doing something at all times of the day. People are stressed at work and so on," Jesper said.

Jesper feels that in Thailand, people are better at focusing their time on what they want to do, and especially on the islands, people are a bit more relaxed.

"For example, I don't know what day it is today. I need to look at my calendar to know. I think maybe it's Tuesday. On the other hand, the locals, of course, work very hard—they work six days a week, 12 hours a day. But here we don't have the feeling of rushing through life," Jesper said.

Jesper thinks Danes should be better at realizing that many live a very good life compared to the rest of the world.

"We always get told that we are one of the happiest countries around, but sometimes I think we focus on the negatives. Maybe people down here are better at appreciating happiness because it is not a given," Jesper says.



# Slum, hope and harmony

In the muddy, worn streets of the Klong Toey slum, a green roof glows like a beacon of hope amidst the dark brown surroundings. Small children in uniforms run around, waving, smiling, jumping, and dancing. The air is filled with the sound of their laughter and chatter, punctuated by the melody of a children's song playing softly in the background. Among these delighted children are eight Norwegian visitors, four of whom wear white shirts bearing the logo of the Sjømannskirken, the Seamen's Church.

*By Karoline Rosenkrantz Paasch*

## From Pattaya to a purposeful adventure

On Thursday, August 22, the Norwegian Seamen's Church in Pattaya organized a tour to Bangkok, visiting the Home of Praise kindergarten and the Immanuel Music School—part of the Music for Life Foundation. The day began with a two-hour ride from Pattaya to the slum. There were four participants and four representatives from the church. Everyone was excited to see what the day would bring.

"The Norwegian Seamen's Church has a lot of activities, and during the high season, they always have one

trip per week," Live Marie Hafredal Lilienberg, a diaconal worker at the church, says.

"There are also smaller events every week, like the knitting café, children's club, and Saturday porridge." She and her husband, Christer, have been working for the church for three years and both participated in this trip.

## A playground of hope

The first stop of the tour was Home of Praise, a kindergarten founded by Norwegian missionaries from the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) and now operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT).



A beacon of hope in the heart of Klong Toey, the kindergarten provides a safe haven where children learn through play.

The participants clearly enjoyed meeting the children, playing with them on the floor and in the sandbox. After playtime, Kru Kritayasai, the center's leader, ensured everyone had a snack and water. Perfectly yellow bananas and large green grapes awaited them in the office, where information was shared. She provided insights into the holistic approach taken at the center, emphasizing the importance of caring not just for the children but also for their families. The Norwegians were eager to ask questions, and Kritayasai made sure to answer them all. The visit offered a glimpse into the dedication and love that goes into nurturing the youngest members of this community.

"Do they put on the uniforms at home, and do the parents have to pay for them themselves?" a woman in a white and green long dress asked. Anita Sofie Gløned, one of the participants, listened closely as Eivind Hauglid, the priest leading the trip, translated Kritayasai's answer to her question. Each child receives one free uniform and is required to wear it upon arriving at the kindergarten.

### From Playtime to Performance

Following the heartwarming experience at Home of Praise, the group proceeded on foot to the Immanuel Music School, part of the Music for Life Foundation. The walk offered a sobering view of the slum and its harsh living conditions, prompting many to take photos and videos as they slowly made their way to the next destination.

"I have been to concerts with them before in Pattaya. The kids from the Immanuel Music School are really

good!" Anita Sofie Gløned says when asked why she joined the trips. She enjoys participating in the Norwegian Seamen's Church trips whenever they are organized but usually goes on trips with her Thai friends every week. She had long wanted to see the kindergarten and the slum, as well as to visit the music school and attend another concert.

### A Symphony of Success

Founded over 20 years ago by Solveig and Dag Johannessen, the music school has grown into a full-fledged institution with 60 students. Although the students were still in school, the visitors were treated to a special concert by the teachers. The performance highlighted the talent and dedication of the faculty, four of whom recently graduated with bachelor's degrees in music from Bangkok universities.

Eivind Hauglid has a deep connection to this area from his time as a missionary in Bangkok, where he worked from 1982 to 1997. From back then, he knew the kindergarten and music school well, which was easy to sense, in the way he communicated with the representatives at each place. Eivind and his wife, Alfhild, are both working a 5-week summer vicarage at the church.

After the concert, lunch was served, and a tour around the music school marked the end of the day. The visits served as a powerful reminder of the impact that education and compassion can have on a community. As the group departed, there was a sense of fulfillment, knowing that these efforts continue to make a difference in the lives of many.



Agneta's  
World

*Agneta de Bekassy*



# Stockholm in my heart, the city that has got it all...

*By Agneta de Bekassy*

Stockholm is very often called the “Venice of the North,” and that is a really great name for Sweden’s capital. To stroll through the city, which is built on 14 islands and connected by 57 bridges, is an adventure. The architecture never stops attracting me. Those old Hansa buildings in terracotta red and mustard yellow are pure art.

Stockholm has become a very trendy city, and the people around, especially in Stureplan, exude self-confidence and poise. Here, the successful, young generation meets after work to watch and be seen. Some look like they own the city, and who knows, maybe they do.

It would be completely false to say that Sweden is an inexpensive country; it has become extremely expensive. To dine out in one of the many fancy restaurants, one needs a rather thick wallet. Still, during the summer evenings, the restaurants are full, mostly with young people.

This summer, my brief visit to Stockholm happened to coincide with the colorful Pride Festival. People had left their houses to join the parade through the inner city, and some had brought their sun chairs, strategically placing them along the main road. Many people participated, but it was still a very controlled parade and audience.

The sunny and relatively warm weather contributed to the atmosphere.



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*When you visit Stockholm, you need time, as there is so much to see and discover.*

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On the evening of the last day of Pride, the discos were crowded, and my four girlfriends, all of whom have lived in Bangkok, and I went to a place in Södermalm, one of the most bohemian and popular parts of Stockholm today, to dance at Södra Teatern (The South Theatre) for a couple of hours. We, four straight and proper women of quite advanced age, at least compared to the crowd, danced like crazy among all the happy homosexual people. It was great fun.

Södra Teatern is located close to Mosebacke, a place known since the 1700s for pleasure and entertainment, and still serves as a kind of pleasure palace today.

It is very easy to gain weight in Sweden. The city offers all kinds of cuisines. The four of us took a walk on beautiful Djurgården and had a delicious lunch at a Lebanese restaurant with absolutely amazing food. It's a place to visit, not only for the food but also for the look of the restaurant. It's only open in the summer and is built of glass and plants.

When you stroll along Strandvägen, you also have a great choice of restaurants, like "Strandvägen 1," a popular place for lunch, dinner, or just meeting for a drink. It's a great place to visit, be seen, and people-watch.

On the parade street, Strandvägen, you must visit the iconic store "Svenskt Tenn" (Swedish Tin), which was founded in 1924 by Estrid Ericson. There, you will find furniture and interior goods, china, fabrics, and many other products. One of the most well-known designers represented is the late Austrian Josef Frank.

Nybrogatan is another popular street with many great restaurants and is close to Östermalmshallen (the Food Hall). I had a lovely dinner there with another girlfriend, who also lived in Bangkok, at Restaurant Grodan

(Restaurant The Frog). I enjoyed a very old, traditional Swedish dish, Råraka with crispy pork and cranberries. Råraka is a kind of fried potato cake. I was in seventh heaven.

Another place to visit is the Hallwylska palatset (The Hallwyl Palace). Here, you will find a unique museum and a patio where you can relax with a glass of wine or have a light lunch.

The palace originally belonged to the Hallwyls; in fact, it was their winter residence, an office for the family's company, and a space for Wilhelmina's antiques. The Swedish architect Isak Gustav Clason received the prestigious mission to design and build the palace. In 1898, it was completed. In 1920, the couple von Hallwyl donated the palace at Hamngatan 4 to the Swedish state, but they continued to live there until their deaths.

Since 1938, it has been open to the public. Wilhelmina Kempe from Stockholm met the elderly Walther von Hallwyl in Bern, Switzerland. Walther von Hallwyl arrived in Stockholm on December 12, 1864, to get engaged to Wilhelmina Kempe. They split their time between Sweden and Switzerland.

When you visit Stockholm, you need time, as there is so much to see and discover.

I ended my trip with a very short stay at Torö, located about an hour south of Stockholm. It is a very nice archipelago with charming cottages and a peaceful atmosphere. It is a gift to have friends residing all over the globe and to be able to visit them.

Soon, it will be time to return to bustling Bangkok again, also a city that makes my heart pound!

# Chinese ship damaged the Finnish-Estonian pipeline and cable



Chinese authorities have concluded an internal investigation into the allegations that a Chinese ship was the culprit in damaging a pipeline and a telecommunications cable going from Finland to Estonia in October 2023.

Chinese authorities could confirm that it was indeed the Newnew Polar Bear container ship which was responsible, albeit by accident, for damaging the Balticconnector sub-sea gas pipeline.

According to a report by the South China Morning Post, Chinese authorities have forwarded the results of their investigation to the two European countries. They explain the damage caused by a strong storm.

# First Indonesian-Danish satellite for maritime surveillance launched

Indonesia and Denmark have entered a landmark partnership. They aim to enhance maritime surveillance and environmental monitoring. This is achieved through the launch of 20 satellites for Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs & Fisheries (KKP). The collaboration began in autumn 2022. It highlights the strong ties between the two nations, involving Indonesia's KKP, Bappenas, and the Danish Space Industry.

The first satellite, named Cakra-1, is set for launch today, August 16, 2024, from Florida, USA. This initiative is supported by Danish Industry, Danish Maritime, EIFO, and the Danish Trade Council. It marks a significant step in ensuring the sustainability and security of Indonesia's marine resources.



Rooted in Government-to-Government cooperation, this project underscores the growing tech-

nological collaboration between Indonesia and Denmark. It sets a precedent for future cooperation.



# Norway to help setup forensic institute in Philippines

Norway has committed to helping the Marcos administration establish a forensic institute to pave the way for science-based investigations in criminal prosecution.

Department of Justice (DOJ) Undersecretary Raul Vasquez disclosed this during a news forum in Quezon City on Saturday, August 3, as reported by the Manila Bulletin.

At least three foreign ambassadors have committed to helping the Philippine government achieve this goal, which was announced during the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 2023, Vasquez said.

Apart from Norway, the other two countries involved are the UK and Australia, he added.

"When Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin attended the 75th

Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he received three pledges. We have completed almost all of them as of December last year," Vasquez noted.

He explained that the Forensic Institute was the government's third pledge, as announced by the Executive Secretary.

"This Forensic Institute aims to enable science-based investigations and criminal prosecutions. More importantly, it will also assist in maritime disasters, natural calamities, and other such events," Vasquez said.

He also mentioned that the two other pledges announced during the Geneva event were the issuance of the Administrative Order creating a Special Committee for Human Rights Coordination under the Office of the President.

"[That] is to ensure that the



government, all agencies of government, perform their duties and responsibilities under the prism of human rights. That's number one, and it's already done. There will be a launch on August 9," the DOJ official stated.

The other pledge is the creation of the Philippine Human Rights Plan, which is also underway.

# Swedish BTS Group acquires SEAC in Thailand

SEAC, a leading organizational and human resource development consultancy based in Bangkok, became part of the Swedish BTS Group AB—a global leader in strategy implementation—as of August 1, 2024.

In a press release, BTS Group highlighted SEAC as the top organizational development and leadership company in Southeast Asia.

"Over the past 32 years, SEAC has served more than 1,500 organizations and 3 million leaders and learners, all while pursuing their mission to grow and empower people

and organizations," BTS stated.

In 2023, SEAC generated approximately USD 6.5 million in revenue, supported by a team of over 50 consultants and specialists, who will now join BTS as part of the acquisition.

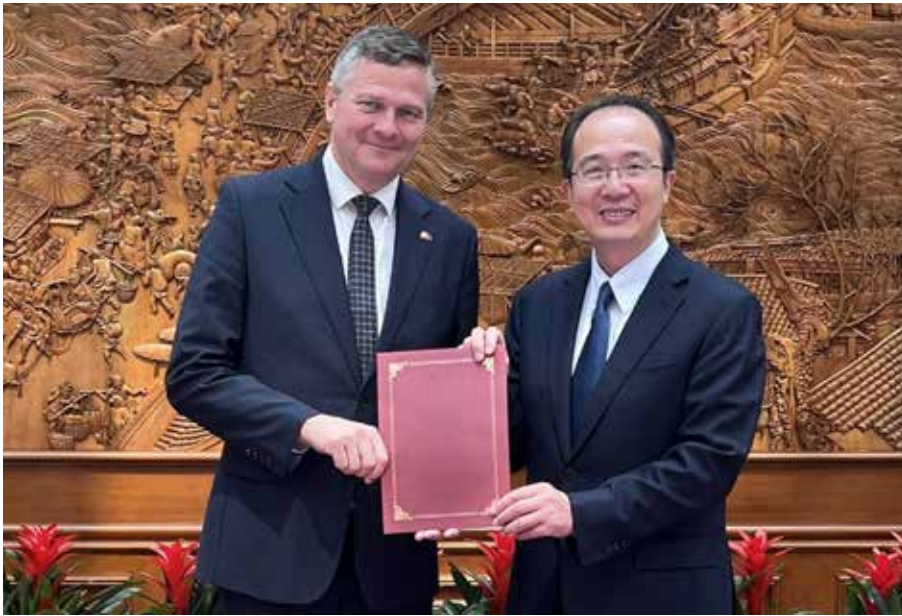
"Since our early days at APM Group, our passion has been to serve and grow organizations and people in Southeast Asia. Joining BTS will allow us to do even more of this on a larger scale," said Arinya Talerngsri, current Managing Director of SEAC.

Philios Andreou, Deputy CEO

of BTS Group, shares this optimism:

"SEAC's focus on client results, their innovative learning methodologies, entrepreneurial spirit, passion, and excellent team align perfectly with BTS' organizational DNA and values. As the two businesses integrate, we foresee further opportunities to increase profitability over time," he stated.

# New Danish Ambassador in China



After five years in Paris as the Danish Ambassador to France, Michael Starbæk Christensen has been appointed to China. On August 16, 2024, he presented his credentials to the Protocol Department at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The former Danish Ambassador to France ended his ambassadorship with the Olympics. Over the past few weeks, Christensen hosted several dignitaries, including HM King Frederik X, HM Queen Mary, HRH Crown Prince Christian, HRH Princess Benedicte, and five

Danish ministers, all while the Olympics were taking place. Despite his demanding schedule, Christensen remains energized and focused.

In a Facebook post from the Danish Embassy in China, he said: "China is a key global player and a crucial trading partner for Denmark. Our bilateral relations are strong, and there is significant potential to enhance our cooperation." He highlighted the Green Joint Work Programme launched last year and expressed enthusiasm for the upcoming 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Denmark and China.

Christensen's career includes roles as Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Head of Cabinet at the European Commission, and postings to the Danish UN Mission in New York and the Danish Embassy in Moscow.

He arrives in Beijing with his husband, Giovanni, and their dog, Diva.

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# Finnish Embassy in Bangkok welcomes new Head of Immigration Affairs



The Finnish Embassy in Bangkok has introduced its new Head of Immigration Affairs, Ms. Saara Grip. Saara recently arrived in Bangkok with her family after a five-year posting in Beijing. In Beijing she served as Consul and Head of the Consular and Immigration Team at the Finnish Embassy.

In a Facebook post by the Embassy of Finland in Bangkok, Saara expressed her excitement about her new role. Although she has visited Thailand many times as a tourist, this is her first time living and working

in the country. She looks forward to learning more about Thai culture and language and exploring the country's natural beauty.

Saara has had a long career with the Finnish Foreign Ministry, with previous postings in Seoul, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, and Vilnius. She expressed gratitude to the embassy staff for their warm welcome and is eager to get to know the Finnish community in Thailand.

# New Swedish Ambassador in Hanoi

Johan Ndisi has officially begun his role as Swedish Ambassador to Vietnam. On August 14, he presented his Letter of Credentials from HM the King of Sweden to the General Secretary and President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Mr. To Lam, in Hanoi. Ambassador Ndisi has pledged to work diligently to strengthen the partnership between Sweden and Vietnam.

His appointment coincides with the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. On Facebook, he expressed gratitude for the warm reception



and emphasized his commitment to enhancing the longstanding and broad ties between Sweden and Vietnam.

Ambassador Ndisi noted the evolution of their relationship from strong people-to-people connections to a significant partnership centered on trade and economic cooperation. He is eager to advance this partnership and explore new opportunities for collaboration.

# New Diplomats strengthen Norwegian Embassy in Yangon

The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Yangon has announced two new members to their team, Anne Glad Fredriksen and Martin Nygaard.

Anne Glad Fredriksen steps in as the new Counsellor and Head of Cooperation. With over a decade of experience in development cooperation, Anne's career includes significant roles at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norad, and the United Nations. Most recently, she worked in the South Asia and Afghanistan section, managing portfolios for Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Her expertise extends to multilateral development banks, where she focused on World Bank issues and IDA. Anne has also served at the Norwegian Embassy in Lusaka, Zambia, and with UNDP in Lao PDR. She is eager to build strong partnerships in Myanmar and immerse herself in the local culture and history.

Martin Nygaard joins as the new First Secretary, bringing a solid background in law and international peace and conflict studies. He previously worked on Myanmar policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and gained valuable legal experience at the Norwegian law firm Wikborg Rein. This posting marks Martin's first international assignment, and

he is excited to explore Yangon's vibrant city life and engage with the local community.

Both Anne and Martin are expected to play crucial roles in enhancing Norway's diplomatic efforts in Myanmar. Their combined experience and enthusiasm promise to strengthen ties and foster cooperation between the two nations.



# Swedish-built Malaysian naval vessel sinks off Johor coast

Salvage operations are in progress after the KD Pendekar, a Malaysian naval vessel built in

Sweden, sank off the coast of Johor on Sunday, August 25th. The Royal Malaysian Navy confirmed that

all 39 crew members were safely rescued before the ship was completely submerged, with no injuries reported.

The KD Pendekar, commissioned in July 1979, was constructed in Sweden and is a fast craft measuring 43.6 meters in length. It was armed with a Bofors 57mm main gun, a 40mm secondary gun, and Exocet anti-ship missiles. The vessel sank two nautical miles southeast of Tanjung Penyusop in Kota Tinggi after reportedly hitting an unidentified underwater object, which caused severe flooding in the engine room.



# Norway enhances security at offshore energy event amid concerns over China espionage



Security measures have been intensified at the Offshore Northern Seas (ONS) energy conference in Stavanger, Norway, due to heightened concerns over potential espionage threats. The Norwegian Police Intelligence Service (PST) has flagged the event as a significant target for foreign intelligence activities, particularly from

China and Russia. Given the strategic importance of Norway's energy sector, foreign espionage has become a more pressing threat than terrorism, according to PST's latest assessment.

To safeguard the event, which attracts global energy leaders, strict restrictions on drone flights have been implemented. The ban covers key areas in Stavanger, preventing

unauthorized aerial surveillance that could compromise security. These steps reflect Norway's broader effort to protect its critical infrastructure from foreign interference.

China's interest in Norway's energy innovations and technological advancements makes it a likely actor in these espionage efforts. As the global energy landscape evolves, the ONS conference has become a prime target for countries seeking to gain an edge through illicit means. The Norwegian authorities remain vigilant, aiming to ensure that the event proceeds without incident while protecting the nation's strategic assets.

This focus on security highlights the ongoing challenges Norway faces in balancing openness with the need to protect its vital industries from external threats.

# Sweden invited to non-war games in Indonesia

Sweden is the only Nordic country invited by Indonesia to participate in the multinational MNEK naval exercise in Bali in February 2025. MNEK stands for “Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo.”

Unlike traditional military exercises, which focus on combat tactics, the MNEK emphasizes humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, search and rescue operations, post-disaster recovery measures, and maritime security patrols. As a result, the participation of some of the 56 invited countries, despite having disputes with one another, is not an issue, according to the organizers.

“We hope this exercise can bring countries together, and we



want to demonstrate that it is viable and highly valuable for navies,” explained Navy Colonel Lukman Kharish during a media briefing on the preparations for the 5th MNEK.

In 2023, around 36 countries participated in the 4th MNEK held in Makassar. On that occasion, 13 countries sent their battleships to conduct a joint drill.

# Norwegian Equinor Withdraws from Vietnam: Offshore Wind Plans Abandoned

Norwegian energy giant Equinor has decided to halt its investment plans in Vietnam’s offshore wind sector, creating a significant setback for the Southeast Asian country’s green power ambitions. A spokesperson from the company confirmed to Reuters, that Equinor will discontinue its business development in Vietnam and close its Hanoi office, marking the first time the company has shut down an international office focused on offshore wind.

Vietnam has attracted global interest for its strong offshore wind potential, but regulatory delays have led several investors to reconsider. Equinor’s exit follows a similar move



by Danish company Ørsted, which paused its plans for large offshore wind farms in the country last year.

Vietnam aims to install 6 GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030, but ongoing political instability and

concerns over projects in the contested South China Sea have stalled progress. The government’s push to assign the first pilot project to state-owned companies has also raised concerns among foreign investors.

# Dennis Knudsen deletes photos amid continuing backlash

Danish celebrity Dennis Knudsen has deleted photos from his dream vacation in Thailand. He continues to face backlash even after removing Instagram posts that showcased his family's close interactions with elephants and a horse. Despite deleting the controversial content, criticism from animal welfare groups and the public persists.

Knudsen initially posted videos and photos of himself, his partner Jeppe, and their children bathing elephants and riding a horse. The images sparked outrage from World Animal Protection Denmark and others, who argue that such ac-



tivities often mask underlying animal mistreatment. Critics claim that any opportunity for tourists to touch, ride, or bathe wild animals typically indicates exploitation and cruelty, despite assurances from the venues.

Following significant backlash, Knudsen removed the posts and issued an apology on Instagram. He explained that he had chosen what he believed to be a reputable sanctuary and was unaware of any signs of mistreatment. However, he admitted that he did not initially recognize the poor condition of the horse he rode. Knudsen's apology stated that he was deeply saddened by the situation and that he does not support animal abuse.

Despite his response, the controversy continues, with many questioning whether Knudsen's actions truly reflect a commitment to ethical wildlife tourism.

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# DJ Alan Walker replaces stolen bike in Vietnam after 'Rogue Walker' incident

Norwegian DJ Alan Walker has garnered attention in Vietnam after a surprise visit to replace a bike stolen

by someone wearing his signature hoodie. The theft, which was widely shared on social media, prompted Walker to act.

In a series of TikTok videos, Walker documented his trip to Hanoi, where he gifted a new bike and a lock to the man whose original bike was stolen. He expressed regret over the misuse of his merchandise and emphasized the importance of bike security.

The original theft, posted on TikTok on July 2, quickly went viral. Walker's visit, showcased in his 'Alan Biker' video series, has been well-received, with fans appreciating his gesture. He also gave hoodies to the bike owner and the neighbor who highlighted the theft.

Walker, known for hits like 'Faded,' previously filmed his music video 'Alone Pt. II' in Vietnam in 2019.





# Global Guy Talk event held to promote gender equality

On Friday, August 23, the Embassy of Sweden in Hanoi, in collaboration with the Swedish Workplace Programme (SWP) and Ericsson Vietnam, hosted a Global Guy Talk event. The event aimed at redefining masculinity and promoting gender equality. This was done by providing a platform for male employees to openly discuss challenging issues such as ego and vulnerability.

## Importance of Men's Involvement in Gender Equality

Ms. Marie-Louise Thaning, Counselor and Head of Trade Promotion, Economic and Political Affairs at the Swedish Embassy, highlighted the crucial role of men in achieving gender equality. "True gender equality can only be achieved with the active participation of men. Gender equality is not just for women; it benefits everyone," Ms. Thaning said.

Research indicates that workplaces with greater gender equal-

ity often have more motivated and engaged teams. The teams are also more open to diverse perspectives, leading to higher quality outcomes. The Global Guy Talk event at Ericsson Vietnam encouraged participants to confront biases and reflect on what it means to be a "real man" in today's world. The discussions fostered vulnerability, empathy, and connection, as men shared their personal experiences and challenges.

This event is part of a broader initiative by SWP to create gender-equal workplaces.

## About Global Guy Talk

The Global Guy Talk concept was first launched by the Swedish Embassy in Hanoi on March 8, 2021. The initiative was designed to engage men in discussions about masculinity, gender equality, and their role in promoting an inclusive society. Originating from Sweden, it provides a safe environment where men can share personal experiences, challenge traditional gender norms, and

reflect on societal expectations surrounding masculinity.

The discussions typically cover topics that men might find difficult to discuss openly. That could be topics such as vulnerability, ego, emotions, and mental health. The goal is to foster a deeper understanding of how gender stereotypes affect everyone and encourage men to actively participate in the pursuit of gender equality.

## Creating Inclusive Workplaces and Societies

Global Guy Talk events are often organized in workplaces or community settings, where male participants engage in honest conversations. The conversations lead to personal growth and cultural change. By addressing these issues, the initiative aims to contribute to the creation of more equitable and inclusive environments, both in the workplace and society at large.



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