

**AL MOUJ GOLF TO HOST
SEASON OPENER OF 2023'S
INTERNATIONAL SERIES**

Oman's championship golf course, Al Mouj Golf, is set to become the first golf course in the Middle East to host the season opener of 2023's International Series, the elevated series of tournaments on the Asian Tour, later this month. **>A3**



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**OMAN SENDS CONDOLENCES TO
PAKISTAN OVER MOSQUE BLAST**

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its sincere condolences to the government and people of Pakistan, as well as families of the victims of the blast that targeted a mosque in the city of Peshawar. It also wished the injured a speedy recovery. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman has iterated its firm stance in condemning all forms of violence and terrorism. **-ONA**



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TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN
**Over 134% increase in
flights at Oman airports**

1 The total number of inbound and outbound flights at the airports of the Sultanate of Oman (Muscat, Salalah and Sohar) surged at the end of November 2022 by 134.5% to reach 57,939 flights compared to 24,710 flights during the corresponding period in 2021, according to the NCSI data. **>A5**

WORLD
**World not heading
to recession in 2023**

2 Inflation will likely slow over the next two years, the International Monetary Fund said in its world economic outlook report. The report said: "Global inflation is expected to fall from 8.8 percent in 2022 to 6.6 percent in 2023 and 4.3 percent in 2024." **>A6**

SPORTS
**Djokovic regains
World No. 1. spot**

3 The 22-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic became the World No. 1 men's player for the first time since last June after winning his 10th Australian Open title. Djokovic returned to World No. 1 in the ATP Rankings after he beat Stefanos Tsitsipas to win 10th Australian Open title. **>A8**



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CRIME STATISTICS	2021	2022
CASES REGISTERED	52,529	60,971
COURT ORDERS GIVEN	127,385	154,853

CRIMINAL CASES FILED AT PUBLIC PROSECUTION UP BY 14.5% IN 2022



	2021	2022
MURDERS	13	13
CHEQUE BOUNCE	7,143	6,500
MONEY LAUNDERING	138	43
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	17	10
CASES AT PUBLIC PROSECUTION	28,201	32,277

**Cheques without balance topped the
list of the most common 10 crimes**

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Public Prosecution authority said that the number of criminal cases filed at its departments rose by 14.5 percent to 32,277 cases in 2022, compared to 2021.

This was unveiled during the Public Prosecution's annual con-

ference held on Tuesday under the title "In the Name of Society". Various indicators and statistics from last year were reviewed.

Attorney General Nasr Khamis Al Sawa'ee said, "Publishing verdicts and names of persons involved is considered part of complementary penalties, and in some cases as secondary penalties. Pub-

lication of the same in the media is conducted under judicial ruling."

He added that 13 murder cases were reported last year and that a working team from the Ministry of Social Development was formed, in cooperation with the Public Prosecution department, to study each case separately.

Al Sawa'ee advised all to report any criminal case or suspicion of the same via proper, official channels to the departments concerned. He affirmed that each report or complaint is dealt with secretly.

In his turn, Dr. Ahmed Said Al Shukaili, Deputy Attorney General, said that the Public Prosecu-

tion department conducted more than 60,000 minutes of investigation, among them some 6,000 conducted in the evening session and about 7,000 via online investigation. Nearly 150,000 judicial order were issued by the Public Prosecution department, of them more than 40,000 issued in the evening session, Al Sawa'ee added.

He pointed out that murder crimes constitute a deep social concern, particularly the repeated use of knives or 'white arms', though the number of murders in 2022 and 2021 was the same with 13 murders.

He said that the Public Prosecution department is liaising with

the authorities concerned to investigate the causes.

"Cheques without balance" topped the list of the most common 10 crimes, followed by residency law violation, labour law violation, the use of narcotics and psychotropic substances, IT crimes, consumer law violation crimes, crimes of violation of human dignity, theft, extortion of money, swindling and traffic law violation.

As many as 30,543 cases of juvenile delinquency were reported last year, 14.7 percent higher than 2021 figures, while felonies rose by 9.8 percent to 1,378 as against 2021 figures. **>A2**

FIRST SURGERY OF ITS KIND

Rare surgery performed at SQUH

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team from the Paediatric Surgery Unit at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) conducted the first surgery of its kind in Oman. The surgery involved endoscopic transplantation of ureters from within the bladder of a one-year-old baby girl.

The head of the medical team, Dr. Zainab Nasser Al Balushi, Senior Consultant in Paediatric Surgeon, Head of the Paediatric Surgery Unit and Deputy Director General of the SQUH for Medical Affairs, said that the girl was suffering from frequent urinary infections and reflux of



urine from the ureters.

X-ray examination revealed the existence of more weakness in the left kidney compared to the right kidney due to infections and

reflux, Dr. Zainab explained. She told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the surgery aimed at diminishing the occurrence of urine infections by 50 percent. **>A2**



Muscat Nights: It's a children's world

A4

MEDIUM-TERM OUTLOOK

Credit rating upgrades reflect lower risks to Oman's economy

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Favourable sovereign credit rating actions during 2021 and 2022 by the three major rating agencies reflects the improved medium-term outlook for the Omani economy and lower systemic risks, according to a new report.

Inflation in Oman has also remained well-contained compared to the majority of the world, the Central Bank of Oman said in its first issue of Macroeconomic Stability Report (MSR) on Tuesday.

The report will be issued annually and complements CBO publications and adds to its timely communication approach with in-depth diagnostic analyses of Oman's macroeconomic performance. The CBO further



said in its MSR that inflation was within limits predominantly due to the impact of the fixed peg in maintaining price stability, the remaining subsidies on essential commodities, the exemption of many essential consumer goods

from the Value Added Tax and the adoption of a price ceiling on fuel.

The MSR 2022 highlights that the situation in the global economy remained highly unstable in 2022, still, the Omani economy recorded significant growth re-



flecting the rebound in oil prices and the relaxation of the pandemic-related measures. Nevertheless, the relative importance of the hydrocarbon sector in the Omani economy remained high. This sector accounted for 43 percent of

the real gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2021. Furthermore, there has been substantial improvement in fiscal balance, the MSR 2022 pointed out. "The overall fiscal deficit declined as a percent of GDP, mainly due to the rise in oil and gas revenues. Accordingly, lower government's financing needs led to a significant decrease in total public debt as a ratio to GDP during 2021 and the first half of 2022," it added in the report. In particular, external debt was sharply reduced during this period with the government redemption/repurchase of Eurobonds and International Sukuk.

The MSR compliments the Financial Stability Report (FSR) in affirming that the ongoing geopolitical tensions in Europe fuel

inflationary pressures that are mounting across the globe. The ensuing monetary tightening may weigh on growth, especially for the sectors that are still in the recovery phase.

The CBO released the first issue of the MSR on Tuesday. The report, which will be issued annually, complements CBO publications and adds to its timely communication approach with in-depth diagnostic analyses of Oman's macroeconomic performance.

The MSR covers a period of 18 months from January 2021 to June 2022 in providing its assessment of the recent macroeconomic developments in Oman, highlighting the strengths and potential macroeconomic vulnerabilities and risks. **-With ONA inputs**

OMAN

PRAYER
TIMINGS

Dhuhr.....12:25pm
Asr.....3:35pm
Maghrib.....5:58pm
Isha.....7:11pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....5:30am

SURGERY

Rare operation done at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

< FROM A1 Dr. Zainab Nasser Al Balushi, Senior Consultant in Paediatric Surgeon, Head of the Paediatric Surgery Unit and Deputy Director General of the SQUH for Medical Affairs, noted that the operation took about 4 hours logistically and medically and that the case was monitored for 5 days until the patient's discharge from the hospital, in good health.

The surgery is one of the world's rare operations. Few medical centres could conduct such types of operations.

The Sultan Qaboos University Hospital seeks to provide the best health care and services to the community.

-ONA

Oman to host semiconductor executive meet

Semiconductors have certain electrical properties that make them basic components of computers and other electronic devices

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Sultanate of Oman will host the International Semiconductor Executive Summits on 22 and 23 February 2023. The summit is due to bring together a large number of companies operating in the field from different countries of the world.

Dr. Ali Amer Al Shidhani, the ministry's Undersecretary for Communications and Informa-



tion Technology, said that the summit is part and parcel of the National Programme for Digital Economy and that it keeps pace with a drive to realise the goals of Oman Vision 2040 pertaining to the development of digital economy.

Al Shidhani added that the ministry exerts extensive efforts to make Oman attractive to investments in the communications and information technology sector. The action includes encouraging international companies specialized in semiconductors and electronic chips to establish projects in Oman, he said.

This will in turn enhance economic diversification, augment the gross domestic product and provide employment for Omanis, while at the same time localizing technology, he observed.

Semiconductors have certain electrical properties that make them basic components of computers and other electronic devices.

A semiconductor is usually a solid chemical element or compound that conducts electricity under certain conditions, making it an ideal means of controlling electrical current and electrical appliances like telephones, computers, cars and planes, as well as weapons. -ONA

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MEETING

Al Buraimi Municipal Council reviews progress of projects

AL BURAIMI: The Municipal Council of Al Buraimi Governorate held its meeting yesterday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Dr. Hamad Ahmed Al Busaidi, Governor of Al Buraimi, Chairman of the council.

The meeting reviewed the progress of some of the current projects in the governorate. It also discussed allocating agricultural investment sites in the Wilayat of Al Sunaina.

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PUBLIC PROSECUTION

Muscat governorate recorded highest number of cases

< FROM A1 The Public Prosecution department cleared 97 percent of cases filed last year. It referred 19,558 cases to the designated courts and reserved 11,687 cases, Al Shukaili said.

He explained that the number of registered suspects stood at 40,113 last year, 15 percent higher than 2021 figures, adding that expatriate suspects constituted 42.3% of the total number of accused persons.

As many as 13,155 cases were registered in Governorate of Muscat (40.8%---the highest), while 188 cases were reported in the Governorate of Musandam---the lowest, at 0.6%.

Al Shukaili stressed that there

is continuous follow-up of fake accounts that spread rumours via social communication channels. It was found that most of the rumours were transmitted from outside Oman, said Al Shukaili, who laid emphasis on the significance of social awareness as a means of combating such rumours.

Al Shukaili pointed out that cases reported to the Public Funds and Money Laundering Department dropped to 43 last year, noting that the total number of recovered funds stood at OMR12,418,971.

The Public Prosecution department kept 982 cases under investigation until the end of last year.

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Al Mouj Golf to host season opener of 2023’s International Series

Oman’s premier golf course is chosen as one of the region’s finest cementing its reputation as a global sporting attraction

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman’s championship golf course, Al Mouj Golf, is set to become the first golf course in the Middle East to host the season opener of 2023’s International Series, the elevated series of tournaments on the Asian Tour, later this month.

The Asian Tour is the only recognised pan-Asian professional golf tour in Asia and will see some of the world’s best players compete for a prize fund of \$2 million.

Famous names including Sergio Garcia and Louis Oosthuizen are



TOURNAMENT: The Asian Tour is the only recognised pan-Asian professional golf tour in Asia and will see some of the world’s best players compete for a prize fund of \$2 million.

among the 132-strong line-up of top-level pros set to play over four days (9th to 12th February) and take on the challenges of the par 72 Greg Norman design course in the first leg of the Middle Eastern swing.

The International Series is set to be staged in 10 different locations globally with each taking place at premier golf clubs carefully selected for the high quality of their course and amenities and

across global locations including Qatar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Set at the ocean’s edge, Al Mouj Golf is the Sultanate’s first links-style course and a World 100 Course with Today’s Golfer plac-

ing it in the top two in the region in 2022 and now, as the first ever Oman course to host The International Series Asian Tour, its reputation as a global sporting and leisure attraction has been raised further.

Over 10 years, the course has earned many plaudits for its superb design and its setting with breathtaking views of the sea and the Hajar mountains. As the nation’s first PGA championship course, it has also hosted several other prominent events including the Oman Open.

By attracting Pro and amateur players from across the globe, Al Mouj Golf has had a significant impact on Oman’s growing sports tourism sector, as CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, Nasser bin Masoud Al Sheibani explains, “We are delighted that Al Mouj Golf will host the kick-off event of the International Series. Our superb course will be the ideal setting for this highly prestigious tournament and it once more highlights Oman as a unique venue on the world golf stage. More than six million golfers regularly travel to different courses in pursuit of their passion and tournaments such as this

showcase our exceptional course to a global audience.

“Tourism is critical as Oman diversifies its economy and the appeal of sports tourism. Al Mouj Muscat is committed to maintaining our global presence by hosting Pro tournament events, and to implementing innovative ways to deliver lasting value to our community, our stakeholders, and the Sultanate of Oman through sustainable tourism and building on the 4 million visitors we attract annually.”

Al Mouj Golf has now received 23 International Awards and has welcomed 16,000 golfers in addition to hosting 35,000 guests with many more expected as part of this latest competition. The course is a key asset of Al Mouj Muscat, the Sultanate’s leading leisure and lifestyle destination, and a joint venture between Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Omran, and Tanmia. As Oman’s first Integrated Tourism Complex Al Mouj Muscat has delivered a significant socio-economic impact on job creation, development, foreign direct investment and growth in the number of SMEs as well as across the tourism sector.

10 RIDERS Oman to participate in Sharjah International Show Jumping Championship

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will participate with 10 riders in Sharjah International Show Jumping Championship, organized by Sharjah Equestrian and Racing Club, United Arab Emirates.

The event, held under the auspices of the International Equestrian Association, takes place at Sharjah Equestrian and Racing Club’s grounds from 2 to 5 February 2023.

Oman’s 10 riders fall in “One Star” and “Juniors” classes.

In the One Star Class, Oman will be represented by Hamoud Sultan Al Tooqi, Sultan Mohamed Al Tooqi, Khalid Said Al Wahaibi and Khalid Darwish Al Subhi (all male).

In the Juniors Class, it will be represented by Mohammed Hamoud Al Tooqi, Sultan Rashid Al Tooqi, Tamim Al Mahrouqi, Al Yaqeen Rashid Al Kindi (the only female), Nassir Fahmi Al Harrasi and Haider Anwar Al Rashid.

-ONA



TEJARAH TALKS



Sustainable manufacturing helps in reducing carbon footprint

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Manufacturers from across Oman are invited to attend Tejarah Talks first session of 2023, ‘Sustainable Manufacturing: Smart Manufacturing’ where the topic for discussion is the incorporation of environmentally friendly practices into business operations.

Scheduled for 7:30pm Wednesday 15 February, at Zain Auditorium, Omantel Head Office, Airport Heights the evening’s discussions will be moderated by His Highness Sayyid Dr. Adham Al Said, Managing Partner, The Firm while the panel includes Harsha Shetty, CEO, Jindal Shadeed, Mazin Al Rubaiai, Marketing Manager, Oman Aluminium Rolling Company and Haider Al Zaa-bi, Co-founder Mays EV.

Speaking ahead of the event, organiser, Maymuna Al Adawi, Director, Oman Business Forum & Public Private Partnerships at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion said: “Today, a growing number of Omani manufacturers are treating sustainability as an important objective in their strategy and operations to increase growth and global competitiveness. In fact, this trend has gone well beyond companies who have tradition-



Maymuna Al Adawi, Director, Oman Business Forum & PPP, Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion.

ally positioned themselves as green and now includes small as well as medium-sized Omani manufacturers.”

According to Al Adawi, one of the key benefits of sustainable manufacturing is the ability to cut energy usage and waste. “By implementing sustainable business practices, Omani manufacturers can reduce their carbon footprint, become energy efficient and decrease overhead costs. This not

only helps protect the environment but also saves companies money on energy bills.”

Noting the commitment to net zero targets of more and more Omani manufacturers Al Adawi added: “It is worth noting that businesses with a robust sustainable record tend to have a stronger corporate brand value, attracting employees and investors and performing better financially through greater focus on innovation, operational efficiency and risk management. Conversely, businesses that fail to act on sustainability issues can potentially risk losing investor interest, as well as alienating consumers and top-notch talent, especially among Oman’s younger generations. Today’s business landscape is increasingly complex and consumer expectations around sustainability will only continue to rise. It is clear that manufacturers who fail to meaningfully incorporate sustainable practices into their operations and supply chains will suffer in the long-run.”

Tejarah Talks is organised by Oman Business Forum in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion and generously supported by JindalShadeed, the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth and Omantel.

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Muscat
Nights



IT'S A
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WORLD

If you thought Muscat Nights is only for shopping, then pause for a moment and look around. Children can't contain their excitement after seeing the many attractions including the roller coaster rides, bumper cars, trampolines and giant slides. Parents are equally delighted to see their children having a whale of a time. Magic shows and cartoon characters are also there for children of all ages. While animated cartoon characters can be seen roaming around Qurum Natural Park. Visitors are not missing a single selfie opportunity. Some can be seen making short videos as well.

"It's fun for children to see their favourite cartoon characters in real life," Sujith Kumar, an Indian expatriate said. Clown acts and magic shows are also attracting the visitors to the park. Even though the acts they perform are for children, they are quite popular among adults too. The boat lake shows, helium shows and laser shows are also attracting children along with the many e-games.

The main stage springs to life each day with concerts and a variety of shows performed by leading stars from many countries.

The comic session for kids by Bob Hoffman will be held today, February 1 at Oman Automobile Association. Bob Hoffman is a leading personality in cartoon serials' making and don't just miss the opportunity of seeing him perform live on stage.

As a family entertainment destination, Muscat Nights no doubt is providing an environment that is filled with joy and surprises.



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MUSCAT: The total number of inbound and outbound flights at the airports of the Sultanate of Oman (Muscat, Salalah and Sohar) surged at the end of November 2022 by 134.5 percent to reach 57,939 flights compared to 24,710 flights during the corresponding period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSD).

The total number of inbound passengers through Oman's airports increased considerably by 142 percent.

Inbound, outbound and transit passengers in the airports of Muscat, Salalah, Sohar and Duqm reached 8,764,286 at the end of November 2022.

The number of outbound passengers also rose by 111 percent compared to the corresponding period in 2021.

Breaking down the figures, the number of international and domestic flights (outbound and in-



bound) went up by 110.3 percent to stand at 61,296 flights (carrying 7,602,856 passengers) at Muscat International Airport at the end of November 2022.

Salalah Airport recorded an increase in the number of international and domestic flights by 73.8 percent to reach 7,940 flights (carrying 1,030,829 passengers) by the end of November 2022.

The number of international and domestic flights (inbound and outbound) at Sohar Airport stood at 743 flights (carrying 69,066 passengers) by the end of November 2022.

Domestic flights (inbound and outbound) at Duqm Airport stood at 598 flights by the end of November 2022 compared to 570 flights during the corresponding period in 2021.

The number of passengers also went up by 38.3 percent to stand at 61,535 by the end of November



MUSCAT: The Arab Forum on Research and Sustainable Development at its conclusion on Tuesday recommended the devising of action plans to enhance the contribution of institutions, research centres and researchers to Arab developmental issues and enabling partnerships between universities, research centres and production and development companies in Arab countries.

The ninth edition of the forum was hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in cooperation with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO).

The two-day forum also advised the stakeholders to encourage Arab researchers and innovators and linking them with specialised companies by boosting cooperation between Arab institutions in the field of education, training and research in a bid to transform scientific innovations into actual national economic projects.

The forum underscored the importance of strengthening the role of the private sector in supporting and financing research and learning about Arab and international experiences that have succeeded in linking research with sustainable development.

Six discussion panels were held on the final day of the forum, during which prominent local and international researchers were hosted.



The panels discussed the role of Arab female researchers in agricultural research, the role of Arab female researchers in engineering and their role in leading Arab institutions and research centres.

The two-day forum aimed to enhance the contribution of institutions, authorities, universities, scholarly research centres, researchers and innovators in Arab development affairs.

It included eight sessions in which 39 working papers were submitted. It also targeted activating partnerships between universities, research and development centers, institutions, production and service companies.

The forum pursued encouraging Arab researchers and innovators and linking them with specialized companies in order to transform their innovations into economic products and projects, and to enhance communication

with Arab scientists abroad and benefit from their expertise in the development of Arab countries.

Further, the forum contributed to strengthening the role of the private sector in supporting, encouraging and financing research in Arab countries, developing Arab scientific publishing tools, manufacturing educational aid tools and supplies, and creating Arabic digital content, in addition to presenting successful Arab and international experiences.

The forum was a milieu that brought together Arab experts, researchers, institutions and companies with their counterparts at the regional and international levels.

It was also an opportunity to attract Arab scientists and experts from inside and outside the Arab world in a bid to contribute to the transfer and localisation of advanced technologies to Arab countries. — **UNA**



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(12) United States Patent Al-Sabli

(54) SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS USING A MOBILE DEVICE

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Mississippi (US)

(72) Inventor: **Mohamed Anwar Mohamed Al-Sabli**,
Mississippi (US)

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(54) Field of Classification Search
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(45) Date of Patent: Jul. 24, 2018

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(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Bill Tsien
(74) Attorney, Agent, or Firm — Hayes Sawney PC

(37) ABSTRACT

A Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) Chip Bank system and method for enabling users registered in the system to control their financial and telecommunications resources from their mobile device over a mobile communications network. The system enables mobile network providers and financial services through the use of SIM chips without the need for modifying the user's mobile device or SIM chip installed therein. A SIM Chip Bank System Operator (SCBO) manages data flow between users, banks, mobile communications service providers, SIM Chip Automated Teller Machines and SIM Chip Service Providing Machines through a plurality of communications channels. Upon a user connecting to the SCBO to request a transaction, the SCBO connects to the appropriate bank to authorize the requested transaction. Upon successful completion, reports are sent back up forth to users confirming the event.

8 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets

US 10,032,156 B2

Page 2

(51) Int. Cl.
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G06Q 20/18 (2012.01)
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(54) Field of Classification Search
USPC 705/205-45
See application file for complete search history.

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* cited by examiner

PAKISTAN

Death toll in Peshawar mosque blast rises to 90

ISLAMABAD: The number of fatalities in a suicide bombing inside a mosque in Peshawar's Police Lines has gone up to 90, with over 100 people wounded, Geo News reported citing Radio Pakistan.

The explosion took place in the central hall of the mosque on Monday at around 1 pm after a suicide bomber blew himself up. A rescue operation is being carried out to

pull out bodies from the debris of the mosque, Geo News reported citing an official. The official further said that a search operation is being conducted. According to the official, about 17 bodies have been brought out of the rubble and one injured person.

According to security officials, the suicide attacker was present in the front row during the prayers

when he blew himself up. The outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Suicide attack

Speaking to Geo News, Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Peshawar Mohammad Aijaz Khan said that the explosion appears to be a suicide attack and the head of the

suspected bomber has also been found at the site.

"It is possible that the attacker was already present in the Police Lines before the blast and that he may have used an official vehicle [to enter]," Geo News quoted Mohammad Aijaz Khan as saying. "About 1,500 to 2,000 police officers visit the Police Lines daily," he added. — **ANI**



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TRANSPORT DISRUPTIONS

France hit by travel woes as workers strike over pensions

PARIS: France saw its second major nationwide strike in two weeks on Tuesday in a backlash against the government's plans to push up the retirement age to 64.

More than one million people marched during the first round of protests on January 19 and workers' unions were expecting a similar turnout for the latest action.

The government had deployed some 11,000 civil and military police as demonstrators took to the streets of Paris, Grenoble, Toulouse, and other cities. Many of the country's schools, transport hubs, and oil refineries came to a standstill amidst the employee walkouts.

The actions come as lawmakers debate the bill at parliamentary committee level.

Due to the major transport disruptions, only one in about three high-speed TGV trains running, and very few local and regional trains were operational. The Paris metro was also severely disrupted.

National carrier Air France said it expected to cancel one in 10 short and medium-haul services, but that long-distance flights would not be affected. About half of all nursery and primary school teachers were to strike, the main teachers' union Snuipp-FSU said.

What is the new pension plan?

Opinion polls show a majority of French people oppose the reform, but President Emmanuel Macron and his government appear intent

on standing their ground. Macron says the reform is important to keep the pension system running.

The government's plan envisages raising the retirement age gradually from 62 to 64 by 2030 and increasing the number of years needed to pay into the system to obtain a full pension from 42 to 43.

State pension

All people in retirement in France receive a state pension — currently around €1,400 (\$1,500) per month on average — funded by contributions from those still in the workforce. The new plan aims to provide a minimum pension of €1,200 per month.

The system is now in jeopardy owing to the aging population, with more and more retirees backed by fewer and fewer contributors.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne says the 64 threshold is "non-negotiable," but the government is exploring ways to offset some of the impacts, in particular on women.

Labour Ministry estimates said pushing back the retirement age by two years and extending the pay-in period would yield an additional €17.7 billion (\$19.18 billion) in annual pension contributions. This would allow the system to break even by 2027.

However, unions say there are other ways to break even, such as taxing the super-rich or asking employers or financially privileged pensioners to contribute more. — **DW**

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

Neglected tropical diseases threaten global health, says WHO

WASHINGTON: Millions of people, especially in tropical countries, are infected with neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) every year.

The poorest people in Africa, Asia and Latin America are worst hit. An acute lack of medical care for NTDs not only erodes quality of life for those who fall ill but also harms them economically.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified 20 NTDs as debilitating and sometimes deadly for humans, especially if left untreated. Trachoma, for example, which occurs in many regions of the world, can lead to blindness and lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), a painful swelling of the limbs that can cause permanent disfigurement, affects over 120 million people in 72 countries.

Other pathogens such as Chagas disease, transmitted mainly in South America, attacks internal organs such as the kidneys or liver. It destroys nerve cells and can cause massive heart damage.

NTDs can be easily transmitted via a bug bite, a sandfly sting, or tiny parasites that penetrate the skin of unsuspecting swimmers out for dip in a lake, for instance.

"The big five" pathogens cause about 90% of all NTD diseases: Lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), river blindness (onchocerciasis), trachoma, schistosomiasis — a chronic disease caused by parasite worms — and helminth or worm infections.

Who is affected by NTDs worldwide?

NTDs affect around 1.7 billion people in 149 countries. Another two billion people are threatened by them, says the German Network against Neglected Tropical Diseases.

Half a million people die directly or indirectly from NTDs every year, according to estimates.

NTDs occur in all tropical regions on the planet — from Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and Africa to South America.

"African countries are the most affected," said Jürgen May, who heads Infectious Disease Epidemiology at the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine in Hamburg.

A researcher on global infections, May added that low-income people are particularly at risk, especially in rural areas isolated

from medical care — and where there is often insufficient clean water and food.

"There's a vicious cycle between diseases, chronic infectious diseases and poverty in these countries," May said. The high cost of treating the diseases leads to greater poverty. Meanwhile, infections are exacerbated by problems, like lack of clean water, that go hand in hand with poverty, May added.

Those who are permanently ill often can no longer work and provide for their families. And disabilities caused by NTDs lead to further stigmatization and exclusion.

The illnesses are often worse

for women and children, and so far there are no child-friendly medicines for many NTDs.

Why are NTD diseases 'neglected'?

Although billions of people worldwide are at risk from NTDs, the fight against them is still underfunded.

The term "neglected diseases" shows "how difficult it is to create awareness" for NTDs, as well as for the "neglected populations who suffer the most," said May. People in rural areas, as well as residents of poor neighborhoods in urban areas, are often not prioritized by lawmakers. More broadly, there's

a lack of awareness that these "diseases are severe" and "chronic."

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major setbacks in NTD control in many African countries, he said, because millions of doses of medicine could no longer be distributed to those affected. In many tropical countries, the consequences of coronavirus infections have not been as bad as the consequences of NTDs, May added.

Are tropical diseases spreading because of climate change?

NTDs are most common in tropical regions but climate change and global travel have helped them spread to Europe and North America.

Mosquito-borne dengue fever, for example, is not only found in Africa, Southeast Asia and South America, but has now reached the Mediterranean and southern Europe, May said.

In African countries, too, where the diseases used to affect mostly rural populations, more areas are now at risk.

Rising temperatures caused by man-made climate change has also impacted the insects that

transmit pathogens.

May explained how global heating has pushed mosquitoes into higher altitudes where bigger African cities like Nairobi in Kenya, or Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, or Antananarivo in Madagascar, are now seeing the spread of disease.

Cases of tropical diseases are also increasing in North America and Central Europe due to climate change. The West Nile virus is strictly speaking not an NTD, but it has been popping up regularly in Germany since 2018, according to May. It's also spread to the US due to hotter temperatures.

What is the next step in the fight against NTDs?

By 2030, the WHO wants to largely contain neglected tropical diseases worldwide through international cooperation between aid organizations, medical professionals, governments and the pharmaceutical industry.

"This is certainly an ambitious goal and will be difficult," said May. Experts fear that other crises from the COVID pandemic to the invasion of Ukraine will delay the fight against NTDs.

— **DW**

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- RBS
- Creatinine
- Sickie Cell
- HIV
- HCV
- VDRL
- HBSAg
- Urine Routine
- Blood Grouping
- TSH
- Antenatal Scan

PREMIUM
(First Trimester)
OMR 99

- OBG Consultation – 3 visits
- CBC
- RBS
- Creatinine
- Sickie Cell
- HIV
- HCV
- VDRL
- HBSAg
- Urine Routine
- Blood Grouping
- TSH
- Antenatal Scan
- Dietitian Consultation – 3 visits
- Physiotherapy Consultation – 1 visit

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(Second Trimester)
OMR 40

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- CBC
- GTT
- Urine Routine
- Growth Scan

PREMIUM
(Second Trimester)
OMR 101

- OBG Consultation – 6 visits
- CBC
- GTT
- Urine Routine
- TSH
- Growth Scan
- Dietitian Consultation – 3 visits
- Physiotherapy Consultation – 3 visits

BASIC
(Third Trimester)
OMR 40

- OBG Consultation – 6 visits
- CBC
- RBS
- Urine Routine
- Cardio Tocography
- Growth Scan

PREMIUM
(Third Trimester)
OMR 99

- OBG Consultation – 6 visits
- CBC
- RBS
- Urine Routine
- TSH
- Cardio Tocography
- Growth Scan
- Dietitian Consultation – 3 visits
- Physiotherapy Consultation – 1 visit

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We need to build self-reliant India by 2047, says President Droupadi Murmu

In her maiden address to the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajay Sabha in the central hall of Parliament, the President lauded India's growing position on the world stage

NEW DELHI: India has entered Amrit Kaal completing its 75 years of Independence and in this citizens have to focus on their duty towards building an 'aatmanirbhar' (self-reliant) India, said President Droupadi Murmu in her pre-budget address to the joint session of Parliament on Tuesday.

"By 2047, we have to build a nation that will be connected to the

pride of the past and which will have all the golden chapters of modernity. We have to build an India that will be 'Aatmanirbhar' and capable to fulfill its humanitarian duties," President Murmu said.

In her maiden address to the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajay Sabha in the central hall of Parliament President Murmu said, "India has entered Amrit Kaal completing its 75 years of

Independence. Amrit Kaal is a period of 100 years of Independence and making of a developed India. These 25 years is a period for all citizens to focus on duty."

The President described an India without poverty and full of prosperity.

"That should be an India that will not have poverty, whose middle class will also be prosperous, an India whose youth and women

will stand at the front to show a path to society and the country, an India whose youth stays two steps ahead of time," she said.

President Murmu also lauded India's growing position on the world stage and said that the country is providing solutions to the world.

"Today, India's self-confidence is at its highest and the world is looking at her from a different per-

spective. India is providing solutions to the world," the President said.

This is President Murmu's first budget session speech since assuming office in July last year. The President arrived in a ceremonial escort to Parliament to address the joint session at the start of the Budget session

Earlier addressing reporters outside Parliament Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Our Finance Minister will present one more Budget before the country tomorrow. In today's global circumstances, not only India but the entire world is looking at India's budget. Amid the unstable global economic situation, India's Budget will attempt to meet the hopes and aspirations of the common citizens. I firmly believe that Nirmala Sitharaman will make all efforts to meet those aspirations."

The budget session that began on Tuesday with the President's address will take place in 27 sittings till April 6 with a month-long recess to examine the budget papers. The first part of the session will conclude on February 13. Parliament will reconvene on March 12 for the second part of the Budget Session and will conclude on April 6. – ANI

NC's Farooq Abdullah praises inaugural address

NEW DELHI: National Conference (NC) MP Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday lauded the President Droupadi Murmu's address to Members of the Parliament of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha ahead of the commencement of the Budget Session of the Parliament, hailing it as a "good address".

"It was good. It was a good address," Abdullah told ANI. However, Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said that the President's address reiterates Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's stand. – ANI

REGARDING POLAND TOUR

US President 'not sure' about his trip to Europe

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Monday said that he was "not sure" about his trip to Europe around the one-year anniversary of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine next month.

Speaking to reporters at the White House, Biden said, "I'm not sure". However, in a separate question regarding Poland tour, the US president said that he would visit a crucial ally, but that date was not yet determined.

Earlier, two senior administration officials in the US said President Biden was considering making a trip to Europe around the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine next month.

A trip is not yet confirmed, and details have yet to be finalized. But one of the officials said that one stop under consideration is Poland, a key NATO ally currently housing thousands of American troops that also serves as a hub for Western weapons transfers to Ukraine. US service members are also training Ukrainian troops there. It is highly unlikely that Biden would travel to Ukraine as part of this trip, however, one of the officials said, citing the ongoing security concerns.

Biden's aides have been planning for several weeks how they will mark the anniversary of the invasion, including potentially a major address. They hope to emphasise the resilience of the Ukrainian people, noting that when the war began, many assumed Kyiv would fall within days.

Responding to queries in South Lawn, Biden also expressed his wish that the George Floyd Act be passed.

Earlier, he also said America will not send the F16 fighter jets to Ukraine, CNN reported. While responding to a reporter on whether he would send F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, Biden said "no".

Interestingly, the US had ramped up military assistance to Ukraine in the form of artillery and tanks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has sought fighter jets to help sustain his war effort against Russia. Biden has consistently said the planes aren't on the table, even as he has given aid in other areas.

Last week, Biden announced that he would send 31 M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, despite top US

officials saying previously the heavy-duty vehicles were a poor fit for the country's military.

Speaking on the White House South Lawn, Biden also said he wasn't sure whether he would visit Europe next month for the one-year anniversary of the start of the war in Ukraine, reported CNN.

In response to a separate question, Biden said he was planning to visit Poland, but wasn't sure when.

Earlier, French President Emmanuel Macron and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that they have not received any requests from Ukraine for fighter jets, according to CNN.

"We do not have such a request formulated [from Ukraine]," Macron said at a joint press conference at The Hague where the two leaders were meeting to prepare the next EU council of February.

Macron said while no requests had been received by France, "nothing is off-limits in principle." He insisted that the usefulness of each request must be considered carefully.

Macron said the weapons requested should not escalate the conflict, reported CNN. – ANI

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SPORTS

Mickey Arthur likely to be appointed as Pakistan cricket team director

A deal is soon likely to be finalised, and Arthur might take over as team director on April 1 as per ESPNcricinfo

LAHORE: Mickey Arthur and the (Pakistan Cricket Board) PCB are nearing an agreement that will see Arthur return to the Pakistan men's squad, albeit as team director rather than as a head coach.

Three weeks before the PCB's announcement that it was pressing forward with its search for a successor to Saqlain Mushtaq, the departing Pakistan coach, talks between the two parties had ended. Given that Arthur had a long-term contract with Derbyshire that he did not wish to cancel, the two parties had been unable to come to an agreement on how such a post could function.

But the temporary chairman of the PCB, Najam Sethi, said last week that he was still looking for Arthur.

A deal will soon be finalised, and Arthur might take over as team director on April 1 as per ESPNcricinfo.

This title, one in which Arthur will serve as a consultant rather



than the team's head coach, will result in an unorthodox management system, at least on a global scale, in which he won't go with Pakistan's team on every outing but will instead delegate responsibility for running things to a hand-selected group of support personnel.

Grant Bradburn, a former Pa-

kistan fielding coach and former director of their High-Performance Center, is slated to serve as the team's top assistant coach and serve as a leader among the support personnel. There won't be a typical head coach, but there will be three coaches for batting, bowling, and fielding.

Arthur will not be deeply in-

involved with the team during the English county season; Pakistan, for instance, will tour Sri Lanka in July and will host the Asia Cup in September.

However, following the conclusion of the county season, Arthur is anticipated to travel with the team for important events like the ODI World Cup in India in Octo-



ber-November of this year and the Test tour of Australia later in the winter. One of the issues still being resolved is the contract's term, but both parties agree that Pakistan's timeline is such that such an agreement is feasible.

Successful run

Between 2016 and 2019, Arthur served as the Pakistan team's head coach. During this time, the team had a largely successful run in white-ball cricket, winning the Champions Trophy in 2017 and transforming their limited-overs teams.

Following a disappointing performance in the 2016 T20 World Cup, Arthur helped a T20 team led by Sarfaraz Ahmed turn things around and elevate them to the top of the ICC rankings, where they had lagged behind other Full Members. There were also significant

Test results, however, it was more difficult to change the red-ball side. Pakistan nearly missed making it to the World Cup's last four due to one significant early loss, and Misbah-ul-Haq quickly replaced Arthur.

More critically, Arthur's comeback will allow him to reconnect with a number of players, including captain Babar Azam, whose growth he helped shape in his last term. Babar had a difficult transition into Test cricket, but Arthur stayed with him and witnessed his ascent with the white ball.

Others have also discussed the influence Arthur has had on their careers, including Sarfaraz, Hasan Ali, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Fakhar Zaman, and Shadab Khan. After his employment in Pakistan, Arthur spent some time in Sri Lanka. Since then, he has worked for Derbyshire. -ANI

TENNIS

Djokovic dethrones Alcaraz to regain World No. 1 spot

LONDON: The 22-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic on Monday became the World No. 1 men's player for the first time since last June after winning his 10th Australian Open title.

Djokovic returned to World No. 1 in the ATP Rankings after he defeated Stefanos Tsitsipas to win a record-extending 10th Australian Open title, while doing so the 35-year-old Serbian rose four places to dethrone Carlos Alcaraz of Spain, who missed the Australian Open tournament through injury and dropped to second. After claiming his 10th Australian Open title on Sunday, Djokovic returned to World No. 1 and in doing so made the biggest jump to the top of the men's tennis mountain between two editions of the Pepperstone ATP Rankings in history (since 1973). The Serbian will climb from World No. 5 to World No. 1.

If Djokovic remains World No. 1 through the week of 20 February, he will tie Stefanie Graf's record for most weeks as World No. 1 in history (men and women) at 377.

In the Australian Open final, the 35-year-old wasn't the only player vying for the top spot in the world rankings. Stefanos Tsitsipas of



Greece had a chance to overtake the leader, but he fell short by one victory.

After reaching his second Grand Slam final at the Australian Open, the 24-year-old player moved up one rank to No. 3. To advance to the final, the Greek defeated Jan-nik Sinner and Karen Khachanov, both seeds. Rafael Nadal drop four places to sixth. Andrey Rublev of Russia climbed to a career-best position of fifth.

The 26-year-old Karen Khachanov, who had reached the semi-finals at the US Open in September, played some of his greatest tennis in Melbourne to advance to his second major final. -ANI

FOOTBALL

Messi expresses regret over his actions in World Cup quarters

PARIS: World Cup champion Lionel Messi expressed remorse over his actions during the World Cup quarterfinals, including wild celebrations and gestures towards Netherlands manager Louis van Gaal.

Messi and his teammates received criticism for their behaviour following their 2-2 draw on December 9 and subsequent win on penalties. The Paris Saint-Germain player ran in front of Netherlands coach Louis van Gaal as he cupped his hands over his ears in celebration of his 73rd-minute penalty goal.

Messi had mentioned that the Netherlands manager used derogatory remarks about Argentina during the pre-match press conference.

"I knew what Van Gaal had said but it [the goal celebration] happened on the spur of the moment. I didn't like what I did, I didn't like what happened after. These are moments of nervousness and everything happens very quickly," Messi said in an interview in Paris with Andy Kusnetzoff's "Perros de la Calle" as quoted by ESPN.

At full-time, the Argentina



captain was spotted arguing with Van Gaal and Edgar Davids, his assistant. During a post-game interview, Messi allegedly yelled at Netherlands goal scorer Wout Weghorst.

Meanwhile, Messi stated he wouldn't have it any other way despite the long wait to win the World Cup.

In Messi's sixth World Cup, Argentina defeated France on penalties in Qatar to win their first World Cup in 36 years.

"I think if I had to choose the moment, it would have been this one. It's at the end of my career, closing a circle. I achieved eve-

rything with the national team I always dreamed of. I got everything in my career, individually. It was closing my career in a unique way. I never imagined that all this was going to happen to me when I started and getting to this moment was the best. I have no complaints and I can't ask for more. We won the Copa America [2021] and the World Cup, there's nothing left," stated Messi.

Messi stated that he wanted for Diego Maradona to witness Argentina's first World Cup victory since the Napoli icon assisted his country in winning the trophy in 1986. -ANI

CRICKET



Glam Homes edge past OCT Ruwi; Khalsa United beat Mordern Muscat Mountains

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Glam Homes beat OCT Ruwi by 3 wickets in the A Division and Khalsa United CT beat Mordern Muscat Mountains by 17 runs in the C Division of the Oman Cricket Domestic League Season 2022-23.

OCT Ruwi started off steadily with Mohammed Al Balushi (95 of 114; 12x4, 3x6) steering them along with Muzaffar Mohammed and Shoaib Al Balushi helping OCT Ruwi create a base to set a good total. Wasim Al Balushi's pinch hitting in the death overs helped OCT Ruwi post a mammoth total of 267/6 in 50 overs.

Nalinda Prasad (3/33) was the key arm for Glam Homes in their bowling. In response, Glam Homes' openers Arbaz Qureshi and Pathum W helped them get off to a start they needed to be in the race.

However, quality bowling spells from Zubair Al Balushi (2/58) and Nawed Al Balushi (2/44) brought the game to life as Glam Homes fell 5 down in 30 overs at 132 runs. Faizan Abdullah (55 of 53; 4x4, 1x6) and Eameen Habib (51 of 44; 5x4, 1x6) stood tall and dominated the OCT Ruwi bowlers to get their team across the line and register victory in the 48th over. Glam Homes went on to the top of the table with one game to go for them.

In the match in C division, Khalsa United CT posted a target of 172/6 in 20 overs for Mordern Muscat Mountains courtesy Sushil Kadam's (66 of 49; 6x4) supported by Usman Asghar's pinch hitting to post a par-score. Sidhi Suman (2/27) was the key bowler for the Mordern Muscat Mountains. In response, Syed Arfan (54 of 40; 4x4) and Pradeesh Kumar (41 of 36; 4x4) carried the innings for the Mountains but fell short by 17 runs to take their team over the line. Usman Asghar bagged 2 wickets to ensure victory for Khalsa United CT.

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OMAN CRUDE PRICE FALLS
The price of Oman oil has decreased, with prices for delivery by March 2023 reaching \$79.91, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil fell by \$2.59 from the price of Monday, which was \$82.50. - **ONA**

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS LOWER
The MSX index closed at 4,703.38 points, down by 0.99 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.21 per cent at 486.52 points. Al Batinah Power, up 5.71 per cent, was the top gainer while Phoenix Power, down 5.26 per cent, was the top loser.

PDO announces new package of social investment initiatives

The initiatives worth more than \$2.1 million include commitments in the key areas of health, community infrastructure development as well as enhancing the education sector

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has committed to supporting a host of new projects totalling more than \$2.1 million, which will benefit communities and boost sustainable

development across the Sultanate. The initiatives include commitments in the key areas of health, community infrastructure development as well as enhancing the education sector. Ten Memorandums of Collaboration (MOCs) confirming



these commitments were signed yesterday at an official ceremony held under the auspices of Sheikh Rashid bin Ahmed Al-Shamsi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Development. To enhance the availability of high-quality medical ser-

vices across Oman, PDO signed an agreement with the Ministry Of Health to fund the construction of the Emergency and Accidents unit in Maqshan Health. To encourage the adoption of sports and healthy lifestyles in Oman, PDO is funding the con-

struction of a 2km walk path with planted trees and solar lights in the Wilayat of Izki, which will be benefit 60,000 people. In line with the company's commitment to boost the education sector within its concession area, PDO signed an agreement to construct two science labs in Abu Mudhabi and Shumookh schools in the Wilayats of Haima and Duqm and also to fund the construction of a sports hall for Mawred School In the Wilayat of Adam. More than 1,000 students in the three schools will benefit from these facilities. PDO External Affairs and Value Creation Director Eng. Abdul-Amir bin Abdul-Hussein Al Ajmi said, "We are thrilled to kick off the year by following PDO's longstanding practice of supporting

local communities through investments in sustainable development projects. This is just the first of many initiatives we will take this year to create a better future for our communities." In addition, PDO has signed two agreements for the Wilayat of Maqshan, one to provide funding for the purchase of vehicles for the Environment Authority in the wilayat and another to provide additional funding for three public majlis in the same area. Moreover, PDO signed agreements to support four NGOs, including the Ihsan Association in Batinah South Governorate, the Omani Women's Association, the Al Noor Association for the Blind in the Wilayat of Nizwa and the Omani Association for the hearing impaired.

PARTNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT FORUM

Forum discusses opportunities to boost ICV and SMEs development in free zones



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (Opaz) organised yesterday the Partnership and Development Forum, with the participation of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Sezad), the free zones in Sohar, Salalah, Al Mazunah and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). Many employees and special-

ists from various directorates and departments concerned with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) development, and the In-Country Value (ICV) in Opaz and its affiliated zones took part in the event. During the forum, participants touched on the constant efforts made by Opaz, since its inception, to serve the community, enhance ICV, and support SMEs through a range of various sustainable initiatives and projects.

CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN

Treasury bills worth OMR70mn issued

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) raised OMR70 million by way of allotting treasury bills on Tuesday. The value of the allotted treasury bills for a maturity period of 91 days amounted to OMR5 million. The average accepted price reached OMR98.789 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at OMR98.785 per OMR100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.85731

per cent and 4.91685 per cent, respectively. Whereas, the value of the allotted treasury bills for a maturity period of 182 days amounted to OMR65 million. The average accepted price reached OMR97.461 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at OMR97.450 per OMR100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.09180 per cent and 5.22444 per cent, respectively. -**ONA**

Board of Directors' Report for the year ended 31 December 2022

Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to present your Bank's full year financial results for 2022.

Performance Summary

I am delighted to share with you the positive results achieved by the Bank during 2022. Our performance shows a 45.9% increase in net profit for the year ended 31 December 2022 to RO26.7 M. This compares with RO18.3 M for 2021, the increase being driven primarily by a 10.2% growth in net operating income and lower operating expenses.

Net interest income was up 9.4% to RO57.0 M for the year compared with RO52.1 M in 2021 mainly due to higher interest income from the favourable interest rate environment, partly offset by higher interest expense on deposits. Net fee income increased by 13.8% to RO10.7 M for the year ended 31 December 2022 compared with RO9.4 M in 2021 mainly due to higher fees from cards.

Net trading income increased by 4.9% to RO6.4 M, an increase of RO0.3 M compared to 2021, due to higher FX volumes.

A net release of RO7.0 M has been reported to the Bank's Expected Credit Loss (ECL) and other credit impairment charges compared with a net release of RO7.5 M in 2021. The Bank released RO6.4 M of Wholesale ECL and RO0.6 M of Retail ECL. The ECL release was largely driven by an improvement in the macroeconomic variables (GDP growth and oil price) which are the key inputs for our IFRS 9 model.

Operating expenses fell by 5.5% to RO50.1 M, primarily due to lower IT related recharges and lower staff cost owing to a lower number of full time employees.

Loans and advances to customers decreased by 7.4% to RO1,247.4 M compared with RO1,347.2 M as at 31 December 2021. Customer deposits decreased by 7.1% to RO1,765.3 M compared with RO1,901.1 M as at 31 December 2021. Our liquidity remains strong, as shown by an Advances to Deposit ratio (ADR) of 70.7% at the end of 2022.

HBON's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) stood at 24.3% for the year ended 31 December 2022 compared with 22.7% as at 31 December 2021.

The Board of Directors proposes a total cash dividend of RO16.0 M, with a dividend pay-out ratio of 59.9%.

Delivering the best customer experience

In Wealth and Personal Banking, we launched key initiatives focused on customer acquisition throughout the year, including a new to bank customer acquisition campaign offering all Premier and Advance new to bank clients an upfront cash back reward. We also launched a campaign offering a chance to win 1 million rewards points for cardholders based on their usage of their credit cards.

As part of our Employee Banking Solutions program, we held a number of virtual meetings and open days with our top corporate employers in order to grow business from our top 120 employers. During the year, we deployed technology that enables the identification of customers through voice biometrics. This allows customers to access our banking services through our contact centre by phone using their voice as their unique identifier. Our digital penetration increased to around 55% (6% higher YoY).

In the Wholesale business, we continued to support our clients on their transition journeys with sustainable financing and investment to help their businesses develop sustainably. During the year we held sessions for Government related entities on Sustainable Finance as this topic increasingly becomes a priority for the Sultanate and our clients.

We also extended our latest payments solution, Global Disbursements, to Oman Air, which will allow it to make international payments in various currencies from its centralised treasury location in Oman.

The annual HSBC Economist Roadshow came to Oman in October with an optimistic forecast for the region's economic outlook in 2023. More than 150 clients and business leaders in Oman attended the presentations made by the HSBC economist team. Throughout 2022, we were proud to receive several awards from Euromoney. We were voted by our corporate clients as the Best Bank for Trade Finance services in 2022 and also won Best Investment Bank for the third consecutive year and the Best Bank in the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) category. The Bank was also voted as "Market Leader" by corporates in the Sultanate of Oman for the 11th consecutive year in the annual Euromoney Cash Management Survey 2022.

Investing in our people and community

We continued to make progress in supporting the country's Omanization agenda, achieving a 94% Omanization rate by 31 December 2022. During 2022 we have appointed more Omani nationals into senior positions in the Bank as part of our ongoing commitment to develop our local talent.

We continued to invest in our staff training programmes. Our learning activities focused on helping our people to understand their aspirations and build the skills needed to achieve their goals. Another area of focus was the wellbeing and mental health of our people. We delivered a number of learning sessions and activities to support our employees to make positive choices about their personal and professional priorities.

As part of the Summer internship program, 30 interns joined the bank during the summer in different areas of our business.

Under Corporate Sustainability, we rolled out a number of initiatives throughout the year in cooperation with local and international NGOs. We signed an agreement with the Environment Society of Oman to support its efforts towards implementing alternative solutions to harmful marine practices that threaten the survival of whales. The agreement included a capacity building programme that focuses on developing the next generation of marine researchers.

We also partnered with the UK based organization "Debate Mate" in a programme that seeks to empower youth with key employability and financial skills.

Potential Merger with Sohar International Bank

As disclosed by the Bank in Muscat Stock Exchange on 16th November, the Boards of Directors of HSBC Oman and Sohar International (SI) have now reached a binding agreement to take the necessary steps towards a merger by incorporation. There will be no immediate change for customers as a result of this announcement. Both banks will remain independent and continue to operate a business as usual service until the merger has completed.

The merger, is expected to complete in the second half of 2023, if approved by the relevant regulatory bodies as well as by the respective shareholders of the two entities.

If the merger goes ahead, all of the assets and liabilities of HBON would be transferred to SI at carrying value and HBON would be dissolved.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank all of our customers for their trust in us, our staff and management for what they have achieved so far, as well as the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for their continued support and guidance.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles
Chairman

Statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December		
	2022	2021
	RO'000	RO'000
Interest income	77,924	67,192
Interest expense	(20,879)	(15,134)
Net interest income	57,045	52,058
Fee income	14,275	12,934
Fee expense	(3,561)	(3,516)
Net fee income	10,714	9,418
Net trading income	6,426	6,144
Changes in fair value of financial investments measured at Fair Value Through Profit and Loss (FVTPL)	-	49
Dividend income	-	3
Other operating income - net	439	39
Net operating income before change in expected credit losses and other credit impairment charges	74,624	67,711
Change in expected credit losses and other credit impairment charges	6,988	7,500
Net operating income	81,612	75,211
Employee compensation and benefits	(21,986)	(22,640)
General and administrative expenses	(22,818)	(25,196)
Depreciation and impairment of property, equipment and right-of-use assets	(3,762)	(2,146)
Amortisation and impairment of intangible assets	(1,527)	(3,058)
Total operating expenses	(50,093)	(53,040)
Profit before tax	31,519	22,171
Tax expense	(4,810)	(3,839)
Profit for the year	26,709	18,332
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss when specific conditions are met:		
Financial investments at Fair Value Through Other Comprehensive Income (FVOCI)		
- Fair value loss	(870)	(206)
- Expected credit losses recognised in income statement	(530)	(134)
- Income tax	130	31
	(1,270)	(309)
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Remeasurement of defined benefit liability	(32)	(22)
Other comprehensive loss for the year - net of tax	(1,302)	(331)
Total comprehensive income for the year	25,407	18,001
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	RO0.013	RO0.009

Statement of financial position as at 31 December		
	2022	2021
	RO'000	RO'000
Assets		
Cash and balances with central bank	123,003	282,721
Due from banks	283,756	213,700
Loans and advances to customers - net	1,247,387	1,347,188
Financial investments	538,213	448,962
Other assets	26,304	34,078
Intangible assets	965	-
Property and equipment	17,669	20,342
Right-of-use-assets	2,396	-
Deferred tax assets	1,935	2,256
Total assets	2,241,628	2,349,247
Liabilities and equity		
Liabilities		
Due to banks	46,762	48,444
Deposits from customers	1,765,275	1,901,094
Current tax liabilities	6,936	5,339
Other liabilities	61,000	48,883
Lease liabilities	2,338	-
Total liabilities	1,882,311	2,003,760
Equity		
Share capital	200,031	200,031
Legal reserve	50,448	47,777
FVOCI reserve	110	1,380
Retained earnings	108,728	96,299
Total equity	359,317	345,487
Total liabilities and equity	2,241,628	2,349,247

The above annual financial results for the year ended 31 December 2022 are subject to the approval of the Central Bank of Oman and the shareholders of the bank.



Issued by HSBC Bank Oman S.A.O.G. P.O. Box 1727, CPO Seeb 111, Sultanate of Oman, Commercial Registration 1080849, Tax Card 8089567.

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Opening up a world of opportunity

MARKET



MSX index ends lower

Al Batinah Power, up 5.71 per cent, was the top gainer while Phoenix Power, down 5.26 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,703.38 points, down by 0.99 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.21 per cent at 486.52 points. Al Batinah Power, up 5.71 per cent, was the top gainer while Phoenix Power, down 5.26 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of United Finance were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 443 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR1.63 million, with more than 14.83 million shares changing hands.

Out of 37 traded securities, 7 advanced, 16 declined, and 14 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net sellers for OMR116,000 while foreign investors were net buyers for OMR102,000, followed by GCC & Arab investors for OMR14,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,550.17 points, down 1.03 per cent. Prices of Global Financial Investments and Ominvest were up by 1.72 per cent and 0.48 per

cent respectively.

Prices of National Bank Oman, Bank Dhofar, Al Omaniya Financial Services, United Finance, and Al Anwar Investment were down by 1.82 per cent, 3.23 per cent, 2.10 per cent, 1.61 per cent and 1.24 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,855.01 points, down 0.11 per cent. Prices of Jazeera Steel Products, National Aluminium and Oman Refreshment were up by 1.82 per cent, 1.56 per cent and 0.81 per cent respectively.

Prices of Oman Fisheries, Raysut Cement and Al Anwar Ceramics were down by 3.30 per cent, 2.31 per cent and 0.58 per cent respectively.

Services Index was down by 0.62 per cent before closing at 1,681.78 points. Prices of Al Batinah Power and Al Suwadi Power were up by 5.71 per cent and 2.86 per cent respectively.

Prices of Phoenix Power, Renaissance Services, SMN Power Holding, OIFC, and Ooredoo were down by 5.26 per cent, 2.22%, 1.82 per cent, 0.79 per cent and 0.46 per cent respectively.

— United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE

INDECIES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	4,750.26	4,700.51	4,703.38	4,750.26	-46.87	-0.99
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,634.63	7,539.53	7,550.17	7,628.53	-78.36	-1.03
Industry Index	5,861.27	5,846.16	5,855.01	5,861.27	-6.26	-0.11
Services Index	1,692.31	1,680.12	1,681.78	1,692.31	-10.53	-0.62
MSX Shariah Index	487.55	486.52	486.52	487.55	-1.04	-0.21
MSX TR INDEX	5,998.00	5,935.19	5,938.82	5,998.00	-59.18	-0.99
FINANCIAL TR IDX	7,988.79	7,889.27	7,900.41	7,982.41	-81.99	-1.03
SERVICES TR IDX	1,795.31	1,782.38	1,784.14	1,795.31	-11.17	-0.62
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	6,102.31	6,086.57	6,095.79	6,102.31	-6.52	-0.11

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
14,838,849	1,632,512	443	23,533,258,756	7	16	14	37

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR TUESDAY, JANUARY 31

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PRI VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET																
OMD0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PROD.	50,345	11,191	6	0.220	0.224	0.220	0.224	0.220	0.004	1.818	0.224	0.224	0.240	0.100	27,977,143
OMD0000003125	GLOBAL INV. H.	50,100	2,856	2	0.057	0.059	0.057	0.059	0.058	0.001	1.724	0.059	0.058	0.060	0.100	11,800,000
OMD0000001533	OMINVEST	200,000	83,600	1	0.418	0.418	0.418	0.418	0.416	0.002	0.481	0.418	0.418	0.000	0.100	279,376,748
OMD0000001152	OMAN NAT. ENG.	92,845	11,049	12	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.000	0.000	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.100	16,660,000
OMD0000002200	AHLI BANK	126,238	20,198	3	0.180	0.180	0.180	0.180	0.180	0.000	0.000	0.180	0.154	0.160	0.100	311,945,195
OMD0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	310	294	1	0.948	0.948	0.948	0.948	0.948	0.000	0.000	0.948	0.928	0.948	0.100	711,000,000
OMD0000003281	TAGEER FINANCE	15,100	1,525	3	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.000	0.000	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.100	26,124,842
OMD0000003389	SOHAR INT. BANK	5,440	555	2	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.000	0.000	0.102	0.101	0.102	0.100	468,186,354
OMD0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSUR.	2,000	570	1	0.285	0.285	0.285	0.286	0.286	-0.001	-0.350	0.285	0.280	0.285	0.100	28,500,000
OMD0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	1,603,290	444,043	61	0.277	0.277	0.276	0.276	0.277	-0.001	-0.361	0.276	0.276	0.276	0.100	2,071,765,589
OMD0000003968	OOREDOO	25,000	10,900	8	0.436	0.436	0.436	0.436	0.438	-0.002	-0.457	0.436	0.436	0.440	0.100	283,811,684
OMD0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	9,000	3,090	6	0.344	0.344	0.340	0.344	0.346	-0.002	-0.578	0.344	0.340	0.344	0.100	75,680,000
OMD0000001525	OMAN INVSTR FIN.	209,720	26,425	5	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.127	-0.001	-0.787	0.126	0.127	0.126	0.100	29,862,000
OMD0000002077	AL OMANIYA FIN.S	251,244	35,175	5	0.141	0.141	0.140	0.140	0.143	-0.003	-2.098	0.140	0.129	0.150	0.100	42,448,909
OMD0000003224	RENAISSANCE SER.	105,402	47,495	9	0.450	0.454	0.440	0.450	0.450	-0.010	-2.222	0.440	0.440	0.462	0.100	104,020,400
OMD0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	175,481	48,093	7	0.281	0.281	0.272	0.274	0.289	-0.015	-5.190	0.274	0.274	0.283	0.100	445,508,302
Total	16	2,921,515	747,058	132												
Parallel Market																
OMD0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	43,700	1,532	5	0.037	0.037	0.035	0.037	0.035	0.002	5.714	0.035	0.035	0.037	0.100	24,970,835
OMD0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	179,413	6,460	10	0.037	0.037	0.036	0.036	0.035	0.001	2.857	0.036	0.034	0.036	0.100	25,718,628
OMD0000001319	ALUMINIUM PROD.	15,300	995	2	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.064	0.001	1.563	0.065	0.063	0.065	0.100	2,182,144
OMD0000001426	OMAN REFRESHMENT	300	372	1	1.240	1.240	1.240	1.240	1.230	0.010	0.813	1.240	0.000	1.240	0.100	62,000,000
OMD0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	71,565	7,250	9	0.101	0.102	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.000	0.000	0.101	0.100	0.101	0.100	8,585,000
OMD0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	283,929	17,036	15	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.000	0.000	0.060	0.054	0.060	0.100	18,428,780
OMD0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	10,543	780	2	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.000	0.000	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.100	9,018,750
OMD0000004420	BANK NIZWA	926,019	92,501	34	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.100	0.100	0.000	0.000	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	223,695,303
OMD0000007043	NATIONAL LIFE INS.	100	34	2	0.340	0.340	0.340	0.340	0.340	0.000	0.000	0.340	0.000	0.340	0.100	135,447,276
OMD0000007084	MCT DESALINATE	12,000	1,188	2	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.000	0.000	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.100	15,399,490
OMD0000007811	MUSANDAM POWER	115,862	36,149	6	0.312	0.312	0.312	0.312	0.312	0.000	0.000	0.312	0.312	0.312	0.100	21,961,680
OMD0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	41,100	3,700	5	0.091	0.091	0.090	0.090	0.091	-0.001	-1.099	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.100	15,750,000
OMD0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	73,850	5,906	7	0.080	0.080	0.079	0.080	0.081	-0.001	-1.235	0.080	0.080	0.079	0.100	16,000,000
OMD0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	8,168,256	503,333	164	0.064	0.064	0.061	0.061	0.062	-0.001	-1.613	0.061	0.060	0.064	0.100	21,997,809
OMD0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	317,800	17,143	13	0.053	0.054	0.053	0.054	0.055	-0.001	-1.818	0.054	0.054	0.054	0.100	10,780,322
OMD0000001419	BAISUT CEMENT	75,800	9,851	12	0.130	0.130	0.127	0.127	0.130	-0.003	-2.308	0.127	0.127	0.139	0.100	25,400,000
OMD0000002549	BANK DHOFAR	1,000,000	150,000	1	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.155	-0.005	-3.226	0.150	0.000	0.000	0.100	449,453,715
OMD0000001566	OMAN FISHERIES	5,000	440	2	0.088	0.088	0.088	0.088	0.091	-0.003	-3.297	0.088	0.087	0.100	0.100	16,022,899
OMD0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	574,287	30,930	17	0.055	0.055	0.053	0.054	0.057	-0.003	-5.263	0.054	0.054	0.055	0.100	78,980,479
Total	19	11,914,824	885,398	309												

6-MONTH PROGRAMME

Accelerator programme to empower, support innovative fintech start-ups

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman and Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, have joined hands to deliver a six-month accelerator programme dedicated to nurturing and empowering fintech start-ups.

The accelerator programme seeks to support innovative fintech start-ups through the challenges of the highly competitive fintech industry through mentorship, training, networking, and fundraising support.

The programme targets promising, high-potential local start-ups with fintech solutions in debt-based crowdfunding, buy now pay later, microfinancing and ROSCA system, a rotating savings and association system.

The five start-ups selected for the accelerator are Al-Jumaeiah,



an application that helps create, manage and organise different jamaeiahs (groups) on a single platform; Hal Capital, a Sharia-compliant embedded fintech offering alternative financing products and services to SMEs and individuals; TasHeel Financial Solutions that provides financial ease to clients through a Buy Now Pay Later solution; Wadiaa, an equity-based crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending solution for start-ups and SMEs; and Zumr Fintech which provides micro-financing oppor-

tunities by encouraging the habit of saving.

His Highness Sayyida Ghada Al Said, Senior Manager, Omantel Innovation Labs, said “It has been a pleasure to work with the Central Bank of Oman to create a valuable fintech programme for the local start-up ecosystem that combines the expertise of Omantel and the Central Bank of Oman. The partnership leverages our shared vision and strengths to contribute to the growth of fintech start-ups in the country and we look forward

to doing our part in accelerating these promising start-ups.”

Ghada Al Kharusi, Acting Manager at the Innovation Department, Central Bank of Oman, said, “Fintech is vital to the future of the Sultanate of Oman's financial sector, and we are committed to supporting fintech start-ups in the country. We are delighted to be working with Omantel on this program that we believe will be a catalyst for accelerating fintech start-ups in Oman.”

In addition to receiving free desk space at the Omantel Innovation Labs, a 1,100 sqm facility in the heart of the Omantel headquarters at Madinat Al Irfan, selected start-ups will also gain access to a network of over 100,000 investors, corporates and mentors and will be eligible for perks worth over \$250,000 in cloud computing, legal services, accounting and other areas.

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ECONOMIC SURVEY

India's 2024-25 GDP growth in real terms projected at 6.8%

NEW DELHI: The Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday tabled the Economic Survey for the Financial Year 2022-23, after the President's address, on the first day of the Union Budget Session 2023-24.

The Economic Survey said that India's economic recovery from the Covid pandemic is complete and the economy is expected to grow in the range of 6 per cent to 6.8 per cent in the coming financial year 2023-24. This is in comparison to 7 per cent this fiscal and 8.7 per cent in 2021-22.

Chief Economic Advisor Dr V Anantha Nageswaran in a press conference in the national capital said that the India Monetary Fund (IMF) in its World Economic Outlook Update, has maintained India's GDP forecast for the current Fiscal Year at 6.8 per cent, the next Fiscal Year at 6.1 per cent and for 2024-25 at 6.8 per cent. India's economy is poised to do better in the remainder of this decade, the CEA said.

The Economic Survey document said the growth projection is broadly comparable to the estimates provided by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank and the Reserve Bank of India.

“The actual outcome for real GDP growth will probably lie in the range of 6.0 per cent to 6.8 per cent, depending on the trajectory of economic and political develop-



ments globally,” the survey read.

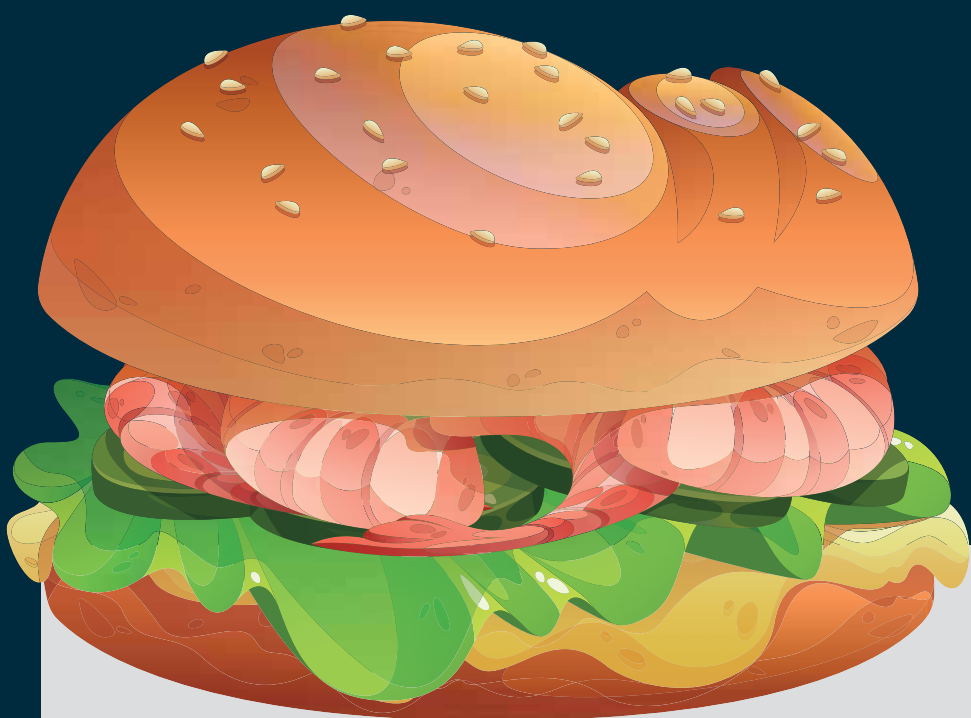
Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday tabled the Economic Survey for 2022-23 in the Parliament, a day ahead of the national Budget for the next financial year.

The Budget session of Parliament began with an address from President Droupadi Murmu of the joint sitting of the two houses of Parliament.

The Economic Survey said that India remains the fastest-growing major economy in the world GDP in nominal terms has been projected at 11 per cent in the next fiscal.

Meanwhile, RBI projects 6.8 per cent inflation this fiscal outside the upper target limit, which the Economic Survey says is

“not high enough to deter private consumption, also not too low to



STUDY REVEALS IMPACT OF HYPER-PALATABLE FOODS



LIFESTYLE

HYPERPALATABLE FOODS ARE THOSE THAT HIT THE ‘SWEET SPOT’ IN YOUR MOUTH AND IMMEDIATELY TELL YOUR BRAIN TO HAVE MORE, EVEN IF YOU ARE FULL. HYPER MEANS EXCESSIVE AND PALATABLE MEANS APPETISING, PLEASING TO THE TASTE BUDS.

“WE HOPE TO GET THE INFORMATION ABOUT HYPER-PALATABLE FOODS OUT THERE FOR INDIVIDUALS TO CONSIDER AS THEY MAKE DIETARY CHOICES, AND WE HOPE THAT SCIENTISTS CONTINUE TO EXAMINE HYPER-PALATABLE CHARACTERISTICS AS A POTENTIAL FACTOR INFLUENCING ENERGY INTAKE

Findings from experts at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the University of Kansas may offer more precise instructions regarding the food you place on your plate if reducing weight was one of your 2023 resolutions.

Researchers tried to identify which aspects of meals were crucial for determining how many calories were consumed using data from prior studies. They discovered that three meal elements—meal energy density (i.e., calories per gramme of food), the quantity of “hyper-palatable” foods, and how rapidly the meals were consumed—consistently contributed to higher calorie intake across four different dietary patterns. The meals’ protein composition also contributed to calorie consumption, but its impact was less consistent.

First described by KU scientist Tera Fazzino in 2019, hyper-palatable foods have specific combinations of fat, sugar sodium and carbohydrates—think of potato chips—

—that make them artificially rewarding to eat and harder to stop consuming.

“We wanted to know how hyper-palatable characteristics of foods, in combination with other factors, influenced how many calories a person consumed in a meal,” said Fazzino, who is associate director of the Cofrin Logan Centre for Addiction Research and Treatment at the KU Life Span Institute, and assistant professor in the KU Department of Psychology.

Fazzino, together with researchers from the NIH’s National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, wrote in the journal Nature Food that hyper-palatability increased the amount of energy consumed across four diet patterns: low-carbohydrate, low-fat, a diet based on unprocessed foods and one based on ultra-processed foods.

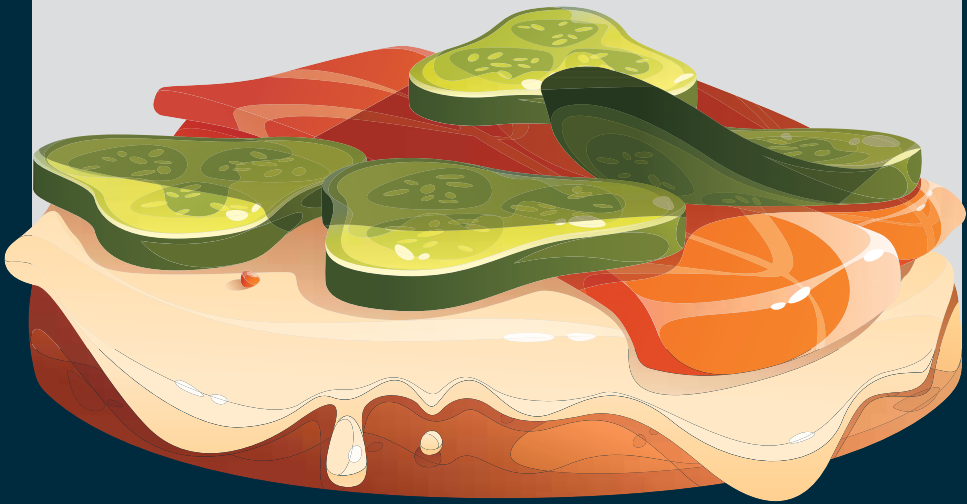
Diet recommendations for weight management could be informed by understanding how some foods result in people eating fewer calories without making them

hungry. People are often advised to avoid energy-dense foods, such as cookies or cheese, that can lead to passive overeating. Instead, foods low in energy density — like spinach, carrots and apples — are often advised. But foods characterised as hyper-palatable may be less familiar to people, and they may be unknowingly adding them to their plate.

While hyper-palatable foods are sometimes also energy dense, the new study suggests that these hyper-palatable foods independently contribute to meal calorie intake.

Fazzino said the findings add to a growing body of research that shows that hyper-palatability plays a role in the food choices that people make and in their weight.

“We hope to get the information about hyper-palatable foods out there for individuals to consider as they make dietary choices, and we hope that scientists continue to examine hyper-palatable characteristics as a potential factor influencing energy intake,” she said. **ANI**



IN-PICTURES



Bell ringers give performances in Istria, Croatia
Bell ringers give performances in Istria, Croatia. The pageant is a Croatian tradition to drive out evil spirits over the winter months and to usher in the start of spring. Xinhua



Brazilian president meets with German chancellor in Brasilia
Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (right) and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz attend a press conference in Brasilia, Brazil. Xinhua



Tourists enjoy boat rides in Pingshan canyon in Hubei
Tourists enjoy boat rides in the Pingshan canyon, a tourist attraction famous for its limpid water, in Hefeng County, central China's Hubei Province. Xinhua



Activities held to celebrate upcoming Latern Festival
People perform a dragon dance in celebration of the upcoming Latern Festival at Liulong ancient township in Dafang County of Bijie, southwest China's Guizhou Province. Xinhua



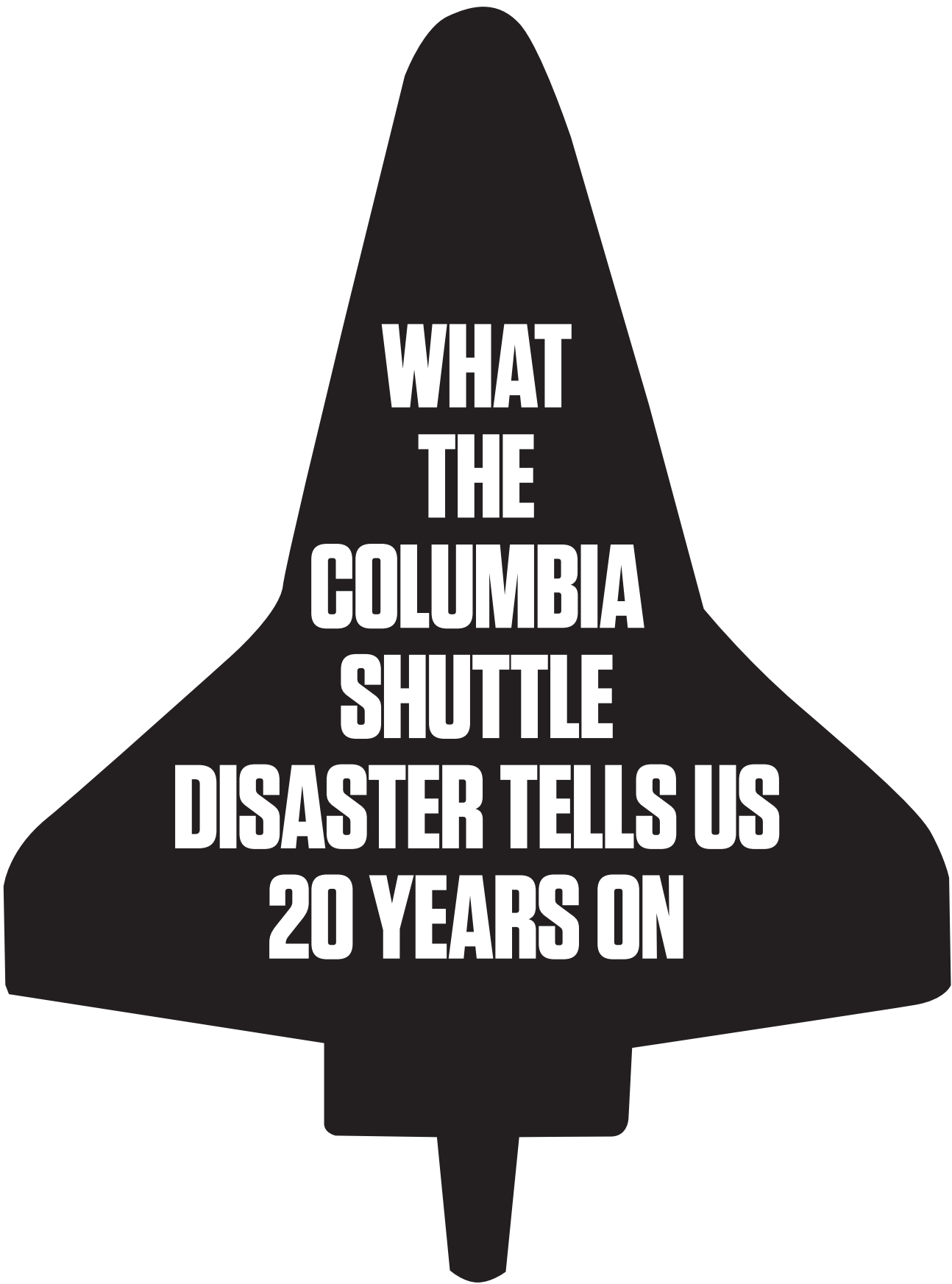
Snowfall in Bucharest, Romania
A woman feeds pigeons in a park during the snowfall in Bucharest, capital of Romania. Xinhua



Wuzhishan section of Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park
This picture shows the Wuzhishan section of the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park in Wuzhishan City, south China's Hainan Province. Xinhua



Special train helps migrant workers return to work
Migrant workers get on the train D4881 at Chongqing West Railway Station in Chongqing, southwest China. It is the first such train of this year for Chongqing workers who work away from home. About 890 migrant workers took the train. Xinhua



Twenty years ago, NASA's space shuttle fell apart on its return to Earth. The crew perished. It could have been avoided.



On the morning of February 1, 2003, US President George W. Bush went live on television to address to the American public. It was the second time during his still young presidency that Bush had had to break bad news to the nation. What Bush had to say said would shake America and, indeed, the entire world.

“My fellow Americans, this day has brought terrible news and great sadness to our country,” he said, “the Columbia is lost. There are no survivors.”

A few hours earlier, just before 8:50 a.m. eastern time in the US, a sensor on the shuttle had reported a strain on the spacecraft's left wing. The wing was higher than it should have been. But that warning was not displayed to the crew.

And within minutes, Columbia's return to Earth turned to disaster, leaving the crew of seven to perish.

A vehicle of exploration
Columbia was the American space agency NASA's first active space shuttle.

The shuttle or orbiter, as it was also known, was a white, plane-shaped spacecraft that became symbolic of NASA's space program, and more generally, space exploration in the late 1970s and 80s.

From 1981 to 2003, Columbia flew 28 times, including that fateful, final mission.

Columbia STS-107 was a routine mission to conduct scientific experiments in space. It launched from Kennedy Space Center in Florida, USA, on January 16, 2003.

But right from the start, things had gone wrong. A piece of foam — used to insulate the shuttle's super-cold fuel — had broken off from a booster rocket during the launch from Earth. And that bit of foam had hit the wing of the orbiter.

Failure of damage assessment
By the second day of the mission, NASA had discovered what had happened. But a decision was made to continue with the mission without fixing the damage or evacuating the astronauts.

The crew was notified about the debris strike via an email from mission control, but was assured that the “same phenomenon [had been seen] on several other flights” and that there was “absolutely no concern” about its affecting their re-entry into Earth's atmosphere.

But when the Columbia shuttle began its descent back to Earth after roughly two weeks in space, the decision to do nothing proved to be wrong — and fatal.

Fate of the astronauts
After the accident, a team of investigators known as the Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB) looked into what had happened.

The CAIB concluded that when the foam broke off during launch, it “breached” or damaged an outer thermal protection system. That damage had then allowed “superheated air” to melt the orbiter's aluminium structure.

Ultimately, that had caused the orbiter to breakup during its re-entry and descent to Earth. The investigators found debris scattered on the ground.

The astronauts onboard the Columbia shuttle probably experienced a rapid depressurisation due to the breakup about a minute and thirty seconds after the final words of the crew were transmitted to mission control. Then, they lost the connection.

It is unclear whether that depressurisation was their cause of death. They were likely also exposed to severe physical trauma when the spaceship started spinning rapidly.

Then as the spaceship disintegrated, their now unprotected bodies would have been exposed to extreme heat due to atmospheric friction.

And, finally, there was the impact on the ground. But it could

also be seen, as it happened above people's heads in the sky.

Spaceflight is still difficult and dangerous

The story and investigation into the 2003 Columbia space shuttle accident illustrates how dangerous and difficult spaceflight was — and is to this day.

At the time, the CAIB described spaceflight as being in a “developmental” phase — and that was 30 years after the Apollo moon missions. Those missions were a huge success for space exploration overall, but they were also marked by technical difficulties and tragedy.

A 2022 research paper noted that the highest fatality rate in spaceflight was in the 1960s. The lowest was in the 1990s and that “since 2003, no astronaut fatality has been reported.”

The study authors calculated a total fatality rate (deaths per spaceflight) of 5.8% up to the paper's publication in 2022.

“With greater international cooperation and maintaining of the International Space Station (ISS), the number of manned spaceflights and days spent in space has constantly increased,” wrote the researchers, adding that there had been “constantly lower rates of incidents and accidents.”

Spaceflight is no less difficult today than it was 20 years ago, or

in the 1960s, but space agencies have introduced safety reforms and regulations as our knowledge and experience of space improves.

Was NASA to blame for the Columbia shuttle accident?

As the Investigation Board concluded, there were — what they called — “organisational causes” for the disaster.

That suggests that NASA, as an organisation, bore some responsibility for what happened. But no individuals at NASA or elsewhere were ever charged with any form of culpability.

An option left untaken
It is likely that the lives of the Columbia's crew could have been saved.

While the Investigation Board judged that it was unlikely that the damage to the orbiter could have been repaired in space, the CAIB said it would have been “challenging but feasible” to launch the Atlantis, another space shuttle, to save the astronauts on the Columbia shuttle.

They said that by working around-the-clock shifts, seven days a week, the Atlantis could have been prepared for launch by February 10 — five days before food and other resources on the Columbia would have run out.

But the plan was not put into action. - dw

ROUND-UP

‘Season of Winning’ benefits on Kia Pegas

The Pegas is the right companion for those looking for their first car or even those in search of a second car to make the most of anywhere they go



MUSCAT: Now own a Kia Pegas and be a winner with Kia. On ‘Season of Winning’ benefits is a chance to win a brand new Kia Niro hybrid electric vehicle and comprehensive service up to 50,000 km, 1 year insurance and cash gift. (Conditions apply. Please visit Kia showroom for details.)

The Pegas is the right companion for those looking for their first car or even those in search of a second car to make the most of any-

where they go.

The Pegas is equipped with a range of features, technology and space for fun journeys.

The Pegas is equipped with an efficient 1.4-liter MPI (multi-point injection) gasoline engine, which produces maximum output of 94PS at 6,000rpm and maximum torque output of 13.5 @ 4,000 rpm. It offers an impressive fuel-efficiency of 17.8 Kms/L.

Giving the Pegas its stylish appeal is the sculpted body panels and bold character lines which are complemented by a striking colour palette and a carefully-balanced

sedan silhouette. The Pegas’ profile is enhanced with a chrome radiator grille, body colour bumper and door handles, body colour outside mirrors, side repeater lamp in outside mirror, halogen lamps, 14” steel wheel, front fog lamp and rear fog lamp. Viewed from the side, the profile of the Pegas gives it a finely-balanced silhouette. Its definitive character lines give the impression of motion, even while it sits stationary.

The interiors of the Pegas contribute to making every journey special. The centre fascia has been designed to enhance ease-of-use,

with many of the car’s functions controlled with clear, ergonomic buttons. Adding appeal to the interior of the Pegas is power windows, front console centre armrest with storage box, driver’s seat adjuster, manual air conditioning, Radio and Bluetooth.

The Pegas is also immensely practical for storing luggage. The trunk has a capacity of 475 litres, enough to store up to three golf bags, or a couple of large suitcases. As the trunk lid opens, illumination within the trunk also reveals any smaller items that could be forgotten.

Furthermore, the Pegas is equipped with an array of safety features, including four airbags, Electronic Stability Program (ESP), Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS) and Keyless Entry System. The Pegas is also equipped with rear parking system and steering audio control.

Customers looking to own a Kia can visit any showroom and experience a Kia. The campaign will end on 26 January 2023 (Conditions apply).

2023 DIRIYAH E-PRIX



Maserati MSG Racing rises from challenging first race

MUSCAT: Maserati MSG Racing experienced a difficult opening race at the 2023 Diriyah E-Prix, with the team navigating a handful of challenges in the first part of Formula E’s Saudi Arabian double-header.

Following a promising weekend in Mexico City, the team made positive progress during practice at the Unesco World Heritage Site, however, endured a bruising qualifying session in the afternoon.

Both Edoardo Mortara and Maximilian Günther launched their efforts in Group A, although a sudden front tyre lock and collision in Turn 11 brought about an early end to Max’s afternoon of running.

Later in the session, Edo was also involved in an accident, in

which an off-line half-spin tipped the Swiss-Italian driver into the barriers on the outside of Turn 16. As a result of extensive repair work, Max was unable to participate in the race, which left Edo as Maserati MSG Racing’s sole charger. From 20th on the grid, he made immediate progress on the opening lap and following a brief Safety Car period, continued to fight forward.

By lap 11, Edo had ascended to 15th and next overtook Sérgio Sette Câmara for 14th before settling into a rhythm behind reigning World Champion, Stoffel Vandoorne. A puncture on lap 33 of 39 dealt a final cruel blow and forced Edo to retire from the race, with the team’s full attention now placed on Race Two in Diriyah.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Orascom appoints Wael Al Lawati as CEO of Muriya Tourism

MUSCAT: Orascom Development Holding announced the appointment of Wael Al Lawati as the new Chief Executive Officer of Muriya Tourism Development, including the award-winning destinations, Jebel Sifah and Hawana Salalah.

In support of Orascom Development’s ambition to be a pre-eminent, multi-national developer, Al Lawati will be responsible for setting the business agenda for the group’s Oman destinations, including leading the overall strategy in alignment with Orascom Development’s strategy, facilitating delivery against the annual business plans and instilling best practices throughout these destinations.

In addition, he will be an integral member of Orascom Development’s Executive Committee, reporting directly to the Group CEO, Omar El Hamamsy.

Omar El Hamamsy, Group CEO of Orascom Development, said, “I am pleased to welcome Wael Al Lawati as our new CEO of Muriya and leading our destinations in Oman. I am confident that Wael will bring a unique perspective and strong track of delivering results to our team. His passion for the industry and ability to lead a team will open a new chapter of growth for our Oman destinations, Jebel Sifah and Hawana Salalah.”

Al Lawati brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of delivering results in tourism, real estate, and other sectors. As a seasoned Omani National, he has held several other leadership positions including CEO of Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) and founder of The Wave Muscat (Al Mouj). More recently, he served as Chief Operating Officer for a real estate advisory and spearheaded international growth at DAMAC Properties. Additionally, Al Lawati was a board member of Muriya between 2008 and 2015.

Al Lawati was selected as a member of the Young Arab Leaders, a group of the top 500 Arab



leaders, and was a board member of the Middle East Leadership Academy (MELA). He previously served on the boards of the Oman Society of Engineers and the Oman Society of Contractors. His engineering background coupled with Real Estate Certification from Cornell University and Executive Education at Harvard Business School, IMD and INSEAD provides him with a well-rounded profile and track record.

Wael Al Lawati, CEO of Muriya, commented, “I am excited to be joining the Orascom Development team and leading its Oman portfolio of destinations. Jebel Sifah and Hawana Salalah are among the largest integrated tourism destinations in Oman, committed to benefiting the local community and contributing to the development of Oman. I believe we have an exciting future in front of us as we capture growth opportunities in Oman and deliver value for our customers and partners.”

Jebel Sifah and Hawana Salalah are Orascom Development’s destinations in Oman, offering a wide range of activities and amenities for visitors, residents, and tourists alike. Jebel Sifah features miles of sandy beaches, a boutique hotel, an 84-berth marina, a coastline golf course, restaurants, and shops.

In addition, Hawana Salalah is Oman’s largest integrated tourism complex and one of the most sought after destinations during the annual and popular Khareef Salalah Festival.

BRAND NEW FLEET

Suhol Al Fayha bolsters distribution fleet with Isuzu trucks from OTE Group

MUSCAT: Underscoring Isuzu’s enduring appeal as the commercial truck of choice of cargo transporters around the world, OTE Group – exclusive distributors of the famed brand in the Sultanate of Oman – celebrated recently the delivery of a fleet of Isuzu reefer trucks to a leading Omani distributor of fresh farm produce.

In all, nine trucks comprising a mix of Isuzu F and N Series vehicles were handed over at a ceremony held at the Hormuz Grand Hotel. Receiving the keys to the brand new fleet were high-level executives of Suhol Al Fayha, by far the biggest importer, distributor and grower of fruits and vegetables in Oman. Taking centre-stage at the event was the neatly arrayed line-up of Isuzu’s 3.5-ton capacity NPR 81H refrigerated trucks, as well as 13-ton capacity FVR-34 refrigerated trucks, emblazoned with Suhol Al Fayha’s new brand colours.

Representing Suhol Al Fayha at the handover event were Abdul Wahid, Managing Director, Abdul Jabbar, Chairman, and Executive Directors Jasim Jabbar, Mohammed



Savad, Jahfar Jabbar, Jabas Jabbar and Mohammed Sajid. Present from OTE Group were Girish Vinayak Bhide, General Manager and Vikrant Handa, Senior Manager.

Acclaimed globally as dependable workhorses by cargo transporters, Isuzu’s N and F series trucks are indispensable to any business’s goal of ensuring the timely, reliable and efficient distribution of consumer products, particularly perishables. Agile, yet sturdy, they can be safely and effectively deployed for distribution services even in challenging climate conditions or in areas that lack paved roads.

Based on Isuzu’s award-winning technology, the Isuzu N and F series powertrains maximise performance with high torque output and fuel-efficient engines. The turbo-charger realises high output from small displacement resulting in improved fuel economics and reduced emissions. A high tensile steel frame bolsters the overall durability of the chassis, while the suspension is designed to reduce vibration and increase driving comfort.

Also accentuating Isuzu’s universal appeal is the truck’s highly rigid cab design, reinforced cabin

doors, multi-reflector halogen headlamps and anti-lock brake systems (ABS) among other active safety features.

Unmatched refrigeration quality is ensured by the installation of world-leading Carrier Oasis 350 cooling units for the FVR 34 and Carrier Oasis 250 for the NPR 81H. Designed for the high-ambient climatic conditions of Oman, the Carrier units together with the insulated reefer body of the trucks, maintain cooling at prescribed temperatures specific to the perishable goods in question, thereby ensuring the quality, shelf-life and integrity of the goods while on the road.

“We are delighted that Suhol Al Fayha has opted to reinforce its distribution fleet with the Isuzu N and F Series trucks – which are simply the best that the industry has to offer. They perform efficiently, reliably and cost-effectively – reasons that make Isuzu trucks the primary choice of transporters in Oman and around the region as well,” commented Girish Vinayak Bhide, General Manager – OTE Group.

RECOGNITION

Bank Nizwa honoured with ‘Most Innovative Islamic Bank’ award

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the fastest-growing Islamic Bank in Oman, was recently honoured with the ‘Most Innovative Islamic Bank’ award from the International Finance Magazine, a prestigious business and finance magazine that connects investors, corporate leaders and companies from around the world.

Held at the Jumeirah Emirates Tower Hotel in Dubai, the event was attended by Khaled Al Kayed, the Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa, who also received the award on behalf of the bank.

Bank Nizwa is leading the charge in the FinTech space in Oman and is actively driving transforma-



tion. It has been rewarded for its commitment to streamlining its activities by incorporating digital technology. This recognition is a testimony to the Bank’s dedication to providing innovative Sharia-

compliant products and services. In the past year, the Bank shifted its focus to aiding customers by launching new digital financial options. Additionally, it has been extending its reach into the un-

tapped retail and wholesale Islamic banking areas.

Al Kayed said, “We are thrilled to receive this esteemed international recognition as a home-grown Islamic bank. A fundamental part of our accomplishment has been our commitment to excellence in delivering a full-scale Islamic banking solution to our customers, along with superior, customer-focused banking experiences that are both gratifying and unforgettable. We will persist in attempting to upgrade our reputation as an Islamic bank that firmly backs the Sultanate’s mission of becoming the international hub of the Islamic economy.”



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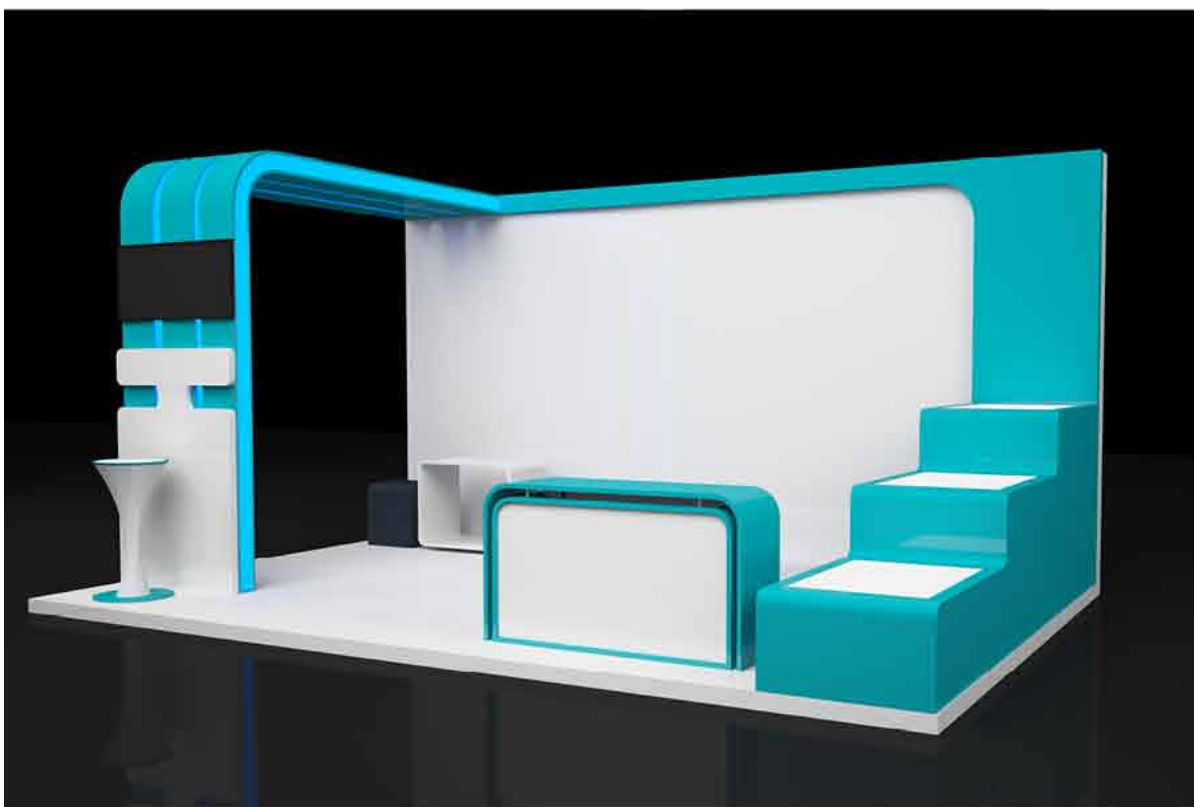
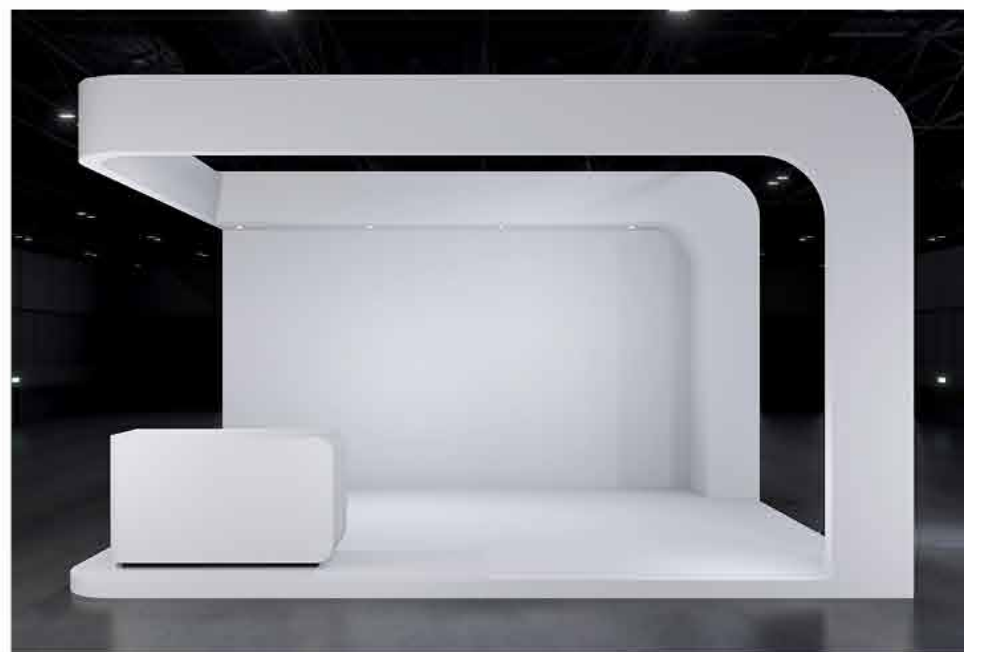
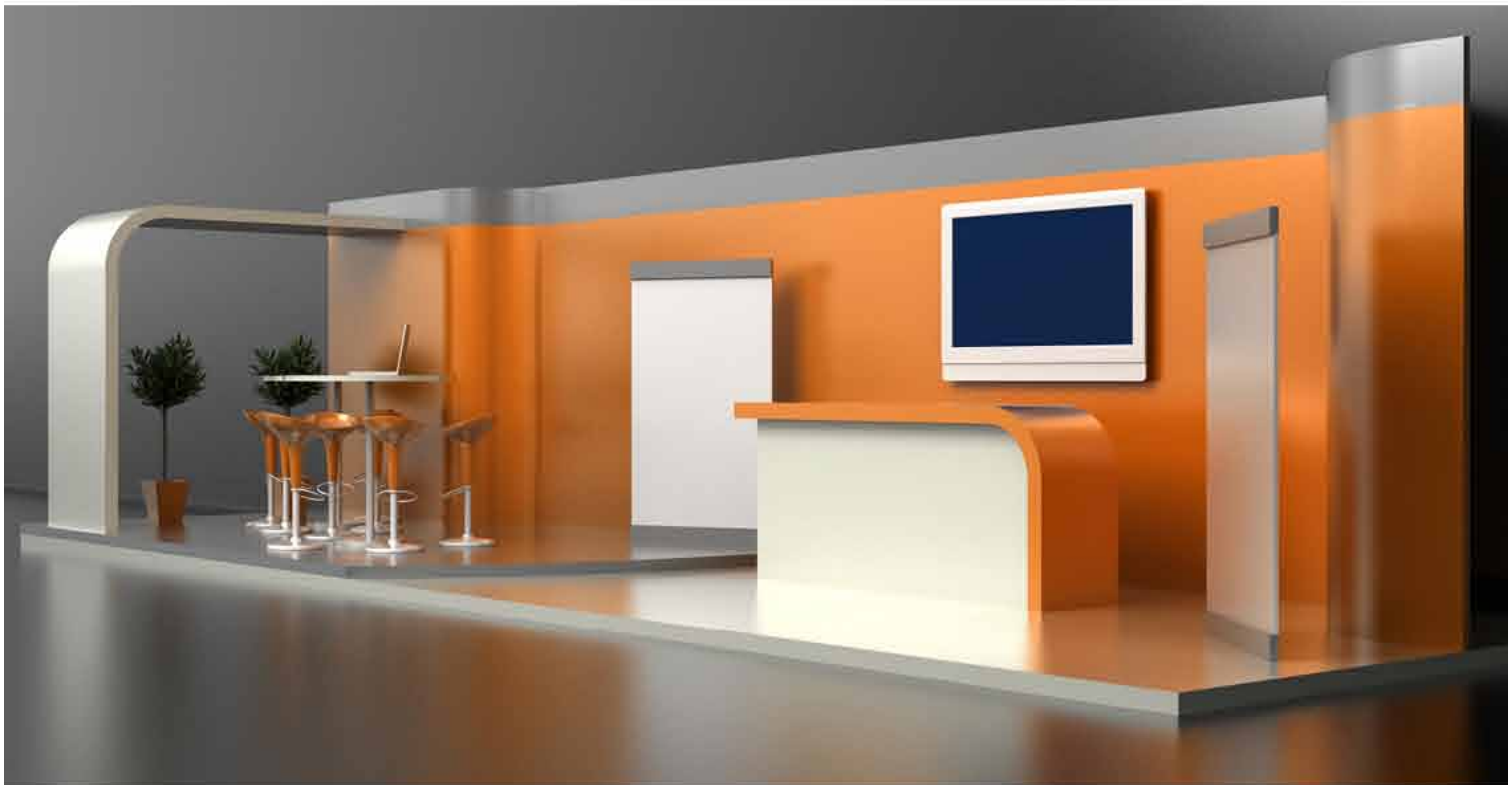
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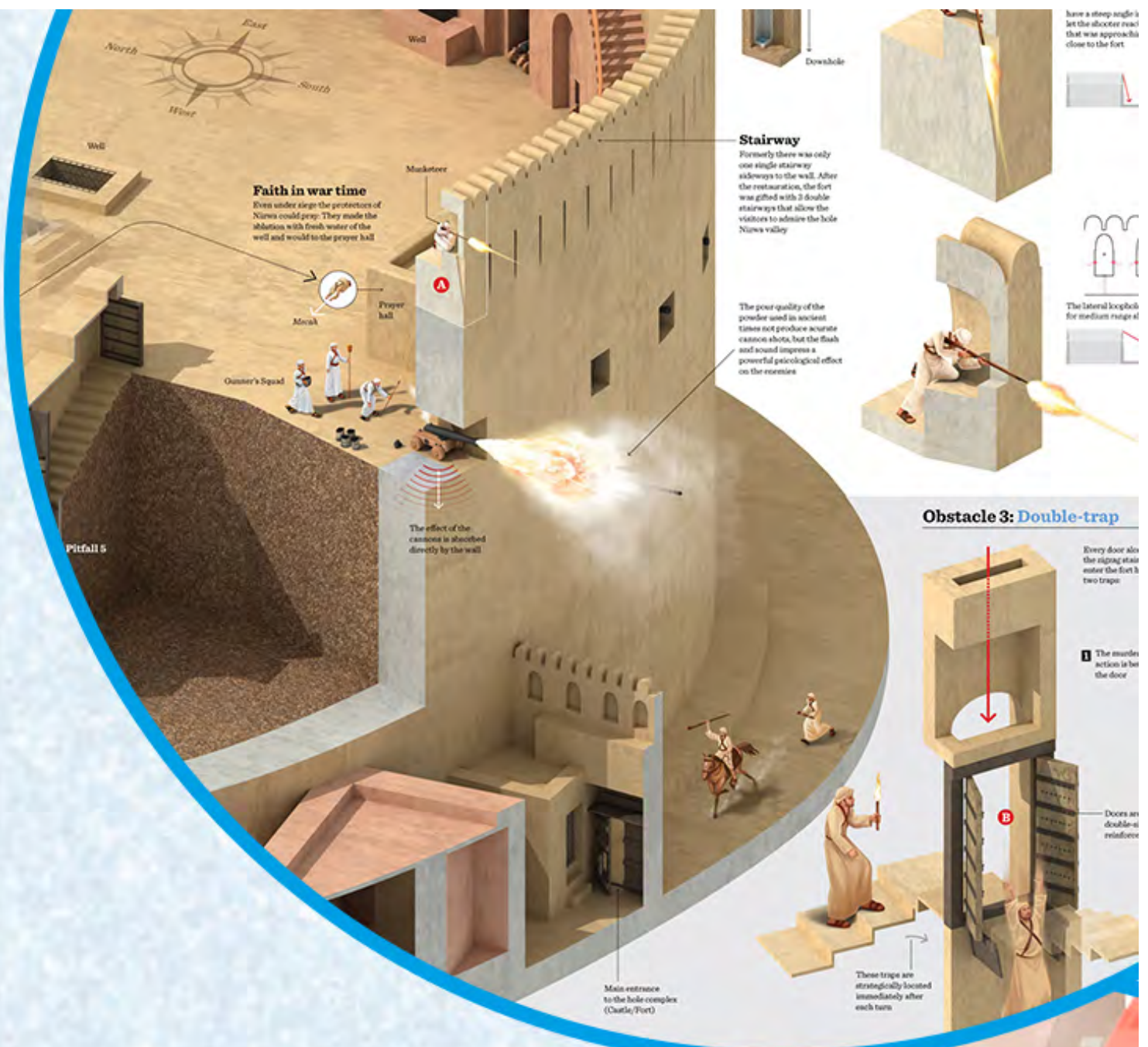
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