

**ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN VESSEL
RESCUES AN IRANIAN BOAT**

A Royal Navy of Oman vessel rescued an Iranian boat, 23 nautical miles from the Muscat Governorate, outside Omani territorial waters. The boat was brought to Sultan Qaboos Port in the Muscat Governorate. **>A2**



CAMEL RACING FESTIVAL ON FEB 13

HH Sayyid Asa'ad bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, affirmed that the Al Bashayer Camel Festival to be held on February 13, in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, is within the framework of the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to increase interest in everything that preserves Omani customs, traditions and values. **>A6**



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AL BURAIMI

Sayyid Theyazin presides over annual horse race

AL BURAIMI: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said on Thursday presided over the annual horse race of the Royal Cavalry in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi. The race was organized by the Royal Court Affairs, represented by the Royal Cavalry.

Ridden by cavalryman Amer Ali Al Rasbi, a horse named "RB-Blast Off", owned by HH Sayyid Saud Harib Al Said, clinched His Majesty the Sultan's Cup in the 5th round, a 2,000-metre run titled "Hisn Al Khandaq Race" for Arabian thoroughbreds.

The first round, a 1,200 metre-run for Arabian purebreds (Hisn



Marjab Race), was dedicated to female horse riders. It was won by a horse called "Al Asbaq", ridden by Ramla Khalil Al Zadjali.

In the second round, a 1,200

metre-run for Arabian purebreds (Hisn Al-aadhid Race), first place was won by a horse called "RB Kinsman", owned by HH Sayyid Saud Harib Al Said. The horse



was ridden by cavalryman Amer Ali Al Rasbi. In the third round, a 1,600 metre-run titled "Hisn Al Hilla Race", a mare called "Futaina" cruised to victory. It was

ridden by Mike Y. Forest.

In the fourth round, a 1,600m run for Arabian thoroughbreds (Hisn Bait Annad Race), first place went to a horse called "Jath-

jat", owned by Abdullah Ali Al Maamari. The horse was ridden by cavalryman Qais Saif Al Busaidi.

Popular shows were held between the races. These included equestrian skills, Aiyala Ballads, archery, tent pegging, horse musical shows, horse and camel pageants, chanting lyrics and hypnotizing horses.

At the conclusion of the event, HH Sayyid Theyazin handed over the cups and trophies to top winners of the five rounds of the race.

He also accepted a commemorative gift from the Royal Cavalry.

The race was attended by Royal family members, ministers, under-secretaries and a large gathering horse riding lovers. **-ONA**

OMAN'S GDP AT CURRENT PRICES REACHES OMR32BN

The rise is due to jump in oil revenues and manufacturing activities

MUSCAT: The gross domestic product (GDP) rate of Oman at current prices increased by 30.4 percent to reach OMR32 billion until the end of September 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

This was revealed in the first edition of the 'Quarterly National Accounts Indicators' report issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSD).

The new report reviews the most important indicators at current and constant prices, the growth rates of economic activities, and the most important indicators supporting an increase in GDP until the end of September 2022.

The report attributed this rise to the high growth rate of oil activities until the end of September 2022 at current prices, by 72.5



percent compared to the same period in 2021, which is the highest among economic activities, in addition to the high growth rate in manufacturing activities, achieving 65.6 percent during the same period.

On the other hand, the growth rate of construction activity decreased by 2.2 percent until the

end of September 2022 at current prices compared to the same period in 2021.

The report stated that the value of the gross domestic product (GDP) at constant prices of the Sultanate of Oman until the end of September 2022 recorded an increase of 4.5 percent to reach OMR26 billion, compared to the

same period in 2021.

This increase is mainly attributed to the growth of oil activities until the end of September 2022 by 12 percent at constant prices, which is considered the highest among economic activities, in addition to the increase in the growth rate of service activities by 5 percent. **-ONA**

FOREIGN MINISTRY



Oman condemns attack on Azerbaijan embassy, civilians in Palestine

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has condemned the attack on the Azerbaijan Embassy in the Iranian capital, Tehran.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry of Oman expresses its condemnation of the attack that targeted the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Tehran, affirming its firm position and rejection of any action targeting diplomatic missions and destabilising security and stability.

The ministry expressed condolences to the families of the victim and to the people and government of Azerbaijan, wishing speedy recovery for the injured.

East Jerusalem

The Sultanate of Oman has reaffirmed its denunciation of all forms of violence and terrorism targeting civilians, disrupting se-

curity and stability and calls for the international community to take the responsibility to cease the serious escalation in the occupied Palestinian lands, which resulted in Palestinian and Israeli victims, the latest of which was the attack targeted civilians at a Jewish synagogue in Eastern Al Quds (Jerusalem).

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate reaffirmed its stance for calling the international community to achieve the fair and comprehensive peace and the support of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in establishment of their independent state on the 1967 borders with its capital of Eastern Al Quds (Jerusalem) in accordance with the two states' solution, the international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

-With ONA inputs

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Embassy of India marks Republic Day

1 The Embassy of India in Muscat celebrated the 74th Republic Day of India with a colourful flag unfurling ceremony by Ambassador Amit Narang and a grand reception in the evening on 26th January 2023. **>A3**



OMAN Oman to take part in US tourism exhibition

2 The Sultanate of Oman is participating for the sixth year in a row, in the activities of the Travel and Adventure Exhibition, which will be held in Washington, DC. **>A2**

SPORTS Al-Rawahi wins Oman International Rally

3 The Oman Rally Team's Abdullah Al-Rawahi and Jordanian co-driver Ata Al-Hmoud clinched win in the Oman International Rally for the second time in three years. **>B6**

WEATHER UPDATE

More rains forecast for today

Times News Service

MUSCAT: With forecasts of more rains in the Sultanate of Oman until Sunday, the Civil Defence and the Royal Oman Police have called people not to take risks and cross flooded wadis.

An official from the Oman Meteorology confirmed exclusively to Times of Oman that the impact of the air depression on most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman will continue till Sunday, with chances of heavy rains along the coastal governorates of the Sea of Oman and the mountains. The peak of the depression will occur on Saturday night.

The official also confirmed that more rains were recorded in the northern governorates, including Musandam, Al Buraimi, North and South Al Batinah, as well as



Al Wusta. There is a possibility of rains of varying intensity in the Governorate of Muscat too.

A statement issued by Oman Meteorology said: "There is cloud condensation activity on the east-

ern Hajar Mountains, and chances of rains of varying intensity and thunderstorms at times - in parts of the governorates of Muscat, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, North and South Al Sharqiyah." **>A5**

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FEBRUARY 3 TO 5

Oman to participate in Washington tourism exhibition



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will be participating for the sixth year in a row, in the activities of the Travel and Adventure Exhibition, which will be held in Washington, DC, from February 3 to 5.

This participation is organised by the Advanced Innovations Foundation, and sponsored by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in coordination with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the United States of America.

Through this participation, the Sultanate of Oman aims to continue introducing and promoting its tourism and the varieties it offers to travellers in tourism, business and investment. The plan is to introduce to the American public what distinguishes the Sultanate of Oman as an

ideal destination for tourism and business.

During its participation, the focus will be on promoting the selection of Dhofar Governorate by "The New York Times" as the best recommended destination to visit during the year 2023, marketing for sports, desert adventures and various festivals implemented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, and reviewing the available investment opportunities in these areas.

It is noteworthy that the American Travel and Adventure Exhibition is one of the largest American exhibitions, and it includes various programs that display destinations in the United States of America and countries of the world and the best travel and vacation options. Media and investment.

DISTRESS CALL

RNO ship rescues Iranian boat



MUSCAT: A Royal Navy of Oman vessel rescued an Iranian boat, 23 nautical miles from the Muscat Governorate, outside Omani territorial waters.

This came after the Operations Centre at Said Bin Sultan Naval Base received a report from the Coast Guard of the Royal Oman

Police that a boat had broken down in the sea.

One of the ships of the Royal Navy of Oman sailed in response to the distress call, carrying out the rescue operation and towing the boat to Sultan Qaboos Port in the Muscat Governorate.

-ONA

INVESTMENTS

OCEC preparing to hold major events this year

MUSCAT: Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) is making arrangements to host new international events and activities during the current year, including seven regional and international events during the coming months.

Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre hosted 215 events in 2022, including 6 regional events and 10 international events, which attracted 1.2 million visitors and hosted over 10,000 participants from over 85 countries.

Said bin Salim Al Shanfari, Chief Executive Officer of OCEC said that hosting these international and regional events would

contribute to the Sultanate's national economy through enhancement of the hotel sector and the increase of travel rates via Muscat International Airport.

The international events scheduled to be hosted by OCEC would attract more foreign investments and foreign spending in the Sultanate, he said, pointing to that the centre is working on hosting high-level events and activities aimed to enhance the competitiveness of the Sultanate and to place the Sultanate in the list of international competitors in hosting events and activities in the Middle East and worldwide.

-ONA

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Embassy of India celebrates 74th Republic Day with fervour

The Indian envoy extended warm greetings to His Majesty the Sultan and noted that India will be a ready partner in the realisation of Oman Vision 2040

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Embassy of India celebrated the 74th Republic Day of India with a colorful flag unfurling ceremony and a grand evening reception on 26th January 2023. Ambassador Amit Narang unfurled the National Flag on the morning of 26th January after paying floral tributes at Mahatma Gandhi's statue. This was followed by the National Anthem and reading out of the President's address to the Nation by the Ambassador. More than 500 people from the



Indian Community, friends of India in Oman, embassy officials, and representatives from the media participated with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervour in the joyous celebration. Students of Indian School Maabela enlivened the occasion with their soulful rendition of patriotic songs. To mark the Republic Day, Ambassador Amit Narang hosted a gala reception on the same day in the evening in which Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour of the Sultanate of Oman graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Sheikh Khalifa bin Isa Al

Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs, Foreign Ministry, Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Co-operation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Faisal bin Abdullah bin Saeed Al-Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), members of State Council and Majlis Al Shura, other senior government officials, ambassadors in Muscat as well as distinguished members of Omani and Indian community attended the reception. Chief Guest of the day together with Ambassador Amit Narang

unveiled the uniquely designed G20 logo titled 'India-Oman : Together in G20' signifying the special invite India has extended to Oman as a guest country for G20 meetings and Summit during India's presidency. Addressing the gathering, Ambassador spoke about why India matters to the world, highlighting the size, scale, and diversity of the country, the unprecedented economic growth, and the historic digital revolution India is witnessing. He also extended warm greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and noted that India will be a ready partner in the



realisation of His Majesty's 'Oman Vision 2040'. The reception also featured a range of captivating cultural performances, including elegantly curated Indian classical dance by a talented group of teenagers from Salalah, a mesmerizing musical band by students of Indian School Ghubra. The reception also featured a wide variety of Indian delicacies, which added to the festive atmosphere of the event. Since 2023 is designated as the International Year of Millets by the United Nations, following a proposal by India, a special stall was set up giving a millet culinary experience to the guests. An added attraction were the three 'Selfie with India' corners enabling the guests to photograph themselves with the life-size exhibits of some the iconic architectural wonders of India.

FOR CLASSES KG I TO IX

Online registration for admission in Indian Schools to start from Feb 1

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The online registration for admission in Indian Schools in the capital area for the next academic year (2023-2024) will start from 1st February 2023 for Classes KG I to IX. The centralised admission system with online registration introduced by the Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman has facilitated the entire admission process, making it convenient for parents and schools to take care of rush for admissions. Online registration for admissions is applicable to seven Indian Schools in the capital area - Indian School Bousher, Indian School Muscat, Indian School Darsait, Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir, Indian School Al Ghubra, Indian School Al Seeb and Indian School Al Maabela. Admissions are open to children of Indian nationality with valid resident visa. The registration of other expatriate nationalities will be considered subject to availability seats from the first week of March. Children who have completed three years as



on 1st April 2023 are eligible for Kindergarten admission. Admissions for children with special needs are open at Care and Special Education (CSE) which is located on the Indian School Muscat premises. Parents can approach the CSE administration directly for admission (www.cseoman.com). Admission procedures have been made completely online; parents, therefore, do not have to visit the schools for submission of documents or the remittance of admission processing fee. The closing date of online registration is 28th February 2023. More details on the admission process shall be available at www.indianschoolsoman.com from 1st February 2023.

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HERITAGE VILLAGE AT NASEEM GARDEN GIVES A MIRROR VIEW OF THE ARAB CULTURE



The sprawling ground of Naseem Garden is almost primed to perfection and the magnificence of Muscat Nights can be seen right from the main entrance. Decorative lights illuminate the alleys that lead to the different venues. Men and women, clad in their traditional attire, can be seen in groups, dancing to the familiar folklore melody in perfect rhythm. The cyclical and repetitive beats of the drum reverberate in the air.

As you glance around you can see several vendors with their carts trying hard to woo the children. For those who are not aware, Naseem Garden has always been the hub of cultural activities and family events that were held as part of the Muscat Festival before and it is no different this year as Muscat Nights. While the Heritage Village aims to give a mirror view of Arab culture, the handicraft stalls are attracting tourists for its timeless appeal and elegance. Carpets and handmade items found in bright colours, fine designs and unique texture are quite an attraction.

Being quite oblivious of the people visiting their traditional stall, many Bedouin women can be seen weaving magic with their dexterous fingers. With their faces covered with traditional beak masks they are busy at their work, heedless of the passers-by. But the moment they see you hanging around near their stalls, they get extremely gracious and draw your attention by their welcoming gesture. If you are not well versed in Arabic, language would be a barrier. But then for these enterprising women their work says it all.

Pure classiness can be seen in the handicrafts, skilfully done by the artisans. There hand woven items represent their traditional lifestyle and offer a kaleidoscope view of their rich culture. Traditional products are on display including handicraft items, chandeliers, copper and silver plates, jewellery, jalebeyahs, shawls, carpets, handmade bags and other accessories.

From key chains, mobile phone holders to traditional homemade cosmetics; their stall is indeed a treasure trove for those who have an inclination for traditional

Wearing traditional and colourful clothes, a number of women can be seen preparing and serving the food. They have travelled from different governorates of Oman, to offer a variety of delectable traditional Omani dishes to the visitors and are keen on ensuring that their offering is of highest quality.

handcrafted items.

The main intention of putting up these stalls is not for the commercial purpose, but to showcase traditional handicraft of Oman and provide a platform for the artisans who come from different parts of Oman to participate in the festival.

"We enjoy coming here, not because of the monetary gains but because we get to meet so many people here," said one woman when asked about her business.

"We like people coming to our stalls and appreciate our crafts-

manship. So we actually do not feel bad even if our products do not sell as per our expectations," she added.

The stall also displays a wide range of homemade beauty products of which facial creams, authentic and traditional eyeliner and henna are there to name a few.

With splashes of colours all around the stalls indeed reflects creativity and imaginative skills of these gifted women.

Ensclosed in one corner of the venue are bakhour sellers and the scents waft in the air. Enthusias-

tic sellers manning small shops selling toys, artificial jewelleryes, and traditional cosmetics can be seen eagerly waiting for the customers, which perhaps will escalate in the days to come.

After going on a shopping spree as soon as you decide to exit the venue the aroma coming from the live food counters will compel you to head straight to the food section to try out some of the delicacies on offer.

Wearing traditional and colourful clothes, a number of women can be seen preparing and serving

the food. They have travelled from different governorates of Oman, to offer a variety of delectable traditional Omani dishes to the visitors and are keen on ensuring that their offering is of highest quality.

Omani bread is in huge demand because of its nutritional value and unique taste and is very popular in the Sultanate. There is Omani bread with various additives, such as cheese, egg and honey.

Every dish is available and served in a way that displays their skills and taste and that is what sets each dish apart from the other.



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PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENT OMAN



OMR87mn Rima water treatment plant to open on Wednesday

MUSCAT: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) will celebrate the official opening of OMR87 million Rima Water Treatment Plant next Wednesday.

The plant is located at Rima oilfield affiliated to PDO, in the Wilayat of Al Jazir, Al Wusta Governorate.

The opening ceremony will be held under the patronage of His Highness sayyid Marwan bin Turki Al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

Rima Water Treatment Plant represents an environment-friendly alternative for discharge of water accompanying oil production and would reduce gas emissions by 48, 000



tonnes, annually.

The plant uses plant cover to purify water from oil pollutants, which contributes to creation of desert oasis for wildlife.

It is worth mentioning that the Rima Water Treatment Plant is

capable of treatment of approximately 60, 000 cubic metres a day of water accompanying oil production operations, which is higher than the designed capacity of the project amounting to 40,000 cubic metres a day. — **ONA**

WEATHER UPDATE



Frost and snow formation witnessed at Jabal Shams

< FROM A1 A statement issued by the CDAA , said: “The authority stresses the need to follow safety instructions during rains and not to venture into flooded wadis to preserve the safety of everyone.”

Jabal Shams recorded temperatures ranging from -1 to -5 degrees Celsius in the morning and between 5 to 1 degrees Celsius during the day, which led to the formation of frost and snow. Citizens and residents rushed during the weekend to watch the snow and enjoyed the cold weather on top of the mountain.

Cautioning visitors on the Jabal Shams road, the Royal Oman

Police (ROP) said: “For users of the Jabal Shams Road in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, it is dangerous to go up and down due to rain. Muddy soil leads to slipping of vehicles, so please do not take the risk and leave safe distance between vehicles.”

Take caution

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism also said: “Given the danger of the road leading to Jebel Shams in the Wilayat of Al-Hamra due to rains, road users are requested not to take risks and take caution.”

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

published the amount of rainfall over a number of wilayats between 24 to 28 January 2023 until 11 am. The state of Mhada in Al Buraimi Governorate received the highest amount of 124 mm rain, followed by the state of Shinas with 105 mm, then Liwa with 103 mm, followed by Dibba, Madha, Ibri and Khasab 90, 75, 61 and 37mm respectively.

On the other hand, the states of Mirbat, Rusatq and Maqshan recorded the least amount of rain in the Sultanate, amounting to 2 mm each, while the state of Al Suwaiq in the Governorate of North Al Batinah recorded the least amount of rain with 1 mm.

FOREIGN MINISTRY

Oman condemns burning of Holy Quran in Copenhagen

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry on Saturday expressed the Sultanate’s condemnation of an extremist’s burning a copy of the Holy Quran in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark.

The Ministry stated that such be-

haviours promote extremism and hatred and insult religions and beliefs and require firm stances from the international community to criminalise and punish whoever commits such behaviours as they evoke the feelings of the people worldwide and

incite violence and hatred.

The ministry reaffirmed the Sultanate’s firm stance on dissemination of the values of coexistence, peace, respect of religions, diversification of cultures and denunciation of violence and discrimination . — **ONA**



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JAN 28 to 30



Taliban ban women from NGO work in Afghanistan

Taliban leaders justified their decision by saying some aid workers had ignored the country's Islamic dress code. Any organisation that continues to employ women will lose its licence to operate

KABUL: Afghanistan is heading into a "humanitarian catastrophe," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said earlier this week at a meeting with her European counterparts in Brussels. It is brutal, she said, to witness the Taliban cut off millions of Afghans from aid.

Baerbock's comments come in response to the Taliban's decision in December to ban women from working for aid agencies in the country. The new rules apply for Afghan as well as foreign organizations.

Taliban leaders justified their decision by saying some aid workers had ignored the country's Islamic dress code. Any organisation that continues to employ women will lose its licence to operate. Baerbock said this ban would make it harder for German aid deliveries to reach the country and called on the Taliban to allow girls and women back to workplaces, schools and universities.

According to a recent UN report, the Taliban have removed over 250 women judges and hundreds of woman lawyers and prosecutors from their positions since returning to power in 2021. UN experts warned of a "collapse of the rule of law" in Afghanistan, adding that judicial positions are now being filled mainly by Taliban members with little more than a basic religious education.

"I am in constant fear day and



night that our company will be shut," businesswoman Latifah Akbari told DW. She has a small food business called Hariva, based in Afghanistan's Herat Province. It sells eggplant paste, marmalade, pickled cucumbers, dried vegetables and more. "Right now, 48 women are employed in the company, earning a living in either full-time or part-time work."

Fariba is one of them. She works part-time and is glad to have a source of income. She was a hairstylist until the Taliban takeover, then lost her job. "I was lucky to have found a way to make money, even if it isn't much," Fariba told DW. "I help produce marmalade and tomato paste and the income helps support my family."

Some 300 Afghan women work in a variety of small businesses throughout Herat Province. "After women were barred from Afghan universities, some of these students tried finding work with women-led businesses in Herat,"

Behnaz Salghoqi, of Herat's Chamber of Industry and Commerce for Women, told DW. Such businesses tend to employ only women, meaning they do not interact with other men.

The Chamber of Industry and Commerce for Women was established in 2014 to assist women entrepreneurs on the national and international level and remains active today. Its goal is to assist women-led businesses and, by helping them, work to make the country's economy less dependent on outside aid. The Taliban takeover, however, has done great damage to their efforts.

Entrepreneurs like Akbari are worried their business could be shut down too. "What would we do if they bar us from working as well?" she asks. Currently, half of the country's 38 million people face food insecurity, and 3 million children are threatened by malnutrition.

Matters have been made even worse by Afghanistan's harsh winter. Temperatures as low as minus 33 degrees Celsius (minus 27 degrees Fahrenheit) were recorded in the central Ghor Province. Regions in the central and northern parts of the country have seen road traffic come to a standstill amid heavy snowfall, as social media posts show.

At least 70 people have died as a result of this extreme cold, Afghanistan's ministry of disaster management said last week. Some 70,000 cattle — an important food and income source — also died. "This winter is by far the coldest in recent years," the head of Afghanistan's meteorology office, Mohammed Nasim Muradi, told AFP.

The relief agency Caritas and others want to help those suffering. "It is our job to assist people in need," Caritas head Oliver Müller told German church-affiliated news outlets. "But we cannot continue to work under these conditions in Afghanistan." Many aid agencies have either fully or partially suspended their work in the country since the ban on female workers came into force.

This ban makes it impossible for aid agencies to directly help Afghan women, as they are not allowed to speak to men outside their families. "This ban hits the nerve of humanitarian aid," Müller further told the news outlets. For now, his organisation is limited to handing out food donations to the local councils headed by men. Müller said this was "unacceptable, as we cannot guarantee this aid goes where it is intended." He called on for politicians to increase their pressure on the Taliban to change course. — DW



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IN AL DAKHLIYAH GOVERNORATE

Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racing festival to be held on February 13

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The sixth edition of Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racing festival will be held on February 13, 2023 in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The festival will take place during the period from 13-18 February at the Al Bashayer Camel Racing Field in the Wilayat of Adam, Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate, with the participation of camel owners from Oman and the GCC countries.

His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and the Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, affirmed that the Al Bashayer Festival comes in its sixth edition in this season within the framework of the lofty vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik to increase interest in everything that preserves authentic Omani customs, traditions and values, and achieves the material and moral benefit of the Omani society.

His Highness said in a statement: "The Al Bashayer Festival for Purebred Arabian Camel Races is among the most prominent sporting, social, cultural and tourism events in the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries. Al Bashayer Square is a meeting place for camel owners and camels competing with each other to obtain sporting achievements, and to transfer the knowledge gained on how to take these ancient camels to the best sports levels to enhance the competitive value of Omani camels."



"The festival is concerned with cultural aspects and social solidarity through the events accompanying it. Every year, the organising committee is keen to hold various cultural events in which Omani, Gulf and Arab creators participate," His Highness added.

His Highness explained that the festival is launched with an economic vision by strengthening the local community's partnership in the economic movement accompanying the festival, and providing investment opportunities for entrepreneurs by offering various products to the public, participants and tourists visiting the festival's activities and other facilities in the field, in coordination with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and the Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan indicated that the competition, which always characterises this festival, gets more exciting every year by increasing the number of participants from the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries. — ONA

SUPREME COURT VERDICT

Nepal's deputy PM loses job over citizenship

KATHMANDU: Nepal's Supreme Court on Friday disqualified Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane from his posts after he was found guilty of producing an 'invalid' citizenship certificate to contest the recent general elections.

The minister tendered his resignation to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda after the apex court verdict. The verdict was pronounced by a Constitutional Bench of the Nepal SC headed by Acting Chief Justice Hari Krishna Karki. The other Justices on the bench were Justices Bishowambhar Prasad Shrestha, Ishwar Khatiwada, Ananda Mohan Bhattarai and Anil Sinha.

"As Rabi Lamichhane has not completed the process for reacquiring his Nepali citizenship after renouncing his American citizenship, he cannot be a candidate for the position of a member of the House of Representatives or be elected to that position," read the Supreme Court verdict on Friday.

"After giving up the US citizenship, Lamichhane was not found adhering to the legal process to acquire Nepali citizenship again. So, he did not deserve to be the candidate of the member of the House of Representatives nor could hold the lawmaker's post," the Bench ruled further.

"With this, a certiorari order is issued as per Article 133 (b and c) and Article 137 of the Constitution of Nepal by scrapping all



activities making Lamichhane an election candidate, announcing his election victory, and conferring him the certificate," the apex court said.

Speaking to reporters on Friday evening while walking out of the Ministry of Home Affairs, post the Supreme Court verdict, Lamichhane said, "As a noncitizen, I have nothing left to say."

However, he said he welcomes the decision of the country's apex court. "I welcome and accept the SC's decision," he said.

He said he had absolutely no idea what his status and the future move would be. He also added that he no longer was the Chairman of Rastriya Swatantra Party.

A television personality-turned-politician, Lamichhane was declared stateless as he does not have any official documents to attest to his nationality. — ANI

THE STIMSON CENTRE DATA

North Korea teetering on the brink of a humanitarian crisis

PYONGYANG: North Korea is currently experiencing a dire food crisis, with analysts warning the present situation could deteriorate into a similar humanitarian disaster seen during the four-year famine in the mid-1990s — referred to as the "Arduous March" by the regime — which led to the deaths of millions of people.

Prices of basic foodstuffs are rising in North Korea as they become ever scarcer in the nation's markets, according to an examination of a range of statistics by experts at The Stimson Centre, a Washington-based foreign affairs think tank.

And while North Korea has experienced food shortages in the past, this one is arguably more serious due to the response of the government in Pyongyang to the outbreak of coronavirus in neighboring China in early 2020, which included sealing its borders and halting virtually all imports, including much-needed food and medicines. To make the already critical situation even more acute, nations that in recent years have provided millions in aid to North Korea have cut back on that assistance in response to increased belligerence by Pyongyang.

And while it remains impossible to obtain a clear picture of the situation in the North, due to the firm control the government exerts over the media and its people, there are reports in dissident media of families starving to death.

A report published by Seoul-based Daily NK on January 9 claimed that a mother and her teenage son had been found dead in their home in the city of Hyesan in mid-December. There was



no food in the house and no fuel to keep the home warm in the sub-zero temperatures, reported the Daily NK, which uses mobile phones to communicate with a network of contacts in North Korea.

According to data from 38 North, a North Korea analysis website run by the Stimson Center, "quantity and price data point to a deteriorating situation, made worse by the regime's choice to self-isolate in response to the Covid-19 pandemic."

Marcus Noland, executive vice president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, and a contributor to the report, pointed out that estimates by agencies such as the World Food Program suggested that the North had a deficit of 1.5 million metric tonnes of food at the peak of the Arduous March, while its most recent harvest left it about 500,000 tons short. "It's clear that things are bad, but we are not talking about another 'great famine' at this point," Noland told DW. But on the other hand, he admitted, there are few indications that the food situation in the North will soon improve.

"The North Korean government

is completely unaccountable and it prioritises other things over its non-elite citizens, starting with its military," Noland said. "It's nuclear weapons, missile systems and the military more broadly, so the reforms that are needed to feed its people are not undertaken because the priority is preserving the stability."

"And their position is that if people are hungry and die, then that's just unfortunate."

Hangover from crisis of 1990s

North Korea's food situation has never completely recovered from the famine of the mid-1990s, which was caused by a combination of economic mismanagement, the collapse of food delivery systems, a series of droughts and floods, and the economic crisis in Russia, which had been a key supporter.

Those underlying factors have been exacerbated by a failure to increase productivity in domestic agriculture made worse by new United Nations sanctions imposed in 2018 after a series of nuclear tests and launches of intercontinental ballistic missiles,

Noland points out.

"Previously, UN Security Council sanctions had focused closely on the military, but this was greatly broadened to take in imports of luxury goods and most North Korean exports, such as textiles and apparel," said Noland. "This was a qualitative change in the sanctions regime."

Pyongyang's decision to cut itself off at the outbreak of the pandemic worsened the situation further, halting supplies of much-needed imports of fertilizer, for example, while North Korea has also not been immune from the increase in global energy prices as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Park Jung-won, a professor of international law at South Korea's Dankook University, says there is clear evidence of "donor fatigue" in countries that have previously stepped in with humanitarian assistance.

"These governments see the constant provocations of the North over the last year or so and they are questioning why this is happening and why they should continue to provide assistance," he said.

"This is a poor country that chooses to spend money on more missiles and nuclear weapons that jeopardise international security — and they are gradually deciding that they cannot justify their previous support," he said.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, governments around the world provided aid agencies with \$2.3 million (€2.1 million) in 2022, down dramatically from \$14 million the previous year. — DW

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- Urine Routine
- Blood Grouping
- TSH
- Antenatal Scan

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(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
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- Growth Scan

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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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India’s G20 presidency will be outcome-oriented

G20 is important because it comprises 85 per cent of the global GDP, 78 per cent of global trade and 2/3rds of the world’s population

HYDERABAD: India’s G20 presidency will be decisive, inclusive and outcome-oriented, said G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant at a press conference on Friday, underlining that G20 is important because it comprises 85 per cent of the global GDP, 78 per cent of global trade and 2/3rds of the world’s population.

It is significant in light of the world’s ongoing crises, Kant said. A new Engagement Group – Startup20 – has been established as part of the G20 India Presidency. Startup20 aims to develop a global narrative for supporting startups and facilitating synergies

“It is significant in light of the world’s ongoing crises. A new Engagement Group – Startup20 – has been established as part of the G20 India Presidency.”

Amitabh Kant
G20 Sherpa

among startups, corporations, investors, innovation agencies, and other key ecosystem stakeholders, according to an official release of Startup20 PRO.

The primary objective is to harmonise the global startup ecosystem through a collaborative and forward-looking approach.

As per the official statement, the purpose of this group is to provide a common platform for startups from G20 member countries to come together to develop

actionable guidance in the form of the building of enabler’s capacities, identification of funding gaps, enhancement of employment opportunities, achievement of SDG targets and climate resilience, and growth of an inclusive ecosystem.

The Startup20 activities will span over five events

The Inception Meet of Startup20 will be held in Hyderabad on January 28-29. The summit event

will happen in July 2023 in Gurugram with three intervening events that have been planned in different parts of India.

The participating countries include the G20 countries as well as 9 observer countries from overseas. About 80 delegates are expected.

Indian delegates expected are around 100, including Incubators, Startups, Investors, and Industry Partners among others, the press release added. – ANI

PERU President Boluarte urges early elections in 2023

LIMA: Peru’s recently appointed President Dina Boluarte urged Congress on Friday to advance the presidential elections from April 2024 to December 2023.

Her comments come at a time when the country remains embroiled in civil unrest opposing her leadership, which has left dozens of people dead. Boluarte became president after her predecessor, Pedro Castillo, was impeached and later arrested.

The Peruvian Congress have already voted to move national elections up earlier than planned, holding the vote in April 2024 instead of April 2026.

An even earlier vote in December this year, however, could help Peru “get out of this quagmire we’re in,” Boluarte said.

“Nobody has any interest in clinging to power. I have no interest in remaining in the presidency. If I am here it is because I fulfilled my constitutional responsibility,” she said, speaking at a military airport where an aircraft was being loaded with emergency aid for regions affected by unrest-induced shortages.

After debating the proposal for 8 hours, Peru’s Congress rejected Boluarte’s request. The proposal to move elections up to December this year received 65 votes against it, 45 votes in favour and two abstentions.

However, a request for reconsideration was submitted, according to Congress President Jose Williams, which could be debated on Monday.

In order to move elections up earlier, a constitutional reform is necessary – but such reforms require a two-thirds majority of 87 lawmakers in order to be approved. It also requires a second vote of approval during the next legislative period, which is slated to begin in February.

Why are the protests still ongoing?

Boluarte, who was vice president to President Pedro Castillo, automatically became Peru’s leader on December 7 after Castillo was arrested for attempting to dissolve Congress and rule by decree. – DW

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ARYNA SABALENKA CLINCHES FIRST-EVER MAJOR TITLE, DEFEATS RYBAKINA IN FINAL



Belarus tennis star
Aryna warded off the
Kazakh challenge by
4-6, 6-3, 6-4 to win
the title

MELBOURNE: Belarus tennis star Aryna Sabalenka clinched her first Grand Slam title by defeating Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in the final of the Australian Open women's singles competition on Saturday.

Aryna warded off the Kazakh challenge by 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 to win the title. Sabalenka owns one of the most coveted titles in the sport after all the accolades and expectations from one of the hardest strikers in the game.

The match featured two of the

most fearless offensive players, with both striking 82 winners between them, with 51 of them coming from Belarusian. But the undaunting play of the number 5 seed during the tense moments of the match made the difference.

Rybakina made a great start to the match, clinching a closely-contested first set by 6-4.

Following that, Sabalenka made a comeback with a 6-3 win in the second set.

In the third set, both players were tied at 3-3. Sabalenka had her third break opportunity of the game and blistered a second-serve return and finished the point with a mid-court overhead winner to restore her lead. In the next game, she finished swiftly with an ace and took a 5-3 lead. But Rybakina delayed her opponent's win to make it 5-4.

Sabalenska took to the court to finish off the match and at her fourth match point, Sabalenska fell to the court joyously as Rybakina hit a forehand long, giving the Belarusian a win.

Sabalenka had more aces, 17 as compared to nine by her opponent, more winners, 51 as compared to 31 by Rybakina and overall points, getting 109 points as compared to 103 points by Rybakina.

Sabalenka received the championship trophy from the legendary American tennis player Billie Jean King, whom she thanked for everything she's done for women's sport.

"I'm still shaking and super nervous. My team -- the craziest team on tour, I would say. We have been through a lot of ups and downs the last year. We worked so hard. You guys deserve this trophy, it is more about you than me," said Aryna as quoted by WTA.

"I know how hard you have worked for that," Rybakina said, congratulating Sabalenka. "Hopefully we are going to have many more battles," added Rybakina.

Sabalenka is the 58th different woman to win a Grand Slam title in the Open Era. The last one to do it was Rybakina at Wimbledon last year. **-ANI**

Oman Cricket's grassroots programme is on a strong wicket, says Varun Khimji

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) has been keen on developing cricket at the grassroots level in the Sultanate of Oman among local and expatriate schoolchildren over the past year. Various programmes and initiatives have been implemented by OC and to ensure the continuity is maintained, a pilot programme in Muscat-based schools, and an training camp under the guidance of legendary South African Gary Kirsten has been organised.

Providing further details on the ambitious grassroots programme, Varun Khimji, advisor to Oman Cricket, said: "Oman Cricket, at the moment, has initiated a grassroots programme with an aim to broaden the exposure of the game of cricket among the youth of the Sultanate of Oman.

"We have started coaching sessions at couple of schools - The Sultan's School and Cheltenham - with many more schools to be included in the coming semesters. The coaching programmes are run by the coaching staff of our established Oman Cricket Academy (OCA).

"It allows the children to experience the game in the best possible environment, where they are able to learn the right skills and have a correct mindset of the game. We feel that our grassroots programme is on a strong wicket."

Varun added: "The programme caters to age-group from 7-16 years. It is the perfect time to identify talents for the future. Our ultimate goal is to provide our national team with a pool of talents that can represent the country at global level."

The OC advisor said: "Our grassroots initiatives are in line with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's vision to enhance Sultanate of Oman's sporting capabilities. Under the dynamic leadership of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the support of the sports ministry has been vital to us in the growth of the game in the country."

Kirsten to speak on 'role of parents'

Elaborating on the forthcoming



Gary Kirsten Camp, which will be held in coordination with OC for the second time, Varun said: "The camp is a high-performance camp for players to experience. It is an intense and focused programme that will be running for four days. We also will have coaches from Gary Kirsten Cricket (GKC) who would be holding a day's session for young children as part of our focus on grassroots programme."

The young OC board advisor added: "We are delighted to host the legendary South African cricketer and a World Cup-winning coach, Gary Kirsten, during the camp."

"In fact, he has agreed to conduct a talk on 'The role of parents in sports'. All the parents and children who have registered for the camp will be invited for the talk, which will be held at 6.30pm on 31 January 2023 at the OCA premises.

"The topic is of great importance and Gary Kirsten's inputs will certainly be of great importance. The role of parents is essential and a key ingredient in the success story of a child, not only in cricket but in any sport."

Varun, who is one of three members of Oman Cricket's advisory panel formed last year, said: "Our partnership with GKC is a long term one, with discussions on going for trips abroad to cricketing destinations where our players are exposed even further in the game. GKC's reputed pro-

file as an academy will only benefit our cricketing knowledge and capabilities in terms of nurturing, coaching, and playing.”

Meanwhile, Evert Laubscher, OCA manager and national team trainer, said: "Two reputed GKC coaches, namely Ryan Van Niekerk and Gareth Von Hoesslin, will be accompanying Gary Kirsten for the second camp in Oman, scheduled from 31 January-4 February."

Laubscher added: "More than 80 players have registered for the camp but there are few more seats available to register for young cricketers who are interested."

Both Van Niekerk and Von Hoesslin have been part of GKC's first camp that was successfully organised in October, 2022, which was attended by nearly 70 children and young players.

The grassroots camp will be held on 1 February at the OCA in the evening while the best three days will be devoted to high-performance camp.

GKC founder and World Cup-winning coach Kirsten is a household name among cricket fans across the world. Since his retirement in 2004, the former opening batter has devoted his time to running GKC, coaching international teams and franchises and tasted tremendous success, leading India to a World Cup title in 2011 and as a mentor of Gujarat Titans in IPL 2022.







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US RECESSION FEARS

A potential US recession and tough comparisons to a stellar 2022 are weighing on the prospects of energy stocks delivering an encore to last year's stunning run, despite valuations that are seen as still comparatively cheap.

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Silicon Valley firms are facing the music, cutting several hundred thousand jobs after years of incredible growth. Economists are divided over whether the US economy is heading for recession and soaring unemployment.

ABU BUTABUL

OQ celebrates inauguration of Bisat oil field at Block 60 concession area

Times News Service

MUSCAT: OQ Group inaugurated the commissioning of the Bisat oil field located at Block 60 concession area in Abu Butabul.

The event was held under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Taimur bin Assad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors, Central Bank of Oman (CBO) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). It was also attended by members of the Royal Family, ministerial dignitaries, sheikhs, key partners, community leaders and OQ's executive leadership team.

The Bisat oil field comes as part of OQ's contribution to supporting the government's efforts to maximise the use of Omani natural resources and enabling national companies to manage operations in the oil exploration and production sector. This resulted in raising OQ's share of the total oil production in the Sultanate to 220,000 barrels per day, which represents about 13 per cent of the upstream sector's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Sultanate.

During the inauguration ceremony, Talal bin Hamed Al-Awfi, Chief Executive Officer of OQ Group, gave a speech in which he said: "We are delighted to inaugurate Bisat oil field whose dis-



covery represents a quantum leap in exploration operations, as the focus shifted to the production of crude oil. The field recorded production growth rates from 5,000 barrels in 2019 to 55 thousand by 2022. Today, the Group celebrates a production increase that reached 60,000 barrels per day."

"The Bisat oil field is one of the most important projects of OQ's upstream sector and Oman Investment Authority's (OIA's) national development portfolio. It comes as part of OQ's efforts to promote the added value of Oman's natural resources, supports the development plans, improves the revenues and achieves the objectives and aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. It is applying modern technologies and digital solutions to enhance the sustainability of resources and operations," he added.



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ing the discovery of the field. As result, the return on investment was maximised within a record time.

"This reflects the efficiency of the strategy that has been adopted to accelerate the production using the latest technologies, the outstanding levels of national competencies working in the field, and the assiduous efforts exerted to support the targets and visions of our national economy."

It is worth noting that the Group adopted and implemented plans and systems that contributed to neutralising the carbon footprint and promoting sustainability values. To this end, the Bisat oil field used new innovative technologies to monitor carbon emissions, gas levels, flaring and energy efficiency for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman. Moreover, the exploration and production arm of OQ used non-metal pipes that have a longer shelf life compared to conventional metal pipes. These pipes could be fixed promptly and flexibly. This resulted in reducing the risks related to the construction works and accelerating the pace of the operation.

His Highness toured the exhibition that was held on the sidelines of the ceremony. This exhibition showcased the stages of the Bisat oil field's development. He listened to an explanation about the potential of the field and the technologies used in it.

MSX declines by 47 points in weekly trading

All sectoral indices on the Muscat Stock Exchange registered a drop except for the service sector index, which rose 41 points



MUSCAT: The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) declined last week by 47 points and closed at 4,751 points, declining for the second week in a row after losing about 81 points in the previous week.

All sectoral indices recorded a drop except for the service sector index, which rose 41 points. While the industrial sector index recorded the highest decline at 179 points, the financial sector index declined by about 140 points, and the Sharia index lost about three points.

About two weeks ago, the Muscat Stock Exchange has been witnessing cautious calm, despite the positive financial results for 2022 announced by public joint stock companies in early January, which showed an increase in profits and a decrease in losses.

The declines of the past two weeks came as investors await more corporate disclosures re-

garding dividends to shareholders. Until the end of last week, seven companies out of about 100 public joint-stock companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange announced that they will distribute dividends to shareholders, noting that the annual ordinary general assemblies that will be held next March will discuss these recommendations, and it is expected that the coming days will witness More recommendations that may reflect positively on the performance of the stock exchange.

The Oman Cables Industry Company came at the forefront of the companies that announced high dividends, as it indicated that it will distribute cash dividends of 56 baisas per share, and the Board of Directors of Bank Muscat recommended a cash dividend of 15 percent, or 15 baisas per share,

while the National Bank of Oman recommended the distribution of cash dividends of 9 per cent, or 9 baisas per share. Bank Dhofar recommended a cash dividend of 4.7 per cent per share. The Gulf Mushroom Production Company said it had recommended a cash dividend of 10 per cent or 10 baisas per share.

While the Taaajer Finance Company confirmed that it recommended the distribution of cash dividends of 5 per cent and bonus shares of 2 per cent, and the Desert Hospitality Company, whose fiscal year ended last November, announced that it had recommended the distribution of cash dividends of 250 baisas per share, and the nominal value of the Desert Hospitality share is one Omani rial. Unlike most public shareholding companies, which divided their shares from one Omani rial to 100 baisas.

Last week, the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded a decline in the trading value, which fell to OMR11.31 million, compared to OMR15.85 million in the previous week, and the number of transactions executed decreased from 2,530 to 1,630 transactions. The market value fell at the end of Thursday's trading to OMR23.57 billion, recording weekly losses estimated at OMR89.6 million.

Al-Barwani sukuk in dollars topped the most traded securities, accounting for 34.2 per cent of the total trading value, as its transactions amounted to OMR3.7 million. Bank Muscat came second with transactions worth about OMR2.2 million, then Al-Barwani's sukuk in OMR, which amounted to OMR1.5 million, representing 13.6 per cent of the total turnover. - **ONA**

PARTNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT FORUM



Opaz to host major forum on development and partnership

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Partnership and Development Forum, organised by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (Opaz), will kick off on January 31, with the participation of a group of employees and specialists from Opaz, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Sezad), the free zones in Sohar, Salalah, Al Mazunah and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

The full day forum will touch on, during its various activities and sessions, the tremendous efforts made by Opaz and all its affiliated zones in the different sectors related to partnership

and social development in general and In-Country Value (ICV) in particular. As well, it intends to highlight the initiatives introduced to support and empower Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

In addition, the participants will review and discuss views, plans and initiatives related to supporting ICV initiatives in the zones. Overall, the Partnership and Development Forum serves as a platform for exchanging experiences and enhancing cooperation in developing business plans for partnership and community development activities for Opaz and its affiliated zones for the year 2023.

ATTRACTS FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Phase 1 of Phelix Pharmaceutical's new factory opens in Salalah Free Zone

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Salalah Free Zone (SFZ), part of Asyad Group, announced the inauguration of Phase I of Phelix Pharmaceutical's new factory on January 25. The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of Dr Hilal bin Ali Al-Sabti, Oman's Minister of Health.

As part of a regional investment of over OMR 23 million (approximately \$60 million), Phase I of Phelix Pharmaceutical's factory will operate an area of over 16,000 sqm in SFZ. Once all phases are completed, the total investment will ultimately cover around 110,000 sqm and will produce a range of medications, including antivirals, diabetes and heart medication, blood thinners and pain killers, as well as other specialised



nutritional products.

The introduction of Phelix Pharmaceuticals, a growing pharmaceutical manufacturing company, to SFZ, adds to the long list of global and local producers already operating in the free zone and capitalising on its state-of-the-art infrastructure network, competitive commercial incentives and premi-

um logistics services powered by Asyad Group's integrated logistics ecosystem.

Since its inception, SFZ has successfully carried out its plans to attract foreign investment and channel it to a select group of vital industries, chief amongst which is pharmaceuticals. By the end of 2022, SFZ became home to 76 fac-



tories and plants with several new projects in the pipeline.

Dr Ali Tabouk, CEO of SFZ, said: "This addition to the host of industries operating in our free zone highlights SFZ's successful strategy to establish its role as a key driver of industry, manufacturing and production in Oman. It also reaffirms our commitment

to helping bolster health security and promote development in critical industries identified in Oman Vision 2040 and other national plans."

"We continue to focus on attracting global, regional, and local investment that advances our strategic goal of cementing SFZ's position as a leading manufactur-

ing and production hub that plays a vital role in the export and re-export to regional and global markets," Tabouk added. "Our success further reflects investors' trust in our unrivalled competitive advantages, from SFZ's unique location close to top Asian and African markets to our proximity to major global shipping routes. Global players are also drawn to our well-devised incentive schemes that aim to improve ease-of-business and increase production and export efficiencies."

Recently, SFZ has also seen OQ's methanol factory kick off its operations on over 118,242.96 sqm, another testament to the Free Zone's growing reputation as the ideal industrial destination in Oman that offers advanced infrastructure and logistics support.

MARKET

Could tech layoffs spread to rest of US economy?



Economists are divided over whether the US economy is heading for recession and soaring unemployment

WASHINGTON: First a trickle, then a stream and now a torrent. US tech giants are cutting thousands of jobs almost every day. The darlings of COVID-19 lockdowns have seen their profits squeezed as lives returned to normal after months of staring at screens.

During the pandemic boom times, the headcounts of Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Facebook parent Meta grew bloated due to overzealous hiring as demand for their products and services soared. But as decades-high inflation took hold and operating costs rocketed, Silicon Valley had no option but to trim the fat.

Tech firms have collectively cut more than 330,000 positions over the past 12 months, according to a tally by research platform TrueUp, including nearly 90,000 since the start of this year.

With inflation still stubbornly high, interest rates rising and slowing growth, the natural conclusion is that the tech sector's woes will quickly spread to the wider US economy. But economists have cited several reasons why further

layoffs may be limited.

Tech sector 'overhired'

"Employment in the tech sector is up about 8 per cent from pre-pandemic levels, while total employment is just right above pre-pandemic levels," Olu Sonola, head of US Regional Economics at Fitch Ratings, told DW. "This suggests that the sector overhired in 2021 and 2022 ... to the tune of about 200,000 to 300,000 jobs."

High-profile names like Twitter, Spotify and Tesla represent the future trajectory of the US economy, so any negative news is more likely to hit the headlines and skew public perceptions. But large numbers of workers across all sectors change jobs every day as the US has one of the world's most flexible labour markets.

"The number of layoffs [across the US economy] every month is about 1.5 million," Karen Dynan, a nonresident senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, told DW, versus 30,000 per month in the tech sector. "The [tech] layoffs have gotten a lot of attention, however, their direct effect on overall US employment is limited."

Many tech firms still hiring

While some tech firms have cut positions, many others are still recruiting aggressively thanks to a red-hot jobs market that has left employers across several sectors struggling to fill vacancies and workers demanding higher pay.

A scan of job sites by TrueUp on Friday found more than 179,000 open positions within big tech, startups and so-called unicorns — new privately held firms worth at least \$1 billion (€0.92 billion). A

survey by ZipRecruit last month found that four out of five fired US tech workers found a new job within three months.

Eight out of the 10 best-ranked jobs in the US are still technology roles — including developers, engineers, and machine learning — according to a ranking by Indeed.com, giving tech applicants the best job prospects in any industry in 2023. Many of the announced job losses also affect employees outside the US.

Despite inflation, US spending spree continues

Economists are divided over whether the US will enter a recession this year as consumer spending — which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity — remains strong.

Consumption fell slightly in November and December, according to the US Department of Commerce. Credit card debt is also rising — evidence that Americans are having to borrow more to maintain their spending levels, which is likely unsustainable.

A clear sign of a recession would be an increase in overall unemployment, but the jobless figure fell by 0.2 per cent to 3.5 per cent in December. The number of people claiming jobless welfare for the first time hit a historic low last week of 190,000.

Some job losses but no cull

"We are seeing some signs of pressures subsiding in the labour market broadly — wage growth is softening, use of temporary workers is dropping, job openings are starting to come down. So we will probably see layoffs pick up in the labour

market generally," Dynan said.

Fitch's Sonola thinks the labour market will "significantly cool" during 2023 but doesn't expect the layoffs in the tech sector to extend to the broader jobs market.

Few analysts expect the same hike in unemployment as during the 2007/8 financial crisis when the US jobless figure reached 7.5 per cent.

"At most, I see unemployment creeping up to 5 per cent from the current historic low of 3.5 per cent in the US," Karin Kimbrough, chief economist at LinkedIn told US television broadcaster CNBC.

Many firms across multiple sectors, including education health care and retail, are still struggling to hire new workers. To tempt them, grocery giant Walmart said this month it would hike its wages to more than \$17.50 per hour — having already increased pay several times during the pandemic. In 2021, the retailer's starting wage was \$12.

Labour market still tight

Rival chains Target and Costco have made similar moves and are seen as unlikely to cut jobs while demand remains strong.

"Companies are very reluctant to let go of workers because they've struggled so much in terms of staffing," Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics told Agence France-Presse.

Even with all of the recent layoffs, most tech companies are still vastly larger than they were before the pandemic. Despite announcing 12,000 job losses last week, Google owner Alphabet has hired more than 100,000 staffers since 2018. Amazon's decision to fire 18,000 people, meanwhile, is just a fraction of its 1.5 million global workforces. **-DW**

WALL STREET WEEK



Recession fears pose challenge to energy shares after stellar year

NEW YORK: A potential US recession and tough comparisons to a stellar 2022 are weighing on the prospects of energy stocks delivering an encore to last year's stunning run, despite valuations that are seen as still comparatively cheap.

The S&P 500 energy sector is up 4.2 per cent year-to-date, slightly lagging the rise for the broader index. The sector logged a 59 per cent jump in 2022, an otherwise brutal year for stocks that saw the S&P 500 drop 19.4 per cent, Reuters reported.

Energy bulls argue the sector's valuations bolster the case for a third-straight year of gains, which would be the first such feat for the group since 2013. Goldman Sachs, RBC Capital Markets and UBS Global Wealth Management are among the Wall Street firms recommending energy stocks.

Despite last year's run, the sector trades at a 10 times forward price-to-earnings ratio, compared to 17 times for the broad market, and many of its stocks offer robust dividend yields.

The potential returns for shareholders were highlighted this week when Chevron shares rose almost 5 per cent after announcing plans to buy \$75 billion worth of its stock.

Some investors worry, however, that energy companies may find it hard to increase profits after huge jumps in 2022, especially if a widely expected US economic downturn hits commodity prices.

"The group appears to be holding up well, but there is some trepidation due to the fact that investors are concerned about an economic slowdown and what that will do to demand," said Robert Pavlik, senior portfolio manager at Dakota Wealth.

He said he is slightly overweight in the energy sector, including shares of Chevron and Pioneer Natural Resources.

Economists and analysts in a Reuters survey forecast US crude

The S&P 500 energy sector is up 4.2 per cent year-to-date, slightly lagging the rise for the broader index. The sector logged a 59 per cent jump in 2022, an otherwise brutal year for stocks that saw the S&P 500 drop 19.4 per cent

would average \$84.84 per barrel in 2023, compared to an average price of \$94.33 last year, citing expectations of global economic weakness. US crude prices recently stood at around \$80 per barrel.

At the same time, many investors beefed up their holdings of energy stocks in 2022 after years of avoiding the sector, which had often underperformed the broader market amid concerns such as poor capital allocation by companies and uncertainties over the future of fossil fuel.

The sector's weight in the S&P 500 roughly doubled last year to 5.2 per cent.

However, that dynamic may be petering out, said Aaron Dunn, co-head of the value equity team at Eaton Vance. "People have come back to energy in a big way," he said. "We had that tailwind the last couple of years, which was that everyone was under-invested in energy. I don't think that's the case anymore." **-BNA**



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ECONOMIC WATCH

China continues to lead in global shipbuilding market

BEIJING: China remained the world's leading shipbuilder in 2022, grabbing the largest market share and making breakthroughs in high-end ship models.

The country topped the globe in three major indicators, contributing 47.3 per cent of global output, receiving 55.2 per cent of new orders, and having 49 per cent of holding orders, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed.

2022 marked the 13th straight year for Chinese ship manufacturers to hold the largest share of global markets. Six companies ranked as the world's top 10 shipbuilding enterprises.

Seizing opportunities from surging global shipping demand, especially for crude oil and natural gas, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, China further consolidated its position as the world's major shipbuilder. Three main shipbuilding clusters have emerged in regions surrounding the Yangtze River Delta, Bohai Rim, and Pearl River Delta.

"Now the shipbuilding industry has entered the recovery cycle, showing a steady upward trend," said Cao Bo, a researcher at the China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry (CANSI).

With the largest shipbuilding market share, China is moving briskly to a manufacturer of quality. Solid progress has been made, particularly in producing lique-



DATA: The country topped the globe in three major indicators, contributing 47.3 per cent of global output, receiving 55.2 per cent of new orders, and having 49 per cent of holding orders.

- Photo used for illustrative purpose only

fied natural gas (LNG) tankers, a type of high-end ship equipped with tanks ensuring the gas is kept in a liquid state at minus 160 degrees Celsius.

Chinese companies received 55 LNG carrier orders in 2022, accounting for over 30 per cent of the world's total, a record high for the country. "It is a massive breakthrough," Cao said.

The shipbuilding orders to Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding (Group) Co., Ltd., a subsidiary of China's largest shipbuilding company China State Shipbuilding Corporation, are already piling high, with production scheduled until 2028.

The company planned to start

the construction of nine LNG ships this year and delivered four.

Apart from LNG ships, China also made headway in producing other high-end ships and marine engineering equipment.

In 2022, China started the construction of its second large cruise ship and delivered the world's first 100,000-tonne intelligent aquaculture ship and super-large container ships with a TEU (20-foot equivalent unit) capacity of 24,000.

China's shipbuilding sector is pushing forward structural adjustments of products and moving toward high-end manufacturing, said Li Yanqing, secretary-general of the CANSI. **-Xinhua**

PAYCHECK

Goldman Sachs slashes CEO's pay by 30% after bank's poor performance

NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs Chief Executive, David M Solomon saw his 2022 pay slashed by nearly 30 per cent, following missteps that have weighed on the elite Wall Street bank's profits and performance, the *New York Times* reported.

Solomon took home \$25 million last year, the bank said in a filing Friday, down from \$35 million a year earlier. Although that paycheck was still hefty compensation by most standards, Solomon ceded his title as the highest-paid bank chief executive to Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase, whose pay for 2022 was \$35 million, the newspaper reported.

The salary cut followed an ugly period for Goldman and Solomon. The bank has admitted to billions in losses from its experiment in consumer banking, and is retrenching from big plans to build checking accounts and other products for modest borrowers, the *New York Times* said. Solomon's brusque style, meanwhile, has produced grumblings inside the firm and contributed to a string of senior departures, the daily newspaper said.

This month, the firm laid off 3,200 employees, the heaviest such job cuts since the financial crisis of 2008. **-ANI**



Researchers at UCLA demonstrated that consuming 1.5 ounces of tree nuts per day (versus pretzels) during 24 weeks of weight loss and weight maintenance, resulted in weight loss, increased satiety, decreased diastolic blood pressure and decreased heart rate.

EATING MIXED TREE NUTS HELPS REDUCE CARDIOVASCULAR RISK



In a study published online this week in the journal *Nutrients*, researchers discovered that eating a variety of tree nuts, including almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamias, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, and walnuts, improved tryptophan metabolism in overweight and obese people. In particular, serotonin, a neurotransmitter, and cardioprotective tryptophan metabolites both increased.

In a previous study, researchers at UCLA demonstrated that consuming 1.5 ounces of tree nuts per day (versus pretzels) during 24 weeks of weight loss

and weight maintenance, resulted in weight loss, increased satiety, decreased diastolic blood pressure and decreased heart rate. Tryptophan (found in tree nuts) has been indicated as an important factor in cardiovascular disease (CVD).

It is metabolised in the gut, producing many bioactive metabolites that are important in immune regulation affecting chronic diseases such as diabetes and CVD. The current study looked at whether tree nut snacks, as part of a hypocaloric diet, could modify the gut microbiome, resulting in increased levels of cardioprotective tryptophan mi-

crobial metabolites.

Plasma and stool samples were collected from 95 overweight or obese participants and were evaluated in the current study for tryptophan metabolites and for gut microbiota. “We’ve known for a long time that tree nuts can help decrease CVD risk, and these findings provide some possible explanations,”

Lead researcher, Zhaoping Li, MD, PhD, Professor of Medicine and Chief of the Division of Clinical Nutrition at UCLA said, “We discovered some new associations between tryptophan metabolites and blood pressure, heart rate, and satiety in overweight/obese sub-

“
Replacing just one of those snacks with 1.5 ounces of tree nuts may help improve overall health and reduce the risk for various chronic diseases



jects, suggesting a broader impact of tryptophan metabolism in overall health, including cardiovascular health.”

Another interesting finding was the significant increase in blood serotonin levels (60.9 per cent and 82.2 per cent increase from baseline at week 12 and 24, respectively) in both the weight loss and weight maintenance phases, in those who consumed mixed tree nuts.

“This is the first time we’ve seen mixed tree nut consumption associated with an increase in serotonin levels in the body,” explained Dr Li.

“While more research is

needed, this is exciting since serotonin can have an important impact on mood and overall mental health.”

Research has shown that people get about 25 percent of their calories each day from snacks and a large proportion come from desserts, sugar-sweetened beverages, sweets and salty snacks.

“Replacing just one of those snacks with 1.5 ounces of tree nuts may help improve overall health and reduce the risk for various chronic diseases,” stated Maureen Ternus, M.S., R.D.N, Executive Director of the International Tree Nut Council Nutrition Research & Education Foundation. -ANI



SPORTS



2023 FIA Middle East Rally Championship, round 1, January 26th-28th, 2023

MUSCAT: The Oman Rally Team's Abdullah Al-Rawahi and Jordanian co-driver Ata Al-Hmoud clinched victory in the Oman International Rally for the second time in three years on Saturday.

After pre-event favourite Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah crashed on the opening super special stage, Al-Rawahi hit the front on the first of a dozen gravel stages in the Sultanate of Oman and stayed clear of major trouble, punctures aside, to guide his Škoda Fabia Evo to victory by the margin of 6min 35.6sec. The feat meant the Omani became one of only 15 drivers ever to win more than one round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship.

"It was a great feeling to win my home rally for the first time two years ago and to do it again is very special," said Al-Rawahi. "This is a perfect start to the championship for us and I would like to thank Ata for his efforts and the team for giving me such a strong car on what was a difficult rally."

The fastest time on the final stage enabled Petr Kačirek and Petra Řiháková to see off a late challenge from Al-Attiyah for second overall and the Czech crew duly sealed the runner-up spot in their Duck Racing Škoda Fabia.

Al-Attiyah and Andorra-based co-driver Mathieu Baumel won 11 of the 13 special stages, but the costly error on the first stage damaged the Volkswagen Golf's radiator and a subsequent time penalty for a seat belt infringe-

- Czech Petr Kačirek holds off Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah to finish second
- Kuwait's Meshari Al-Thefiri seals MERC2 victory with fourth overall

ment meant the task was ultimately too much for the Qatari to challenge for the win.

Al-Attiyah reached the finish at the Muscat Drift Arena in third overall to keep the defence of his regional title firmly on track. He may well have caught Kačirek and snatched second had he not suffered a rear right puncture and driven 17km on the shredding tyre to the finish of the final stage.

"After what happened on Thursday, I suppose I am happy enough with the result," said Al-Attiyah. "But I am disappointed to have the puncture on the last stage when second place was achievable. That's rallying. I drove for 17km on a rear right puncture." Meshari Al-Thefiri and his Qatari co-driver Nasser Al-Kuwari were passed by Al-Attiyah on the afternoon's loop of stages but the Kuwaiti managed to finish fourth overall and confirm victory in the MERC2 category in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X. He had led the event outright on Thursday evening after winning the opening super special stage.

Al-Attiyah's cousin Nasser Khalifa Al-Atya teamed up with Giovanni Bernacchini to round off the top five in a Ford Fiesta R5, while the Jordanian duo of Shaker Jweihan and female co-driver Nancy Al-Majali finished sixth and second in MERC2.

Kuwait's Yousef Al-Dhefiri overhauled Jordan's Sheikh Bader Al-Fayez to claim seventh overall and third in the showroom category.

Jordanian Ihab Al-Shorafa was deprived of a finish after stopping in the final stage. The Mitsubishi driver's demise lifted fellow countryman Shadi Shaban into

ninth place and Lebanon's Ahmad Khaled rounded off the top 10. The Omani crew of Abdullah Al-Zubair and Taha Soomar were the last of the finishers in 11th.

Ghaith Al-Qasmi and Ahmed Salim sealed victory in the day's round of the Oman National Championship. The Mitsubishi crew beat Faisal and Yaqdhan Al-Rashdi by 2min 15.8sec. Mutasim and Nofel Al-Balushi came home in third place.

The previous day's winners, Issa Abu Jamous and Yazan Juma, missed out on second place after shedding time in the 12th stage. The Jordanian crew finished fourth, well clear of fifth-placed Abdullah Al-Toqi and his Austrian co-driver Ilka Minor.

With the exception of Haitham Al-Zadjali, nine national entrants began the one-day round of the Oman National Championship. Salim Al-Toqi and Saif Al-Harthy fell by the wayside after the eighth stage and Mohammed Al-Mazroui retired his Yamaha on stage nine. Musab Soomar was the next retirement on SS11.

Saturday - as it happened

A second time penalty had ruined any chance Al-Attiyah had of catching Al-Rawahi and the Qatari began the final day in seventh place, trailing the Omani by 11min 27.4sec. Nevertheless, he beat the rally leader by seven seconds in the opening Mulaynah test and climbed above Sheikh Bader Al-Fawaz and into sixth.

Another fastest time followed through the Misfah speed test and Al-Attiyah displaced Jweihan to snatch fifth overall. The top four of Al-Rawahi, Kačirek, Al-Thefiri

and Al-Zubair held station.

When Al-Zubair dropped 12 minutes in the 10th Murayrat stage, following delays trying to change a puncture when the jack failed after an accident, Al-Attiyah climbed to fourth place, although he still trailed Al-Rawahi by 10min 48.2sec.

Even if the five-minute penalty was rescinded by rally officials, it was now virtually impossible for Al-Attiyah to catch the leader, although a place on the podium was well within reach. Al-Rawahi's impressive morning run meant that he reached the service point leading by 7min 59.4sec.

The re-run of Mulaynah netted Al-Attiyah another fastest stage time and he continued to reel in Al-Thefiri in his quest for a podium finish. The Kuwaiti remained in third place and first in MERC2, but Al-Attiyah reached Misfah trailing the Mitsubishi driver by just 20.9 seconds. The second quickest time enabled Al-Rawahi to increase his advantage over Kačirek to 8min 39.2sec.

The Qatari moved ahead of Al-Thefiri and into third place with another quickest time in Misfah 2. He beat a cautious Al-Rawahi by 18.9 seconds, but the Omani headed for the final stage with an overall lead of 9min 36.9sec.

Even if Al-Attiyah was able to overturn the five-minute penalty that he'd been given on Friday, he was too far behind to post a challenge for victory. Meanwhile, Al-Zubair's woes continued and the Omani plummeted to the foot of the rankings after stopping again in the penultimate stage.

A fastest time for Kačirek on the final stage ruined Al-Attiyah's potential clean sweep of all the gravel special stages and enabled the Czech to hang on to second place behind a victorious Al-Rawahi. Al-Attiyah had sustained a rear right puncture and drove 17km to the stage finish.

Action in the regional rally series continues in Qatar on February 16th-18th.

2023 Oman International Rally - positions after SS13 (unofficial @ 16.15hrs):

1. **Abdullah Al-Rawahi (OMN)/Ata Al-Hmoud (JOR)**
Škoda Fabia Evo --2hr 37min 30.1sec
2. **Petr Kačirek (CZE)/Petra Řiháková (CZE)**
Škoda Fabia--2hr 44min 05.7sec
3. **Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND)**
Volkswagen Polo GTI --2hr 44min 38.0sec
4. **Meshari Al-Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser Al-Kuwari (QAT)**
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X--2hr 46min 45.7sec
5. **Nasser Khalifa Al-Atya (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA)** Ford Fiesta R5--2hr 52min 41.2sec
6. **Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Nancy Al-Majali (JOR)**
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X --2hr 54min 07.0sec
7. **Yousef Al-Dhefiri (KWT)/Carlos Hanna (LEB)**
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X --2hr 56min 39.1sec
8. **Sheikh Bader Al-Fayez (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR)**
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X -- 2hr 58min 13.8sec
9. **Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR)**
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X-- 3hr 15min 17.1sec
10. **Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Samer Sfeir (LEB)**
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX -- 3hr 21min 22.0sec
11. **Abdullah Al-Zubair (OMN)/Taha Soomar (OMN)**
Subaru Impreza STi--3hr 24min 13.4sec

13 STARTERS, 11 FINISHERS

2023 Oman National Rally Championship - positions on round 2 (unofficial):

1. Ghaith Al-Qasmi (OMN)/Ahmed Salim OMN)
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII--1hr 29min 23.5sec
2. Faisal Al-Rashdi (OMN)/Yaqdhan Al-Rashdi (OMN)
Subaru Impreza STi--1hr 31min 39.3sec
3. Mutasim Al-Balushi (OMN)/Nofel Al-Balushi (OMN)
Yamaha YXZ 1000 R --1hr 32min 03.4sec
4. Issa Abu Jamous (JOR)/Yazan Juma (JOR)
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX--1hr 32min 32.6sec
5. Abdullah Al-Touqi (OMN)/Ilka Minor (AUT)
Toyota Yaris--1hr 39min 53.8sec



FOOTBALL

Al-Ittihad Club to face Al-Fayhaa Club in Saudi Super Cup final

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Al-Ittihad Club will face Al-Fayhaa Club in the final of the Saudi Super Cup for football at King Fahd Stadium in Riyadh on Sunday.

The Moroccan international player, Abdul Razzaq Hamdallah, led his team Ittihad Jeddah, to victory over Al-Nassr by three goals to one in the match that was held on the grounds of King Fahd International Stadium in the semifinals

of the Saudi Super Cup.

Al-Ittihad was able to open the scoring with Brazilian Romarinho in the 15th minute, before Abdul Razzaq Hamdallah added the second goal in the 43rd minute. While Anderson Talisca narrowed the difference in favour of Al-Nassr in the 67th minute.

Al-Ittihad managed to settle the match with a final goal scored by Mohammed Al-Shanqeeti, in the third minute of stoppage time.

Thus, Al-Ittihad Jeddah will face their counterpart Al-Fayhaa in the Saudi Super Cup final on Sunday, at 10:00 pm Muscat local time (18:00 GMT +1) at King Fahd International Stadium.

Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo fell in his first big test with his new team Al-Nassr by losing the semi-final match of the Saudi Super Cup football competition at King Fahd Stadium in Riyadh in front of Al-Ittihad 1-3.



ROUND-UP

New 2023 Nissan Patrol unveiled in Oman with host of aesthetic upgrades



Catering to the evolving needs of customers in the region, the 2023 Nissan Patrol builds on a longstanding heritage that spans over 70 years and features an all-new and distinctive Patrol-branded fender vent badge for a unique visual identity



MUSCAT: Building on its SUV dominance and as a testament to its commitment of making innovative automotive experiences accessible to all, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has launched the new 2023 Nissan Patrol in Oman with a host of aesthetic upgrades. Catering to the evolving needs of customers in the region, the 2023 Nissan Patrol builds on a longstanding heritage that spans over 70 years and features an all-new and distinctive Patrol-branded fender vent badge for a unique visual identity. Oman's relationship with the iconic Patrol dates back to 1956 when the first-generation of the SUV arrived in the Gulf. Proving itself as a reliable and capable SUV that can conquer all terrains, the 2023 Patrol builds on the success of its predecessors and remains true to the nameplate's ethos in continuously rewriting the benchmark for design, comfort, and technology. A senior official of SBA said: "For over 70 years, the Nissan Patrol has integrated itself into the cultural fabric of Oman, earning its status as an icon and the admi-

ration of nationals and expatriates alike. A flagship model for Nissan in the region, the Patrol is synonymous with class-leading luxury, performance, and technology and the new 2023 Nissan Patrol continues to build on this deep-rooted legacy of defying ordinary and conquering everywhere." Inspired by the brand's powerful design aesthetic, the 2023 Nissan Patrol makes a bold statement with a striking V-Motion chrome grille and 20-inch machine-cut alloy wheels. The stylised chrome along the bodywork emphasises the visual breadth of the vehicle, while the iconic design exudes luxury with a new fender vent badge. Inside, drivers and occupants are welcomed into a premium and technologically loaded cabin. A high-resolution 12.3-inch infotainment screen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity takes centrestage on the dashboard, while two 10.1-inch rear entertainment screens, enhanced with screen mirroring capabilities, allow passengers to be more connected and entertained. Packed with a suite of Nissan In-

telligent Mobility (NIM) features, the 2023 Nissan Patrol offers drivers a safer, smarter, and more connected driving experience with more safety features available as standard across the line up. The safety of those onboard and around the Patrol is ensured through a variety of assuring technologies, including Intelligent Emergency Braking with Pedestrian Detection, Intelligent Lane Intervention, Intelligent Blind Spot Intervention, Rear Cross Traffic Alert with Intelligent Intervention, and Intelligent Cruise Control. Under the hood, drivers receive a choice of two powerful engines: a 4.0-liter V6 that produces 275 horsepower and 394 NM of torque, offering a unique combination of power, performance, and efficiency; or a larger 5.6-litre V8 that generates 400 horsepower and 560 NM of torque for ultimate performance in the toughest of conditions. The V8 engine's direct injection system provides better wide-open throttle performance and comes fitted with a dedicated Eco mode for improved efficiency. Both engines are mated to an advanced

7-speed automatic transmission with Adaptive Shift Control that ensures smooth shifts, while allowing drivers to shuffle through gears manually for a more engaging experience behind the wheel. The category-defining Variable 4x4 Mode allows for an effortless switch between drive modes and maximizes the Patrol's go-anywhere capability with ease. Four dedicated modes (Sand, On-Road, Rock, Snow), which are accompanied by a locking rear differential and hill descent control, allow drivers to confidently explore off the beaten path, supported with the Hydraulic Body Motion Control System. Agile steering on- and off-road is provided by an engine-speed-sensitive power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering system. Responsive braking is supplied by a 4-wheel disc brake system with Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) with Electronic Brake force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist. Standard on all models is also 4-wheel limited-slip (ABLS) and a Vehicle Dynamic Control (VDC) system with an in-built deactivation switch for unintrusive expe-



ditions off-road. Nissan has been conferred with Oman's Most Trusted Brand 2021 in the crossover category at a ceremony at held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Continuously winning the trust of Oman residents, Nissan is now among the top brands to be conferred with 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand' honour for five times in a row in the automobile category. Nissan, considered a premium and trusted name in the market has won the award across categories including SUV, crossover, 4WD and mid-size since 2016. SBA is largely committed to supporting Nissan's growth in the Sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of 14 showrooms, 17 service centres and 24 spare parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers. Every customer purchasing a Nissan vehicle can be assured of Nissan's top class after sales service, which guarantees the advantage of factory-trained experts. Nissan has built up its reputation through innovative technology, and a broad product line-up.

GHEDEX EDUCATIONAL SERIES

'Building future-ready skills': ABA Head of School at Ghedex



MUSCAT: As part of the Ghedex educational series, Craig Williamson, Head of School at ABA Oman International School was invited to participate in a panel discussion alongside esteemed academia on the topic - "The Skills to Build a Sustainable Future". The event, held under the patronage of Sayyid Salim Musallam Al Busaidi, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, provided a platform for industry leaders to share their insights and perspectives on the evolving job market, and the skills required for success in the future. During the panel discussion, Williamson emphasised the need for schools to develop transferable future-ready skills in students, through programmes that enhance their ability to adapt to new and emerging technologies in the dynamic workplace. "Education needs to prepare young people to imbibe a growth mindset and acquire new skills to meet the demands of the rapidly-

changing workplace. Through the IB programme offered at ABA Oman International School, we focus on building fundamental lifelong skills such as language and communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, complex problem-solving skills and social skills that enable learners to grow as confident, socially responsible global citizens with a sense of purpose. The emphasis on experiential learning beyond the classroom also helps prepare students to tackle real world challenges," he stated. Williamson further exhorted leadership in education to identify the disconnect between classrooms and the real world, and engage in discussing practical solutions to improve upskilling. The panelists were in agreement as they highlighted the importance of honing soft skills and emotional intelligence in students to help them thrive in the future. The event was moderated by Amr Babood, Group CEO and Sadiq Khan, Group COO - OITE & ARB (Comex & Ghedex Global).

The panel consisted of esteemed academia and industry leaders, including Dr Fatma Mohammed Al-Balushi, Deputy Director General for Administration and Financial Affairs at QAAQA, Dr Yasmin Shannan Al Bulushi, Senior advisor at The Royal Academy of Management, Najah Al Rashdi, Director General of Innovation Center at Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Dr Shadha Al Amri, Head of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Department at University of Technology and Applied Science, and Suad Said Al Zakwani, Head of Data Science at Petroleum Development Oman. ABA Oman International School is the leading International Baccalaureate Continuum School in Oman. Founded in 1987, ABA is a not-for-profit, non-selective, K-12 independent school located at Madinat Al Irfan, Muscat. ABA educates the next generation of leaders and innovators in a diverse community, inspiring and empowering them to make a positive impact in the world.

MEMORANDUM OF COLLABORATION



GUtech signs pact with SLB

MUSCAT: Digital and Integration (D&I), a Division of SLB Company signed a memorandum of collaboration (MoC) with German University of Technology in Oman on conducting a technical programme of Artificial intelligence called "AI Academy". The programme will provide and supply university students and professionals with the platform to use AI and ML theoretically and practically for any required field. The aim of the MoC is to deliver a step -change in the technical learning programmes and find new ways to extract maximum value from AI business. The signing ceremony patronage of Dr Ali bin Amer Al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology at Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology.

Dani Rahal, Mena VP Digital Manager said, "I'm honoured to be here as the VP for the region, and I am excited to see the impact that this programme will have on our workforce and our company as a whole. Artificial Intelligence is revolutionising the way we do business and it is crucial that we stay ahead of the curve to stay competitive. The AI Academy program will provide our employees with the necessary training and education to excel in this ever-changing landscape and will be a key component in achieving our goals as a company. I am confident that the knowledge and skills that our employees will gain through this program will be invaluable, and will enable us to continue to lead in the industry." Dr Hussain Al Salim said, "We are happy that we signed this memorandum of collaboration with SLB to establish AI Acad-

emy at GUtech, which is the first in the Middle East. Having such strong partnership with SLB will prompt the Energy industry with the latest technology by having a real industry challenges solved by Artificial Intelligence. GUtech was one of the leading Omani Universities to introduce the Artificial Intelligence as a full bachelor Academic programme, and once this AI Academy programme launched it will increase the skills and experiences of our students and those who are interested to study and learn AI in simple way. In fact, the AI Academy is designed for non-AI and IT specialist, and those from other disciplines such as the engineers, the geologists, and the business and logistic students and professionals who can enjoy the AI solutions without going into full AI or coding programme.

ROUND-UP

Lexus Oman unveils exclusive Muscat Nights campaign benefits

Lexus has an advanced range of vehicles including sedans, SUVs and HEVs. The models include the UX, NX, RX, GX, IS, ES, LS and LX

MUSCAT: Lexus Oman is offering luxury automotive enthusiasts a wonderful opportunity to own a Lexus and enjoy exceptional ownership experiences with exclusive ‘Muscat Nights’ benefits.

Own any Lexus and get service 3 years / 30,000km (Whichever is earlier) and 1 year free registration. (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

Lexus has an advanced range of vehicles including sedans, SUVs and HEVs. The models include the UX, NX, RX, GX, IS, ES, LS and LX.

The UX reflects the “Yet Philosophy,” in many ways, but especially in terms of design, performance and utility. The front wheel drive Lexus UX is powered by a high-

efficiency 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine, which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT).

The NX SUV is equipped with two powertrain options. An inline 4-cylinder, 2.4 L turbocharged engine that produces 275 hp and 6000 RPM and is paired to an 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT). The NX is also available with hybrid-electric system that combines two power sources consisting of a 2.5-litre petrol engine and two electric motors producing 240 hp. The hybrid-electric system is paired to a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT).

The Lexus RX has always stood



out for its technology, design and cutting-edge features. The Lexus RX is available in 5 & 7-seater configurations. It is powered by a choice of two powertrains. The RX 350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine, which produces 296 HP and 377 Kg.M of torque and is paired to an eight-speed automatic transmission. And the RX 450h

hybrid variant is equipped with a 3.5- litre V6 petrol engine and two electric motors and produces a combined system output of 308 hp. The RX Hybrid is available with a hybrid battery warranty of 8 years or 160,000km, whichever is earlier.

The powerful Lexus GX460 is perfect for families who seek

no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving, comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week. The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance.

In sedans, the range includes the IS350. This sleek and stylish

powerful sedan is equipped with a 3.5-litre engine that’s paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission. The turbocharged IS300 features a 2.0-litre twin-scroll turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine with intercooler that generates 241 Hp.

The flagship LS which is an inspiring luxury sedan, is available in 3.5- litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System producing 354 hp, a 3.5- litre V6 naturally aspirated Atkinson-cycle producing 311 hp and 38.7 Kg.M Torque, and a 3.5- litre twin-turbo V6 engine producing 415 hp and 61.2 Kg.M of Torque.

Lexus ES emotional design elevated by the new design front grille is a thrilling drive personality imbued by two powertrain options. ES350 is powered by a 3.5 litre, 24 valve, V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg.m. of torque. While the ES250 is powered by high efficiency 2.5 litre, 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg.m of torque.

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as manufacturer’s warranty of 4 years/100,000km (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA.

EXTENDS SUPPORT TO FISHERMEN

Bank Muscat strengthens partnership with Omani Fishermen’s Association

MUSCAT: In line with its strong commitment to social responsibility, community service and keenness to contribute to national development, Bank Muscat the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has strengthened its partnership with the Omani Fishermen’s Association.

The bank recently provided 35 refrigerators to fishermen in the Wilayat of Sur at a ceremony organised at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Sur under the auspices of Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Hilal Al Busaidi, the Deputy Wali of Sur. The event was also attended by Dr Juma bin Mohammed Al Maamari, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Fishermen’s Association, and Abdullah bin Juma Al Araimi, Senior Regional Manager, Dakhliyah and Sharqiyah, Bank Muscat.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Juma Al Araimi, Senior Regional Manager, Bank Muscat, expressed his happiness with this partnership with the Omani Fishermen’s Association. He said that the bank was keen to strengthen its partnership with various civil society organisations so as to provide the best services to different sections of society.

He added that this support would contribute to the further growth and development opportunities for fishermen in Sur and improve their overall quality of life. Abdullah Al Araimi pointed out



the importance of fisheries as one of the promising sectors identified for further development under Oman Vision 2040.

He also expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Omani Association of Fishermen for their efforts and hard work in aiding fishermen across the Sultanate, and wished them all success in their future endeavours.

On his part, Dr. Juma bin Mohammed Al Maamari, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Fishermen’s Association, extended his sincere thanks to Bank Muscat for the effective role played by the bank in supporting

various civil society organisations and institutions in Oman. He stated that the bank’s initiative would play a positive role in bettering the livelihood of fishermen and strengthen the national economy. He also described the role being played by the Omani Fishermen’s Association in promoting various fisheries related activities such as the production and marketing of fish and related products, provision of suitable equipment to the fishing community in the Sultanate and partnering with the concerned authorities to further develop Oman’s fisheries sector.

Over the years, Bank Muscat has

been successfully providing support through various programmes and initiatives to various national development priorities and sectors. The bank has demonstrated its pioneering position in the field of sustainable development and actively encourages different segments of society to enhance their contributions to the national economy as well as efforts for economic diversification.

Its extensive achievements continue to be recognised with the bank winning a number of accolades including being honoured by the Ministry of Social Development in 2022.

IN SOHAR



Lulu Exchange opens 38th branch

MUSCAT: Lulu Exchange, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, opened its 38th branch in the country, at Ohi Sanaiya Sohar on Wednesday. The branch was inaugurated by Sheikh Mohammed Hamed Ali Al Ghazali, Director, Lulu Exchange.

Other attendees at the opening ceremony included Narayan Pradhan, COO, Lulu Exchange, Lathish Vichitran, General Manager, Lulu Exchange and other senior management of the company.

The new branch also marks the 265th Global Branch of Lulu Financial Holdings, and Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director of Lulu Financial Holdings congratulated the

team on the milestone occasion.

“The expansion of our branch network reflects our ambition to innovate in matters of customer experience and convenience for both retail and corporate customers. We are fully committed to the growth prospects of the Omani economy, and are actively driving the future of the payments ecosystem by putting technology and innovation at the heart of all things new.”

Lulu Exchange presently provides remittances, currency exchange and value-added services in a timely, transparent and reliable manner through its network of branches and mobile payments app, Lulu Money.

SUPPORT

Zubair Corporation sponsors forum for Deaf and Hard of Hearing



MUSCAT: The Zubair Corporation sponsored a forum for the DHH-Deaf and Hard of Hearing in collaboration with Vertex Business Solutions & Al Massa.

The forum was an opportunity to highlight some of the challenges faced by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in Oman and to call for further recognition of their social status and welfare access. This forum sponsorship is an integral

part of The Zubair Corporation’s CSR strategy to support the socio-economic development of Oman.

It was held under the auspices of Sheikh Nasr bin Amer Al Hosni, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour. The forum held under a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Labour, and with the support of The Zubair Corporation, Tanmia and Octal, this is the first time that an event has been

exclusively organised to encourage and support DHH individuals and business owners and corporates.

The forum included several panel discussions focusing on ways to empower people identifying as deaf or with a hearing impairment. The focus was on the influence of the private sector specifically and how companies can provide further job opportunities with flexible requirements to en-

sure more inclusion and diversity in the workplace. As part of the forum, several working papers were published with recommendations to improve the access to employment and Education for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Commenting on the forum, Hilal Omar Al Siyabi, Chief Corporate Services Officer at Al Zubair Corporation, said: “The Zubair Corporation’s sponsorship of this forum

is a reflection of our commitment to support local communities and empower talented individuals in various artistic, cultural, sports and social fields, enhancing their skills in order to achieve their desired goals. We will continue to contribute meaningfully by helping similar initiatives that lead to the development of skills of people with special needs, especially those in the deaf and difficult hearing.”





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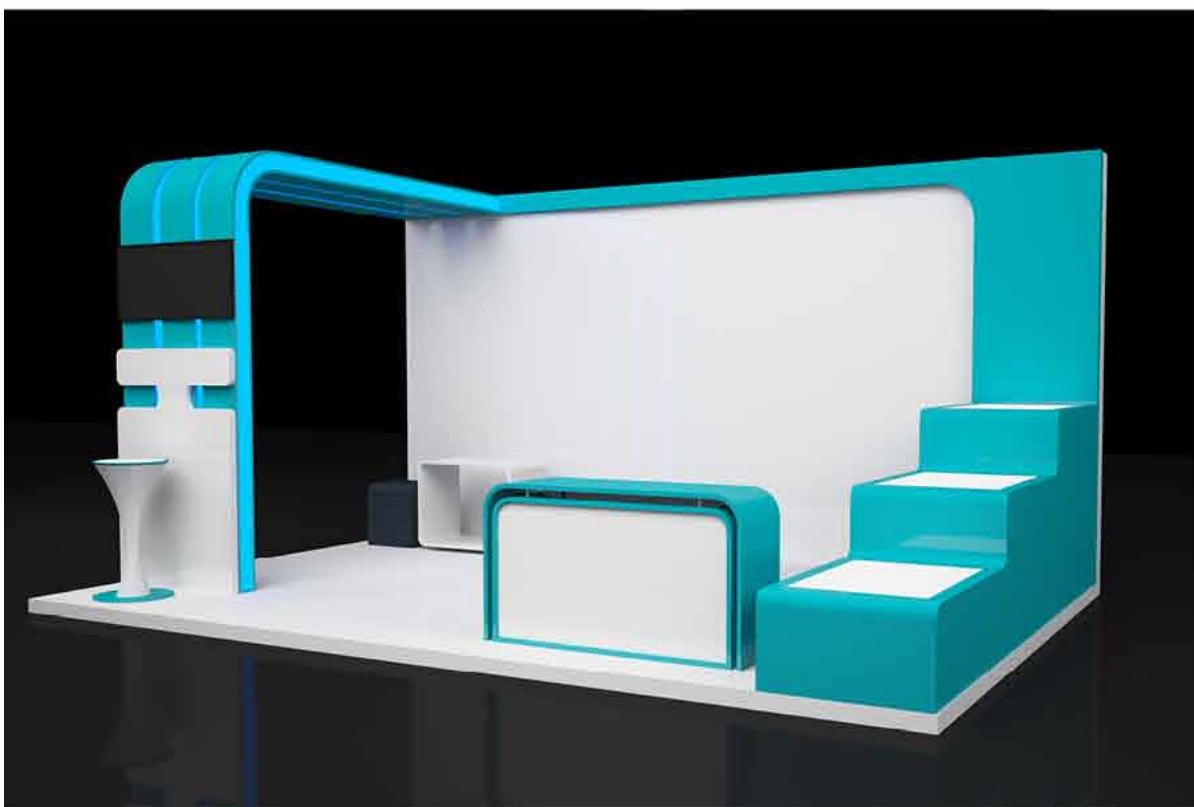
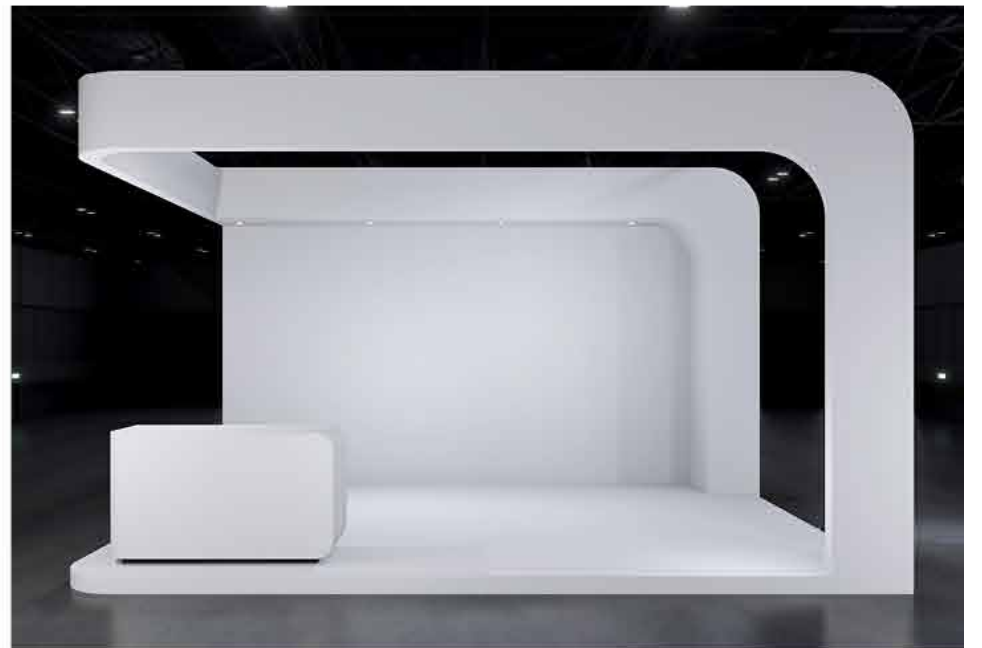
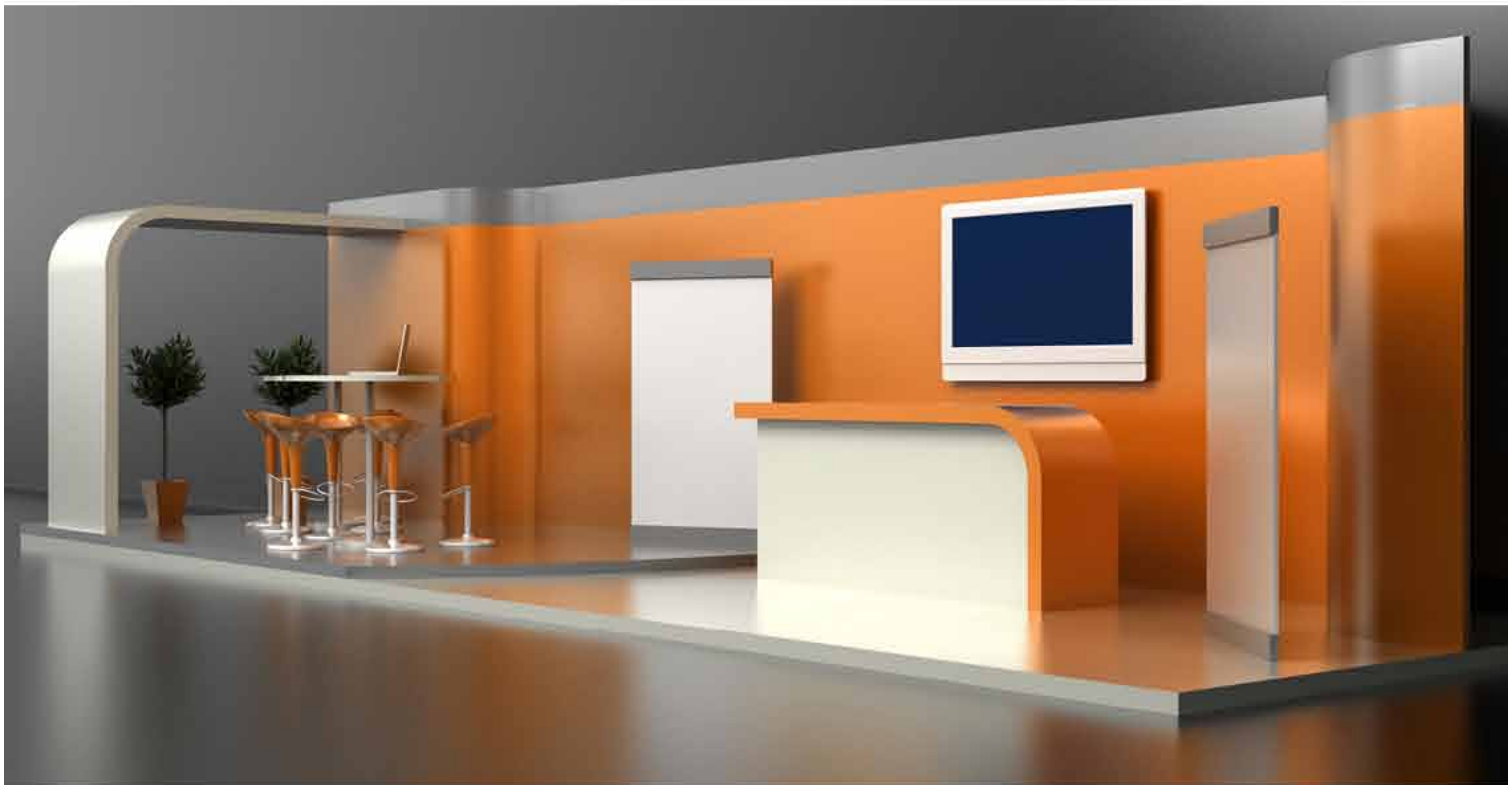




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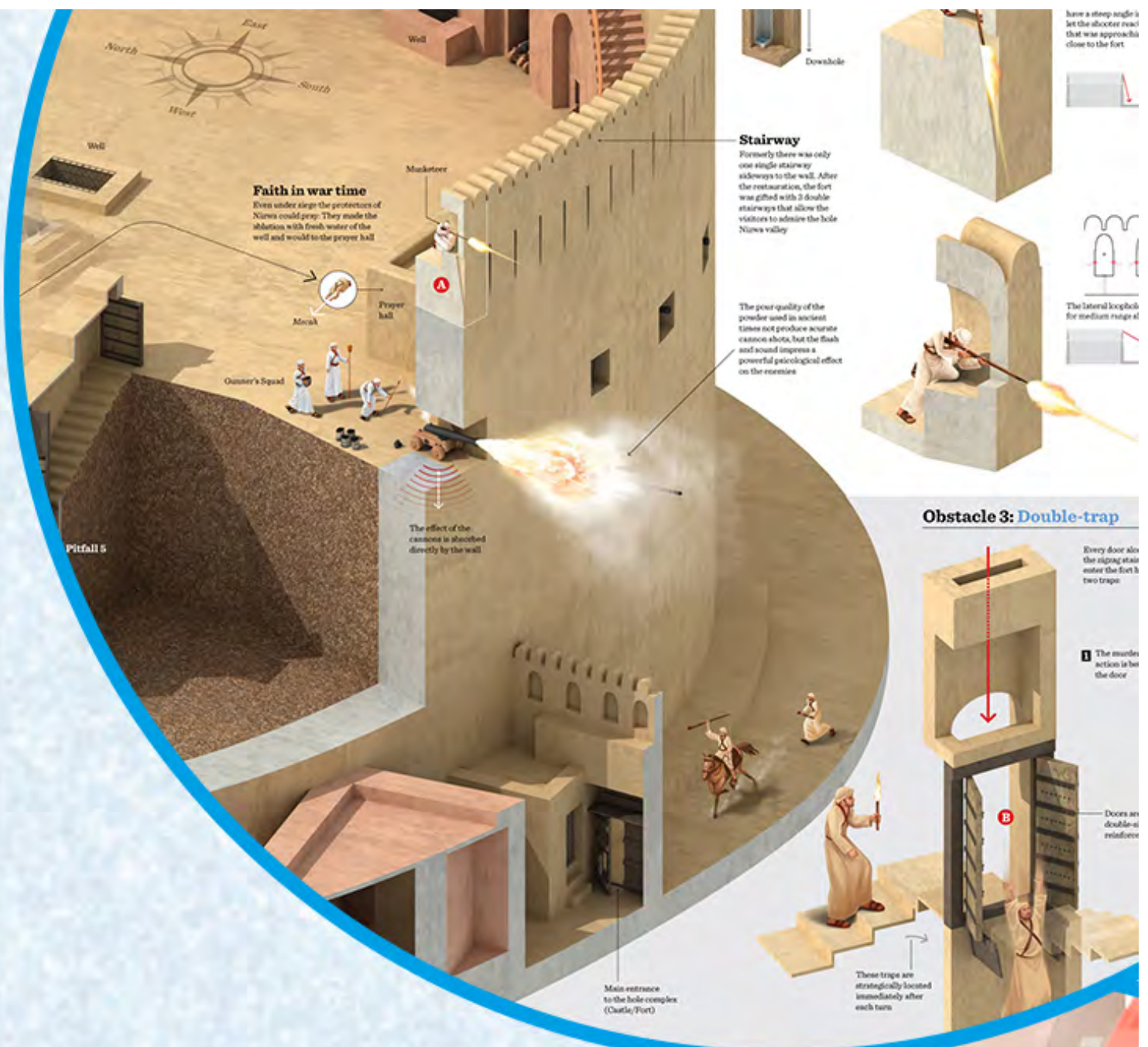
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