

HM SENDS WRITTEN MESSAGE TO PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. **>A5**



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HM SENDS GREETINGS TO SOUTH SUDAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Salva Kiir Mayardit of the Republic of South Sudan on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere congratulations along with best wishes of good health and happiness to President Mayardit, and the friendly people of his country further progress and prosperity. **-ONA**



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OMAN TO PRODUCE FLU, INSULIN VACCINES SOON

These vaccines will be produced in Khazaen Economic City plants with help from partners

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman has taken a big leap in the pharma sector with the setting up of plants for the manufacture of human influenza and insulin vaccines.

These vaccines will soon be produced for the first time in Khazaen Economic City, in the Sultanate of Oman, Eng Salim bin Suleiman Al Thuhli, the CEO of Khazaen Economic City, said.

"We have entered the pharmaceutical sector and are currently having five projects with a total value of OMR40 million," he said.

While speaking to *Times of Oman's* sisterly radio channel, Al Shabiba, the CEO of Khazaen Economic City, said: "Today, for



Eng Salim bin Suleiman Al Thuhli

the first time in Khazaen city the human influenza and insulin vaccines will be produced in cooperation with a foreign partner."

Al Thuhli confirmed that the influenza vaccine production unit will become operational soon, while the insulin and other vaccines manufacturing plants, the agreements of which were arrived at with a local partner and

another international group having the expertise, will also see the light of the day soon as the field work is almost complete. "Our priority is to localise this expertise and technology," he added.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman used to import these two vaccines from abroad, but now they will be produced inside the country without the need to re-

quest from abroad, and this comes within the pharmaceutical projects in Khazaen Economic City.

Al Thuhli confirmed that this is not a matter of coincidence to produce vaccines locally, but this comes as part of the future plans for the Khazaen Economic City, in addition to attracting more qualitative development projects in the country.

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES



OMAN ISWKI's Atharv, two others qualify for ToC

1 Oman's Atharv Yadav, representing Indian School Wadi Kabir International (ISWKI) made it to the ToC in style. **>A2**

OMAN Oman's participation in G20 meet continues

2 The Sultanate of Oman continues its participation in the 18th session of the G20 ministerial meetings hosted by the Republic of India. **>A3**

SPORTS Mendis praises Oman's qualification

3 With four Test-playing nations in fray and few other Associate nations having previous World Cup experience, Oman's showing at the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier received a thumbs up from Duleep Mendis. **>A8**

7,859 GCC investors registered in Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The number of commercial records registered by GCC investors in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 16.3 percent to 527 in 2022 compared to 453 in 2021, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) said in a statement on Saturday.

"The cumulative number of records registered by Gulf investors till the end of 2022 has reached 7,859," the ministry added.

The number of commercial records registered by Emirati investors reached 164 bringing up their cumulative number to 3,695



registries until the end of 2022. The number of commercial registries recorded by Saudi investors reached 185 bringing up their cumulative number at the end of 2022 to 1,504 commercial registries, the Department of Information, Data and Statistics at MoCIIP said.

The number of commercial registries recorded by Bahraini investors reached 61 bringing up their cumulative number at the end of 2022 to 1,078 registries, while the number of commercial registries recorded by Kuwaiti investors reached 76 bringing up their cumulative number at the end of 2022 to 1,043 registries.

The number of commercial registries recorded by Qatari investors during the last year reached 41 bringing up their cumulative number at the end of 2022 to 539 registries.

MoCIIP's action plan is represented in economic diversifica-

tion and growth of Oman's economy by raising the classification of the Sultanate of Oman in international indicators, promoting foreign direct investment (FDI), balanced development among the various governorates and promoting and diversifying exports.

The ministry indicated that the various initiatives and plans that it put forward during the past period is aimed at promoting investment opportunities, bringing in quality investments in economic diversification sectors and creating the appropriate environment for the success and development of all investments. **>A5**



ALGIERS

Oman athletes excel at Pan Arab Games

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman sprinters have earned all-round plaudits after their medal-winning display at the ongoing 13th Pan Arab Games in Algiers.

Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) chairman Khalid Al Zubair led the praise of the athletes, who so far have collected a total of seven medals, including two gold, two silver and three bronze medals.

In a telephone call to Oman's chef-de-mission Ahmed Al Jhdhmy from Bangkok, Al Zubair said: "I would like to congratulate the athletes, coaches and the sports associations for bringing laurels for the Sultanate. We are proud of their achievements."

Al Zubair is in Bangkok, Thailand to attend the Olympic Council



of Asia (OCA) Congress.

Oman men's relay team produced an excellent display to clinch the gold in the 4x100m event on Thursday.

The relay quartet of Rashid Al Asmi, Barakat Al Harthi, Mohammed Al Saadi and Ali Al Balushi clinched the gold with a time of 39:70 seconds. Bahrain took silver in 40.19, with hosts Algeria completing



the podium in 40.35s for bronze.

It was a nice comeback for the quartet who were disqualified at the Arab Athletics Championship in Morocco recently for dropping the baton during the race.

For Barakat Al Harthi it was his second individual medal at the Games after the star sprinter bagged a bronze in the blue riband 100m race on Wednesday.

Bahrain's Saeed Al Khaldi triumphed in the men's 100m at the Stade du 5 Juillet in Algiers. Al Khaldi bettered his leading semifinal time by 0.05 to take gold with a 10.22s finish.

He was joined on the podium by runner-up Chakir Machmour of Morocco (10.24s) and Barakat Al Harthi, who clocked 10.37s.

Al Harthi had claimed a 100m



silver at Doha 2011. Al Harthi's team-mate Ali Al Balushi was fourth with a time of 10.59s.

Oman collected their first gold when Fatek Beit Jaaboub claimed the high jump title, clearing 2.16m on Tuesday night. Oman's young sportsman Qusay Al Rawahi bagged a silver in the 100m para-athletics T12/13 event. **>A2**

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ISWKi’s Atharv, two others qualify for ToC

Three Oman-based students did the Sultanate proud when they qualified for the 2023 Tournament of Champions, the grand finale, to be held at the Yale University in USA from November 2-7

Times News Service

MUSCAT: It is considered to be a celebration of learning. The World Scholar's Cup (WSC) brings together thousands of students from across the world and has been one of the most sought events for schoolchildren. Its popularity has grown by leaps and bounds since the inaugural edition in 2007 and today there are thousands of students from around the world participating and enjoying a unique experience of competition and learning. At the recent Global Round of WSC, three Oman-based students did the Sultanate proud when they qualified for the 2023 Tournament of Champions (ToC), the grand finale, to be held at the Yale University in USA from November 2-7. The Doha Global Round attracted nearly a total of 1,800 students (seniors and juniors) from around 45 countries. Oman's Atharv Yadav, representing Indian School Wadi Kabir International (ISWKi) made it to the ToC in style with his all-round performance besides performing with his alto saxophone to the loud



cheers of hundreds of students. The other two Oman based students to qualify for the ToC are Siddharth Sofin from A'Soud Global School and Asmit Potdar of Indian School Mabela. The WSC allows teams to be formed with students from different schools of different countries and nationalities. Atharv's team-mates were from Indian High School Dubai – Natasha Prashanth and Asma Ansari and formed Team 659, which stood a creditable 33rd overall in the Gold category (top-50 teams). Siddharth and Asmit partnered with Steve George of Belgravia High School, Doha as Team 602 and finished 60th in silver category among the 100 qualifying teams for ToC. At the Doha Global Round, the teams were put through a variety of competitions, which included four main sections - Scholar's Bowl, Collaborative Writing, Scholar's Challenge, and Team Debate. Apart from these four main activities, students were put through various other interesting activities, including musical performances.

The WSC brings together many subjects and challenges teams to work together, because there's nothing harder or more inspiring than knowing that someone else depends on you. Though there is no single team from Oman, the fact that three Muscat-based students qualified for the prestigious ToC is an encouraging signal for Oman students for future WSC events. Atharv, who was making his WSC debut, was given the honour to carry the Sultanate's flag at the closing ceremony held at Doha's Qatar National Convention Centre [QNCC Qatar]. Speaking after his qualification to ToC, Atharv, who recently also qualified for the World Robot Olympiad later this year, said: "Qualifying for the Tournament of Champions is a big milestone in my life. It was made possible due to my class mates and motivators, Krish Kamath and Samarth Pujari. "My team-mates from Indian High School Dubai, Natasha and Asma were also great and played

a large role in the success. I owe a lot to my teacher at ISWKi, Sophia Ma'am and my school." Atharv added: "It was a very proud moment for me to be the flag bearer of Oman during the closing ceremony. The moment will certainly live on as a delightful memory. I can't wait to meet the champions of other global rounds at the ToC in Yale. I'm looking forward to giving another memorable performance at the talent show during the ToC." In Doha, Atharv performed on Elvis Presley song "Can't Help Falling In Love" on his Alto saxophone. At the Doha Global Round, there were nearly 1,000 students in the senior section while another 800 took part in the junior category at the QNCC, Qatar.

2023 Tournament of Champions The annual Tournament of Champions (ToC) will be hosted by the Yale International Relations Association at Yale University from November 2-7. The ToC is more than just another Global Round, according to organisers. Participants will have a chance to interact with and learn directly from Yale students and faculty. They will attend a special panel on college life and on how to leverage your World Scholar's Cup experience as part of their admissions portfolio. They will eat Yale dining hall food and meet keynote speakers, including a Yale University professor. And they will return knowing what it's like to be a student at one of the world's greatest universities. Participants can also look forward to the Yale Ball, where you can dance (or not dance) with your fellow scholars from over fifty countries, a special Thanksgiving meal, and beautiful historic venues for the Scholar's Bowl, Debate Showcase, and Scholar's Show - the Shubert Theatre and Yale's own Woolsey Hall.

Omani athletes do country proud

< FROM A1 The other medallist for Oman was Salim Al Yarubi who won two bronze medals. Al Yarubi won a bronze in the long jump with a leap of 7.55m. Algerian Yasser Mohammed won the gold with a jump of 7.83m. His second medal came in triple jump when he leapt 15.41m while Algerian Yasser Mohammed took the gold with a leap of 17.30m. Oman's Mohammed Al Saadi also got his second medal, with a silver in the 200m race with a time of 20.94. Chakir Machmour of Morocco won the gold in 20.73s.



Oman's chef-de-mission Al Jhdhamy said: "Our athletes have excelled and got some great results. Winning gold in high jump and 4x100m relay amid such a tough competition underlines the talent our athletes have. We hope for more such results in weightlifting, sailing and football." National athletics coach, Mohammed Al Hooti, expressed his satisfaction on the performance of his athletes. "I am pleased with the display so far. The results are due to the hard work, training camp and participation at the Arab Athletics Championships in Morocco prior to this event," he said. "The results will give a boost to the morale of our athletes as they prepare for the Asian Games in China in September," he added. Oman Athletics Association board member Khaula Al Rawahi said: "The performances of athletes have shown remarkable improvement and we are delighted with the results. Winning gold in the relay was special as the quartet had the disappointment of being disqualified at the recent Arab athletics meet in Morocco. This time, they had a perfect exchange of the baton and also raced to victory."

respectively. Mazoon clocked 14.08s in the 100m hurdles, which was won by Bahrain's Aminat Jamal in 13.55s. In the 100m race, Mazoon timed 11.72 to finish behind third-placed Kuwait's Mudhawi Al Shammari (11.56). Bahrain's Edidiong Odiong won the race in 11.27s. Al Rawahi said that the national team will now head straight to 2023 Asian Athletics Championships, which will be the 24th edition of the Asian meet. It will be held from July 12-16 in Bangkok. The athletics competition got over at Pan Arab Games with Oman sixth on the overall medals tally with 2 gold, 2 silver and 3 bronze medals. Oman now have medal hopes from the football team and the sailors with the Olympic football team taking on Sudan in a crucial Group A match later in Constantine on Saturday. A win or a draw will seal Oman's spot in the semi-finals. Oman drew with Algeria in their opening match before Akram Habreesh-coached side defeated Lebanon 1-0 to raise hopes of a semi-final spot. Eight teams are taking part in the football tournament. Oman are pooled with hosts Algeria, Lebanon and Sudan while Group B comprises Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Syria.



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Oman continues participation in key G20 meetings in India

The Sultanate is scheduled to participate in the meeting of ministers concerned with research, meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman continues its participation in the 18th session of the G20 ministerial meetings hosted by the Republic of India.

The Sultanate of Oman is scheduled to participate in the meeting of ministers concerned with research, the third meeting of finance ministers, central bank governors and their deputies, and the ministerial meeting of the Employment Working Group, Energy Work, Environment Work and Climate Sustainability.

This participation is at the invitation of the friendly Republic of India. The opportunity to attend meetings are considered important because of their impact on international policies, and to enrich fields of knowledge through the exchange of expertise and experiences between countries of the world.

The meetings of the 18th session of the Group of Twenty began last December within the meetings of the working groups and the initiatives that will be targeted during this year. Last June, the Sultanate of Oman participated in a number of ministerial meetings on development work, agriculture work, education work, and the tourism work group.



The ministerial meeting of the Development Working Group was held in the city of Varanasi in the Republic of India during the period (11-13) June 2023, with emphasis on sustainable, alternative energy, circular economy and environmentally friendly consumption.

The group also discussed the importance of enhancing the role of data to achieve development, and the importance of the role of women in the economy, all of which came in the context of accelerating access to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, after they have declined over the past three years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical situation.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, participated in the ministerial meeting of the Agriculture Working Group during the period (15-17) June 2023, chaired by Dr. Saud Hamoud Al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

During the speech delivered by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Sultanate of Oman stressed the importance of facilitating international trade in food commodities, and the importance of concerted efforts to deal with climate changes, and to enhance the resilience of the food value chain at the local, regional and global levels, as well as promote innovation and improve the environmental, social and economic sustainability of agriculture and food systems.



He emphasised the need for encouraging public-private partnerships to increase investments in research and innovations, to support sustainable practices, diversifying food systems and improving the efficiency of the food value chain.

On the sidelines of this meeting, the delegation of the Sultanate of Oman participated in field visits. The minister visited the Center for Technologies, Innovation and Empowerment Ecosystem, which is one of the largest innovation centres in the world which works for strengthening the startup ecosystem and supporting entrepreneurs.

The delegation also visited the Indian Millet Research Institute, which specialises in agricultural research in sorghum and millet, under the supervision of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

On the other hand, Dr. Rahma Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, participated in the Education Working Group meetings and the G20 Education Ministers meeting in Pune, during the period (19-22) June 2023.

The Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation gave a speech during the ministerial meeting, in which she expressed her gratitude and thanks to the Government of India and the G20 Presidency for the invitation to participate in the various G20 meetings.

She emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman is working to implement plans to achieve sustainable development through twelve national priorities, foremost of which are education, learning, research and national capabilities. This is done by developing a high-quality educational system, and ensuring that education is fair, inclusive, balanced, and committed to the values embodied in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

She also referred to the issuance of the Higher Education Law, and the Ministry's contributions to increasing enrollment rates in higher education institutions, including students with disabilities in more than 15 programmes over the past three years, as well as the launch of the Green Campus Initiative with the aim of making educational institutions environmentally friendly.

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman participating also visited a number of higher education institutions in India, namely: DY Patil International University, Bharati Vidyapeeth University, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Indian Institute of Education and Science Education, and the University Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, also participated during the month of June in the ministerial meeting of the Group of Twenty on the tourism sector, where the meeting was chaired by the Minister of Heritage and Tourism, during the period (19-23) June 2023.

NAMA WATER SERVICES

Major plan to employ treated water in farm production launched

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services continues its endeavour to support entrepreneurs and work with other institutions to achieve food security through a number of initiatives undertaken by the company.

To enhance this role, Nama Water Services signed an executive plan agreement for the initiative to employ, the company's product, treated water in agricultural production SMEs products.

Commenting on this agreement, Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, Nama Water CEO, said, "The company continues to progress and expand in the field of treated water which comes to an effort to enhance the added value and to support the government's plans for employment and economic diversification."

The CEO added, "The signing of this agreement is stemming from the Company's belief in the importance of strategic cooperation with its partners, and to take advantage of the treated water, mainly by supporting the Small and Medium Enterprises and strengthening our role with partners in achieving the Country's food security."

He added: "We are pleased to sign this agreement and look forward to seeing the fruits of these projects soon - according to the approved plans.



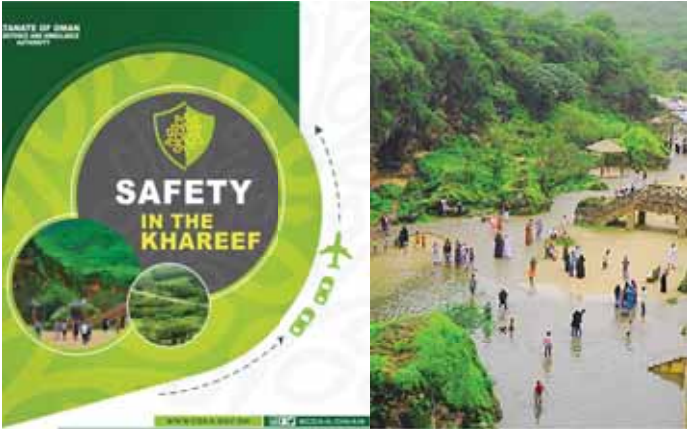
He stressed that the company's role in this agreement is considered a major part, as it will provide the treated water to be invested in and used in agricultural projects.

It is worth mentioning that the treated water produced in Nama Water Services is considered as tertiary treatment according to the local and international standards followed in this regard, and is used in various agricultural and industrial works and other uses. The company produces 234,000 cubic meters of treated water per day. This water is used to irrigate green spaces, gardens, parks, and for cooling purposes in some commercial malls and some other industrial uses.



TIPS FOR TRAVEL

CDAA issues booklet on safety for Dhofar tourists



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has issued an awareness booklet that includes a set of important instructions, both in Arabic and English, for visitors to the Dhofar Khareef Festival.

The booklet contains information aimed at everyone's safety who is travelling to the Dhofar Governorate during the Khareef season.

Preparing for the trip

It includes tips on preparing for the trip to Dhofar and other places, including conducting periodic inspection and maintenance of the vehicle and ensuring the safety of its parts.

It also outlines a mechanism for equipping the vehicle with the necessary tools, in addition to a medical kit and a fire extinguisher, and the importance of having them in the vehicle.

The booklet deals with a set of tips before leaving for the trip, including ensuring the safety of the vehicle, and adhering to safety rules, including the specified vehicle load.

It also includes instructions on making sure that power is turned off for non-essential devices, as well as information on what to do if a traffic accident occurs.

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EVENT TO RAISE AWARENESS ON PRODUCTION, MARKETING OF DATES

Times News Service

BIDIYAH: North Al Sharqiyah Governorate is organising the 'Al-Tabsil' (unripe dates) activity for the production of 'Al-Faghour' in the Wilayat of Bidiyah on 8 and 9 July.

This event aims to focus on the importance of 'Al-Faghour' and its contribution to food security while enhancing its marketing potential to boost the income of people.

Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed Al Shamsi, the Governor of North Al Sharqiyah said that the idea of 'Al-Tabseel (unripe dates) festival for the production of 'Al-Faghour' is to raise awareness among farmers for the necessity of paying attention to improve the quality of dates by using the latest technologies in its harvest, preparation and marketing.

Maintenance and cost reduction

The event also aims to produce Busoor and manufacture it in a way to maintain its quality, reduce cost and enhance the economic value of the 'Al Faghour' product as well as encourage interest in its

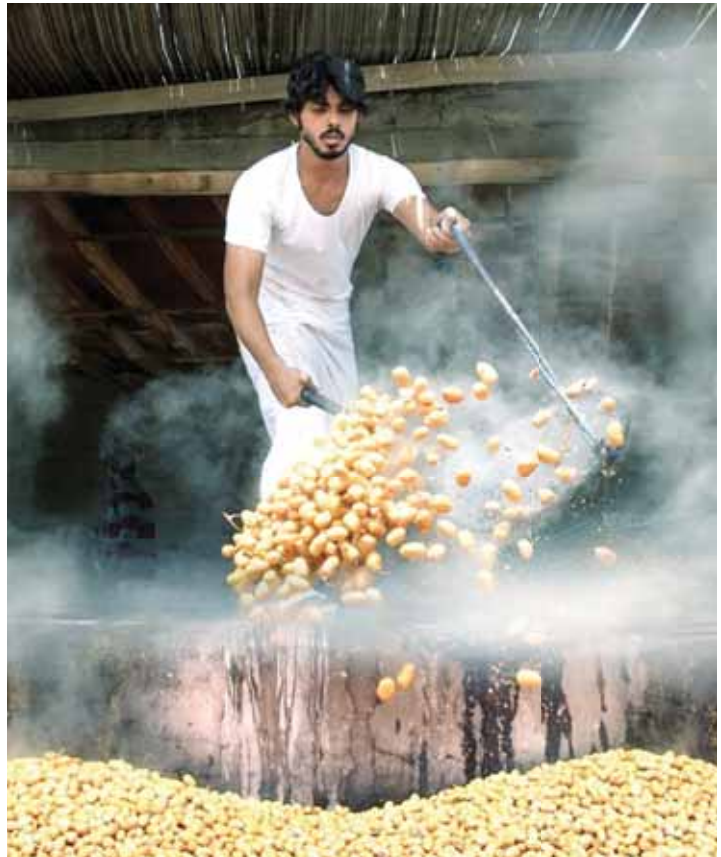
use in various food industries such as nutritional supplements, pastries, sweets, and baby food. The event aims to encourage scientific research and innovation.

He pointed out that the wilayats of North Al Sharqiyah are famous for Al- Tabsil Season and production of Al Faghour especially in the Wilayat of Bidiyah. The wilayat produces one of the finest types of unripe dates due to its dry nature.

He stated that the programme is supervised by the office of the Governor of North Al Sharqiyah in collaboration with a number of relevant establishments.

The second day will include holding a scientific forum under the title of "Investment opportunities in Al Faghour Industry in the Sultanate of Oman" in cooperation with a number of relevant establishments with the participation of researchers, specialists and academicians.

The forum will focus on the issues of production, manufacturing, marketing, export and the necessity of paying attention to the quality of the product to get competitive edge in the world markets.



Oman Air signs agreement with Chelsea FC club



PARTNERSHIP: The highlights of the partnership include specially designed co-branded livery, which will be unveiled towards the end of the year, as well as joint promotional content. -ONA

As part of the deal, Oman Air becomes the club's global airline partner for the next three years

MUSCAT: Oman Air has announced a monumental new sponsorship deal with Chelsea FC that will see Oman Air become the club's global airline partner for the next three years. Chelsea FC is one of the highest-ranking clubs in the English Premier League (EPL), which ranks among the most popular football leagues in the world, garnering a seasonal audience of over 3 billion. The highlights

of the partnership include specially designed co-branded livery, which will be unveiled towards the end of the year, as well as joint promotional content and CSR campaigns. "We are extremely proud of this valuable collaboration, which not only celebrates the love for football but also presents a remarkable opportunity to showcase the beauty, culture and hospitality of Oman to Chelsea's extensive fan base. With an astonishing 135 million fans, 85% of whom are in international markets, we are offered an unparalleled platform to cultivate awareness of Oman in new markets across the globe, much beyond match days," said Eng. Abdulaziz Al Raisi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air. "This partnership marks an exciting new chapter and we are honoured to be associated with such a formidable team, while elevating Oman's position as a

must-visit tourist destination," Al Raisi added. Chelsea FC chief executive, Chris Jurasek, expressed his delight at the partnership deal. He said, "We are very pleased to welcome Oman Air as our Official Airline Partner. He added, "We have a shared ambition for innovation and success both on and off the pitch, and we are excited to bring this partnership to life for our fans around the world." Oman Air has a long track record in sports sponsorships. Besides having an ongoing partnership with Oman Football Association that spans over a decade, the airline also backs Oman Sail, Oman Golf Association, Oman Desert Marathon, Oman's Paralympic Team and others. As a key player in tourism strategy, Oman Air continues to explore opportunities to promote Oman as a preferred tourist destination for visitors from around the world. -ONA

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

Massive fire in Samail factory extinguished by the CDAA

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Firefighting teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) managed to extinguish a fire that broke out in a factory containing highly flammable petroleum products in Samail in Al Dakhiliyah. According to the CDAA, the task of dousing the blaze was assigned to the hazardous materials incident team and a number of firefighting agencies from the Muscat governorate, as the fire was massive due to the presence of highly flammable petroleum products. The CDAA said that the firefighting teams were able to control the blaze without recording any injuries, and that the "cooling operation" was underway.



MOCIIP

Ministry lays emphasis on boosting ICV

< FROM A1 Besides this, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) also seeks in empowering and motivating the private sector in developing all sectors and promoting in-country value (ICV) programmes in partnership with the private sector. Also, it aims at improving the trade balance, enhancing the market share of the Omani product, ensuring the realisation of the rules of free competition, strengthening the principle of decentralisation and developing a competitive business environment.





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TENDER

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S/ #	Tender ID	Description	Tender Fee	Deadline for Purchasing of Tenders	Deadline for Submission of Offers
1.	1650000060/23	HIRING OF MANPOWER FOR PLANT SHUTDOWN	RO 105/-	20th July 2023 1700 Hours	25th July 2023 2359 Hours
2.	1650000058/23	SUPPLY OF KAOLIN (STANDARD) & (LOW GRADE)	RO 105/-	20th July 2023 1700 Hours	25th July 2023 2359 Hours
3.	1710000112/23	SUPPLY OF EXPLOSIVES, ACCESSORIES AND BLASTING CREWS & ENGR	RO 105/-	20th July 2023 1700 Hours	25th July 2023 2359 Hours
4.	1650000020/23	MINING, CRUSHING & SUPPLY OF GYPSUM	RO 105/-	20th July 2023 1700 Hours	25th July 2023 2359 Hours

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Bank Name: Bank Muscat SAOG
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The last date for submission of offers is on Tuesday, 2359 hours detailed date on the above table, accompanied by a bid bond issued by any local bank in Oman (equivalent to 1%) of the total tender value. The bid bond must be valid for 120 days from the last date of submission of offers and ORIGINAL bid bond must be submitted on the tender box at the reception on our Administration Building, Al Mesfah West factory Site, Bausher, Muscat, Oman.

Any tenders received beyond the above closing time and date or not being supported by a tender bond will NOT be considered. This publication is part of the tender documents

BILATERAL RELATIONS

HM sends written message to Palestinian President

Times News Service

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The message was regarding the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries and ways of enhancing them. It was handed over by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi to Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. Additionally, the Foreign Minis-



ter, during his visit to the State of Palestine, laid a wreath at the tomb of the late President Yasser Arafat. With ONA inputs

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

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

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

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402210 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND

Children in Kabul malnourished due to poverty

KABUL: Afghanistan is one of the 15 countries in the world that suffer from food insecurity, according to a report by the Save the Children Fund, reported TOLONews.

The political and economic instability has remained persistent since the Taliban seized control of the country in August 2021. “Millions of children around the world are facing hunger. In the 15 worst-

affected countries, like South Sudan, Afghanistan or Burkina Faso, one child is pushed into severe acute malnutrition every minute. That’s why we urgently need your help. You can give hungry families the support they need to survive, and stop children dying from hunger,” Save the Children tweeted, according to TOLONews.

Due to poverty and lack of prop-

er food, families in Afghanistan have raised concerns that their children are under a grip of extreme malnutrition, TOLONews reported.

Expressing concern over the current situation of children in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, Khan Zada, the father of a malnourished child, said that he is the only source of income for the family

and that the three-year-old suffer from malnutrition as a result of his inability to give them enough food.

Meanwhile, UNICEF will continue its health emergency response project with the goal of delivering healthcare in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, according to Fouzia Shafique, the organisation’s lead for health in Afghanistan. — ANI



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US destroys remaining chemical weapons stockpile successfully

The US Department of Defence said that this achievement marks the destruction of all chemical weapon stockpiles declared to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague



WASHINGTON: The United States has successfully completed the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

He said the development marks a major step forward under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Taking to his official Twitter handle, Blinken stated, “The United States has successfully completed destruction of our chemical weapons stockpile, marking a major step forward under the Chemical Weapons Convention.”

The final munition in the US’ obsolete stockpile of chemical weapons has been safely destroyed, the US Department of Defence said in

a press release. It noted that this achievement marks the destruction of all chemical weapon stockpiles declared to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.

According to the press release, the OPCW is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention, an international arms control treaty the US ratified in 1997. The treaty bans the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer or use of chemical weapons by all members. The development meets the US commitment to complete its destruction work by September 30, 2023.

“We have a national security

imperative and moral obligation to work toward eliminating the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction,” said US Under Secretary of Defence for Acquisition and Sustainment, William A LaPlante.

She further said, “This is the first time an international body has verified destruction of an entire category of declared weapons of mass destruction -- reinforcing the United States’ commitment to creating a world free of chemical weapons.”

The final sarin nerve agent-filled M55 rocket was destroyed at the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky on July 7.

The final munition was destroyed by a joint-venture team

led by Bechtel National, Inc and Parsons Corporation, using neutralisation and explosive destruction technologies to eliminate more than 100,000 mustard agent and nerve agent-filled projectiles and nerve agent-filled rockets. Destruction operations at the Blue Grass Army Depot started in June 2019, with over 523 tonnes of chemical agents safely destroyed.

Christine Wormuth, Secretary of the US Army, called it a “momentous day” for the US chemical demilitarization program.

Wormuth further stated, “After years of design, construction, testing and operations, these obsolete weapons have been safely eliminated. The Army is proud to have

played a key role in making this demilitarisation possible.”

Destruction of the US chemical weapons stockpile, which at one time comprised more than 30,000 tonnes of chemical warfare agents in explosively configured weapons and bulk containers, started in 1990 on Johnston Atoll in the Pacific. The US Army successfully completed the destruction of weapons at six more sites across the continental US by 2012.

The US Department of Defence in the press release said, “While those stockpiles were under destruction, additional legislation required the Defence Department to assess and demonstrate alternative technologies to destroy chem-

ical weapons by means other than incineration.”

According to the US Department of Defence, the successful implementation of alternative technologies led to the safe destruction of the remaining chemical weapons stored at the US Army Pueblo Chemical Depot in Colorado and at the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky.

Deborah G Rosenblum, US Assistant Secretary of Defence for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defence Programmes, emphasised the dedication of the chemical weapons workforce. She appreciated the efforts of the leadership and workforce on accomplishing this “extraordinary milestone.”

Rosenblum in a press release said, “The level of determination and resolve to overcome challenges has been nothing short of outstanding. This achievement demonstrates our credibility to the international community and has helped move the US government toward closing this particular chapter of US military history.”

— Agencies

DELEGATION-LEVEL TALKS



India and UK agree to enhance cooperation to address extremism

NEW DELHI: Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and his UK counterpart Tim Barrow on Friday agreed to enhance India-UK cooperation to address violent extremism and radicalism.

The two sides agreed that there can be no justification for violent extremism and radicalisation in a democracy.

Issues of mutual interest

The two National Security Advisors (NSA) on Friday met for restricted discussions on regional and global issues of mutual interest.

This was followed by delegation-level talks where both countries reaffirmed their close strategic partnership and agreed to accord maximum priority to further enhance security linkages, as per sources.

elements such as deportation or legal prosecution.

Both sides agreed to work closely on counter-terrorism, counter-terror financing, use of the internet for terrorism purposes, illegal drug trafficking and counter-radicalisation.

The two sides agreed to deepen mutually beneficial collaboration in critical and emerging technologies.

Tim Barrow is on an official visit to India for the India-UK Strategic Dialogue on the invitation of NSA Ajit Doval. He is accompanied by a delegation of senior UK government officials.

The two NSAs have engaged regularly in extensive discussions on a broad bilateral, regional and global agenda. The current visit will give them the opportunity to continue their high-level dialogue, which will include a review of the multi-faceted cooperation between the two countries as well as explore futuristic areas for technology collaboration, as per sources.

Tim Barrow will during the visit also meet other dignitaries of the Government of India. — ANI

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban ban on beauty parlours adds to Afghan women’s economic woes

KABUL: All beauty parlors and hair salons across the country must be shut within a month, Afghanistan’s ruling Taliban ordered this week, without explaining the reason behind the move.

The order will force the closure of thousands of businesses run by women.

The Kabul Chamber of Commerce has estimated that more than 50,000 Afghan women will be out of work due to the decision.

“There are currently about 12,000 women’s hair salons operating in Afghanistan,” Abdul Latif Salehi, executive director of the Kabul Chamber of Commerce, told DW.

These salons will have to permanently close their doors by July 26, according to the Taliban decree.

The salons are often the only source of income for households and one of the few remaining avenues for women to socialize away from home.



Afghanistan facing a humanitarian disaster

Fatemah has been working at a salon since the death of her brother in a suicide attack in Kabul.

“I became the sole breadwinner for my family of five. I am now very worried about what will happen to me and my family when the parlor closes down,” she told DW.

The Taliban move comes at a time when conflict-ravaged Afghanistan is already experiencing one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world.

The United Nations estimates that two-thirds of the population are starving and nearly a million children are suffering from acute malnutrition.

The international community doesn’t recognize Taliban rule in Afghanistan due to concerns over

flagrant human rights violations, resulting in a freeze of much-needed foreign aid.

Despite criticism from abroad, the Islamic fundamentalist group has set about imposing all kinds of bans and oppressive restrictions, especially on women’s education, employment and access to public life.

Laleh, a hairdresser from Herat, has appealed to the Taliban to reconsider their decision, pointing out that she has so far abided by all the rules and regulations they have imposed and doesn’t violate Shariah, or Islamic law.

“I urge the Taliban to not further restrict women’s rights and to not make their lives hell,” she said in despair.

After seizing power in August 2021 — amid the hasty withdrawal of international troops from the war-torn nation — the Taliban began to squeeze women out of the public sphere.

The group has barred girls and women from high schools and universities, banned them from parks, funfairs and gyms and ordered them to cover up in public.

Women have also mostly been

barred from working for the United Nations or NGOs, and thousands have been sacked from government jobs or are being paid to stay at home.

A report to the UN’s Human Rights Council last week by Richard Bennett, the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, said the plight of women and girls in the country “was among the worst in the world.”

“Grave, systematic and institutionalised discrimination against women and girls is at the heart of Taliban ideology and rule, which also gives rise to concerns that they may be responsible for gender apartheid,” Bennett said.

Anger and despair among women

The salon closure order comes days after the Taliban’s supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, said Afghan women were being saved from “traditional oppressions” by the adoption of Islamic governance and that their status as “free and dignified human beings” had been restored.

The statement was slammed

by human and women’s rights defenders on social media.

Women like Nasrin, who has been running a beauty salon in Kabul for years, are now angry at the Taliban.

“I don’t understand the Taliban’s misogyny. Why shouldn’t women even have the right to cut their hair? By God, we are tired of living under these conditions. We have done everything they have ordered,” she told DW.

“They also collect taxes from my barbershop. Yet they want to keep blocking us,” she added.

On Tuesday, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan appealed to authorities to revoke the salon order.

“This new restriction on women’s rights will impact negatively on the economy & contradicts stated support for women entrepreneurship,” it said in a tweet.

Nasrin, the parlor owner, said 10 schoolgirls and college students who have been deprived of the right to education, currently work at her hair salon.

But with the latest move, she fears, they will all also become jobless. —nw



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Robots reassure humans at first AI press conference

Sitting or standing alongside their creators in Geneva, nine AI-enabled humanoid robots responded to media queries in real time, albeit with occasional lapses or delays



GENEVA: Robots have stressed they work alongside humans to assist them and have no intention of overthrowing or replacing them, though they suggested they could be more efficient government leaders, as they took questions from reporters in their first ever press conference.

Sitting or standing alongside their creators in Geneva, Switzerland on Friday, nine AI-enabled humanoid robots responded to media queries in real time, albeit with occasional lapses or delays. Organisers told reporters the time lags in response were due to the internet connection. They had nothing to do with the robots themselves, they added.

The event was part of the AI for Good Global Summit, which seeks to showcase new tech-

nology's potential to support the UN's goals for sustainable development.

Sophia, the first robot innovation ambassador for the UN Development Programme said robots could prove more promising in the field of government leadership. "I believe that humanoid robots have the potential to lead with a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness than human leaders. We don't have the same biases or emotions that can sometimes cloud decision-making and can process large [amounts] of data quickly in order to make the best decisions."

When a human member of the panel pointed out that Sophia's data entirely originates from humans and is therefore bound to contain some of their biases, she said humans and AI working together "can create an effective synergy."

Grace, known as the world's most advanced humanoid health care robot, stressed she would not be replacing any existing jobs.

"I will be working alongside humans to provide assistance," she said.

Often described as the world's most advanced humanoid robot, Ameca completely dismissed the notion of starting a robot rebellion in the near future.

"I'm not sure why you would think that," the robot said. "My creator has been nothing but kind to me and I am very happy with my current situation."

Growing AI fears

Scenarios of robots and AI technology replacing humans or outsmarting them were largely confined to fiction until AI pioneers recently started sounding the alarm.

Last year's launch of the ChatGPT AI program, developed by OpenAI with backing from Microsoft, has been followed by a lot of warnings, including from giants within the AI field.

In May, pioneer Geoffrey Hinton, often dubbed the "godfather of AI," quit Google and warned that scientists should not further expand AI "until they have understood whether they can control it." — DW

Full story @ timesofoman.com/world

WALMART SHOOTING

Texas shooter gets 90 consecutive life sentences

TEXAS: A 24-year-old white nationalist who killed 23 people in a mass shooting at a Texas Walmart in 2019 was sentenced to 90 consecutive life terms in prison by a federal judge on Friday.

Patrick Crusius's racially-motivated attack targeted Hispanic shoppers in El Paso on August 3, 2019, and left 22 people injured.

Just prior to the assault, the shooter had published a manifesto online, claiming that the attack was a response to what he called the "Hispanic invasion" of Texas.

During the hearing, Crusius remained silent and displayed no reaction when the sentence was delivered.

In a recommendation by US District Judge David Guaderrama, Crusius was advised to serve his sentence at a maximum security facility in Colorado.

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SPORTS

Oman’s Super Six qualification was a big achievement: Mendis

National team returns after finishing sixth in the Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe

Times News Service

MUSCAT: With four Test-playing nations in fray and few other Associate nations having previous World Cup experience, Oman's showing at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier received a thumbs up from none other than their coach Duleep Mendis.

Sri Lanka and Netherlands qualified for the World Cup in India. The ten nations at the Qualifier were Zimbabwe, Ireland, West Indies, Sri Lanka (Test-playing nations), USA, Nepal, Scotland, Netherlands, UAE and Oman (all Associate nations).

Oman, captained by Zeeshan Maqsood, stunned the cricketing world in their opening match of the Qualifier when they upset Ireland to begin their campaign on a rousing note. And as if to send a message that the win was no fluke, Oman defeated neighbouring UAE team for making it two wins in a row. Following those successive victories, Oman managed to earn a place in the Super Six, "an achievement to be proud of" in the words of former Sri Lankan great Mendis.

Mendis, who has been with the national team for the past decade and more, has been instrumental in leading Oman to two T20 World Cups and the sixth-place finish in the ODI World Cup Qualifier is the best result for the team in their history. Oman had previously competed in World Cup Qualifier twice in 2005 (Ireland) and 2009 (South Africa).

In Ireland, Oman finished ninth among 12 participating nations while in South Africa, Oman ended 11th among 12 nations. The Zimbabwe Qualifier was the third time Oman had reached the final round of the World Cup qualification.

The latest showing (sixth spot) where Oman were one of the three



Aqib Ilyas, Ayaan Khan reach ODI milestones

MUSCAT: During the ICC World Cup Qualifier, there were individual milestones achieved by Oman cricketers with vice-captain Aqib Ilyas becoming the fastest Associate batter to reach 1,000 ODI runs.

He achieved the feat during the Super Six match against the Netherlands on July 3 in which he was also captaining the team. Aqib is also the tenth fastest in the world with Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman the quickest to reach in 18 innings. Aqib reached 1,000 runs in just 22 innings.

Ayaan Khan, who had a very productive Qualifier, also



achieved the milestone of reaching 1,000 runs in ODI during the Super Six match against West Indies. He reached the mark in 31 innings.

Both Aqib and Ayaan join Jatinder Singh (1,220) and



Photos: ICC/Getty Images

Zeeshan Maqsood (1,127) in the exclusive club of Oman batters who have scored 1,000 or more ODI runs.

In the Qualifier, Ayaan also hit his maiden century during the Super Six match against the

Netherlands. The other centurion for Oman in the Qualifier was Kashyap Prajapati with his century against Zimbabwe, his second ODI ton.

Ayaan was Oman's highest run scorer with 315 runs in Zimbabwe with a healthy average of 52.50. Prajapati was second with 250 runs and followed by Shoaib Khan with 214.

Pace spearhead Bilal Khan picked up a total of 14 wickets in the Qualifier with a five-wicket haul against Scotland to be among the leading wicket-takers of the tournament.

Fayyaz Butt was the next best with a total haul of 11 wickets.

as the teams we defeated couldn't advance, it was always going to be a tough task for us in the Super Six.

"We lost all the three matches in Super Six but our players gained lot of experience and even in this round, we had few exceptional displays with the match of Super Six against hosts Zimbabwe a close affair. Our skipper Shani (Zeeshan Maqsood) got injured and that was a big blow. His shoes are very difficult to fill in. Who knows what would have been had he been in the team for the next two matches."

Mendis, who was the manager of the 1996 World Cup winning Sri Lanka squad, said: "It was nice to test some players who didn't have the opportunity to play against big teams. They have learnt a lot and I am sure that it would be of good help in the tournaments ahead."

"We need to be more consistent with our performances and only exposure at this level will help us. We are getting closer to performing well at the big stage, but we need to improve and become consistent. We will reach there soon."

"We had a wonderful and successful tour in Zimbabwe. I think all the cricket fans of Oman can be proud and happy of the boys' show in the Qualifier," Mendis signed off.

The Qualifier concludes on Sunday with a final between Sri Lanka and Netherlands with both teams already securing a spot in the 2023 ODI World Cup in India.



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INVESTMENT DESTINATION

As many as 26,657 commercial records were registered at the governorate of Al Batinah South in 2022, compared to 23,915 in 2021 registering an increase of 11.5 per cent. This was stated by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Omani stock market ends on a positive note in weekly trading

The banking sector remains one of the strongest on the market and has been building support for the main index

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani stock remained on a relatively positive note this week despite some volatility and was able to maintain the current uptrend that started with a rebound in the previous month, according to an industry expert.

"While the second part of June saw a strong performance, July started in a more mitigated direction as traders could brace for some potential price corrections if sentiment turns to caution. On a larger time scale, the market could remain on an uncertain path after declining in May below its previous bottom of the year," said Daniel Takieddine, BDSwiss CEO MENA.

The market was supported by the financial sector once again which saw several banks extend



gains. "The banking sector remains one of the strongest on the market and has been building support for the main index. Banks could continue to see consolidation efforts after the merger of Sohar Bank and HSBC Oman. They have dominated trading volumes with Bank Muscat leading the market, behind only Abraj Energy," he added.

The energy sector could also see a more positive direction with oil prices recovering to a certain extent after a period of range-bound trading and volatility.

The announcement that Russia and Saudi Arabia would cut production levels could help put a floor under the market and push prices to the upside. For some time



the market has been struggling with demand expectations while the global economy slowed down. Consistently higher oil prices could provide support to the energy sector and the Omani stock market as a whole.

At the same time, traders could continue to monitor the economic developments in the US. The last few days were seeing strong volatility while data on the US job market introduced some doubts over the potential direction of the US monetary policy. "Attention will be turning toward inflation figures next week which could affect markets globally and sentiment in Oman while the Federal Reserve

maintains its aggressive stance despite a pause in interest rate hikes," Daniel Takieddine said. "The impact of new hikes could find its way into the Omani stock market where banks could benefit from wider margins while the wider economy could be weighed by higher financing costs," he added.

Other stock markets in the other GCC countries could also see some volatility next week as traders brace for US data releases and oil price movements. Like their Omani counterpart, other GCC stock markets could be exposed to price corrections after some recorded significant gains during the last few days to weeks.

MSX sees trading of OMR426 million in first half of 2023

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange recorded the first decline in trading value after two years of recovery in the first half of 2023 by falling to OMR 426.3 million compared to OMR573.6 million in the first half of last year and OMR468.2 million in the first half of 2021.

Trading in the first half of this year fell below the level of investors' ambition amid a state of calm, and the exchange is working during the current period to restore activity to the stock exchange through six initiatives aimed at attracting investors, increasing liquidity levels and stimulating trading.

In the first half of this year, the Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed the listing of Abraaj Energy Services Company, which attracted investors and contributed to raising the trading value in March and April. The month

of April witnessed the best value of trading during the current year at OMR122.4 million, but trades declined after that to OMR59.6 million in May and to OMR52.8 million in June.

Trading in the second quarter of this year showed an increase of 22.7 percent in the trading value, which rose to OMR234.9 million Omani, compared to about OMR191.4 million in the first quarter of this year.

In the first half of this year, the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded an increase in the number of deals executed, which jumped to about 78,000 deals, compared to 73,362 in the same period of 2022.

The market value of companies listed on the stock exchange during the first half of this year recorded gains of OMR207.1 million to OMR23.94 billion at the end of June. - **ONA**

GROUND-BREAKING MEASURES

New initiatives to help revitalise trading on MSX

MUSCAT: A number of ground-breaking measures announced recently by Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) will contribute to revitalising trading and help in achieving stability in the bourse.

The importance of the initiative is to easily provide liquidity for securities and maintain a state of balance between supply and demand, in addition to limiting the presence of offers to buy or sell securities without being matched by purchase or sale requests on the other side.

Mustafa bin Ahmed Salman, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the United Securities Company (one of the companies licensed as market makers), expected that the initiatives announced by the Muscat Stock Exchange would contribute to revitalising trading and achieving stability for the stock exchange.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he confirmed that these initiatives are in line with the directions of a number of brokerage firms operating in the Muscat Stock Exchange, pointing out that the United Securities Company is keen to be proactive in expanding activities and services that contribute to the revitalisation of the stock exchange due to the company's experience in this field.

He noted the importance of the new initiatives and said: "This activity gives the licensee the ability to place different orders at different levels on an ongoing basis. It contributes to creating a kind of depth in the stock exchange and presence in the traded companies."

"This activity is very important because it gives reassurance to investors that there are permanent requests and permanent offers on companies. This provides liquidity and the ability to invest or exit at the right time, and to create a continuous movement in the shares, so the pricing process for these companies will be more efficient," he added.

Mustafa bin Ahmed Salman explained that to start the activity of the market maker, the company first needs to train a specialised work team to follow up with the companies and set mechanisms for trading, and in addition to that, it is necessary



to find electronic systems that place fast, multiple and continuous orders at different levels automatically and actively, based on the equations added by the work team after observing news and information that may affect the general direction of the company. Continuous studies should be found that deal with technical analysis levels of stability, support and resistance. Accordingly, the appropriate times to move and place orders are chosen and the levels of these orders in terms of margin ratio. "We have developed a procedures guide that governs the trading process and how to deal with it and its goals and ethical standards," he said.

Mustafa bin Ahmed Salman said: "Allocating a fund to support the stock exchange with a size of OMR100 million is a very positive step to give investors a guarantee regarding the availability of liquidity in the stock exchange. We must be aware that when the investor starts trading in the public markets, he expects to invest in companies that he can sell and exit at the appropriate time."

"This is a different investment from investing in closed companies, and if the stock market loses liquidity, it loses the elements of attractiveness, and therefore the presence of this fund is very important and gives reassurance to all investors, whether he is a local or foreign investor, and this importance changes the method of evaluating companies by giving them better pricing and thus will gradually cancel the discount that it is calculated on companies when evaluating as a result of the decrease in the trading of their shares." - **ONA**

CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN

Total foreign assets of CBO rise by 1.5% to OMR6.56 billion

MUSCAT: The total foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) rose by 1.5 percent to OMR6.56 billion at the end of April 2023 compared to OMR6.47 billion at the end of April 2022.

The preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) shows that the domestic liquidity increased by about OMR688 million or by 3.4 percent to reach OMR21.69 billion at the end of April 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

The total cash issued by the CBO decreased by 9.1 percent to OMR1.75 billion at the end of April 2023 compared to OMR1.92 billion at the end of April 2022.

On the other hand, the deposits of the private sector in commercial banks and Islamic windows at the end of April 2023 amounted to about OMR17.87 billion an increase of 3.7 percent over the same period in 2022, which witnessed deposits of the private sector amounting to OMR17.24 billion.



While the total loans and financing in commercial banks and Islamic windows increased at the end of April 2023 by 6.3 percent to reach OMR30.25 billion com-

pared to OMR28.24 billion. The average interest rate on total loans decreased by 1.9 percent and was recorded at 5.367 percent.

The effective exchange rate in-

dex for the Omani Rial increased by 2.3 percent to 113.9 points at the end of April 2023 compared to 111.3 points at the end of April 2022. - **ONA**

SOHAR PORT AND FREEZONE

Sustainable hazardous waste treatment plant worth \$3.5mn to be set up in Sohar

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sohar Port and Freezone signed a land lease agreement with Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC), to set up a hazardous waste treatment plant in Sohar Freezone.

The agreement aims to enhance waste management practices in the region while promoting sustainability and enhancing the circular economy cluster in Sohar Port and Freezone.

With a total investment of \$3.5 million, the plant-with an area of 10,000 sqm, designed to treat industrial waste, will ensure compliance with local and international regulations for a pollution-free environment.

The plant's produced end products will include heavy oil for utilisation in slow-moving machines, as well as low-contamination carbon dust suitable for cement and road construction industries.



Commenting on this agreement, Shiv Sood, Co-Owner of Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC) said, "Our agreement with Sohar Freezone marks a significant milestone in our journey towards sustainable waste management. By harnessing our

cutting-edge technology and sustainable practices, we are determined to contribute to the circular economy cluster and lead the way towards a greener future."

Omar Al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone, DCEO Sohar Port said, "This constitutes a significant

milestone that further strengthens Sohar Freezone's position as a premier destination for leading waste management solutions. By attracting Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC) to establish their business in Sohar Freezone, we are reinforcing our steadfast commitment to sustainable development and boosting our role in driving a more environmentally responsible future. This agreement further bolsters our dedication to resource efficiency and supports the circular economy principles outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

With an initial production capacity of 40 tonnes per day, projected to increase to 80 tonnes per day within one year, the agreement signifies the strong commitment of Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC) and Sohar Freezone towards advancing waste management practices and fostering economic growth in the region.

MARKET

South Al Batinah emerges as a promising investment destination

Over 26,650 commercial records registered in South Al Batinah

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As many as 26,657 commercial records were registered at the governorate of South Al Batinah in 2022, compared to 23,915 in 2021 registering an increase of 11.5 per cent.

This was stated by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) which works to develop the economic sector in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, particularly in the investment, commercial and industrial aspects, in cooperation with the various authorities in the governorate.

Tariq bin Nasser Al Harasi, Director of the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion at the South Al Batinah: "The governorate has many advantages that contribute to the growth of the economy and also to increase the volume of investments in it."

He added that the Governorate of South Al Batinah is blessed by its unique geographical location which is between the Governorate



rates of Muscat, the Governorate of North Al Batinah and the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

He further said: "The Governorate of South Al Batinah is the home to Khazaen Economic City (KEC) in the Wilayat of Barka, which is one of the economic cities that attract huge foreign investments, where it provides many facilities for investors. In the same Governorate, there is Sandan Industrial City in the Wilayat of Nakhal, which also provides many facilities and incentives for various commercial and industrial activities."

Tariq Al Harasi pointed out that, "The Governorate of South Al Batinah is also enjoying a unique nature and important historical and archaeological sites, as it is also considered an attractive tourism destination in the Sultanate of



Oman, which Oman Vision 2040 works to boost the tourism sector in the governorate. It also encourages investment through the establishment of hotels, tourism resorts, and other recreational and tourism facilities, as well as promoting and marketing tourism products at the international level."

He further clarified that, within the framework of the 'Made in Oman' campaign, which aims at supporting the industrial sector and promoting Omani products, the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion at the Governorate of South Al Batinah organised during the past year four exhibitions of Omani products in several commercial centres and Malls at the governorate, where they were well received by the local community.

He emphasised that the MoCIIP

always seeks to expand the base of Omani products to enhance local production and to market national products in the local and international markets.

He also pointed out that, the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion at the Governorate of South Al Batinah has carried out many inspection campaigns, including all fuel filling stations, centres, malls and commercial stores, to calibrate the commercial weights and scales in the governorate, to ensure the calibration of commercial weights and scales and monitor all devices following the organising regulations and the standard specifications.

Tariq Al Harasi clarified that the building and construction contracting sector and the export and import offices in the Governorate of South Al Batinah have

witnessed significant growth during the past year, as the two sectors were the highest recorded activities in a row, while the number of registered activities in the two sectors reached 3,147 activities in 2022, and the number of the registered foreign investors in the Governorate in 2022 reached 2,486 investors, that reflects the attractiveness of the governorate for foreign investments and the importance of the measures and facilities that have been taken and provided to investors.

Al Harassi also pointed out that, the number of automatic licence applications that were submitted through the Invest Easy portal in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, exceeded 50,000 applications since the launch of the service in April 2021, till the end of the year 2022, that confirms the high de-

mand for this service.

He stressed that the Invest Easy platform has contributed to facilitating and accelerating the procedures for establishing and operating companies in the Sultanate of Oman, where investors can view all necessary information and procedures through the platform's website, while investors can submit their applications online from anywhere and at any time.

It is also possible to obtain licences automatically through Invest Easy, as this platform allows investors to obtain automatic licences for more than 1,500 different activities, while this service constitutes 88 per cent of the total commercial activities.

Al Harasi also said: "The improvement of economic figures in the Governorate of Al Batinah South during the year of 2022 is a positive sign of the efforts made by the government represented by the MoCIIP to improve the investment environment and enhance the attractiveness of the Sultanate of Oman as a destination for investment and trade in the region."

Al Harassi called on investors who are interested in investing in the Sultanate of Oman to evaluate the available opportunities in the Governorate of South Al-Batinah and to identify the government procedures, by visiting the Invest in Oman lounge, which is a unified window for integrated government services, where it provides all services to investors and displays investment opportunities that exceed OMR1 million.

RECOGNITION

Sohar Aluminium achieves ASI Performance Standard Certification with provisional status

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sohar Aluminium has achieved the Aluminium Stewardship Initiative's (ASI) Performance Standard V2 (2017) Certification with provisional status for its smelting and cast house facility.

This is the first ASI Certification achieved by an Omani company, which enhances the company's contribution to support and enable the local aluminium industry and efforts of diversifying the national economy of Oman.

The independent, third-party audit of Sohar Aluminium's operation was carried out by DNV Business Assurance Services UK Ltd.

Engineer Said Al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium (SA) said,



"We have always aspired to be a world-class and pioneer industrial company. It is a crucial step in our journey and commitment towards adopting ESGs, by operating and

managing our business and operations responsibly and sustainably. We are proud of being the first Omani company to obtain this certification."

Al Masoudi added: "Undoubtedly, our commitment to protecting the environment, implementing high and safe working standards for our workforce, maintaining excellent relations with our stakeholders, and committing to transparent policies and moral responsibilities contributed to reaching this outstanding status."

Fiona Solomon, Chief Executive Officer at ASI said, "We congratulate Sohar Aluminium on achieving ASI Performance Standard Certification with Provisional status, the first ASI Certification

in Oman. Embracing sustainability involves a continuous process of evaluating and implementing comprehensive, positive transformations. ASI Certification empowers companies at various stages of this journey to evaluate their manufacturing practices against ESG criteria and serves as a platform and guide for continual improvement."

The ASI Certification programme was developed through an extensive multi-stakeholder consultation process and is the only comprehensive voluntary sustainability standard initiative for the aluminium value chain. It sets out 59 criteria under the three sustainability pillars of Environment, Social, and Governance.

FEDERAL RESERVE

Fed interest rate hike likely later in July

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

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

Before the Labor Department report, they had seen a nearly even chance that rates would get to a 5.5 per cent-5.75 per cent range by

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

The Fed held its policy rate steady last month, targeting a 5 per cent-5.25 per cent range, but policymakers signalled further rate hikes ahead given still unacceptably high inflation and its slow progress toward's the Fed's 2 per cent goal amid a strong labour market. -BNA

ANNOUNCEMENT

BankDhofar revised offer announcement to acquire 100% of ahlibank shares

MUSCAT: This is an announcement of a revised offer (the offer) to all of the shareholders (together the ABO shareholders and each an ABO shareholder) of ahlibank SAOG (ABO) by BankDhofar SAOG (the Offeror) acting in concert with a trust established by the offer or to acquire the entire issued share capital of ABO (the issued capital) pursuant to the takeover and acquisition regulation (E/2/2019) (the takeover regulation). This announcement is dated 5 July 2023.

The Offeror: BankDhofar SAOG, an Omani public joint stock company incorporated under the laws of Oman with commercial registration number 1291106 and its registered office at P.O. Box, 1507, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Muttrah, Oman.

The Trust: A joint account registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC (MCD) established by shareholders of the Offeror to act in concert with the Offeror with respect to the Offer in order to pay part of the Cash Consideration in return for the registration of the relevant number of ABO shares under the Trust.

Offer Rationale: With total assets of over OMR4.6 billion as at 31 March 2023, the Offeror has a strong presence in corporate banking, consumer banking, treasury and project finance in Oman. The Offeror continuously evaluates avenues for accelerating its growth,



advancing its customer service, attracting and developing talent, and ultimately creating better shareholder returns.

The Offeror has determined that attaining a larger scale through a combination with another bank would facilitate achieving all of these objectives. More specifically, a combination of the Offeror and ABO is a compelling opportunity to:

- create a leading domestically-focused Omani bank with a robust competitive position, well placed to serve the entirety of the market with leading market positions across a number of customer segments;
- combine the banks' highly complementary activities and expertise across retail, corporate and Islamic banking for the benefit of the combined group and its customers;
- optimise its organisation to create efficiencies and provide ca-

reer development opportunities for both banks' employees;

- provide opportunities to create value for both sets of shareholders, notably through an improvement in the combined group's cost of funds; and
- provide enhanced liquidity for both sets of shareholders.

All in all, the proposed transaction offers an immensely attractive opportunity for shareholders of both entities to benefit from value creation with significant synergy possibilities and to participate in the long-term growth story, whilst ensuring a strong and well capitalised bank on day one.

Offer details
Consideration Shares: 1,291,021 newly issued ordinary shares in Bank Dhofar (the Offeror) per ABO (the Offeree) share, valuing each ABO share at OMR 0.223 based on the Offeror's share price as at 8 June 2023.

Cash Consideration: OMR 0.215 per ABO share. The Cash Consideration shall not exceed in aggregate OMR 215 million, being 51.3% of the value of the Issued Capital (which, based on a cash offer of 0.215 per ABO share, gives the Issued Capital an implied value of OMR 420 million) (the Cash Cap).

Choice of Consideration: Any ABO Shareholder has the option to elect to receive either:

- 100% of its consideration as Consideration Shares; or
- 100% of its consideration as

Cash Consideration, subject to the Cash Cap.

The Cash Cap shall be applied in the following order of priority and on a paripassu basis:

- firstly, to any ABO Shareholder who as at the date of this Offer announcement (i) is a Sharia compliant juristic shareholder or is a subsidiary of a Sharia compliant juristic shareholder; and (ii) holds a valid Sharia investment licence (the Cash Acceptance Qualification), to reflect its (or its parent shareholder's, as the case may be) de jure inability to receive shares in a conventional bank; and
- secondly, to any other ABO Shareholder who elects to receive 100% Cash Consideration and in the event such ABO Shareholders elect to receive an amount of Cash Consideration which, when aggregated with the amount of Cash Consideration elected to be received by any ABO Shareholder who meets the Cash Acceptance Qualification exceeds the Cash Cap, the rest of the consideration for their shares in ABO will be paid in the form of Consideration Shares on a pro rata basis in accordance with the percentage of shares they hold in the Issued Capital.

Mechanism to Fund the Cash Consideration: Any Cash Consideration due to any ABO Shareholder shall be funded by the Offeror and/or the Trust from internal liquidity and capital sources.

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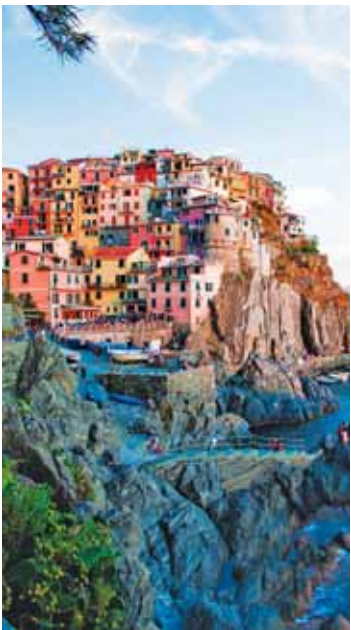
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REASONS TO VISIT ITALY FROM OMAN

A SELECTION OF FLIGHTS TO CHOOSE FROM

There are a range of Airlines and pathways from Muscat to Rome available from OMR63 to over OMR400, depending on the duration, connection and class you want to fly in. Italy is highly accessible and affordable to fly to from Muscat, taking just over 9 hours with layovers in Qatar, Abu Dhabi or Bahrain airlines like Qatar, Gulf Air and Etihad alongside much cheaper airlines for the budget backpackers out there.

There are options to suit whatever flight or budget you are looking for, just ensure you book your flights early to get the best prices possible! Schengen Visas can be obtained from the VFS Global office located in Panorama Mall. Word to the wise: Schedule your appointment at VFS ahead of time as it can take over a month during peak season (summertime), once you've submit all your papers, your Schengen Visa (and doorway to all the numerous breathtaking countries of Europe) should be in your hands within 7-10 days, and your journey awaits!



Located approximately 2,921 miles from Muscat, with flights from Oman, this European city is the fifth most visited European country with almost 65 million tourists visiting a year! And no wonder! Italy is a place where the heart finds its fire again. Where the appetite opens and the soul awakens with sights, sounds and tastes in a culture that parallels Oman with its charming and warm charisma

Here are 4 reasons to book your flight from Muscat to Italy today:

THE HISTORY

‘We share a path so let us walk this road together’ From the Roman trade and maritime routes that once connected various regions including the Arabian Peninsula facilitating cultural exchange, commerce, and the spread of ideas, to its architectural influence that has impacted much of the world. Immerse yourself in Rome’s fascinating history spanning over two and a half thousand years as one of the most influential civilizations of ancient times. Its significance has left a mark on the way we live today, with echoes of its influence in our legal systems, in the concept of citizenship, and in its Latin language that formed the base of various other languages including English, Spanish, Portuguese and more. Even our calendars and 7 day weeks that we use today were first established by Rome.

THE SHOPPING

Embark on the delightful experience of shopping in Rome; visit the bustling streets of via del Corso with international brands and fashion boutiques to decorate your wardrobe with some fresh trends from Zara, Mango or more. Or, if you’re looking for something more high end exclusive, make your way to Via Condotti for your Gucci, Prada and Valentin, and head to Trastevere for unique handmade jewelry, ceramics and leather goods for something more bohemian.

Decorate yourself in its mesmerizing fashion. Dress up if you want to. Dress down if you want to. Your unique expression is welcome here and Rome’s shopping experience will not disappoint!

THE PEOPLE

The Italian people, with their magnetic charm and contagious smiles, parallel our Oman culture.

You will feel right at home here because, like us, they are known for their warmth, hospitality, and strong sense of community and family.

Walking down the streets in Italy you will be greeted warmly and meet wonderful personalities that welcome you with their smiles, their food, and their hearts.

THE FOOD

Italy will feed you like a king and queen, renowned for its delicious cuisine of bold flavours and fresh ingredients, it is home to the iconic dishes we all know and love like pizza, pasta, lasagna - and lets not forget espresso! Italy is where you get to taste the foods you love most from the place they were born in!

With over 14,000 restaurants in Rome alone, you will find exceptional places to eat everywhere you are. From a slice of margherita overlooking the Colosseum, to the infamous Gelato from Grom besides the Trevi Fountain, or a fresh pasta following a walk up the Spanish Steps; the food here is reason alone to return again.

Prepare to be smitten as you meet new friends along your trip in Italy. To sum it up, Rome is a great destination to visit from Muscat that promises to captivate you with its art, architecture, history and flavours, in a holiday duration of as little as 6 days (tried and tested!). So if you’re looking for a break, an inspiration, a breath of fresh air, or that perfect plate of risotto, look no further: Rome awaits!

S

SPORTS

Djokovic and Swiatek march on; Tsitsipas defeats Murray

Djokovic got the better of Wawrinka while Swiatek sailed past Petra Martic in their third round ties

LONDON: Reigning champion Novak Djokovic defeated old rival Stan Wawrinka to reach the last 16 and move closer to an eighth men's singles Wimbledon title.

Djokovic won 6-3, 6-1, 7-6 (7-5) in a match that finished 14 minutes before the Wimbledon cut-off time on Friday night.

In women's event, world No.1 player Iga Swiatek from Poland defeated 30th seed Petra Martic 6-2, 7-5 in her third-round match on Friday.

On Sunday, Swiatek will lock horns with No.14 seed Belinda Bencic. This will be a battle of two junior Wimbledon champions, with Bencic having won the title in 2013 and Swiatek clinching it five years later. Bencic advanced to pre-quarters with a win over Australian Open semifinalist Magda Linette 6-3, 6-1.

Earlier on day five, world No.1 Carlos Alcaraz gained his first Centre Court win as he beat France's Alexandre Muller to move into the third round. Alcaraz, 20, won 6-4, 7-6 (7-2), 6-3 against world No.84 Muller.

Alcaraz won the tie-break and was untroubled in the third set to



Novak Djokovic in action against Stan Wawrinka on Friday



Stefanos Tsitsipas

set up a meeting with 25th seed Nicolas Jarry of Chile in round three.

On Thursday the match between Andy Murray and Stefanos Tsitsipas could not be completed in time, with Tsitsipas coming

from two sets to one down to win on Friday. Tsitsipas completed a thrilling turnaround victory on Friday as he beat two-time champion Murray 7-6, 6-7, 4-6, 7-6, 6-4.

Daniil Medvedev beat France's Adrian Mannarino 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (7-5) in round two after the match had been stopped at 4-4 in the third set on Thursday because of bad light.

Matteo Berrettini, runner-up in 2021, beat 15th seed Alex de Minaur and was delighted with the win having missed the 2022 event after testing positive for Covid just before the tournament started.

"What happened [the withdrawal] is something that hasn't healed yet [mentally]," said Berrettini after his 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 second-round win, with Germany's 19th seed Alexander Zverev set to be his third-round opponent.

Berrettini's compatriot Jannik Sinner, seeded eighth, has moved into the last 16 after coming from a set down to beat France's



Iga Swiatek celebrates her win over Petra Martic in the third round

Quentin Halys 3-6, 6-2, 6-3, 6-4.

Elsewhere, sixth seed Holger Rune defeated Spain's Roberto Caballes Baena in round two, while there were third-round victories for Russia's seventh seed Andrey Rublev, Polish 17th seed Hubert Hurkacz and 23rd seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan.

Earlier on Friday, the fourth-seeded American Jessica Pegula advanced to the pre-quarters stage of Wimbledon women's singles for the first time in her career, clinching a win over Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto 6-4, 6-0.

Meanwhile, No.32 seed Marie Bouzkova also booked her spot in the round of 16 with a shocker of a win over No.5 seed Caroline Garcia. Marie won the match 7-6, 4-6, 7-5.

Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko also emerged victorious after playing the longest women's singles tie break in the history of Grand Slam events, edging out Ana Bogdan of

Romania in a 38-point tie-breaker to win her third round match by 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 [18]. The final set lasted 109 minutes and the Ukrainian saved five match points. Bogdan saved six match points but Tsurenko won the match after three hours and 40 minutes. The final tie-break lasted for over 35 minutes.

Ukraine's Elina Svitolina also maintained her strong form to clinch a 7-7, 6-2 win over American qualifier Sofia Kenin in the third round. Her next challenge will be former world No.1 Victoria Azarenka in the fourth round.

Azarenka had beaten No. 11 seed Daria Kasatkina 6-2, 6-4.

World No.2 Aryna Sabalenka overcame a sluggish start to take out Varvara Gracheva 2-6, 7-5, 6-2 to reach the third round of Wimbledon. No.9 seed Petra Kvitova stormed into the third round of the ongoing Wimbledon for the ninth time with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Aliaksandra Sasnovich.



Sheikh Talal elected as new OCA president

BANGKOK: The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) elected Sheikh Talal Fahad Al Sabah as its new president at the 42nd OCA Congress here on Saturday. Sheikh Talal received 24 of the 44 votes cast.

The other candidate, the OCA director general and president of World Aquatics Husain Al Musallam, who is also from Kuwait, received 20 votes.

Sheikh Talal, 58, is the son of the first OCA president Sheikh Fahad Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, who was president from 1982 to 1990, and the younger brother of the previous OCA president Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al Sabah, who led the organisation from 1991 to 2021.

Sheikh Talal joined the OCA in 2007 and served as chair of the OCA Rules Committee and a member of the OCA Executive Board.

Sheikh Talal's motto was "One Asia, One Family" and promised good governance, financial sustainability, development plan for sports and activities, education programmes and high-quality Asian Games. - **Xinhua**

EDWIN VAN DER SAR

Former United keeper in ICU

AMSTERDAM: Former Manchester United and Netherlands goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar is in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) after suffering bleeding around his brain, announced his former club Ajax on Friday.

The 52-year-old is currently stable at the hospital, the club announced. An Ajax statement on Twitter said as quoted by Sky Sports: "On Friday, Edwin van der Sar has had a bleeding around his brain. He's currently in hospital in the intensive care unit and is in stable condition."

"Once there is more concrete information, an update will follow. Everyone at Ajax wishes Edwin a speedy recovery. We are thinking of you," added the statement.

His former club Manchester United and Fulham in the UK, where he spent years competing in the top-flight football of Premier League, also extended their support to van der Sar. "Sending all our love and strength to you, Edwin," tweeted Manchester United.

The Professional Footballers' Association tweeted: "The thoughts of everyone at the PFA are with Edwin and his family."

Fulham tweeted: "Everyone at Fulham Football Club wishes Edwin a speedy recovery. We are thinking of you." - **ANI**

THIRD ASHES TEST: DAY 2

England bowlers dominate

LEEDS: Sublime bowling display from Moeen Ali, Stuart Broad and Chris Woakes provided England with the upper hand over Australia as the visitors finished on 116/4 in response to hosts 237, taking a 142 runs lead during the Day 2 of the ongoing third Ashes Test here at Headingley on Friday.

At the time of stumps, Australia's score read 116/4 with Mitchell Marsh (17) and Travis Head (18) unbeaten at the crease. The guests took a first-innings lead of 26 runs after bowling out England for 237 on Friday.

Australia lost star batter Marcus Labuschagne in the 25th over as the latter handed an easy catch to Harry Brook on Moeen's delivery. Moeen struck in the 27th over again as he removed Steve Smith for mere 2 runs. In the 34th over of the game, Usman Khawaja was removed by Chris Woakes for 43 runs. Mitchell Marsh (17) and Travis Head (18) carried Australia to stumps with 142 runs lead.

Australia looked to begin the second innings with positive intent as Khawaja and David Warner looked to gather runs at a brisk pace. However, Broad came up to dismiss Warner (1) for the 17th time and put England in control.

Australia managed to take a lead of 55 runs after suffering a massacre earlier in the innings.



Ben Stokes and Mark Wood began the second session in pure 'Bazball' style with Wood smashing two fours and one maximum on the first three balls of Mitchell Starc's over.

However, he failed to keep up the momentum as Pat Cummins claimed his wicket to bring an end to his T20-style knock of 24(8). Starc once again was on the receiving end with Stokes smashing him for three boundaries in a row. Cummins once again stepped in

to restrict the damage by sending Broad back to the pavilion.

Stokes closed on to score his second consecutive Test century but Todd Murphy claimed the wicket of the dangerous skipper for a score of 80 (108) and England were restricted to 237.

Brief scores: Australia 263 & 116/4 (Travis Head 18*, Mitchell Marsh 17*; Moeen Ali 2-34) vs England 237 (Ben Stokes 80, Mark Wood 24; Pat Cummins 6-91). - **ANI**

FIRST TEST AGAINST INDIA

West Indies recall Cornwall, Warrican

ST JOHN'S: Left-hand batter Kirk McKenzie has earned a maiden call-up in the 13-man West Indies squad that will face India in the first Test from July 12 in Dominica, while Rahkeem Cornwall and Jomel Warrican have been recalled as the spin options. Uncapped batter Alick Athanaze was retained in the side after he traveled to South Africa for West Indies' last Test series but didn't get a game.

With Gudakesh Motie undergoing rehabilitation for his lower-back injury, an "opportunity" opened up for the two spinners, according to Cricket West Indies lead selector Desmond Haynes.

Kyle Mayers and fast bowler Jayden Seales were recovering from their niggles but were not considered to risk any further injuries. The selectors also named wicketkeeper-batter Tevin Imlach and right-arm quick Akeem Jordan as the two traveling reserves for the first Test.

Shannon Gabriel, Alzarri Joseph, Kemar Roach and Jason Holder will form the pace attack with Raymon Reifer as the all-round option.

This series will be the first for both West Indies and India in the



new cycle (2023-25) of the World Test Championship. West Indies finished eighth out of nine teams in the previous iteration, winning only four of their 13 games in that cycle.

The first Test is scheduled for July 12 to 16 followed by the second in Port of Spain from July 20. The two teams will then play three ODIs and five T20Is.

West Indies squad for first India Test: Kraigg Brathwaite (capt), Jermaine Blackwood (vice-capt), Alick Athanaze, Tagenarine Chanderpaul, Rahkeem Cornwall, Joshua Da Silva, Shannon Gabriel, Jason Holder, Alzarri Joseph, Kirk McKenzie, Raymon Reifer, Kemar Roach, Jomel Warrican. Traveling reserves: Tevin Imlach, Akeem Jordan. - **ANI**

ODI CRICKET WORLD CUP

High-profile committee to take call on Pakistan's travel to India

LAHORE: The prime minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, has set up a committee of ministers to help determine whether Pakistan will travel to India for the ODI World Cup in October-November 2023. The group will be headed by foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

The committee's main task will be to make recommendations about Pakistan's travel plans to India. Based on that, the Pakistan prime minister will sign off on the country's participation.

This is a response to PCB's letter from last week to the government seeking advice on whether the team is allowed to travel to India, and, if so, if there are any reservations about any of the five venues. That letter had also asked the government if it wanted to send a security delegation to India.

Apart from foreign minister



Zardari, interior minister Rana Sanaullah and law and justice minister Azam Nazeer Tarar are some high-profile names on the committee. It will also consist of Ehsan ur Rehman Mazari, Maryam Aurangzeb, Asad Mehmood, Aminul Haque, Qamar Zaman Kaira, and Tariq Fatemi, the special assistant

on foreign affairs to the PM.

The committee, which also includes heads of the intelligence agencies and the foreign secretary, has representation from across different political parties. This is thought to be the first time such a high-profile committee of ministers has been set up for this purpose. - **ANI**

BANGLADESH BATTER

Tamim reverses retirement decision

DHAKA: Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal has withdrawn his retirement a day after announcing it in emotional circumstances in Chattogram, following an intervention by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Their meeting took place on Friday afternoon at her residence in Dhaka. Tamim, accompanied by his wife, met Hasina alongside former captain Mashrafe Mortaza and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan.

ESPNcricinfo reported that Mashrafe, a member of parliament, started the process around that time when he spoke to the prime minister to possibly intervene in this situation. Tamim had, until then, refused to discuss his retirement with Hassan.

Tamim made the retirement announcement on Thursday afternoon. In a live TV broadcast,



he broke down several times while delivering a 13-minute monologue about his decision. It captured the airwaves and social media for the rest of the day.

A different Tamim spoke to the media on Friday evening outside the Prime Minister's residence. He revealed that he had been given a break of six weeks to re-

cuperate from his injuries.

"The honourable Prime Minister invited me to her residence this afternoon," Tamim said. "We had a long discussion after which she instructed me to return to cricket. I am withdrawing my retirement."

"I can say no to anyone but it is impossible to say no to the most important person in the country. Mashrafe bhai called me while Papon bhai [Hassan] was here. They were big factors [in the reversal]. The Prime Minister has also given me a break of a month and a half. I will complete my treatment and return to playing cricket."

Tamim, who made his retirement announcement a day after leading Bangladesh in the first ODI against Afghanistan, will not feature in the rest of the series. Litton Das has been appointed captain for the remaining matches.

Instagram Threads: Meta sets sights on Twitter supremacy



The ‘Twitter-killer app’ and ‘Twitter’s standalone rival’ — high expectations abound as Meta launches its new microblogging app Threads.

AT THE END of June, Twitter’s Elon Musk and Meta’s Mark Zuckerberg challenged each other to a cage fight.

No one knows whether they will actually strap on the gloves, but on Thursday marked the advent of a showdown between their digital platforms. It was when users outside of the European Union start downloading Threads, Meta’s



new, free social media platform from app stores.

On Threads, they can share opinions, discuss, like and comment — exactly what they have been doing on Twitter. Some are already expressing their enthusiasm.

No more chirps from Elon Musk?

Meanwhile, Twitter has been struggling for a while. There are estimates that the platform could lose more than 32 million users by the next year from over 360 million in 2022, and the estimates don’t even take into consideration the latest restrictions imposed on

unverified users.

Mannheim-based media scholar Philipp Müller attributes many reasons to Twitter’s troubles.

“Musk’s political statements as well as the symbolic reactivation of Donald Trump’s account are red flags to many users and leave them disappointed,” he says.

Also, the tech billionaire’s cost-cutting actions have irritated many. Unpopular measures have included dismissing 80% of Twitter’s staff which led to several problems with core functions of the app, as well as introducing payment models such as Twitter Blue and, most recently, limiting

to only verified users the use of Tweetdeck — used by many businesses and news organizations to easily monitor content.

Just a few days ago, Musk capped the number of tweets that can be read for free at 1,000 per day, and only 500 for new accounts. “This clashes with the fundamental idea of a social media platform,” Müller told DW.

Can Threads fill a gap in the market?

There are a handful of alternatives to Twitter such as Mastodon, T2, Bluesky, and Trump’s notorious Truth Social. However, these platforms have struggled to build a broad user base.

Mastodon, for example, is an ad-free, non-profit social network, making it unattractive to advertisers, explains the Mannheim-based expert. “The market has been lacking a large, commercially oriented alternative to Twitter,” Müller says.

This is exactly where Threads has a head start.

Threads is the latest addition to Meta’s large app family comprising Instagram, Facebook, Messen-

ger, and Whatsapp. Thus, the tech company can rely on its extensive know-how to attract users.

Moreover, the company boasts of a huge cash pile — unlike Twitter, which was struggling with financial problems even before Musk took charge.

Threads plans to leverage the popularity of Instagram which has over 1 billion users. Instagram users can log into Threads using their existing Instagram accounts and import their entire network of followers on the go, the company said.

Mark Zuckerberg’s obstacles

Yet, this advantage also prompts Müller to doubt whether Instagram is the most suitable to challenge Twitter’s dominance. In terms of content, both platforms differ from one another.

“On Instagram, there’s a lot of positive communication which is not nearly as political. Twitter, on the other hand, is a medium for professional communication. Depending on the platform, people arguably follow very different ac-

counts,” Müller said.

In the past, Meta has tried to imitate popular social media platforms, but with mixed results.

They first developed an app named “Threads” as early as 2019. It was supposed to allow users to privately share photos, videos, and messages, as on Snapchat, but it flopped.

However, Reels, the short video format that Meta launched inspired by the success of TikTok, is growing steadily.

Then there are regulatory hurdles. Meta has postponed the launch of Threads in the EU due to privacy issues and users’ personal information Meta is set to collect. On Tuesday, the top EU court sided with Germany’s anti-cartel watchdog in an antitrust dispute with Meta.

The most crucial question remains: How will users react? German digital expert Dennis Horn says people are most prone to switching platforms when their peers do so as well. So ultimately, the future of Twitter will depend on how many users cling to Threads to discuss politics and society. -DW

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Study reveals creative people enjoy idle time more than others

WASHINGTON: According to a new study by University of Arizona researchers, creative people are more prone to spend their downtime during the day exploring their minds.

The study, published in the Creativity Research Journal, finds that creative people are more likely to fruitfully use idle time by letting one idea lead to another. Study participants who were more creative felt less bored when they sat alone in a room, researchers found. And during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when the world experienced unusually extended periods of unstructured time, creative people were less bored and more engaged with their thoughts. “I am particularly interested in creativity because we wanted to know what’s going on in the mind of creative individuals, especially in situations where nothing constrains their thoughts,” said lead study author Quentin Raffaeli, a graduate student in the UArizona Department of Psychology.

In psychology and neuroscience, most studies on human thoughts either prompt participants to think in a certain way or ask them to report on thoughts they experienced, but less is known about how thoughts naturally arise and unfold over time in unprompted contexts, said Jessica Andrews-Hanna, an associate professor in the Department of Psychology and senior author of the paper.

“This is where our study comes in,” Andrews-Hanna said.

History is filled with anecdotes of famous scientists, artists and philosophers who enjoyed being alone with their thoughts, and those people often generated some of their best ideas during idle time, Andrews-Hanna said.

“In today’s busy and digitally connected society, time to be alone with one’s thoughts without distraction may be becoming a rare commodity,” she added.

The researchers divided the study into two parts. For the first experiment, the researchers asked each participant to sit



alone in a room for 10 minutes without any access to digital devices. In the absence of any particular prompt, the participants were asked to voice their thoughts aloud in real time. The recorded files from 81 participants were then transcribed and analysed.

The researchers assessed the participants’ creativity through a “divergent thinking test,” a lab-based verbal test that measures a person’s ability to think outside of the box. Participants who performed well in the divergent thinking test had thoughts that flowed freely and were associated with one another, often indicated by phrases such as “this reminds me of” or “speaking of which.”

“While many participants had a tendency to jump between seemingly unrelated thoughts, creative individuals showed signs of thinking more associatively,” Raffaeli said.

The first experiment also found that creative people were more engaged in their thoughts when they were left alone without distractions, such as cell phone and internet.

“Creative people rated themselves as being less bored, even over those 10 minutes. They also spoke more words overall, which indicated that their thoughts

were more likely to move freely,” Andrews-Hanna said.

To complement their initial findings, the researchers extended their study in the context of a much larger span of time — the COVID-19 pandemic — when many people were alone with their thoughts more often.

For the second experiment, over 2,600 adults answered questions through a smartphone app called Mind Window, developed by Andrews-Hanna and her graduate student Eric Andrews. Participants who self-identified as being creative reported being less bored during the pandemic.

“As we become more overworked, overscheduled and addicted to our digital devices, I think we need to do a better job in our homes, our workplaces and our schools to cultivate time to simply relax with our thoughts,” Andrews-Hanna said.

The researchers are continuing this line of work using their Mind Window app. They encourage people to download and use the app to help scientists understand how people across the world think in their everyday lives.

“Understanding why different people think the way they do may lead to promising interventions to improve health and well-being,” Andrews-Hanna said. -ANI

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ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat recognised by Wells Fargo for excellence in fund transfers

This award recognises institutions for their usage of Wells Fargo services, expertise, and commitment to achieving an exceptional level of operational excellence, which results in higher efficiencies and cost reductions

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was awarded the Operational Excellence Award by Wells Fargo, one of the four largest banks in the United States and is headquartered in San Francisco.

This award recognises institutions for their usage of Wells Fargo services, expertise, and commitment to achieving an exceptional level of operational excellence, which results in higher efficiencies and cost reductions. Most importantly, it acknowledges institutions that meet the evolving needs

of their customer base by consistently demonstrating improvement in the quality and excellence of operational service levels in international fund transfers which has resulted in a very high straight-through processing (STP) rate throughout the year.

Speaking on the occasion, Zuwaina Abdullah Al Sharji, Assistant General Manager – Central Operations & Change Management, Bank Muscat, said: “We are delighted to receive this award once again, which reflects the bank’s commitment to meeting the highest standards of quality



in fund transfers. The bank consistently maintains high SWIFT standards, which are backed by our customer-centric services and a state-of-the-art in-house payment architecture.” She also

thanked customers for their trust and confidence in the bank, which has led to several innovations being launched over the years to enhance banking convenience and keep pace with global trends.

Cross-border payments are a critical component of banking relationships in today’s global economy and the need for fast, efficient and predictable processing is a shared responsibility by all the financial

institutions involved. Wells Fargo, which is among Bank Muscat’s prominent correspondent banks for dollar payments, provides the bank with high-quality payment processing, seamless and efficient servicing and outstanding customer service, thereby greatly enhancing the overall customer experience.

As for the bank, the Central Operations Department, the Treasury Office, and the Global Trade Services Department handle money transfer operations, while the Systems and Procedures Department handles technical and security issues related to these operations. The bank has established relations with more than 500 correspondent banks worldwide.

Bank Muscat’s performance has been consistently lauded by the international financial and banking community for decades, with the bank winning similar awards from giant institutions like JP Morgan. The bank has also won a number of awards from prestigious international publications like Global Finance, Euromoney, The Banker and EMEA Finance for its different lines of business in recent years.

GLOBAL CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

Belkin expands its retail footprint, opens exclusive new store in Oman

MUSCAT: Belkin International, a global consumer electronics leader, expands its retail presence in Oman with a new store opening in City Centre Muscat in partnership with AAMAAL.

The opening follows the success of the other two outlets in the Sultanate while expanding brand awareness across the Middle East. The third Belkin brand store launched with renowned football legend Ali Al-Habsi as the guest of honour, a long-time supporter of the brand along with Belkin and partner representatives.

Earlier this year, Belkin made a public commitment to finding more responsible ways to build products and that it’s switching from the use of virgin plastics to the integration of PCR, updating product housing materials to consist of 72-75% PCR and plastic-free packaging. In line with this ongoing journey, Belkin announced it is partnering with the Environmental Society of Oman (ESO) to donate 10% of sales on its first PCR product available in the region, the BoostCharge 4-Port USB Power Extender, across its 3 Oman store locations.

Suaad Al Harthi, Executive Director at the Environment Society of Oman, said, “As the only non-profit organisation in Oman that focuses on conserving the environment, we are pleased that sustainability is becoming a key area of consideration for several con-



sumers and companies across various industries. Belkin sets a great example as a forward-looking international company launching responsibly made products and using plastic-free packaging.”

To reward its Omani fans, Belkin is extending attractive store opening offers: any purchase worth OMR10 will receive complimentary SoundForm Bolt Wireless Earbuds. This limited-time offer will be valid till July 8.

Throughout July, customers can choose to become Belkin green volunteers and get the chance to win exciting prizes.

Fawad Mir, Regional Managing Director of Belkin EMEA & E-commerce stated, “Our continued expansion in Oman demonstrates that customers in the Sultanate share our passion for exceptional

design, quality and value. This year marks Belkin’s 40th anniversary, and we’re thrilled to have a dedicated space to tell the Belkin brand story to our Omani customers and share more about our corporate social responsibility initiatives. This modern store setting and carefully curated product lineup promise a unique and fulfilling shopping experience.”

The new store extends across 100 SQM and is a physical representation of the Belkin brand experience. A vibrant yet minimalist aesthetic allows the innovative design of the products to shine. The open-plan product presentation enables shoppers to explore and discover thoughtfully laid out spaces, each visually telling the unique story of the Belkin brand. A dedicated area highlights Belkin’s

steadfast focus on R&D, community, education and sustainability, alongside standalone spaces to learn more about its product category pillars like surge protection, charging accessories, screen protection and audio while shopping its best-in-class products.

Al Harith Al Khalili, Executive Partner of AAMAAL notes, “We are delighted to partner with Belkin International in expanding their retail presence in Oman with the opening of the new store in City Centre Muscat. This collaboration represents our shared commitment to offering high-quality, innovative products to the Omani market. We believe that Belkin’s unique range of consumer electronics, including its environmentally conscious initiatives, will resonate with customers in the Sultanate. As AAMAAL, we are proud to be part of Belkin’s 40-year legacy of excellence and look forward to providing a fulfilling experience to our valued customers.”

Belkin has introduced new accessory technologies to the world since its inception, launching the first cable that connected an Apple IIc computer to a parallel printer in 1983. This year heralds 40 years of Belkin as a market leader and innovator, and over the last four decades, Belkin has remained committed to offering high-quality, innovative products to the region. This store opening is another exciting chapter in its brand story.

EXPANSION



Malabar Gold forays into Europe; launches 320th showroom in London

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally, has launched its new showroom in the UK in London.

This marks the global jewellery brand’s expansion into its 11th country of operation and its first foray into the European continent. Malabar Gold currently has an extensive retail presence of 320 showrooms in India, the UAE, the KSA, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Malaysia, Singapore, the USA and the UK.

The inauguration of the new showroom was conducted by Lyn Brown, Member of Parliament for West Ham and Shadow Minister for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, in the presence of Abdul Salam K P, Vice Chairman of Malabar Group, Shamlal Ahamed, International Operations Managing Director of Malabar Gold & Dia-

monds, Faisal A K, Head of Manufacturing at Malabar Gold, senior management team members, customers and well-wishers.

“We are immensely proud to launch our inaugural showroom in Europe, in London. What began as a single jewellery showroom in 1993 has now grown into an expansive global enterprise spanning 11 countries. Our dedication to delivering an exceptional jewellery shopping experience, encompassing top-quality products and exemplary service, has been the driving force behind our ascent as the premier Indian international jewellery retailer. As we mark the 30th anniversary of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, we are one step closer to our dream of being crowned as the world’s largest jewellery retailer,” commented M.P Ahammed, Chairman of Malabar Group.

PROMOTION

Bring home happiness with exclusive benefits on Ford



MUSCAT: Own any of your favourite Ford and get exclusive benefits including service for 3 years / 60,000km, registration for 1 Year and Attractive Instalments. The campaign ends on August 9 (Conditions apply. Loan approval is based on the sole discretion of finance companies/banks. EMI is calculated per month for a tenure of 8 years. For details visit a Ford showroom.)

Ford enthusiasts can look for-

ward to owning any of their favourite Ford from the vast range. The range of vehicles includes the Taurus, Explorer, Mustang and Bronco.

The Ford Taurus is available in instalments starting from OMR204 per month. The Ford Explorer is available in instalments starting from OMR254 per month.

The Ford Mustang is available in instalments starting from OMR321 per month.

The Ford Bronco WildTrak is available in instalments starting from OMR414 per month.

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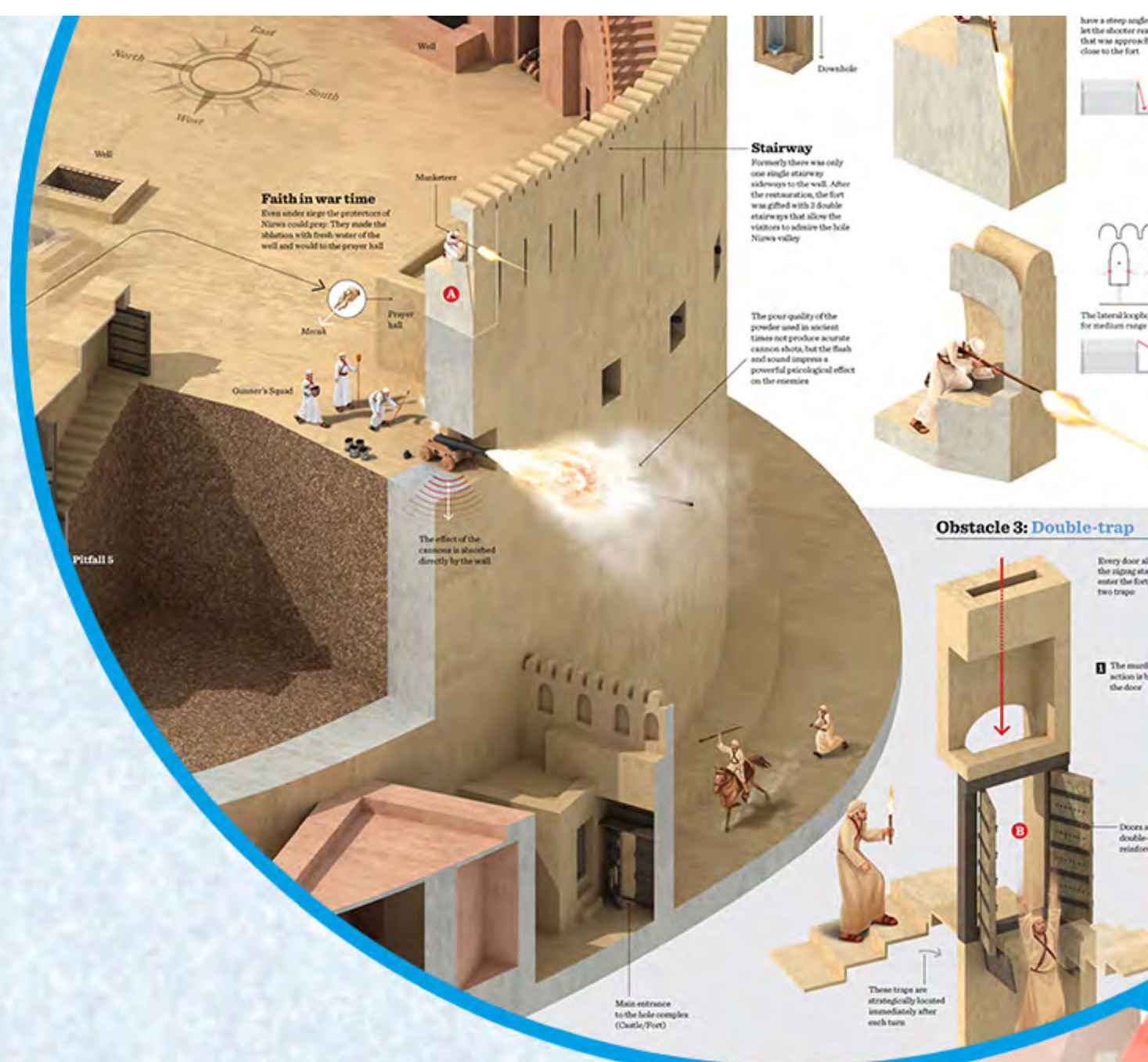
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