



WINTER SOLSTICE FOR THIS YEAR COMMENCES

MUSCAT: The winter solstice for 2024 began on Saturday, marking the first day of winter in the northern hemisphere. This astronomical event started in Oman at 1:20pm, featuring the longest night and shortest day of the year. The winter will last for 88 days, 23 hours, and 40 minutes. An official clarified that the winter solstice occurs due to the tilt of Earth's axis and its orbit around the sun. **>A3**



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SAYYID THEYAZIN ATTENDS GULF CUP OPENING EVENT



His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, attended the opening ceremony of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup in the State of Kuwait at Jaber Al-Ahmed International Stadium under the auspices of Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait. HH Sayyid Theyzain also witnessed the opening match between Oman and Kuwait that ended in a 1-1 draw. His Highness Sayyid Theyazin conveyed the warm greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said to the Emir of Kuwait. He also expressed His Majesty's heartfelt wishes for the sisterly State of Kuwait to achieve great success in hosting this distinguished fraternal sporting event, which brings together the nations of the Arab Gulf.

— ONA

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Oman, Angola to boost partnership in economic and investment fields



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Angola have expressed interest in establishing new cooperation, enhancing partnership, particularly in the economic, commercial, and investment sectors, specifically in the areas of mining, clean energy, technology, tourism, agriculture and food security, transportation, logistics, and ports.

This came in a joint statement issued on the occasion of the official visit of President João Lourenço of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman. It reads as follows:

“At the gracious invitation of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço of the Republic of Angola paid an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman, during 19-21 December 2024.

His Majesty held discussions with the President, during which they reviewed bilateral relations

and explored ways to develop them to serve the common interests of both countries.

The two leaders expressed interest in establishing new cooperation, enhancing partnership, particularly in the economic, commercial, and investment sectors, specifically in the areas of mining, clean energy, technology, tourism, agriculture and food security, transportation, logistics, and ports.

They agreed to commence negotiations to enter into a cooperation agreement that covers economic affairs, science, technology, and culture, in addition to signing memorandums of understanding and agreements on areas such as mutual visa exemption for holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports, on political consultations, as well as in the field of Agriculture. His Majesty the Sultan and the President also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, reaffirming their respect for international law and the United Nations Charter, and emphasizing the importance of cooperation within the framework of international organizations to achieve peace and security. Both leaders stressed the need to intensify efforts to address issues related to climate change.

The two sides held meetings to discuss ways to develop trade, exchange visits of commercial and investment delegations, and encourage the establishment of joint projects.

His Majesty commended President Lourenço's efforts in bringing a lasting peace to the Eastern DRC, and wished him success on the assumption of the Africa Union Chairship in February 2025. The President of Angola praised the wise leadership and foreign policy of HM, which is based on principles of dialogue and the promotion of peace and harmony for all. **- ONA**

INDUSTRIAL SECTOR SEES A HUGE JUMP IN OMANISATION RATES

Statistics show that the national workforce reached 30,993 by the end of November 2024, with employment of 1,708 Omanis



Times News Service

MUSCAT: With the employment of 1,708 Omanis, including 1,145 males and 563 females, the industrial sector in Oman has achieved significant growth in Omanisations from January to November end this year, surpassing the set targets for national workforce employment by 5.5%.

Data from the Ministry of Labour, across various specialisations and fields within the industrial sector, show that the national workforce reached approximately 30,993 by the end of November 2024, exceeding the goal of employing 1,000 Omanis this year.

Dr. Ahmed bin Khalfan Al-Badawi, Director of the Industrial Strategy Implementation and

Evaluation Department and Head of the Employment File Team at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), emphasised that the coming period will focus more on localising technical and specialised jobs in the industrial sector.

The ministry aims to enhance vocational specialisations to develop the technical skills of the national workforce, reflecting the ministry's strategic direction to invest in national talent through 265 initiatives in collaboration with development partners.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Dr. Al-Badawi highlighted that the Royal endorsement of the Industrial Strategy 2040,

which came into effect in mid-2024, has yielded positive results. The strategy includes 265 initiatives, 125 of which are directly linked to the ministry's sectors, making up about 47% of the total initiatives, while the remaining 140 initiatives are distributed among relevant entities.

The Industrial Strategy Team at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion has begun organising workshops with these entities to introduce them to the details, objectives, and implementation plans of the initiatives. These efforts aim to establish new high-tech industries, foster entrepreneurship and innovation, and develop governance and industrial development management. **>A2**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Omran Hackathon driving innovation

1 Omran Group has successfully concluded the inaugural edition of the Omran Hackathon, marking a significant milestone in advancing innovation and entrepreneurship within Oman's tourism sector. **>A2**



OMAN Ministry of Education organises forum

2 The Ministry of Education, represented by the Omani Commission for Education, Culture and Science, organised a major forum. **>A3**

WORLD 4 killed in Germany's Magdeburg attack

3 Four people are now known to have been killed in the Magdeburg attack, according to reports in the Bild newspaper, as well as by public broadcasters. **>A7**



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CITIZEN RESCUED IN CRITICAL CONDITION FROM QURIYAT

Emergency rescue teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in Muscat Governorate responded to an incident in which a citizen fell down from a mountain cliff in the Fins area of Quriyat. The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said: “The rescue teams successfully reached the individual, provided emergency medical care, and transported him to the hospital in critical condition.”



KEY PROJECTS

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Sugar refining project to boost food security

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources announced the launch of a number of projects and investment opportunities in the field of food security in cooperation with the government related entities and partners in the private sector.

Salim bin Abdullah Al Ghufaili, Director General of Food Security at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that the key projects announced included the sugar refining project, which is the first of its type in the Sultanate of Oman on a total area of 18,000 Sqm at Sohar Port.

The productivity of this project is approximately one million tonnes a year.

The project would be equipped with production lines of European



origin and with the state-of-the-art technology which would refine high-quality sugar and would be distributed at the local, regional and international level, he said.

The completion percentage of the project reached 91%, he added. Salalah Mills Company is cur-

rently working on execution of the Food Industries Centre Project at Khazaen Economic City at an estimated cost of OMR 18.5 million and with production capacity of 1.4 million pieces a day in the first phase.

The project is expected to start



operation by end of the current year.

The projects include construction of wheat silos at Sohar Port, which would increase the storage capacity of grains to 160,000 tonnes, he said.

He also pointed to the project on

expansion of the fodder factory of Oman Mills Company in Muttrah which aims to boost food security and to contribute to the integration of production chains. The factory is expanded with production capacity of 20 tonnes of fodder, he added.

<FROM Promising
A1 sectors

Dr. Al-Badawi explained that the ministry focuses on promising sectors such as resource-based industries, which include three industrial clusters distributed across 15 sub-industries, capital-intensive industries with two industrial clusters covering 9 sub-industries, and knowledge-based industries with two industrial clusters covering 5 sub-industries.

These represent important strategic goals for enhancing industrial sector growth. It is worth noting that the ministry continues to work through governance committees with relevant entities to ensure that job localisation efforts align with the aspirations of the National Employment Programme via the “Tawteen” platform. — ONA

INAUGURAL EDITION

Omran Hackathon driving innovation and sustainability

Times News Service

AL JABAL AL AKHDAR: The Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has successfully concluded the inaugural edition of the Omran Hackathon, marking a significant milestone in advancing innovation and entrepreneurship within Oman’s tourism sector.

Organised in strategic partnership with the Oman Across Ages Museum, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and several Oman Investment Authority entities, and executed by Al Jabr Mena, the event showcased a collaborative approach to tackling key challenges in tourism and related industries like energy, logistics, environment, and others.

The closing ceremony was held under the patronage of H.E Halima Rashid al-Zari, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, in the presence of Mr. Al Muatasim bin Said Al Sariy, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors of Omran Group, and Dr. Hashil bin Obaid Al Mahrouqi, CEO of the Group, at the Al Jabal Al Akhdar’s Naseem DusitD2 Resort.

The hackathon kicked-off with an intensive bootcamp held on December 14th at the Oman Across Ages Museum. Out of over 400 applicants, 100 participants were selected to form 20 teams. During the boot camp, they underwent intensive training sessions.



After rigorous evaluation, only 8 teams were selected to advance to the final stage, which took place from December 19 to 21 at the Naseem DusitD2 Resort in Al Jabal Al Akhdar.

Participants completed their projects under the guidance of a panel of experts and mentors from various sectors. The final ideas were then presented to a judging panel composed of experts and specialists.

The closing ceremony witnessed the crowning of the winners of the first places, which were as follows: first place went to the “Beyond” team, whose project focused on designing an intelligent tourism platform that utilizes VR and AR technologies, targeting primarily the Chinese market.

Meanwhile, the “Walk” team

secured second place, crowned for their project that employs AI to assist visitors in exploring destinations and tourist experiences. The third place was awarded to the “Hydro-X” team, which presented innovative solutions that contribute to reducing water waste through the use of advanced leak detection technologies.

Additionally, the “Janainah” team received a special award presented by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, whose project focused on developing a digital platform that serves as a smart technical reference and personal assistant for every farmer, facilitating farmers’ access to the latest information and remote consultations on various crop cultivation methods.

Highlighting the significance of this milestone, Kawthar Said Al

Amrani, Research, Development & Innovation Lead at Omran Group, stated: “The Omran Hackathon has served as a dynamic platform to cultivate creativity and empower national talent in developing sustainable, impactful solutions for Oman’s tourism landscape. It reflects our commitment to shaping a future where innovation and sustainability drive the growth of tourism in the Sultanate.”

She added, “We extend our sincere gratitude to our partners in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate for their support in making the first edition of the hackathon a resounding success. Their efforts have been instrumental in identifying the most pressing challenges facing the tourism sector in the governorate, which the participants have worked

diligently to address”. Mohammed Salim Al Wahibi, CEO of Al Jabr, commented: “Collaborating with Omran Group on this initiative highlights our shared vision of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship within the Sultanate. The exceptional ideas presented by participants showcase the potential of Omani talent to address industry challenges through sustainable and forward-thinking solutions. Events like these are instrumental in building a vibrant ecosystem that supports economic and social progress.”

Mohammed Said Al Maashani, the leader of the first-place team, shared his experience, stating, “Being part of the Omran Hackathon was a transformative experience. The guidance we received from mentors and industry experts ena-

bled us to refine our ideas into actionable projects. This journey has instilled in us the confidence and determination to pursue innovation and contribute meaningfully to Oman’s tourism sector.”

The inaugural Omran Hackathon represents a significant step toward fostering a culture of innovation in Oman’s sustainable tourism sector. With the continued support of strategic partners and industry experts, participants are poised to advance their ideas into actionable projects that will drive growth and innovation across tourism and related industries.

Through this event, Omran Group reaffirms its commitment to enhancing Oman’s position as a world-class tourism destination that blends authentic heritage with sustainable innovation.



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Winter solstice in Oman commences

Winter will last for 88 days, 23 hours, and 40 minutes

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The winter solstice for 2024 began on Saturday in Oman, marking the first day of winter in the northern hemisphere. This astronomical event started at 1:20pm, featuring the longest night and shortest day of the year. Wissal bint Salem Al Hinaai, Vice President of the Community Outreach Committee at the Oman Astronomical Society, explained to *Oman News Agency* that Sunday will have the shortest daylight, with sunrise in Muscat at 6:44am and sunset at 5:25pm Oman time,



making the day 10 hours and 41 minutes long. The winter will last for 88 days, 23 hours, and 40 minutes. Al Hinaai clarified that the winter solstice occurs due to the tilt of Earth's axis and its orbit around the sun. Since Earth is tilted at an

angle of 23.5 degrees, the northern and southern hemispheres alternately receive sunlight. It is a common misconception

that the seasons are due to Earth's distance from the sun. In fact, Earth is closest to the sun (perihelion) during the northern hemisphere's winter, indicating that the coldness of winter is due to the angle of solar rays, not the distance. During this phenomenon, the sun reaches its southernmost point in the sky, with the North Pole tilted away from the sun. Therefore, not all places on Earth experience sunrise and sunset on the winter solstice. For example, north of the Arctic Circle, the sun remains below the horizon throughout day, while south of the Antarctic Circle, it stays above the horizon, a phenomenon known as the mid-night sun. The sun rising from the south-eastern horizon and its low apparent path marks the winter solstice. It is also observed that the shadows are longest during this time of the year. This phenomenon follows the autumnal equinox in September when the sun's apparent movement gradually shifts southward after aligning with the equator. This gradual decrease in daylight in the northern hemisphere culminates in the shortest day and longest night on the winter solstice, while the opposite occurs in the southern hemisphere. Al Hinaai noted that Earth has two motions: its rotation on its axis from west to east every 24 hours, resulting in day and night, and its orbit around the sun every 365.25 days, resulting in the four astronomical seasons. She concluded that during the winter solstice, it appears as if the sun rises from the same southern point for several days before starting its apparent northward movement again due to Earth's orbit around the sun. This continues until the day and night hours equalise at the spring equinox on March 20, 2025.

INTERNATIONAL ARABIC LANGUAGE DAY

Ministry of Education organises forum on Spaces of Arabic Language and Digital Transformations

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Omani Commission for Education, Culture and Science, organised a forum entitled "Spaces of Arabic Language and Digital Transformations" in celebration of the International Day of Arabic Language, which falls on 18 December each year. The forum was held at the Crowne Plaza Al Irfan Hotel under the patronage of Dr. Jokha bint Abdullah Al Shukaili, CEO of the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, in the presence of a number of advisors and directors general at the Ministry of Education. The forum targeted a number of researchers, academics, Arabic language teachers, and school students. The forum included an opening session, a main session, and accompanying training sessions, which discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the Arabic language in the era of digital transformations, in an effort by the Ministry of Education to enhance the importance of linguistic knowledge by highlighting the various efforts of the educational field, which had a distinct impact on the intellectual and creative path of the Arabic language. The forum aimed to highlight the importance and role of the Arabic language in the civilizational development of human societies, enhance scientific and educational research, encourage the practice of artificial intelligence applications in developing and employing Arabic language skills, and present the challenges facing the fields of the Arabic language



and creative solutions to preserve and sustain them. During the opening ceremony, Dr. Mahmoud bin Abdullah Al-Abri, Secretary-General of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, delivered the Ministry's speech in which he pointed out that language is not only a tool of communication, but also the primary mirror for understanding culture, knowledge, and the awareness of peoples. Therefore, everyone competes to highlight their language, care for it, and protect it from weakness and extinction. He said: "The world celebrates the International Arabic Language Day under the UNESCO on December 18 of each year. This specific date was chosen to celebrate the Arabic language because it is the day on which the United Nations General Assembly made its historic decision in 1973 to make Arabic the sixth official language of the organization. The Ministry of Education, represented by the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in cooperation and coordination with various relevant divisions, has been keen to celebrate this day, participating with the Arab and Islamic world, and highlighting the eternal identity that each one of us must preserve and maintain. On this day, we do not only seek to celebrate the International Arabic Language Day, but also to shed light on what the age of artificial intelligence can do to language and its impact on reality and humanity, as artificial intelligence has become fundamental in everything related to education, knowledge production and culture."



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2676061/2024	Asset Lease Agreement Renewable Solar Power Project (20 MW)	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board in Excellent Grade and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	2500 /- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	16/01/2025	13/03/2025

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om and in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om



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His Majesty, President of Angola grace signing of agreement, MoUs

The agreement provides for acquiring a stake in Angola's Catoca and Luele mines

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola on Thursday graced the signing of an agreement and two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) at Al Alam Palace, as part of the President's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

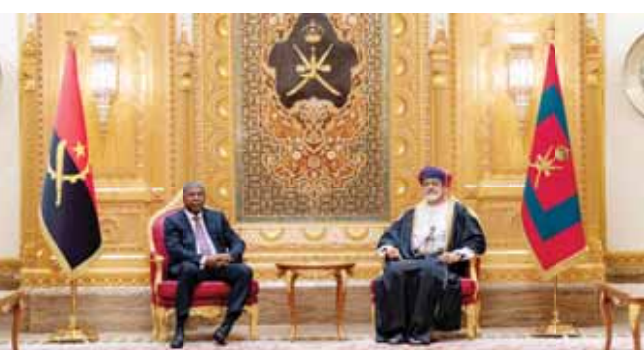
The agreement provides for acquiring a stake in Angola's Catoca and Luele mines. The first MoU deals with cooperation in the fields of energy between the two sides, while the second pertains to exploring opportunities for co-operation in strategic financial initiatives.

The agreement and the MoUs were signed on behalf of the Sultanate of Oman's government by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, while Diamantino Pedro Azevedo, Minister of Mineral Resources, Oil and Gas and Vera Esperança dos Santos, Minister of Finance signed the pacts on behalf of the Angolan government.

The event was attended by some Royal Family members, ministers, military commanders and members of the delegation accompanying the President. — **ONA**



BILATERAL RELATIONS



HM, Angola President hold official talks

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace on Thursday. The session explored areas of cooperation and investment between the two countries in the mining, agriculture, food security, ports, logistics and renewable energy sectors. The session was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Nu'mani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal Al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign

Minister, Dr. Hamad bin Said Al Oufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority and Dr. Said bin Mohammed Al Saqri, Minister of Economy (Head of the Mission of Honour).

Meanwhile, it was attended from the Angolan side by José de Lima Massano, Minister of State for Economic Coordination, Tête António, Minister of External Relations, Vera Esperança dos Santos, Minister of Finance, Diamantino Pedro Azevedo, Minister of Mineral Resources, Oil and Gas, Mário Augusto da Silva Oliveira, Minister of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Social Communication, Edeltrudes Costa Lourenço, Chief of Staff at the Presidency and Dr. Frederico Cardoso, non-resident Ambassador of the Republic of Angola. — **ONA**

AT AL ALAM PALACE

Angolan President accorded official reception in Oman



MUSCAT: President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola was accorded an official reception at Al Alam Palace on Thursday, on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

Upon the arrival of the motorcade of the President at the courtyard of the palace, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received

the Angolan President, welcoming him as a dear guest in the Sultanate of Oman. His Majesty wished him and his accompanying delegation a successful visit.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied the President to the Dais of Honour where the national anthem of the Republic of Angola was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the President of Angola. On his turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, ministers and military commanders. — **ONA**



AL ALAM PALACE

HM hosts dinner in honour of Angolan President



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted an official dinner at Al Alam Palace guesthouse on Thursday, in honour of President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola and his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

Prior to the dinner, His Majesty the Sultan and his spouse exchanged commemorative gifts with the President of Angola and his spouse.

His Majesty presented President Lourenco with an Omani sword, while the President and

his spouse reciprocated the gesture, presenting His Majesty with an artistic painting and a symbolic statue of the first Angolan queen.

The official dinner was attended by some Royal family members, ministers, undersecretaries and advisors.

Meanwhile, Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed Al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman hosted a dinner for the Spouse of the Angolan President, in the presence of some female invitees from both sides. -ONA



BILATERAL RELATIONS

Omani-Angolan joint meeting explores bilateral cooperation



MUSCAT: A joint meeting was held in Muscat on Thursday between a number of Omani ministers and undersecretaries with their Angolan counterparts to explore bilateral cooperation in various areas of mutual interest and develop relations, within the

framework of the current official visit of President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angoloto the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of cooperation in different economic and trade spheres, and discussed



means of facilitating joint investments. They stressed the importance of boosting strategic partnerships to achieve joint interests and enhance integration.

José de Lima Massano, Minister of State for Economic Coordination of the Republic of Angola told

Oman News Agency (ONA) that the meeting aimed to promote relations in various fields, such as the financial sector, industry, fisheries, logistics and food security. He pointed out that the two sides encourage businesspeople to seize the available opportunities in the



two countries.

On his turn, Tête António, Minister of External Relations of the Republic of Angola affirmed that the visit of the President of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman would push the bilateral relations towards wider horizons.

He underlined his country's keenness to promote joint cooperation and develop strategic relations in various fields, such as energy and minerals. He explained that there are many opportunities that can be utilized by both sides. -ONA

WARM WELCOME

President of Angola and his spouse visit National Museum

MUSCAT: President João Lourenço of the Republic of Angola, his spouse and their accompanying delegation on Thursday visited the National Museum, within the context of the current visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The President and the accompanying delegation were received by Jamal Hassan Al Mosawi, Secretary General of the National Museum and some official of the museum.

During the visit, President Lourenço and his delegation toured the Museum and its Galleries, receiving a detailed overview of its collections, showcasing significant aspects of Omani history and civilisation.

While touring the Maritime History Gallery, the guest viewed models of Portuguese ships and artefacts recovered from a ship wreckage of Vasco da Gama's fleet and reviewed the publication on the Omani Navigator Ahmad bin Majid as-Sa'adi.

The book reveals a description of 'Angola' in one of its sections. The description includes indications that the Omanis may have reached 'Angola' before the Portuguese.

In the Prehistory and Ancient History Gallery, the guest took note of major historical time periods Oman has experienced, including the emergence of the copper-rich "Majan" civilisation during the Bronze Age in the 4th millennium BCE. He also explored the Omani UNESCO World Heritage sites of Bat, al-Khutim, and al-Ayn, that are considered some of the most inclusive settlements from the 3rd millennium BCE. Additionally, President of Angola was



introduced to the international frankincense trade that flourished from the 3rd millennium BCE and the four archaeological sites associated with it and listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

In Oman and the World Gallery, he explored artefacts reflecting Oman's historical contributions to East Africa. He also toured the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said Corner in the Renaissance Gallery, where he viewed the original Letter No. 1 addressed by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said to the esteemed members of the Royal Family Council through the Defence Council, alongside several other Royal artefacts.

President Lourenço continued the tour and visited the Cinema where he watched a video about the National Museum, its significance, and the treasures of Oman's history it houses.

At the end of the visit, President João Lourenço recorded a letter in the Museum's VIP registry, expressing his admiration for the artefacts and the testimonies of historical relations between Oman and East Africa.

Jamal Hassan Al Mosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, presented a museum publication to the esteemed guest. The President and his spouse were accompanied during their visit to the National Museum by Dr. Said Mohammed Al Saqri, Minister of Economy (Head of the Mission of Honour), Dr. Rahma Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation along and several members of the mission of honour. - ONA

AT THE ROYAL AIRPORT

President of Angola concludes his official 3-day visit to Oman



MUSCAT: President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola and his spouse concluded the official three-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Angolan President left Oman yesterday as he was seen off at the Royal Airport by Sayyid Khalid Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court.

He was also seen off by Abdul-salam Mohammed Al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Dr. Rahma Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Dr. Said Mohammed Al Saqri, Minister of Economy (Head of the Mission of Honour) and Dr. Frederico Cardoso, non-resident Ambassador of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the visit, the Angolan President was accompanied by an official delegation that comprised José de Lima Massano, Minister of State for Economic Coordination, Tête António, Minister of External Relations, Vera Esperança dos Santos, Minister of Finance, Diamantino Pedro Azevedo, Minister of Mineral Resources, Oil and Gas, Mário Augusto da Silva Oliveira, Minister of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Social Communication, Edeltrudes Costa Lourenço, Chief of Staff at the Presidency and the Angolan non-resident Ambassador to Oman. -ONA

US withdraws \$10m reward for Syrian leader’s capture

The decision came after discussions in Damascus, marking the first visit by US officials to Syria since President Bashar Al-Assad was ousted

WASHINGTON: US diplomat Barbara Leaf revealed that the United States has announced the withdrawal of a USD 10 million reward for the capture of Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria's new leader and head of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group, Al Jazeera reported.

The decision came after discussions in Damascus, marking the first visit by US officials to Syria since President Bashar al-Assad was ousted earlier this month.

Leaf, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, revealed the development following a meeting with al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammed al-Julani, and other officials in Syria's



transitional administration.

Leaf stated that the US received “positive messages” during the talks, including assurances that HTS would prevent any “terrorist” threats. “Based on our discussion, I told him we would not be pursuing the Rewards for Justice reward offer that has been in effect for some years,” Leaf said.

The discussions in Damascus highlight a significant shift in US diplomatic efforts toward Syria. HTS, which led the offensive that removed Assad from power, was designated a “terrorist” organisation by the US in 2018 due to its ties with al-Qaeda.

However, Leaf emphasised the importance of inclusion during Syria's transitional period, saying, “We fully support a Syrian-led

and Syrian-owned political process that results in an inclusive and representative government which respects the rights of all Syrians, including women, and Syria's diverse ethnic and religious communities.”

While the US has not lifted HTS's designation as a terrorist group, the talks suggest a cautious approach to fostering stability in the region.

The designation imposes sanctions but does not restrict US officials from engaging in dialogue, reported Al Jazeera.

Al Jazeera's Rosiland Jordan highlighted that the decision to drop the reward is not a direct exchange but aims to facilitate discussions that could lead to a “productive, safe, and secure Syria.”

Efforts to resolve cases of missing Americans were also a focus of the talks. Journalist Austin Tice, who disappeared near Damascus in 2012, remains a central concern for US officials.

HTS has reportedly expressed willingness to assist in locating Tice, reaffirming their commitment during the dialogue.

“Again, not a quid pro quo, but a chance for the Americans and the Syrians to really talk about how they can work together in the weeks and months ahead,” Jordan added.

Simultaneously, the US military continues its operations in Syria, targeting remnants of ISIL (ISIS). On Friday, the US conducted an airstrike in Deir ez-Zor, killing an ISIL leader, Abu Yusuf, also known as Mahmud. **-ANI**

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GREEK BOAT DISASTER

Pakistan PM orders action against officials involved in trafficking

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ordered strict action against officials of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) implicated in facilitating human traffickers, following the tragic Greek boat disaster that left at least five Pakistani nationals dead, The Express Tribune reported.

During a meeting on Friday in Islamabad, PM Sharif instructed the relevant authorities to expedite investigations into the growing issue of human trafficking and emphasised the urgency of addressing such incidents.

“Such incidents tarnish Pakistan's global image and must be dealt with swiftly and effectively,” he remarked. The Prime Minister's directives come after the latest tragedy, in which a boat capsized near Greece, resulting in Pakistani casualties.

The PM expressed concern over the delay in addressing last year's similar boat capsizing incident. “The delay in taking action against those responsible for last year's boat capsizing incident is concerning,” he said, adding, “We cannot allow this to continue, as these tragedies only harm our country's reputation.”

The meeting was updated on preventive measures taken to



combat human trafficking, alongside new developments regarding the recent boat disaster near the Greek island of Gavdos.

The Pakistani mission in Greece confirmed that five Pakistanis had died in the incident, though they stated they had no concrete information about the exact number of missing persons, reported The Express Tribune.

An official from the Pakistan mission updated the media, saying, “So far, we have identified five dead Pakistanis and rescued 47 others. There is no concrete information about missing persons at this stage, and this is the final information available.”

On Thursday, the FIA registered cases against three traffickers and arrested two of its own officers for negligence. **-ANI**

BOTH HOUSES

US avoids shutdown with last-minute funding bill

WASHINGTON DC: Both houses of US Congress passed a three-month funding bill that will avert a government shutdown that would have disrupted everything from law enforcement to national parks.

The Democratic-controlled Senate, in an 85-11 vote, passed the bill to continue funding the US government 38 minutes after it

lapsed at midnight local time).

Earlier, with a 366-34 vote, the House approved the last-minute plan from House Speaker Mike Johnson that will now keep federal operations and disaster aid temporarily funded.

The passing provided immediate relief for about 800,000 federal workers who were at risk of being

sent home for the Christmas holidays without pay.

Johnson had said Congress would “meet our obligations” and not allow federal operations to cease ahead of the winter holidays.

Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told the Senate that it was “good news that the bipartisan approach in the end

prevailed ... It's a good outcome for America and the American people.” The late-night vote followed a frantic week that saw President-elect Donald Trump and tech billionaire Elon Musk — who is set to be Trump's efficiency czar — defeat an initial bipartisan deal, which threw Congress into disarray. **-DW**

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ROCKET ATTACKS

Missile fired from Yemen hits Tel Aviv, 16 people injured



TEL AVIV: Israeli emergency services said on Saturday that 16 people were injured when a rocket fired from Yemen hit Tel Aviv overnight. An attempt to intercept the rocket had failed, according to the Israeli military.

Yemen's Houthi rebels later claimed responsibility for the strike, their second such attack in a matter of days. They said it was carried out with a ballistic missile and targeted “a military target of the Israeli enemy.”

The Israeli rescue service Magen David Adom reported that 16 people suffered minor injuries from broken glass windows and were receiving medical treatment.

The Houthis have launched repeated rocket attacks on Israel in solidarity with Palestinians since the Gaza war began over a year ago, most of which have been intercepted.

Saturday's strike came just two days after the Houthi rebels fired a missile at Israel that damaged a school. In return, Israel bombed ports in Yemen and the country's capital, Sanaa.

According to the Times of Israel newspaper, the Houthis have fired about 200 rockets and 170 drones at Israel in the past 12 months. The Houthis have also attacked ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Soon after retaliating for Thursday's attack, Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned the Houthis of severe repercussions.

“After Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis are almost the last remaining arm of Iran's axis of evil,” he said in a statement.

“The Houthis are learning and will learn the hard way, that those who strike Israel will pay a very heavy price for it.”

Over two million people remain trapped in Gaza

Louise Wateridge, Emergency Officer for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza, stated on Friday that more than two million people remain trapped in dire conditions in Gaza, deprived of their basic needs.

Wateridge emphasised that residents are unable to flee, describing the situation as one where every possible route leads to death.

UNRWA reported that worsening weather conditions in recent days are expected to continue. Despite this, the agency has been forced to prioritise food over shelter assistance.

Supplies intended for Gaza have been held outside the region for six months, leaving UNRWA to make difficult choices between feeding people or providing them with shelter.

Meanwhile, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) expressed deep concern over the ongoing impact of the crisis on children in Gaza.

Rosalia Bolin, UNICEF's Chief Communications Officer in Gaza, stated that the war on children serves as a stark reminder of the global responsibility to end their suffering.

Bolin highlighted that a generation of children is bearing the brunt of severe violations of their rights and the destruction of their future.

Bolin described Gaza as one of the most heart-wrenching places for humanitarian workers, where every effort to save a child's life is overshadowed by relentless devastation.

For over 14 months, children have lived on the brink of disaster, with reports of over 14,500 children killed and thousands more injured.

UNICEF also warned of the worsening situation as winter sets in. Children in Gaza are enduring cold and damp conditions, many still dressed in summer clothes and walking barefoot. Bolin added that children are scavenging through rubble for plastic to burn for warmth, while diseases are spreading across the region due to the lack of health-care services and ongoing attacks on hospitals. **-Agencies**

Magdeburg Christmas market car-ramming death toll rises to 4

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will visit Magdeburg on Saturday after a car drove into a crowd of people at a Christmas Market



BERLIN: Four people are now known to have been killed in the Magdeburg attack, according to reports in the Bild newspaper, as well as by public broadcasters WDR and NDR, citing the police. The mass-circulation Bild said 41 were gravely injured in the car ramming, while 86 people were being treated in hospital for serious injuries. WDR and NDR cited security

officials as saying 200 people were injured in Friday night's attack, more than double earlier estimates of about 60 people. Local officials had said Friday that the initial death toll of two was likely to rise. **What do we know about Magdeburg attack suspect?** The suspect in Friday's car ramming is a 50-year-old Saudi na-

tional, who has been in Germany for 18 years. Officials said the man had permanent residency in Germany and was practicing medicine. Several German media outlets identified the man and reported that he was a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy and was practicing in Bernburg, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Magdeburg. Describing himself as a former Muslim, the alleged perpetrator shared dozens of tweets and retweets daily focusing on anti-Islam themes. He often criticized the religion and congratulated Muslims who left the faith. He also accused German authorities of failing to do enough to combat what he said was the "Islamism of Europe."

He has also voiced support for the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, Der Spiegel magazine reported. Recently, he repeatedly claimed on social media that German authorities had been targeting Saudi asylum-seekers and sought "to destroy our anti-Islam activism." **Saxony-Anhalt orders flags to be flown at half-mast** The German state of Saxony-Anhalt, of which Magdeburg is the capital, has ordered flags to be flown at half-mast at all official buildings following Friday night's deadly attack. Public buildings in the city, including cultural institutions such as theaters and museums, are to remain closed for the "coming days," according to authorities. Magdeburg said it would create a place of vigil near the Johanniskirche (St. John's Church) for the public to lay flowers and pay their respects to the victims. A memorial service will be held in Magdeburg Cathedral on Saturday evening. **Berlin increases police presence at Christmas markets** The Berlin state government has ordered tighter security at Christmas markets in the German capital following the deadly attack on a festive gathering in Magdeburg. Berlin Interior Minister Iris Sprange announced the decision, saying authorities were in close contact to discuss stepping up their presence in the city. "My sincere sympathy goes out to the victims and their families at this difficult time," Sprange said. Magdeburg is approximately a two-hour drive from Berlin. Friday night's atrocity came almost eight years to the day since an Islamist terror attack on a Christmas market in Berlin. Authorities have not commented on a possible connection between the two attacks. On December 19, 2016, a man drove a truck into a crowd at Breitscheidplatz, killing 13 people. More than 70 people were injured, some of them seriously. -DW

RAJASTHAN

Death toll in Jaipur tanker truck collision rises to 14, confirms DCP

JAIPUR: The death toll in the tanker truck collision on Bhankrota Ajmer Road in Jaipur on Saturday rose to 14, as confirmed by DCP West Jaipur, Amit Kumar. The Friday accident, which resulted in a massive fire, involved a truck loaded with chemicals colliding with a tanker carrying LPG and other vehicles. Prior to DCP Kumar's confirmation, Dr Deepak Maheshwari, the Principal of SMS Medical College, told ANI in the early hours that 13 people had lost their lives in the accident so far. Meanwhile, on Friday, Dr Sushil Kumar Bhati, Superintendent of SMS Hospital, provided further details, confirming that seven people had died and 10 to 12 others had been injured. He noted that over 60 percent of the victims sustained burns, with around 28 patients admitted to the hospital, six of whom are on ventilators. Earlier, Kumar described the incident as "horrific," explaining, "The accident and subsequent fire occurred in the Bhankrota area of Jaipur early today on the main Ajmer Road. Nearly two dozen vehicles caught fire, and many trucks



and trolleys were reduced to ashes. The accident took place near a petrol pump." He added, "The fire started due to a collision involving several vehicles one after the other. Efforts are being made to extinguish the fire." **PM Modi condoles deaths of victims of Jaipur** Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered condolences to the families of the victims of the Jaipur fire incident, resulting in the death of at least seven people. The PM also announced an ex-gratia of Rs2 lakh for the families of the deceased as well as Rs50,000 for those injured in the incident. Prime Minister's Office in a post on social media platform X, "Deeply saddened by the loss of lives in the accident on Jaipur-Ajmer highway in Rajasthan. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon. The local administration is assisting those affected" "An ex-gratia of Rs. 2 lakh from PMNRF will be given to the

next of kin of each deceased. The injured would be given Rs. 50,000," the post added. On Friday morning, a truck loaded with chemicals collided with a tanker carrying LPG and other vehicles on the Jaipur-Ajmer route, resulting in a massive fire in Jaipur. Following the incident, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma visited the site of the Bhankrota fire and announced the establishment of a helpline, along with necessary arrangements to provide treatment to those injured. Amit Kumar, Superintendent of Police (SP), told ANI, "A horrific accident and fire occurred in the Bhankrota area of Jaipur. The accident happened early today on the main Ajmer Road. Nearly two dozen vehicles caught fire, and many trucks and trolleys were burnt to ashes. The accident took place near a petrol pump in the Bhankrota area." He further stated, "The fire started due to a collision involving several vehicles one after the other. Efforts are being made to extinguish the fire." -ANI

CONDOLENCES

World leaders condemn Christmas market car attack

LONDON : World leaders have expressed shock over the car attack in the German city of Magdeburg on Friday, offering condolences to the families of the victims and wishing a speedy recovery to the injured. At least two people were killed and dozens injured in the attack at a Christmas market, CNN reported. The incident occurred when a car deliberately rammed into a crowd of people at the market, causing multiple fatalities and injuries. According to local public broadcaster MDR, Saxony-Anhalt Prime Minister Reiner Haseloff confirmed that the victims included an adult and a toddler. Haseloff also stated that the suspect, a Saudi national who has been residing in Germany since 2006 and worked as a doctor, was responsible for the attack, DW reported. The incident left 68 people injured, including 15 with serious injuries, 37 with moderate injuries, and 16 with minor injuries. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed horror over the incident, offering support to Germany. In a post on X, he said, "I am horrified by the atrocious attack in Magdeburg tonight. My thoughts are with the victims, their families, and all those affected. We stand with the people of Germany." French President Emmanuel Macron also conveyed his solidarity with Germany. Macron on X wrote, "Deeply shocked by the horror that struck the Magdeburg Christmas market in Germany this evening. My thoughts are with the victims, the injured, and their loved ones. France shares the pain of the German people and expresses its full solidarity." Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni condemned the attack, stating, "I am deeply shocked by the brutal attack on the defenseless crowd at the Christmas market in Magdeburg. I stand with the entire government, the families of the victims, the injured and all the German people. Violence must have no place in our democracies." European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen offered condolences to the families and friends of the victims. -ANI

KNIFE ATTACK

Girl dead, others wounded in Croatia stabbing incident



ZAGREB : A knife attack at an elementary school in Zagreb, Croatia, has resulted in the death of a seven-year-old girl and left eight others injured, including a teacher who is now in critical condition, CNN reported. The attacker, a 19-year-old believed to be a former student of Precko Elementary School, entered a first-grade classroom early Friday morning and began his assault with a knife. The attack left a teacher with life-threatening injuries, and the injured students are being treated in hospitals across the city. Authorities confirmed that the teacher's condition remains critical. "The attacker is under police custody. The injured persons are receiving medical treatment," Zagreb police said, as per CNN. Witnesses described chaotic scenes as emergency services arrived at the school. Helicopters were used to transport the wounded to various hospitals. Among the five injured students, three are said to have sustained non-critical injuries. Croatian Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic praised the quick response from police, who subdued the attacker just 10 minutes after the assault began, reported CNN. The attacker's mother spoke to Croatian media, revealing that her son had been emotionally unstable for years and had been admitted to a psychiatric ward multiple times. "I begged the doctor not to discharge him because he is not fit to be out," she said. The attacker, who

reportedly lived near the school, had graduated from it five years prior. The Croatian government has expressed its horror over the incident. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic condemned the tragedy, calling the nation "appalled" by the attack. He also announced a national day of mourning for the victims. Meanwhile, Health Minister Irena Hristic is set to visit the hospitals where the injured are being treated, CNN reported. School attacks are rare in Croatia and the broader Balkan region, but the incident comes on the heels of recent tragedies in neighboring Serbia, including two mass shootings targeting schools in Belgrade last year. -DW

OHCHR

782 dead in Sudan's El Fasher siege, more than 1,143 injured

GENEVA : The ongoing siege and hostilities in El Fasher, the capital of Sudan's North Darfur State, have left at least 782 civilians dead and more than 1,143 injured, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a report published on Friday. -ANI



SOUTHEASTERN BRAZIL

22 dead in road crash

RIO DE JANEIRO: At least 22 people were killed in a road accident in southeastern Brazil on Saturday, said the fire department. The accident occurred early morning in the municipality of Teofilo Otoni in Brazil's state of Minas Gerais. The driver lost control of a bus after its tire burst, and the bus collided head-on with a truck coming from the opposite direction, according to the authorities. Moments later, a car traveling behind the bus crashed into it. The collision sparked a fire that engulfed the bus, firefighters said. -Xinhua



INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT

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TENDER NOTICE

REF: ISM/ADMIN/TENDER/2024-25/004

Sealed tenders are invited from potential service providers / contractors for the following requirements of the school.

1. Modification and Maintenance of Electrical Panels with new feeder line
2. Supply and Installation of WiFi Access Points (141 Nos.)
3. Supply and Installation of Desktop Computers (All-in-One: 190 Nos.)
4. Supply and Installation of Interactive Smart Display Boards (25 Nos.)
5. Supply, Installation, and Configuring of Firewall Solution
6. Yearly contract for the supply of Stationeries, Memento/Trophies/Medals, Printer Toners and Printing of Banner/Certificates/Exam Answer books etc.
7. Supply & Installation of Automatic Polycarbonate Rolling Shutter for NMPP LED Screens (Two Nos.)
8. Supply of Office/Visiting/Guest Chairs for various purposes in the School

Interested parties shall collect the tender documents from the school cash counter against the payment of RO.10/- as a non-refundable tender fee from 22nd December to 30th December 2024 during the working days (Sunday to Thursday) of the school between 8.00 a.m. and 12.30 p.m.

The completed tender shall be dropped in the Tender Box kept in the school office before the due date. The tender should be in a sealed envelope, addressed to The Chairman, Purchase Sub Committee, Indian School Muscat, P.O. Box: 2470, PC: 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

Note: Respective tenders shall clearly mention the "name of service quoted for" by the bidding party.
Any tender without the name of service/supply will be considered disqualified.

Last date of tender submission: 09th January 2025

Oman, Kuwait share honours

Issam Al Sabhi equalised after the hosts took the lead in the opening Group A game of the 26th Gulf Cup football tournament in Kuwait

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman and hosts Kuwait played out a 1-1 draw in their Group A clash as the 26th Gulf Cup kicked off with an exciting but evenly matched opener at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium on Saturday night.

Both teams had their moments to seize victory, but a combination of resolute defending and wasteful finishing saw them settle for a point apiece.

Kuwait drew first blood in the 34th minute when Yousef Al Sulaiman leapt above Oman's defender and captain Mohammed Al Musalami to deliver a towering and powerful header that beat goalkeeper Ibrahim Al Mukhaini. The stadium erupted in celebra-



tion as the hosts seemed poised to take control of the match.

Oman, however, responded just before halftime. In the 43rd minute, Issam Al Sabhi capitalised on a deft pass from Jameel Al Yahmadi, slotting the ball home with a clinical finish to level the scores and quiet the home crowd.

The second half saw opportunities for both sides to snatch a win, but poor finishing proved costly. Oman's best chance came in the 74th minute when a cross from the right flank found Motaz Abdraboh

and Abdul Al Mushaifri miss the golden opportunity to tap the ball in, letting Kuwait off the hook.

Kuwait, too, had their moments, but Ibrahim Al Mukhaini stood tall in Oman's goal, making crucial saves to deny the hosts a late winner. The game ended with both teams sharing the spoils, a fair reflection of the contest.

The Gulf Cup holds special significance for Oman in Kuwait, who last lifted the trophy during the 23rd edition in Kuwait in 2017-18 under the late Dutch coach Pim

Verbeek. That title marked their second title, following their maiden triumph in 2009 in Muscat.

Oman, under coach Rashid Jaber, now turn their focus to their remaining Group A fixtures against Qatar (December 24) and the UAE (December 27). With every point vital in a competitive group, Oman will look to sharpen their finishing and build on their opening performance. Group B features Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Yemen, promising more high-stakes action.



T20 GULF CUP

Oman's title defence ends as Kuwait set up T20 Gulf Cup final clash with UAE

MUSCAT: Defending champions Oman exited the T20 Gulf Cup Cricket Championship after a three-wicket loss to Kuwait in the final league match at the ICC Academy in Dubai, UAE, on Friday.

The victory propelled Kuwait into Saturday's final against hosts UAE, who topped the league standings with four wins and eight points. Kuwait's progression to the final was sealed by a superior Net Run Rate (NRR) over Saudi Arabia after both teams finished the league stage with six points from three wins. Kuwait's NRR of +0.525 was significantly better than Saudi Arabia's -0.166, confirming their spot in the title decider.

Oman, led by coach Duleep

Mendis, entered the tournament with a revamped squad. Despite flashes of brilliance, they struggled to find consistency, suffering close defeats to Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait, which ended their title defence.

In their final game on Friday, Oman batted first and posted a competitive total of 143/8 in 20 overs. Wicketkeeper-batter Vinayak Shukla stood out with a commanding unbeaten 52 off 29 balls, hitting three boundaries and as many sixes to provide a late surge. Skipper Jatinder Singh contributed a steady 27 off 25 balls at the top, while opener Karan Sonavale added 20 off 26 deliveries.

However, a mid-innings col-



lapse, triggered by disciplined bowling, restricted Oman from reaching a more imposing total. From 50/1 in ninth over, Oman slipped to 88/6 in 15 overs. But



Shukla stayed unbeaten to help Oman reach a challenging total.

Kuwait's bowlers delivered a well-rounded performance, as Meet Bhavsar picked 2 wickets for

22 runs and Adnan Idrees claimed 2 for 13 in his two overs. Mohammed Aslam and Yasin Patel kept things tight, ensuring Oman's batters struggled to find rhythm.

Chasing 144, Kuwait relied on a match-winning innings from Meet Bhavsar, who showcased his class with a fluent 63 off 46 balls, studded with eight fours and a six. Kuwait's chase got off to disappointing start as they were reduced to 11/2 in two overs.

However, Bhavsar shared a 47-run third wicket stand with Adnan Idrees (17) and then stitched a strong 74-run fourth-wicket partnership with Muhammad Umar, who added a vital 36 off 30 balls with three towering sixes, to steer Kuwait towards the target as they

reached 137/4 in 18 overs.

Couple of runouts in the death overs did cause a concern but Kuwait skipper Mohammed Aslam slammed a boundary to lead his team to win with three balls to spare.

Oman's bowlers Jay Odedra and Shakeel Ahmed, claimed two wickets each while conceding just 15 and 28 runs respectively. However, the target proved achievable as Kuwait sealed the game with three balls to spare, finishing at 144/7.

Brief scores: Oman 143/8 in 20 overs (Vinayak Shukla 52*, Jatinder Singh 27; Meet Bhavsar 2/22, Adnan Idrees 2/13) lost to Kuwait 144/7 in 19.3 overs (Meet Bhavsar 63, Muhammad Umar 36; Jay Odedra 2/15, Shakeel Ahmed 2/28).

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INDIA TO SPEND \$8TRILLION

NEW DELHI: India is poised to spend a massive \$8 trillion on investments over the next five years, says a report by Motilal Oswal. The report highlighted that the country is set to witness a significant resurgence investment landscape, which is regaining momentum after a prolonged period of stagnation. > **B2**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE

SOHAR PORT AND FREEZONE

SOHAR Port and Freezone has successfully completed the transportation of 69 oversized shipment units for United Solar Polysilicon (FZC) SPC, a global leader in green energy. In collaboration with C. Steinweg Oman this complex operation, which spanned 90 days, involved moving cargo that included units weighing up to 500 tonnes and measuring as long as 103 metres. > **B2**



COMPLEX OPERATION



Positive economic forecasts expected for GCC countries

MUSCAT: The forecasts of the GCC Statistical Centre (GCC-Stat) indicate that the gross domestic product (GDP) of the GCC countries constant prices will grow by 3.7% in the current year 2024.

The centre expects growth to continue at a higher pace in 2025 to reach 4.5%, then it will stabilise at a rate of 3.5% in 2026.

The GCC-Stat forecasts that this expected growth for the years 2024, 2025 and 2026 is attributed to the increase in oil production in the GCC countries, especially in light of the fact that the Opec+ alliance is gradually liberalising production quotas since the second half of this year 2024.

The growth will continue in particular with the development of new gas fields in the region, in addition to the accelerated pace of economic recovery in sectors related to transportation, tourism and infrastructure projects supported by expansionary policies at the level of public finance.

The initial forecasts issued by the GCC-Stat also indicated an improved growth in the non-oil sector in the GCC Countries to register a growth rate of 4.5% during the current year 2024, while maintaining this growth rate with an increase of 3.3% and 4.1% in 2025 and 2026 respectively.

This growth will be driven by an accelerated increase in private sector activities, especially in the tourism, transportation, storage and retail sectors. In addition, infrastructure projects in the GCC countries will contribute to enhancing growth in related sectors and stimulating growth in the private sector.

The forecasts also emphasize that the GCC countries' continued implementation of economic

diversification strategies during the years 2024 - 2026 will lead to significant growth in key sectors, most notably renewable energy, technology, innovation, and manufacturing industries.

The GCC-Stat demonstrated that the GDP at constant prices of the GCC countries during the year 2023 amounted to 1,691.8 billion US dollars to log a growth of 0.5% compared to the year 2022, as the added value of the non-oil sector witnessed a growth of 3.3% in 2023.

The average per capita GDP at current prices in the GCC countries witnessed a decline of 5% in 2023 to reach \$36,700 compared to \$38,600 registered in 2022.

The GCC countries' GDP at current prices contributed to 2% of the global GDP, which amounted to \$105.4 trillion in 2023. It accounted for 60.5% of the total Arab GDP, which amounted to \$3.5 trillion.

On the other hand, the GCC-Stat's forecasts that inflation rates in the GCC countries will stabilize at 2.4%, 2.6% and 2.1% during the period of 2024 - 2026.

The risks that may increase inflationary pressures are represented by consumer prices, the rise in prices of raw materials imported from outside the GCC countries, the increase in consumption rates and public spending in all GCC countries due to the increase in employment rates, the rise in wages and the improvement in household income.

Additionally, the monetary policies in the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Japan in keeping interest rates to curb inflationary pressures will contribute to the stabilisation of inflation rates in the GCC countries. — **ONA**

Total deposits at Oman's commercial banks rise by 10.4%

Credit granted to the private sector increased by 1.8 percent to reach OMR20.7 billion by end of October 2024

MUSCAT: The total credit granted by Oman's conventional commercial banks increased by 2.7 percent by the end of October 2024.

Credit granted to the private sector increased by 1.8 percent to reach OMR20.7 billion by the end of October 2024.

Total investments of traditional commercial banks in securities witnessed a 29.7 percent increase to reach about OMR6.1 billion by the end of last October.

Investment in government development bonds (GDs) decreased by 0.7 percent compared



to the same period last year, reaching OMR1.9 billion.

As for the investments of these banks in foreign securities, they increased by 75.1 percent to reach OMR2.5 billion by the end of October 2024.

On the liabilities side, total deposits with conventional com-

mercial banks increased by 10.4 percent to reach OMR25.4 billion by the end of October 2024.

Within this total, government deposits with commercial banks also increased by 1.8 percent to reach about OMR5.3 billion, while deposits of public sector institutions increased by 50.1 percent to

reach about OMR2.8 billion during the same period.

Private sector deposits increased by 5.3 percent to reach OMR16 billion in October 2024, constituting 63.2 percent of total deposits in conventional commercial banks.

— **ONA**

'THE BEST LOCAL VENDOR - 2024'

Talent Electric Services honoured by Nama Electricity Distribution Company

MUSCAT: Talent Electric Services LLC (TES) added yet another feather to its cap by bagging the award for "The Best Local Vendor - 2024" from Nama Electricity Distribution Company (NAMA) at a recently held event hosted by NAMA for its partners in line with their vision to get together to 'collaborate, connect and create' a brighter future.

Being one of the leading manufacturers of low and medium voltage electrical panels catering to several prestigious, commercial and infrastructural projects in Oman, TES has been pushing the boundaries over the years and setting new benchmarks in the field of switchgear solutions.



"It is extremely humbling and gratifying to see the collective efforts of our talented and dedicated team get this highly valuable recognition from NAMA. This will certainly serve as a motivational boost to stretch even harder to live up to the expectation stand-

ards of NAMA in terms of quality, service and innovation in the days ahead," said K.Rajkumar, MD of TES on receiving this award.

WEEKLY MARKET REPORT

Muscat Stock Exchange records improvement in its performance

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded an improvement in its performance last week, with the prices of 31 securities rising, compared to 19 securities whose prices declined and 26 securities that maintained their previous levels.

However, these increases were not reflected in the MSX indices, which were affected by the decline in the shares of a number of leading companies such as banks, telecommunications companies, services and industrial companies.

The gains recorded during the week included shares of Majan Glass, Muscat Gases, Oman Oil Marketing Company, Sharqiya Desalination Company, Oman United Insurance, Gulf International Chemicals, Oman Flour Mills, in addition to a number of other companies.

The recorded increases led to the total market capitalisation of securities listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange rising by the end of last week to OMR27.32 billion, recording weekly gains of OMR17.2 million.

The market value also benefited from the listing of OQ Basic Industries Company on the parallel market after the subscription of 49 percent of the company's capital, which was offered for public subscription at a price of 111 baisas per share, was completed.

The company's capital amounts to approximately OMR138.4 million, divided into 3.4 billion shares, and the company's market value



at the end of the week's trading amounted to OMR384 million.

Trading data issued by the Muscat Stock Exchange showed investors' interest in OQ Basic Industries shares last week, which witnessed trading worth OMR16.5 million, accounting for about 57 percent of the total trading value. The shares witnessed 6,535 transactions and closed at 111 baisas, unchanged from the subscription price, despite its decline during the week to 100 baisas.

These transactions pushed the trading value on the Muscat Stock Exchange to rise during the week to OMR29 million compared to OMR17.7 million Omani riyals in the previous week. The number of transactions executed during the week recorded an increase of about 100 percent from 5,613 transactions to 11,223 transactions.

OQ Exploration and Production stock came in second place among the most traded companies in terms of trading value, after witnessing trading worth OMR6.1 million, representing 21 percent of

the total trading value, while Bank Muscat stock came in third place with trading worth OMR1.54 million, representing 3.6 percent of the total trading value.

The performance of the Muscat Stock Exchange indices was negative, with the exception of the Sharia index, which recorded a slight increase of less than one point and closed at 413 points, while the main index fell by 37 points and closed at 4,508 points, the financial sector index fell by 44 points, the industrial sector index lost 52 points, and the services sector index recorded a decline of one point.

In corporate news, Bank Dhofar announced that it has obtained preliminary approval from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) to acquire the banking business of Bank of Baroda, Oman branch, explaining that the preliminary approval specifies the procedures that both Bank Dhofar and Bank of Baroda must complete and confirm, adding that once these procedures are completed, the Central Bank of Oman will issue its final approval for the deal. — **ONA**

MSX declines amid Fed's less dovish stance

MUSCAT: The Omani stock market recorded another negative weekly performance of 0.82%, extending its downward trend to late-2023 levels and maintaining a muted performance for 2024, according to an analyst.

"Regional markets broadly declined this week, primarily influenced by the Federal Reserve's less dovish stance, which indicated only two rate cuts for the coming year versus the previously anticipated four," said Ahmed Negm, Head of Market Research MENA at XS.com.

This narrative triggered negative sentiment in US markets, with spillover effects across global exchanges. In response to the Fed's 25 basis point rate cut, the Omani central bank, along with other regional counterparts, implemented similar monetary policy adjustments.

"Market activity was notably influenced by the debut trading of OQ Basic Industries, which exhibited volatile price movements before settling on a neutral performance," he further added.

This listing significantly



boosted trading volumes and values, following the successful introduction of OQ Exploration. As the market approaches year-end, expectations for 2025 center on potential market catalysts, including planned IPOs that could enhance market depth and liquidity, alongside anticipated improvements in economic activity and oil price developments.

The Industrial sector led the decline with a 1% drop, characterised by broad-based weakness across major constituents.

The Financial sector retreated 0.59%, with Bank Dhofar experiencing the steepest decline by 7.06%, followed by Ominvest by 1.79% and Sohhar Interna-

tional Bank by 0.75%.

The Services sector showed some resilience with a marginal decline of 0.09%. While Oman Telecom by 0.75% and Barka Water and Power by 0.94% faced pressure, OQ Gas Networks by 1.55% and Renaissance Services by 1.88% provided positive momentum.

Against the backdrop of current market weakness across sectors, Fitch's positive outlook revision for Oman, underpinned by strengthening fiscal metrics and improved debt management, marks a significant milestone in the country's credit profile evolution. This rating action could catalyse positive market sentiment, as improved sovereign creditworthiness typically leads to lower risk premiums and funding costs across the corporate sector.

Particularly for banking stocks, which have shown recent weakness as evidenced by the sector's decline, the enhanced sovereign profile could translate into stronger fundamentals through improved funding conditions and better asset quality prospects.

MARKET

REPORT

India poised to spend \$8 trillion on investments in next five years

NEW DELHI: India is poised to spend a massive \$8 trillion on investments over the next five years, says a report by Motilal Oswal.

The report highlighted that the country is set to witness a significant resurgence investment landscape, which is regaining momentum after a prolonged period of stagnation.

It said “As the investment base grows, India is expected to spend another \$8 trillion in the next five years. India’s investment landscape is experiencing a resurgence after a period of stagnation.”

With the investment-to-GDP ratio recovering after a dip since 2011, the country’s economic revival is attributed to post-COVID recovery efforts and increased government spending.

It also noted that since independence, India has spent \$14 trillion on investments, with \$8 trillion being spent in the last decade alone. This steady growth underscores India’s growing economic potential and its appeal as an investment destination.

However, the report also mentioned that the country’s economy is currently navigating through moderated growth, with urban sectors facing slower investments and subdued consumption.

Despite these challenges, the services sector continues to provide stability and remains a key contributor to the economy.

It said “While these challenges have impacted overall GDP growth, the services sector continues to provide a stable foundation”

It also added that the rural consumption, on the other hand, is showing signs of recovery, driven by a healthy monsoon and improved agricultural growth. Positive indicators such as a surge in personal credit growth are adding to the optimism surrounding the rural economy. — **ANI**

OMAN ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION COMPANY

CFI launches ‘Trading Transparency+’ Programme to raise awareness and highlight trading realities

DUBAI: CFI Financial Group, the region’s leading online trading provider, proudly announces the launch of its pioneering program, “Trading Transparency+: Empowering Awareness and Clarity in Trading.” This initiative aims to tackle misinformation and market noise, helping individuals gain clarity on trading realities and access the resources they may need to determine whether trading aligns with their financial aspirations and circumstances.

With trading becoming increasingly accessible, individuals are often overwhelmed by a flood of information, unrealistic expectations, and confusion about the suitability of trading. Trading Transparency+ serves as a trusted guide, cutting through these complexities with transparency and knowledge. The program includes multiple components, with the “Trading Reality Check” as a standout feature—an engaging tool designed to help participants explore whether trading aligns with their goals and if they fully understand the realities and related risks of trading. Beyond this, Trading Transparency+ provides



a comprehensive suite of educational and awareness resources, including videos, seminars, webinars, and articles, to explain trading’s suitability, risks, and myths.

To explore the program further and access its comprehensive resources, visit: <https://cfi.trade/trading-transparency>

Empowering Knowledge, Promoting Responsibility

The Trading Transparency+ program is built on three core pillars:

1. Reality-Based Education: Offering seminars, webinars, articles, and videos that address trading myths, risks, and rewards with transparency and clarity.

2. Interactive Tools for Self-Reflection: Featuring the “Trading Reality Check,” a user-friendly tool that provides individuals with a personalized exploration of whether trading aligns with their goals and circumstances, and whether they have the facts right about the realities of trading.
3. Collaborative Partnerships: Engaging with governmental, regulatory, and educational institutions to provide credible, actionable insights that promote responsible trading practices.

“We recognise that the public is often exposed to wrong and sometimes even misleading information about trading and its reality,”

said CFI’s Co-Founder and Managing Director, Hisham Mansour. “Through Trading Transparency+, its pillars, and particularly the “Trading Reality Check,” and the different videos, articles, seminars, and webinars we will be arranging, we aim to empower individuals to understand whether trading aligns with their personal circumstances, goals, and risk tolerance or not, the difference between trading and investing, and much more. We also aim to raise awareness that sometimes, the right decision might be choosing not to trade or at least not to trade specific products. Our mission through this initiative is to bring clarity and confidence to every step of the financial journey.”

Through Trading Transparency+, CFI reaffirms its dedication to fostering clarity, education, and integrity—empowering individuals to make thoughtful and informed choices when it comes to trading and financial markets.

About CFI: CFI Financial Group is MENA’s leading online trading broker with over 25 years of experience, boasting the highest number of regulated entities

and regional offices, including key locations such as London, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Cape Town, Baku, Larnaca, Beirut, Amman, and Cairo. Specializing in online trading services across equities, currencies, and commodities, CFI offers highly competitive trading conditions, including zero-pip spreads and no commission fees. The company is a pioneer in AI-driven trading tools and applications. The group supports elite sports through partnerships with organisations like AC Milan and FIFA WASL.

It proudly names Seven-Time Formula One™ World Champion Sir Lewis Hamilton as their Global Brand Ambassador, reflecting a shared commitment to excellence and innovation.

The group is also partnered with the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), demonstrating its commitment to promoting local culture and fostering community engagement. The group actively participates in various Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the communities where it operates.

AT ANKARA GEMC MEETING

Financial Services Authority reviews Bayanat experience

MUSCAT: Ahmed Ali Al Maamari, Executive Vice President of the Financial Services Authority (FSA) reviewed the Sultanate of Oman’s experience in implementing supervisory technological solutions to regulate securities markets, shedding light on the electronic disclosure platform (Bayanat) and the processes it provides that contribute to advancing disclosure and regulation processes on the issuers of securities on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

This came on the sidelines of

the FSA’s participation by an official delegation in the meeting of the Growth and Emerging Markets Committee (GEMC) of the International Organisation of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) hosted by the Capital Market Board of Türkiye in Ankara, where Al Maamari, head of the delegation, participated in the discussion sessions that addressed topics related to supervisory technological solutions (SupTech) to develop emerging markets stressing the importance of utilising technology to enhance

supervisory efficiency in order to enhance the confidence of consumers in the markets and ensuring that the technological aspect is harnessed to protect investors with a focus on practical solutions appropriate for emerging markets with limited resources.

Al Maamari pointed out to the experience of the Sultanate of Oman in the implementation of technological solutions to develop the disclosure system through the electronic disclosure platform “Bayanat”, reviewing the features and advantages that the platform

offers in regulating the disclosure processes of financial data or material information, as it is considered an effective tool for analysing financial indicators based on the XBRL language to facilitate the reading of data in standard language to all stakeholders in the financial market, further to enabling them to delve deeper into digital data and perceive the latest developments, stressing the significance of continuing to adopt technological tools to enhance efficiency and ensure transparency.

The GEMC meeting discussed

developments in the regional and international stock markets and topics related to the development of the securities industry in light of the fintech revolution and the practical practices it is witnessing at the level of the committee’s member states. The meeting also dealt with discussions related to enhancing financial culture, financial inclusion and supporting financing for small and medium enterprises through capital markets in addition to regulating digital currency and crypto assets markets.

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COMPLEX OPERATION



Sohar Port and Freezone streamlines transportation of 69 oversized shipment units for United Solar project

MUSCAT: SOHAR Port and Freezone has successfully completed the transportation of 69 oversized shipment units for United Solar Polysilicon (FZC) SPC, a global leader in green energy. In collaboration with C. Steinweg Oman this complex operation, which spanned 90 days, involved moving cargo that included units weighing up to 500 tonnes and measuring as long as 103 metres.

The total project is part of United Solar’s ambitious \$1.6 billion polysilicon plant, set to produce 100,000 tonnes annually.

The oversized cargo travelled a distance of 14 km at a speed of just 1km/h, showcasing SOHAR’s role as a leading logistics hub connecting businesses to the world.

Ali Al Yamani, VP Technical, commented, “We are proud to have facilitated this complex transportation project for United Solar Polysilicon. This achievement underscores our specialised logistics capabilities

and our commitment to providing tailored solutions to meet the unique needs of our tenants. The readiness of the infrastructure between SOHAR Port and Freezone plays a crucial role in enabling efficient transport. Our robust facilities and dedicated team were vital in ensuring the safe and timely delivery of this critical shipment. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all stakeholders involved, whose collaboration and support have been integral to the success of this project.”

The operation faced significant logistical challenges, including navigating nine roundabouts, crossing over gas pipelines, and managing critical overhead power lines rated at 400KV, 220KV, and 132KV.

To accommodate the oversized shipment, the transport company constructed 3 kilometers of temporary roads and facilitated two crossings of the Al Batinah Highway, requiring complete traffic

stoppages. Throughout the operation, safety and coordination were prioritized, with a strong focus on securing crossings over underground utilities and overhead lines. All of these measures were implemented in close collaboration with the Royal Oman Police and Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, ensuring the operation was carried out smoothly and safely, adhering to the highest standards.

This oversized shipment, totaling 69 units, marks a significant milestone for United Solar Polysilicon’s polysilicon plant and reinforces SOHAR Port and Freezone’s position as a leading logistics hub capable of managing diverse and complex cargo requirements. By offering seamless connectivity and efficient services, SOHAR continues to support the growth of its tenants while contributing to Oman’s broader economic development.



LIFESTYLE

NASAL FUNGI LINKED TO ALLERGIC RHINITIS, ASTHMA: STUDY

Researchers identified stronger fungal connections in patients with both conditions, suggesting a potential role in the nasal immune environment

A GLOBAL team of researchers, including scientists from the University of Porto, has discovered that people with allergic rhinitis and asthma have different nasal fungal communities, or mycobiomes, compared to healthy individuals.

The study, published in *Frontiers in Microbiology*, analysed nasal swabs from 306 participants, including 214 patients with respiratory diseases and 125 healthy controls.

The findings revealed that patients with allergic rhinitis and asthma had richer and more diverse fungal mycobiomes, particularly dominated by the fungal families *Ascomycota* and *Basidiomycota*.

Researchers also identified stronger fungal connections in patients with both conditions, suggesting a potential role in the nasal immune environment.

Notably, three metabolic pathways linked to the production of AIR (5-aminoimidazole ribonucleotide), a DNA and RNA building block, were overabundant in the respiratory disease groups. This pathway, essential for energy metabolism and DNA synthesis, could be a future target for treatment or diagnosis if further studies confirm its significance.

Lead researcher Dr. Luis Delgado emphasized the need for longitudinal studies to track mycobiome changes over time and explore fungi's role in disease progression.

While the study provides a snapshot, it lays the groundwork for understanding nasal fungi's impact on allergic rhinitis and asthma, potentially informing new therapeutic strategies. - DNA

Ghazanfar’s magical spell powers Afghanistan to ODI series victory

Afghanistan have now won each of their bilateral ODI series against Zimbabwe baring the one in 2014, which was shared

HARARE: Afghanistan sealed a comprehensive eight-wicket victory over Zimbabwe in the third ODI at Harare Sports Club on Saturday, clinching the series 2-0 after the first game was washed out.

The win, driven by a stellar performance from 18-year-old off-spinner AM Ghazanfar, marked Afghanistan's sixth consecutive ODI series triumph over Zimbabwe.

Batting first after losing the toss, Zimbabwe crumbled to 127 all out in just 30.1 overs, despite a fighting 60 off 61 balls from Sean Williams. Ghazanfar led Afghanistan's bowl-



ing effort with figures of 5 for 33, his second five-wicket haul in just 11 ODIs. Rashid Khan provided ample support, claiming 3 for 38, as Zimbabwe's batting lineup fal-

tered against Afghanistan's spin duo. Zimbabwe's troubles began early, with the openers struggling to score freely. Fareed Ahmed and Azmatullah Omarzai kept the

pressure on, and Ghazanfar struck in the seventh over when Joylord Gumbie top-edged a sweep to short fine-leg. A contentious caught-behind decision ended Craig Ervine's

innings in the following over, while Ben Curran fell lbw to Ghazanfar despite replays suggesting the ball was sliding down leg.

Sean Williams and Sikandar

Raza attempted a recovery, but Raza's dismissal lbw to Rashid for 13 triggered a collapse. Zimbabwe lost five wickets for 29 runs, with Ghazanfar dismissing both Tadiwanashe Marumani and Wellington Masakadza in the same over with sharp carrom balls.

Williams fought valiantly, striking boundaries off Rashid and debutant Bilal Sami, even as wickets tumbled at the other end. He reached his 36th ODI fifty but eventually fell to a reverse sweep against Rashid, caught at slip. Zimbabwe's innings ended shortly after, their total reflecting a year where their team batting average hit a decade-low 14.22.

Chasing 128, Afghanistan began cautiously, scoring just 15 runs in the first six overs. Sediqullah Atal, fresh from a century in the previous match, accelerated with a 50-ball 52, supported by Abdul Malik's steady 29. Their opening stand of 83 ensured there were no jitters in the chase. After both fell, Hashmatullah Shahidi and Rahmat Shah comfortably guided Afghanistan home in just 23 overs.

Brief scores: Zimbabwe 127 in 30.1 overs (Williams 60; Ghazanfar 5-33, Rashid 3-38) lost to Afghanistan 131/2 in 23 overs (Atal 52; Gwandu 1-27). - Agencies

RED BULL TEAM

Hadjar gets final F1 seat for 2025

LONDON: Frenchman Isack Hadjar has been promoted to Red Bull's second team to race alongside Japanese Yuki Tsunoda during the 2025 Formula 1 season.

The announcement fills the final seat on the 20-car F1 grid.

Hadjar is a replacement at the team that will now be known as Racing Bulls for Liam Lawson, who has been switched to Red Bull after they dropped Sergio Perez, *BBC Sport* reported.

Hadjar, 20, finished second in Formula 2 last season to Brazilian Gabriel Bortoleto, who will be racing for Audi-owned Sauber in F1 next year.

Racing Bulls team principal Laurent Mekies said: "Isack's journey to F1 has been nothing short of outstanding. He has shown remarkable growth, with a series of impressive results in the junior single-seater ranks.

"He has the talent and drive necessary to compete at the high-



est level, and we have every confidence that he will adapt quickly and make a significant impact. I believe Isack and Yuki will make a great team."

Hadjar said: "The journey from karting through the ranks in single-seaters, to now being in F1 is the moment I've been working towards my whole life, it is the dream.

"I feel like I'm stepping into a whole new universe, driving a much faster car and racing with the best drivers in the world. It'll be a huge learning curve, but I'm ready to work hard and do the best I can for the team."

The announcement also effectively confirms a change in a way of referring to the team for next year.

Red Bull's second team raced as RB in 2024 but the Lawson and Hadjar announcements this week have both referred to them as Racing Bulls.

The initials RB were short for Racing Bulls, and were used because the company felt that the full team name including its title sponsor, a credit card company, was too wordy.

But the team's email addresses all used the name Racing Bulls this year, and now Red Bull has decided the original name will be used after all.

Racing Bulls chief executive officer Peter Bayer said last month: "The only question throughout the year was: 'What does RB mean, what does RB mean? Now we're making it official: RB means Racing Bulls."

The new name was reflected on the official FIA F1 2025 entry list, external which was published last week. - Agencies

BORDER-GAVASKAR TROPHY

Australia call-up teen Konstas for Boxing Day Test against India



MELBOURNE: Australia have dropped Nathan McSweeney and called up 19-year-old opener Sam Konstas to replace him for the final two Tests for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India. The Boxing Day Test in Melbourne starts on December 26 with the series tied at 1-1.

New South Wales' Konstas is in line to become Australia men's youngest Test batting debutant since Ian Craig in 1953.

McSweeney was preferred to Konstas at the start of the series but he managed only 72 runs across six innings at an average of 14.40.

Australia's chief selector George Bailey said Konstas' selection offers the chance to "throw something different" at India's bowling attack.

"I think Sam's method and style is different to Nathan's, should we go down that path," he said.

Earlier this season Konstas scored two centuries against South Australia in the Sheffield Shield, becoming the youngest player to do so since Ricky Ponting in 1993.

Should the right-hander be picked, he would become Australia's youngest Test debutant since current skipper Pat Cummins, who was 18 years and 193 days when he played against

South Africa in 2011.

Seamer Jhye Richardson, who last played a Test in the 2021-22 Ashes, has also been recalled with Josh Hazlewood out injured.

Fellow quick Sean Abbott and all-rounder Beau Webster, both uncapped at Test level, have been retained in the squad, having been called up previously in the series but not selected in the XI.

Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne, who, like McSweeney, have struggled at the top of the order, have retained their places in the squad.

Konstas made his debut for New South Wales in 2023, less than two months after his 18th birthday, but has played only 11 first-class matches.

Part of the Australia team that won the Under-19 World Cup earlier this year, his breakthrough came with the twin centuries against South Australia in October when he followed a first-innings 152 - his first first-class hundred - with 105 in the second innings.

Australia squad for final two Tests: Pat Cummins (captain), Travis Head, Steve Smith, Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Marsh, Jhye Richardson, Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster. - Agencies

ATHLETICS

World silver medallist Katir handed 4-year ban

LONDON: World 5,000m silver medallist Mohamed Katir on Friday received a four-year ban for tampering after he was found to have falsified travel documents submitted during an investigation into missed doping tests.

The 26-year-old Spaniard was suspended for two years by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) in February for missing three doping tests in 12 months, *BBC Sport* reported.

But during its investigation the AIU discovered that on the date of one of those missed tests, February 28, 2023, Katir had altered his travel itinerary, boarding pass and booking confirmation in an attempt to mislead investigators who were looking into where he was that day.

The AIU requires athletes to log their 'whereabouts', external to assist unannounced out-of-com-



petition tests.

The four-year ban will run concurrently with Katir's previous sanction, extending his suspension until February 2028.

"There can be no doubt that the athlete put forward a false version of events and altered documents," concluded the AIU's disciplinary tribunal.

"He did so in order to persuade WA (World Athletics) that his filing failure on 28 February 2023 should not be treated as a whereabouts failure,"

Katir, who won World Championship bronze in the 1500m in 2022 and silver in the 5,000m in 2023, will miss the Worlds in Tokyo next year and Beijing in 2027.

The AIU asked for Katir's results from 9 March 2023 onwards to be disqualified but that was rejected by the disciplinary tribunal because the timing of his whereabouts failure did not offer a "competitive advantage which affected his results".

The head of AIU Brett Clothier said the ruling underscored the seriousness of tampering.

"Gone are the days in athletics when explanations offered in anti-doping cases are just accepted at face value," said Clothier.

"Thanks to strong investment in investigations, since its inception in 2017, the AIU has prosecuted 25 tampering cases.

"The vast majority of our elite athletes respect the strict rules and processes of the sport and they should take heart at the action being taken to ensure a level playing field." - Agencies

BLACKPOOL-BORN STRIKER

England 1966 World Cup-winning squad member Eastham dies at 88



LONDON: George Eastham, a member of England's 1966 World Cup-winning squad, died aged 88 on Saturday, *BBC Sport* reported.

The Blackpool-born forward made 19 international appearances and, while he was part of manager Sir Alf Ramsey's squad at the World Cup 58 years ago, he did not play as England won it for the only time in their history.

He was also an unused squad member at the 1962 World Cup and went on to make his England debut in an FA Centenary match against Brazil at Wembley in 1963.

His last appearance was in a 2-0 friendly win over Denmark before the 1966 World Cup.

Only the 11 players that started the final against West Germany in 1966 were initially awarded winners' medals but, following a campaign, Eastham and other squad members - and Ramsey - received medals in 2009.

The Football Association said it was "saddened" by Eastham's passing and "our condolences go to George's family and friends".

Eastham played for Newcastle United and Arsenal before joining

Stoke for £35,000 shortly after the 1966 World Cup.

He played 194 times for the Potters and scored the winner for them in the 1972 League Cup final when they beat Chelsea 2-1 at Wembley.

Eastham was also involved in a 1963 court case, external which improved players' freedom to move between clubs in a major reforming of the British transfer market and he was awarded an OBE for his services to football in 1973.

He retired from playing in 1974

and then had a stint as Stoke manager from March 1977 to January 1978.

Stoke said, external they were "immensely saddened by the passing of club legend" Eastham and would wear black armbands for their game at Sheffield Wednesday.

They also plan to pay tribute to Eastham at their home game against Leeds United on December 26.

"Our thoughts are with George's family and friends at this difficult time," the club added. - Agencies

IN PICTURES



Coffee farming provides lifeline for Kenya's central region
Farmers pick coffee berries in a coffee farm in Kirinyaga, Kenya. *Xinhua*



Albula-Bernina railway in Switzerland
A train runs on the Landwasser Viaduct along the Albula-Bernina railway in Switzerland. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008, the Albula-Bernina railway, one-third of the century-old Rhaetian Railway (RhB), spans 122 km from Thusis, Switzerland, to Tirano, Italy, traversing 196 bridges, 55 tunnels, and 20 towns across alpine landscapes. *Xinhua*



6th Lancang-Mekong International Film Week kicks off in Cambodia
Artists perform during the opening ceremony of the sixth Lancang-Mekong International Film Week in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. *Xinhua*



Highlight of 2024-2025 NBA regular season game
Cameron Johnson (left) of Brooklyn Nets blocks Ja'Kobe Walter of Toronto Raptors during the 2024-2025 NBA regular season game between Toronto Raptors and Brooklyn Nets in Toronto, Canada. *Xinhua*



Varun Dhawan during trailer launch of Baby John
Bollywood actor Varun Dhawan, actresses Keerthy Suresh and Wamiqa Gabbi, director Atlee Kumar, and his wife Krishna Priya, producer Murad Khetani and others pose for a group picture during the trailer launch of their upcoming film 'Baby John', in Mumbai. *ANI Photo*



Illuminated new year tree seen in St. Petersburg, Russia
This picture shows an illuminated new year tree at Palace Square in St. Petersburg, Russia. *Xinhua*

ROUND-UP

Over 70 teachers trained in financial literacy through Maliyat Academy from Bank Muscat

The training covered key themes such as making smart choices, learning to earn, spending & saving, and growing your money



MUSCAT: In a significant move to boost financial literacy awareness, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, organised the second training workshop of the Maliyat Academy initiative. The workshop saw an active participation of 71 teachers and employees of the Ministry, including vocational guidance specialists and supervisors and Khazna project Team. The sessions took place at the Grand Hormuz Muscat Hotel. The training, delivered by Yousuf bin Rashid Al Mafraji, Coach in Financial Awareness & Literacy, covered key themes such as making smart choices, learning to earn, spending & saving, and growing your money. Participants also shared insights from their experiences in previous courses, discussing how they conveyed financial principles to students. This workshop reflects the on-

going collaboration between Bank Muscat and the Ministry of Education, for the second year in a row, as part of the Maliyat Academy, one of the Bank's CSR pioneering initiatives. During 2023, it targeted a number of 66 vocational guidance specialists & teachers, who passed the knowledge to their peers in schools, taking the total number to 488 trainers, benefiting 23,000 students across approximately 395 schools in various willayats and governorates of Oman. On this occasion, Talib bin Saif Al Makhmari, Head of Community & Media Relations at Bank Muscat, expressed pride in the partnership with the Ministry of Education to implement a key social responsibility initiative which significantly enhances knowledge development among school students and improves their financial knowledge & skills. He said: "Financial literacy is a crucial life skill that promotes a comprehensive understanding of better financial management, enabling individuals—especially youth—to better prepare for and manage their future financial plans. Bank Muscat is dedicated

to instilling this concept in young people, equipping them with modern techniques for effective management, which will enhance their financial decision-making skills over time." Al Makhmari further noted that the workshop adds a new dimension to the Maliyat Academy initiative by engaging trainers, including teachers and vocational guidance specialists from all governorates. This effort ensures the sustainability of knowledge transfer to their peers for years to come. "Currently, there are 137 trainers involved, and the goal is to reach even more schools and students targeted this year," he confirmed. Participants in the training workshop highlighted the significance of proper financial management and the need to instill this concept among school students. Nadia bint Saleh Al Rahbi, a vocational guidance specialist at Um Saad Al Ansariya School for Basic Education (Grades 7-10) in Muscat Governorate, praised Bank Muscat's initiative, noting that the workshop aligns with the goal of promoting financial literacy

among both participants and students. She explained: "the workshop was rich in knowledge and practical skills for managing money wisely, which we can apply and pass on to tenth-grade students. This will help develop students' ability to use money optimally and cultivate a sustainable financial mindset that supports future planning." Al Rahbi added that past workshops on financial literacy, involving active student participation, revealed a strong interest in learning financial skills, noting "Students have become familiar with key concepts such as earning, spending, saving, and making sound financial decisions, all of which are vital to building a financially literate generation. We have seen enthusiastic engagement and questions were raised by students about investment opportunities, reflecting a growing financial awareness. I would like to extend appreciation for Bank Muscat's efforts in organizing such impactful initiatives, which play a crucial role in benefiting an important segment of society."

Ahmed bin Ali bin Mustahil Al Shehri, a vocational guidance specialist at Khalid bin Al Waleed School for Basic Education in Dhofar Governorate, emphasized: "training on financial literacy is an investment in the future of our youth. Through Bank Muscat's Maliyat Academy, we have gained valuable insights into the importance of money and methods of earning and spending. This knowledge will be transferred to other specialists, who will, in turn, conduct training sessions to instill these financial concepts among students in schools." He further explained that delivering this knowledge to students requires simplified and engaging approaches to ensure practical application in their daily lives. To achieve this, various initiatives, competitions, workshops, and forums are conducted, all aimed at enhancing financial awareness among students. This helps them become financially responsible individuals from a young age—an essential skill, especially given the current economic fluctua-

tions that demand a deeper understanding of money management. "Spreading financial literacy is a shared responsibility, starting from home, to school, mosque, and even to playground. By educating young people in alignment with their age-specific needs, we contribute to fostering an economically balanced and informed society." He confirmed. The Maliyat Academy initiative, part of Bank Muscat's sustainability and social responsibility initiatives, aims to elevate the financial literacy of the young generation. It provides essential skills for managing financial matters and making informed spending choices from an early age. In light of current economic fluctuations, these concepts are crucial for fostering financial stability among individuals and families. Moreover, the Bank hosts a free online financial literacy platform, Maliyat, offering financial literacy courses to community members of all ages. This initiative underscores Bank Muscat's commitment to social responsibility and sustainability.

IN BIDIYA, NORTH SHARQIYAH

MHD Automobiles hosts second edition of Jeep Jamboree

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles LLC, the trusted distributor of Jeep in Oman, successfully concluded the second edition of the Jeep Jamboree, a three-day off-road extravaganza held in the stunning landscapes of Bidiya, North Sharqiyah. The event brought together 140 Jeep Wrangler customers, a spirited community of Jeep enthusiasts, to celebrate adventure, camaraderie, and the unmatched capabilities of Jeep vehicles. Set amidst the iconic sand dunes of Bidiya, the Jeep Jamboree offered participants an unparalleled off-road experience. Jeep Wrangler owners, alongside MHD Automobiles' staff and support teams, embarked on a journey that tested their vehicles' endurance and deepened their connection with the brand's adventurous spirit. Speaking about the event, Mr. Mohsin Hani Al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles LLC, said: "The Jeep Jamboree is more than just an off-road event; it's a celebration of the Jeep community's passion for adventure and exploration. Hosting the 2nd edition in the majestic dunes of Bidiya brought a unique challenge and thrill to the experience, and we are proud to deliver such enriching moments to our valued customers." One enthusiastic participant, Ahmed Al Said, shared his thoughts about the event: "The Jeep Jamboree was an incredible experience. It was well-organized, and I got to test the true strength of my Jeep Wrangler in the challenging terrains. The expert guidance and the sense of



community made it an unforgettable adventure." Participants navigated rugged trails, steep dunes, and varied terrains, experiencing firsthand the superior capabilities of their Jeep Wranglers. The meticulously designed itinerary catered to all skill levels, offering thrilling challenges for seasoned off-roaders while ensuring a safe and enjoyable adventure for newcomers. Over 140 Jeep Wranglers participated in the event. Three days of adrenaline-pumping activities across Bidiya's scenic dunes and landscapes. Opportunities for participants to enhance their off-road driving skills under expert guidance. A platform to celebrate the ruggedness and versatility that define the Jeep brand. The event emphasised the values of teamwork and community, as Jeep owners shared tips, stories, and laughter around campfires. The sense of togetherness was palpable, transforming the event into more than just a drive—it became a cherished memory for all attendees.

EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE

Genetco honoured by TCL for Most Distinguished Trade Partner for 2024

MUSCAT: Genetco, a leading corporate house in the Sultanate of Oman, has been awarded the prestigious title of "Most Distinguished Trade Partner for 2024" by TCL Corp in Wuhan, China. This recognition highlights Genetco's exceptional performance and partnership with TCL, which is one of the leading manufacturers of LED TVs, air conditioners, and home appliances in the world.



TCL AIR conference The award was presented during the TCL AIR conference by Ms. Sunny Yang, General Manager MEA, and Mr. Frank DGM for

TCL Air Conditioners; and accepting the award on behalf of Genetco were Dr. Muthanna Al Durrah,

CEO and Board Advisor, and Dr. Ambuj Khare, COO. Genetco is one of the largest dis-

tributors of renowned brands in the Sultanate of Oman, committed to putting customers first and delivering top quality products and service. **Dedication, efforts recognised** TCL recognised the dedication, efforts, and the top customer service by Genetco which resulted into substantial Growth and record sales in the Sultanate of Oman. This accolade is a testament to the strong collaboration between Genetco and TCL, and their shared commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction.

INDIAN SCHOOL AL MAABELA

ISAM celebrates 14th Annual Day

MUSCAT: Indian School Al Maabela (IASM) celebrated its 14th Annual Day on Wednesday, 18 December 2024, with an impressive combination of musical brilliance, dance artistry and riveting theatrical skills that charmed the audience. The school was honoured to have H.H Al Sayyid Abdullah Al Busaidi, Chief Government Relations Officer, Ooredoo as the Chief Guest of the day. Ms. Kawthar Al Sulaimani, Assistant Director of International Schools, Ministry of Education, Oman graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour, Mr. Omar Sulaiman Al Bahri, General Manager, Corporate Techno Plastic Industry SAOC, honored the event with his esteemed presence as the Special Guest of the day adding prestige and warmth to the An-



nual Day Programme. Mr. Syed Salman, Vice Chairman, and the Director-in-Charge of ISAM, Mr. Krishnendhu S, Chairperson of the Grievance Committee, and the Director-in-Charge of ISAM, extended their heartfelt congratulations to the ISAM family on the wonderful and successful completion of the Annual Day Programme. The President and other esteemed members

of the School Management Committee, Principals of other Indian Schools, invited dignitaries, members of the staff, parents, awardees and students attended the celebrations. The event began with the national anthems of India and Oman, followed by the ceremonial lighting of the lamp and a prayer invoking the blessings of the Almighty. Mr. Shamim Hussain, President of the School Management Committee, accorded a formal welcome to the gathering. The chief guest and other dignitaries were cordially welcomed with floral bouquets. Principal Mr. Parveen Kumar presented a kaleidoscopic view of the activities and achievements of the students during the academic year 2023-24 through his annual

report. A digital presentation highlighting the exceptional accomplishments, significant events, and prestigious accolades showcased the dedication and hard work of students, staff and the entire ISAM community. The Chief Guest appreciated the achievements of the school and lauded its outstanding organizational efficiency and functioning. Mr. Krishnendhu S, presented a memento to the chief guest as a token of appreciation and gratitude. The official ceremony concluded with a note of gratitude extended by the School Head Girl, Suveeksha Shanbag, and the festive mood was elevated by a vibrant cultural performance with an exquisite theme, SAMSARA – The Enchanting Mystical Circle of Life.



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Beach Party

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