

NORTH AL BATINAH AN ATTRACTIVE WINTER DESTINATION FOR TOURISTS

North Al Batinah Governorate boasts of a diverse range of tourism assets, including mountains, wadis, sea, sand dunes, and springs, making it an attractive winter tourism destination. The governorate also features several proposed sites for adventure tourism and models for simulating these sites. **>A4**



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PROMISING STARTUPS

HM the Sultan issues three Royal decrees

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued three Royal decrees reading as follows:

Royal Decree No. (18/2025) promulgates the establishment of an index for promising startups.

Article (1) states that a sub-index to be named "Promising Startups Index" shall be established at Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

Article (2) stipulates that the Financial Services Authority shall undertake the tasks of supervision and audit on the companies listed in the Promising Startups Index.

Article (3) states that the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Financial Services Authority shall issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this decree, as well as the incentives granted to the companies listed in the Promising Startups Index, through co-ordination with the departments concerned.

Article (4) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its

date of issue.

Royal Decree No. (19/2025) ratifies an agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Maldives on mutual visa waiver for holders of diplomatic, special, service and official passports, signed in Muscat on 11 December 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No. (20/2025) ratifies an agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of Mongolia on mutual visa waiver for holders of diplomatic, official, special and service passports, signed in Muscat on 9 December 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **ONA**

ENHANCING RELATIONS



HM the Sultan gives audience to Kuwait's First Deputy PM

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday to Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior in the State of Kuwait.

During the audience, the guest conveyed a verbal message to His

Majesty the Sultan from Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait. The message deals with means of enhancing the distinguished relations between the two countries to serve the joint interests.

The audience also reviewed areas of the military and security co-

operation between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait, and means of promoting them in a manner that maintains stability and security in the two countries and the rest of regional countries.

The audience was attended by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for

Defence Affairs, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal Al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Dr. Mohammed bin Nasir Al Hajri, Ambassador of Kuwait to Oman and Major General Hamed Manahi Al-Mutairi, Assistant Undersecretary for Criminal Security Affairs at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior. — **ONA**



SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES SECRETARY GENERAL OF ITUC

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers received on Tuesday Luc Triangle, Secretary General of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The guest is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman to attend a symposium titled "Towards a more sustainable social dialogue" organised by the General Federation of Oman Workers. **>A2**

PUBLIC PROSECUTION SETTLES ALMOST 98% OF CASES FILED IN 2024

Labour law suits topped the list of five most common crimes during 2024

MUSCAT: The Public Prosecution Department (PPD) affirmed that it settled 97.9 percent of the cases filed in 2024.

The cases were termed sealed through final settlement or referral or issuance of penal order.

The success rate was 97.6 percent for cases in which the court followed the actions of the PPD, either by condemnation or by upholding decisions for filing.

This was unveiled at the annual PPD conference held on Tuesday. Speaking at the conference, Attorney General Nasr Khamis Al Sawa'i, said that 32 of the rulings pertaining to public funds were issued in 2024 and 2025.

He added that 25 percent of the cases that were referred to the courts in 2023 were settled and that related fines stood at OMR1.43 million, while instances of restitution and confiscation stood at OMR15.407 million—together making a total of OMR16,841,410.

Al Sawa'i said that the total number of cases related to public funds and money laundering in 2024 stood at 192 crimes, including 33 felonies and 159 cases of



20,852

CASES WERE REGISTERED IN THE MUSCAT GOVERNORATE, FOLLOWED BY NORTH AL BATINAH 7,500 CASES AND DHOFAR 4,457 CASES.

46,359

CASES WERE FILED IN 2024, INCLUDING 43,957 CASES OF MISDEMEANOUR, 2,281 FELONIES AND 121 REPORTS OF VIOLATIONS AMONG OTHERS

misdeemeanour, while the number of false cheques and fraud misdeemeanour cases (a predicate crime to money laundering) stood at 132 crimes.

The PPD appointed 73 public prosecution members specialised in juvenile cases to operate in various governorates of the Sul-

tanate of Oman, said Al Sawa'i, noting that steps are underway to raise the number in the forthcoming stage.

He pointed out that modern technology, like artificial intelligence, helped chart out the PPD's course of action, making a PPD's member decisions closer to accuracy. He added that, despite the rise in number of cases, the achievement rate grew to 97.9 percent.

Al Sawa'i affirmed PPD's readiness to handle false claims filed via social media sites that target Oman's "national fabric or accomplishments", noting that a vigilant PPD team is monitoring social media sites that publish such false or forged content. **>A3**

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TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES



OMAN Pakistan official holds meetings

1 Air Vice Marshal Khamis Hammad Al Ghafri, Commander of RAFO met Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar, Chief of Air Staff of Pakistan's Air Force. **>A2**

WORLD Five shot at a school in Sweden

2 Swedish police are responding to a shooting incident at a school in Orebro city, about 200 kilometres west of Stockholm. **>A7**

MARKET Broad money supply increases by 11%

3 The total broad money supply (M2) in Oman increased by 11% by the end of November 2024 to reach OMR24,827.7 million. **>B1**

PRAYER
TIMINGS

Dhuhr.....12:26pm
Asr.....3:38pm
Maghrib.....6:01pm
Isha.....7:13pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....5:28am

MEETING

JOINT COOPERATION

Oman appreciates constructive role undertaken by the ITUC

Royal Office Minister meets Turkish Chief of General Staff

<FROM A1 After welcoming the guest, HH Sayyid Fahd expressed the Sultanate of Oman's appreciation for the constructive role undertaken by the ITUC in encouraging cooperation among trade unions in the countries of the world.

He also underlined the Sultanate of Oman's full cooperation with the ITUC through the General Federation of Oman Workers, which seeks to protect the interests of workers, raise the productive efficiency of workers, consolidate work values, develop workers' skills, polish their capabilities and raise their professional level.

HH Sayyid Fahd pointed out that Oman pays great attention to supporting the three parties to the production process (the government represented by the Ministry of Labour, business owners represented by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and workers



represented by the General Federation of Oman Workers) in order to enable each party to carry out its responsibilities in serving the objectives defined by the Omani Labour Law, with the prime aim of enhancing the work environment and conditions for all workers in the state's sectors.

The meeting reviewed cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the ITUC and means of promoting it in various areas. It also explored the potential of

exchanging expertise in a manner that serves the interests of workers and contributes to maintaining the positive rates of comprehensive and sustainable development in the country.

On his turn, the Secretary General of the ITUC expressed his gratitude for the good preparations made to organise this symposium.

He affirmed that Oman is one of the leading countries in regulating trade union work and protecting workers' rights. - **ONA**

MUSCAT: Gen. Sultan Mohammed Al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office yesterday Gen. Metin Gürak, Chief of the General Staff of the Republic of Türkiye.

Al Nu'amani lauded the bilateral relations between Oman and Türkiye. The two sides explored means of boosting joint cooperation in a manner that enhances the security of the two countries.

The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). It was also attended by the ambassador of Türkiye to the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng. Uday Hilal Al Maawali, Head of the Medical City for Military and Security Services received Gen. Metin Gürak and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, both sides discussed several matters related to medical and healthcare fields.

The guest and his accompanying delegation toured the departments and facilities of the Medical City for Military and Security Services. - **ONA**



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MEETINGS

Defence Ministry Secretary General, SAF Chief of Staff meet Pakistani official



MUSCAT: Dr. Mohammed Nasser Al Za'abi, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence on Tuesday received Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar, Chief of Air Staff of Pakistan's Air Force and his accompanying delegation.

Military cooperation

During the meeting, both sides discussed several military matters of mutual interest that aim to boost military cooperation.

The meeting was attended by Air Vice Marshal, Khamis Hamad Al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, Brigadier Ahmed Ibrahim Ambusaidi, Director General of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Defence and the Military Attaché of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's embassy in Muscat.



Chief of Staff of SAF

Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) received in his office on Tuesday Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar, Chief of Air Staff of Pakistan's Air Force and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on several military matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Air Vice Marshal Khamis Hamad Al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman and the military attaché of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's embassy in Muscat.

mad Al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman and the military attaché of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's embassy in Muscat.

RAFO Commander receives Pakistani official

Air Vice Marshal Khamis Hamad Al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar, Chief of Air Staff of Pakistan's Air Force and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several matters of common concern.

The meeting was attended by senior RAFO officers and the Military Attaché of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's embassy in Muscat. - **ONA**

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NORTH AL BATINAH

ROP arrests four for thefts

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested four individuals in North Al Batinah Governorate for stealing two vehicles from different locations

and for the theft of a safe from a residential building within the governorate.

The ROP said: "North Al Batinah Governorate Police Com-

mand arrested four people for stealing two vehicles from different locations and stealing a safe from a residential building in the governorate."

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Labour permits’ approval for Nepali workers starts

The provision of legalisation of labour permits from the embassy will facilitate Nepali workers to receive several benefits as per the policy of the Government of Nepal

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Nepal in Muscat has started the legalisation/approval process of labour permit for the Nepali workers who are legally working in Oman but have not got labour permit from Nepal.

It was the first live enrollment for the legalisation of labour permits in a foreign country which was started on 31 January 2025 in Salalah.

The embassy organised a special programme in Salalah from 31 January to 1 February 2025, which included interaction with the ambassador, labour law awareness, financial literacy, enrollment for the social security fund scheme, and passport consular services.

The provision of legalisation of labour permits from the embassy will greatly facilitate Nepali workers to receive several benefits as per the policy of the Government of Nepal.

Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman and Surya Bahadur Khatri, Director General of the Department



of Foreign Employment, jointly inaugurated the legalisation/approval of labour permit for Nepali workers.

The technical arrangements were made by Naresh Prasad Das, computer engineer from the Department.

During the programme, the ambassador shared information about the activities the embassy accomplished in the past and the initiatives underway for the future.

He expressed confidence that the legalisation of labour permit service would greatly help Nepali workers to avail several benefits.

The ambassador also highlighted

the importance of the social security fund, remittance flow through legal channels and requested to strictly follow the rules, regulations, tradition, culture of the host country.

He responded to the questions raised by the attendees. Director General Surya Bahadur Khatri congratulated everyone on the first-ever legalisation of labour permit provided by the embassy abroad and shed light on its significance.

He informed Nepali workers about the importance of obtaining approval and explained why one should not work abroad without approval, and responded to queries raised during the programme.

The Nepali workers expressed their happiness as the embassy regularly provides services such as passport renewal, legalisation of labour permit, and various other services in Salalah itself, located about 1,100 kilometers from Muscat.

Representatives from the Nepali Social Club, volunteers, and Nepali associations actively participated and supported the programme.

Moreover, an interaction programme was held at Nepal House, Muscat for the legalisation of labour permit on 3 February 2025.

During the event, the ambassador and the Director General of the Department of Foreign Employment interacted on topics such as labour, economic diplomacy, and the concerns of Nepali workers.

Representatives from Nepali organisations in Oman, bank officials, volunteers, social activists, and other distinguished guests raised various concerns and provided suggestions, which were addressed during the programme.

Nepali workers, who are currently working in companies in Oman without obtaining a labour permit from Nepal, can obtain a labour permit at the embassy of Nepal in Muscat.

For the legalisation of a labour permit, workers need to create their profile through the FEIMS system, upload documents, submit an online application and thereafter, they must appear in person at the embassy for biometrics (photo and fingerprint).

The Director General of the Department of Foreign Employment, and Naresh Prasad Das arrived in Oman on 30 January 2025, and participated in the programmes from 31 January to 3 February, and departed on 4 February 2025.

Both events were conducted by the Second Secretary Bishesh Kumar Sah at the embassy.

Promising Startups Index at MSX boosts business environment



FINANCING ALTERNATIVES: The Financial Services Authority explained that the Promising Startups Index aims to attract private firms and family companies, small and medium enterprises. -ONA

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority (FSA) affirmed that the issuance of the Royal Decree establishing a sub-index at Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), under the name of “Promising Startups Index” on Tuesday, serves as a clear evidence of the great attention accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the government for developing the investment and business environment in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to enhancing the stock market sector.

Market value

The FSA explained that the Promising Startups Index aims to attract private firms and family companies, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and emerging startups whose market value is not less than OMR0.5 million.

This, the FSA added, seeks to achieve two main goals: (1) Enable these startups to benefit from the financing alternatives provided by the capital market (allowing them to thrive and expand; and (2) Empowering these startups to adopt approved standards for governance in a manner that ensures their sustainability in future.

Financing tool

The Financial Services Authority stressed that this step would enhance the role of the stock market as a major financing tool that contributes to developing an attractive investment environment that supports the national economy in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The presence of these startups in the stock market will prepare them to meet the needs for offering their shares in public listings and adding them on the main stock market in the future after fulfilling the prescribed requirements.

Issuing decisions

Under this decree, the Financial Services Authority will supervise and audit the tasks of companies listed on the index, besides issuing decisions and regulations for their operations in coordination with the authorities concerned. -ONA

1,325 crimes against children recorded

<FROM A1 For his part, Dr. Rashid Obaid Al Kaabi, Assistant Attorney General, said that the number of crimes against children in 2024 grew to 1,325 cases, including harassment, physical assault, other forms of violence and exposing the under-aged to juvenile delinquency.

The number of cases filed to the PPD in 2024 grew by 22.5 over the figures of 2023. The total number of cases filed in 2024 (46,359 cases) included 43,957 cases of misdemeanour, 2,281 felonies and 121 reports of violations, administrative complaints and other incidents.

The number of defendants during the past year stood at 58,858, among them 89.2 percent were males, 1.8 percent were minors and 46.8 percent were foreigners.

The number of defendants registered a rise of 23.5 percent over 2023 figure.

Muscat Governorate registered the largest number of cases (20,852 cases), followed by North Al Batinah Governorate (7,500 cases) and Dhofar Governorate (4,457 cases).

Statistics show that 32,856 cases were forwarded by the Royal Oman Police (ROP), followed by 5,757 cases from the PPD’s e-services portal and 4,142 cases from the Ministry of Labour.

Labour law suits topped the list of five most common crimes



during 2024 (a total of 12,407 cases), followed by false cheque crimes (9,699 cases), foreign residency law crimes (9,154 cases), fraud crimes (5,343 cases) and theft and extortion crimes (4,002 cases).

As many as 21,414 rulings were issued in 2024, up by 20.1 percent over the figures of 2023, of which 17,547 rulings were carried out. Settled rulings in 2024 registered an increase of 13 percent over 2023 figures. The total number of cases received electronically by the PPD during 2024 stood at 45,538, up by 24 percent over 2023 figures. -ONA



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North Al Batinah is an attractive winter destination for tourists

Several historical landmarks offered for investment, with agreements signed for the management and operation of three forts by the private sector.

Times News Service

MUSCAT: North Al Batinah Governorate boasts a diverse range of tourism assets, including mountains, wadis, sea, sand dunes, and springs, making it an attractive winter tourism destination.

The governorate also features several proposed sites for adventure tourism and models for simulating these sites.

The Directorate of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) in North Al Batinah Governorate stated that by the end of 2024, the number of hotel establishments registered with the directorate reached 58, comprising hotels, hotel apartments, guesthouses, green inns and tourist rest houses, which include 1,591 rooms and 395 apartments.

Additionally, the number of castles and forts in the governorate reached 20 by the end of last year, and several historical landmarks have been offered for investment, with agreements signed for the management and operation of three forts in the governorate.

Hassan bin Sulaiman Al Jabri, Director of the MHT Directorate in North Al Batinah Governorate, said, "The directorate here encourages SMEs to invest in various tourism products and experiences, which are highly popular among visitors to different wilayats of the governorate. These include establishing guesthouses, green inns hotel apartments, and rest houses. Coordination is ongoing with various government entities to optimise the projects being implemented, enhance the services offered, and market them effectively. Furthermore, we con-

tinuously coordinate with the Office of the Governor of North Al Batinah to increase the number of utilised tourism sites in line with the governorate's total potential, in alignment with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040."

Al Jabri explained that last year, new tourism licences were issued for hotel establishments, including 11 hotel apartments, green inns and six guesthouses, which are currently under construction.

Additionally, it is expected that 2025 will witness the opening of two new hotel establishments, three green inns and three guesthouses.

He added, "There is a need to focus on activities and events that set the governorate apart from others, including sports events, exhibitions, conferences, skilled artisans, local folk bands, and the unique lifestyle of the governorate. Special attention should also be given to promoting Omani traditional cuisine, as the Sultanate of Oman stands out in the region for its diverse culinary offerings. Mountain hiking and adventure tourism are also gaining significant popularity in the governorate's wilayats. We are currently working to enhance these activities in collaboration with various public and private entities, while introducing safety and security guidelines that must be adhered to by those working in this vital sector. These activities significantly contribute to promoting various tourism and heritage sites."

Al Jabri further noted that winter camping projects in mountainous and remote wadi areas are attracting the private sector and entrepreneurs.

He emphasised that in recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in requests from SMEs for tourism-related projects and the issuance of tourism licenses for hotel establishments, tourism facilities, and travel and tourism agencies in the governorate.

He concluded by highlighting the directorate's efforts to develop adventure tourism. A seminar focusing on adventure tourism was held, promoting the governorate's tourist sites. Additionally, several Omani tourism companies specialising in adventure tourism were hosted, and a tourism programme was organised for them to visit adventure tourism sites. A similar programme was also organised for over 20 tourism companies from GCC countries.





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HM receives message from Kuwait Emir



Industrial sector is the basic pillar of economy

The converting industries sector contributed OMR2.19 billion, equivalent to 10.5 percent of the GDP



MUSCAT: The industrial sector serves as one of the main pillars of the Omani economy as it contributed OMR4.09 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices by end of June 2024, representing 19.5 percent of the total GDP.

The converting industries sector takes credit for this increase as it contributed by OMR2.19 billion, equivalent to 10.5 percent of the GDP, which greatly enhanced economic growth and generated employment opportunities.

Parties in touch with the industrial sector stressed that supply chains enhance production efficiency and help improve product quality, which contributes to increasing competitiveness at the local and international levels. They explained that the consolidation of supply chains greatly improves the process of converting and distribution, ensuring that market needs are met faster and more effectively.

They said that the integration of supply chains with various other sectors - including transportation and logistics - enhances the competitiveness of Omani products, helps open new markets and



increases exports, which reflects positively on the national economy as a whole.

Dr. Ibrahim Ali Al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors, explained that the growth in the industrial sector's contribution to the GDP at current prices is an indicator of the success of government policies in enhancing economic diversification.

He added that the government made great efforts to reduce dependence on oil by diversifying the industrial sector that covered converting industries, mining, petrochemicals and food industries.

Al Balushi pointed out that the government has provided a set of incentives and facilities to support the industrial sector, most notably the establishment of specialized industrial zones like Sohar Industrial City, Duqm Industrial Zone and the free zones in Salalah and



Al Mazunah.

These zones provide an integrated infrastructure that facilitates industrial operations which eventually boost the competitiveness of Omani products, he added.

For his part, Eng. Khamis Mohammed Al Alawi, general manager of a leader industries company, affirmed that Omani industries achieved tangible success, thanks to the efforts made by the government and the private sector. He added that the Sultanate of Oman has diverse industries including food, oil, metal, and leather industries.

Al Alawi observed that taking advantage of available natural resources—like oil, gas and minerals—provides one of the most important factors for success. He added that—thanks to their high quality and continuous improve-



ment in production standards—Omani products began to compete in local and regional markets.

On his turn, Azhar Hamoud Al Hinai, Executive Director of Bin Ahmed Plastic Industries Projects, said that the Omani industry has great potential to achieve big leaps forward, due to their focus on innovation and sustainability and to a high rate of cooperation among different parties concerned.

Al Hinai laid emphasis on economic diversification as a key pillar for achieving sustainable development in the Sultanate of Oman. He said that Oman succeeded in reducing dependence on oil by developing many industrial sectors like manufacturing aluminum and petrochemicals, mining and developing converting industries in the fields of food and pharmaceuticals. -ONA

OMSB celebrates graduation of doctors



MUSCAT: The Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) on Tuesday celebrated the graduation of 144 doctors from the 16th batch who completed a training period ranging from four to six academic years for specialised training programmes and one to three years for local fellowship.

The ceremony, which was held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, was sponsored by Dr. Hilal Ali Al Sabti, Minister of Health and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Oman Medical Specialty Board.

The graduates' specialisations were distributed among 21 medical specialisations, 3 of which were in the local fellowship, namely: ear medicine and surgery, genetic medicine, and pediatric hematology and oncology, and 18 medical specialisations, namely: tissue diseases, anesthesia, biochemistry and clinical, dermatology, emergency medicine, family medicine, general surgery, hematology, internal medicine, microbiology, obstetrics and gynecology, ophthalmology and surgery, oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthopedics, ear, nose and throat surgery, pediatrics, psychiatry, and radiology.

In her speech, Dr Fatima bint Mohammed Al Ajmi, CEO of the Oman Medical Specialty Board, said: "Celebrating your graduation represents a gateway to a new world full of responsibility, as you today carry the torch of knowledge to contribute to the advancement of the health system in the Sultanate of Oman. You will enter a field full of challenges, but it is a field full of opportunities for giving and humanity, so be ambassadors of goodness and knowledge."

She added: The Oman Medical Specialty Board remains a lofty edifice that illuminates the path of science and specialisation, and the training curriculum of the Board makes development and keeping pace with medical education and training developments a basic motive for qualifying doctors. In its halls, you have refined your professionalism and received advanced training in your specialisations, to raise the level of medical professional performance.

She pointed out that the Council continues to achieve its goals and implement its educational and training plans, confirming its leadership and uniqueness in qualifying doctors. Since its establishment until today, 1,508 male and female doctors have graduated from its specialty and fellowship programmes. -ONA

WORLD CANCER DAY

Nepal rolls out HPV vaccination campaign

KATHMANDU: Nepal has launched the national Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign on World Cancer Day on Tuesday, aiming to immunise over 1.6 million girls aged 10-15 years.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a viral infection that spreads through skin-to-skin contact and is a leading cause of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the

second-most common cancer in the developing world and a major cause of death among Nepali women. It is estimated that hundreds of women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in Nepal every year.

The vaccination campaign started on February 4 (World Cancer Day) with a target to inoculate both school-going and out-

of-school girls aged between 10 and 15 years with a single dose of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine.

HPV vaccine

The decision to administer a single dose of the HPV vaccine is in line with the recommendation of the World Health Organization, and the National Immunisation Advi-

sory Committee, an expert panel in the country.

Over 1.68 million girls between 10 and 15 years old will be immunized in a nationwide HPV vaccination campaign. The Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunisation (GAVI) supplied 1,770,400 vaccine doses. The alliance has also provided funds to cover the campaign's operational costs. — **ANI**

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Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali
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Chief Executive Officer: Ahmed Essa Al Zedjali

EDITORIAL: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24813153, E-mail: editor@timesofoman.com
ADVERTISING: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24812624, E-mail: advertising@timesofoman.com
CIRCULATION: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24818270, E-mail: circulation@timesofoman.com

Trump tariffs spark trade war fears, shakes global markets

Trump's tariffs are unprecedented in their scope and scale, targeting three of the United States' largest trading partners simultaneously. Economists have said their impact will likely paralyse economic growth both in the US and around the world

rate. Energy imports from Canada would be subject to a 10% tariff. However, hours before they took effect, Trump paused the levies on both Mexico and Canada for 30 days as negotiations continued.

Trump's tariffs are unprecedented in their scope and scale, targeting three of the United States' largest trading partners simultaneously. Economists have said their impact will likely paralyse economic growth both in the US and around the world.

While the president has justified the move as an attempt to address large trade imbalances and fight the illegal drugs trade and irregular immigration, Carsten Brzeski, chief economist at the Dutch ING bank in Germany, warned that the tariffs have marked the start of a "fully-fledged trade war which could still escalate."

Rüdiger Bachmann, professor of economics at the University of

Notre Dame in the US, noted how "[Trump] doesn't seem to distinguish between traditional friends and foes, adding that "China is seemingly getting a better deal than allies Canada and Mexico."

Bachmann also told DW that the US president was throwing the global trade order into "chaos."

Markets jolted by trade war fears

Reacting to the weekend announcement, Asian stock markets fell by up to 2% on Monday — beginning the so-called Year of the Snake with a venomous bite. Some European markets, including Frankfurt and Paris, saw similar drops after the US president warned the European Union would be hit "pretty soon" by similar tariffs.

Shares in European automakers, measured by the STOXX 600 index, fell more than 4% on Monday morning. German automakers

— who export tens of thousands of cars to the US yearly from Mexico — are likely to be hit hard by the new tariffs. Around two-thirds of Volkswagen's US-bound cars are produced in Mexico, according to analysts at the US investment bank Stifel.

The North American auto industry is deeply integrated, with car parts crossing borders multiple times during the manufacturing process. The new tariffs threaten to disrupt these complex supply chains, leading the German carmakers association VDA to speak of "a significant setback for rules-based global trade."

US stock futures were also down sharply early Monday, in what is the biggest week for fourth-quarter earnings. More than 120 S&P 500 companies are set to report their results, including Google parent Alphabet, Amazon and The Walt Disney Co.

The dollar soared against other major currencies, rising by 2.3% against the Mexican peso and more than 1% against the Canadian dollar and euro, which the European Central Bank (ECB) warned could weaken further.

Oil prices also rose more than 2% on fears of supply disruptions from the tariff on Canadian energy exports and after Trump threatened further tariffs related to the oil and gas sector in mid-February, without giving further details.

Tariffs paused, targets prepare retaliatory tariffs

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau confirmed on X on Monday evening that the US tariffs had been put on hold "for at least 30 days," following two calls between him and Trump earlier in the day.

Over the weekend, Trudeau had hit back at Trump's move by announcing 25% levies on \$107 billion (€104.5 billion) of US imports. Leaders of several Canadian provinces announced their own retaliatory measures, including the immediate halt of US alcohol purchases.

Before the US tariffs were put on hold, Trudeau effectively called for a boycott of US goods, asking the public on X to "choose products made right here in Canada." In a speech, he warned Americans that the tariffs would potentially put US jobs at risk and raise food and gasoline costs.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum confirmed earlier Monday that Trump had agreed to pause the tariffs on Mexico for a month, detailing on social media her commitment in return.

"Mexico will reinforce the northern border with 10,000 mem-

bers of the National Guard immediately, to stop drug trafficking from Mexico to the United States, in particular fantanyl," Sheinbaum posted on X.

At the weekend, Sheinbaum had ordered her economy minister to "implement Plan B," which includes unspecified "tariff and non-tariff measures" on US imports.

Meanwhile, China said it would "take necessary countermeasures to defend its rights and interests." Beijing said Trump's move violates World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and has vowed to bring a case before the body that governs global commerce.

China's Ministry of Finance later announced plans for 15% tariffs on imports of US liquefied natural gas (LNG), coal and several other goods.

Trump said later Monday that he was due to hold talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping within the next 24 hours.

Inflation, recession fears rise

Deutsche Bank wrote Monday that the new tariffs, whenever they take effect, would affect around 44% of all imports to the US — worth around \$1.35 trillion — and would likely raise US inflation by as much as 1%.

For US consumers, the measures could mean higher prices for essential goods like oil, electronics and groceries, exacerbating the current cost of living crisis. Higher inflation may prompt the US Federal Reserve to maintain or increase interest rates, some economists have warned. — **DW**

 Full story @ timesofoman.com/world

SANTORINI

Thousands flee Greek island amid quake warnings

SANTORINI: Hundreds of people packed a port on the Greek island of Santorini in the early hours of Tuesday morning hoping to board a ferry to safety.

More people were expected to fly out later on Tuesday as airlines set up special flights and shipping companies sent additional ferries.

Hundreds of tremors have been recorded between the volcanic islands of Santorini and Amorgos in the Aegean Sea since Friday.

On Tuesday morning, regular quakes, just minutes apart, continued to rattle the region.

Locals are fleeing Santorini and the neighboring islands of Anafi, Ios and Amorgos — all popular summer holiday spots — amid fears the tremors may be leading up to a larger earthquake.

"I haven't slept for days, the children and the women are crying, it's shaking every five minutes," one man who left Santorini by ferry told Reuters news agency.

Around a third of Santorini's 16,000 residents have temporarily left the island, according to DPA, a German news agency.

"Everything is closed. No one works now. The whole island has emptied," Dori, an 18-year-old local resident told Reuters before boarding the ferry.

Rescue teams

Authorities have sent rescue teams to Santorini and three nearby islands until Friday, as a precautionary measure. Authorities have also closed schools,

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotaki on Monday asked people to stay calm and follow instructions from authorities. People have been asked to avoid large indoor gatherings and keep out of coastal areas due to the risk of landslides.

Hotels and houses have been told to empty their swimming pools as large volumes of water could destabilise buildings in the event of a large quake.

"We are monitoring the situation closely, but at this stage, there is no reason to panic," Efthymios Lekkas, the president of Greece's Earthquake Planning and Protection Organisation, told the Greek news site eKathimerini. — **DW**

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

India inks multi-billion-dollar submarine deal with German company Thyssenkrupp

NEW DELHI: The German engineering and steel production conglomerate Thyssenkrupp is set to build six submarines for the Indian navy in a multi-billion-dollar deal after a bid with its Indian partner was approved.

The conglomerate's shipbuilding division, known as Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS), teamed up with India's state-owned Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders (MDS) for the contract. Both companies recently confirmed that India's Ministry of Defence had opened the bid for "further processing."

The bid was the only one to clear the navy's field trials, beating off competition from Spanish company Navantia, which had partnered with India's Larsen & Toubro.

An exchange filing by MDS said the Indian Ministry of Defence had invited the company for commercial negotiations. Media reports quoting people close to the discussions put the value of the project at around \$5.2 billion (€5 billion), but the final figure could be higher.

In a statement provided to DW by Thyssenkrupp, Oliver Burkhard, CEO of TKMS, said, "By acting in partnership, and with the support of the German and Indian governments MDL and Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems will be setting standards for a sustainable and safe maritime future."

The deal is not necessarily a sign that India's dependence on Russian military imports will be reduced anytime soon. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia accounted for 36% of India's defense imports from 2019-2023, the most of any single

country.

"India's reliance on the Russian military platforms continues unabated, and it has shown little desire to substantially reduce that dependence on Moscow," Sushant Singh, lecturer in South Asian studies at Yale University, told DW.

However, SL Narasimhan, a retired member of the Indian defense forces and an expert in Indian security issues, expects more collaboration between India and Europe on defense "when the requirement, price expectations and availability match."

Speaking with DW, he pointed to a recent agreement between France and India to build Scorpene class submarines in India as another example of collaboration.

Germany has also been exporting arms in large volumes to India. In the first six months of 2024, India was the third-largest recipient of German arms, valued at around €153.75 million (\$160 million).

Designed in Germany, made in India

The deal with Thyssenkrupp is

for six diesel submarines, known as advanced conventional submarines. Among the technical requirements is that the submarines have air-independent propulsion (AIP) technology, allowing them to stay underwater longer to increase stealth capacity.

It's part of an Indian Navy strategy to boost its capability in the face of the Chinese navy's growing presence in the Indian Ocean and across South Asia. "India is now becoming a major maritime power of the world," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said earlier this month at the launch of two Indian-made warships and a submarine.

TKMS has said it will help with engineering and designing the new submarines, with MDS building them in India.

Thyssenkrupp has a substantial history with the Indian Navy. Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft, a former shipbuilder now owned by TKMS, built four submarines for India in the 1980s, with two built in the German city of Kiel and two in Mumbai.

Sushant Singh says there was "nothing new" about this latest deal. "It is an old project which has moved forward after major delays when the fleet of submarines in the Indian navy has reached a critical stage."

Modi has prioritized domestic defense manufacturing and Indian defense spending overall has increased substantially in absolute terms during his decade as prime minister. However, defense spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen in each of the past four years.

"The defense forces are crying for modernization but are getting no funds to buy modern weapons and platforms," said Singh. "More than half of India's defense spending goes towards personnel costs, and with high inflation and falling foreign exchange rates, the funds for buying defense equipment are coming down drastically in real terms." — **DW**

 Full story @ timesofoman.com/world

Task force to manage Gaza affairs in line with national unity goals formed

The task force is working under direct directives from President Abbas to expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid, reopen roads, clear debris, and provide adequate shelter for those whose homes have been destroyed, paving the way for comprehensive reconstruction

GAZA: Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa announced during the opening remarks of the weekly Cabinet session on Tuesday that, “In affirmation of the unity of the territory of the State of Palestine, and in pursuit of strengthening national unity, the Palestinian Government, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, has decided to establish a task force to manage affairs of the Gaza Strip.”

Mustafa emphasised that “the



Government, as part of its ongoing efforts and in coordination with our brothers—particularly the Arab Republic of Egypt—and other relevant parties, is working under direct directives from President Abbas to expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid, reopen roads, clear debris, and provide adequate shelter for those whose homes have been destroyed, paving the way for comprehensive reconstruction.”

The Prime Minister noted that last October, the National Reconstruction Preparation Team was established, which is working in close coordination with various UN and international partner institutions in preparation for the reconstruction process.

“On the ground, the Government is actively working through the Government Operations Room for Emergency Interventions in the Gaza Strip, in coordination with various partners, to deliver

as many essential services as possible to our people in Gaza, including water, electricity, healthcare, and education. This is a national responsibility toward our people, who have endured the horrors of war for the past fifteen months,” he underscored.

On the situation in the West Bank, Mustafa stated, “Amid the escalation of Israeli occupation crimes in the refugee camps of Jenin and Tulkarem, and more recently in al-Far’a camp and Tamnun, as well as forcing thousands of our people—including children, the elderly, and women—out of their homes; coupled with the systematic destruction and sabotage of houses, infrastructure, and civilian property. In response, President Abbas has directed an urgent request for a Security Council emergency session to intervene urgently and assume its responsibilities regarding these grave violations. The session has been

scheduled for this evening.”

The Prime Minister added, “Our diplomatic missions have intensified their efforts and engagements with governments across the world to expose the crimes of the Israeli occupation, document its violations, and rally international support for Palestinian inalienable rights. We are also pressing for an end to the Israeli aggression and destruction that is targeting the entirety of Palestinian Territory. Accordingly, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council, will convene in Geneva tomorrow to investigate these crimes and violations, particularly in the northern West Bank.”

Mustafa also noted that emergency committees in the northern West Bank and the Ministerial Committee for Emergency Action

have been tasked with following up on the needs of displaced Palestinians and ensuring immediate and urgent shelter.

He further explained that the Ministry of Social Development has already dispatched eight shipments of relief supplies and infant formula to Jenin and Tulkarem and is working to prepare additional aid. The Ministry has also launched a large-scale relief campaign for northern West Bank citizens in coordination with chambers of commerce, national institutions, and partner organizations. Mustafa stated, “Despite the unjust financial siege imposed by the Israeli occupation, deducting and withholding more than half of Palestinian clearance revenues, we remain steadfast in mobilizing the necessary resources to repair the destruction caused by the occupation and to uphold our responsibilities in strengthening the steadfastness of our people.”

Mustafa affirmed that “we will neither capitulate nor despair in the face of the international community’s failure to stop Israel’s war machine. These crimes against our people must end. We will continue our legitimate struggle for all our rights because we are certain that justice will prevail as no right is ever lost when fought for.”

The Cabinet also reviewed a report on the efforts of the Government Operations Room for Emergency Interventions in the Gaza Strip and the coordination between government institutions and international relief organizations to support the Palestinian people in the Strip.

Israeli forces continue wide-scale military offensive in Jenin

For the fifteenth consecutive day, the Israeli occupation continues its aggression on the city of Jenin and its camp, resulting in the killing of 25 Palestinians, amidst widespread destruction to the infrastructure and the demolition and bombing of dozens of homes.

Additionally, the Israeli occupation forces notified the family of the slain Palestinian Nidal Al-Amr that their house near Al-Ansar Mosque would be detonated, while two homes were demolished deep inside the camp amidst the sounds of explosions resulting from the demolition and destruction of citizens’ property inside.

The occupation continues to send more military reinforcements to the city and camp of Jenin through the Jalameh military checkpoint. The occupation forces also detained a young man after seizing his vehicle near Al-Hathnawi roundabout in the center of Jenin city.

UNRWA stated that the Israeli aggression on the Jenin and Tulkarm camps displaced thousands of Palestinians, noting that the horrific scenes in the West Bank portend a new escalation.

Regarding the booby-trapping and demolition of about 20 buildings in Jenin camp, the agency said, “We did not receive any prior warning about the explosions in Jenin camp, and contact with the Israeli authorities is no longer allowed, while large parts of the camp were destroyed in successive explosions.” – **WAFA**

SWEDISH POLICE

At least five shot at school

STOCKHOLM: Swedish police are responding to a shooting incident at a school in Orebro city, about 200 kilometres (125 miles) west of Stockholm, police said on Tuesday, adding that at least five people were shot. Police said the incident “involves threats of lethal force,” advising the public to stay away from the school and the hospital. “This is currently seen as attempted murder, arson and aggravated weapons offense,” the police statement read. Ambulances, rescue services and police forces were at the site of the shooting, a spokesperson for local rescue services said. The severity of the injuries sustained by the shooting victims was unclear. – **DN**

INDIA’S ENVOY

‘India-Bangladesh trade connectivity will continue’

DHAKA: Trade connectivity and economic engagement between India and Bangladesh will continue to strengthen the ties between the two nations, Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma said.

The High Commission of India, Dhaka organised an interactive session with leading businesses and business chambers from Bangladesh’s textile sector on Monday.

The session was held in the context of the upcoming Bharat Tex 2025, a global textile event set to take place in New Delhi, India from 14-17 February 2025. The event will bring together major stakeholders from the textile industry and cover the entire textile value chain under one roof.



In his remarks at the event, High Commissioner Pranay Verma highlighted the importance of the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector in Bangladesh’s socio-economic development and also in promoting closer supply/

value chain linkages between India and Bangladesh.

He identified cooperation between the two countries in the RMG and textile sector as a testament to their interdependence and mutual benefit. He expressed

hope that the participation of a large delegation from Bangladesh in Bharat Tex 2025 will open up new opportunities for establishing new supply chain linkages, and investment and technology tie-ups across various segments of the textile value chain.

High Commissioner also expressed hope that trade connectivity and economic engagement between India and Bangladesh will continue to bring the people and businesses of the two countries closer together.

Md. Anwar Hossain, Administrator, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) & Vice-Chairman, Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and Mr. Mohammad Hatem, President, Bangladesh

Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) were the Guests of Honour for the event.

Faruque Hassan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology (BUFT) and Mr. Md. Jashim Uddin, Chairman of Bengal Commercial Bank & Vice Chairman of Bengal Group of Industries were the Special Guests for the event.

Industry representatives from Bangladesh looked forward to their participation in the Bharat Tex 2025 and expressed confidence that greater economic engagement with India will open up new avenues and growth opportunities for Bangladesh’s garment industry. – **ANI**

GLOBAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

Submarine cables seen as the Achilles heel of digital world

FRANKFURT: A spate of sabotage attacks on underwater cables, allegedly perpetrated by a Russian “shadow fleet,” have shown global telecommunications infrastructure is poorly protected against deliberate acts of destruction.

Different types of underwater cables

Some submarine cables transport high-voltage direct current (HVDC), electrical energy, over long distances, such as between islands or countries. These cables can also connect offshore wind turbines with onshore sites.

Then there are telecommunications cables. They transmit about 95% of global data traffic, including internet searches, online shopping and phone calls — albeit with a slight signal delay, as calling up a US website from Europe takes around 60 milliseconds.

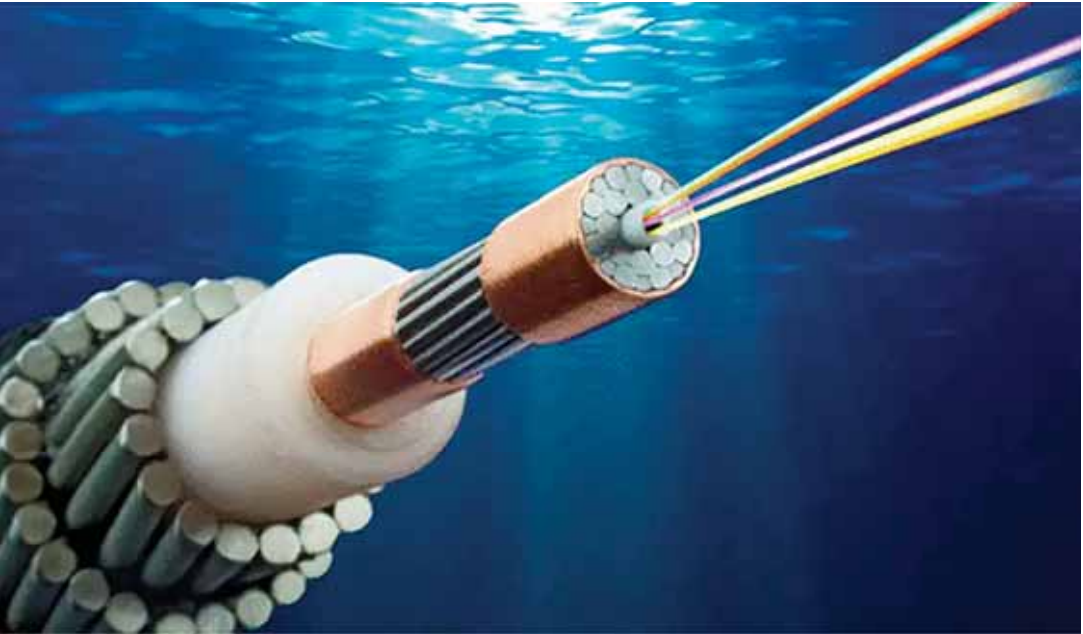
In addition, some cables link data centers and large network nodes, as well as those for military communication and research, which are more protected than other cables.

Satellites are not an alternative to underwater cables

Only a fraction of international communication goes via satellites. Submarine cables can transmit much more data at a lower cost.

Satellite connections are slower and more susceptible to interference.

Nevertheless, the US and the EU are investing in satellite technologies, such as Starlink and the IRIS



(Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite) program, to create more secure, alternative communication channels.

Where do underwater cables lie?

Worldwide, there are about 500 cable lines consisting of 1.4 million kilometers of cable. The cables are so long that they could be wrapped around the equator 30 times. New cables are added every year.

Most cable connections are located in the Atlantic between Europe and North America and in the Pacific between the US and East Asia. However, no complete global

atlas shows the exact location of every cable.

Platforms such as submarine-cablemap.com or TeleGeography offer maps, but without precise location information.

About 90% of data traffic between Europe and Asia runs via 14 cables off the Yemeni coast. In 2024, Houthi rebels attacked three data lines with a hijacked freighter in the region.

Who lays underwater cables?

In the past, telecom service providers, such as AT&T and China Telecom, dominated the market and ownership of submarine

cables.

Now, it’s the big tech companies like Google, Microsoft, Meta and Amazon investing heavily in submarine cables.

Google owns six active submarine cables and plans to build more.

Meta has a stake in 16 existing cables and plans to make its own global network.

How are underwater cables constructed?

Modern submarine cables consist of several layers of fiber optics that use light pulses to transmit digital information.

They are surrounded by protec-

tive layers of steel wire or steel armor, polyethylene and waterproof materials. These protect against the extreme pressure and conditions of the deep sea and ensure a lifespan of about 25 years.

Large submarine cables with a diameter of more than 20cm (7.87 inches) can weigh between 40-70 kilograms per metre (88-154 pounds/3.2 feet).

How are underwater cables laid?

Geologists and engineers determine the best locations for cables, considering obstacles such as trenches, ocean currents, fishing areas and shipping routes.

In the North and Baltic Seas, around 1.6 million tons of dumped ammunition from past wars also pose a significant challenge.

In deeper waters, up to about eight kilometres, the risk of damage is lower. The cables are often laid directly on the seabed by special cable-laying vessels.

The cable has to be taut during the laying process. If there is too little tension, loops might form in the cable. However, if the cable is too taut, it can make it float and break.

How do underwater cables get damaged?

Trawl nets and anchors cause most damage to submarine cables. But they are also damaged through deliberate acts of sabotage: Hybrid warfare attacks have been known since the Cold War. As early as 1959, the Americans accused the

Russians of deliberately damaging an underwater cable with fishing nets.

Espionage is also a big problem, as submarine cables can be tapped for data.

How are underwater cables repaired?

Repairing submarine cables is complicated due to extreme underwater pressure and unpredictable weather conditions.

Depending on the damage and depth of the cable, divers can repair cables in dry chambers, or a cable repair ship can carefully lift them to the surface.

On board, technicians replace damaged sections with new ones. After extensive testing, the cable is carefully recessed and laid again.

How can underwater cables be protected?

Submarine cables are well protected against natural threats but are often inadequately protected against deliberate damage by hostile states, intelligence agencies or terrorists.

Underwater drones and acoustic sensor systems could help to detect potential acts of sabotage at an early stage.

Some states are developing coordinated protection strategies, with close cooperation between the states, submarine cable operators and international organisations. Experts are calling for a new legal framework at national and international levels, especially in the event of war. – **DN**

Oman aim for another clean sweep

Duleep Mendis' men will take on USA and Namibia in World Cup League 2 tri-series from February 8-18 at the Oman Cricket Academy ground

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman are set to continue their quest for ICC Men's Cricket World Cup qualification with a highly anticipated tri-series at home, hosting the United States and Namibia in the World Cup League 2 (WCL2) from February 8-18 at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground.

Duleep Mendis-coached Oman will be looking to build on their momentum from a stunning clean sweep in November 2024 when they defeated both the Netherlands and the UAE, securing a 4-0 victory at home in the League 2.

As the series kicks off, Oman are currently sitting in 5th place in the ICC WCL 2 standings with 14 points from 12 matches, having won six, lost four and two matches abandoned.

Their net run rate stands at -0.047, but their recent form has been strong, with four consecutive victories in their last five matches, including successive wins against the UAE and Netherlands in November.

With the USA and Namibia coming to Muscat, Oman will look to capitalise on their home advantage and make a solid push up the standings. Oman's last defeat was against hosts Canada on September 26, 2024

Head coach Duleep Mendis has expressed confidence in the squad's preparations, with the



team ready to take on table toppers USA (16 points) and Namibia (10 points) in the competition.

"We did brilliantly last time in November beating fancied Netherlands and UAE twice. The boys have prepared hard since December, and the domestic tournaments provided perfect pre-tournament exposure with the recent conclusion of the D50 and the introduction of two-day matches that helped them stay at the crease for longer periods," said Mendis.

"Hopefully, the boys will come out with another good show and keep us World Cup contention," he added.

Mendis also stressed the importance of hard work and focus in the lead-up to the series, especially on improving fielding skills alongside batting and bowling. The head coach is optimistic that this focus will result in another dominant display at home.

"The boys have been training hard, and the focus was on fielding along with batting and bowling," the former Sri Lankan great added. "We are ready for the challenge."

Captain Jatinder Singh, who has been in stellar form during the D50 tournament, will lead the 15-member team. His leadership

has been a key factor in Oman's recent success.

Mendis has called up new faces for the ODI team with the inclusion of Vinayak Shukla, Hashir Dafedar, Hassnain Ali Shah, Muhammad Imran. The players who got dropped from the squad that featured in November tri-series are Sandeep Goud, Muzahir Raza, and Karan Sonavale.

After the 50-over tri-series, Oman will face the USA in a three-match T20I series from February 20 to 23.

The standings heading into this crucial series have the USA

in first place with 16 points from 12 matches, having won eight and lost four. Their net run rate stands at 0.428. Namibia, in contrast, are sitting in 6th place with 10 points from 12 matches, having won five and lost seven, with a negative net run rate of -0.180.

For Oman, the upcoming matches are crucial in their bid to qualify for the 2027 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup. With only the top four of the eight teams securing qualification, every match counts.

A successful series at home against the USA and Namibia could see Oman rise in the stand-

ings and strengthen their position

Oman squad: Jatinder Singh (captain), Aamir Kaleem, Ashish Odedara, Hammad Mirza, Mohammad Nadeem, Sufyan Mehmood, Sha-keel Ahmed, Jay Odedra, Samay Shrivastava, Wasim Ali, Vinayak Shukla, Hashir Dafedar, Hassnain Ali Shah, Muhammad Imran, Siddharth Bukkapatnam.

Fixtures (all matches begin at 10am): February 8: USA vs. Namibia; February 10: Oman vs. Namibia; February 12: Oman vs. USA; February 14: Namibia vs. USA; February 16: Oman vs. Namibia; February 18: Oman vs. USA.

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OMAN CRUDE PRICE FALLS
The price of Oman oil has decreased, with prices for delivery by April 2025 reaching \$77.41, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil fell by \$1.44 from the price of Monday, which was \$78.85. - **ONA**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER
The MSX index closed at 4,586.91 points, up by 0.74% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.11% at 413.70 points. Voltamp Energy, up 10.00%, was the top gainer while Dhofar Insurance, down 9.57%, was the top loser.

Broad money supply in Oman jumps by 11% to OMR24.82bn

Statistics issued by the NCSI show that the total foreign assets at the CBO increased by 8.1% to OMR7.04 billion by the end of November 2024

MUSCAT: The total broad money supply (M2) in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 11% by the end of November 2024 to reach OMR24.82 billion, according to the preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).
The issued currency declined by 5.2% to reach OMR1,505.2 million by the end of November 2024 compared to OMR1,588.1 million by the end of November 2023.
Narrow money supply (M1) by

the end of November 2024 stood at OMR7,046.3 million, comprising an increase of 22.1% compared to the corresponding period in 2023.
Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that the total foreign assets at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) increased by 8.1% to OMR7,041.8 million by the end of November 2024, compared to November 2023 when the figure stood at OMR6,516.2 million.
Meanwhile, private sector deposits in commercial banks and Islamic windows by the end of November 2024 stood at OMR20,639.0 million, up by 9.2% compared to the corresponding period in 2023 when the figure stood at OMR18,904.2 million.
Total loans and financing in commercial banks and Islamic windows grew by 4.2% by the end of November 2024 to OMR32,165.1 million, compared to OMR30,878.4 million.
The average interest rate on total loans increased by 3.3 per cent by the end of November 2024 to reach 5.667.
The effective exchange rate index of the Omani Rial decreased by 1.3% to 114.2 by the end of November 2024. - **ONA**



OMAN ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION COMPANY



OETC hosts CIGRE International Steering Committee and GCC CIGRE Regional Committee meetings

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to strengthening collaborative relations with various institutions, experts, and specialists in the energy and electricity sector worldwide, and providing platforms for knowledge and experience exchange, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) and GCC CIGRE recently hosted the Steering Committee Meetings of the International Council for Large Electric Systems (CIGRE) and the GCC Regional Committee for Large Electric System (GCC CIGRE).
Held from February 3 to 5, and attended by chairmen, CEOs, and representatives from various Omani authorities and institutions, alongside more than 20 members of the CIGRE International Steering Committee from different countries.
The visit program included a series of meetings with key sector officials and stakeholders, as well as field visits to Omani factories, grid stations, and specialised centers. A key session held at OETC provided an overview of OETC and GCC's electricity sector, its developments, structure, and the company's role within the sector. Additionally, the visit featured a tour in the OETC's specialised centres, to gain insights into Oman's experience in managing the electricity sector and to learn from global best practices.
Eng. Ahmed Abdullah Al Rahbi, Corporate Affairs' General Manager at OETC and Oman's Representative in GCC CIGRE,

emphasised the significance of such meetings and periodic engagements with global institutions, experts, and specialists to ensure that Oman remains up to date with sector advancements and innovations in various areas while applying the best industry practices.
Al Rahbi added, "We believe in the necessity of effective communication to achieve continuous development and improvement, ensuring we move in the right direction by implementing the latest technologies and best practices that drive Oman's electricity sector forward. As part of a vital industry, OETC is committed to participating in such global engagements to draw inspiration from international success stories, achieve the highest levels of quality and performance in the sector, and enhance the reliability, security, and sustainability of Oman's electricity transmission network."
It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across the Sultanate's network. The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centres in the governorates.
The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate, whether in the north or the south. Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

'DUQM NOW'

Development Bank backs new business initiative for Oman's sustainable growth

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Development Bank will support a new business initiative aimed at accelerating Oman's sustainable development.
Launching today at 7.30pm and organised by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Sezad), Duqm Now will bring the business community together with industry leaders, policymakers and experts to showcase opportunities in key sectors aligned with Oman Vision 2040.
Taking place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Duqm, the inaugural Duqm Now event entitled 'Up and Down the Green Stream' will explore renewable energy prospects for Oman's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), highlighting developments in solar, wind and green hydrogen projects.
Commenting on Sezad's Duqm Now series, Hussain Al Lawati, CEO, Development Bank said: "We are delighted to support this initiative and look forward to the opportunities it will unlock, particularly for SMEs eager to harness the potential of Sezad. Development Bank remains strongly committed to funding SME ambitions, with our lending growing



"We are delighted to support this initiative and look forward to the opportunities it will unlock, particularly for SMEs eager to harness the potential of Sezad"
Hussain Al Lawati
CEO, Development Bank

from OMR23.6 million in 2023 to OMR38.9 million in 2024 - a remarkable 64.8% increase."
The CEO added: "Given that sustainable development is at the heart of Development Bank's strategy, I am especially pleased to see

this first session will focus on the possibilities of renewable energy. This sector is not only of immense importance to our economy but also to the achievement of Oman's 2050 Net Zero target. With these factors very much in mind, Development Bank is already working

to secure sustainable financing for green projects by collaborating with international institutions such as the Green Climate Fund."
Duqm Now "Up and Down the Green Stream" will feature a panel of prominent industry figures, including Musab Al Farsi, CEO, Na-fath Renewable Energy; Dr. Khalil Al Hanashi, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Energy & Minerals; and Dr. Firas Al Abduwani, Director General, Renewable Energy & Hydrogen, Ministry of Energy & Minerals. The evening's discussion will be moderated by Dr. Mohammed Al Mugheiry, Petroleum Engineering Commercialization Manager, PDO.
The Duqm Now programme will roll out across 2025 with four focused sessions covering renewable energy, manufacturing-education partnerships, circular economy practices and sustainable petrochemical production. Each event is designed to generate practical solutions for participating organisations.
Duqm Now is free of charge to attend, conducted in Arabic, and open to all. To secure a seat, email your name and contact details to duqm.now@duqm.gov.om

REPORT

India's fiscal and monetary policies shift towards supporting economic growth

NEW DELHI: India's fiscal and monetary policies are now focusing more on supporting economic growth, aligning with expectations of a cyclical recovery, according to a report by Morgan Stanley.
The report highlighted that the Union Budget has maintained the path of fiscal consolidation, though at a slightly faster pace than anticipated.
It noted that despite the accelerated fiscal consolidation, the Budget includes measures that encourage consumption and increase capital expenditure, which should help drive economic growth.
The report stated, "In our view, both fiscal and monetary policy are pivoting to support growth, which is in line with our view of a cyclical recovery in growth."
The government's approach aims to strike a balance between stimulating demand and maintaining macroeconomic stability.
The Budget has focused on both fiscal discipline and economic expansion, with a lower fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP for FY26 (compared to Morgan Stanley's estimate of 4.5 per cent of GDP).
A key measure in the Budget is



the reduction in income taxes, particularly for low- and middle-income taxpayers, which is expected to support consumption.
The Finance Minister has estimated that direct tax changes

could lead to a revenue loss of Rs 1,000 billion (0.3 per cent of GDP), helping to boost spending power.
On the expenditure side, the government has prioritized capital expenditure. Effective capital expenditure (which includes direct capex and grants for asset creation) is expected to grow by 17.4 per cent in FY26 Budget Estimates, compared to 5.3 per cent growth in the revised estimates for FY25.
A significant portion of this increase comes from grants to states, aimed at infrastructure and long-term economic development.
Morgan Stanley emphasized that this synchronized approach between fiscal and monetary policies reflects the government's commitment to strengthening economic recovery.
The targeted spending and fiscal prudence suggest a strategy designed to sustain growth while keeping macroeconomic stability intact. - **ANI**

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The targeted spending and fiscal prudence suggest a strategy designed to sustain growth while keeping macroeconomic stability intact. - **ANI**

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Voltamp Energy, up 10.00%, was the top gainer while Dhofar Insurance, down 9.57%, was the top loser



MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,586.91 points, up by 0.74% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.11% at 413.70 points. Voltamp Energy, up 10.00%, was the top gainer while Dhofar Insurance, down 9.57%, was the top loser. Shares of Ahli Bank were the most active in terms of number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 962 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of RO 168.85 million, with more than 848.59 million shares changing hands. Out of 57 traded securities, 22 advanced, 13 declined, and 22 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net buyers for RO 161862K while GCC & Arab investors were net sellers for RO 161833K, followed by foreign investors for RO 29K worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,933.25 points, up 0.69%. Prices of Financial Corporation, Bank Dhofar, Ahli Bank, Muscat Fi-

nance, Bank Nizwa were up by 8.89%, 4.64%, 2.26%, 2.13%, 1.98% respectively. Prices of Dhofar Insurance, National Bank Oman, National Finance, Oman Arab Bank were down by 9.57%, 3.33%, 1.52%, 1.36% respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,482.51 points, up 1.17%. Prices of Voltamp Energy, Construction Materials, Muscat Thread Mill, Jazeera Steel Products, Gulf International Chemicals were up by 10.00%, 5.63%, 5.30%, 1.29%, 1.27% respectively. Prices of Al Anwar Ceramics, Oman Flour Mills were down by 0.93%, 0.91% respectively.

Services Index was down by 0.05% before closing at 1,690.10 points. Prices of Muscat Desalination, OQ Gas Networks, Majan College, SMN Power Holding, Oman Telecom were up by 2.99%, 2.31%, 1.87%, 1.18%, 0.56% respectively. Prices of Ooredoo, Dhofar Generating, Sembcorp Salalah, Abraj Energy, Sharqiyah Desalination were down by 2.66%, 1.56%, 1.00%, 0.84%, 0.71% respectively. — United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

INDICES

MSX 30 INDEX

FINANCIAL INDEX

Industry Index

Services Index

MSX Shariah Index

MSX TR INDEX

FINANCIAL TR IDX

INDUSTRIAL TR IDX

SERVICES TR IDX

FIXED INCOME INDEX

Trading Summary

Volume

Turnover

Trades

Market Cap

Up

Down

Equal

Sec. Traded

848,595,741

168,846,660

962

27,586,973,527

22

13

22

57

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

ISIN

SECURITY NAME

VOLUME

TURNOVER

TRADES

OPEN PRICE

HIGH

LOW

CLOSE PR.

PREV. CLOSE

DIFF. RD.

DIFF %

LAST PR.

LAST BID

LAST OFFER

PRE. VALUE

MARKET CAP

REGULAR MARKET

OM0000000972

QO GAS NETWORKS

682,326

89,541

97

0.130

0.133

0.130

0.133

0.130

0.003

2.308

0.132

0.132

0.132

0.100

575,972,981

OM0000002176

JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS

357,016

111,075

13

0.310

0.314

0.310

0.314

0.310

0.004

1.290

0.314

0.308

0.314

0.100

39,217,959

OM0000003125

GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.

637,982

56,503

46

0.088

0.089

0.088

0.089

0.088

0.001

1.136

0.089

0.088

0.089

0.100

17,800,000

OM0000001535

OMNINET

86,658

28,658

16

0.352

0.354

0.352

0.355

0.352

0.003

0.904

0.355

0.352

0.355

0.100

223,924,418

OM0000001087

OMAN UNITED INSURANCE

8,294

2,002

3

0.241

0.242

0.241

0.242

0.240

0.002

0.833

0.242

0.240

0.243

0.100

24,200,000

OM0000003398

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK

2,590,359

365,022

29

0.139

0.141

0.139

0.140

0.139

0.001

0.719

0.140

0.139

0.140

0.100

926,414,478

OM0000003026

OMAN TELECOM

211,610

190,513

35

0.300

0.305

0.297

0.305

0.300

0.005

0.556

0.305

0.300

0.305

0.100

678,750,000

OM0000003224

RENAISSANCE SERVICES

76,744

27,608

26

0.364

0.364

0.358

0.361

0.360

0.001

0.278

0.361

0.360

0.363

0.100

85,344,010

OM0000001881

OMAN EMIRATES HO.

6,600

436

1

0.066

0.066

0.066

0.065

0.065

0.000

0.000

0.066

0.066

0.066

0.100

7,921,875

OM0000001749

OMAN CEMENT

7,100

5,826

4

0.399

0.399

0.397

0.399

0.399

0.000

0.399

0.399

0.397

0.399

0.100

132,018,211

OM0000002440

AL SHARQIYA INVESTMENT HO.

95,642

7,173

3

0.075

0.075

0.075

0.075

0.075

0.000

0.000

0.075

0.075

0.081

0.100

6,750,000

OM0000002796

BANK MUSCAT

46,222

11,888

9

0.259

0.259

0.257

0.259

0.259

0.000

0.000

0.259

0.258

0.259

0.100

1,944,156,839

OM0000002804

ASAFFA FOODS

376

146

3

0.393

0.400

0.393

0.400

0.400

0.000

0.000

0.400

0.393

0.400

0.100

48,000,000

OM0000004768

MADINA TAKAFUL

86,909

7,289

7

0.084

0.084

0.083

0.084

0.084

0.000

0.000

0.084

0.083

0.085

0.100

14,700,000

OM0000004925

ALBATHINAH POWER

853,780

58,921

18

0.069

0.070

0.069

0.069

0.069

0.000

0.000

0.069

0.068

0.069

0.100

46,587,233

OM0000004933

AL SUWADI POWER

324,329

22,379

8

0.069

0.070

0.069

0.069

0.069

0.000

0.000

0.069

0.069

0.070

0.100

49,294,037

OM0000008934

ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES

211,478

50,173

64

0.238

0.239

0.236

0.236

0.238

-0.002

-0.840

0.236

0.238

0.235

0.100

181,767,200

OM0000002168

AL ANWAR CERAMIC

5,000

535

1

0.107

0.107

0.107

0.107

0.107

-0.001

-0.926

0.107

0.103

0.107

0.100

23,540,000

OM0000004735

SEMBCORP SALALAH

30,261

2,986

3

0.099

0.099

0.099

0.099

0.100

-0.001

-1.000

0.099

0.099

0.099

0.100

94,502,623

OM0000003968

OOREDOO

94,682

20,922

30

0.230

0.230

0.220

0.220

0.226

-0.006

-2.655

0.220

0.220

0.230

0.100

143,207,731

OM0000001483

NATIONAL BANK OMAN

707,630

2,122,939

17

0.300

0.300

0.290

0.290

0.300

-0.010

-3.333

0.290

0.288

0.300

0.100

471,524,433

Total

21

13,489,974

3,177,549

433

<



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Email: jobcpacma@gmail.com

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Contact: 77258382 Indian, male, 23 yrs, Bcom with 2 yrs experience in India looking for suitable job. Contact: 76326650 Senior Accountant BCOM, MBA, finance with 11+ yrs experience (9 yrs in Oman) NOC & D/L available. Contact: 78109909, Email: shinsjohn@gmail.com Sr. Accountant, accountant, 16 yrs of experience in Oman. Accounts up to finalisation and auditing. Contact: 94001764. Accountant MBA (Finance) having 5 yrs experience in airport & logistics ready to join immediately. Contact: 77596968, Email: mohdirfanahmed64@gmail.com Junior accountant, Indian, male B.com graduate 2yrs experience in Oman seeking suitable job. Contact: 7804 7716 Highly skilled Chief accountant looking for suitable position. Contact: +968 79888153 Indian male, having 2.5 yrs of experience in Accounts, finance, admin looking for job. Contact: +968 79414996, Email: sajadzn29@gmail.com Indian male with 4+ yrs exp. in Oman, worked as Accounts & admin executive Bachelor Degree in Management (BBA) with valid D/L, ready to join immediately. Contact: 93536020, Email: naseemt24@gmail.com	Female, B.com seeks Admin, finance job. Presently in Oman. Contact: 78354801 Indian male MBA, HR & marketing having 13 yrs experience in administration, sales operations,customer relations seeks suitable senior position in Oman as immediate joiner. Contact: +968 91314570 Indian (M), Oman experience in projects, corporate communications, CEO office. WhatsApp: +968 97457945. Experienced admin, ops, and HR specialist with 10 yrs in Oman and Dubai. Skilled in payroll, recruitment, workforce management, and SAP ERP. Seeking opportunities to drive organizational growth. Contact: 77360927, Email: z.butt47@gmail.com. Indian male have experience in project coordinator, sales and marketing have diploma in mech, valid D/L. Contact:95645241 Indian male MBA(HR) & Btech (Comp) with nearly 10 yrs of over all experience seeks job. Contact: +968 94168194, +91 9745020204, Email: gokulgopan91@hotmail.com	Looking for driving job have car. Contact: 98586920 Looking for driving job. Contact: +968 99532361 Looking for driving job with 2 yrs experience. Contact: 97995898 EDUCATION/TRAINING Indian female, completed MCA and also having experience in teaching, available in Oman on family visa, looking for a suitable job. Contact: 79090343/94117967, Email: induchandran01@gmail.com Chemistry teacher with 7 yrs experience of teaching IGCSE chemistry (Pakistani). Currently in Oman. Contact: +968 78684306 ENGINEER Junior mechanical engineer from a prestigious UK university, possessing approximately 2 yrs experience in mechanical and aerodynamics design. Proficient in solidworks, catia, ansys work-bench and autocad. Focused on the design and optimization of mechanical components and systems. Currently in Oman. Contact: 77007422 Experienced Biomedical Engineers seeking opportunities in Oman. Presently in Oman & available for immediate joining. Email: asmathalipvi@gmail.com Contact: +968 72031225 Indian male with 10 yrs. Experience in Oman, have 3 yrs Electrical diploma, General maintenance, valid Oman D/L. Contact: 93220672 Diploma in Electrical Engineering looking for Fire Fighting site supervisor/suitable job. Contact: 95933453, Email: haquefaizan3786@gmail.com Mechanical Engineer, Indian Origin with own visa based in Oman for 18 yrs with total 35 yrs in Oil and Gas Industry is available for freelance Consulting services. Contact: WhatsApp: 94192265, Email: innovativetraders674@gmail.com Male, B.E Civil engineer with 15+ yrs of experience. Have worked in oilfield and gas sector, building construction and piling. Along with PDO and standard D/L. Contact: +968 98505167, 97431611, Email: 80.ferdous@gmail.com BE Civil site, project engineer (Keralite) having 12 yrs of experience in Oman looking for a suitable position as a site engineer (part time/full-time) in any reputed companies. having valid Oman D/L. Contact: 91281006, 78385414 Project manager in civil with 18 yrs experience (14 yrs in gulf region) seeks suitable placement. Ready to join immediately, with D/L. Contact: 95181197, Email rooswin.anto@gmail.com	Civil engineer supervisor, 14 yrs experience civil & tower project with D/L & own visa. Contact: 78002980 Mechanical engineer with over 4 yrs experience in sales and operations having Oman D/L with MSc in Engineering management from UK available to join immediately. Contact: 96111283, Email: dobin.mathew@gmail.com. BE Project engineer 12-13yrs experience. Contact: 93850875, Email: abdulcivilco2015@gmail.com B-Tech Civil Engineer with total 16yrs GCC experience include 11 yrs Oman experience, project manager job seeking. Contact: 97733497 HOSPITALITY Experienced Housekeeping supervisor with 9 yrs in the hotel industry seeking a suitable opportunity. Skilled in team management, cleanliness standards, and guest satisfaction. Available immediately. Open to opportunities in Oman. Contact: 77298378, Email: sijokurvillaabraham90@gmail.com IT Experienced IT professional with 19+ yrs experience in the Gulf & India, specializing in end-to-end IT infrastructure services, IT operations, and support. Contact: 95218692 Experienced developer, 8 yrs experience in full stack developer & NET developer. Contact : 96962176. 15+ yrs Oman experienced IT support professional, looking for suitable opportunities with valid visa & NOC available. Contact: 79063180. Email: dd.mcp@hotmail.com MEDICAL Indian Female, with Phd in Biotechnology looking for opportunity in research (Lab) & Teaching fields. Contact: 99341926, Email: farzanabiomeitez@gmail.com MANAGER Fresher operational manager with D/L. Muscat. Contact: 79471027 Finance manager with 15 yrs of experience in oil & gas multinational company looking for suitable placement. Contact: 95230609 Indian male, MBA. 12 yrs of experience as (branch Manager & key accounts executive) looking for suitable position. Contact : 98132055	Indian male, 22 yrs, BBA in Aviation & logistic management seeking for opportunities in logistic, management or administrative, sales, marketing or any suitable position. Contact: 79487865, E-mail: Officialabdulraziq@gmail.com Indian male, storekeeper, document controller 2+ yrs of experience in GCC, completed BCA ,ready to join immediately. Contact: +968 71818173, Email: swamierethasouth@gmail.com Sudanese Supply chain professional with CSCP certificate, MBA and 10 yrs experience in supply chain, logistics, procurement and project management. Contact: 95272472, Email: kemeir@hotmail.com MISCELLANEOUS Merchandiser job or helper with 4 yrs experience in Oman. Contact: 78651895 PROCUREMENT/ PURCHASE 27 yrs experience in Oman, Indian, looking for a manager position in purchase, sales, holding valid Omani D/L. Contact: 94338072, 78177167 Procurement engineer, Sudanese, 10yrs experience in Oman,MEP, firefighting, projects, D/L. Contact: 79027138 SALES/MARKETING Indian, MBA, 20 yrs of experience in Sales. Previously held supervisory, managerial position with D/L seeks suitable placement. Contact: 95548480 Looking for a job related to sales. 16 yrs experience in an international jewellery brand . Having valid Oman D/L. Contact: +968 96928343 Key accounts sales executive (MBA) 8 yrs experienced with Oman modern market and IR market, Seeking for suitable vacancies. Contact: 77528906. Email: subymon557@gmail.com Indian male with 14 yrs of sales & marketing experience. looking for suitable job with valid D/L. Contact: 95136784 Indian male, Sales executive (MBA in Marketing) with 10 yrs of experience in FMCG & automobile with strong communication skills, holding valid Oman D/L.Contact: 92350798 Indian male MBA graduated specialized with Marketing & HR (fresher). Looking for suitable positions . Currently in Muscat Oman. Contact: +968 71084371, Email: ccrashid9@gmail.com



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LIFESTYLE



A CURE
FOR HIV:
'ONE OF THE
HARDEST
GOALS
IN SCIENCE'

HIV is “like a time bomb,” said James Riley, a microbiologist at University of Pennsylvania, US. Even now — decades after the virus was identified — and with antiretroviral drugs allowing us to suppress it before it develops into AIDS, 40 million people still live with the condition. Scientists are still trying to find a cure for HIV.

Because, “unless people get PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) therapy every day, HIV will go off and restart the infection again,” said Riley.

Scott Kitchen, an expert in infectious diseases at University of California Los Angeles, US, described antiretroviral HIV drugs as a “miracle” of modern medicine, but said they were still not a cure for infection.

Finding a cure is proving to be very challenging for researchers. Riley said finding a cure for HIV is “one of the hardest goals in science.”

“We’ll beat solid cancers [cancers with tumors] because we have a good handle on what the problem is and how to solve it. But with HIV, we haven’t got a solution to the problem yet,” he said.

The problem: HIV hides in the human genome

An HIV infection is so difficult to cure because the virus is incredibly effective at hiding in our cells.

When HIV infects our bodies, it integrates itself into our genetic material and hides in the genomes of our cells in a dormant, inactive state.

It is then activated when our cells turn DNA into proteins — a process called transcription and translation — and it’s one that we need for life. HIV piggybacks this process. And our cells inadvertently replicate the virus.

The problem is that there’s nothing to distinguish the cells which harbor HIV from those that don’t, so there are no reliable ways to eradicate HIV from the body — if you can’t see the target, you can’t hit it.

Antiretroviral drugs like PrEP do suppress the virus to undetectable levels, but the virus still remains embedded and hidden in the human genome.

Haven’t people already been cured of HIV?

Seven people are confirmed to have been cured of HIV with a stem cell therapy used to replace all the immune cells in their bodies.

“Everyone who has, to date, been

Curing HIV will be harder than curing cancer. Apart from a few ‘miracle’ cases, antiretrovirals only suppress HIV, they don’t kill it. But new research is promising.

cured of HIV received a bone marrow transplant to treat a cancer [leukemia or lymphoma] while concurrently infected with HIV,” said Kitchen.

But this form of stem cell therapy is unsuitable as a cure for HIV in most people. Bone marrow transplants are a difficult procedure, with a high risk of death. They are only attempted in people undergoing late-stage cancer treatment.

“Outside of the high costs, these procedures, because they carry considerable risk to the patient, need to be performed in a major hospital or medical center. This limits their [use] in many settings where HIV is of high prevalence,” said Kitchen.

Kitchen is currently researching a new type of stem cell therapy as a cure for HIV. It uses modified blood stem cells to kill HIV-infected cells once they mature in the body.

“In essence, this is a ‘genetic vaccination’ that could allow the body to naturally form cells that eradicate HIV,” he said.

While still in the early stages of research, Kitchen said their approach would avoid the need for chemotherapy or finding a stem cell donor.

Other researchers are pegging their hopes of a cure on T-cell therapies (TCRs), which do not require a stem cell transplant. T-cells are a type of immune cell. They detect proteins made inside cells, as though they were viral proteins or toxic chemicals, then kill the cell to eradicate the threat.

If a cell is infected with HIV, it will contain markers of the HIV, but they are very difficult to detect by normal T cells. “[TCRs] work by designing [specialized] T cells to hunt for markers of HIV in a cell, then kill the cell,” said Riley. It’s like introducing a pack of hunting dogs into the system who’ve been primed with the scent of a fox.

TCRs are being tested in several clinical trials, with an emphasis on proving their safety. It’s too early to say whether they are effective or not.

Riley said he’s not pessimistic about finding a HIV cure, but conceded the goal was like getting to the moon. “Was going to the moon hard? Yes. But we got there. And we invented new technologies because of trying to get to the moon. That’s what I think curing HIV is like. Our efforts will spill over into how we cure other diseases,” he said. -nw

SPORTS

Al Rawahi eyes redemption at Qatar International Rally

Three rally drivers for Oman are to compete in Qatar with Abdullah Al Zubair currently leading MERC 2 standings followed by Zakaria Al Amri in the same category

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's rally star and defending joint MERC champion Abdullah Al Rawahi is determined to bounce back at the 50th edition of the Qatar International Rally this weekend after an unfortunate mechanical issue stalled his progress in the opening round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) at the Oman International Rally in Sohar.

Al Rawahi, who was forced to retire on the first day in Sohar due to car troubles, rejoined the rally under Super Rally regulations and proved his pace by setting the fastest times in four of the six stages on day two. Al Rawahi, who shared the MERC title jointly with Nasser Al Attiyah in 2023, currently occupies eighth place in the overall



championship standings. He now aims for a stronger result in Qatar, where he finished third last year. "The Qatar Rally is more challenging for us than for the local drivers, who have a deeper familiarity with the stages," Al Rawahi said.

"For example, Nasser Al Attiyah and other Qatari drivers know the best approaches to enter and exit each stage efficiently. "That's why it's crucial for us to take precise notes during reconnaissance. Last year, we secured

third place in Qatar, and we're aiming for a better position this time." Al Rawahi is one of three Omani drivers competing in Qatar, alongside Zakaria Al Amri and Abdullah Al Zubair. Al Zubair, a rising talent in re-

gional rallying, leads the MERC 2 category with 30 points after a strong performance in Sohar, where he won the MERC 2 top honours along with his co-driver Taha Soomar. The Omani driver has been steadily building his reputation and is now aiming to extend his lead in Qatar, where he expects tough competition from seasoned regional drivers. Al Amri, who also faced technical issues with his car's turbo system in Sohar, is eager to maintain his momentum in the MERC 2 category. "We have good knowledge of the Qatar Rally and its stages. There are some changes this year and challenges in navigation, but our goal is to win our category so we can go to the third round in Saudi Arabia as leaders," Al Amri said. "I have a great partnership with my navigator, Mohammed Al Mazroui, and we're ready to push." Al Amri is currently placed

second with 24 points. The Qatar International Rally, one of the oldest and most prestigious events in the region, marks its 50th anniversary this year. The event has a rich history, with past winners including nine-time champion and current FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem and six-time winner Saeed Al Hajri. Defending MERC champion Nasser Al Attiyah is the event's most successful driver, with a record 17 wins, and will be aiming to extend his dominance this weekend. With 29 teams from 19 countries set to compete, the event promises high-octane action. The rally features 13 special stages, covering a total of 212.64 competitive kilometres, with an overall rally distance of 627.19 kilometres. It will commence with a 4.36-km spectator stage on February 6, followed by two days of intense competition on gravel tracks in the northern desert. The Qatar Rally has also seen its fair share of surprise winners over the years. Oman's Nizar Al Shanfari, alongside the late Tom Steele, stunned rivals in 1999 by clinching victory in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution V. In 2017, Rashid Al Naimi and Hugo Magalhães secured an unexpected win in a Subaru Impreza WRX STi. As the season gains momentum, the Omani drivers are set to make their mark, with Al Rawahi determined to reclaim lost ground and Al Zubair and Al Amri locked in a competitive battle for MERC 2 supremacy.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea edge West Ham in dramatic comeback

LONDON: Chelsea battled back from a goal down to secure a crucial 2-1 victory over West Ham at Stamford Bridge, marking former manager Graham Potter's return to his old stomping ground with a bitter defeat on Monday night. The win lifts Chelsea back into the Premier League's top four with 43 points, leapfrogging Manchester City and Newcastle, who both suffered losses over the weekend. Despite a resilient performance, Potter's West Ham remain 15th in the standings with 27 points. West Ham stunned the home crowd in the first half when Jarrod Bowen, making his first appearance since fracturing his foot in December, capitalised on a misplaced backpass from Levi Colwill to fire past Filip Jorgensen. Chelsea, reeling from recent poor form, struggled to break through a disciplined Hammers defence before halftime. Desperate for a turnaround, Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca made bold changes early in the second half, introducing Pedro Neto and Marc Guiu. The substitutions injected much-needed energy, and it was Neto who made the difference, pouncing on a rebound in the 64th minute after Enzo Fernandez's initial shot was blocked by Vladimir Coufal. With momentum firmly in Chelsea's favour, their pressure



paid off just 10 minutes later when Cole Palmer's cross deflected off Aaron Wan-Bissaka and looped over West Ham goalkeeper Alphonse Areola, sealing an important victory. **A statement win: Maresca** Maresca, relieved to see his side bounce back after slipping from second to sixth in recent weeks, hailed the result as a key moment in Chelsea's season. "We are there, and hopefully, we can stay there until the end," Maresca said. "Playing this kind of game in February and still being in contention is an important statement." The Italian tactician also defended his decision to start Jorgensen over Robert Sanchez, citing the need to give the latter a break.

For Potter, who lasted just seven months as Chelsea manager before his dismissal in 2022, a spirited West Ham display was not enough to take anything from the game. Missing the influential Lucas Paqueta due to injury, West Ham showed glimpses of promise, particularly through Bowen's sharp movement. "I thought the performance was really good, lots of positives," Potter reflected. "We were intelligent tactically, but ultimately, we didn't take our chances." With London derbies against Brentford and Arsenal looming, West Ham will look to build on this competitive showing, while Chelsea will hope this comeback sparks a strong run in their push for Champions League qualification. - Agencies

CZECH STAR

Kvitova to return to tennis after birth of son



LONDON: Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova has announced she will return to the sport following the birth of her son. Former world No.2 Kvitova has been away from tennis for 15 months, last competing at the China Open in October 2023. The 34-year-old Czech, who won Wimbledon in 2011 and 2014, gave birth to her son in July 2024. "After 15 months being away from tennis and having my baby boy Petr, I'm coming back to the tennis circuit," Kvitova said in a video on Instagram. "I really miss tennis and I miss competing, so I am really looking forward to being back. I can't wait." Kvitova said she plans to return at the ATX Open in Austin, Texas, which begins on 24 February. She has won 31 WTA singles titles, most recently triumphing in Miami and Berlin in 2023. - Agencies

130 GOLFERS TO TAKE PART



Assarain Classic to be held at Ghala Golf Club on February 7-8

MUSCAT: The 29th edition of the Assarain Golf Classic, one of Oman's most prestigious golf tournaments, is set to take place at Ghala Golf Club on February 7-8. More than 130 golfers have registered for this highly anticipated event, which continues to raise the bar for amateur golf in the Sultanate. Organised by Ghala Golf Club and sponsored by Assarain Group of Companies, the tournament provides amateur golfers with a professional-level competition that meets international standards. Over the years, it has drawn a diverse field of participants from Oman and across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Ibrahim Al Wahaibi, Director of Assarain Group of Companies and the driving force behind the

tournament, said: "We support golf and are committed to helping the game flourish in Oman. We look forward to the 2025 edition of the Assarain Golf Classic and are confident that it will exceed expectations." He added, "This tournament is a highlight of the golfing calendar in Oman, bringing together players of all skill levels. Open to men, women, and juniors, the Assarain Golf Classic continues to set new benchmarks every year." The 36-hole competition is one of the largest in the region and welcomes players with a verifiable handicap. The event will conclude with a grand prize presentation on February 8, celebrating winners across multiple categories with exciting surprises in store.

SERIES AGAINST INDIA

England's Smith likely to miss first two ODIs; Varun drafted into India squad

MUMBAI: England wicketkeeper Jamie Smith is likely to miss the first two one-day internationals (ODIs) against India this week but is expected to be fit for the Champions Trophy. Smith, 24, has a calf issue which caused him to leave the field during the third T20 in Rajkot on 28 January. He missed the following two games as India won the series 4-1. The three-match ODI series begins in Nagpur on Thursday, with the second match following on Sunday. The final match - England's last outing before their Champions Trophy opener against Australia on February 22 - is on Wednesday, February 12. The eight sides have to name their final Champions Trophy squads



the same day. Joe Root has joined England for the ODI leg of the tour but England's batting line-up will largely be the same as the one that struggled in the T20s, with Smith's

absence limiting their options. Phil Salt and Ben Duckett are set to open, with Root returning at number three for his first 50-over international since the 2023



World Cup. Captain Jos Buttler, Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone and Jacob Bethell are the middle-order options. Spinner Rehan Ahmed, initially

only selected for the T20 leg, has been added to England's squad for the ODIs. **Uncapped Varun called up** India, meanwhile, have added spinner Varun Chakravarthy to their squad after he finished the T20 series as the leading wicket-taker. The 33-year-old, who is uncapped in the 50-over format and has only played 23 List A games in his career, took 14 wickets at an average of 9.85. India also welcome back captain Rohit Sharma, batter Virat Kohli and wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant. There is no place for Abhishek Sharma, India's centurion from the fifth T20 in Mumbai.

Varun's presence in the ODI squad strengthens a spin-attack that already included Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar. Varun's inclusion is a significant development considering these ODIs against England are the first 50-over games India are playing since August last year and the only series before the upcoming Champions Trophy. A number of specialist bowlers in the Champions Trophy squad - Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah - are on the comeback trail from injuries. Bumrah is part of the squad for only the third ODI against England, with Harshit Rana in the 16 for the first two games. - Agencies

IN PICTURES



Highlights of Haute Couture Week Spring/Summer 2025 in Paris
A model presents a creation from the haute couture Spring/Summer 2025 collections by Germanier during the Paris Fashion Week in Paris, France. [Xinhua](#)



Croatia holds celebration parade welcoming men's national handball team
This picture shows fans at the celebration parade welcoming Croatia men's national handball team at Ban Jelacic Square in Zagreb, Croatia. Croatia won silver medal at the 2025 IHF World Men's Handball Championship after losing to Denmark in the final. [Xinhua](#)



Migrant shelters in Ciudad Juarez offer refuge to Latin American immigrants
A child plays at a migrant shelter in Ciudad Juarez, state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Located on the border between Mexico and the United States, Ciudad Juarez is an important city in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, just across the Rio Grande River from El Paso, Texas in the United States. A large number of immigrants from Latin American countries gather here, and migrant shelters provide temporary housing for them. [Xinhua](#)



Philippines declares food security emergency to tame soaring rice prices
Workers carry sacks of rice inside the National Food Authority (NFA) warehouse in Valenzuela City, the Philippines. Philippine Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel declared a food security emergency on rice on Monday to stabilise the "extraordinary" rice prices in the country. [Xinhua](#)



Opera House lit up in red to celebrate Chinese New Year in Sydney
This picture shows the Opera House lit up in red to celebrate the Chinese New Year in Sydney, Australia. [Xinhua](#)



Sri Lanka celebrates 77th Independence Day
Dancers perform a traditional dance during the 77th Independence Day celebrations in Colombo, Sri Lanka. [Xinhua](#)

ROUND-UP

Grand Millennium to celebrate Valentine’s Day with moonlit retreat and dining experience

Designed as an ultimate staycation experience, the hotel’s ‘Moonlit Retreat’ is set to captivate senses and create unforgettable memories for guests

MUSCAT: Grand Millennium Muscat is inviting couples to escape the ordinary and indulge in a dreamy Valentine’s Day staycation. Nestled amidst the vibrant city, the hotel offers a haven of tranquillity and luxury, perfect for creating unforgettable memories.

Designed as an ultimate staycation experience, the hotel’s ‘Moonlit Retreat’ is set to captivate senses and create unforgettable memories for guests. Whether one is seeking a luxurious escape in an elegant suite or a cozy deluxe room, the hotel’s exclusive Valentine’s offers promise an enchanting getaway, complete with lavish pampering, gourmet dining, and serene relaxation.

Unwind in style

For those looking to unwind in style, the Deluxe Room package incorporates the perfect setting for a special getaway. Couples can enjoy a stay in a beautifully appointed deluxe room, complete with a delicious breakfast, and also avail a 20 percent discount on extra food and beverages at any of the hotel’s world-class dining venues.



And for those seeking the ultimate indulgence, the hotel’s Executive Suite package takes luxury to new heights. Guests are invited to stay in an expansive, elegantly designed executive suite that offers VIP status and exclusive arrival amenities. The package features a delectable breakfast as well as a 20 percent discount on extra food and beverages at the hotel’s premium dining venues.

The evening features the Moonlit dining experience at Arayikpool side, or an in-room dining setup for a more private setting. To further enhance relaxation, couples can indulge in a one-hour Balinese Couples Massage - a blissful experience that rejuvenates both the body and soul.

Grand Millennium Muscat’s Moonlit Retreat offers the ideal balance of luxury, romance, and tranquillity for couples looking to celebrate Valentine’s Day in style.

ENGAGING WITH MASSES



Sohar International sponsors 8th Al Bashair Festival

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s Best Bank, served as the Strategic Sponsor for the 8th Al Bashair Festival 2025, a premier camel racing event set to take place from February 10 to February 15, in Adam, Al Dakhiliya region. This sponsorship reflects the bank’s commitment to preserving Oman’s rich heritage while fostering economic diversification and strengthening synergies between the private and public sectors.

As a key contributor to national progress, Sohar International continues to champion initiatives that drive cultural, social, and economic value.

The Al Bashair Festival, a cornerstone of Oman’s cultural calendar, not only celebrates tradition but also stimulates tourism, entrepreneurship, and local business growth. Through this collaboration, Sohar International reinforces its role as an enabler of sustainable development, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 and supporting initiatives that contribute to a dynamic and inclusive economy.

Commenting on the sponsorship of the event, Abdul Wahid Al Murshidi, Acting Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International stated, “Sohar International remains committed to championing initiatives that celebrate Oman’s rich heritage while driving broader economic and social value. This festival serves as a vital platform that not only preserves cultural traditions but also stimulates key sectors such as tourism, entrepreneurship, and creative industries. By supporting such events, we reinforce our role in fostering community engagement, empowering young Omanis to showcase their talents in media, arts, and cultural expressions linked to camel racing, and contributing to the long-term sustainability of Oman’s diverse economy.”

The seventh edition of the Al Bashair Festival, spanning six days and attracting participants from Oman and the wider GCC, featured 74 competitive rounds across multiple categories, with prestigious prizes including 20 cars and 15 trophies, such as gold and silver swords.

As a distinguished platform celebrating Oman’s rich camel racing heritage, the festival unites competitors and spectators from across the region, reinforcing cultural continuity and fostering regional ties.

Through its strategic sponsorship, Sohar International is leveraging this opportunity to engage with a diverse audience, supporting one of the nation’s most esteemed traditions while reinforcing its commitment to cultural and economic development. With the festival drawing visitors from all corners of the region, Sohar International is eager to once again be part of a momentous occasion that celebrates vibrant Omani customs while fostering new opportunities for collaboration, and continued growth.

REDEFINING FUTURE OF MOBILITY

Sporty, stylish Lynk & Co 06 set to hit roads

MUSCAT: Lynk & Co in Oman is redefining the future of mobility, standing apart as a globally inspired brand that thrives on personalisation, openness and connectivity. With a philosophy rooted in innovation and forward-thinking, Lynk & Co combines European design, cutting-edge technology, global manufacturing and international sales to create cars that speak to a bold, modern lifestyle.

Over the years, Lynk & Co has introduced a versatile lineup of cars that have captured the imagination of car enthusiasts worldwide. From the smart and premium SUV Lynk & Co 01 to the racing-inspired Lynk & Co 03 and 03+, the adventurous Lynk & Co 05 AWD SUV, and the luxurious seven-seater Lynk & Co 09, each model is a masterpiece that blends value, safety, technology, performance, and design. This dynamic range has cemented Lynk & Co as a brand built for those who demand the extraordinary.

Now, Lynk & Co is ready to take the next leap with the upcoming Lynk & Co 06- a sporty, edgy SUV that is set to innovate driving experiences. This exciting new model boasts dynamic control for a thrilling drive, a trend-setting exterior that turns heads, and powerful performance that delivers on every front.



The highly anticipated Lynk & Co 06 will be launched on 12th February 2025. With its sleek design, powerful performance, and advanced technology, this compact crossover is ready to elevate your driving experience. Be excited for what’s to come!

INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB

ISC organises workshop on investment, succession planning and carefree retirement

MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club, Oman organised a workshop on the subject of finance and investment on 25 January. It was an enriching talk explaining on how one can navigate through one’s financial labyrinth and make it rewarding in later years.

Afshan Patel is a Chartered Accountant from India, a Certified Public Accountant from Canada, a Certified Internal Auditor from the USA and a Post Graduate Diploma holder in Islamic Banking and Insurance. She has worked for the Central Bank of Oman and the University of Toronto. She has written several articles on Corporate Governance, Ethics and Economics for a leading business magazine in Oman, ‘The Oman Economic Review’. She conducts workshops on ‘Interpreting the financial statements of Banking Institutions’ for banking profession-



als held by the ‘College of Banking and Finance’, in Muscat, Oman. She is also a guest faculty at the College of Banking and Finance.

She says, “The aforementioned qualifications are parameters that society requires to evaluate you. I would much prefer to just be identified as a good human being and continue working at improving myself in that sphere.”

The presentation delved into the realm of Investments, Succession Planning and Retirement. The issues discussed were the importance of identifying your risk profile as a starting point to ensure that you have a good fit between what you invest in and what your risk appetite and risk tolerance allow. The fundamental principles that guide investing and the types of investments available to investors were discussed covering Bonds, Shares, Mutual Funds, Funds for start ups, Real Estate, Gold etc. The features of each of these investment classes were covered highlighting risks and returns in each of them. Succession Planning was discussed bringing to attention that the most difficult part of succession planning is to start ‘thinking about it’.

Once this hurdle has been passed, proper planning in a timely manner can make succession planning effective, make passing on assets to your heirs stress free and an organized exercise in accordance with your wishes rather than becoming a random or haphazard exercise. Vigilant periodical review of your investment portfolio and careful succession planning can take you towards a carefree retirement. The workshop was an interactive one with all queries being answered by Afshan throughout the talk.

FINANCIAL NEEDS

Dhofar Islamic empowers future leaders through youth savings account



MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic Youth Account is designed to meet the unique financial needs of Omani youth to help them achieve their various ambitions and dreams to reach financial independence and build responsible future leaders.

This youth-oriented account is a testament to Dhofar Islamic’s commitment to empowering youth through flexible and convenient banking solutions that enable them to achieve financial independence from an early age, as it is specifically designed to meet the needs of youth between the ages of 18 and 23.

The Youth Account is a Sharia compliant savings account (based on Mudarabah principles) specially crafted to cater to the unique needs of youth aged between 18 and 23 years. It comes with no minimum balance requirement and allows free fund transfers through mobile payment service ensuring that young account holders can enjoy their banking experience without any extra fees. This innovative youth-centric account is a testament to Dhofar Islamic’s commitment to empowering the youth with convenient and flexible banking solutions that enable financial independence from an early age.

Commenting on the launch of the Youth Account, Amor Said Al Amri, DGM and Head of Retail Banking - Dhofar Islamic said, “Our Youth Account is designed to empower the young generation to learn essential money management skills, take control of their finances and build a strong financial foundation for their future. We are committed to providing them with the tools they need to start their career and achieve their financial goals.”

Dhofar Islamic is one of the leading Islamic windows in Omans etting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman by adopting best international banking practices. It is also committed to following the best international practices in the Islamic banking sector. Therefore, Dhofar Islamic is keen to meet the aspirations of its valued customers by providing offers and services that are compatible with the provisions of Islamic Sharia.



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Exclusive for one couple per evening



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Chi, The Spa
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