

OMAN-BRITAIN STRATEGIC GROUP HOLDS MEETING

The Oman-Britain Strategic Consultative Group held in Muscat a coordination meeting. The meeting discussed enhancing relations between the two countries in financial and economic fields. **>A5**



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RNO TO USE OUT OF SERVICE SHIP FOR MARINE RESEARCH

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on Tuesday sank one of its vessels that went out of service to utilise its wreck in forming coral reefs and attract marine organisms in a manner that suits Omani marine environment. It is intended that the ship will later act as a tourism attraction spot and a site for marine research and studies to be conducted by scientists. **>A5**



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TURKEY EARTHQUAKE

SURVIVORS TELL TALES OF TRAUMA, GRIT

For the Omani tourists in Turkey, the humanitarian catastrophe would be etched in their memory for entire life

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The earthquake in Turkey has left a trail of destruction and tragedy. For the fortunate Omanis holidaying in Turkey, this is the worst nightmare they have witnessed in their life.

"There are hundreds of dead bodies lying everywhere. Many are missing while the wounded are crying for treatment. The stench of rotting bodies mixed with rain and

snow is simply unbearable. People in the streets are crying for help - a sight that I will not forget in my life," an Omani citizen, Farouk Al Owaidi, from the Wilayat of Dima Wal'Tayyin, said.

Farouk, who is in the Mersin region, south of the Turkish Republic, shared a chilling first-hand account, saying, "The earthquake occurred at 4:30 am. Everything started shaking like a swing around me. Without realis-

ing what was happening, I ran out of my hotel room," he said.

Before going out, I wondered, "Should I go down from the sixth floor or jump outside the building? What if the building falls while I am going down? Should I take my things, money, valuables, passport, or should I save myself now? Within a split second, I left the hotel leaving behind everything. I also decided not to use the elevator, as the stairs are safer, but it was raining outside and freezing cold. **>A3**

CONDOLENCES

His Majesty the Sultan makes phone calls to Turkish President, Syrian President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik yesterday made a telephone call to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkey. He expressed his sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathies to President Erdogan and the friendly people of Turkey on victims of the recent destructive earthquake. He wished the injured quick recovery.

Turkey will recover

In the telephonic conversation, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed Oman's stand in commiseration with Turkey, hoping that the country will overcome the impacts of this natural disaster. He prayed to Allah the Almighty to help the friendly people of Turkey overcome the crisis and to spare them all calamities.

In his part, President Erdogan expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for his kind initiative and noble humanitarian sentiments. He valued Oman's solidarity with the Turkish people, praying to Allah the Almighty to pro-

tect His Majesty the Sultan and Omani people and to spare them all evils.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik made a telephone call to President Dr. Bashar Al Assad of Syria, expressing his deep condolences and heartfelt sympathies to the President and the Syrian people in the aftermath of the recent devastating earthquake. He wished the injured speedy recovery.

During the telephonic conversation, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed the Sultanate of Oman's solidarity with the Syrian Arab Republic. He voiced Oman's support for all in view of this grave accident, praying to Allah the Almighty to alleviate its impacts, help the Syrian people overcome this ordeal and spare them any harm.

In his turn, President Al Assad expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for his kind initiative and noble feelings. He valued Oman's stand, praying to Allah the Almighty to spare His Majesty the Sultan and Omani people any calamity. **-ONA**

RESEARCH STUDY

Omani researcher devises new model for understanding chemical reactions

MUSCAT: An Omani researcher has succeeded in devising a model to understand the interactions that take place between components of industrial products composed of chemical elements.

The model is the first-of-its kind in the world in calculating the diffusion coefficient by discovering the concentration of the solute surfactant.

Dr. Maitha Rabee Al Jabri, Assistant Professor of Engineering at the Chemical Engineering Unit of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Sohar, told ONA that the research study provided a new approach that influences chemistry-based industry, namely by developing a new mechanism that facilitates the handling of chemical elements entering into the composition of products.

She pointed out that the research study came out with several results. A major finding of the study is the fact that the dissolution of surfactant by changing the attractive forces between water and surfactant elements produces long-lasting solvents,



thereby slowing down the dissolution process.

Dr. Maitha explained that the results of the research study were published as part of a scientific paper titled "The Effect of Hydrophobicity on the Dissolution of Reaction Phases with Lamellar Surfaces", published in the journal of the international publishing house "Elsevier".

She pointed out that the research study is titled "Modelling Compound Products Used in Industrial Chemistry, and Chemical Engineering Applica-

tions to Understand Interactions between Components and Their Properties".

The study received funding from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

It is noted that compound products in the form of liquid solutions have many uses in our daily life. They are available as medicines, detergent liquids, cosmetics, paints, foods, among other products. They contain different components that merge with each other at different stages during the manufacturing process. **-ONA**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Over 1.6mn vehicles registered in Oman

1 The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate of Oman reached 1,603,376 by the end of December 2022, according to the latest data issued by the NCSI. **>A3**



WORLD India-France-UAE discuss defence ties

2 India-France-UK Trilateral Dialogue discussed taking the cooperation forward in the fields of defence and energy. **>A6**

SPORTS Finch retires from international cricket

3 Aaron Finch has called time on his international career that included leading Australia to their first T20 World Cup trophy. **>A8**



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Isha.....	7:14pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....	5:27am

Canadian Jebel K9 brings back ‘Canines for a Cause’ 2023 show

This year marks the 5th annual event for this initiative, presenting a fun-filled family day out for everyone to enjoy

Times News Service

MUSCAT: After a long period of anticipation, Canadian Jebel K9 is excited to announce the comeback of the annual ‘Canines for a Cause’ charity festival on 11 February 2023 at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, in collaboration with media partner HiFM.

The day boasts both prize draws and door prizes as well as a host of vendors showcasing products and services for the community. The event will also shed a light on local rescue groups to help raise awareness for animal welfare across Oman.



After being placed on hold since 2019 due to the pandemic restrictions, this year marks the 5th annual event for this initiative, presenting a fun-filled family day out for everyone to enjoy, especially dogs.

Doors open at 9am and the official event will start at 10am and ends at 3pm, where a line-up of talented dogs will showcase various displays such as ‘Agility, Search and Rescue Display’ and ‘Jumping Display’.

“We are so delighted to bring back such an exciting initiative to support our local community. During our last event, we welcomed over 1,000 participants and over 400 dogs. You can imagine the excitement and buzz from dog-lovers enjoying the games and competitions while marvelling at a world of breeds, coming together at the beautiful setting of Al Bustan Palace” – Alfa Vold, founder and managing partner of Canadian Jebel



K9 and Jebel 5 Star Pet Resort, the organiser of ‘Canines for a Cause’.

For those who like to add a little more fun to the day, guests are invited to bring their dog in a costume for a chance to win the ‘Best Dressed Dog’.

Some of the other entertaining competitions include: Best Trick, Dress-Up Relay, Rocket Recall, How High Can You Fly Jumping Competition, Musical Hoops, Bone Appetite, Paw-casso and

Find the Treat. Visitors can also try out the Obedience and Agility Competition for novice and advanced obedience.

Prizes and ribbons will be awarded to first and second place and prizes are in store for the best dressed dog, loveliest lady dog, the most handsome hound, the most outrageous dog, the gorgeous golden oldie, the best rescuer and find the treat winner. Dogs of all varieties and levels are welcome to join

in, whether a beginner or experienced canine in competitions.

Tickets are available at the entrance and fees for this special event are OMR 5 per person, OMR 2 per dog and children under 12-year-old are free of charge for entry. Proceeds from all ticket sales will be going to Child Care Center and Animal Rescue in Oman. There will be a lunch served on the lawns at an additional cost to the entrance fee.

11 FEBRUARY 2023

SOTC Travel announces roadshow in partnership with Khimji’s House of Travel



MUSCAT: SOTC Travel, a leading omnichannel travel and Tourism Company announced its first physical consumer roadshow in Oman since the pandemic with a host of products specially tailored for its customers. The holiday roadshow is scheduled on Saturday, 11 February 2023 at Khimji’s House of Travel, Next to Oman Air Office, Ruwi, Muscat.

The location for the roadshow at the head office of Khimji’s House of Travel, has been chosen with care for convenient access. Weekend has been selected to offer families the convenience to walk-in at leisure and plan their holidays together with the Company’s experts present on-ground to guide/assist.

Daniel D’souza President & Country Head - Holidays, SOTC Travel said, “It is exciting to be back in Oman. SOTC has always received strong support from this market, and this being our first physical roadshow since the pandemic, our team of experts are excited to meet and interact with customers in-person once again

SOTC has always received strong support from the market, and this is the first physical roadshow since the end of the pandemic

to understand their holiday requirements. We are positive this roadshow will help us reestablish our customer connect in this high potential market. To delight them, we have created a portfolio of interesting itineraries that are wide ranged and cost effective simultaneously for our customers in Oman.”

Cashio Vettom, GM Khimji’s House of Travel added, “The objective is to re-engage. Travel has

slowly traversed back to the pre pandemic scenario and travelers are now open to group travel. We are getting many queries for summer and therefore, to support our customers looking at group holidays with the fulfillment of Indian meals, SOTC’s holiday roadshow has been organised.”

The companies’ product range includes a diversity of holiday options to delight consumer segments across Gen Z/new age travelers, millennials/young professionals, multigenerational families, and couples/honeymooners. In addition to special group tours (accompanied by an experienced Tour Manager), the holiday portfolio includes personalized tours for a group of friends/extended family, individual/solo trips and customized options, specially designed based on the customer’s unique preferences.

Popular destinations include: Europe, USA, Australia – New Zealand, South East Asia’s Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Vietnam and Cambodia; also Japan and South Korea.

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COMMENTARY

Smart technology and Oman 2040 Vision



SALEH AL-SHAIBANI

Shurooq Al-Balushi is working on a Smart Technology project as part of her contribution to Oman's Vision 2040 to make use of information to understand how improvements can be made to deliver better results to the Sultanate's economy. As part of her doctorate thesis, 30-year-old Shurooq, who is a lecturer at the National University, is on track to cut business costs as well as make savings for both the civil service and private companies. "Smart technology, if planned well, will lead to lower costs on how businesses are run. That will have a direct impact of controlling inflation when market prices stabilise. Cutting costs also will lead to lower operating expenditure. The money the businesses save will lead to expansion of their operations. Expansion to their

Smart technologies that can warn drivers of slippery roads or wadis during the rain seasons. We see so many drivers lose control when it rains or get drifted away in the strong wadis, especially in the low lying areas or even towns on the hills

Shurooq Al-Balushi



operations will mean job creation for graduates," Shurooq explained. There are many ways companies can use to save running expenses. Video conferencing with customers can cut down shopping queues when they shop from home. Private hospitals can use this technology to make diagnoses without patients coming over to see doctors on consultation basis. Smart technology can also save domestic bills for home owners by cutting on electricity, gas and water usage. "Efficient thermostat for air conditioning can lead to lower electricity bills. Water leaks are a major problems for most home owners and a smart technology can detect a leak as soon as it has started. Smart technology also can save lives with cooking gas leaks and prevent

explosions," she said. She is also working on the road safety to reduce accidents on a variety of technology that can give ample warnings to drivers on the roads. "Smart technologies that can warn drivers of slippery roads or wadis during the rain seasons. We see so many drivers lose control when it rains or get drifted away in the strong wadis, especially in the low lying areas or even towns on the hills," said Shurooq. National statistics support her claims. On average, road accidents during the rain seasons kill on average about forty people a year. In the last five years, 17 people died in the wadis during the rain seasons when their cars plunged into the deep water as they tried to cross roads. Gas leaks and electricity shocks have killed 22 people

in their homes in the last five years, according to official statistics. Smart Technology can also make online payments easier and much safer to avoid financial frauds. Banks in Oman have repeatedly warned customers on hackers who are trying to access private or even corporate accounts to defraud them with their money. But how easy smart technology can be monitored? "Smart technology devices can be connected and can be accessed through a central point that monitor activities. The monitoring systems can be an electronic tablet, laptop, consoles or even a phone. You can monitor safety operations and conditions or make sure your money is secure from wherever you are," Shurooq concluded.

EARTHQUAKE

'Buildings came down like a pack of cards in Turkey'

< FROM A1 "After coming out from the hotel, I saw that all the buildings started shaking in Mersin. I wondered whether I was dreaming or if it was a reality. Soon, the earth shook and nearby buildings swayed violently enough that I thought they might come down on top of us. On visiting Diyarbakir, I saw sounds of crashing cars and screaming people all around," he added.

"Some buildings collapsed like a pack of cards within seconds in Diyarbakir. Then the tremor stopped, leaving behind destruction, terrifying scenes. I went back to check the conditions. I heard screams of people in pain from everywhere. I sat on the ground as I could not stand when I saw the terrible tragedy."

Another Omani citizen, Abdullah Al-Masrouri, said: "Around 4:35 am Turkish time, I woke up to send a message on my phone. Suddenly, I realised that the furniture around me was moving together on the eighth floor of a 12-storey building." Al-Masrouri added: "The sight of men, women and children rushing to the empty squares in the extreme cold was frightening. Everyone was terrified with

cries of babies and screams of people renting the air. It was really very scary." Al-Masrouri also said that the sight of the destroyed buildings and houses was terrifying. "We heard the cries of residents, some of them looking in disbelief after their dream houses came crashing on the ground. Voices started coming out from under the rubble, asking for help but we were helpless. The sirens of police cars and ambulances could be heard everywhere. Those were terrifying moments - a sight that will be etched in my memory throughout my life." **State of emergency** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on Tuesday, declared three-month state of emergency in 10 southern provinces which was hit by massive quakes, Anadolu Agency reported. While addressing the State Information Coordination Centre in Ankara, Erdogan said, "Based on the authority given to us by Article 119 of the Constitution, we decided to declare a state of emergency. We will quickly complete the presidential and parliamentary processes about the state of emergency decision."

NCSI

Over 1.6 million vehicles in Oman by December 2022

MUSCAT: The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate of Oman reached 1,603,376 by the end of December 2022, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Vehicles registered Vehicles with private registration constituted 79.4 percent of the total vehicles registered in Oman, to stand at 1,273,791, while the number of vehicles with commercial registration reached 238,512, constituting 14.9 percent of the total number of vehicles. Meanwhile, rental vehicles reached 28,633, comprising 1.8 percent and the number of taxi vehicles stood at 28,117, comprising 1.8 percent. The number of government vehicles (military vehicles excluded) stood at 12,167 and motorbikes stood at 6,765. The number of driving instruc-



REGISTERED: Rental vehicles reached 28,633, comprising 1.8 percent and the number of taxis stood at 28,117, comprising 1.8 percent. -ONA

tion vehicles stood at 5,744 and the number of vehicles with temporary registration (temporary inspection, export and import) stood at 7,528.

Moreover, the number of farming tractors stood at 1,280 and vehicles with diplomatic entity registrations stood at 839. -ONA

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2023 TOUR OF OMAN:

AN ORIENTAL TREASURE
BETWEEN THE DESERT AND THE SEA



Thirteen years after the Tour of Oman saw the light of day, there remain many places to be explored, vast deserts to be crossed, verdant mountains to be climbed —such as the famous Jabal Al Akhdar (Green Mountain)— and, above all, a great culture to be discovered. The 2023 edition, spanning five stages, introduces a new race as an appetiser and brings a plethora of opportunities to gaze in awe at the historical, cultural and natural treasures of the Sultanate of Oman.

Even the best habits can go hand in hand with exciting new adventures, and this year, the Tour of Oman will be sharing the spotlight with a brand-new race, the Muscat Classic, held on 10th February, one day before the start of the 2023 Tour of Oman.

5 STAGES, 5 WAYS OF DISCOVERING THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

From deep-carved canyons and sprawling sand deserts to lush wadis and the sparking blue waters of the Indian Ocean, its rich tapestry of landscapes is the first surprise that the Sultanate of Oman has in store. Washed by the Arabian Sea, this ancient cross-roads of the Silk Road and the incense trade routes also boasts a fascinating heritage and historical gems. The Sultanate of Oman is a real kaleidoscopic destination, as the riders will see for themselves as soon as the Muscat Classic rolls around on 10th February.

The next day, the inaugural stage of the Tour of Oman will get under way from Al Rustaq Fort, recognised as the highest castle in the country and surrounded by a radiant natural setting. The 126-strong peloton of the twelfth edition will head to the Omani coast and the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, instantly recognisable thanks to its rotunda shape and rose petal-inspired dome.

After that, the start of stage 2 will take place in front of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, which regularly hosts international matches and was named for Qaboos bin Said Al Said. The

- ICONIC SIGHTS:
- The capital, Muscat, one of the oldest cities on the Arabian Gulf, where modernity meets tradition
 - The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre
 - Jabal Akhdar, aka “Green Mountain”, and its hanging oases
 - The heights of Jabal Haat, boasting one of the most beautiful panoramas in the country
 - The port of Quriyat and its grandiose sandy beach
 - The Al Hajar Mountains, in the northern reaches of the Sultanate
 - Rustaq Fort, the highest in Oman, surrounded by ramparts once defended by no fewer than twelve towers
 - The Royal Opera House
 - Izki, the oldest town in the Sultanate of Oman

finish line will be in Quriyat, 85 km from Muscat. This small finish town is well worth a visit for its atmosphere, delightful sandy beach and 19th-century fort.

Stage 3 will culminate on the uneven slopes of Jabal Haat, a unique vantage point over the mountains of Oman.

Stage 4 will be a 195.5 km trek from Izki, the oldest town in the country, to the Omani coast on the Yitti hills.

The fifth and final stage promises to be a majestic experience, with the start in Samail’s “Al Feyhaa Resthouse” and the finish on the summit that exerts a magnetic attraction on the region, Jabal

Akhdar (Green Mountain). In a first for the Tour of Oman, the finale, which until now was held on the Muttrah Corniche, will offer an exceptional panorama of the mountains, valleys and terraced farms amid the rose bushes and fruit trees in bloom on the heights of the Hajar Mountains.

From colourful dunes and beaches to natural landscapes and jaw-dropping architecture, the Sultanate of Oman has it all —a land of a thousand faces!

Further afield

At over half the size of metropolitan France (more than 309,000 km), the Sultanate of Oman has a 3,165km coastline on the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, a small stretch of which will get a visit from the Tour of Oman. The peloton has yet to venture into the centre and south of the country:

- Jabal Shams. The “Mountain of the Sun” is the highest peak in the country. It is also the base camp for exploring the “Grand Canyon” of Wadi Nakhar, one of the most dramatic natural sites in the country.
- The Sharqiyah Sands desert. Heading inland, the desert undergoes a tone shift from white to red-ochre as the tall dunes of the Sharqiyah Sands emerge from the vast expanse.
- Dhofar (southern Oman). The southernmost governorate of Oman, blessed with the rains of the summer monsoon, stands in stark contrast with the rest of the country. Its peaks are decked in green pastures from June to September, while Salalah basks in its tropical climate.
- The “Land of Frankincense” UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Frankincense, a resin obtained from Boswellia sacra, a tree native to Oman, was one of the most widely traded products in the ancient and medieval worlds. UNESCO has listed four sites: the frankincense trees of Wadi Dawkah, the remains of the caravan oasis of Shisr (Wubar) and those of the ports of Khor Rori (the Samhuran of old) and Al-Baleed. These places hold the most interesting archaeological vestiges in the Sultanate.





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Heritage Festival simulates ancient sea journey at Sur

The simulation action among the festival activities highlighted the historical role of Wilayat Sur as a commercial centre in the past and present

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The activities of the Maritime Heritage Festival in the Wilayat of Sur in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah embody the historical human relationship with the sea. The festival tries to simulate the ancient journey of the sailors and merchants.

The simulation action among the festival activities highlighted the historical role of Wilayat Sur as a commercial centre in the past and present, as well as considered a memorial site and technical knowledge in shipbuilding, sea arts, and the voyages of Omani ships to and from Omani ports.

The simulation included highlighting the paths of ships and the goods that were transported along each path in accordance with the demands of the market in the past.

Ahmed bin Muslim Al-Alawi, the kin of one of the most famous captains of the Omani ships in Sur city, described the ancient maritime trade routes in Sur by telling the story of the sailing of (the Al Boum ship), which sailed on a moonlit night sky in the month of August. The ship was loaded with Al-Jandal wood imported from Africa, in addition to some local materials of dried dates and lemon.

Ali bin Khamis Al-Alawi, said that the camels come from Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan from the north of Al Sharqiyah, they were load-



ed with lemons and nuts, while some families were used to travel through Sur port to East Africa to seek a new livelihood at that time.

Juma Al-Alawi said: "After the departure of the loaded ships with goods heading to their destination, there was the (Hourai Al-Abra) a local boat, through which people were transported from Al-Aija to Al-Batah and brought the people to the market and then returned with their daily needs.

The stimulation action also included showing women, and housewives, washing clothes and utensils at the seashore, as well as bringing water from the sea for washing purposes.

These scenarios were really amazing and beautiful scenes.



TOURIST ATTRACTION



RNO to use out of service ship for marine research

MUSANDAM: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on Tuesday sank one of its vessels that went out of service to utilise its wreck in forming coral reefs and attract marine organisms in a manner that suits Omani marine environment.

It is intended that the ship will later act as a tourism attraction spot and a site for marine research and studies to be conducted by scientists.

The submerged RNO vessel was one of the fastest in operations during its 35-year service



that included a variety of national tasks and missions.

Sayyid Ibrahim Said Al Busaidi, Governor of Musandam, said that the site to sink the ship was selected due to the fact that it falls

in a naturally secluded area, away from marine currents. The site is already frequented by divers. The vessel will add another element of beauty and activate tourism in the governorate. — ONA

REVIEW MEETING



Oman-Britain group holds key meeting

MUSCAT: The Oman-Britain Strategic Consultative Group held in Muscat on Tuesday a co-ordination meeting.

The meeting discussed enhancing relations between the two countries in financial and economic fields.

The meeting also reviewed a range of topics pertaining to finance, business and renewable energy sectors, in addition to exchanging opinion and experience.

Further, the meeting explored opportunities of cooperation to realise the common goals to develop these sectors.

The meeting was chaired from the Omani side by Nasser Khamis Al Jashmi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance, Supervisor General of the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development whilst it was chaired from the British side by Lord Grimstone. — ONA

VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING

Arab women's forum

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, took part on Tuesday, via videoconferencing, in the tasks of the 42nd session of Arab Women's Committee, organised by the Arab League.

The meeting dealt with three topics: Following up the implementation of Women's Development Agenda 2030, Women's Agenda for Security and Peace and Women's Empowerment through the cooperation of international and regional bodies concerned.

Oman also participated in a meeting held in preparation for the 67th UN session of Women's Status Committee.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Google to introduce AI chatbot service

SAN FRANCISCO: Search engine giant Google announced on Monday it was introducing a chatbot service, in a move anticipated to rival Microsoft's AI-powered ChatGPT.

In a blog post on Monday, Alphabet Chief Executive Sundar Pichai introduced the chatbot, called Bard. It would be integrated into the company's search engine.

The conversational AI service would be powered by LaMDA, Google's own AI with the power to generate human-like prose that was described as sentient by a company engineer last year. The claim was later dismissed by Google. Last month, Microsoft announced extending its partnership with ChatGPT creator OpenAI. The chatbot can generate

text, sparking widespread fears of cheating in schools and universities, as well as rendering several professions obsolete.

Pichai said in his Monday blog post that Bard would test users for feedback, ahead of a public release within the coming weeks. Google is also planning to add AI features to its popular search engine which could cater to complex queries

such as which musical instrument would be easier to learn.

"Bard seeks to combine the breadth of the world's knowledge with the power, intelligence, and creativity of our large language models," Pichai said, referring to AI. He added that it relied on a version of LaMDA that requires less commuting power, to be able to serve more users. — DW

EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY



Bold plan to beam solar energy down from space unveiled

PARIS: The European Space Agency (ESA) recently announced a new exploratory programme called Solaris, which aims to figure out if it is technologically and economically feasible to launch solar structures into orbit, use them to harness the sun's power, and transmit energy to the ground.

The programme is considered a "preparatory" one, meaning the ESA has already completed a pilot study, but it's not yet ready for full-scale development. It calls for designing an in-orbit demonstration of the technology, launching it in 2030, developing a small version of a space solar power plant in the mid-2030s, and then scaling it up dramatically.

For now, ESA researchers will begin by investigating what it would take to robotically assemble the modules of a large solar array, for example while in geostationary orbit at an altitude of about 22,000 miles. This way, the structure would remain continuously above a particular point on the ground, regardless of the Earth's rotation.

NASA and the Department of Energy explored the concept in the 1970s and '80s, but sidelined it because of the expense and technological challenges. Still, much has changed since then. Launch costs have dropped, mainly thanks to reusable rockets. Satellites have

become cheaper to mass-produce. And the cost of photovoltaics, which convert sunlight into electricity, has fallen, making solar power in orbit more competitive with terrestrial energy sources.

But researchers are considering other designs too. For example, they could deploy three or more smaller arrays in a medium Earth orbit. Instead of functioning at a fixed point in the sky, as a single geosynchronous satellite would, they would form a relay. Each time one array rotated out of transmission range, another would take its place and continue to beam down energy. This could allow for nearly uniform, predictable solar power, gathered at multiple locations on the ground. It would also allow for smaller receivers, since the arrays would be closer to Earth, said Sergio Pellegrino, co-director of the California Institute of Technology's Space Solar Power Project, which is complementary to Solaris.

Other groups have made advances with space-based solar too, including the Space Energy Initiative. The London-based organisation, a partnership between the UK government, researchers, and industry, got to work following a 2021 report that recommended proceeding with a study of space solar power. — OMA

The three countries agreed to remain in touch and regularly review progress on the trilateral roadmap

NEW DELHI: Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra participated in the India-France-UK Trilateral Dialogue and discussed taking the cooperation forward in the fields of defence, energy and environment, innovation and people-to-people exchanges, according to the statement released by the Ministry of External Affairs.

The three countries agreed to remain in touch and regularly review progress on the trilateral roadmap. "Foreign Secretary @AmbVMKwatra participated in a meeting of focal points of the India-France-UAE trilateral dialogue and discussed potential cooperation in the fields of defence, energy and environment, innovation and people-to-people exchanges," MEA said in a tweet.

Kwatra, who is on an official visit to France, also held the Foreign Office Consultations with Secretary-General Anne-Marie Descotes of France.

"Foreign Secretary @AmbVMKwatra held Foreign Office Consultations with Secretary-General Anne-Marie Descotes of @francediplo_EN," MREA tweeted.

This meeting came as the follow-up after the Foreign Ministers of India-France-UAE adopted



a roadmap during their telephone call on February 04, 2023.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, France Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan held a phone call in which they discussed collaboration in areas such as education, business, maritime and green energy.

"Discussed convergences and further collaboration in education, business, maritime, culture and green energy for a stable peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific," Jaishankar said in a tweet.

The three foreign ministers had met for the first time in a trilateral format in September last year on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

They agreed to establish a formal trilateral cooperation initiative, with the aim of expanding cooperation in various fields of mutual interest in acknowledgment of their shared desire to pro-

mote international stability and prosperity, and to further build upon the constructive and collaborative ties that exist between the three countries.

It is in this context that a phone call between the three Ministers was held on Saturday to adopt a roadmap for the implementation of this initiative.

During the phone call, the three sides agreed that the trilateral initiative will serve as a forum to promote the design and execution of cooperation projects in the fields of energy, with a focus on solar and nuclear energy, as well as in the fight against climate change and the protection of biodiversity, particularly in the Indian Ocean region, a joint statement said.

For this purpose, the three countries will explore the possibility of working with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to pursue concrete, actionable projects on clean energy, the environment, and biodiversity, a statement said. — ANI

India, Canada aim to boost bilateral partnership

NEW DELHI: India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Canadian counterpart Melanie Joly on Monday deliberated on deepening the bilateral partnership between the two countries by focusing on trade, investment, mobility, education, and security.

"Good discussions today with FM @melaniejoly of Canada. Deliberated on deepening our bilateral partnership, focusing on trade, investment, mobility, education, and security. Recognized the centrality of people-to-people ties to the expansion of our cooperation," Jaishankar tweeted. According to the external affairs minister, they exchanged views on the global situation, in particular, the Indo-Pacific and Ukraine conflict.

Jaishankar, and Joly during the India-Canada Strategic Dialogue today, expressed interest in deepening collaboration across domains and looking forward to the Early Progress Trade Agreement, according to a release. — ANI

SPREAD OF THE VIRUS

Could bird flu in mink signal threat of a human pandemic?

LONDON: It started in October 2022, when several dead mink were discovered on a farm in Galicia in northwestern Spain. Veterinarians initially blamed the coronavirus. But tests revealed that the highly pathogenic avian flu virus H5N1 was the culprit.

To stop the spread of the dangerous pathogen, more than 50,000 mink on the farm were killed.

While farm workers themselves were not infected, the case remains a cause of concern for scientists.

Mink farm outbreak 'incredibly concerning'

The spread of the virus from birds to other species is nothing new. The pathogen that causes bird flu, or avian influenza, has been found in raccoons, foxes and seals, though these remain isolated cases.

While there have been some cases of H5N1 infecting humans, the World Health Organization has said there's no evidence of human-to-human transmission so far.

When the disease has spread to humans and other mammals, it has been via direct contact with excrement from infected birds or their carcasses, according to Timm Harder, an avian influenza expert at the Friedrich Loeffler Institute's diagnostic virology department in Germany.

But the mink outbreak appears to be a rare case where mammals are transmitting the disease to each other rather than through direct contact with an infected bird. This is something "new," said Harder.



Part of the problem is that mink are intensively farmed. They're kept in high numbers in confined spaces, which means infection spreads rapidly in the highly susceptible mammals, said Harder.

Harder added that researchers have identified several pathogen mutations in the mink, one of which allows "the virus to better reproduce in mammals."

Scientists are worried that the virus, which has led to the deaths of tens of millions of birds globally, could spread to more mink farms and become "more transmissible."

"This is incredibly concerning," said Tom Peacock, a virologist at Imperial College London, in an interview with the scientific journal, Science. "This is a clear mechanism for a H5 pandemic to start."

Could avian influenza trigger a human pandemic?

Of the 868 known cases of H5N1 infection in humans worldwide

between January 2003 and November 2022, 457 were fatal, according to the WHO.

However, because there has been no sustained human-to-human transmission, the risk of human infection from avian flu is low, said the WHO.

Some highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses have an increased potential to cause new zoonotic diseases — which are transmissible from animals to humans and vice versa.

While Timm Harder said there are "numerous hurdles for a more extensive adaptation to humans," he added the mutations seen in the virus that infected mink must be further studied and evaluated.

How a harmless virus became dangerous

Waterfowl have long played host to influenza viruses, but these early strains were low in pathogenicity, said Wolfgang Fiedler, an

ornithologist at the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior. The viruses weren't too contagious or damaging.

But when these viruses that were harmless to wild birds spread to factory poultry farms — where thousands of animals were crammed tight — the disease spread rapidly and the virus could mutate, Fiedler explained.

The result was the highly contagious virus strains H5N1 and H5N8, which likely originated on poultry farms in East Asia, according to the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds established by the UN.

Farmed ducks likely become infected from wild birds. Ducks are "kept together with pigs, for example," which aided the mutation process, noted Fiedler. Such animal husbandry methods "make a virus like this insanely happy."

In fact, outbreaks of these highly pathogenic strains are typically



associated with "intensive domestic poultry production and associated trade and marketing systems ... via contaminated poultry, poultry products and inanimate objects," according to the UN's bird flu task force.

The highly contagious H5N1 and H5N8 virus strains were in turn transmitted to wild birds via infected farmed birds, explained virologist Timm Harder. The viruses could then be transmitted over great distances during bird migrations.

How much damage has the bird flu outbreak caused?

The ongoing avian flu outbreak is considered the largest observed in Europe to date, according to the European Food Safety Authority, an EU agency.

Between October 2021 and September 2022, 50 million farm birds had to be culled in 37 countries.

More than 3,800 highly pathogenic bird flu cases were counted in wild birds. Experts believe the number of unreported cases is

probably much higher.

"Now the virus is also circulating in wild birds during the summer months," confirmed Harder, noting that the animals breed closely in large colonies in the warmer months, providing ideal conditions for the spread of the virus.

The avian influenza wave also reached South America for the first time in the fall. Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia were among the countries affected. In Honduras, more than 240 dead pelicans were found in one week alone.

Harder said he is concerned that the virus could spread from South America to Antarctica and endanger penguin populations. Apart from Antarctica, only Australia has escaped the virus.

Despite the acute outbreak among birds, Harder sees one ray of hope in that the broad spread of the virus could promote immunity in wild birds. Antibodies have already been found in live animals. — ew



Earthquake death toll tops 5,000 in Turkey and Syria

Attempts to reach survivors were also impeded by temperatures below freezing and close to 200 aftershocks, which made the search through unstable structures perilous

ADANA: Rescuers on Tuesday raced to find survivors in the rubble of thousands of buildings brought down by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake and multiple aftershocks that struck eastern Turkey and neighbouring Syria, with the discovery of more bodies raising the death toll to more than 5,000.

Countries around the world dispatched teams to assist in the rescue efforts. Turkey's disaster management agency said more than 24,400 emergency personnel were now on the ground. But with such a wide swath of territory hit by Monday's earthquake and nearly 6,000 buildings confirmed to have collapsed in Turkey alone, their efforts were spread thin.

Attempts to reach survivors were also impeded by temperatures below freezing and close to 200 aftershocks, which made the search through unstable structures perilous.

The region sits on top of major fault lines and is frequently shaken by earthquakes. Some 18,000 were killed in similarly powerful earthquakes that hit northwest Turkey in 1999.

The US Geological Survey measured Monday's quake at 7.8, with a depth of 18 kilometres (11 miles). Hours later, another

Turkey appreciates India for sending search, rescue teams

NEW DELHI: Appreciating India's help in the form of search and rescue teams that landed in the morning after two devastating earthquakes struck Turkey in 24 hours, Turkey's Ambassador to India Firat Sunel, on Tuesday, said that the second plane will land in the country before evening.

While addressing the press conference, Sunel said, "India is among the countries that send teams for search and rescue operations. And as you all know very well, India is among these foreign search and rescue teams. Early on Tuesday, just a few later than the first earthquake, Indian National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) held a coordination meeting upon the instruction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." "Later, I also participated in the meeting with the Minister of External Affairs with NDRF members. And yesterday India sent a plane, a C-17 car-



rier to Turkey, carrying more than 50 search and rescue members, and experts, including research and rescue dogs and some equipment. This plane arrived early in the morning. And the rescue team in Turkey has already started the operation. Also early, this morning back in Turkey it is still in the air but we are also expecting to land before evening," he added.

On Monday morning, a massive earthquake of magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale hits 26 km E of Nurdagi in Turkey, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS). -ANI

quake, likely triggered by the first, struck more than 100 kilometres (60 miles) away with 7.5 magnitude.

Thousands of buildings were reported collapsed in a wide area extending from Syria's cities of Aleppo and Hama to Turkey's Diyarbakir, more than 330 kilometres (200 miles) to the northeast.

The international community has been quick to offer assistance to Turkey and Syria as the full scale of the disaster becomes clear, according to report.

On Tuesday morning, planes carrying aid from Iraq and Iran, including food, medicines and blankets, arrived at Damascus In-

ternational Airport in Syria, Syrian state media SANA reported.

Japan announced it would send the country's Disaster Relief Rescue team to Turkey, and on Monday night, the first of two disaster relief teams left India for Turkey with dog squads and medical supplies.

The European Union activated its crisis response mechanism, while the United States said it would send two search and rescue units to Turkey.

Palestinian civil defense and medical teams will also be sent to Turkey and Syria to help in rescue operations, reported media.

— Agencies

10 SOUTHERN PROVINCES

Turkey declares 3-month state of emergency in quake-hit provinces

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on Tuesday, declared three-month state of emergency in 10 southern provinces which was hit by massive quakes, Anadolu Agency reported.

While addressing the State Information Coordination Centre in the capital Ankara, Erdogan said, "Based on the authority given to us by Article 119 of the Constitution, we decided to declare a state of emergency." "We will quickly complete the presidential and parliamentary processes about the state of emergency decision, which will cover 10 provinces where earthquakes have occurred and will last for three months," he added.



"We are facing one of the biggest disasters not only of the history of the Turkish Republic but also of our geography and the world," Erdogan said. Stating that experts describe these two earthquakes as "exceptional ground movements that are independent of each other but trigger each other and that

have no example in the world," Erdogan said, "Both earthquakes were experienced at a distance of 7 kilometers on earth that exponentially increased the severity of the destruction." "It has caused great destruction in a very wide area compared to their counterparts. Therefore, we are faced with one of the biggest disasters not only in our Republic's history but also in our geography and the world. Our state, with all its institutions, organisations, personnel, tools, equipment, and facilities, has been in the disaster areas with the spirit of mobilisation from the first moment of the earthquake. started to work," he said. -ANI

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EARTHQUAKE

Syria death toll rises to over 1,700

DAMASCUS: At least 1,712 people have died in Syria after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit southern Turkey.

Syria's state news agency SANA said at least 812 people were killed and 1,449 people injured in the government-held provinces.

At least 900 people were killed in Syria's opposition-held northwest and 2,300 injured, with the toll expected to "rise dramatically," the White Helmets rescue team said.

The White Helmets rescue team operating in opposition-held territory in northwest Syria warned on Tuesday "time is running out" out to find survivors.

"We appeal to all humanitarian organisations and international bodies to provide material support and assistance to organisations responding to this disaster," the emergency organization said. -AP

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Australia T20I captain Aaron Finch announces retirement from international cricket

Finch led Australia in a world record 76 men's T20Is, and in 55 ODIs, before announcing his retirement

MELBOURNE: Australia T20I captain Aaron Finch has called time on his stunning international career that included leading Australia to their first ICC Men's T20 World Cup trophy. Finch led Australia in a world record 76 men's T20Is, as well as in 55 ODIs, before announcing his retirement on Tuesday. The long-term white-ball skipper represented



Australia in 254 international matches across all formats, playing five Tests, 146 ODIs and 103 T20Is. "Realising that I won't be playing on until the next T20 World Cup in 2024, now is the right moment to step down and give the team time to plan and build towards that event," ICC quoted Finch as saying at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). "I also want to say a huge thank you to all the fans who have supported me throughout my international career," he added. Since making his international debut in a T20I against England in January 2011, Finch amassed 8,804 runs which include 17 ODI

centuries and two T20I tons. Finch ended his ODI career in September of last year, but he continued to captain Australia in T20s, notably during their disappointing home defence of the T20 World Cup. In that competition, the right-hander played his final international game and top-scored with 63 as Australia defeated Ireland by 42 runs, but they were unable to go to the semi-finals. Throughout much of his time playing at the highest level, Finch was a white-ball cricket superstar. In 2020, he was nominated for the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Decade award. When he slammed 172 runs off just 76 balls against Zimbabwe in Harare in 2018, he set the record for the highest T20I score. His amazing innings featured 10 sixes and 16 fours. Finch's 156 from 63 balls against England in Southampton in 2013 remains the third-highest men's T20I score ever. -ANI

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS

Manchester City charged by Premier League for alleged multiple fair play breaches

MANCHESTER : Manchester City, the defending Premier League champions, were on Monday charged by the league for allegedly breaking financial rules across nine editions of the competition from 2009-10 to 2017-18. The league confirmed that a number of alleged breaches between all the aforementioned seasons have been referred to an independent commission with the conclusion of a four-year investigation. The commission will be held in private and it can impose open-ended sanctions like fines, point deduction or even relegation from the Premier League. A statement from Premier League, according to ESPN, said: "In accordance with Premier League Rule W.82.1, the Premier League confirms that it has today referred a number of alleged breaches of the Premier League Rules by Manchester City Football Club to a Commission under Premier League Rule W.3.4." "City have been charged with more than 100 breaches of rules which required the club, according to the Premier League, to provide accurate financial information



tion that gives a true and fair view of the club's financial position," added the statement. The defending PL champions have also faced accusations of failing to cooperate with the investigation. The club issued a statement in response to allegations on Monday. "Manchester City FC is surprised by the issuing of these alleged breaches of the Premier League Rules, particularly given the extensive engagement and vast amount of detailed materials that the EPL has been provided with." "The club welcomes the review of this matter by an independent Commission, to impartially consider the comprehensive body of irrefutable evidence that exists in support of its position." -ANI

UNDER-19

Hong Kong to play 4-match series at Oman Cricket Academy from February 15

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket will host a strong Hong Kong under-19 team for a four-match 50-over-a-side bilateral series at the Oman Cricket Academy in Al Amerat from February 15. Aditya Gurumukhi has been named the skipper of Oman squad with Tanuj Sivakumar appointed his deputy for the series that will conclude on February 21. The bilateral series is part of OC's endeavour to provide greater exposure to national U19 cricketers with coach Adeel Shafique hoping that his boys would gain experience and build on their match temperament by playing against stronger opposition. Oman U19 lads had missed out on a place in the Asia Regional Qualifier after going out in the semifinals of the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup Division 2 - Asia Qualifier at home last October. On the other hand, Hong Kong reached the final before losing to Singapore. Both Singapore and Hong Kong along with Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal and hosts UAE will fight for the lone spot in the final qualification event - Asia Regional Qualifier - for the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup 2024 in Sri Lanka. The Asia

Regional Qualifier will be held in the UAE from February 24-March 2 and Hong Kong's tour of Oman is expected to give them good preparations ahead of the regional qualifier. The Oman squad, supported by Majees Technical Services, will include few new faces since the national team played in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup Division 2 - Asia Qualifier. Among the new faces are Wajih Abbas Farista, Adarsh Srinivasan, and Mustaqeem Sayed. The first of the four-match 50-over series will begin on February 15 while the second match will be played the next day. The third and

fourth match of the series will be held on February 19 and 21. According to Shafique, talks are underway with Hong Kong Cricket officials on enhancing the bilateral relations and making the series into an annual affair. U19 squad: Aditya Gurumukhi (captain), Tanuj Sivakumar (vice-captain), Aryan Bisht, Mohammad Arafat Islam, Lakshmi Narayana, Glen Menezes, Wajih Abbas Farista, Devansh Loya, Prateish Ramesh, Mustaqeem Sayed, Rahul Habibulla (wk), Aleem Matto, Adharsh Srinivasan, Ahmed al Zadjali (Omani). Manager: Sher Mohammad. Coach: Adeel Shafique.



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OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES

The price of Oman oil has increased, with prices for delivery by April 2023 reaching \$80.45, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil rose by \$2.14 from the price of Monday, which was at \$78.31. - **ONA**

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,757.98 points, up by 0.07 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.01 per cent at 488.79 points. Dhofar Cattle Feed, up 6.35 per cent, was the top gainer while Muscat Finance, down 4.76 per cent, was the top loser.

Oman LNG signs pact with China's UNIPEC

The signed term-sheet agreement encapsulates supplying a total volume of one million metric tonnes per annum of LNG from Oman LNG to UNIPEC



age the ever-growing partnership between Oman LNG and international energy firms, where UNIPEC has become the latest beneficiary of the Omani LNG marking the first LNG term deal with a Chinese firm. The deal constitutes a remarkable milestone for both companies and countries opening doors for new opportunities in the Chinese market.

The signed term-sheet agreement encapsulates supplying a

total volume of one million metric tonnes per annum of LNG from Oman LNG to UNIPEC, the trading arm of the Chinese company SINOPEC.

The agreement is based on a 4-year contract, starting in 2025. Signing term-sheet agreements beyond 2024 emphasise Oman LNG's role in sustaining the Sultanate of Oman's reputation as a reliable and trusted LNG supplier, coupled with the effective man-

agement of business processes to produce clean energy, and deliver it to customers around the world safely and reliably.

The agreement's signing ceremony was held under the patronage of Eng. Salim Nasser Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals in Muscat.

The agreement was signed by Hamad Al Nu'amani, CEO of Oman LNG, and Wang Yahang, General Manager of UNIPEC.

Speaking after the signing ceremony, Hamad Al Nu'amani, CEO of Oman LNG, said, "The term-sheet signing with UNIPEC marks another milestone, where the Omani LNG will be creating new opportunities in China. Such an agreement will further enhance our position in the global energy industry, and ensure we maintain our reputation as a clean and reliable energy supplier worldwide. This step boosts our ongoing efforts to add value to the local economy through growth and collaborations with international partners such as UNIPEC." - **ONA**

MEETING



Madayn BoD discusses developments of Sur international port

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) held its second meeting for the year 2023 in Sur Industrial City, chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry and Chairman of Madayn's Board of Directors.

The meeting was followed by a field visit to Sur Industrial City, during which the board was briefed on the projects and

achievements made during the last period, as well as visited the waterfront site of the international port project planned in Sur Industrial City and discussed the developments to expedite the pace of work on this project.

The Board of Directors, accompanied by officials of Sur Industrial City, then visited several localised companies and factories in the industrial city including Al Hael Ceramic Company and Oman India Fertiliser Company (Omifco) to get familiarised with their production lines and observe the opinions and recommendations of the investors.

INSURANCE PROVIDER

GIG Gulf unveils plan for ambitious growth in Oman

BAHRAIN: GIG Gulf, one of the largest insurance providers in the Mena region, has set out plans for an ambitious 11 per cent growth in Oman for 2023 after being rated "A" (Excellent) by AM Best for the second year in a row, a rating achieved only by handful insurers in Oman.

Following its 2022 transition from AXA, which has been present in the region for over 70 years, GIG Gulf's growth in Oman builds upon the insurer's fast-growing presence in the country and its status as the Bancassurance partner for Bank Muscat - the largest bank in Oman.



As part of its strategy, GIG Gulf is scheduled to welcome over 100 members of the Oman brokerage community today in Al Bustan Palace in Muscat to share its growth ambitions and present its strategy for innovation. **See also B8**

CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN

Treasury bills worth OMR16mn issued

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) raised OMR16 million by way of allotting treasury bills on Tuesday.

The treasury bills are for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached OMR98.790 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at OMR98.790 per OMR100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.85330 per cent and 4.91274 per cent, respectively.

The treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks with the opportunity to invest their

surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 5.25 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 5.75 per cent.

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. - **ONA**



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LIFESTYLE

Quality Conversation Can Increase Daily Well-Being was published in the journal Communication Research by Hall and co-authors Amanda Holmstrom, Natalie Pennington, Evan Perrault and Daniel Totzkay

HAVING QUALITY CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND CAN BOOST DAILY WELL-BEING

Just talking to a friend once during the day to catch up, have fun banter or tell them you're thinking of them can boost your happiness and reduce your stress level by the end of the day.

These are some of the findings of a recent study co-authored by Jeffrey Hall, a University of Kansas professor of Communication Studies and friendship expert.

"Quality Conversation Can Increase Daily Well-Being" was published in the journal Communication Research by Hall and co-authors Amanda Holmstrom, Natalie Pennington, Evan Perrault and Daniel Totzkay. The study was informed by and provides further support for Hall's Communicate Bond Belong (CBB) theory of rela-

tionships. Hall is the director of KU's Relationships and Technology Lab.

"This paper was an attempt to define quality communication in the context of relationships," Hall said. "The types of communication we chose to study were ones shown in past research to make people feel more bonded through conversation."

There were seven: Catching up, meaningful talk, joking around, showing care, listening, valuing others and their opinions and offering sincere compliments.

Over 900 study participants from five university campuses — before, during and after pandemic lockdowns — were directed to engage in one of the seven communication behaviors on a single day, and then reported back that night

“The types of communication we chose to study were ones shown in past research to make people feel more bonded through conversation.”

about their feelings of stress, connection, anxiety, well-being, loneliness and the quality of their day.

As it turned out, Hall said, it didn't matter which of these quality conversations someone had. The very act of intentionally reaching out to a friend in one of these ways was what mattered most.

"One of the take-home messages of this study is

that there are many paths towards the same goal," Hall said. He said the study was also designed to explore the impact of both the quality and quantity of daily communications.

"There's a lot of good research that says the number of interactions you have as well as the quality of interactions are both associated with being a less lonely, happier and more connected person," said Hall.

This study found that once is enough, but more is better. Participants who chose to have more quality conversations had better days. "This means the more that you listened to your friends, the more that you showed care, the more that you took time to value others' opinions, the better you felt at the end of the day," he said.

"The experimental design means that it's not just people who are already having fulfilling lives who have higher-quality conversations," Hall said.

"This study suggests that anyone who makes time for high-quality conversation can improve their well-being. We can change how we feel on any given day through communication. Just once is all it takes."

The study also brought in Hall's past research on different ways to connect in the era of social and mobile media.

The study found high quality face-to-face communication was more closely associated with well-being than electronic or social media contact.

"If at least one of their quality conversations was face-to-face, that mat-

tered," Hall said.

The paper also explains why quality communication makes people feel better. CBB theory claims that people use conversations with friends to help get their need to belong met.

"Across these three studies, quality conversation mattered most for connection and stress," Hall said.

"This supports the idea that we use communication to get our needs met, and, in doing so, it helps us manage our stress."

What is exciting about this research, Hall said, is that it shows there are a host of good things that come along with just one good conversation with a friend.

This drives home the point that making time for quality conversation makes our days better. **ANI**

Biden dials Erdogan, vows to ‘provide any and all’ help

Biden said that US teams are deploying quickly to support Turkish search and rescue efforts

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Monday reaffirmed the readiness of America to provide any and all needed assistance to Turkey to recover from the devastating earthquakes.

In a telephone call to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Biden vowed US assistance to NATO ally Turkey. “He reaffirmed the readiness of the United States to provide any and all needed assistance to our NATO ally Turkey in response to this tragedy,” the White House said in a statement on Biden’s call with Erdogan.

“President Biden expressed condolences on behalf of the American people to those who were injured or lost loved ones in the earthquakes,” it read.

According to latest estimates, over 4,000 people have been killed due to the deadly earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

At least 4,372 deaths have been



confirmed dead according to officials and agencies.

Turkey’s toll rose to 2,921 as of Tuesday morning, according to Yunus Sezer, Turkey’s head of disaster services.

A total of 15,834 injuries have been reported, Sezer said in a news conference in Ankara.

Sezer said he would provide a more comprehensive update at 6 am local time (10 pm ET).

In Syria, 1,451 deaths and 3,531 injuries have been reported by officials, reported CNN.



is still being determined, reported Washington Post.

CNN reported that thousands of buildings collapsed in both countries and aid agencies are particularly worried about northwestern Syria, where more than 4 million people were already relying on humanitarian assistance.

According to Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca, who spoke during a news conference carried out live on CNN Turk on Monday evening from Hatay Emergency Coordination Center, the weather and the scale of the disaster are creating challenges for aid teams.

“The weather conditions and the scale of the disaster make it hard for our teams to reach the region,” Koca said, adding “our helicopters could not take off today due to weather conditions.”

“Heavy snowstorms have also recently hit parts of Syria and Turkey, with further sub-zero temperatures forecasted,” UNICEF said in a statement released on Monday.

All state institutions have been mobilized in the recovery effort, including the national police, municipal workers, the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency and the Gendarmerie, an armed general law enforcement organization part of Interior Ministry that maintains security and safety.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

UN, WHO dispatch forces, medical aid for quake-hit Turkey

ANKARA: The United Nations (UN) and World Health Organisation (WHO) in a humanitarian effort have dispatched emergency response teams and Medical Teams to Turkey for rescue and relief after a deadly 7.8 magnitude earthquake claimed numerous lives.

According to CNN, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) stated emergency response teams from the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) are sent to Turkey to assist the country in tough times. Moreover, WHO’s Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) are being mobilized to Turkey to assist in the humanitarian response.

The United States announced it will send two search and rescue units to Turkey, while the European Union launched its crisis response mechanism, as per CNN.

According to the Russian Defense Ministry, 10 Russian army units totalling more than 300 personnel are cleaning debris and assisting in search and rescue efforts in Syria.

In reaction to the earthquake in Turkey, Japan has dispatched its Disaster Relief Rescue Team, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on Monday.

“Upon the request of the Government of Turkey, and in light of humanitarian perspective and Japan’s friendship relations with Turkey, Japan has decided to provide this emergency assistance to Turkey to meet its humanitarian needs,” CNN reported citing the statement.

Turkey and Syria were hit by three consecutive devastating earthquakes of magnitude 7.8, 7.6 and 6.0 on Monday.

The initial quake of 7.8-magnitude was followed by dozens of powerful aftershocks, including one recorded at 7.5 magnitudes in the same fault zone of south-central Turkey on Monday afternoon. Most of the damage is in southern Turkey and northern and central Syria.

The death toll in Turkey and in neighbouring Syria following powerful earthquakes on Monday rose to over 4,000, the Washington Post reported. -ANI

SUPPORT

Pakistan PM will travel to Ankara to offer condolences

ANKARA: Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will be travelling to Ankara on Wednesday to offer his support following the devastating earthquake, reported CNN.

In a statement on Tuesday, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said Sharif would “express condolences and solidarity with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the people of Turkey over the loss of precious lives and destruction caused by yesterday’s deadly earthquake.” Pakistan has also deployed two search and rescue teams to Turkey.

Another quake of magnitude 5.4 jolted eastern Turkey on Tuesday, according to the United States Geological Survey.

The fifth earthquake was reported around 12:41 pm (local time) at a depth of 6.8 km at the location 38.116°N 38.669°E, added USGS. At least 4,940 deaths have now been confirmed in Turkey and Syria after a powerful mag-

nitude 7.8 earthquake rocked the region early on Monday, reported CNN.

Rescuers are using at least 10 ships and 54 aircraft to transport the wounded and help with search operations, he said.

At least 100 aftershocks measuring 4.0 or greater have occurred since the 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern Turkey on Monday morning local time, according to the United States Geological Survey.

As the time from the original earthquake extends, the frequency and magnitude of the aftershocks tend to decrease.

However, 5.0 to 6.0-plus aftershocks are still likely to occur and bring a risk of additional damage to structures that are compromised from the original earthquake. This brings a continued threat to rescue teams and survivors.

Hundreds of families remain trapped under the rubble of collapsed buildings. -ANI

TRAGEDY

Turkey, Syria earthquakes: Rescuers helping the needy with ‘bare hands’

IDLIB: Eyewitnesses have told DW that rescuers in Syria were trying to save victims of a devastating earthquake with their “bare hands” amid a lack of resources.

A 7.8 magnitude quake struck near Gaziantep in southern Turkey near the border with Syria early Monday, followed by a new 7.5 tremor after midday.

Over 3,500 people have so far been confirmed killed in the two countries, with the death toll expected to rise amid ongoing rescue operations.



The woman said the city was in urgent need of blood donation, amid a continuous rise in the number of those injured.

“I’m in total shock, I feel all the time that the earth keeps shaking underneath me, but it can also just be that it’s my body that’s shaking.”

Though urged to evacuate their homes, the woman said the people of Aleppo have not heeded the calls.

“Because they don’t know where to go, and they don’t have money to stay in hotels further away from here.”

The Syrian Health Ministry said 656 people were killed in the government-controlled provinces of Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Tartus. Some 1,419 more were injured, the ministry said, adding that the toll was “not final.”

Some historical buildings were destroyed as a result of the quake in the provinces of Aleppo, Hama, and Tartus, the Syrian Cultural Ministry said. The most notable damage reported was that which hit the historic Aleppo Citadel, among the world’s oldest and largest castles.

Aleppo’s ancient citadel is damaged following a deadly earthquake that shook Syria on February 6, 2023. Aleppo’s ancient citadel is damaged following a deadly earthquake that shook Syria on February 6, 2023.

The minaret inside Aleppo’s ancient citadel, among the oldest in the world, was partially destroyed due to the earthquake. Image: AFP

The ministry said it sustained “little to medium” damage, including the collapse of parts of its Ottoman mill, and the destruction of its entrances. The dome of the minaret of the Ayyubid mosque inside the citadel also sustained partial collapse. -DW

Idlib’s buildings destroyed, old and new

Syria’s opposition-held Idlib province in the northwest was among the worst hit regions. The province lacks the technical equipment to rescue survivors of the earthquake, local journalist Omar Albam told DW.

Albam spoke from Sarmada, a small town some 30 kilometers north of Idlib city and on the border with Turkey. He said the town has been hit hard, nearly leveled to the ground by the quake.

“The earth shook twice. The aftershock felt much longer,” Albam said, describing the first moments after the quake in Idlib. “People in Idlib streamed out of their homes, they were in panic.”

He said the collapsed buildings were already in bad shape due to the country’s civil war, ongoing for some 12 years, and particularly due to “the Russian airstrikes.”

“But newer buildings also collapsed, all over Idlib province,” the journalist said.

He said that entire families remained buried under the rubble.

White Helmets struggle with rescue operation

The voluntary Civil Defense Forces were unable to pull people from under the rubble, Albam said. Also known as the White Helmets, the group has been known for years for their ability to rescue people from under the rubble as a result of airstrikes bringing down buildings.

Albam said the earthquake also struck connection networks, with some areas completely cut off from communication.

“There are currently no reliable estimates of how many people have died as a result of the earthquake. There is chaos and it is still unclear at this time.”

The White Helmets had said that the earthquake killed over 700 people in the opposition-held northwest Syria, injuring some 2000 more. On Idlib’s streets, residents spoke to DW about the horrors they witnessed. One described how he spent hours searching for his friend’s family under debris.

“We kept on searching for them until 6 in the morning. We found his wife and two of his children dead. And this is what people are going through.”

Many called for international support, saying that though immense, the White Helmets’ effort was not enough.

Civil defense workers and residents search through the rubble of collapsed buildings in the town of Harem near the Turkish border, Idlib province, Syria, Monday, Feb. 6, 2023. Civil defense workers and residents search through the rubble of collapsed buildings in the town of Harem near the Turkish border, Idlib province, Syria, Monday, Feb. 6, 2023. “I hope that humanitarian organizations can just help us remove the debris. Just equipment and medical help, nothing more,” one said.

Another resident described the moments of the quake, saying: “Horrible moments that we

experienced at 4 in the morning. We have never witnessed such an earthquake. Many buildings collapsed. My family and I survived and the neighbors did too, but five people died here. The civil defense [White Helmets] is putting in all its effort. This seems to me like it was the Day of Judgment.”

Ordinary civilians make up Aleppo’s rescue operation

Syria’s government-controlled Aleppo, which was badly hit by the devastating Monday earthquake, is not equipped to deal with the aftermath, with most helpers working without proper training, an anonymous eyewitness told DW.

The female 30-year-old resident of Aleppo, who did not wish to give her name for security reasons, said most of those helping with the rescue operations were ordinary civilians.

“Most of them are not trained for this. They help with their bare hands because there is hardly any recovery equipment. This is dangerous, they could be buried under the rubble themselves at any time.”

ROUND-UP

Bank Nizwa invests in digital onboarding

Individuals can open Sharia-compliant savings accounts remotely via their laptop or mobile device, elevating their experience and satisfying their appetite to be digitally onboarded

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, has invested heavily in seamless and efficient digital account opening experiences for customers. Individuals can open Sharia-compliant savings accounts remotely via their laptop or mobile device, elevating their experience and satisfying their appetite to be digitally onboarded. Transparency is at the heart of Bank Nizwa's operations whilst simplified technology enhances customer convenience. Innovation is considered a fundamental

pillar of the bank's growth. "Bank Nizwa has always been a pioneer in digital solutions, and we are committed to developing smart and fully digitised processes to ensure our efficiency. As a result of the digital onboarding process, we are able to manage cases efficiently, capture documents automatically, and collaborate more efficiently, resulting in less paperwork and more productivity. Offering self-service options allows the bank to attract new customers," said Sadiq Al Lawati, Head Channels and Digitalisation at Bank Nizwa. "Fine-tuned



digital onboarding experiences are customer-centric and form a solid foundation for long-term relationships with their clients. By acting digitally and recommending tailored products, banks can increase customer loyalty and brand awareness," he added. Locals and residents over 18 years of age can open a savings account virtually by downloading the Bank Nizwa Mobile App. They will need to take a picture of both sides of their IDs, take a selfie, fill out the required information, and then make a deposit. Digital onboarding provides customers with faster

access to all of the bank's products. Once the process is complete the digital identity of the customer is fully set up, the savings account is open and the customer is able to use the entire portfolio of digital products of the bank. The debit card will be delivered to the customer where-ever he/she resides. The Bank Nizwa's savings account serves as the basic tool when it comes to investing and growing funds with the principles of Mudaraba. Under this, the client is Shaheb-Al Mal and the bank is Mudarib. In general, Mudaraba Savings Accounts are designed for non-trading customers with some potential savings and only a few transactions per month. The key privileges of having a Bank Nizwa Savings Account include unlimited deposits to the account, quarterly profit pay-out on the monthly average balance, Bank Nizwa MasterCard debit card, zero minimum balance charges, quick fund transfers and remittances, pay orders, convenient bill payments, the advantage of mobile top-ups and the option to make donations through the account.



Europcar celebrates annual staff event

MUSCAT: Europcar Oman, a leading mobility service provider, held its yearly staff event at Crown Plaza Qurum on January 29. The event supported a charitable cause and was a part of the company's corporate social responsibility. Europcar has been giving back to the community through various initiatives and is committed to continuing this work in the future. The company extended support to the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disability, and a cheque was presented to Sabah Al Bahlani - CEO of the Association. Safiya Al Bahlani was the keynote speaker at the event. She is an Omani entrepreneur and a disability activist who narrated her inspiration-

al story of overcoming obstacles. Rishi Khimji, the managing director of Asha Enterprises, was the chief guest, joined by the General Managers of other divisions like Mistal, Travelx, WH Smith, Havas Advertising, Mumtaz Mahal & Woodlands. Nitin Sapre, the GM of Europcar Oman & Bahrain, said that the annual staff event is a chance to celebrate the success of the company and the people who make it happen. The day was filled with team building activities, entertainment, raffle prizes and employees had the opportunity to celebrate the company's achievements. Awards were presented to recognise the hard work and dedication of employees.

OSHRM CONFERENCE

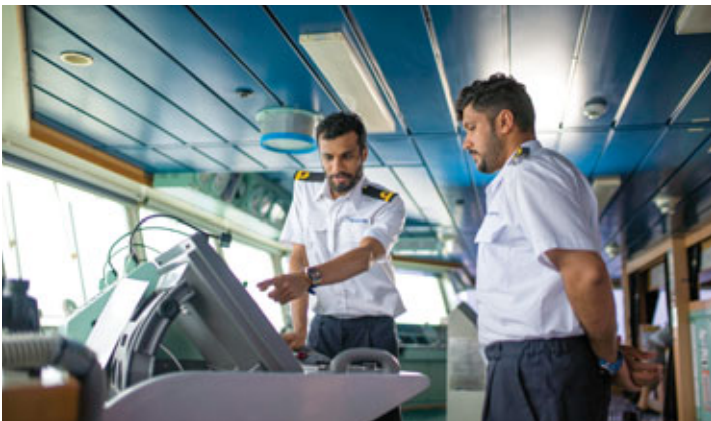
Asyad presents its journey in building unified culture

MUSCAT: Asyad Group is participating, as a platinum sponsor, in the 6th annual Omani Society for Human Resource Management (OSHRM) Conference, 'The New Era of Work', taking place from February 7-9 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre in Muscat. In line with its people-first culture, Asyad's participation at OSHRM reaffirms the group's commitment to a people-centric approach built on investment in skills, experiences and tools that build the capacities of its human resources. Asyad Group designed its uni-

fied people-first culture to create a nurturing workplace to foster collaboration and innovation across the group and build the group's competitiveness amongst regional and global players. Asyad's people-centric approach also enables the group to further advance the growth of the Sultanate's economy by developing Omani leaders who drive change and innovation to deliver Oman's logistics sector goals and projects. During the conference, Asyad will present its journey in crystallizing its core values, derived from

the Group's purpose and vision, and showcase how the group is enacting and translating them into daily conduct by every Asyad employee. These shared values are forged in one single institutional culture focused on investing in promising talents and equipping the leaders of tomorrow with global expertise and comprehensive learning programs that combine professional education with world-class successful experiences and global market research. More importantly, the global integrated logistics provider has successfully developed a uni-

fied culture that acts as the optimal vehicle to deliver Asyad's strategy and objectives, as it instills key values that consolidate the group's position as the employer of choice in Oman. With a regional and global audience, the OSHRM conference is an ideal platform for Asyad to share its journey in building the Asyad way culture with strategic partners and show pathways to develop competitive Omani leaders who excel at decision-making and shaping a sustainable future for the logistics sector.



CULINARY SKILLS



Foodlands organises cooking contest

MUSCAT: Foodlands Restaurant Oman has been a pioneer in conducting cooking contests over the years. The agenda behind this is to find, felicitate and celebrate the perfect home chef. Under the banner of Foodlands, Gourmet Chef Semifinal was held at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in October 2022. 75 semi-finalists were shortlisted from an overwhelming 300 plus recipe entries that were received in the preliminary round alone. The event gave a platform for home cooks to demonstrate their culinary knowledge and skills which in turn was beneficial in discovering their hidden talents. The top 5 finalists were selected to compete with each other in the grand finale on February 4 at the Foodlands Commercial Kitchen, Al Khoudh. The top 5 contestants were pro-

vided with a 3-course menu challenge they had to cook live and present to the judges in two hours. The Winners were judged on the parameters of taste, innovation, organisational skills, time management, presentation, wastage and hygiene. The panel of judges comprised food enthusiasts, recipe strategists, columnists and the owner of the popular Facebook group "What's Cooking Oman?" Oneza Tabish, Foodlands Indian chef Ramsingh Kundan Singh, Foodlands Continental Chef Arya Vijay Lal and Foodlands Executive Chef. Libin Thomas. Out of the 5 finalists, Ruksana Harshad was announced the winner followed by Ambreen Jahangir as the 1st runner-up and Harshida Jasam as the 2nd runner-up. The winners were awarded gold coins, certificates and gift hampers.

ADVENTURE

GAC successfully completes first-ever 'Montero Mania' desert excursion

MUSCAT: General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor for Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, marked another milestone by successfully completing their first-ever 'Montero Mania' desert excursion. The event, the spiritual successor of the 'Team Pajero Adventure', took place on February 3 and 4 and saw 200 participants in 50 Mitsubishi Montero Sport SUVs drive into the desert for a weekend of adventure and fun. The 'Montero Mania' event provided Montero owners and enthusiasts with the opportunity to experience a true desert adventure in the vehicle best suited to handle the challenge - the Mitsubishi Montero Sport. The event was designed to enhance the customer experience and allow participants the opportunity to better understand and test their vehicle's capabilities. Manoj Ranade, General Manager of General Automotive Company, stated, "At GAC, delivering exceptional customer experiences and opportunities to appreciate their vehicles' capabilities fully is of utmost importance. The 'Montero Mania' desert excursion, just like the 'Team Pajero Adventure' before it, was a testament to this commitment, offering customers the chance to push the limits of the Montero Sport in a



safe and controlled environment. We are thrilled with the overwhelmingly positive feedback received from all participants." The "Montero Mania" desert excursion officially kicked off at the Mitsubishi showroom on February 3, where 200 enthusiastic customers gathered in their 50 Montero Sport SUVs. Led by 20 experienced GAC staff members, the convoy ventured into the desert towards the Al Raha Camp in the picturesque Wahiba Sands. At the camp, the convoy was escorted by expert guides from Mitsubishi Oman. The drivers were treated to a thrilling dune bashing

session followed by a breathtaking sunset view from the top of a nearby dune. Back at the camp, a wide range of activities and entertainment awaited families, including a night filled with fun and laughter. The next day, the customers were given the opportunity to enjoy the desert scenery on camelback or race across the sand on dune bikes. After a memorable weekend, the convoy departed from Wahiba Sands, successfully concluding the first-ever "Montero Mania" desert excursion. "We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all customers who joined us for this exciting

event. Your participation and enthusiasm made it a truly memorable experience for everyone involved," added Manoj Ranade. The Montero Sport adopts a powerful yet refined exterior design with Mitsubishi's signature Dynamic Shield front view design. It emphasises the vehicle's width, with the headlights continuing from the front grille and the combination lamps at the bumper corners. This bold exterior is complemented by a refined interior that delivers high quality, comfort, and advanced functionality. The Montero Sport is also brimming with technology, thanks to several advanced and convenient new features. These include the easy-to-read 8-inch colour digital dash, 8-inch Smartphone-Link Display Audio (SDA) system, the Mitsubishi Remote Control smartphone app, and more. Powering the Montero Sport is a 3.0L MIVEC V6 gasoline engine that produces 218hp@6,000rpm and 285Nm@4,000rpm. This powerplant is mated to Mitsubishi's 8-speed automatic transmission that delivers a smoother, more luxurious ride and improved fuel efficiency. The Montero Sport also retains the Super-Select 4WD-II system, which delivers optimal traction regardless of the driving surface, and confidence-inspiring handling characteristics.

STYLISH

Experience benchmark luxury in Lincoln Aviator



MUSCAT: The luxury Lincoln Aviator SUV is designed to stand out and be above expectations with its stylish and sleek design, range of advanced features and inspiring luxury. The Aviator is powered to offer rewarding drives with its standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine that is paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission. This helps the Aviator dish out an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless

acceleration. The three-row luxury SUV is equipped with all-wheel drive capability. Adding thrill to journeys in the Lincoln Aviator is the Lincoln Drive Modes' five signature settings - Normal, Conserve, Excite, Slippery and Deep Conditions. This feature allows owners to further customise their driving experience, while a 10.1-inch standard configurable LCD instrument cluster confirms their choices

with beautiful, easy-to-read dynamic graphics and prompts. For increased safety the Lincoln Aviator is equipped with available technology that enables Aviator to "see" most potholes or uneven pavement and immediately make suspension adjustments to keep the ride as smooth as possible. Adaptive Suspension with Road Preview uses an advanced forward camera to constantly scan the road, seamlessly adjusting the sus-

pension as needed. All Lincoln vehicles come standard with a suite of driver-assist features known as Lincoln Co-Pilot360. Traffic Jam Assist helps guide the vehicle using adaptive cruise control with stop-and-go, lane centring and traffic sign recognition, adjusting speed based on the information obtained. Evasive Steer Assist offers assistance to the driver to help avoid a collision with a slower or stopped vehicle.

ROUND-UP

GIG GULF: LARGE MULTI-LINE REGIONAL INSURER CONFIRMS GROWTH AMBITIONS IN OMAN

BAHRAIN: GIG Gulf, one of the largest insurance providers in the MENA region, has set out plans for an ambitious 11% growth in Oman for 2023 after being rated “A” (Excellent) by AM Best for the second year in a row, a rating achieved only by a handful of insurers in Oman, and receiving the Health Insurer of the Year award for the second consecutive year at the 2023 MENA IR Awards.

Following its 2022 transition from AXA, which has been present in the region for over 70 years, GIG Gulf’s growth in Oman builds upon the insurer’s fast-growing presence in the country and its status as the Bancassurance partner for Bank Muscat – the largest bank in Oman.

As part of its strategy, GIG Gulf is scheduled to welcome over 100 members of the Oman brokerage community on the 8th of Feb in Al Bustan Palace in Muscat to share its growth ambitions and present its strategy for innovation. The event, which is a first of its kind gathering in Oman, reflects the importance of brokers in the local market, and their instrumen-

“

GIG Gulf is uniquely positioned to transform the Omani insurance industry for the better through its multi-distribution model, high performing digital platforms, and its capabilities as a multi-line insurer that operates across all insurance segments

Paul Adamson
CEO of GIG Gulf

tal role in GIG Gulf’s growth. The event follows a year of milestones for the insurer, which revealed its new regional headquarters in 2022, which have



been designed and built around state-of-the-art facilities and digital infrastructure to transform its customer’s experience in Oman and the wider region.

Paul Adamson, CEO of GIG Gulf, commented: “GIG Gulf is uniquely positioned to transform the Omani insurance industry for the better through its multi-dis-

tribution model, high performing digital platforms, and its capabilities as a multi-line insurer that operates across all insurance segments. From Healthcare to,

Motor and Property, the company is the preferred partner to some of Oman’s most important public and private sector organizations – with a regional spread that serves over one million consumers including SMEs and corporations.”

GIG Gulf has launched a series of ground-breaking services in Oman over the past year, including EasyClaims, which is a digital platform for real-time end-to-end motor claims. It is the first such service to be offered by an insurance company across four major GCC markets – the UAE, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain. The platform allows customers to register their motor insurance claims by entering minimal information and track the process in real-time. EasyClaims uses big data and AI-based analytics to present granular details on the parts needed for repairs, costs, and timeline.

GIG Gulf is committed to simplifying the customer experience through digital solutions that are unique and add value, and by providing customer-centric insurance innovation.

AUTHENTIC JAPANESE CUISINE

Japanese restaurant Sakana opens at Sifawy Boutique Hotel



MUSCAT: Jebel Sifah has recently opened ‘Sakana’ restaurant at Sifawy Boutique Hotel.

Overlooking the picturesque marina in Jebel Sifah, Sakana is a new dining outlet serving authentic Japanese cuisine.

The Sushi and Teppanyaki signature restaurant offers a wide variety of mouth-watering Japanese platters featuring Ebi Tempura, a dedicated Teppanyaki Hibachi set menu and a la carte, noodles, traditional sushi, Nigiri sushi, sashimi, maki sushi, and more.

The opening of Sakana adds to an extensive food and beverage portfolio in the destination that

Jebel Sifah is well known for in Muscat. Japanese cuisine is recognised globally as one of the finest cuisines worldwide for what it has to offer from colorful and appetizing to healthy delicacies that have gained millions of food lovers craving this kitchen internationally.

With its talented chefs preparing nothing but the best of Japanese dishes using the freshest ingredients, Japanese cuisine lovers and food connoisseurs are guaranteed a remarkable culinary journey at Sakana within its charming ambiance.

Sakana is open from Wednesday to Sunday between 1pm and 10pm.



GOLF



Omani team wins at Omantel Country Pairs Betterball hosted by Ras Al Hamra Golf Club

MUSCAT: Ras Al Hamra Golf Club in partnership with Omantel hosted the Omantel Country Pairs Betterball on January 27.

The fact that each team is made up of players from the same nation distinguishes this golf competition from others. The monthly competition featured 19 teams in the course.

When all of the results were in, the UK team of Paul Brotherton and Joe Watson and the Omani team of Salim Al Harthy and Hisham Al Siyabi were tied.

The total was 46 for both teams. The Omani Team prevailed after the final count back

with 18 points versus the UK team’s 16 points.

With 45 points, the United Nations team of Christophe Perringerard (France) and Robbie Joseph (USA) came in third place.

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club Captain said, “We would like to congratulate all our winners and extend a special thank you to Omantel for their generous support.”

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club was founded in 1969 making it the oldest golf club in Oman. Originally a sand course, it was redesigned by Graham Marsh Golf Design and opened as a floodlit grass course in November 2014.

AWARDS CEREMONY

National University of Science and Technology to host graduation on February 12



MUSCAT: The National University of Science and Technology, announced the honouring of 1215 students receiving their M.Sc., B.Sc and BEng and Diploma degrees for the academic year 2021-2022, at its graduation and awards ceremony on February 12.

The graduation will be under the patronage of Dr Hilal bin Ali Al

Sabti, Minister of Health.

Dignitaries, parents and well-wishers are invited to attend and recognise the achievement of the graduates.

Special awards and the awards of degree of all programmes will be conferred upon by the chief guests, vice chancellor, University of South Carolina representative,

Glasgow Caledonian University representative, West Virginia University representative, and the Deans of the Colleges.

Special awards for high achievement will also be presented by the university. These include the Academic Excellence Award PG, Academic Excellence Award UG, Meritorious/ High Honors, Hon-

ors and Citizenship Awards.

The National University of Science and Technology has collaborated with renowned international academic institutions to bring the best international practices from different partnerships so to add value and provide the best higher educational experience in the Sultanate of Oman.



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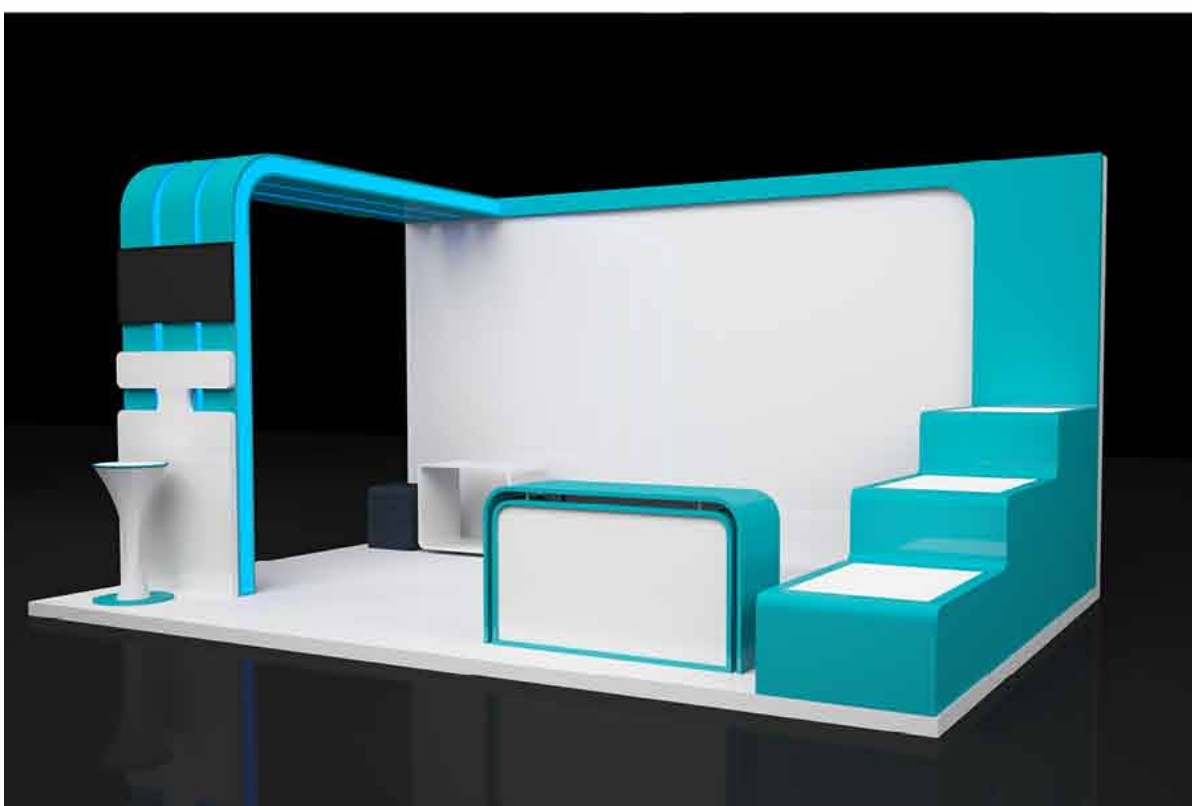
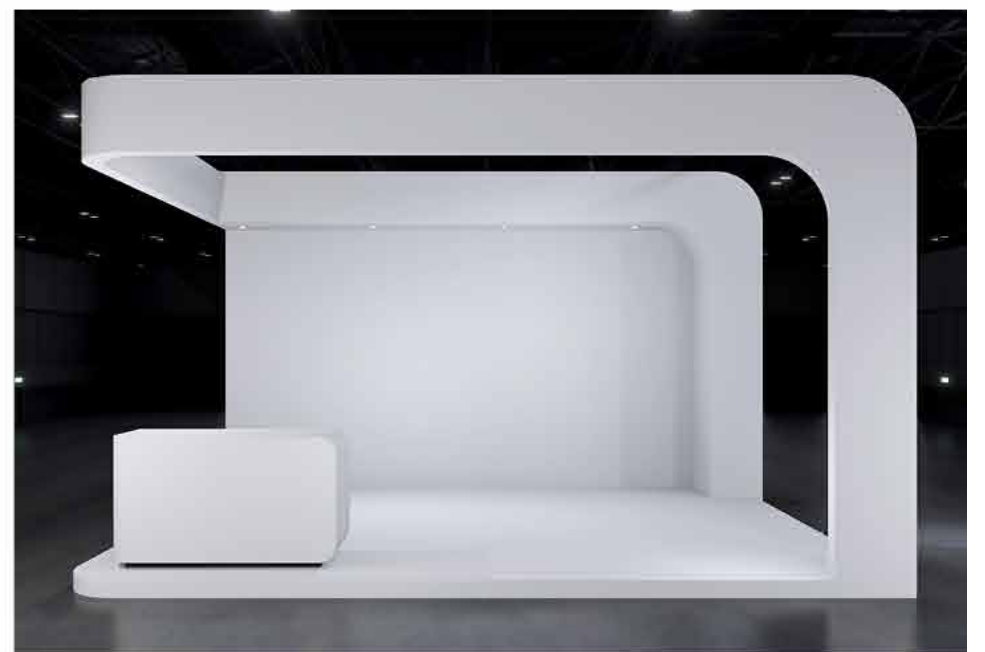
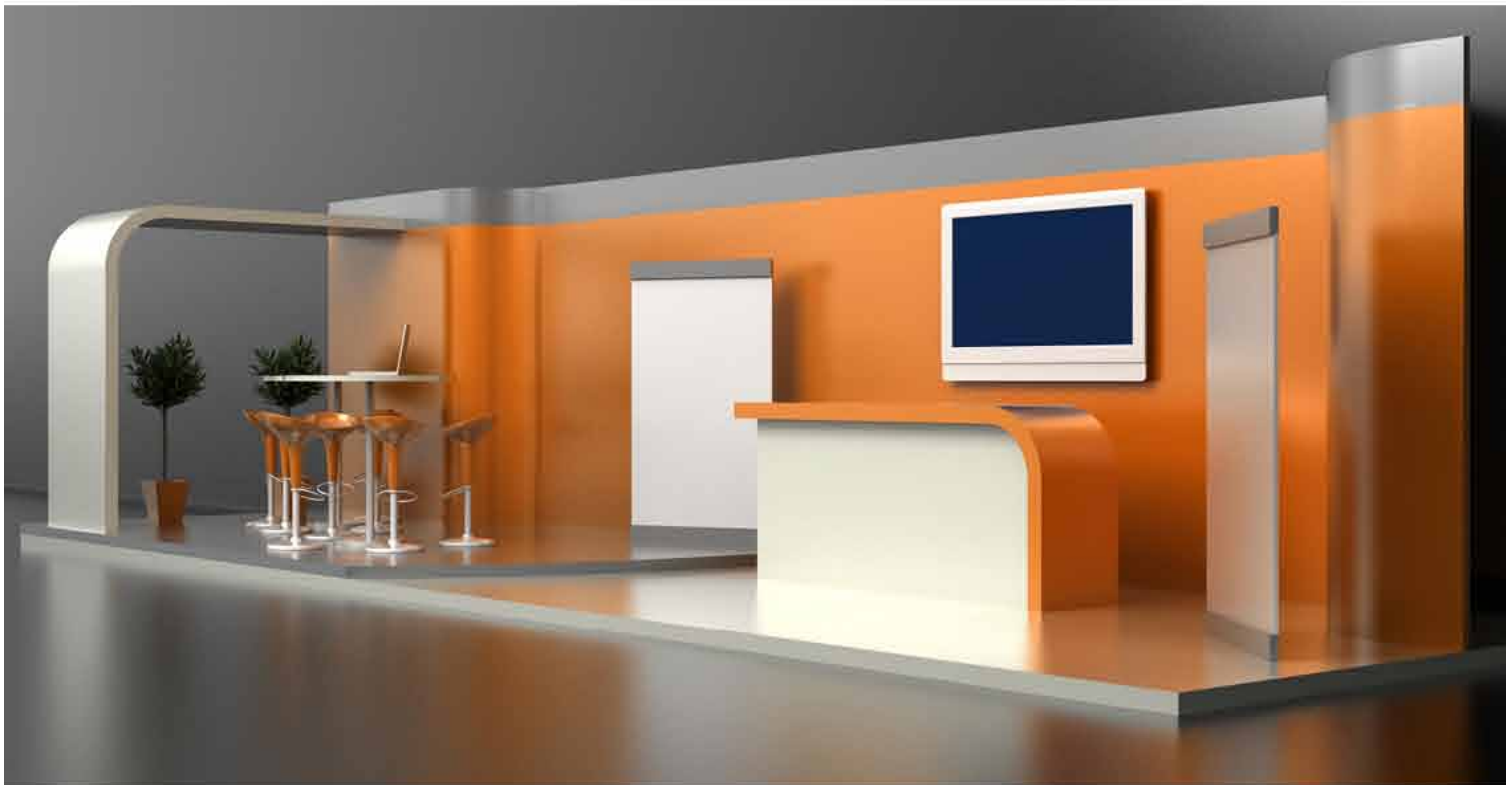
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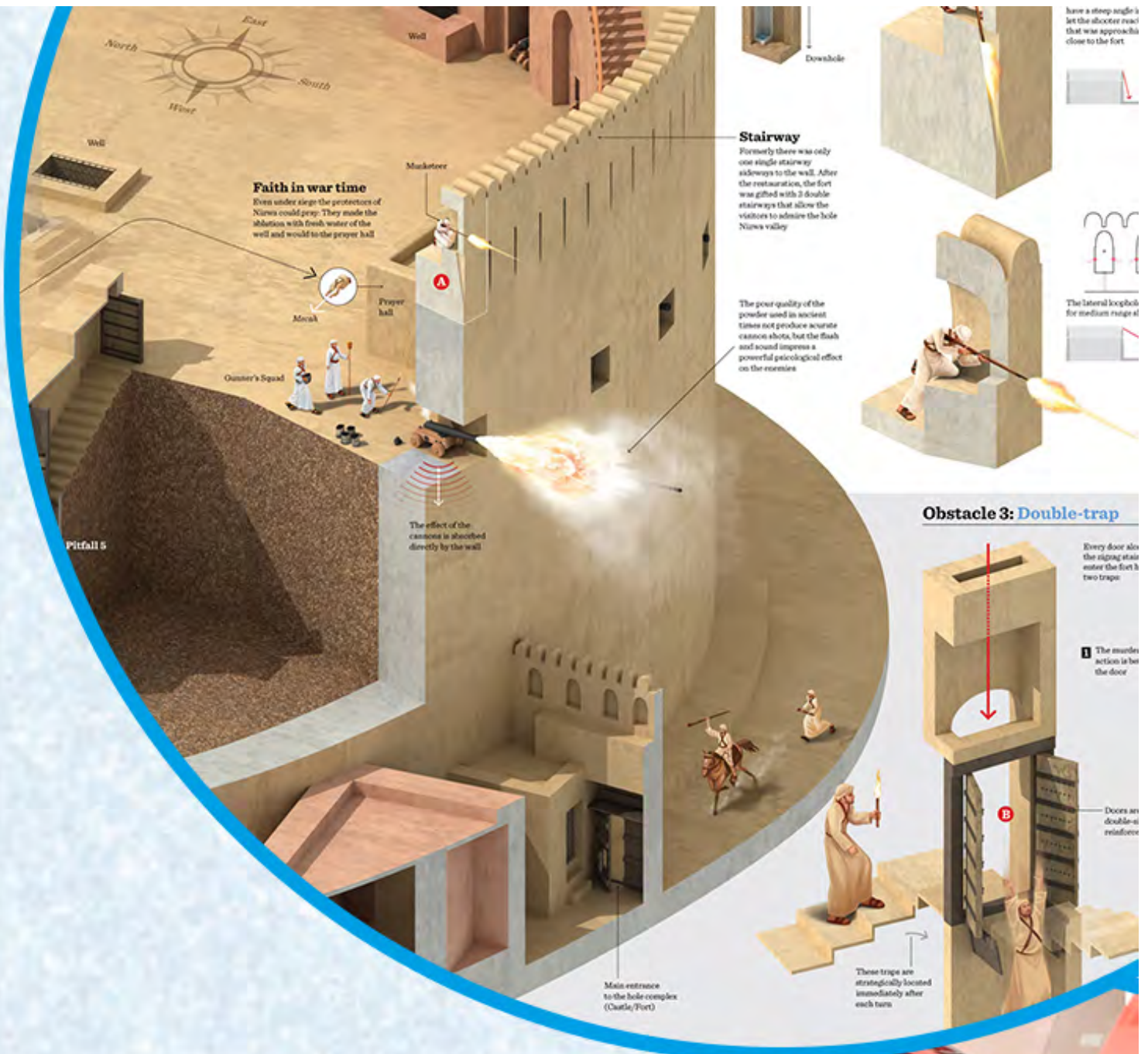
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