

**NEW DAMS IN SALALAH
TO REDUCE FLOOD RISK**

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is continuing with the construction of two dams to mitigate the flood risks in the wilayat of Salalah in Dhofar Governorate. **>A2**



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**HM THE SULTAN CONGRATULATES
PRESIDENT XI JINPING**

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulation to President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China on the Chinese New Year. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and wishes of good health and happiness to the president and to his country's people further progress and prosperity. **-ONA**



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MUSEUM VISITS

Participants of Bilarab bin Haitham award visit France, UK to sharpen designing skills

MUSCAT: Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design concluded its overseas trip for the designers of the ten top projects who have qualified for the final stage of the award.

The trip included visits to a number of museums in France and the United Kingdom.

The tour was an initiative taken by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism supervising the execution of the first place winning project out of the total projects competing on the design of maritime history museum in wilayat of Sur.

The tour started with a visit to the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations in Marseille city in France, where they got acquainted with the architectural and construction aspects of the museum, reflecting the civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean across history.

The second visit was at the



National Maritime Museum in London, one of the prestigious museums in the United Kingdom, opened in 1937.

The museum showcases the maritime history of the United Kingdom and the world and accommodates over one million masterpieces related to the mari-

time history of Britain and other European countries during the 17th century along with other marine possessions.

The participants also visited other museums and buildings with different architectural patterns and designs including the Victoria and Albert Museum, one of the in-

ternationally renowned museums in terms of art and design.

The museum hosts over 2,800 million pieces, books and records of the various civilisations, worldwide. The visit to the museum represents an opportunity for the participants to enrich their experience in the field of architectural engineering due to its unique design and to learn how to display their designs, which is a vital field for the participants.

The participants considered and analysed some of the architectural patterns and exchanged views on how to benefit from them in developing their projects and knowledge.

They expressed their delight at the trip and expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for adopting the idea of the trip. **-ONA**

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A4

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN UK forum focuses on investment in Oman

1 The Omani-British Trade Forum focused on the investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman. **>A2**

WORLD Egypt ties with India to get a big boost

2 The Egyptian President visit to India at the upcoming Republic Day celebrations on January 26 will reinforce the ties between the two earliest civilisations. **>A7**

SPORTS Bilal Khan picked by Sharjah Warriors

3 Picked by Sharjah Warriors, Bilal Khan is set to showcase his mettle at the region's inaugural T20 international franchise competition IILT20. **>A8**

60% OF BACHELOR'S AND HIGHER GRADE DEGREE HOLDERS ARE WOMEN

Female illiteracy rate in Oman decreased to 6.3% in 2021

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sixty percent of the total holders of bachelor's degree or higher grades in Oman are women, and the illiteracy rate among them decreased to 6.3 percent in 2021, compared to 2017, when the rate was 6.8 percent.

The number of Omani children in the age group of 0-17 years reached 1,221,751, constituting 44 percent of the total Omani population of 2,804,117 until the end of 2021, according to the Special Categories Bulletin for the year



2022 issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information.

The rate of Omani children increased by 16 percent between 2017 and 2021, with the highest percentage of them concentrated in the Governorate of North Al Batinah at 44 percent of the total Omani population of the govern-

rate. The bulletin stated that the number of Omani youth in the age group of 18 to 29 years amounted to 544,983 young men and women, representing 19.4 percent of the total Omani population, and that 51 percent of the youth are males and 49 percent of females, and 60 percent of the employed

Omani youth are in the private, family and civil sectors.

The bulletin indicates that the number of Omani elderly in the age group (60 years and over) increased from 149,824 in 2017 to 154,405 in 2021, constituting 5.5 percent of the total Omani population.

While the number of Omani females by the end of 2021 reached 1,391,609, representing 49.6 percent of the total Omani population for the year 2021.

As for the age-related fertility rates for Omani females, it decreased from 4 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age (15-49 years) in 2017 to 3.4 per thousand women of childbearing age for the year 2021. The number of Omanis with disabilities reached 42,613, constituting 1.5 percent of the total Omanis, of whom 61 percent were males compared to 39 percent of females in 2021.

The highest percentage of persons with disabilities was concentrated in the Governorate of North Al Batinah with a rate of 22 percent, followed by the Governorate of Muscat with a rate of 16 percent. And Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate, with a rate of 13.9 percent, while the lowest percentage was in the Al-Wusta Governorate, with a rate of 0.6 percent. **>A2**

ARABIAN GULF CUP

Proud of my boys, says Ivankovic as Red Warriors return home

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Red Warriors returned home to a muted reception on Friday night after going down gallantly to Iraq 2-3 in the final of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup at Basra International Stadium in Basra, Iraq, on Thursday.

The team was received at the Muscat International Airport by Sayyid Saeed Al Busaidi, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, along with other senior ministry and Oman Football Association officials.

The final score line 3-2 in favour of Iraq certainly doesn't provide the real picture of the thrilling action on the night that was preceded by a stampede leaving two Iraqi fans dead and scores injured.

In his post-match comments, Ivankovic was gracious in compli-



menting the hosts Iraq for the successful organisation of the tournament and for winning the title, the fourth overall, to go second in all-time titles after Kuwait's ten.

Despite the narrow defeat in a five-goal thriller, the Croatian said: "I am proud of my players. They are a young group and the tourna-

ment was a good learning experience for them.

"Yes, we missed lifting the trophy, but the boys gave it all and the way they fought back to draw level twice exemplified the strong desire to win the title. The team is young and this defeat will be a good lesson for them ahead."



The Croatian added: "Congratulations to Iraq on winning the title. It was a match filled with lot of drama in a packed stadium. The final was not going to be easy and both the teams exhibited a wonderful match and players deserve lot of praise. Iraq had luck on their side. This is football."

He admitted that Iraq's winning goal in the final minute of extra-time was a result of a defensive mistake. "My players tried not to be affected by the events [referring to stampede outside the stadium earlier in the day] ahead of the match but the team comprises young players," he said. **>A3**

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TIMINGS

Dhuhr.....	12:23pm
Asr.....	3:30pm
Maghrib.....	5:51pm
Isha.....	7:05pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....	5:32am



Oman first in Asia, Arab region in life quality index

Quality of Life Index is based on several criteria, such as cost of living, purchasing power, housing affordability

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of



Oman is ranked first in Asia and the Arab region, and eighth in the world in the Quality of Life

Index 2023, according to the Numbeo. Globally, the Netherlands came

first, followed by Denmark and Switzerland. As for the Arab world, the UAE is ranked second (15th globally), followed by Qatar (20th globally), Saudi Arabia (32nd globally), and Kuwait (49th globally). Numbeo's 2023 Quality of Life Index is based on several criteria, including cost of living, purchasing power, housing affordability, pollution, crime rates, health system quality, and traffic. Numbeo is a collection of web pages containing detailed numerical data on cities and countries. It is noteworthy that several institutions issue the "Quality of Life Index" and measure the performance of countries and cities according to specific criteria.

OMANI-BRITISH TRADE FORUM

UK forum focuses on opportunities for investment in Oman



Times News Service

LONDON: With the participation of the Oman Investment Authority, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and a number of government companies representing various sectors, a trade forum was organised in London. The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the United Kingdom played a key role in cooperation with the University of West London Business Centre in organising the Omani-British Trade Forum. The forum focused on investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman and introduced the various sectors available for investment with the aim of achieving economic diversification. During the forum, government companies made visual presentations about investment opportunities available in the logistics, tourism, mining, fisheries and food sectors, and introduced the services and facilities provided by Credit Oman to individual and corporate investors. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion also gave a visual presentation on the services and facilities provided by the "Invest in Oman" hall directly from the Omani Embassy in London, while Bank Sohar presented the products and facilities that it will provide to investors wishing to invest in the Sultanate of Oman. During the conference, the provision of "Invest in Oman" services was announced by opening a commercial registry, granting an affiliation certificate and activity licence for the first time directly from the Omani embassy in London, and opening a bank account for individual investors and companies. Badr bin Mohammed Al Mandhari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom, said that the Oman-Britain Trade Business Conference was a translation of the royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to activate the role of economic diplomacy and activate the work of the Commercial Attaché at the Embassy of the



Sultanate of Oman in the United Kingdom. Al Mandhari explained that during the conference, investment opportunities in various fields and the facilities provided to investors in the Sultanate of Oman were presented. The Ambassador confirmed that investors from the United Kingdom wishing to invest in the Sultanate can complete their procedures at the embassy's headquarters in London through the "Invest in Oman" service, which includes opening a commercial registry, granting a certificate of affiliation with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, licensing activity, opening a bank account, and other procedures. Arwa bint Abdul Rahim Al Balushi, Minister Plenipotentiary - Commercial and Investment Attaché at the Embassy of the Sultanate in the United Kingdom in London, explained that the establishment of this conference comes from the standpoint of enhancing foreign investment, supporting economic diversification of non-oil sectors, and promoting investment opportunities through the participation of some Oman Investment Authority companies. Al Balushi indicated that the conference included holding a panel discussion on the services provided by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and "Credit Oman", which is considered one of the primary and essential tools for some factories and companies seeking to expand outside the United Kingdom. The Oman-Britain Trade Business Conference witnessed the participation of a number of British government officials, as well as the participation of about 150 British companies. -ONA

DISABILITIES

<FROM A1 Social security

The bulletin indicated that 57 percent of persons with disabilities are the result of congenital causes, and that 17.6 percent of the disabilities were during childbirth. The bulletin indicated that the number of cases benefiting from social security amounted to 72,675 by the end of 2021, constituting 2.6 percent of the total Omani population, decreasing by 8.6 percent between the years (2017-2021), as North Al Batinah included the highest cases of social security beneficiaries. With a rate of 26 percent of the total beneficiary cases, and that 42 percent of the beneficiary cas-



es from social security are from the old age category, followed by the disability category at 29 percent. -ONA

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SEASON 2022-2023



Construction work on two dams in Salalah continues

Times News Service

SALALAH: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is continuing with the construction of two dams to mitigate the flood risks in the wilayat of Salalah in Dhofar Governorate.

These dams will store the rain-water from the mountain areas and stop their flow towards the Port of Salalah, Raysut Industrial City and Salalah Free Zone.

The first dam is at Wadi Adawnib with a capacity of over 83 million cubic metres, which is the second largest dam in the Sultanate of Oman after Wadi Dhaiqa Dam in the Muscat Governorate.

The second dam is at the course of Wadi Ana'ar in Raysut area with a capacity of 16 million cubic metres. This is in addition to the construction of protection wall for Salalah Port.



The two dams represent part of the protection system to reduce the risks of floods, which includes construction of five protection dams in the wilayat of Salalah.

The other three dams would be constructed in the future as to provide utmost protection from flood risks.

Ali bin Bakhit Bait Said, Director of Water Resources Department at the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate, said that the completion percentage of Wadi Adawnib Dam is 22 percent at a total cost of approximately OMR24 million.

Its construction is expected to be complete during the second half of 2024, he added.

The project includes construction of a dam at Wadi Adawnib for a length of 386 metres and a height

of 68 metres besides construction of a channel to discharge water from the dam's reservoir with a capacity of 83.3 million cubic metres, he said.

He said that the completion percentage of the project of Wadi Ana'ar Dam is 26 percent at a total cost of OMR23 million. The project includes construction of a dam for a length of 1,680 kilometres and the height of 20 metres.

The construction is expected to be complete during the last quarter of 2023. The project includes construction of a concrete spillway for the length of 430 metres and a discharge channel with a capacity of 16 million cubic metres, he added.

He said that the side protection works for Salalah Port includes construction of a protection wall for a length of 1,610 kilometres and a height of 2 to 4 metres. -ONA



FOOTBALL

Good learning experience for team: Ivankovic



< FROM A1 "The most important thing for our team was gaining experience on the field and enjoying the experience of playing in front of such large crowds," said Ivankovic. Iraq coach Jesus Casas of Spain said that his team "didn't play a good game but the players displayed strong heart and got us the win. I am happy that the title brought joy to the Iraqi people and the players' families."

"When I took over as head coach, not many believed in this team. We worked together as a team and achieved success." Earlier Iraqi defender Manaf Younis scored the winning goal two min-

utes into the added time of extra-time after the teams were locked 1-1 at the end of regulation time. Oman demonstrated amazing spirit to bounce back from being goal down on two occasions, first to force the game into extra-time and the second minutes before the end of extra-time.

The fighting spirit and grit of the Red Warriors in the summit clash truly symbolised the tag the team holds it proudly - Warriors.

Two-time champions Oman were attempting to claim their third title and could be proud of their display during the tournament under Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic.



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EXPERIENCE THE FUN AND FIESTA



The much-awaited Muscat Nights 2023 is finally here to entertain and enthrall the citizens and residents of Oman. The event that kick-started on January 19 will continue until February 4 at Qurum Natural Park, Naseem Park, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) and Oman Automobile Association (OAA).

A number of shows have been lined up in the different venues. In Qurum Natural Park one can enjoy boat lake shows, helium shows, yacht decor, lasers, light water shows and many more. These shows of artistic formations along with the rhythms of the fountains and dazzling lights of the lake will be held at different timings in the evening.

Carnival shows, horse shows, show jumping competitions, boats with LED lighting technology, waterfalls lighting shows are some of the other not to miss events. Several stage shows like the Magic show by Fred Sharp, wave show, LED show will also be held at different timings with many repeat shows. Apart from these, food is one of the major attractions here and one can find several food stalls and restaurants. The park also includes a cinema hall with a projection screen and equipped lounges, as well as the effectiveness of full 360-degree photography.

Al Naseem Park is hosting a number of activities, including a qualitatively different participation of Madagascar Village and performances including activities, songs and live exhibitions. Visit The Land of Ice Cream. Al Naseem Park is also hosting chil-

dren's electronic games, Chupa Chup show, football skills show, ballerina bubble ball show, a traditional ultraviolet show, hologram dance and other events.

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre is holding a unique entertainment carnival for children that meets the aspirations of different age groups, including a theatrical performance of Aladdin's Wonderland and an artistic show entitled Winter in the Forest, which is a circus that suggests an experience that reflects the Arctic winter, with other carnival shows such as Fantasy Lion, Mr. Bob and the 3D Mapping show. The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre also showcases a variety of international cartoon characters, art shows and parties, competitions and electronic games.

The Oman Automobile Asso-

ciation will witness competitions for drifting, E-Gaming + Gaming truck events. There are pavilions of small and medium enterprises, vending and food carts, the Japanese village and more.

The event was launched by Sayyid Saud bin Hilal Al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, in the presence of ministers and officials and the public at the Qurum Natural Park. Ahmed Mohammed Al Hamidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, recently said in a press conference that the activities of Muscat Nights are not limited to entertainment, but extend to tourism promotion and means of supporting local industries by providing access for social and cultural communication. It is an opportunity to let Muscat Nights inspire greater concepts for the festival's future edition.





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FROM JANUARY 23-25

Bait Al Zubair Sufi Music Festival begins from Jan 23

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As part of its celebrations of the Silver Jubilee, Bait Al Zubair Foundation is organising Bait Al Zubair Sufi Music Festival (second edition) over three nights.

The theatre of Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort will host the festival from January 23-25 and three bands from inside and outside Oman.

The bands will sing poems by great poets such as Ibn Al-Farid, Rabia Al-Adawiya, and Sheikh Jaed Al-Kharousi, accompanied by a professional performance individually and collectively.

The festival will host Sheikh Hamed Dawood Group on the first day whose works are basically related to classical Sufi poets, especially inspired by the famous Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi.

The group contains prestigious artists with long professional careers and with the experience of numerous performances in different parts of the world, performing one of the most captivating aspects of Syrian's traditional arts with a spiritual musical atmosphere that leads to entering the universe of mystical art.

While the second day, the Omani Zawiyia Band will perform, which is a band concerned with mystical and humanistic music. The band was founded in 2015 and has local and Arab participation, including the Fez International Festival of Spiritual Music in Morocco.

The well-known Tanzanian artist, Yahya Baihaqi Hussain,



is participating with the band, where he is one of the performers of supplications known for their many participations at the Arab and international levels.

The festival nights will be concluded with the Egyptian band, Al-Hadrah for Sufi music. It is a singing group that aims to transfer the heritage of Egyptian Sufi societies to theaters, in an artistic manner preserving the most significant components of the Egyptian popular religious heritage.

This edition of the festival

comes after the success of the first edition of the Festival of Sufi Music, which hosted Ibn Arabi Band from Morocco, Farid Ayaz Band from Pakistan, Salar Aqili Band from Iran, and Al-Zawiya Band from the Sultanate of Oman. In its first edition, the festival received wide praise from fans of Sufi music.

It is worth noting that this festival is available to attend free of charge, and it comes in partnership with the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort, Oman Air, Zubair Automotive, Zeenah, Photo Center, and Oman Oasis. This partnership comes to emphasize the role played by various parties for the vitality of cultural action. In addition to expanding the horizon of its coordinates, which expects partnership and systemic cooperation that lead to new and diverse extensions in cultural content that serve the aspirations of those interested and the current trends of cultural discourse.

AT THE UNITED NATIONS

International community hails Oman's progress in child rights

GENEVA: Members of the "United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child" hailed the progress made by Oman in the field of child rights.

The global applause was based on the report submitted to the committee and the replies given by the Omani delegation during the elaboration on the National Report on child rights. The discussion took place at the 92nd session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Geneva.

The committee, which consists of representatives of different

countries in the world, expressed satisfaction with the efforts made by Oman "to achieve the best interest of the child". The committee looked forward to further "progress for children's rights in Oman". In this framework, the committee also valued "the efforts exerted in the Sultanate of Oman in the childhood field across many sectors."

Dr. Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, who headed Oman's delegation at the meeting, said, "The Sultanate of Oman strives to achieve comprehensive development by espous-

ing the principles of human rights in the various strategies, plans, programmes and development projects."

Oman ranks 52nd on the Human Development Index, according to 2021 data which map countries that have very high human development. This was also stated in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its recent report for the year 2022.

The meeting was attended by Idris Abdul Rahman Al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman at the UN.

— ONA



Tender Announcement

Muscat Stock Exchange SAOC invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tender.

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- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Muscat Stock Exchange SAOC office located in Hayy Al Souq Al Mall RUWI before 1:00 pm on the submission date.
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- Muscat Stock Exchange is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any reason.**

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UNITED STATES

Abortion opponents gather in Washington for rally

WASHINGTON: Thousands of anti-abortion activists gathered in Washington on Friday for the annual “March for Life” rally, seven months after Roe v. Wade was overturned by the nation’s top court.

The 1973 decision protected a woman’s right to an abortion on a nationwide level. It’s reversal sparked an outcry among large swathes of the US public, yet anti-abortion campaigners are demanding stricter restrictions at the state and national levels on the procedure. “We want it to be unthinkable for a woman to have an abortion,” activist Tammy Milligan, who was present at the rally, told AP news agency.

The “March for Life” rally began in 1974 as a challenge to Roe

v. Wade. Every January, activists from across the United States have descended upon the capital to urge the Supreme Court justices to reverse that decision, with their wish being granted last year.

Past the high court, they are now setting their sights at the US Capitol, aiming for federal anti-abortion legislation.

Carrying banners proclaiming

“I demand protection at conception” and “abortion is genocide,” the participants at the rally asked for all states to ban abortion at all stages of pregnancy.

“I believe that, just like we wouldn’t want to murder anybody out here, we wouldn’t want to see any of these lives hurt or lost,” Rob McNutt, a pastor from Maryland, told a news agency. – **bw**



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

EDITORIAL: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24813153, E-mail: editor@timesofoman.com
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BILATERAL RELATIONS

Turkey cancels planned visit of Swedish Defence Minister over protest permit

ANKARA: Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar on Saturday announced that a planned visit by Swedish Defence Minister Pal Jonson to Turkey had been cancelled.

The visit, aimed at overcoming Turkey’s objections to Sweden’s bid to join the NATO military alliance, had been scheduled for next week.

“At this point, the visit of Swedish Defence Minister Pal Jonson to Turkey on January 27 has become meaningless. So we canceled the visit,” Akar said.

Later on Saturday, Jonson tweeted that he and Hulusi had agreed to postpone the visit on Friday during a summit at the Ramstein air base in Germany.

“Yesterday I met with my Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar at the US military base in Ramstein, Germany. We decided then to postpone the planned meeting in Ankara until later,” Jonson said.

“Our relations with Türkiye are very important to Sweden, and we look forward to continuing the dialogue on common security and defence issues at a later date,” he added.



crime of hatred.”

“Allowing this action despite all our warnings is encouraging hate crimes and Islamophobia,” he said.

“The attack on sacred values is not freedom but modern barbarism.” On Friday, Turkey summoned Sweden’s ambassador over Swedish authorities’ permission for the protest.

Meanwhile, pro-Kurdish and pro-Turkish groups in Sweden were planning demonstrations in Stockholm over the weekend.

Ankara had summoned the ambassador at the start of a month over a video circulated on social media showing an effigy of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan swinging from a rope at a Kurdish protest in Sweden’s capital.

Turkey holds off on approval of NATO bid

Ending decades of military non-alignment, Sweden is seeking to join the NATO alliance in light of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Accession is only possible with the approval of all the alliance’s current members, including Turkey.

Turkey has demanded that Sweden and neighbouring Finland crack down on Kurdish militants in exchange for support for the countries’ membership bid. Helsinki and Stockholm have since signed a memorandum with Ankara to secure its support for the two Nordic countries’ accession to NATO. – **bw**

Full story at timesofoman.com/world

UN’s top woman officials meet Taliban over ban on female aid workers



The UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq said the UN delegation that visited Afghanistan found some Taliban officials to have been “cooperative and they’ve received some signs of progress”



KABUL: The two top-ranking female officials from the United Nations made some progress in engaging with the Taliban to have them reverse their crackdown on women’s rights, a UN spokesman said.

The UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the Executive Director of UN Women Sima Bahous spent four days in Afghanistan this week and their trip concluded on Friday.

Together with Khaled Khari, the assistant secretary-general for UN political, peacebuilding and peace operations, the UN team met with the Taliban in capital city Kabul and in the southern city of Kandahar.

Amina Mohammed said in a statement her message to the de facto rulers of Afghanistan was clear — new restrictions on women’s education and jobs “confines

them in their own homes, violating their rights and depriving the communities of their services.”

During her visit, Mohammed met with Deputy Governor Maulvi Hayatullah Mubarak in Kandahar, which is the Taliban’s birthplace.

The Kandahar Information Office said in a statement that the deputy governor told Mohammed that the Taliban wanted a strong relationship with the world and the removal of sanctions on its leaders.

Those decrees are on top of the Taliban slamming shut middle and high school for girls, breaking with their promises of running the country more moderately as compared with their first stint in power between 1996 and 2001.

The UN officials this week also met with former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who has remained in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021.

Some signs of progress, says UN

The UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq said the UN delegation that visited Afghanistan found some Taliban officials to have been “cooperative and they’ve received some signs of progress.”

Haq said the “key thing is to reconcile the (Taliban) officials that they’ve met who’ve been more helpful with those who have not.”

Haq specifically said there were many “different points of authority” among the Taliban and the UN team was trying to get them to “work together to advance the goals that we want, which include most crucially, bringing women and girls back to the full enjoyment of their rights.”

Taliban shunned by international community

The UN and the international community broadly does not recognise the Taliban as legitimate rulers of the country and the UN General Assembly last year adopted a resolution accusing the Taliban of plunging the country into dire economic conditions.

The text was drafted by Germany, which hoped all 193 members of the General Assembly would adopt the resolution by consensus.

Ten countries, including China, Russia and Pakistan, abstained, while 67 countries didn’t vote. General Assembly resolutions reflect world opinion, and aren’t legally binding like Security Council resolutions. – **bw**

ECONOMY

Lebanon’s middle class vanishes as economy collapses

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s capital Beirut has turned into a city of contrasts. Expensive cars park before popular restaurants and bars, while people of all ages rummage through bins for something edible.

“Also, more and more people are begging in the streets, mainly children but also elderly people,” Anna Fleischer, head of the German Heinrich Böll Foundation’s office in Beirut, told DW. While it is hard to tell the nationality, “it can be assumed that there are many Syrian refugees, but also Lebanese,” she added.

Years of political instability in combination with an ongoing economic crisis — exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut blast in August 2020 — have brought the country close to collapse.

Lebanon ranks not only “among the most severe crises globally since the mid-19th century,” according to the World Bank, but it is also likely that “an unprecedented institutional vacuum will further delay any agreement on crisis resolution and critical reform ratification, deepening the woes of the Lebanese people,” the World Bank report says.



Vanishing middle class, rising hunger

Following years of massive economic contraction, in combination with a 95% devaluation of its currency, the Lebanese middle class has practically vanished. In March 2020, the World Bank de-

valued Lebanon to a lower-middle income country.

“A person that is earning 1,500,000 Lebanese pounds used to have an equivalent of \$1,000 before the crisis, and now it is equivalent to less than \$200,” Hussein Chaeto, a development economist at The Policy Initiative, a Beirut-based research center, told DW.

In a recent publication on rising hunger and poverty in Lebanon by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Lena Simet stated that “millions of people in Lebanon have been pushed into poverty and have cut back on food.” The senior economic justice researcher at HRW pointed to worrying trends of food insecurity in the lowest bracket of earners.

Similarly, a September report on food insecurity in the Middle East by the independent research network Arab Barometer found that nearly half of all citizens in Lebanon stated that they ran out of food before they had money to buy more.

Extreme wealth inequality

Meanwhile, there are no indications for change, and the tax system is not helping the overall situation in Lebanon.

“The taxation system in Lebanon is highly regressive, which means that there is no wealth tax code, and corporate taxes are amongst the lowest in the world compared to all OECD averages,” Hussein Chaeto told DW.

The beneficiaries of the taxation system are those of the “political class and their business connections, because this 1% owns more than 70% of the national income,” Chaeto said. This, in turn, leaves a very small percentage of wealth to the rest of the society,” he claims.

Furthermore, those who earn their wages in Lebanese pounds, or receive support via charity organisations, suffer from another disadvantage. Banks only offer limited cash withdrawals in US dollars to those who have US dollars in their accounts.

Also, for the past 20 years, Lebanese banks have kept the pegged exchange rate of \$1 to 1,500 Lebanese pounds. This, however, will be updated to \$1 to 15,000 pounds

on February 1. Even though this is 10 times more than before, it is still far from the actually used exchange rate on the black market. The current rate is 50,000 pounds to the dollar.

On the other hand, for those, who work for international companies or have other means of accessing dollars, life has become relatively cheap, which also explains the thriving cocktail bars and fully booked restaurants.

Dollarisation of the economy

“The reality today is that one of the most important sources of income for families are remittances from family members who live abroad,” Lynn Zovighian, the co-founder and managing director of The Zovighian Partnership, a family-owned social investment platform that develops research-led socioeconomic interventions, told DW.

“The collapsed private sector, and expected contraction of the public sector, is driving rising unemployment numbers,” she said, adding that “Lebanon is also going through a de facto dollarization of its economy, but not by law or policy. This is happening with no price controls or penalties against financial abuse,” the Beirut-based Zovighian said.

Meanwhile, talks between the Lebanese government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have led to a staff-level agreement for a program worth about \$3 billion over the next 46 months.

However, a financial recovery plan to protect the most vulnerable in society, was not included.

“Three billion dollars will be barely enough to get the country back on its feet, given the size of the losses in the financial sector, which are at least \$70 billion,” Chaeto said.

Moreover, the IMF agreement highlighted that, given the weak state of the Lebanese government and the public sector, Lebanon should focus on state-owned enterprises and the privatization of social and public services, Chaeto told DW.

Macro-economic stabilisation

“What are the guarantees that private companies won’t actually engage in price hikes and further inflation, which we’ve seen in Latin America? This could mean that only the ultra-rich will be able to access services,” the analyst said.

He regards macroeconomic stabilisation as the only solution to save the country from collapse and with it, the majority of the population.

“I refer to the redistribution of losses in the financial sector, ensuring that we have a clear financial recovery plan that primarily protects the smallest of depositors and people who have a middle or low income,” Hussein Chaeto said, adding that “their wealth has to be recapitalised, without this it will be impossible to really see the income gap being reduced.” – **bw**

WORLD



Egyptian President's Republic Day visit to boost ties with India



As India has assumed the chair of the G20, the invitation to a leader of an important country in Africa signifies India's role as the voice of the south and an interlocutor between the global South with the North



NEW DELHI: The invitation to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as India's chief guest at the upcoming Republic Day celebrations on January 26 will likely reinforce the age-old connection between the two earliest civilisations.

As India has assumed the chair of the G20, the invitation to a leader of an important country in Africa signifies India's role as the voice of the south and an interlocutor between the global South with the North. "It is the first visit as a chief guest by an Egyptian President. Of course, we did have leaders from the Arab world before. We had the Saudi King also before and others. But, this is the very first time from Egypt," Ausaf Sayeed, secretary (CPV & OIA), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) told ANI on Monday.

"Egypt is a very important bilateral partner for us. We are celebrating 75 years of our engagement with Egypt. In fact, it was one of the first countries with which we established our diplomatic relationship, just the first week itself when we became independent. So, we are looking forward to this visit," he further said.

The stature of the two countries in their respective regions and domains are such that their bilateral

engagement could go a long way in positively influencing regional, political and economic scenarios. Notwithstanding ebbs and flows the bilateral relationship is moving on a positive trajectory since they became independent.

These two ancient civilisations had economic and cultural exchanges since time immemorial. Ashoka's edicts refer to his relations with Egypt under Ptolemy II. After independence, both India and Egypt also shared a journey in the promotion of a non-aligned movement. In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi and Saad Zaghloul shared common goals on the independence of their countries, a relationship that was to blossom into an exceptionally close friendship between Gamal Abdel Nasser and Jawaharlal Nehru, leading to a Friendship Treaty between the two countries in 1955.

The Non-Aligned Movement, led by Nehru and Nasser, was a natural concomitant of this relationship. The bilateral economic ties have grown over the years and are evolving. The India-Egypt Bilateral Trade Agreement has been in operation since March 1978 and is based on the most favoured nation (MFN) clause.

The trade relations remained robust despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Bilateral trade has expanded by more than five times over the last decade, reaching \$4.55 billion in FY 2018-19. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the volume of trade declined only marginally to \$4.5 billion in FY 2019-20 and to \$4.15 billion in FY 2020-21.

Trade between both countries

jumped by 75 per cent year-on-year in FY 2021-2022, amounting to \$7.26 billion. India's exports to Egypt in FY 2022 amounted to \$3.74 billion, registering a 65 per cent increase over the previous year. At the same time, Egypt's exports to India during the same period reached \$3.52 billion, registering an 86 per cent increase.

As per data from Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS), India emerged as the third-largest export market for Egypt, the sixth-largest trading partner, and the seventh-largest exporter to Egypt. In 2022, India-Egypt recorded the highest-ever bilateral trade of \$7.26 billion, with items like crude petroleum, fertilizers, bovine meat, cotton yarn etc. dominating the trade basket.

The increasing trade relations are reflected in the fact that India was Egypt's eighth-largest trading partner in FY 2021 and now it is the sixth-largest. India's import basket from Egypt is dominated by products such as mineral oil, petroleum, fertilizers, inorganic chemicals, cotton, etc.

The main items exported from India to Egypt include bovine meat, iron and steel, light vehicles, and cotton yarn. Indian companies have also invested heavily in Egypt, to the tune of \$3.15 billion. Recently at the fifth India-Egypt Joint Trade Committee meeting held in Cairo on July 25, 2022, India's Ambassador to Egypt, Ajit Gupte, announced India's plans to inject around \$700 million worth of private investments in Egypt over the coming few years. — ANI

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AIS invites specialized contractors to participate in our tender for "Renovation of Atyab International Services Building at Al Khuwair)" as per the scope of work.

Tender Documents: Bidders wishing to participate in this tender are required to provide all details of their company, contact details and bank details no later than the date shown below via email: tender@ais-mea.com

AIS will send all the tender documents to participants after receiving a tender fee depositing receipt copy via email.

Tender fee shall be deposited directly to the Atyab International Services LLC bank account as mentioned below,	
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Account Number: 01041052224002	Swif Code: BDOFOMRUXXX

Tender Ref. No.	AIS/TD-23/011
Tender Subject	Renovation of AIS Building at Al Khuwair – MEP, HVAC, Civil and Fire Protection Works.
Tender fee	75/RO
Start date for tender collection	Jan 22, 2023
Last date for tender collection	Jan 26, 2023
Site visit	9:00 am to 14:00 pm
Last date for receiving the technical queries	Feb 02, 2023
Closing date of the tender	Feb 09, 2023
Mode of payment of tender fee	Online
Email address for communication	tender@ais-mea.com
Mode of submission	Sealed tender documents with proper reference number and label in the box at Atyab International Services, P.O. Box566, P.C:112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. On or before the closing date of tender

- Vendor selection will be based on "best and final offer". AIS is not bound to select the lowest bidder.
- All tender communication must be addressed to: tender@ais-mea.com
- Notwithstanding the specific terms in the Tender Documents, Tender fee is not refundable
- Bids submittal shall consist of 2 separate sealed envelopes (Technical) & (Commercial), with bidder name on each and tender reference number (AIS/TD-23/011 (Renovation of Atyab International Services Building at Al Khuwair)).
- USB/CD containing the tender documents, detailed BOQ and guidelines for preparing the tender may be collected on any working day from Sunday 22 Jan 23 to Thursday 23 Jan 23 between 9:00 am to 14:00 pm, from "The Tender Committee, Purchase Department Atyab International Services LLC, P.O. Box:566, P.C:112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman



جامعة الشرقية
A'SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

A'SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) is a private higher education institution located in Ibra, North of A'Sharqiyah Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, about 150 km from Muscat. It was established in 2009 by Ministerial Decision (78/2009) issued by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Tender details:
ASU's Tender Committee has the pleasure to invite the companies who are experienced in Providing Equipment for Electrical lab:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit Date	Bids Submission Deadline	Document fees
ASU/04/2023	Providing Equipment for Electrical lab at A'Sharqiyah University in Ibra	26/01/2023	29/01/2023 at 10:00 am	16/02/2023	100 OMR

- The specialized companies of the above assignment can obtain the tender document from Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra, during the working days from 9:00 am to 03:00 pm.
- Bids have to be submitted in closed sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to (Tender Committee, A'Sharqiyah University - Ibra), bearing the tender subject with its reference number with no indication to the name of bidders.
- The submitting of the main envelope should contain the following:
 - Separate sealed envelope contains technical proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains commercial proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains tender bond.
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.
- For more details, please don't hesitate to contact us on: (+968) 25401115.



A'sharqiyahUni

SPORTS

EIGHT-WICKET WIN

India thrash New Zealand in second ODI, clinch series

RAIPUR : India secured a comprehensive eight-wicket win against New Zealand in the second ODI on Saturday to clinch their seventh consecutive ODI series at home.

Rohit Sharma's fifty coupled with a fiery performance from the Indian bowlers made sure that the hosts cruised to victory, chasing a paltry 109 at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium, Raipur. The Indian captain played a 51-run knock while Shuman Gill remained unbeaten on 40 runs to take India over the line. Henry Shipley and Mitchell Santner took a wicket each.

Chasing the target, the hosts had a shaky start with the Indian captain getting beaten and surviving a close call in the very first over. However, Rohit pulled Henry Shipley for a boundary in the second over to get things going for.

The openers didn't face any discomfort after initial few overs as they started to middle the ball and caress boundaries with ease. Rohit stamped his authority with some powerful hits, smashing Lockie Ferguson for a six in the fifth over with his trademark hook shot.

It was one-way traffic as India piled up the misery on the visitors, with the Indian captain firing on all cylinders. He took the hosts to 52/0 at the end of the 10 overs, smacking a four and a sublime six

in the over.

The right-hander brought up his fifty in the 13th over but was unfortunate to be dismissed on a ball that kept drastically low and was declared leg before wicket for 51. He stitched a 72-run stand for the opening wicket with Gill.

Gill carried on his purple patch and made 40* as the hosts lost Virat Kohli for 11(9) in quick succession.

Ishan Kishan and Gill took India past the Kiwi total in the 21st over. The right-hander finished things with style as he struck a superb boundary over mid-on to secure eight-wicket win.

After coming under a severe assault at the back end of the New Zealand chase in the first ODI, the Indian bowlers unleashed their fury to skittle out the visitors for 108 in the second ODI.

The Indian new ball bowlers ran riot on a pitch that had decent grass cover, making use of the favourable bowling conditions on offer. Mohammad Shami was the wrecker-in-chief, scalping three wickets. Hardik Pandya and Washington Sundar picked two wickets each. Siraj, Kuldeep and Shardul took one wicket each.

Most New Zealand batsmen could not reach double digits.

Mohammad Shami was declared the player of the match for his clinical bowling. **ANI**



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ILT20 TOURNAMENT

Sharjah Warriors pick Oman pacer Bilal Khan

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Bilal Khan has been the main spearhead of Oman cricket team for the past few years.

The 34-year-old fast medium pacer has been instrumental in many a victories for Oman and is now set to showcase his mettle at the region's biggest and inaugural T20 international franchise competition -the International League T20 (ILT20), which began on January 14.

Picked by Sharjah Warriors, one of the six franchises in the ILT20, Bilal is the only Omani player to feature in such a top-class international T20 league.

Having been with the squad since the start of the tournament began last week, Bilal said: "I am super excited to be part of the Sharjah Warriors squad. The team includes some of the world's top stars and I am happy to be part of a team set-up that have greats like Moeen Ali, Marcus Stoinis and Chris Woakes among others.

"It is a great learning curve for me. Rubbing shoulders with such stars definitely will improve my bowling skills."

Bilal, who is yet to feature in the team's playing XI, is hopeful of being picked in the forthcoming matches.

Sharjah Warriors have so far played three matches and have failed to open their account.

The tournament, which began on January 14, has managed to attract some of the biggest stars and has a lot to offer for the players.

With each team allowed to pick nine overseas players, the ILT20 has given a good opportunity for cricketers from Associate Nations like Oman and Namibia.

Bilal said: "I have been working hard over the past many years and I am indebted to my national team coach Duleep Mendis, bowling coach Aavishkar Salvian and our trainer



Evert for their full support.

"Sharjah Warriors head coach Paul Farbrace of England and team's bowling coach G Jayakumar of India have backed my bowling during the nets and practice games. I feel confident of producing a good spell for the team in the upcoming games."

Bilal is not new to franchise cricket as he had in the past played in Afghanistan's Shpageeza Cricket League in 2017-18 and 2022 with Speenghar Tigers and Amo Sharks respectively.

For Bilal, the home ground in Sharjah brings back good memories as one of his three five-wicket match hauls in his ODI career was achieved at the same venue last year in a match against Namibia.

"I have very good memories of Sharjah cricket stadium. I hope to put up some strong performances if given a chance and I am looking forward to my first match with Warriors. I had played two practice games where I picked up two

wickets so far. The coaches are happy with me and I am proud of the fact that I am playing along with world-class stars," said Bilal.

Warriors is a Capri-Global owned Sharjah-based franchise and includes England quartet of Moeen Ali, who is the skipper, Chris Woakes, Danny Briggs and Dawid Malan, Afghanistan quartet Mohammad Nabi, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Noor Ahmad and Naveen Ul Haq, Australia's Marcus Stoinis and West Indies' Evin Lewis.

The local players from UAE are Karthik Meiyappan, Muhammad Jawadullah, Alishan Sharafu and Junaid Siddique and Namibia's JJ Smit is the other Associate Nation player.

The six-team franchise-style league is being played over a 34-match schedule at Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. The final is scheduled to be played on February 12, 2023.

Besides Capri Global owned Warriors the other franchise teams are owned by Reliance Industries (MI Emirates), Adani Sportsline (Gulf Giants), GMR Group (Dubai Capitals), Knight Riders Group (Abu Dhabi Knight Riders), and Lancer Capital (Desert Vipers).

While there are four local players in each squad, teams are allowed to field as many as nine overseas players in their starting XI, compared with the usual four foreigners per side seen in established T20 franchise leagues.

A number of the international stars have agreed deals worth \$450,000 per season to play in the tournament, with the salary cap the second highest after the powerhouse Indian Premier League (IPL).

The league is sanctioned - but not owned - by the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB), and is being run by ECB vice-chairman Khalid al-Zarooni and general secretary Mubashshir Usmani.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Swiatek, Gauff, Pegula in last 16

MELBOURNE : World number one tennis star Iga Swiatek from Poland advanced to the round of 16 of the ongoing Australian Open, defeating Spain's Cristina Bucsa comprehensively in her third-round match on Friday.

Swiatek defeated her Spanish opponent 6-0, 6-1. In the pre-quarters, Swiatek will take on last season's Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, who defeated the previous year's runners-up Danielle Collins by 6-2, 5-7, 6-2 in their third-round match-up.

"I feel I am more and more confident since Day 1 here," Swiatek said in her post-match press conference as quoted by WTA. "I am not even talking about matches, but also practices. I feel like I have done so much work to feel more confident, more relaxed on the court."

"I am pretty happy that I did it because it is just a little bit easier. When you actually play those matches, you can feel the rhythm a little bit more. I think that is the thing that I am most pleased with."

Looking ahead to Rybakina's challenge, Swiatek added: "Rybakina really is a solid player. Since we played juniors, I knew that she is kind of going in the right direction. With her serve, she can do a lot."

Meanwhile, America's Jessica Pegula and Coco Gauff continued their good show at the prestigious tournament.

Pegula, the number 3 seed, fended off challenge from Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk on Friday. She defeated her by 6-0, 6-2 to advance to the fourth round.

Pegula will be facing number 20 seed Barbora Krejickova in the fourth round. The 2021 Roland Garros champion advanced to the fourth round after a 6-2, 6-3 win over Anhelina Kalinina.

"I think the score obviously looked dominant, but there was a lot of really tough games in that match," Pegula said afterwards. "She can be really a dangerous player," added the American.

"I think I just did a good job of playing every single point, every single game, really tough, not letting her kind of get any free points or free games. I made her really have to earn it today. I think that paid off," concluded Pegula.

On the other hand, Gauff downed Bernarda Pera in her third-round match to reach the round of 16 for the second time. Gauff won the match 6-3, 6-2.

The 18-year-old sensation had last reached the round of 16 in the tournament back in 2020, where she lost to eventual champion Sofia Kenin. Gauff will be facing 2017 Roland Garros winner Jelena Ostapenko in the fourth round. **ANI**

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2023



TRADE DEAL WITH INDIA

The United Kingdom Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and the United Nations at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Lord Tariq Mahmood Ahmad said that a strong trade deal with India could boost the economy by billions of pounds over the long term.

Total net profits of MSX-listed banks jump 20% to OMR409mn



The preliminary financial statements announced by the six banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange showed an increase in the profits of all banks and a rise in their various financial indicators

MUSCAT: The net profits of local banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) jumped by 20.6 per cent to OMR409 million in 2022 compared to OMR338.9 million reported in 2021.

The preliminary financial statements announced by the six banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange showed an increase in the profits of all banks and a rise in their various financial indicators. This reflects the state of recovery of the Omani economy from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the government's efforts to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on various economic activities. Also, the efforts made by banks to diversify their lending and financing portfolios and their contributions to financing projects implemented

by the government and the private sector aided the robust performance of the banks in Oman.

Bank Muscat recorded the highest profits at OMR200.7 million in 2022 compared to OMR189.6 million in 2021. However, the growth rate recorded by the bank is the lowest among the six banks, amounting to 5.8 per cent. The National Bank of Oman (NBO) ranked second with profits amounting to OMR48.2 million, recording an increase of 59.2 per cent in 2022 compared to OMR30.3 million in 2021. Bank Sohar came in third place, recording net profits of about OMR34.9 million in 2022 compared to OMR28.3 million in 2021, an increase of 23 per cent.

The National Bank raised its net profits last year to about OMR33.1

million in 2022, compared to OMR27.6 million in 2021, registering an increase of 19.9 per cent, while the net profits of HSBC Bank Oman increased from OMR18.3 million to OMR26.7 million, recording an increase by 45.9 per cent. The net profits of Oman Arab Bank increased to OMR16.2 million in 2022 compared to OMR7.1 million in 2021, recording an increase of 128.1 per cent, which is the highest rate of increase in bank profits during the past year. Bank Nizwa, which operates in accordance with Islamic Sharia, was able to increase its net profits in 2022 to OMR15 million compared to OMR12.5 million in 2021, an increase of 20 per cent.

The preliminary financial statements indicated that the assets of the six banks increased at the end of last year to OMR35.99 billion, registering an increase of about OMR90 million over their level at the end of 2021. All banks recorded an increase in their total assets during the past year, except Bank Muscat.

Bank Muscat accounted for 49 per cent of the total net profits recorded by banks during the past year and accounted for 35.4 per cent of the total assets of the six banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange. - **ONA**

MSX service sector index rises in weekly trading

MUSCAT: The shares of energy, oil and telecommunications companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), which rose last week, pushed the service sector index to rise, at a time when the main index of the stock exchange and other sectoral indices declined.

During the past two weeks, the public joint-stock companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange announced their initial financial results, which indicated an improvement in results. However, investors are still waiting for the companies' boards of directors to approve the financial results and announce the dividends that will be discussed by the annual general assemblies that will be held next March.

Last week, the shares of Phoenix Energy, Sembcorp Salalah, Muscat Desalination City, Al Maha for Marketing Petroleum Products and Omantel rose, prompting the services sector index to rise 24 points, concluding last week's trading at 1,635 points, while the main index of the Stock Exchange declined by about 81 points and closed at 4,798 points, recording the first decline during the year.

The current trend after its rise in the past two weeks by 10 points and 11 points, respectively, the industrial sector index recorded the highest decline at 305 points, the financial sector index declined by 154 points, and the



Sharia index lost 11 points.

The trading value increased last week to about OMR15.1 million, compared to OMR8.5 million in the previous week, recording a rise of 77 per cent. The number of deals executed increased to 2,530 compared to 1,383 in the week ending on January 11, and the market value of the listed securities declined. On the Muscat Stock Exchange at the end of last week, it reached OMR23.66 billion, recording weekly losses of OMR94.5 million.

Bank Muscat topped the most heavily traded companies after witnessing transactions worth OMR3,627,000, representing 24 per cent of the total trading value.

Al-Barwani Sukuk in Omani riyals came in second place, with transactions amounting to OMR2,211,000, followed by Al-Nahda Services, which witnessed transactions worth OMR1.55 million, representing 10.2 per cent of

the total trading value.

The prices of 24 companies increased compared to 41 companies whose prices declined, and 13 companies stabilised at their previous levels last week. SMN Power Holding recorded the highest increase, up by 13 per cent, and closed at 52 baisas, and the Phoenix Energy share rose by 11.3 per cent, closing at 49 baisas while Sembcorp Salalah shares rose to 71 baisas, up by 10.9 per cent.

The share of Al-Anwar Ceramic Tiles came at the forefront of the losing shares, down by 17.4 per cent and closed at 340 baisas. The share of the National Aluminium Products Company fell to 66 baisas, down by 14.2 per cent. The share of Takaful Oman Insurance fell by 12.5 per cent and closed at 42 baisas. The share of Muscat Gases also declined in the same way ratio and ended its trading at 105 baisas. - **ONA**

NEW TELECOM TOWERS

BankDhofar signs OMR30 million financing pact with Oman Towers

Times News Service

MUSCAT: BankDhofar and Oman Towers Company have recently signed a financing pact worth OMR30 million, to finance the rollout of new telecom towers in the Sultanate of Oman over the coming years.

The agreement was mutually signed by Abdul Hakeem Omar Al Ojaili, CEO of BankDhofar, and Eng. Majid Amor Al Kharoosi, Managing Director at Oman Towers, in the presence of executive management members of both sides.

On signing the agreement, Abdul Hakeem Omar Al Ojaili, CEO of BankDhofar noted: "As one of the leading Banks in the Sultanate, we have aligned our strategy with Oman Vision 2040. Thus, we have capitalised on partnerships with various strategic sectors. To-



day, we are glad to sign this agreement with Oman Tower Company, which plays a crucial role in enhancing the telecommunications infrastructure in the Sultanate. The partnership will enable the company to build a world-class

infrastructure that will reflect in uplifting the quality of telecommunication services."

Oman Tower Company provides various infrastructure solutions such as Greenfield towers, rooftops, in-building solutions and

other innovative ideas for the 4th industrial revolution.

Moving ahead with the coming technologies like 5G, IoT and others, OTC is working with suppliers of street furniture to accommodate future antennas.

INSURANCE

Bank Muscat extends 40% discount on GIG home insurance till January 31

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to offer the best services and value to its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has announced that the 40 per cent discount currently being offered on home contents and personal belongings insurance will be extended to January 31.

The bank pointed out that homes and their contents are the most valuable possessions most people own in their lifetimes. Hence, in line with the excellent feedback received so far and to en-

sure that the maximum number of people in the Sultanate can protect their homes and everything under its roof against damage or destruction caused by natural disasters or accidents, the bank decided to extend its special offer till the end of the month.

Through its tie-up with GIG Gulf, the No. 1 regional insurer, the bank has successfully served over 200,000 customers with personalised, top-notch solutions such as Life, Saving, Health, and Motor insurance since 2016. In particular, the GIG Home Insurance plan is an ideal solution for protection against unexpected events that

might take away one's most valued possessions. It offers exceptional value to both homeowners and tenants. It protects the building and its contents against fire, explosion, lightning, earthquakes, accidental damage, fixture breakage, and the like.

It also offers worldwide personal belongings coverage for valuables such as passports, driver's licenses, legal documents, jewellery, watches, music, sports and portable equipment, laptops, or any other items that customers may carry outside their homes.

The plan also includes the owner's and occupier's liability cover,

which protects the insured from any claim made against them, and the tenant's liability cover, which protects the insured if they are legally held liable for property damage. As an added benefit, the insured can choose to cover domestic helpers under the home insurance policy for both medical coverage and repatriation of mortal remains.

Customers can purchase their home insurance plan and redeem the 40 per cent discount on home contents and personal belongings insurance cover at Bank Muscat branches with GIG Gulf help desks or through the online portal.

FACTORY OF FELIX PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRIES



Oman's new project to be regional centre for pharmaceutical and biological industries

Times News Service

MUSCAT: A project will be inaugurated after three days in the city of Salalah, which will make it a regional centre for the pharmaceutical and biological industries. The factory of Felix Pharmaceutical Industries will open on Wednesday in the Salalah Free Zone, under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali Al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The factory is the latest project in the field of pharmaceutical industries in the Sultanate of Oman, which aims to transform the Salalah Free Zone into a regional centre for the pharmaceutical and biological industries, with investments amounting to about \$150 million.

The project included 3 development phases, including the establishment of an advanced factory for pharmaceutical products and a centre for development and research. The company plans to produce more than 100 pharmaceuticals, including various types of drugs in the current phase and vaccines in the second phase,

with a production capacity of one billion medicinal tablets and one billion capsules annually for the first phase.

The factory is currently witnessing opportunities and operational plans locally and internationally, and its products are marketed in the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar, and a number of other countries in the region. The factory was built according to approved international specifications, which qualifies it to enter the global markets.

This project, in 2018, was the foundation stone for the Felix Pharmaceutical Industries Group was laid and later in 2021, according to a statement by an official in the company published in local newspapers; the company began to cover the needs of the market by more than 35 per cent. The company also seeks to secure the Omani market first, and then export locally manufactured products to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Yemen and Iraq, in addition to targeting the African market in the plan.

MARKET

Strong trade deal with India likely to boost UK economy by billions of pounds

Cutting red tape and high tariffs could also make it easier and cheaper for UK companies to sell in India, driving growth and supporting jobs, said UK Minister Lord Tariq Mahmood Ahmad

LONDON: The United Kingdom Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and the United Nations at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Lord Tariq Mahmood Ahmad said that a strong trade deal with India could boost the economy by billions of pounds over the long term.

“A strong trade deal with India could boost the UK economy by billions of pounds over the long term, helping families across the country. Cutting red tape and high tariffs could also make it easier and cheaper for UK companies to sell in India, driving growth and supporting jobs,” Lord Ahmad said in a debate on the Importance of the relationship between the United Kingdom and India in the UK Parliament. According to the transcript of the UK Parliament debate, Tariq Mahmood Ahmad said that India and UK have concluded six rounds of negotiations for a trade deal and will begin the next round very soon. He also

spoke about UK Trade Secretary’s visit to India in December to meet her counterpart in person to move these talks forward. Notably, India and UK began the negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement between the two nations in January 2022.

In his remarks, the UK minister said that India and Britain announced the young professionals’ scheme in November. Lord Tariq Mahmood Ahmad said that the new scheme gives freedom and opportunity to thousands of young people in the UK and India to live, study, travel and work in each other’s country for up to two years.

Conservative Party leader Baroness Verma said that India and UK have “far more” to the ties between the two countries than the trade deal. While speaking at a debate on the Importance of the relationship between the United Kingdom and India in the UK Parliament, Verma said that India’s growth story provides opportunities for new markets domestically



and internationally.

“As the UK and India continue the important work of negotiations on the free trade agreement, there is of course far more to the relationship between the two countries than the trade deal. I have spent well over two decades engaging with business organisations and businesses in India, and I refer to my interests in the register,” Baroness Verma said.

He further said, “I have led UK business delegations to India, engaging with progressive states that have changed, and continue to change, India, not just domestically but internationally, as India’s growth story provides opportunities for new markets.”

During the parliament debate, Lord Narendra Babubhai Patel called it an “opportune time” to have ties for science and innovation as the UK is developing strong trade ties with India. He stressed

that UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office can play an “important part” in establishing ties between the two nations.

“As the UK develops stronger trade ties with India, it is an opportune time to have such ties for science and innovation. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office can play an important part,” Lord Patel said.

“I have no doubt that the UK science community will be very supportive of developing a UK-India science council that could provide the exchange of scientists with common interests,” he added.

Lord Karan Bilimoria said that the trade agreement between India and UK is “well-advanced.” He said that India is the 12th trading partner of the UK and stressed that it is “not enough.” He said that India and UK should quickly conclude the Free Trade Agreement.

“The UK-India free trade agree-

ment is well-advanced. Although our trade at the moment is worth £29.6 billion, India is only the 12th largest trading partner of the UK. That is not enough; it should be so much higher. I am sure the Minister will agree that we should conclude the FTA as quickly as possible, but not in a rush, it needs to be as comprehensive as possible,” Lord Bilimoria said.

“The young professionals’ scheme has just been concluded; 3,000 degree-educated nationals from India will be able to spend two years here, and vice versa,” he added.

In the debate, Labour Party leader Lord Kuldeep Singh Sahota called it “admirable” that India and UK are taking measures to collaborate on trade and investment. Kuldeep Singh Sahota stressed that the 2030 Roadmap for India-UK Future Relations will strengthen the economic ties between the two nations through enhanced trade agreements.

“It is admirable that both countries are now taking special steps to collaborate on trade and investment. The secret lies in the 2021 agreement between the Prime Ministers of both countries: the 2030 Roadmap for India-UK Future Relations. This will strengthen the economic relationship between our two countries through an enhanced trade partnership, thus doubling UK-India trade over the next 10 years,” Lord Sahota said in the debate.

Lord Rajinder Paul Loomba said that the relationship between UK and India is “multidimensional.” He stressed that both nations share values, strong family ties and a record of cooperation for mutual benefit. He said that India is rapidly becoming a global powerhouse in technology and added that Britain has expertise in areas, including cyber security and climate change.

“The importance of the 2030 Roadmap for India-UK future relations cannot be overstated. The relationship between our two countries is multi-dimensional. We have shared values, strong family ties and a record of cooperation for mutual benefit,” Lord Loomba said.

“India is rapidly becoming a global powerhouse in technology, and the UK has world-leading expertise in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, robotics and creative technologies,” he added.

Lord Rajinder Paul Loomba further said that India and UK have a mutual interest in global challenges, including climate change and the green economy, the power of arts and culture to drive growth and regeneration, and delivering social value by addressing inequalities. During the debate in the UK Parliament, Lord Jeremy Purvis called for innovative discussions on mobility and some kind of agreement with India which is similar to what Britain has with Australia and New Zealand. Lord Purvis said that he is in favour of a trade agreement between India and the UK. -ANI

ORIENTATION SESSION

Session on stock market investments held

Times News Service

MUSCAT: According to AV Manohar, CEO, Wisdom Business and Training Services, who facilitated an orientation session on stock market investments recently ‘Be system-oriented, strategy-driven and smart-in-action and this is the secret of success in investment’.

A step-by-step approach towards investment in publicly traded shares of Muscat Stock Exchange was guided to an audience comprising young nationals, finance and accounting professionals, equity analysts and aspiring investors.

‘First save and then spend’, is a formula of success for rich investors and hence worth emulating. Investment is a wonderful journey and if one steps in at a young age, through compulsory savings



every month, he can reach the higher portals of wealth early in life. A great chance of compounding one’s savings through fabulous multiplier effects awaited in this

game of skills. ‘Make money out of money’ is the narrative that comes out in this exciting endeavour. ‘Stock returns hedges the inflation’ is yet another advantage.

It was emphasised that stock market investment is not as risky as thought to be by many, provided the investor keeps invested in fundamentally good scripts and decides to hold for the long term. ‘Buy right, sit tight’ is wise advice from equity winners. Researching on fundamentals of the company before investing, arriving at the intrinsic value of the stock, operating with stop-loss and exiting at the appropriate time are the SOPs for making money in the stock market.

‘Invest out of savings and not through borrowing’ was highlighted as a matter of caution. Reckless investing without a proper study, greed, fear and following a herd

mentality are the destructive forces that should be kept away from the dashboard of investment.

The participants were guided through different aspects of investment such as equity shares, stock market, research on economy, sector and fundamentals of the chosen company, intrinsic valuation of the stock, fixing the target return, buy & sell strategy, investment plan and philosophy. Besides, a touch-up on technical analysis, mutual funds, unlisted companies and bonds enriched the overall investment technique and knowledge of the participants.

The session concluded with a powerful take-home message, ‘Knowledge is power; application of knowledge is super power. Login to investment. It may be a small step today but a great leap for tomorrow’.

GARTNER FORECAST

Worldwide IT spending to grow at 2.4% in 2023

DUBAI: Worldwide IT spending is projected to total \$4.5 trillion in 2023, an increase of 2.4 per cent from 2022, according to the latest forecast by Gartner, Inc. This is down from the previous quarter’s forecast of 5.1 per cent growth. While inflation continues to erode consumer purchasing power and drive device spending down, overall enterprise IT spending is expected to remain strong.

“Consumers and enterprises are facing very different economic realities,” said John-David Lovelock, Distinguished VP Analyst at Gartner. “While inflation is devastating consumer markets, contributing to layoffs at B2C companies, enterprises continue to increase spending on digital business initia-

tives despite the world economic slowdown. A turbulent economy has changed the context of business decisions and can cause CIOs to become more hesitant, delay decisions or reorder priorities. We’ve seen this in action with the reshuffling taking place among some B2B companies, especially those that overinvested in growth. However, IT budgets are not driving these shifts, and IT spending remains recession-proof.”

The software and IT services segments are projected to grow 9.3 per cent and 5.5 per cent in 2023, respectively. The devices segment is forecast to decline 5.1 per cent this year as both consumers and enterprises lengthen device refresh cycles.

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ATTRACTS STRONG DEMAND

Opec Fund mobilises \$1bn for development finance with landmark debut SDG bond

VIENNA: The Opec Fund for International Development priced its inaugural benchmark bond issue in the capital markets on Wednesday. The bond was priced using its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) bond framework on which Credit Agricole CIB acted as the sole sustainability advisor.

Attracting strong demand from investors globally, the 3-year fixed-rate sustainability bond raised \$1 billion, which will be used to finance or refinance key sustainable development projects that are aligned with the Opec Fund’s multi-sectoral development mission and directly contribute to achieving the SDGs.

The bond attracted very broad interest with 52 per cent of investors coming from Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), 27 per cent from Asia-Pacific (APAC) and 21 per cent from North America (NAM). In terms of investor type, central banks & official institutions accounted for 62 per cent, banks 19 per cent, asset managers 9 per cent and insurance/pension funds 8 per cent.

Dr Abdulhamid Alkhalifa, Opec Fund Director-General, said, “The robust demand for our inaugural benchmark is a testament to the confidence that investors have in the Opec Fund and our long-standing development-focused mandate. It also confirms the appetite for sustainable investments globally. At a time when there is an increasing need for

Attracting strong demand from investors globally, the 3-year fixed-rate sustainability bond raised \$1 billion, which will be used to finance or refinance key sustainable development projects that are aligned with the Opec Fund’s multi-sectoral development mission and directly contribute to achieving the SDGs

development finance, the Opec Fund is proud to have achieved this milestone. It will allow us to mobilise additional funds in support of our partner countries. The Opec Fund has a 47-year track record in delivering successful development outcomes and the additional funds will enable us to further deepen our impact.”

The Opec Fund is financing development projects in low- and middle-income countries in line with its South-South cooperation mandate. The bond proceeds will be allocated according to the specific criteria defined in the SDG Bond Framework focusing on food security, healthcare, infrastructure, education, employment and renewable energy.

The Framework is aligned with the Sustainability Bond Guidelines 2021, Green Bond

Principles 2021 and Social Bond Principles 2021 published by the International Capital Market Association (ICMA) and has received a positive opinion from the Second Party Opinion Provider Sustainalytics.

Tarek Sherlala, Opec Fund Assistant Director-General, Financial Operations, added, “These increased financial resources will enable us to step up the delivery in partner countries and help boost our development impact. The support of global investors will add to our credit strength and move us to a new phase in our delivery of impactful and sustainable development cooperation.”

Martine Mills, Opec Fund Head of Funding, said, “This bond pricing is a major milestone for the Opec Fund and the culmination of several years of intensive work.” -WAM

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Carbon pricing standards needed to boost green energy

DAVOS-KLOSTERS (SWITZERLAND): To reach 2050 emissions reduction targets, trillions of dollars in public and private capital are needed to adopt and scale green energy technologies, financial experts told participants at a session on climate finance at the 53rd World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.

Despite the urgent need for climate finance, numerous barriers have impeded the flow of private capital to decarbonisation projects around the world and especially in the Global South.

Financial experts agreed that a major hurdle is a need for carbon pricing. “We’re still resisting the necessity that carbon has to be priced, and the price has to climb up,” said Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund. Public resistance to a carbon tax has prevented many nations from establishing carbon pricing via taxation, but taxation is not the only way to deter emissions, the WEF said in a statement on Friday.

Global South means the nations of the world which are regarded as having a relatively low level of economic and industrial development and are typically located to the south of more industrialised nations. -ANI



STUDY REVEALS KEY REASON BEHIND SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

JUST 15 PER CENT OF THE MOST HABITUAL NEWS SHARERS IN THE RESEARCH WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR SPREADING ABOUT 30 PER CENT TO 40 PER CENT OF THE FAKE NEWS

USC researchers may have found the biggest influencer in the spread of fake news: social platforms' structure of rewarding users for habitually sharing information.

The team's findings, published Tuesday by Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, upend popular misconceptions that misinformation spreads because users lack the critical thinking skills necessary for discerning truth from falsehood or because their strong political beliefs skew their judgment.

Just 15 per cent of the most habitual news sharers in the research were responsible for spreading about 30 per cent to 40 per cent of the fake news.

The research team from the USC Marshall School of Business and the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences wondered: What motivates these users? As it turns out, much like any video game, social media has a rewards system that

encourages users to stay on their accounts and keep posting and sharing. Users who post and share frequently, especially sensational, eye-catching information, are likely to attract attention.

"Due to the reward-based learning systems on social media, users form habits of sharing information that gets recognition from others," the researchers wrote. "Once habits form, information sharing is automatically activated by cues on the platform without users considering critical response outcomes, such as spreading misinformation."

Posting, sharing and engaging with others on social media can, therefore, become a habit.

"Our findings show that misinformation isn't spread through a deficit of users. It's really a function of the structure of the social media sites themselves," said Wendy Wood, an expert on habits and USC emerita Provost Professor of psychology and business.

"The habits of social media users are a bigger driver

of misinformation spread than individual attributes. We know from prior research that some people don't process information critically, and others form opinions based on political biases, which also affects their ability to recognize false stories online," said Gizem Ceylan, who led the study during her doctorate at USC Marshall and is now a postdoctoral researcher at the Yale School of Management.

"However, we show that the reward structure of social media platforms plays a bigger role when it comes to misinformation spread."

In a novel approach, Ceylan and her co-authors sought to understand how the reward structure of social media sites drives users to develop habits of posting misinformation on social media.

Why fake news spreads: behind the social network

Overall, the study involved 2,476 active Facebook users ranging in age from 18 to 89 who volunteered in

response to online advertising to participate. They were compensated to complete a "decision-making" survey approximately seven minutes long.

Surprisingly, the researchers found that users' social media habits doubled and, in some cases, tripled the amount of fake news they shared. Their habits were more influential in sharing fake news than other factors, including political beliefs and lack of critical reasoning.

Frequent, habitual users forwarded six times more fake news than occasional or new users.

"This type of behaviour has been rewarded in the past by algorithms that prioritise engagement when selecting which posts users see in their news feed, and by the structure and design of the sites themselves," said second author Ian A. Anderson, a behavioural scientist and doctoral candidate at USC Dornsife.

"Understanding the dynamics behind misinformation spread is important

given its political, health and social consequences."

Experimenting with different scenarios to see why fake news spreads

In the first experiment, the researchers found that habitual users of social media share both true and fake news.

In another experiment, the researchers found that the habitual sharing of misinformation is part of a broader pattern of insensitivity to the information being shared. In fact, habitual users shared politically discordant news — news that challenged their political beliefs — as much as concordant news that they endorsed.

Lastly, the team tested whether social media reward structures could be devised to promote sharing of true over false information.

They showed that incentives for accuracy rather than popularity (as is currently the case on social media sites) doubled the amount of accurate news that users share on social platforms.

THE STUDY'S CONCLUSIONS:

- Habitual sharing of misinformation is not inevitable.**
- Users could be incentivized to build sharing habits that make them more sensitive to sharing truthful content.
 - Effectively reducing misinformation would require restructuring the online environments that promote and support its sharing.
 - These findings suggest that social media platforms can take a more active step than moderating what information is posted and instead pursue structural changes in their reward structure to limit the spread of misinformation. —ANI

SPORTS

Omani drivers in the National category display their driving skills on the track

A total of 46 drivers competed in the qualifiers on 19 of January for selection and 32 of them qualified for the finals the next day at the Muscat Drift Arena



MUSCAT: Another thrilling show was executed by the drifters in the second round of the Oman International Drift Championship.

A total of 46 drivers competed in the qualifiers on Thursday, the 19th of January, for selection and 32 of them qualified for the finals the next day at the Muscat Drift Arena.

Tough decisions were taken by the judges on the panel, taking in every minuscule detail

into consideration.

After his win, Lithuanian driver Benediktas Cirbasaid: "It was just incredible. This year the competition is higher than ever and I feel honoured to be given first place for this round. I can't wait for what's in store for the next one.

Cirba's race with Ali Makhseed from Kuwait was a close call, with the both of them putting up an incredible fight until

the end. Runner up for the International Category and first place winner for the MENA category, Ali Makhseed said: "It's a bitter-sweet moment to lose in the final because of a mechanical issue but I'm lucky today to get to the final, and thank God for that.

"It's been a long weekend, and big thanks goes to OAA for organising such a great event and I look forward to seeing everyone in the next round."

Display of skills

The local drivers in the National category gave a tremendous performance with a great display of skills on the track.

Ahmed Al Amri, champion of the local category said: "I'm so happy to have earned first place in the National category. It's been such a great season so far with all these great drifters and I thank OAA for all the work they have put into organising



THE WINNERS FOR ROUND 2

- National Category**
1st place: Ahmed Al Amri
2nd place: Ali Al Balushi
3rd place: Haitham Al Hadidi
- MENA (Middle East / North African) Category**
1st place: Ali Makhseed (Kuwait)
2nd place: Ahmed Al Amri (Oman)
3rd place: Ahmed Daham (Jordan)
- International Category**
1st place: Benediktas Cirba (Lithuania)
2nd place: Ali Makhseed (Kuwait)
3rd place: Alan Hynes (Ireland)

this tournament."

In continuation with Round 3 on the 9th and 10th of February, the Oman Automobile Association wishes the contestants of this season the best of luck and success in the upcoming drift battles.

OCEC

Mixed Doubles champions crowned at the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships Muscat 2023

MUSCAT: The penultimate day of play saw the first ever Mixed Doubles world titles decided at the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships Muscat 2023, held at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Denmark's Carsten Egeholt and Janne Jensen took the title in the 40-years category, after overcoming the pair of Igor Krokhin from Sweden and Finland's Marina Donner (11-9, 3-11, 11-7, 11-9) in the final. Italy's Hansjoerg Toll and Korea Republic's Oh Yunkung secured victory in the 45-year category in what was the closest final of the day – the pair recovered from a two-game deficit to secure victory (5-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-4) over Ukraine's Viktor Vasylevskyi and Nataliia Ostrovska.

Latvian duo Sandijs Vasiljevs and Ina Jozepson claimed gold in the 50-years category after a hard-fought match against Denmark's Karsten Haumann and Pia Toelhoej (11-7, 11-9, 11-7), while Romania's Andreas Fejer-Konnert and Switzerland's Margit Geiger emerged victorious in the 55-year category in straight games (11-4, 11-2, 11-4) against Denmark's Jan Søndergaard and Jette Vieg.

In the 65-years category, Paal Guttormsen of Norway and Estonia's Kai Thornbech overcame Ukraine's Leonid Segal and Svea Onno in a four-game match (7-11, 11-7, 12-10, 11-7) to claim top spot on the podium. The title decider in the mixed doubles 75 years category was a contest between husband-and-wife teams from the United States. David and Donna Sakai beat Del and Connie Sweeris (12-10, 11-7, 8-11, 11-4) to take first prize.

The team of Cheung Tingting and Jiang Zhaozhao from China emerged victorious in the 70-years category after beating India's Pinakin Sampat and Japan's Etsuko Iseki (11-3, 11-1, 11-5) in the final. In the 85-years category, Japan's Kazuo Masuda and Reiko Miura secured gold after a tough match against Germany's Peter Stolzenburg and Marianne Blasberg (11-4, 11-9, 9-11, 11-9). A German win came in the 80-years category when Dimitrije Bilic and Heidi Wunner defeated England's Roy Norton and Carol Judson (9-11, 11-4, 11-5, 11-5).

Vivek Kohli, Co-Chairman of STAG International, representing India said, "Oman is a lovely place, and this World Veteran Table Tennis Championship will leave deep memories with the players. I can say this is the best ever tournament. The venue is so nice, the people, and everyone has enjoyed this. The

“

Denmark's Carsten Egeholt and Janne Jensen took the title in the 40-years category, after overcoming the pair of Igor Krokhin from Sweden and Finland's Marina Donner

next host will have to do a lot to exceed this! For me, as a player, it has been an amazing experience. I am returning after eight years; everything has been perfect. I have really enjoyed it. In singles I finished Top 32 in Doubles Top 8 in the world, so it is a good feeling."

Peter Karlsson, Head Table Tennis Coach at the Aspire Academy in Qatar, representing Sweden said, "I have to give a big thanks to the organising committee and the country of Oman. The way the country and the people have received me is amazing. Secondly, the competition itself was very fun. For me coming here as an experienced player, it is nice to meet a lot of friends. Of course, we want to win, but it's not the main thing. It was when I was younger, but now I have a different mindset. Life is more about friendship and happiness, so I am very happy to have to his opportunity in Muscat."

Saturday will see the winners in the Men's and Women's Singles and Doubles competitions decided, adding tension and excitement to proceedings and bringing an incredible tournament to a close with players looking to take home the trophy.

The two most experienced players in the entire competition will compete in the final of the 85-years group. Hyun Youngja and Watanabe Yasu, both from Japan, have proved throughout the championships that age is just a number as the two 90-year-olds show how sport can bring lifelong joy.

The World Veteran Table Tennis Championships 2023 is organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Oman Table Tennis Association and the International Table Tennis Federation, with support from Oman Fiber Optic, STAG Sports, Oman-tel and Belltel.



IN-PICTURES



Türkiye hit by severe drought amid lack of precipitation

This aerial picture shows the cracked lake bottom of Selkapani Dam Lake in Ankara, Türkiye. Türkiye is experiencing severe drought as dams around the country's major cities have reached low levels amid a lack of precipitation and an unusually warm winter stemming from global climate change. Xinhua



Malawi runs out of cholera vaccine amid outbreak spike

Environmental officers disinfect themselves after disinfecting a body at Bwaila hospital in Lilongwe, Malawi. Malawi has recorded 27,501 confirmed cholera cases and 899 deaths since the disease broke out in March 2022. Xinhua



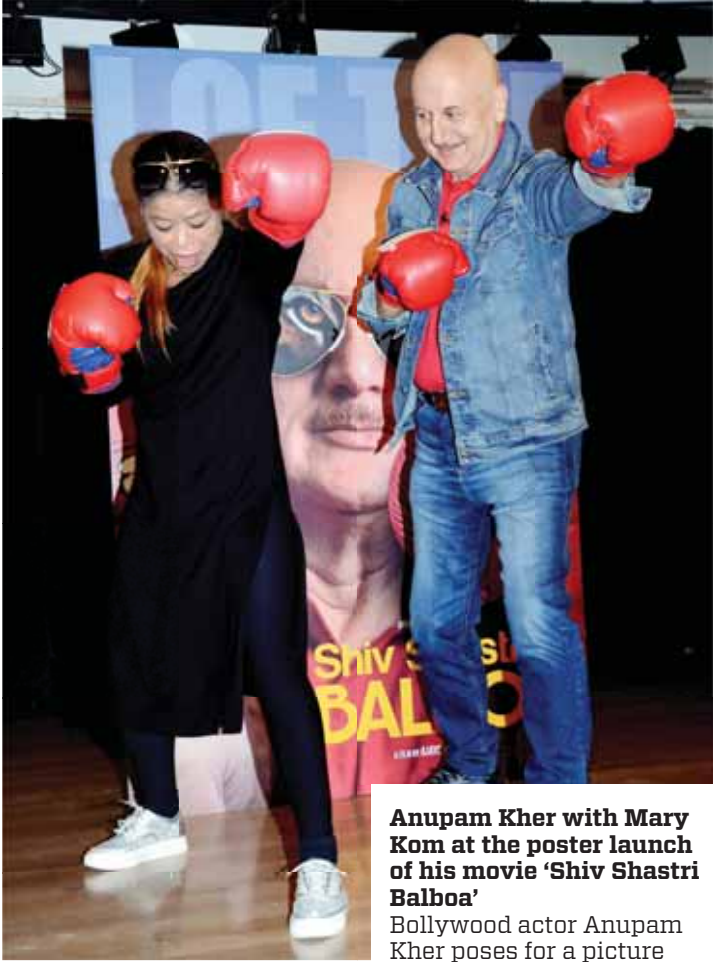
Avalanche in Tibet kills 28, rescue work completed

Rescuers work at an avalanche site in Nyingchi, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region. An avalanche that hit the city of Nyingchi in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region has killed 28 people. The search and rescue operation came to an end at 5:30pm on Friday. Xinhua



Plantains harvested in Cameroon

People transport harvested plantains in a plantation in Njombe-Penja sub-division of Littoral Region, Cameroon. Abundant in volcanic soil, heat and water resources, the Njombe-Penja sub-division nurtures plenty of plantations where plantains can be harvested all year round. Xinhua



Anupam Kher with Mary Kom at the poster launch of his movie 'Shiv Shastri Balboa'

Bollywood actor Anupam Kher poses for a picture with boxer Mary Kom at the poster launch of his movie 'Shiv Shastri Balboa', in Mumbai. ANI Photo



Lunar New Year celebration kicks off at Disney California Adventure Park

People take part in a parade during the Chinese Lunar New Year celebration at Disney California Adventure Park in Anaheim, California, the United States. Xinhua

ROUND-UP

INFINITI QX80 praised for its bold blend of luxury and capability

Owners of the full-size luxury SUV three row INFINITI QX80 for its versatility, comfortability and safety

MUSCAT: Equipped with great equipment, innovative technologies, and stylish features befitting its luxury status, INFINITI QX80 is well liked for its bold blend of luxury and capability.

Owners of the full-size luxury SUV three row INFINITI QX80 for its versatility, comfortability and safety.

Widad Al Shukaili says, "INFINITI QX80 represents one of the best luxury SUV models on the market. As INFINITI's flagship full-size luxury SUV, the QX80 includes powered to perform 5.6-litre V8 engine that that delivers 400 horsepower and 560 torque, paired to a 7-speed automatic transmission. Equipped with INFINITI All-Mode Four-Wheel Drive as standard, the QX80 meets any condition head-on."



Wahid Al Blaushi loves the vehicles INFINITI InTouch System and says owners can be connected to both your vehicle and your world with the Infiniti InTouch services

He explains, "The incredible QX80 has a revised centre cluster featuring a single INFINITI InTouch 12.3-inch widescreen HD display that includes wireless Apple CarPlay and USB-based Android Auto compatibility for entertainment on the go. An all-new wireless smartphone charger is included along with a Bose® Premium Sound system."

Amal Al Riyami is appreciative of the brand's forward-thinking innovation. She says, "QX80's Smart Rear-View Mirror system enhances the car's functionality and improves user experience. It is genuinely useful in a full-size SUV."

She loves the INFINITI Intelligent Cruise Control (ICC) which is an advanced cruise control system designed to respond to fluctuating traffic. Amal says, "Intelligent Cruise Control automatically slows the vehicle down when slower traffic gets in front of you. As the vehicle ahead slows, the system lowers your speed

to maintain your desired distance. When the slower traffic clears, Intelligent Cruise Control automatically resumes your set cruising speed, so you can glide forward with ease."

Ahmed Al Jabri loves to immerse himself in the symphonic experience of 17 speaker Bose Performance System. "You can feel the power of your drive. Drivers and passenger can become enveloped in rich, spacious sound, with each speaker carefully and precisely engineered for optimum performance," he says.

Engineered with exceptional

capabilities and an inspired design that challenges the limits, INFINITI QX80 takes on a modern interpretation of upscale full-size SUV luxury. INFINITI QX80 with its body-on-frame full-sized luxury SUV features a single, larger interior touchscreen and wireless smartphone charger to complement its opulent interior, across three enhanced grades: SENSORY, ProACTIVE and Black Editions.

A senior spokesperson at INFINITI Oman said, "INFINITI QX80 is liberally outfitted with thoughtful touches, with plenty of room to grow in. It is created to handle all of life's roads, so owners can make memories that last. A design and engineering work of art, QX80 exudes luxury from every angle, for every passenger."

A Smart Rearview Mirror is standard on ProACTIVE and Black Edition grades and can display a sharp view behind the luxury three-row SUV when engaged, even if cargo or passengers obstruct rearward vision inside. An Around View Monitor with Moving Object Detection and Front and Rear Sonar System is included to help make navigating tight parking spaces easier. Additional driver-assistance systems are available for the flagship SUV, including Intelligent Cruise Control, Backup Collision Intervention, Lane Departure Warning, Blind Spot Intervention, and Lane

Departure Prevention.

Inside, the QX80 features leather or semi-aniline appointed seats in all three rows, with the option of second-row captain's chairs. Climate-controlled front seats are also available, as are Bose® Performance Series Audio with 17 speakers. The QX80 has bold proportions and commanding exterior details such as available 22-inch alloy wheels, dark chrome accents, and chrome exterior accents."

The INFINITI QX80 offers a four-wheel independent, double-wishbone suspension for a calm and confident ride. The standard hydraulic Body Motion Control System provides a more refined ride and rear automatic self-leveling suspension is standard on all models for more confident towing.

The new INFINITI QX80 SENSORY includes leather-appointed seating in all three rows, 22-inch alloy wheels, a 12.3-inch INFINITI InTouch display, a Bose® 13-speaker premium audio system, a power liftgate and more.

The ProACTIVE grade builds on that with INFINITI's ProACTIVE safety package, Towing package, satin chrome exterior trim and more. The Black Edition grade (a GCC exclusive) includes 22" forged aluminum-alloy wheels with dark machined finish, as well as black and dark chrome exterior finishes including outside mirrors, front grill, side fender vents and more.

BEST SCRIPT WRITER

Muscat-based Indian expat wins two Media City awards

MUSCAT: Indian expatriate Ramachandran Nair, living in Muscat for more than three decades, won two awards at the 9th Media City Film-Television and Media Awards 2022, held in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala recently.

Nair was recognised as Best Script Writer for his short film, *My Little Brother*, while his musical album *Karnikaram* was adjudged Best Concept.

The song *Karnikaram* is presented in the beautiful voice of K S Chithra, the renowned Indian playback singer. Although there are many songs about Kerala, the song *Karnikaram* reminds everyone, particularly music lovers, of the state's affection, natural beauty, tradition and abundance. Meanwhile, *My Little Brother* highlights the issue of adoption. It dwells on the issue of loneliness and revolves around a girl who loses her parents quite early in life and is taken care of by her grandfather.

The Media City Film-Television and Media Awards night was held on December 21, 2022, and attended by renowned film, media and political personalities.



MODERN COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND SCIENCE

MCBS organises 'Employability Skills for Graduates' programme

MUSCAT: Within the framework of the Modern College of Business and Science's (MCBS) relentless pursuit to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-life application and to provide its students and graduates with practical skills and competencies to successfully join the workforce, the college conducted its second training cohort for the 'Employability Skills for Graduates' as part of the Tajseer programme in partnership with the Ministry of Labour (MoL).

In November 2022 MCBS signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Labour to implement the Tajseer programme which focuses on bridging the gap between the academic experience and the real-life expectations of the workplace and provides training on employability skills to MCBS students and graduates.

The training covered topics related to helping students and graduates prepare to achieve their job goals by developing several tools: how to prepare a professional CV, how to optimise their



LinkedIn profiles to enable them to grow a professional network that will assist them in their job search; how to prepare for a job interview, as well as how to prepare for the realities of the workplace and how to align themselves with job market expectations.

This cooperation between the College and the Ministry of Labor aims to train various batches of MCBS students and graduates to acquire the necessary skills and

competencies and help them find suitable job opportunities by improving their competitive advantage in today's constantly changing job market.

The training took place for 4 days. Further cohorts will be organised throughout the year and announced accordingly, and Modern College hopes that its graduates will be keen to take advantage of these high-quality training opportunities.

NEW ERA

Maserati MSG Racing completes first race of Formula E's Gen3 era



MUSCAT: Maserati MSG Racing accelerated into a new era for Formula E at the Mexico City E-Prix, with the team narrowly missing out on the top 10 at the Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez.

Facing the dawn of Gen3, drivers Edoardo Mortara and Maximilian Günther gained invaluable insight during the Season 9 opener and showed promising initial pace following an encouraging pre-season test. A challenging qualifying session - which saw both drivers fall short of the Duel stages - left

the duo facing an uphill recovery in the race, in which they started from 16th and 17th.

Edo advanced to 15th on the opening lap by overtaking McLaren's Rene Rast, although the race was quickly paused when a collision for Robin Frijns brought out the Safety Car.

Action was resumed on lap five but was again halted one lap later when Jaguar's Sam Bird stopped on track with a technical failure. The field took to green flag running again on lap nine.

Edo and Max overtook a penalised Dan Ticktum during the restart, while the latter also passed Rast, who activated Attack Mode, for 15th. On lap 18, an unfortunate spin and collision caused by a snap of understeer forced Edo to retire, leaving Max as the team's sole runner for the remainder of the race.

With a late Attack Mode activation, the German pilot made good progress to threaten for points in the closing laps and overtook DS Penske's Jean-Eric Vergne on the final tour to finish 11th.

Formula E's ninth season will continue on January 27 and 28, with a double-header event on the Riyadh Street Circuit in the Unesco World Heritage Site of Diriyah.

James Rossiter, Team Principal, Maserati MSG Racing said, "It was a difficult day but in motorsport, you learn the most from your bad days - not your good ones. A poor qualifying put us on the back foot, but in the race, we were able to come back strong, with Max fighting from 17th to 11th and finishing just outside the points."



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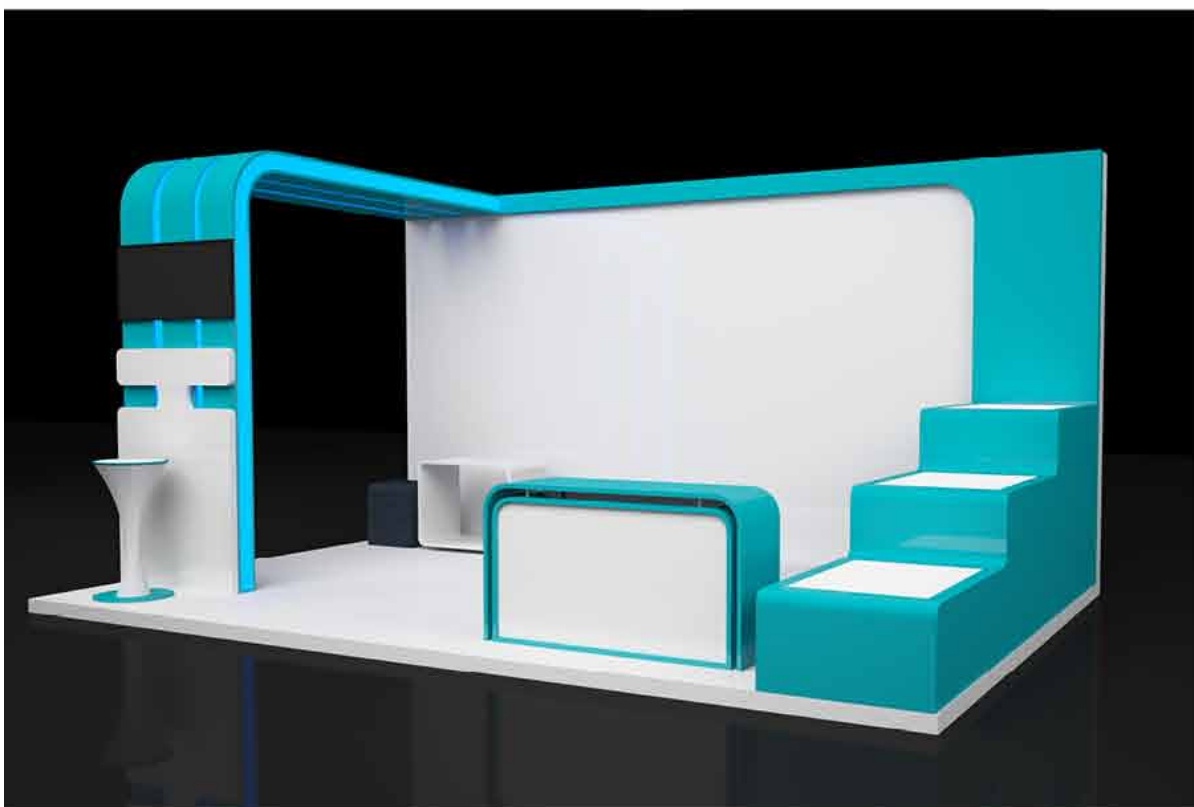
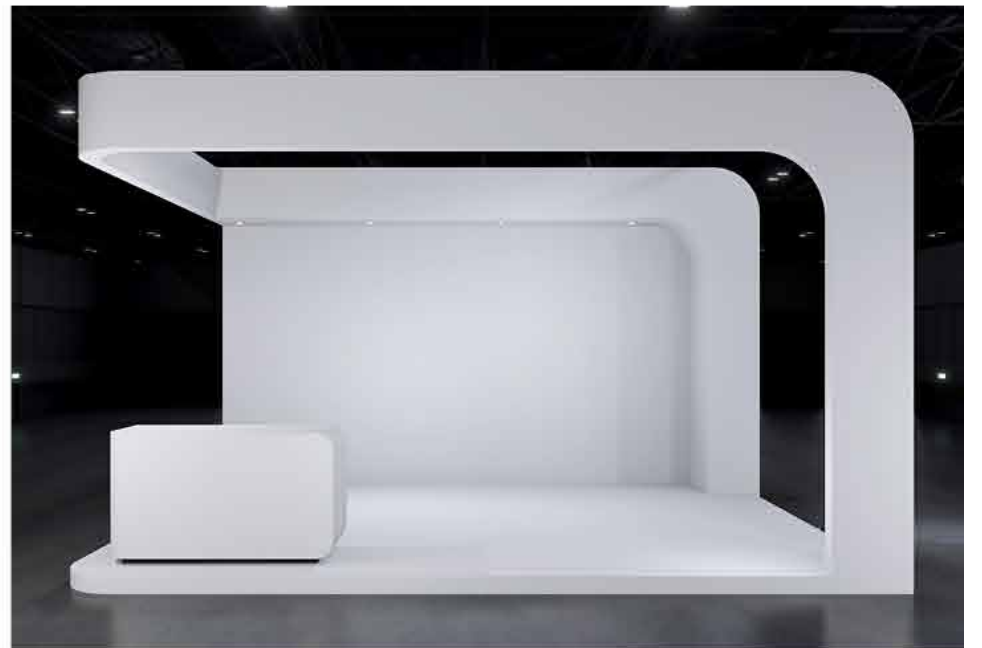
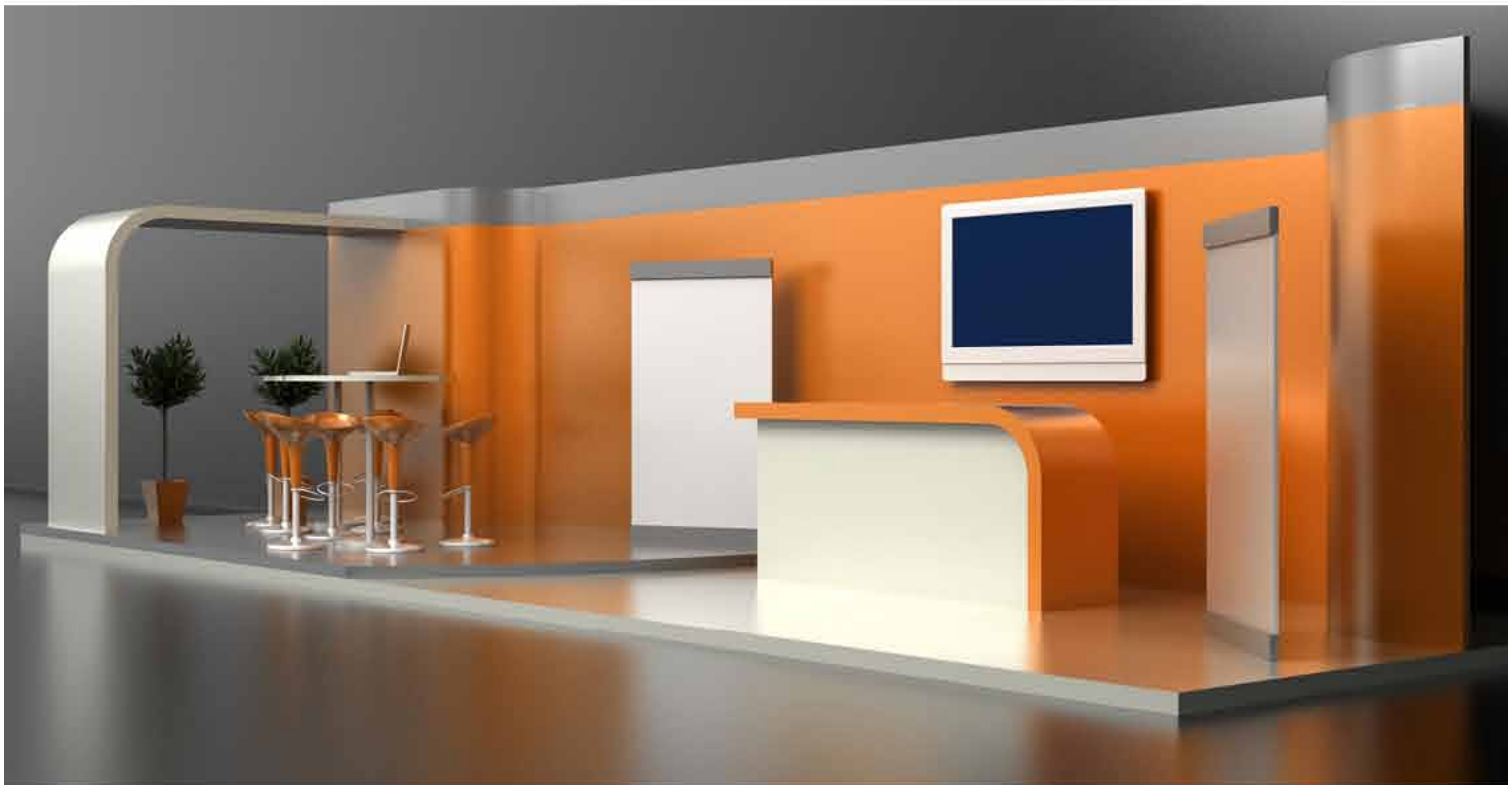
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