



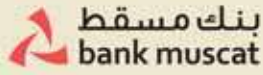
HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN SENDS GREETINGS TO LIBYA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Turik has sent a cable of congratulations to Dr. Mohammad Al Manfi, Chairman of the Libyan Presidential Council on his country's Independence Day anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and wishes of good health and happiness to him and for his country's people further progress and prosperity. **-ONA**



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OQ'S EXPENDITURE ON GOODS AND SERVICES HITS \$974 MILLION

This expenditure aligns with the group's strategic focus on enhancing its ICV contribution, in tandem with the government objectives of Oman Vision 2040

Times News Service

MUSCAT: OQ, the globally integrated energy group, has said that its expenditure on goods and services reached approximately \$974.07 million in the third quarter of 2023. Of this, \$753.11 million was allocated to goods and services through local suppliers, resulting in \$314.17 million being retained as In-Country Value (ICV).

The group has reported spending a total of \$172.53 million on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by the third quarter of this year. This includes a significant amount of \$56.99 million explicitly allocated for SMEs holding the Riyadh Card.

This expenditure aligns with the group's strategic focus on enhancing its ICV contribution, in tandem with government efforts and the objectives of Oman

Vision 2040, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to invest and support local markets, goods and SMEs.

Recognising the significance of supporting Omani Goods, OQ has given special attention to goods made in Oman in its procurement policies. This includes offering up to a 10 percent price preference for Omani goods and specifically targeting Omani goods in some contracts and procurements. As a result, spending on goods manufactured in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately \$122.41 million.

Furthering its dedication to local industry, OQ has launched initiatives aimed at industry localisation, notably the recently signed agreements to establish projects in the Ladayn Polymer Park. These projects are expected to contribute an ICV of around \$46 million annually. **>A4**

Sayyid Theyazin to preside over Municipal Councils Symposium

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth will preside over the Municipal Councils Symposium organised by the Ministry of Interior and the launch of Tanmia application on Sunday.

The ceremony will be held at Al Bustan Palace Hotel in Muscat in the presence of a number of ministers, undersecretaries and members of the municipal councils in the governorates.

The two-day symposium includes a number of sessions in which several working papers on development work of municipal councils will be delivered by specialists in the field.

The symposium will acquaint with the views and proposals of



the members of the municipal councils along with exchange of views and opinion on the work of the municipal councils.

It is worth mentioning that the Tanmia application, initiated by the Ministry of Interior, is the

digital interface of the municipal councils and it enhances communication between the individuals and establishments which leads to achievement of sustainable development and further improvement of municipal work. **-ONA**

TURKISH EMBASSY

Omanis can travel to Türkiye visa-free for tourism purpose

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Omani citizens holding ordinary passports will be exempted from visa requirement for their travel for tourism purposes to Türkiye.

Announcing this, the Turkish embassy in Muscat, said: "Dear citizens of the friendly country Sultanate of Oman. By the Presidential Decree No. 7976 dated 23 December 2023, it has been decided that Omani citizens holding ordinary passports will be exempted from visa for their travels with touristic purposes to Türkiye for up to 90 days in any 180 day period."

The Embassy also clarified on Twitter: "The visa exemption implementation process is in progress and additional information will be provided when it is completed."

The exemption of visa can significantly impact tourism as more Omanis are likely to visit Türkiye



in the coming months, according to the travel agents based in Oman. "The visa-free policy will attract more visitors from Oman, thereby increasing the tourism in Türkiye," one of them said.

More than 130,000 Omani tourists visited Türkiye during 2022, according to Oman News Agency.

Along with Oman, Türkiye announced exempting visa need for tourism purposes to nationals of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, the US and Canada. The exemption covers the holders of ordinary passports from these countries for 90 days in any 180 day period, the Turk Press reported, citing a Presidential Decree.

COMMENTARY

The United Nations Terror Council



MOHAMED ALZADJALI

Muammar Gaddafi's last speech to the United Nations (UN) was delivered during the 64th session of the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2009.

In his lengthy and controversial speech, Gaddafi criticised the UN Security Council, calling it the 'terror council' and questioning its legitimacy.

He also accused the Security Council of being undemocratic and suggested that it should be replaced by a new system where all member states have equal power.

The speech lasted for over 90 minutes, significantly exceeding the allotted time limit, which led to some delegations walking out



in protest.

Gaddafi's speech was passionate and at times erratic, with him tearing up a copy of the UN Charter and throwing it on the floor of the General Assembly. Overall, his speech was seen as highly controversial and received mixed reactions from the international community.

Going back to his speech, why does the west want him dead?

It's because he spoke the truth. We can see how the Western countries have adopted double standards vis-a-vis Ukraine as compared to Israel and Palestine. It is obvious that the UN is biased and the time has come to find a real solution so that not only the super powers, everyone has equal rights.

Imagine if it was the other way

around, I am sure by now the USA would have led an international alliance to fight the Palestinians, but since it is Israel, the USA follows whatever the Zionist regime tells.

It is really shameful that innocent Palestinians are dying and how the IDF is destroying everything on which they are laying on their hands. Gaza has become

a killing field and the IDF is destroying everything in its way, be it buildings or graveyards.

The USA will have to hide its face with the majority of its allies after the end of this crisis for obeying the orders of its lying commander.

After World War II, America has fought many wars, conflicts and has been involved in the change of regimes more than any country, but calls itself "the Guardian of FREEDOM", yes freedom to kill and destroy!

Someone asked me why I am targeting America and the West while this is an issue between Palestine and Israel, my answer is, 'Hamas is not fighting Israel only!'

If that would have been the case, Israel would have disappeared from the world map a long time ago.

Hamas is fighting for their land while the Israeli immigrants, 79 percent from the west, are fighting to stay on.

Look! who is helping them right now, and why we should boycott their products. It is good that the majority of the people in western countries are against their official government policy!

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Oman welcomes UNSC resolution

1 Though Oman's Foreign Ministry has welcomed the UN resolution, it said that the decision doesn't meet the broad global consensus. **>A2**

OMAN FIH Hockey5s trophies unveiled

2 The trophies of the FIH Hockey 5s World Cup were unveiled at Al Mouj Walk Way on Saturday. The function was held under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed Al Rawas. **>A3**

WORLD New Covid cases rise 52% globally

3 The number of new COVID cases increased by 52% during the past four-odd weeks, the WHO said, with over 850,000 new cases reported during the period. **>A7**



CEASEFIRE

Oman welcomes UNSC resolution, but says it falls short

MUSCAT: Though Oman's Foreign Ministry has welcomed the UN Security Council resolution, it said that the decision does not meet the broad international consensus calling for a ceasefire.

The UN Security Council adopted a resolution calling for "urgent steps to be taken for immediate delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza and to create the necessary conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities."

In a statement, the ministry added: "The Sultanate of Oman stresses the need to ensure the continuous and effective flow of humanitarian and relief aid to the entire Gaza Strip."

It called on the Security Council to carry out its responsibilities in implementing all its resolutions related to the Arab-Israeli conflict to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, based on the two-state solution and ending the illegal Israeli occupation of Arab lands. -ONA

HEALTH

Major progress in cancer treatment in Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCRC) has unveiled a groundbreaking advancement in cancer care with the launch of Lutetium-177 (Lu-177) PSMA radionuclide therapy.

This introduction expands its Theranostics Programme, fundamentally reshaping the landscape of oncology treatment nationwide.

The inaugural patient has successfully undergone the initial cycle of Lutetium-177 (177 Lu) Prostate-Specific Membrane Antigen (PSMA) therapy, administered by the Nuclear Medicine team at SQCCRC.

Dr. Khulood Al-Riyami, head of the Nuclear Medicine section at SQCCRC, said: "This treatment option is typically reserved for prostate cancer patients with extensive disease who have shown no response to other treatments like androgen deprivation therapy and chemotherapy."

She further explained: "The therapy aims to alleviate symptoms and stabilise the disease, thereby enhancing the patient's quality of life."

The treatment involves a radioactive component (177 Lu) combined with a peptide (PSMA) that specifically targets prostate cancer cells, inducing radioactive damage and impeding their growth, occasionally leading to cell death.

Cutting-edge technology

SQCCRC's Theranostics Programme, blending cutting-edge technology and interdisciplinary expertise to offer tailored treatment options, represents a significant stride in the field of oncology.

This programme employs a theranostics approach that integrates nuclear medicine tools innovatively to optimise cancer management by precisely targeting radioactive medicine while minimising harm to adjacent healthy tissues.

Dr. Rashid Al Sukaiti, head of the Radiology and Nuclear Medicine department, remarked: "Many patients will no longer need to seek treatment abroad, marking a pivotal achievement for the Nuclear Medicine section. A multidisciplinary team comprising nuclear medicine physicians, technical experts, medical physicists, oncology consultants, and nursing teams collaborated to ensure the highest standard of medical care for patients."

Expressing enthusiasm for the launch of 177Lu therapies, Dr. Khulood Al-Riyami added: "We are excited to introduce 177LuPSMA to the Theranostics Programme—an unparalleled approach merging diagnostics, therapeutics, and the capabilities of nuclear medicine, unlocking new avenues in cancer treatment. We aim to extend Lutetium-177-based therapy to patients with conditions such as neuroendocrine tumours in the near future."

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ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

Passing out of military music batches marked

MUSCAT: The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) on Thursday celebrated the passing out of a number of military music batches.

The RGO also marked the passing out of the joint musical troupe that combined the Royal Cavalry band and the Royal Camel-Mounted Band at the Royal Court Affairs, as well as the scout music band of the General Directorate of Scouts and Guides.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj.Gen Salim Ali Al Hosni, Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman.

The ceremony, held at the RGO headquarters, began with a briefing on theoretical and practical application stages of the training courses, which aimed to provide the musicians with necessary knowledge and skills.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Maj. Gen. Al Hosni handed over awards of appreciation to top students and distributed graduation certificates.

- ONA

Recall

2023 Model Year Accord

Recall Date: 24/12/2023

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Accord (CY1, CY2)	2023	CY1: 111 Unit CY2: 41 Unit Total: 152

Recall consequence

Due to improper optical axis standard setting of the headlight tester used to adjust the optical axis of headlights in the completion inspection process before shipment from the factory, the optical axis of shipped vehicles may not meet the regulatory requirement or in house inspection standard.

Recall Action

The procedure will be carried out according to the technical instructions received from Honda.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pccp.gov.om>

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WINTER SOLSTICE

Warm wears are back as winter chill descends

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The winter chill is now in the air in Oman. Moving out without warm clothes early in the morning or late in the night has become a necessity, else it will cause you shivers or you can even catch a cold.

Friday, December 22, 2023 was officially announced the first day of winter solstice in the northern hemisphere, the Omani Astronomical Society announced.

Ibrahim bin Muhammad Al-Mahroqi, Vice President of the Omani Astronomical Society, said: "Friday, December 22, 2023 will be characterised by the shortest day and longest night. The sun will rise in Muscat at 6:45 am and set at 5:25pm MCT. The length of the day will reach 10 hours and 40 minute and 46 seconds, which is the first day of winter and lasts for 88 days, 23 hours and 39 minutes."



He added that the winter solstice is an astronomical phenomenon that occurs due to the tilt of the Earth's axis and its movement in its orbit around the sun, as the Earth during its rotation around the sun is not vertical, but rather tilted by 23 and a half degrees, so the northern half and the southern half of the Earth exchange places to receive sunlight.

It is wrong to say that summer and winter seasons arise as a result of the proximity or distance of Earth from the Sun. He explained that during this phenomenon, the Sun reaches the southernmost point in the sky, and the North Pole is tilted away from the sun during the winter solstice.

He added: "Not all places on the Earth have sunrise and sunset on the day of the winter solstice. To the north of the Polar Circle the Sun remains below

the horizon throughout the day, while in the Antarctic Circle, no sunrise or sunset is observed because the sun remains above the horizon all the day, a phenomenon known as the midnight Sun."

He pointed out that the sunrise from the far southeast and the low apparent path of the Sun characterise the winter solstice, where it is observed that the shadows of objects are at their maximum length during the year, saying that this phenomenon comes after the autumnal equinox that occurs in September. The phenomenon gradually moves towards the south after perpendicular to the Equator on the day of the Autumnal Equinox, and the length of the day gradually becomes shorter in the northern hemisphere, and this gradient reaches its peak at the shortest day and longest night on the winter solstice,

while the opposite happens on the same day in the southern hemisphere.

He added that the Earth has two movements: the first is its movement around its axis from west to east approximately once every 24 hours, resulting in the alternation of day and night, and the second is its movement in its orbit around the sun approximately once every 365.25 days, resulting in the alternation of the four astronomical seasons.

He stated that the winter solstice will be observed if the sun rises from one point in the south of the sky for a few days before it begins its apparent path towards the north again, as a result of the movement of the Earth in its orbit around the Sun, the hours of daylight begin to increase until they are equal on the night of the Vernal Equinox, which will occur on March 20, 2024.

AL MOUJ WALK WAY

FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024 trophies unveiled

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The new-look trophies of the FIH Hockey 5s World Cup 2024 was unveiled at a colourful function at Al Mouj Walk Way on Saturday.

The function was held under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Undersecretary for Sports and Youth at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Other dignitaries present included Sayyid Idris al Busaidy, Director General of Finance and Administration at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma Al Juma, OHA officials and members of the organising committee of the Hockey5s World Cup.

Oman's newly-built state-of-the-art hockey stadium at Al Amerat will play host to the first edition of men's and women's FIH Hockey5s World Cup matches from January 24 to 31, 2024.

On January 24, the 16 women's teams from around the world will compete to become the first ever Hockey5s World Champions.

The men will follow, on January 28, for another four days of intense competition.

"This is an exciting start to the



final build-up for the FIH Hockey5s World Cup.

The men's and women's trophies are unveiled here today and the organising committee along with the Oman Hockey Association will not spare any efforts to promote this great event to be hosted by the Sultanate of Oman," Dr Marwan bin Juma Al Juma, OHA Chairman said.

"The trophy will have a tour around Oman, passing to public avenues, malls and schools to introduce the community to the great spectacle of hockey," Dr Marwan added.

The trophy is commissioned by the world hockey governing body

FIH with its headquarters in Switzerland. It is made on the shape of Hockey5s World Cup and represents modern Oman with its edgy curves.

Oman's men's and women's hockey captains posed with the chief guest and the OHA chairman along with the men's and women's Hockey5s World Cup trophies and mascots to kick-start the exciting run-up to the global showdown of hockey.

The organising committee hopes to attract the hockey lovers and general public to the World Cup which will have a minimal ticket price of OMR1 to enjoy the matches.



Recall

Recall Date: 24/12/2023

2023 Model Year Accord

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Accord (CY1, CY2)	2023	CY1: 140 Unit CY2: 43 Unit Total: 183 Unit

Recall consequence

Front seat belt pretensions were assembled without a rivet securing the quick connector and wire plate. Seat belt pretensions missing a rivet will not properly restrain the occupant in the event of a collision, increasing the risk of injury.

Recall Action

The procedure will be carried out according to the technical instructions received from Honda.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pocp.gov.om>



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ICV CONTRIBUTION

FROM A1 OQ’s expenditure on goods and services hits \$974 million

Eng. Mabrook bin Hamed Al Siyabi, General Manager of In-Country Value at OQ, said, “Our focus at OQ is set on maximising our ICV contribution across all our projects and activities. We recognise the pivotal role local businesses play in building our national economy and driving sustainability. To this end, we invest in programmes that boost the growth and development of local businesses and create opportunities for the supply of local products.”

“Our commitment extends to sourcing goods and services from SMEs and locally registered suppliers, creating job opportunities, and fostering skill development and innovation,” he added.

Al Siyabi further elaborated that ICV represents the total expenditure retained within the country, contributing to business development, human capacity building, and productivity stimulation in the national economy. To this end, OQ has established a robust framework aimed at maximising ICV. Key components of this strategy include the formation of a dedicated ICV unit, the im-



plementation of comprehensive group-wide performance metrics to monitor ICV, and the integration of ICV requirements into procurement policies. Furthermore, the group ensures that all tenders are transparently displayed on the e-procurement platform (Tawreed), with ICV being a primary criterion in bid evaluations. The

effectiveness of these strategies is continuously assessed through a specialised ICV monitoring and reporting platform.

Emphasising the role of employment, training, and scholarships in OQ’s ICV initiatives, Al Siyabi revealed that the group’s Omanisation rate reached about 84 percent by the end of 2022.

He further explained that in the training sector, OQ has invested in developing 800 leaders through the ‘Masar’ programme, to foster leadership to guide the group through its transformation phase.

OQ’s commitment to ICV is also evident in the group’s spending trend over the past three years. In 2022, OQ spent approximately \$1,016.86 million in goods and services that supported local businesses, a significant portion of its total goods and services expenditure of \$1,385.55 million. About \$453.52 million was ICV retained value, comprising 32.7 percent of the ICV index. The previous year, 2021, saw OQ’s local spending reach about \$931 million, with approximately \$392 million as ICV retained value, accounting for 29 percent of the ICV index. In 2020, the group’s local expenditure was around \$712 million, with \$282 million as ICV retained value, contributing nearly 28 percent to the ICV index.

Al Siyabi revealed that around 2,200 SMEs are now registered on Tawreed, OQ’s e-tendering system, including 617 enterprises holding

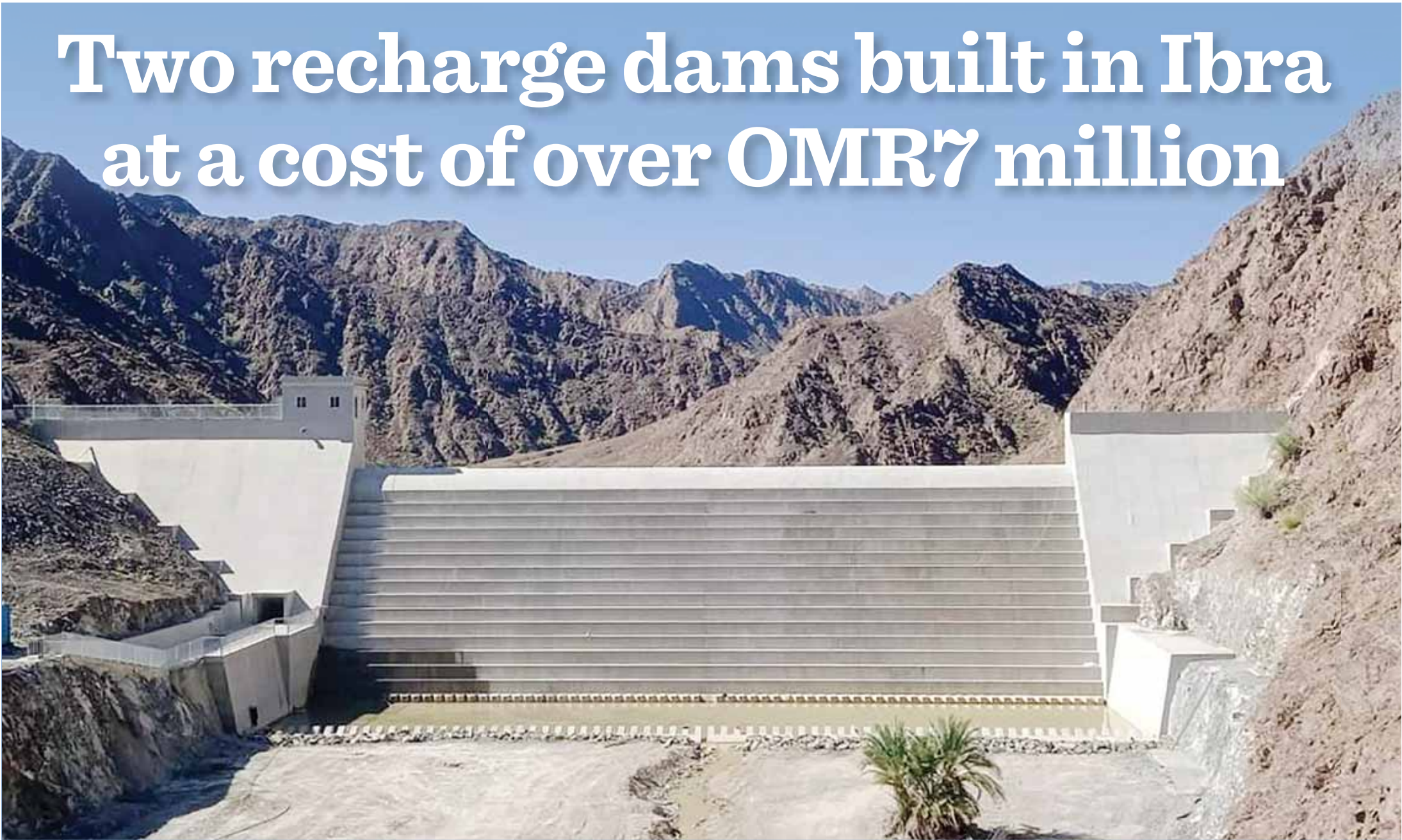
the Riyada Card. OQ is committed to bolstering SME growth and participation in its supply chain, as evidenced by initiatives like earmarking 10 percent of its total procurement spending for SMEs. This move is part of a broader strategy to align with government economic incentive programmes and enhance OQ’s procurement and contracting policies.

On streamlining procurement procedures and practices for Riyada Card holders, Mabrouk Al Siyabi added, “OQ has initiated several measures to support these enterprises, including prioritising them for purchase orders and contracts for goods and services below OMR10,000. Additionally, for contracts exceeding this value but not surpassing OMR50,000, OQ offers a preferential pricing advantage of up to 10 percent. Moreover, OQ has allocated 10 percent of its total procurement spending specifically for SMEs and commits to a swift payment policy, settling invoices within 15 days. OQ also waives tender fees and initial guarantee requirements for these enter-

prises, thereby enhancing SMEs’ ease of doing business within its supply chain”.

Among its ICV initiatives, OQ has also launched a Supplier Development Programme to empower local suppliers and manufacturers in the energy sector. This programme mainly focuses on local SMEs and Riyada Card holders, offering them opportunities for growth and development.

Additionally, OQ has implemented a unique programme restricting specific tenders entirely to SMEs and Riyada Card holders. This includes allocating a percentage of business exclusively to these groups and designating particular scopes of work for them. OQ also supports start-ups through research and innovation, encouraging creative solutions to challenges in the sector and leveraging modern technologies. These efforts collectively reflect OQ’s dedication to nurturing a dynamic, inclusive business landscape, promoting local entrepreneurship and pioneering innovation in the energy sector.



The dams have been built to feed the underground reservoirs that will help raise the water level of wells

Times News Service

IBRA: The work for the construction of two underground recharge dams in the Wilayat of Ibra, North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, has been completed at a cost of over OMR7 million under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

Dr. Abdulaziz bin Ali Al Meshaihi, Director General of Agriculture and Water Resources in North Al Sharqiyah, said that the first re-

charge dam built at Wadi Qaffah is a concrete dam aims to feed the underground reservoir which will help raise the water level of wells and Aflajs in Qaffah area.

The storage capacity of the dam is approximately one million cubic metres, where the length of the dam is 122 metres, and the maximum height is 24.3 metres , he added.

The other recharge dam is located in Wadi Warid aims to raise the level of water wells and Aflajs in Al Haimah Village in the wilayat of Ibra, he said, adding that the storage capacity of the dam is approximately 702 sq. metres of water and has the length of 255 metres and the maximum height of 18.5 metres .

The cost of construction of the two dams is OMR7.185 million, he said pointing to the two dams would feed the underground reservoir in the areas where they are located.

It is worth mentioning that the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah has 13 dams including two underground recharge dams. **ONA**



Youth learn to keep pace with the digital economy

The programme allowed Omanis to learn about international experiences and discover the global perspective in multiple fields, including leadership, management, and innovation, strategies

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management concluded the Master's Programme in Leadership and Management.

The course aims to train young national cadres who are scientifically and practically empowered and have the knack to keep pace with the digital economy built on innovation.

The programme was implemented through the latest blended online learning methods, and the participants in the Master's Programme in Leadership and Management graduated from the category of department heads and the like in units of the state's administrative apparatus after completing the third and final educational course from the Thunderbird College of Global Management of Arizona State University in the United States of America.

The programme allowed participants to learn about international experiences and discover



PROGRAMMA: The sessions also touched on adopting smart technologies to achieve urban growth and economic progress. - ONA

the global perspective in multiple fields, including leadership, management, innovation, strategies, public policy analysis, and agile government. The programme was also distinguished by its diversity in implementation methods.

The Academy - with the scientific and cognitive component provided by the university - was keen to add other components in order to achieve complementarity, and to provide a qualitative programme that combines scientific knowledge and mental development, enhancing leadership skills and capabilities, and managing processes to change and enhance innovative patterns of thinking.

Economic landscape

The third educational course was implemented to complement the Master's Programme in Leadership and Management at Arizona State University, and included many enriching sessions presented by an elite group of speakers, during which several pivotal topics were addressed that focused on the economic landscape, partnerships between the public and private sectors and their role in driving innovation and technological progress through review a number of cases and examples from the ground.

Revitalising the economy

The sessions also addressed topics related to economic success, modern manufacturing mechanisms and what they represent in the integration of public and private efforts, revitalising the economy and attracting technology giants to invest, in addition to learning about a project that works to harness modern technology to achieve impact on a global level, and bring communication applications that enrich people.

The sessions also touched on adopting smart technologies to achieve urban growth and economic progress, with a focus on joint efforts between the public and private sectors, technological progress, and innovative initiatives in shaping the economic path towards achieving flexibility and sustainable growth.

The learning trip also included

a number of field visits to a number of institutions in the United States of America, during which participants learned about the direct impact of innovative strategies in various social, economic, health care, climate adaptation and other fields.

During the implementation of the third (final) educational course of the Master's Programme in Leadership and Management, a number of group projects that participants worked on in the field of digital transformation were reviewed, and innovative ideas were created to suit the requirements of the new economy, as the projects varied to include various sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

Self-employment

These are developing the creative cultural industries sector, the government digital transformation program, developing the self-employment sector system, in addition to the project to establish the social health insurance program, and developing the internal and external communication strategies in the "Invest in Oman" hall.

MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE

Over 400 participate in Physical Activity Day

Times News Service

MUSCAT: More than 400 citizens and residents participated in the Physical Activity Day organised by Oman Olympic Committee (OOC).

The event was represented by Oman Sports and Active Society Committee in cooperation with the Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Musandam Governorate last Wednesday, under the patronage of Mubarak bin Ali bin Saeed Al Rahbi, Head of the Musandam Governor's Office. The day aimed to promote health and physical fitness by encouraging participants to practice physical activity and adopt a healthy lifestyle, and creating an opportunity for interaction between different ages through sports and activities. In addition to providing the opportunity for community members to acquire new sports skills, and motivating them to enhance community interaction and social communication.

The events included many sports programmes and activities for different ages.

The activities included a march for athletes starting from the Khasab Port Gate to the event venue at Bassa Beach, various

traditional Omani games, and swimming and athletics competitions, most notably long jump, and show jumping for different age groups.

Additionally, a roping competition for adults, mountain climbing for children and adults, various activities for scouts, guides, and troopers, as well as various sports activities and competitions for children, and a health workshop with the aim of educating community members about the importance of healthy nutrition and its role in improving public health, enhancing healthy food decision-making skills, and encouraging them to adopt a healthy lifestyle by reducing the consumption of nutritional supplements and focusing on beneficial foods.

The events witnessed wide community participation from all ages and received great interaction, high competition in various sports, and fruitful cooperation with the institutions cooperating in the governorate with OOC to make this sporting event a success.

Because of its importance in strengthening the concepts of sport in society and making it a priority in their public life and enhancing public health.

ANNOUNCEMENT



This is to inform all concerned that **Mr. Afeef Shamsudheen holder of Indian Passport No. U5200164, Resident card No. 117164613** has been terminated from our company BlueOcean Technology & systems LLC from 01.12.2023. Therefore, all the concerned are requested to stop dealing with the above named in favor of the company.

If anyone is dealing with him it is at their own risk and the company will not take any responsibility hereafter. If anybody has any claim, he/she should report to the company within the next 3 working days.

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MTCT/ 276/2023	CONSULTANCY SERVICES OF SUPERVISION FOR CONSTRUCTION OF DUALIZATION OF BIDBID SUR ROAD, SECTION II PART2 (AL KAMIL TO SUR)	21-12-2023	31-12-2023	21-1-2024	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST CLASS)	(-/150) ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY OMANI RIAL (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL FOR SME NON-REFUNDABLE

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15 PEOPLE KILLED

Czech Republic mourns university shooting victims

PRAGUE: The Czech Republic observed a minute of silence at noon on Saturday as the country holds a national day of mourning after a mass shooting at a Prague university killed 15 people including the shooter.

The shooting was carried out by a 24-year-old student who is now thought to have killed his father on the same day and a man

and a baby last week.

National flags on public buildings flew at half-staff, while bells rang out at noon to mark the start of the minute of silence, which retailers said they would also observe.

Czech President Petr Pavel and speakers of both houses of Parliament attended a special Mass for the victims held at St. Vitus

Cathedral in Prague, with similar religious services taking place in other cities and towns.

Christmas markets in several locations were closed or reduced their programmes, with other pre-Christmas events canceled.

Mourners laid flowers and lit candles in front of the university buildings.

The shooter opened fire at the

Charles University Faculty of Arts, where he had been studying, killing 13 people immediately and wounding 25 others.

The university confirmed that two staff members were among the 14 people killed.

No link to any extremist ideology or groups is suspected by investigators, who say the motive for the shooting was still unclear. —**rw**



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‘Indian diplomacy successful in forging relationships with competing powers’

Speaking at the 3rd convocation of Rashtriya Raksha University in Lavad, Jaishankar emphasised that geopolitical considerations often revolve around identifying reliable partners during challenging times



GANDHINAGAR: Highlighting the accomplishments of Indian diplomacy, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserted that New Delhi has effectively cultivated relationships with multiple and often competing powers, calling it a “significant” milestone.

Speaking at the 3rd convocation

of Rashtriya Raksha University in Lavad, Gandhinagar, Jaishankar emphasised that geopolitical considerations often revolve around identifying reliable partners during challenging times.

He said, “It has been a significant achievement of Indian diplomacy that we have been successful in forging relationships with multiple and often competing powers.”

Highlighting the positive impact

of overall national development since 2014 that has addressed the shortcomings in the security domain, Jaishankar said, “Strenuous efforts have been made, especially in the last decade, to correct the shortcomings of the previous ones. The overall development of our national strengths that we have seen since 2014 has clearly had positive repercussions in the security field, whether it is internal, external or

at the border.” “There are some basic components of these capabilities that all of us are familiar with. How to acquire and develop weapons and development-related capabilities has not only been at the core of our business policies but even of our diplomacy. Indeed, a large part of our geopolitical calculations rest on which nations are reliable partners during times of stress,” he added.

The External Affairs Minister affirmed that the security factor is embedded “deeply” into India’s strategy and diplomacy while engaging with a competitive world.

“We embed the security factor deeply into our strategy and into our diplomacy when we engage a competitive world. The magnitude of what we seek naturally reflects growing interest, greater aspirations and, in fact, the nature of warfare.. What would we consider relevant to national security itself has a very much broader definition,” the EAM said.

“We have long been conversant with the concept of dual technology, which was extended even more to encapsulate critical and emerging technologies,” he added.

Jaishankar had earlier said that India is now seen as a “credible and effective development partner.”

Jaishankar highlighted India’s transformation into a “credible and effective development partner,” with a development portfolio spanning 78 nations.

“In our travel abroad, I am glad to report that we are now seen as a credible and effective development partner. Our development partnership portfolio now spans 78 countries and the hallmark of these projects is that they are demand-driven, transparent, empowerment-oriented, environ-

ment friendly and rely on a consultative approach,” Jaishankar underlined.

The Minister emphasised India’s role in promoting digital public infrastructure and sharing digital governance best practices, especially with the Global South.

“We have also been spearheading the promotion of digital public infrastructure and sharing best practices in digital governance, especially with the Global South,” he added.

EAM Jaishankar stressed that international affairs have become “unprecedented and complex.” He noted that India’s people-centric policy is guided by the demands and aspirations of society as well as “India speaks as the voice of peace, security and prosperity for all”. “At a time when international affairs have become unprecedented and complex, our people-centric foreign policy is guided by the demands and aspirations of our society. Today, the world recognizes that when India speaks, it speaks not only for itself, but for many others,” Jaishankar had said.

“And that India speaks as the voice of peace, security, and a prosperity for all. While serving as a force for global good and stability, we have also vigorously defended our national interests,” he added.

— ANI



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Is Kim Jong Un grooming his daughter to rule North Korea?

PYONGYANG: Kim Ju Ae first appeared in public alongside her father, the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, at the launch of a missile in November 2022. Believed to be about 9 years old at the time, she caught the attention of the analysts and media, but there was little debate about her future role in a regime that is steadfastly male-dominated.

By February 2023, Kim Ju Ae had accompanied her father to five events, and still the consensus was that she could not be considered the heir in the isolated and impoverished nation.

North Korea’s Confucian value system prevents a woman from ruling. Under this practice, the military would not take orders from a woman.

That accepted wisdom has been evolving in recent months, however, and took a more decisive turn on December 6 when South Korean Unification Minister Kim Yung-ho said at a media event that the North Korean leader appears to be “in a hurry” to put his daughter in the spotlight, despite her tender age, and prepare the nation for a third transfer of power within the world’s only hereditary communist dynasty.

The minister’s conclusions are now shared by the South’s National Intelligence Service, with director Cho Tae-yong telling broadcaster KBS earlier this month that he believes Kim Ju Ae is indeed being groomed to one

day take over from her father.

Cho said the North Korean propaganda machine has swung into top gear and is busily building a cult of personality around the girl, with domestic media now referring to her as the “Morning Star of Korea,” a title that was previously reserved for Kim Il Sung, the nation’s founder and her great-grandfather.

Laying the groundwork

Even those who had reservations a year ago are coming around to the idea that Kim Jong Un is laying the groundwork to eventually hand over the baton to his daughter. “Previously, I was sceptical that the North could have a female leader, but gradually that has changed as Kim Ju Ae has appeared at more and more military events — which is extremely meaningful,” said Kim Sung Kyung, an expert on North Korean society and culture at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

“Wherever Kim Jong Un goes and whatever he says is very carefully calculated for both the rest of the world and a domestic audience,” she told DW. “At first, analysts assumed there was a political intent behind Kim’s daughter appearing with him, but few considered it possible that this patriarchal socialist society would have a female leader.”

One alternative theory that was put forward, she said, was that

having a young girl accompanying the dictator would somehow soften his image, even when she was largely attending military events, such as missile launches or military parades.

A growing alternative school of thought is that Kim is laying the groundwork for an eventual transition of power. These actions already have parallels to historic precedent in the Kim family, the professor added.

Kim Il Sung handed over military power to his son, Kim Jong Il. The second hereditary ruler of North Korea then committed the nation to developing nuclear weapons, which Kim Jong Un inherited when his father died in December 2011.

In turn, Kim Jong Un has invested heavily in developing a nuclear arsenal and an array of ballistic missiles, the most capable of which are believed to be able to strike the US mainland. And this is the military power that he is visibly handing on to his daughter in an effort to legitimise her rule when the time comes.

“Many analysts have pointed to Kim Ju Ae’s gender as ruling her out of leading the North, but I do not believe it is such an important issue,” said Kim Sung Kyung. State media has time to create the image of Kim Ju Ae as both the powerful leader, associated with men, as well as a caring mother figure for the nation, she added.

— DW

UNSC passes resolution to boost humanitarian aid access to Gaza

The proposed resolution, presented by the United Arab Emirates, garnered support from 13 council members, while the United States and Russia opted to abstain from the vote within the 15-member council

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council on Friday passed a key resolution, emphasising the immediate acceleration of aid deliveries to the distressed civilians in Gaza, but without the original call for an “urgent suspension of hostilities” between Israel and Hamas.

Resolution 2720 demands parties to the conflict “allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip, and in this regard calls for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access and to create



the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities.”

The resolution demands that the parties to the conflict “allow and facilitate the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip,” and requests the UN secretary-general to “appoint a senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator” with responsibility for facilitating, coordinating, monitoring, and verifying in Gaza, as appropriate, the humanitarian nature of all humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza provided through states which are not party to the conflict.

The text demands the “immediate and unconditional release of all hostages,” as well as ensuring humanitarian access to address medical needs of all hostages, and demands the provision of fuel to Gaza at levels that will meet requisite humanitarian needs.

‘Two-state solution’

The resolution reiterates its “unwavering commitment” to the vision of the “two-state solution” where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognised borders, consistent

with international law and relevant UN resolutions, and in this regard stresses the importance of “unifying the Gaza Strip with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority.”

The proposed resolution, presented by the United Arab Emirates, garnered support from 13 council members, while the United States and Russia opted to abstain from the vote within the 15-member council.

The vote followed a US veto of a Russian amendment that would have restored the call for a “suspension of hostilities.”

Speaking after the vote, Dai Bing, charge d'affaires of China's permanent mission to the United Nations, told the Security Council that given the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, the resolution offers “at least a glimmer of hope” for more and faster delivery of aid to Gaza. He added that “whether this glimmer of hope can be truly felt by the people of Gaza in the midst of this disaster also depends on whether the resolution can be effectively implemented.”

“We expect action to expand humanitarian assistance in Gaza, including by the full use of Karem Shalom and the opening of other crossing points,” the ambassador said, while urging Israel to stop its collective punishment of the population of Gaza and insisting that realization of a ceasefire remains the overriding goal.

Riyad Mansour, permanent observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations, said after the vote that the Security Council first met to address the crisis when hundreds of Palestinians had been killed by Israel.

“The council is now meeting after over 20,000 Palestinians have been killed, almost half of them children and 60,000 wounded, and two million Palestinians have been forcefully displaced,” he said.

Mansour underscored that the “inhumane and criminal Israeli siege” and the use of vital humanitarian “as a method of war” must end immediately.

“What we are dealing with is an attempt at the destruction of our people and their displacement forever from their land,” he said, adding “this is Israel’s goal, its true ob-

jective, no future for Palestinians in Palestine.”

Noting that “death is everywhere” in Gaza, Mansour said that the resolution is intended to alleviate the untold suffering and pain being borne by civilians. He welcomed the provision to establish a UN mechanism to accelerate the provision of humanitarian relief consignments and call for its rapid implementation.

“This resolution is a step in the right direction. It must be implemented and must be accompanied by massive pressure for an immediate ceasefire,” he said.

The latest vote on the resolution came after a four-day delay, driven by hopes of averting a US veto.

Ultimately, after a week of tense negotiations, a revised text emerged that the United States had indicated it would not oppose as of Thursday night.

The original language, which called for an immediate ceasefire, was substituted with a call for “urgent steps” to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and “create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities.”

On December 8, the United States exercised its veto power to block a Security Council resolution that had called for a ceasefire in Gaza. The same resolution secured passage on the UN General Assembly floor with overwhelming support, garnering 153 votes in favor and only 10 against. In a separate instance, a resolution advocating for “humanitarian pauses” was approved by the Security Council in November, with the United States choosing to abstain from voting. — Xinhua

REQUEST BY SPECIAL COUNSEL

US Supreme Court declines to fast-track Trump immunity case

WASHINGTON, DC: The US Supreme Court on Friday rejected a request by special counsel Jack Smith to fast-track arguments on whether Donald Trump has any immunity from federal prosecution for alleged crimes he committed while in office, according to media report.

The court did not explain its reasoning and there were no noted dissents.

The court’s decision comes as a major blow to Smith, who made an extraordinary gamble when he asked the justices to take the rare step of skipping a federal appeals court and quickly deciding a fundamental issue in his election subversion criminal case against Trump.

As per CNN, both sides will still have the option of appealing an eventual ruling by the DC Circuit Court of Appeals up to the high court, but the court’s move is a major victory for Trump, whose strategy of delay in the criminal case included mounting a protracted fight over the immunity question, which must be settled before his case goes to trial.

An expedited review of the issue is already underway at the DC Circuit, which has scheduled oral arguments for January 9. The election subversion trial is currently set to begin in March.

According to CNN, Professor at the University of Texas School of Law Steve Vladeck said: “The real question is what happens then. Assuming the court of appeals rejects Trump’s claim, will it keep the trial on hold pending further review from the Supreme Court, or will it allow the trial to go forward and force Trump to seek a stay from the Supreme Court? It’s still possible that the trial begins on March 4, but the Supreme Court’s apparent willingness to let the D.C. Circuit go first makes it at least somewhat - and perhaps significantly - less likely.”

In urging the court to not take the case, Trump’s attorneys argued the special counsel was trying to “rush to decide the issues with reckless abandon.”

“The fact that this case arises in the vortex of political dispute warrants caution, not haste,” Trump attorneys wrote in court papers.

Earlier this month, Trump’s team had asked the appeals court to examine the immunity ruling issued by District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is overseeing his criminal case.

But Smith’s team sought to bypass the appeals court’s review of the matter by having the justices step in now. — ANI

850,000 NEW CASES

Number of new Covid cases increase 52% globally in past one month: WHO

NEW DELHI: The number of new COVID cases increased by 52 per cent during the past four-odd weeks, the WHO said, with over 850,000 new cases reported during the period.

The number of new deaths decreased by 8 per cent as compared to the previous 28-day period, with over 3,000 new fatalities reported, World Health Organization (WHO) said in its latest press release.

As of December 17, over 772 million confirmed cases and nearly seven million deaths have been reported globally since the onset of COVID-19, the WHO noted.

Further, the WHO said over 118,000 new COVID-19 hospitalisations and over 1600 new intensive care unit (ICU) admissions have been recorded, with an overall increase of 23 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively, globally.

As of December 18, 2023, JN.1, a sub-lineage of BA.2.86 Omicron variant has been designated a separate variant of interest (VOI) apart from its parent lineage BA.2.86 due to its rapid increase in prevalence in recent weeks. Globally, E.G.5 remains the most reported variant of interest.

Due to its rapidly increasing spread, WHO is classifying the variant JN.1 as a separate variant of interest (VOI) from the parent lineage BA.2.86. It was previously classified as VOI as part of BA.2.86



sublineages.

Based on the available evidence, the additional global public health risk posed by JN.1 is currently evaluated as low. Despite this, with the onset of winter in the Northern Hemisphere, JN.1 could increase the burden of respiratory infections in many countries.

The WHO had earlier said it was

continuously monitoring the evidence and would update the JN.1 risk evaluation as needed.

Current vaccines continue to protect against severe disease and death from JN.1 and other circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, it noted.

COVID-19 is not the only res-

piratory disease circulating. Influenza, RSV, and common childhood pneumonia are also on the rise.

Meanwhile in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala Health Minister Veena George on Friday reacted to the new COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1 and said that there is “nothing to worry” about and everything is “under control.” — ANI

NEWARK, CALIFORNIA

Temple wall defaced by anti-India graffiti, cops treating it as ‘hate crime’

CALIFORNIA: Suspected pro-Khalistan activists allegedly defaced the Swaminarayan temple in Newark, California, police said, adding that the incident came to light on Friday.

The exterior wall of the Hindu temple was defaced with anti-India graffiti.

The Newark Police Service has started an investigation into the vandalism.

According to the temple administration, the incident took place on Thursday night.

“One of the devotees, who lives close to the shrine, discovered anti-Hindu and anti-India graffiti in black ink on an exterior wall of the building, and the local administration was immediately informed,”

Bhargav Raval, the spokesperson for the temple administration, told ANI. The spokesperson added the temple authorities were ‘shocked’ to find the anti-Indian graffiti on its wall.

Shedding more light into the incident, Jonathan Arguello, a police captain for the city of Newark, said the ‘targeted act’ was being investigated.

“Based on the graffiti, we believe it was a targeted act, and it’s going to be investigated with full thoroughness. I can also tell you that as a member of the Newark Police Department and the Newark community, we’re deeply saddened when these types of acts occur, and we think they’re senseless and they have no room. We won’t tolerate them here in Newark. So today, I wanted to make sure that you understand how seriously we take these situations and know that we will investigate as thoroughly as possible with utmost care and sensitivity. I can also tell you that officers are currently investigating this via evidence collection,”



ate them here in Newark. So today, I wanted to make sure that you understand how seriously we take these situations and know that we will investigate as thoroughly as possible with utmost care and sensitivity. I can also tell you that officers are currently investigating this via evidence collection,”

the captain told reporters during a press conference.

The police official said to piece together the chain of events leading to the act of defacement, the footage from surveillance cameras in the neighbouring residences were being looked into.

“Our policies that any acts of vi-

olence or threats of violence, property damage, harassment, intimidation, or other crimes motivated by hate or bias are considered very serious and given the utmost care. We’re handling this investigation as a hate crime at this point, based on our conversations with you and the physical evidence we’ve seen,” he said.

This is not the first such incident where a temple has been defaced with such graffiti in the recent past.

The incident comes close on the heels of the US Justice Department unsealing an indictment against an Indian national for his alleged involvement in a foiled plot to assassinate India-designated terrorist Gurbatwant Singh Pan-

nun on American soil.

The Justice Department claimed that an Indian government employee (named CC-1), who was not identified in the indictment filed in a federal court in Manhattan, recruited an Indian national named Nikhil Gupta to hire a hitman to carry out the assassination, which was foiled by US authorities, according to prosecutors.

Gupta is currently in custody and has been charged with murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. Czech authorities arrested and detained Gupta on June 30, pursuant to the bilateral extradition treaty between the US and the Czech Republic. — ANI

SPORTS

Luis Suarez reunites with Lionel Messi, joins Inter Miami from Gremio

MIAMI : Uruguayan superstar Luis Suarez joined Inter Miami on Friday, after leaving Brazilian club Gremio as a free agent. Meanwhile, Suarez is set to reunite with his former teammate Lionel Messi. Apart from Messi, Suarez joined his former Barcelona teammates, Jordi Alba and Sergio Busquets at



the Florida-based club. Inter Miami's official social media accounts confirmed the transfer news and welcomed the 36-year-old on Friday. While speaking on the club's official media channel, Suarez said that he is excited to take up the new challenge at Inter Miami. The

Uruguayan striker also hoped that he could win more trophies with the club, **Great Club** "I'm very happy and excited to take on this new challenge with Inter Miami. I'm ready to work to make the dream of winning more titles

with this great Club a reality," Suarez said. Earlier, the 36-year-old was a part of the Brazilian team Gremio where he appeared in 53 matches and scored 26 goals. Suarez's football career saw a peak when he played for the Catalan club Barcelona in La Liga

alongside Messi and Neymar. The Inter Miami player in Barcelona from 2014 to 2020, where he appeared in 283 matches and scored 198 goals. The Uruguayan helped his former side Gremio to win the Campeonato Gaucha and Recopa Gaucha in Brazil. **-ANI**

Foden and Alvarez inspire City's maiden FIFA Club World Cup win



The win in Jeddah also was a landmark for the Manchester-based club after they got hold of five titles in the year 2023

JEDDAH : Phil Foden and Julian Alvarez powered Manchester City to a 4-0 win over Fluminense in the final game of the FIFA Club World Cup 2023 at King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah on Friday. The win in Jeddah also was a landmark for the Manchester-based club after they got hold of five titles in the year 2023. They have won the Premier League, FA Cup, UEFA Champions League,



UEFA Super Cup, and Club World Cup this year. City started with a dominant performance and had a great start to the game. Guardiola's side just took 40 seconds to make the first breakthrough of the match after the Argentine striker Alvarez stooped to chest



the rebound ball of Nathan Ake, who attempted a shot from City's defence after the Fluminense keeper Fabio stretched forward to the midfield. In the 27th minute of the game, Ake again kept a through ball to Foden, who had a lot of space down the left flank of the box. Af-

ter moving forward, the 23-year-old kept a square pass on the box. However, the Brazilian club's defender Nino made a slide to clear the ball but it took a deflection and looped into the bottom corner beating Fabio. In the 40th minute, Fluminense tried to make a comeback



after Arias placed a header from Keno's corner but City goalkeeper Ederson was prepared and reacted quickly to save it. Before the end of the first half, the English club tried to score more goals but Grealish's fiery shot towards the far post from the edge of the box was saved by the Flu-

minense keeper after he pushed the ball away. City went to the first half after taking a 2-0 lead in the game. Just after the start of the second half, City started their attacking play. In the 48th minute, Fabio made a double save to stop Grealish and Foden's shots. In the 52nd minute, City won a free kick in the midfield but Alvarez's low cross was saved by the opponent's goalkeeper. Foden scored his first goal of the match in the 72nd minute of the match after Alvarez kept a stunning brilliant low cross on the box, where the Englishman just had to tap the ball on the back of the net. In the 88th minute, the Argentine striker scored his second goal after he placed a shot to the bottom corner of the box to make the scoreline 4-0. After the end of the game, City successfully kept a clean sheet and won their maiden Club World Cup trophy after beating the Brazilian club. **-ANI**

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Got a lot of ODI, T20 cricket still left in me: Alex Carey

SYDNEY: Australia wicketkeeper-batter Alex Carey is not interested in specialising in long-form work, although he is hoping for another Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) hundred when hosts take on Pakistan in the second Test, saying that "plenty of ODI and T20 cricket is still left in him." After reaching his first Test century at the MCG at the start of 2023, he faced obstacles in front of and behind the wickets in India, where his glove work reached new heights. Although Carey is focused on repeating his incredible performance on Boxing Day from a year ago, he acknowledges that he is also planning to make a push in the upcoming months to be called back for white-ball cricket. One of the left-hander's most cherished moments is his maiden century against South Africa at the MCG last summer, which was made possible by his close friend Cameron Green sticking by him despite having a broken finger. Aside from two memorable half-centuries in the World Test Championship final and the opening Ashes Test, Carey's batting statistics have since declined. After the Melbourne Test, he amassed 404 runs at 23.76 in



18 Test innings. The wicketkeeper-batter wants to play short-form cricket because he isn't satisfied with being a long-form specialist. Carey thinks he was in fantastic form during the past 12 months, but his form declined at the wrong time, making it difficult for him to get into the World Cup squad. "I still feel like I've had some pretty solid performances over the last 12 months in one-day cricket. The timings of the leaner trot led to that decision (to drop him at the World Cup) from the selection panel. But absolutely I feel like I've got a lot of one-day cricket and T20 cricket still left in me," Carey said. **-ANI**

BANK NIZWA SIGNS PACT
Bank Nizwa inked a financing agreement with Renaissance Duqm Accommodation Company, a subsidiary of leading accommodation solutions, facilities management and services solutions company, Renaissance Services, to extend \$90 million in sustainability linked financing to support its projects.

MARKET BUSINESS & FINANCE



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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2023



MSX ENDS LOWER

Oman's stock market recorded limited price movements during the three days of active trading this week and remained without a strong direction overall, according to an analyst.

Green hydrogen projects to boost Oman's non-oil economy

The significant inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) would boost gross domestic product (GDP), Fitch Ratings said in a new report

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The government of Oman's ambitious targets to expand local green hydrogen production could support key credit metrics, such as GDP, fiscal revenue and the balance of payments, over the long term against the backdrop of the global energy transition, according to a new report.

Fitch Ratings in a report on Thursday said the government aims to raise renewable energy-



based hydrogen production to at least one million metric tonnes (mt)/year by 2030, rising to at least 3.25 million mt by 2040 and 7.5 million mt by 2050. Local state-owned enterprise (SOE) Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) signed six investment agreements, worth over \$38 billion, with partners in 2023.

"But we believe the hydrogen strategy will not involve large-

scale SOE investments or associated sovereign contingent liabilities, with Hydrom only providing prepared plots and another SOE, OQ Alternative Energy, only taking relatively modest minority stakes in selected projects," the ratings agency said in the report. Most projects focus on producing and exporting either hydrogen – in the form of ammonia – or steel.

The main impact of the green hydrogen development plan in the near term is likely to be on investment, external metrics and employment. The significant inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) would boost gross domestic product (GDP), but the lift would be counterbalanced by rising imports for project delivery. "We estimate that in-country value-added re-

quirements for these investments will support existing GDP and ancillary sectors," Fitch ratings said.

The projects' exports would support Oman's current account balance, but this will be partly offset by external debt repayment and dividend payments to parent companies. The sector's activity would also boost GDP and employment. A large share of staffing needs would be sourced abroad, but producers will also be subject to employment targets for Omani nationals.

Oman's near-term take from its 15 percent corporate income tax is likely to be negligible, based on Fitch Ratings assumption that most companies in the emergent green hydrogen sector globally will initially have low profitability. Most of the budget uplift would come from the 5 percent average in-kind royalty on green hydrogen.

"We estimate the royalty on one million metric tonne produced at current prices would be equivalent to about 0.7 percent of Oman's GDP in 2023. This is a modest figure that is unlikely to significantly reduce the volatility of its fiscal revenues, which remain exposed to hydrocarbon prices," it further added.

Fitch stated in September 2023, at the time of our upgrade of Oman's rating to 'BB+' from 'BB' with a Stable Outlook, that growth of the non-oil economy that notably improves non-oil fiscal revenues and reduces social spending pressures on the government could lead to positive rating action.

In the longer term, Oman's success in the development of a green hydrogen sector would help to reduce somewhat its high dependence on fossil fuels and its exposure to the global energy transition. Fiscal and export revenues from green hydrogen may still be susceptible to global energy-price cycles, but if Oman is able to develop an export base for green steel, this could diversify its exports.

Fitch believes Oman has the potential to compete in green hydrogen production, reflecting its low renewable-energy costs, available export infrastructure through Hydrom and the under-utilised Duqm port, and a clear, relatively low tax framework. However, the sector's long-term viability will depend on a number of factors, including the speed and scale of global adoption of green hydrogen, carbon prices (particularly in Europe) and the emergence of competitors.

NCSI DATA



Annual inflation rate in Oman reaches 0.6% in November

MUSCAT: The annual inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman reached 0.6 percent at the end of November 2023, according to data from the monthly survey of consumer prices issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The inflation rate was driven by an increase in most of the main groups that make up the consumer price index, led by the food and non-alcoholic beverages group, which rose by 2.91 percent due to an increase in the prices of most of the group's components, led by fish and seafood, by 15.29 percent, and food products not classified under another heading, by 5.07 percent.

Milk, cheese, and eggs were at 4.94 percent, vegetables at 3.95 percent, foodstuffs at 3.21 percent, sugar, jam, honey, and sweets at 3.1 percent, fruits at 2.61 percent, bread and cereals at 1.41 percent, and non-alcoholic beverages at 0.23 percent, while meat prices decreased by 0.37 percent.

The prices of various personal goods and services groups also increased by 2.39 percent, tobacco by 2.35 percent, furniture, fixtures and household equipment, and routine household maintenance by 1.46 percent, culture and entertainment by 1.02 percent, health by 0.28 per-

cent, clothing and shoes by 0.1 percent, and housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels by 0.01 percent. While the prices of transportation groups decreased by 1.45 percent, education by 0.57 percent, communications by 0.16 percent, and restaurants and hotels by 0.04 percent.

Compared to October 2023, the inflation rate increased by 0.07 percent, as this is due to an increase in the prices of the food and non-alcoholic beverages groups by 0.30 percent, culture and entertainment by 0.05 percent, and transportation by 0.04 percent, compared to a decrease in the prices of the restaurants and hotels groups by 0.14 percent and miscellaneous personal goods and services by 0.11 percent, furniture, fixtures, household equipment, and regular home maintenance by 0.02 percent, and clothing and shoes by 0.01 percent, while the prices of the rest of the groups stabilised.

The governorates of North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah recorded the highest rate of increase in inflation at 1.05 percent, followed by Al Dhahirah Governorate at 0.95 percent, then Dhofar Governorate at 0.71 percent, North Al Batinah at 0.63 percent, Al Dakhiliyah at 0.57 percent, Muscat at 0.41 percent, and Al Buraimi at 0.13 percent. - OMA

CBO BULLETIN

Oman's broad money supply sees 4.5% growth

MUSCAT: The broad money supply witnessed a growth of 4.5 percent on an annual basis to reach OMR21.6 billion by the end of September 2023.

The monthly bulletin issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) stated that despite the decrease in cash in its narrow sense by 2.9 percent, the increase witnessed in cash in its broad sense is due to the increase in quasi-cash by 7.4 percent, which consists of the sum of savings and time deposits in Omani rials with certificates of deposit. Issued by banks, in addition to security margin accounts and all foreign currency deposits with the banking sector.

The cash reserves at the end of September recorded a decrease of 0.7 percent, while demand deposits witnessed a fall of 3.4 percent.

Regarding the interest rate in traditional commercial banks, the weighted average interest rates on



deposits in Omani rials increased from 1.877 percent in September 2022 to 2.453 percent in September 2023, and the weighted average interest rates on loans in Omani rials decreased from 5.416 percent to 5.451 percent during

the same period.

Additionally, the average interest rates in the overnight interbank lending market recorded an increase of 5.388 percent in September 2023, compared to 3.151 percent in September 2022.

This came as a result of the weighted average interest rates on repurchase operations rising to 6 percent compared to 3.22 percent during the same period last year, in line with the policies of the US Federal Reserve. - OMA

NURTURING LOCAL TALENT

Sohar Port and Freezone bolsters ICV and empowers local companies with new marine service agreements

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a strategic move that enhances In-Country Value (ICV) and supports local companies, Sohar Port and Freezone signed three key agreements aimed at boosting its marine services. These agreements are a pivotal step in putting to action the port's dedication to nurturing local talent.

The first agreement with Global Tank Solution outlines a plan to revolutionise the vessel tank cleaning services at the port. By introducing advanced mechanised cleaning technology and skill development opportunities, automated and non-man entry tank cleaning systems. This collaboration is expected to sharpen the competitive edge of local companies in the maritime sector.

In another agreement aimed at elevating its bunker services, Sohar partnered with Global Oil Resources. This partnership will precipitate opportunities for local companies to interface with major enterprises in the marine fuel logistics and supply chain, thereby advancing Oman's global operations. Global Oil Resources will be able to supply bunker to vessels calling Sohar Port with MGO and VLSFO. The third agreement signed this



morning, Sohar's collaboration with American Medical Center, in partnership with Star Lake Medical Services, introduces a comprehensive range of medical services for seafarers. This initiative is poised to stimulate growth in the local healthcare sector by increasing demand for medical supplies,

services, and expertise.

Sharing his insights on these developments, Batti Al Shibli, Harbour Master, Sohar Port and Freezone, said, "By integrating these specialized services at Sohar Port, we are elevating our operational efficiency and significantly contributing to the growth of Oman's

maritime industry and economy. These collaborations align with our broader ICV strategy, our commitment to creating sustainable opportunities for Omani Companies, and our role in helping the Sultanate achieve the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

As the only complex of its kind in the region managed under a singular entity, Sohar offers a competitive edge in attracting foreign investments and promoting business growth. The port plays a critical role in supporting Omani companies, providing a platform for them to engage in large-scale industrial and logistical activities, which facilitates the growth and development of local businesses, contributing significantly to the ICV and national economy.

MARKET

Oman’s stock market ends lower during short trading week

The main index concluded the week with a 0.59 percent decline, marking a third consecutive week of losses with trade volume and value were significantly lower than during the previous few weeks

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's stock market recorded limited price movements during the three days of active trading this week and remained without a strong direction overall, according to an analyst.

"However, the main index concluded the week with a 0.59 percent decline, marking a third consecutive week of losses," Daniel Takieddine, BDSwiss CEO Mena. "Trade volume and value were significantly lower than during the previous few weeks. On a larger timescale, the market continued to see downside risks and displayed a downtrend since the beginning of the year," he further added.



Other stock markets in the region recorded mixed performances with some seeing increases. On a global level, stock markets were rallying with US markets in particular extending their gains thanks to positive sentiment. Stronger expectations of interest rate cuts in the coming months could continue to support performances. "The risk-on sentiment could also have a positive impact on the Omani stock market as traders could look for new investment opportunities after the holiday period," Daniel Takieddine said.

However, geopolitical tensions in the region could remain a source of risks for local markets and could affect sentiment among local and international investors," he added. At the same time, the volatility in oil prices could weigh on expectations. While crude markets have been rebounding this week, they remain on a downtrend overall since their peak in September.

All sectors in the Omani stock market recorded a negative per-

Foreign investors raise their purchases on MSX

MUSCAT: Foreign investors raised their purchases on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), taking advantage of the decline in stock prices, less than two weeks before the end of the fiscal year.

The total value of foreign purchases on the MSX in the week amounted to OMR2.4 million, accounting for about 23 percent of the total trading value witnessed in the Muscat bourse. Foreign investors targeted companies with low prices and high returns.

On the other hand, Gulf investors tended to sell, and their sales amounted to OMR1.8 million, constituting 17.8 percent of the total trading value.

Statistical data issued by the Muscat Stock Exchange indicated a decline in the main index and sectoral indices that lacked support from leading companies, with investors focusing on OQ Gas Networks shares and Bank Muscat's first-class perpetual bonds, which together accounted for about



75 percent of the total trading value last week.

The total value of trading in the week amounted to OMR10.4 million, registering a decline of 48 percent from its level a week ago, which amounted to OMR20.2 million Omani rials. The current week's trading was limited to three trading days, as the stock exchange was closed on Sunday and Monday for an official holiday. The number of transactions executed decreased from 3,972 to 2,870, and the daily trading average last

week reached OMR3.48 million, compared to OMR4 million during the week before.

The market value of securities listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange declined at the end of the week to OMR23.87 billion, recording weekly losses of OMR29.6 million.

On January 7, OQ Gas Networks will hold an ordinary general assembly meeting, where it will discuss the distribution of cash dividends of 7.62 baisas per share for the third quarter ending on September 30, 2023.

Bank Muscat's first-class perpetual bonds witnessed interest from investors, witnessing trades worth OMR3.2 million, representing 30.8 percent of the total trading value.

During the week, the prices of 12 securities rose compared to 25 securities whose prices declined, and 25 other securities stabilised at their previous levels. Aman Real Estate Investment Fund units recorded the highest gains, rising by 5.4 percent and closing at 97 baisas, and National Industrial Detergents shares rose by 4.6 percent and closed at 97 baisas. 680 baisas, and Muscat Desalination City shares rose to 75 baisas, rising by 4.1 percent.

Muscat Gases' stock came at the top of the losing stocks, declining by 9.7 percent and closing at 83 baisas, Al Maha Ceramics' stock fell by 6.9 percent and closing at 200 baisas, and Barka Water Desalination stock fell to 116 baisas, down by 6.4 percent. - **ONA**

ADVANCED TECH SOLUTION

Omantel launches FTTR solution to offer exceptional home broadband experience

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched the next-generation FibreToTheRoom (FTTR) solution to deliver to home subscribers an exceptional home broadband experience.

Omantel is the first internet service provider in the Sultanate of Oman to offer this revolutionary technology, an advanced tech solution that is guaranteed to considerably enhance the customer experience in every room.

Saleh Mahmood Al Maimani,



Senior Manager Residential, Omantel, said: "The FTTR solution represents a remarkable advance in smooth connectivity within rooms. A2-mm thin and transparent fibre

cable is used to replace traditional network cables in an innovative way to achieve premium experience of full gigabit coverage and seamless Wi-Fi coverage."

From small apartments to big villas, you can get your whole home covered with up to 10 rooms with reliable high-speed connectivity and low latency that will be the best upgrade your home entertainment needs to stream 8K Ultra High Definition (UHD), play cloud gaming services and enhance your smart home living experience.

Omantel is the Sultanate of Oman's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news, and entertainment.

ROBUST GROWTH

Global outstanding sukuk market surged to \$823bn

DUBAI: Bashar Al-Natoor, the Global Head of Islamic Finance - Managing Director, Fitch Ratings, has projected a sustained uptrend in global sukuk issuance, with the market soaring to \$823.4 billion at the end of Q3-23, reflecting a robust 9.8 per cent annual growth.

Speaking to the Emirates News Agency (WAM), Al-Natoor attributed the surge to several key factors driving the adoption of sukuk: a) filling budget gaps, especially in non-oil-rich countries; b) diversifying funding options; c) establishing flexible financial tools for institutions; d) expanding liquidity sources for banks; and e) offering corporates

and projects alternatives to traditional bank loans.

He also categorised nations based on their financing and refinancing needs or their aspirations to enhance and diversify their debt markets. While higher oil prices have bolstered their finances, GCC countries are proactively issuing sukuk not just for immediate needs, but to achieve strategic goals like building robust debt market structures and diversifying their funding options, he added. Al Nattoor pointed out that the rise in interest rates has a negative impact on global issuances of sukuk, and therefore on the global sukuk market. - **WAM**

SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE VENTURES

Bank Nizwa, RDAC sign financing pact for \$90mn in sustainable financing

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As the pioneering provider of fully Sharia-compliant sustainable finance solutions in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in Oman, ardently champions endeavours that align with its strategic focus on sustainable development for the advancement of the country's economy.

In line with the same, the bank formalised a financing agreement with Renaissance Duqm Accommodation Company (RDAC), a subsidiary of leading accommodation solutions, facilities management and services solutions company, Renaissance Services, to extend \$90 million in sustainability linked financing to support its projects.

The financing agreement was signed at a ceremony, by Khalid Al Barwani, DGM & Head of Wholesale Banking Group at Bank Nizwa and Raashid Ali, Chief Financial Officer, Renaissance Services, in the presence of key personnel from both organisations.

Renaissance Duqm Accommodation Company's efforts in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Sezad) have culminated in the establishment of the world-class Renaissance Village Duqm, a pioneering enabler of the government's vision for Duqm as a smart city and global logistics hub driv-



ing economic diversification in the Sultanate of Oman. The integrated workforce accommodation facility provides premium living standards to workers of all segments, in full compliance with the standards of Sezad and the International Labour Organisation.

"At Bank Nizwa, sustainability is a core concept shaping our product and service offerings, in alignment with Oman's Vision 2040," commented Khalid Al Barwani, on the occasion. "As the leading and most trusted Islamic Bank in the country, we are keen to forge partnerships with corporates and entities that share our dedication to the adoption of green practices and eco-conscious endeavours to guarantee

the socio-economic progress of the Sultanate. Our partnership with Renaissance signifies more than just a financial pledge; it marks a strategic alliance toward a sustainable future."

He added, "Through this partnership, Bank Nizwa will be supporting the development of sustainable workforce accommodation projects undertaken by Renaissance Duqm Accommodation Company SAOC."

Speaking on the occasion, Raashid Ali, Chief Financial Officer, Renaissance Services, said, "In line with Renaissance's commitment to sustainability and alignment with the Sultanate's Net Zero target, we are delighted to announce our partnership with

Bank Nizwa for our first-ever sustainability-linked financing facility. This innovative collaboration is a testament to continuous efforts to meet sustainability benchmarks. We believe collective efforts are essential to achieving ambitious targets that benefit future generations, and our partnership aims to encourage a strategic shift towards a more sustainable future for corporates in the Sultanate."

Under its Wholesale Banking arm, this partnership exemplifies the bank's commitment to supporting key national projects that aid in the socio-economic development of the country, and to fostering the development of a green and circular economy.

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Real Madrid and Girona can have a happy Christmas

Real Madrid are still favorites for the title, but with 45 points from 18 games, the very least Girona can expect is a place in Europe next season

MADRID: Football in Spain has shut down until the New Year, with Real Madrid at the top of La Liga on goal difference from Girona, FC Barcelona third, and Atletico Madrid and Athletic Club Bilbao just behind them.

Girona's incredible form has to be the story of the season so far, with coach Michel Sanchez, whose teams have always played attractive football, getting the most out of a squad of journeymen players.

Wingers Savio and Yan Couto, both on loan from Manchester City, are impressing, but it is the performances that Michel is getting from players such as central defender David Lopez, left-back Miguel Gutierrez, and midfielder Yangel Herrera that are making Girona such a joy to watch.

Real Madrid are still favorites for the title, but with 45 points from 18 games, the very least Girona can expect is a place in Europe next season.



At the start of the season, it looked as if Real Madrid could be lacking firepower in attack after Karim Benzema's departure, but Rodrygo has been excellent. Nevertheless, Real Madrid's campaign can be defined by one name: Jude Bellingham.

The English international has been outstanding in his first season at the club, scoring 13 league goals in an instant adaptation to the Spanish game. When other players have dipped in form, Bellingham has carried the team and if he continues as he has started, it's hard to see Madrid slipping up.

The club has been badly hit by

injuries, with Thibaut Courtois, Eder Militao, and David Alaba out for the season, but others such as Eduardo Camavinga, Dani Carvajal, Vinicius Jr, Ferland Mendy, and Arda Guler, who has yet to make his debut, will be back in the New Year to boost Carlo Ancelotti's squad for the busy period ahead.

On paper, FC Barcelona looks to have a stronger squad than the one which won last season's title, but on the pitch, they have struggled to find consistency.

Injuries have not helped Xavi Hernandez, with Gavi out for the campaign, while Frenkie de Jong, Pedri, Marc Andre Ter Stegen,

with Atletico, and outplayed them a week ago, with Ernesto Valverde leading an energetic and aggressive young side that has the pace of the Williams brothers as their attacking spearhead and Spain international keeper Unai Simon as a reliable last line of defense.

Athletic has dipped in form at the halfway point in recent seasons as their efforts take their toll, but this year the eruption of players such as Benat Prados and Gorka Guruzeta means they have a deeper squad, and much could depend on how far they advance in the Copa del Rey.

Below them, Real Sociedad and

Betis are usual suspects in the battle for Europe, with 'La Real' mixing impressive attacking football and players such as Take Kubo and Umar Sadiq, with some solid and, at times, cynical defending.

Betis has been inspired by former Real Madrid midfielder Isco, who is enjoying a second lease on life, and as long as he keeps going, their options will remain, although European commitments could distract both teams come February.

Things look very clear cut at the other end of the table, with Almeria and Granada already looking doomed to relegation. Almeria has improved under Gaizka Garitano as narrow defeats to Atletico and Barca will testify, but five points from 18 games are numbers that it's impossible to recover from.

Granada has only three more points and replacing Paco Lopez with Alex Medina as coach hasn't changed things for a side that simply can't defend. Although they are only seven points off safety, something drastic would have to happen to save them.

Rafa Benitez's Celta is third from bottom and although the general feeling is that they are too good to go down, they need to turn some decent displays into results.

Quique Sanchez Flores' arrival at Sevilla should mean they pull clear of the danger zone, although the internal problems at the club won't help, while Cadiz will be nervous after four months without a win, including five draws in five games, has seen them gravitate down to 17th and unless they start scoring goals, it may not be a happy New Year. —Xinhua

FIFA FORWARD REPORT

FIFA funds over 1,600 projects worth \$2.8 billion



GENEVA: More than 1,600 projects were funded with \$2.8 billion during the past seven years, said the FIFA Forward report released by the world's soccer governing body on Friday.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said, "Investment in football is both our responsibility and our obligation, and through FIFA Forward we have the structure to do that in a viable and transparent way."

"The outcome has been a seven-fold increase in investment since 2016 - during a spell in which FIFA's revenues have not even doubled. This shows that funding is not only being delivered correctly, but it is being monitored and implemented to ensure the sustainable development of football for the long term," Infantino added.

FIFA put the investments into eight categories -- administration and governance, infrastructure, national teams, competitions, equipment and others, women's football, capacity development, as well as football operating expenses. — Xinhua

2024 T20 WORLD CUP

Andre Russell vows to look 'like a UFC fighter'

TAROUBA: West Indies explosive all-rounder Andre Russell has vowed to arrive in the 2024 T20 World Cup "looking like a UFC fighter" following their T20I series win over reigning champions England.

The experienced all-rounder returned to international cricket after two years of absence. The last time he represented the West Indies was at the 2021 T20 World Cup in the UAE.

Russell was the leading wicket-taker for the hosts with seven wickets in the five-match series and was influential with the bat as he scored at a strike rate of 169.35.

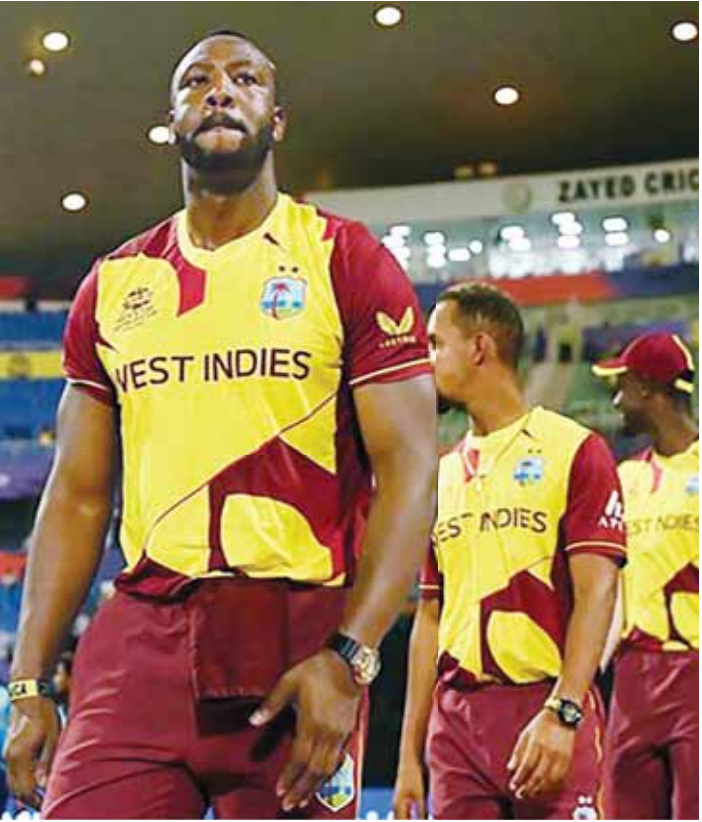
He expressed his hope of returning to the team.

"I'll be in better shape, to be honest: I'll be looking like a UFC fighter. This series win means so much. It [makes me] want to push myself to the limit. It means a lot, to be honest, getting the call-up to come back and join the West Indies team. I've been working for the last two years, waiting on a call-up," he told TNT Sports as quoted from ESPNcricinfo.

"I'm just excited to be back and have a win, highlighting the role that Daren Sammy has played in his return. The coach has been backing me a lot. I'm so happy. I feel like I've won a big, big championship with just a series win, that's how much it means to me," he added.

Russell joined the team immediately after playing in the Abu Dhabi T10 League. He stated that the long flight had affected his performance.

"I was coming from Abu Dhabi



where it's a big time difference. Flying back into Barbados I tried to stay up as late as possible to make sure that I get enough sleep so that I can [be] fresh for the game," Russell said.

"When I got to Grenada, I just couldn't sleep. I started feeling sleepy at 6 am, which would be the time that I would sleep in Abu Dhabi. Fans won't know that, but I still get the pressure and the backlash and all of that.

It just makes me stronger. I love my Caribbean fans and I know they are passionate about the game, and when we're messing up, they will be on our backs," Russell added.

Coming to the series, West Indies clinched the first two games and England bounced back to win the next two. With the series level, the hosts outclassed England and clinched the series with a four-wicket victory. — ANI

ON REAL'S 1-0 WIN OVER ALAVES

It was very difficult but thanks to the team, says Ancelotti

MADRID : Following Real Madrid's 1-0 win over Deportivo Alaves in La Liga at Mendizorrotza Stadium on Friday, the Los Blancos head coach Carlo Ancelotti accepted that it was a difficult game against the home side.

Speaking at the post-match presentation, Ancelotti praised his side for their immense commitment and clinching a win against Alaves. He added that his side deserved to win the game since they had put in a lot of effort.

"We're really pleased with tonight because it was very difficult but thanks to the immense commitment of this team, we have won it. Playing with ten men for over half an hour required a huge effort. That's why we deserved to win it at the end," Ancelotti was quoted as saying by Real Madrid's website.

Talking about the game, the Italian head coach said that they played some good stuff and were good with the defence even with ten players.

"It was a tough game and when we went a man down, everyone thought this might be the day we slip up. This team has unfathomable energy. We dug in well, played some good stuff and defended well with ten men, and we got our reward at the end," he added.

After Nacho's red card, Tchouameni was pushed back in defence. Ancelotti praised the French midfielder and said that



he played well as a centre-back.

"He'll be upset, but he's a fantastic centre-back. He plays very well, he brings the ball out from the back like few others and tactically he's very good. He's lucky that he can play in two positions: as a defensive midfielder and at centre-back," he added.

Following the 1-0 win, Real Madrid stand in the top place on the La Liga standings with 45 points after winning 14 of their 18 league games.

In their upcoming fixture, the Los Blancos will lock horns against Mallorca on January 3 at the iconic Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid. — ANI

THIRD ODI

Tanzim Hasan helps Bangladesh in win against New Zealand

NAPIER: Tanzim Hasan Sakib's three-wicket haul helped Bangladesh clinch a nine-wicket win against New Zealand in the third ODI at McLean Park in Napier on Saturday. Even though the Kiwis lost the game, they registered a 2-1 series win against Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's decision to bowl first after winning the toss in Napier worked for them. The Bengal Tigers put up a stupendous bowling performance and ended New Zealand's inning by the 32nd over.

Kiwi opener Will Young (26 runs from 43 balls) and skipper



Tom Latham (21 runs from 34 balls) were the only standout batters for the home side. Young and Latham's effort led the Kiwis to 98/10. Rachin Ravindra (8 runs from 12 balls) who recently had a stunning journey for the Kiwis during the ODI World Cup 2023, failed to make a mark against Bangladesh.

The visitors dominated the game from the very first over of the match. Three Bangladesh bowlers bagged three-wicket hauls in Napier - Shoriful Islam, Tanzim, and Soumya Sarkar. Mustafi-

zur also picked one wicket on Saturday.

In the run chase of 99 runs, last match's top performer Soumya Sarkar (4 runs from 16 balls) retired hurt after sustaining an injury. However, skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (51 runs from 42 balls) did not let his absence be felt and ended the match by the start of the 16th over. Anamul Haque (37 runs from 33 balls) also played a pivotal role during the run chase.

Tanzim gave away only 14 runs in his seven-over spell and was

named the 'Player of the Match'. The top run scorer of the series Will Young (220 runs from 3 innings) was named the 'Player of the Series'.

Brief score: New Zealand: Will Young 26(43), Tom Latham 21(34), Josh Clarkson 16(23); Tanzim Hasan Shakib (3/14), Soumya Sarkar (3/18), Shoriful Islam (3/22) vs Bangladesh: Najmul Hossain Shanto 51*(42), Anamul Haque 37(33), Soumya Sarkar 4(16); New Zealand: Will O'Rourke (1/33), Adithya Ashok (0/2), Adam Milne (0/18). — ANI

IN-PICTURES



Flamingos seen in Larnaca Salt Lake, Cyprus
Flamingos are seen in Larnaca Salt Lake, Cyprus. Xinhua

Diver dressed in Santa Claus costumes performs at Bangkok Ocean World
A diver dressed in Santa Claus costumes performs at the Bangkok Ocean World in Bangkok, Thailand. Xinhua



Christmas fair in Madrid, Spain
A boy looks at toys at a Christmas fair in Madrid, Spain. Xinhua



Kajol attends the 60th birthday bash of Anand Pandit
Bollywood actress Kajol poses for a picture at the 60th birthday bash of film producer Anand Pandit, in Mumbai. ANI Photo



China's Tangshan encourages development of clean energy
This aerial picture shows a wind farm in Tangshan City, north China's Hebei Province. In recent years, Tangshan City in Hebei Province encouraged the development of clean energy and promoted the construction of wind and solar power plants. Xinhua

Elephant show in Thailand for Christmas
An elephant distributes gifts to students during Christmas celebrations at a school in Ayutthaya province, Thailand. Every Christmas, Thailand's Ayutthaya province organises elephant trainers to dress up as "Santa Claus" and ride elephants to give gifts to students in an effort to promote local tourism industry. Xinhua



ROUND-UP

Majid Al Futtaim elevates sustainability standards in Oman with LEED Platinum Certification

The LEED Platinum Certification has been granted to City Centre Muscat, located in the capital's Seeb area, affirming Majid Al Futtaim's commitment to its sustainability plans in Oman

MUSCAT: Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, is proud to announce that City Centre Muscat has been awarded the coveted Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum Certification.



The LEED Platinum Certification has been granted to City Centre Muscat, located in the capital's Seeb area, affirming Majid Al Futtaim's commitment to its sustainability plans in Oman. The recognition signifies the highest level of achievement in sustainable building practices within the LEED green building rating system, a globally recognised standard.

In 2021, the Mall of Oman in Muscat also became the world's biggest mall to have achieved LEED Platinum for Building De-

sign and Construction under New Building Core and Shell (LEED BD+C: Core and Shell).

These certifications mark a significant stride, building on the Group's recent climate-friendly achievements and recognitions in global ESG best practices – with a total of 20 Majid Al Futtaim malls in the region now LEED-certified, and are also taking place against the backdrop of the COP28 UN climate summit being hosted in the UAE currently.

The recent LEED Platinum Cer-

tifications follow Mall of the Emirates' recognition earlier this year, positioning it as the largest operational mall globally to receive this prestigious certification.

Majid Al Futtaim's sustainability initiatives contributing to the LEED Platinum status encompass various practices such as water efficiency measures, including the installation of high-efficiency toilet fixtures across all malls, reducing water consumption significantly. Furthermore, the malls' strategic accessibility to public

transportation enhances their location and transportation credit, reflecting the Group's dedication to sustainable mobility.

Implemented industry practices also include efficient waste management strategies, such as waste reduction and segregation, resulting in a positive impact on waste performance credit. Additionally, the integration of efficient lighting systems and ongoing HVAC optimization significantly earns the malls higher points in the Energy and Atmosphere category. These sustainable enhancements not only ensure long-term viability but also enhance the well-being and overall satisfaction of customers.

Commenting on the LEED Platinum Certifications, Khalifa Bin Braik, CEO of Majid Al Futtaim – Asset Management, said: "As Oman focuses on sustainable growth, Majid Al Futtaim is dedicated to leading the charge toward a more sustainable future. This latest achievement is a testament to our years of hard work and dedication and also a result of our increased focus on sustainability, resulting in Majid Al Futtaim now having 20 LEED certified malls. "Our commitment to sustain-

ability is deeply ingrained in our operations, and these LEED Platinum Certifications reaffirm our dedication to providing environmentally responsible shopping experiences for our mall patrons."

Setting a sustainable future

The latest milestone is a reflection of Majid Al Futtaim's continued efforts towards becoming a global sustainability leader and aligns with its broader sustainability commitment of becoming Net Positive in carbon and water by 2040.

The focus on sustainability at Majid Al Futtaim malls in Oman aligns with the group's recent achievements in global ESG best practices, with Mall of the Emirates in Dubai winning the 2023 MENA Green Building Awards for implementing a Green Operations and Maintenance plan, resulting in reduced waste generation and improved energy efficiency.

Earlier this year, Majid Al Futtaim also announced its second Sustainability-Linked Loan (SLL), structured as a \$1.25 billion revolving credit facility (RCF) linked to the company's environmental, social and governance (ESG) related targets.

2ND EDITION

Meethaq Islamic banking takes part in 'Decrypt the Future of Islamic Banking' forum

MUSCAT: In order to reinforce its commitment to advancing Islamic Banking practices, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat participated in the 2nd edition of Decrypt the Future of Islamic Banking Forum, which came this year under the title "Islamic Financing in Digital Transformation Era: Vision for Achieving Sustainable Development".

The event was organised under the patronage of Tahir bin Salim Al Amri, Executive President, CBO, and attended by a large number of officials and experts from the sector from different institutions.

The forum touched upon the recent updates and opportunities in Islamic Banking Sector and financial technology in Oman. Discussions included the role of Islamic financing in enhancing sustainable development, opportunities and challenges of digital era, and the profound impact of Islamic Banking services. During the forum, attendees got introduced to innovation in Islamic Banking products, Islamic Banking and social justice, Fintech and Islamic Banking and artificial intelligent. The forum served as a meeting ground for specialists in Islamic Banking and Finance in Oman fostering collaborative dialogues aimed at propelling sectoral growth.

About Meethaq's participation, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistance General Manager, Meethaq Personal Banking, said: "We are pleased to participate in the second edition of this forum to contribute along with the other institutions in enhancing the role of Islamic Banking in the Sultan-



ate. In Meethaq, we are keen to work towards achieving common goals and contributing in the development of national economy. As a pioneer in Islamic Banking sector, Meethaq will continue to enhance its leadership position by developing and offering the best Sharia-compliant services and products."

Meethaq has been keen to participate in the events related to fostering the concept of Islamic banking, and the services provided through Islamic financing. Since its inception, Meethaq has been providing a comprehensive range of value-added products and services that undergo rigorous Sharia compliance certification by the Sharia Supervisory Board and adheres to guidelines set forth by the Central Bank of Oman. Meethaq's adoption of AAOFI standards (Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions) further distinguishes its Islamic banking practices.

STELLAR LINEUP OF VEHICLES

MG's unbeatable features now meet unbelievable prices

MUSCAT: MG Oman presented a stellar lineup of vehicles with unmatched features at prices that set a new benchmark in the automotive industry.

Beginning at just OMR 6,295, this deal includes the power-packed fastback sedan MG GT, the MG 6, known for its dynamic design and efficient performance, and the T60, a versatile pickup built for the rigours of both work and adventures. Adding to the luxury segment are the sophisticated MG HS, the powerful MG RX5, the elegant MG RX8 and the sleek MG RX8 Black Edition, each offering a unique blend of comfort and cutting-edge technology.

Mohsin Hani Al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE says, "Our diverse range of MG models is designed to cater to every preference, and this campaign is a



testament to our commitment to affordability and quality." In addition to the exceptional starting prices, customers will benefit

from free insurance, free registration, and a free 10km service, ensuring a seamless buying experience. The campaign reflects

MG's dedication to customer satisfaction, as evidenced by MG's recognition as Oman's Most Trusted Brand of 2022.

RECOGNITION

Renaissance Services achieves top rating in independent assessment of Internal Audit function

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to excellence, Renaissance Services received the highest possible rating of 'Generally Conforms' for its Internal Audit function during an independent assessment.

The rating was given following an external quality assessment (EQA) conducted by an independent professional assessor. It implies that the relevant charter, structure, policies and procedures of the Internal Audit department, as well as the processes by which they are applied, comply with the requirements of International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) from the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and the regulations of the Capital Market Authority of Oman (CMA).

The EQA was held as part of efforts to evaluate the conformance of Renaissance's internal audit activities to the mandatory guid-



ance of the IPPF, assess the effectiveness in carrying out its mission as outlined in the charter, identify opportunities to enhance its management and work processes.

Yahya Said Al Jabri, Chairman of the Audit and Internal Controls Committee of the Board of Directors, Renaissance Services

accepted a special award from Shatha Al Maskiry, Country Managing Director, Protiviti Oman on this occasion. Hesaid, "This remarkable achievement marks the company's unwavering dedication to excellence and adherence to global best practices in internal auditing. As the company continuously up-

holds these high standards, stakeholders can be assured of a professional and robust internal audit function that contributes significantly to our ongoing success. The Board strongly believes that good corporate governance practices are pivotal to maximising long-term value while safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders."

Stephen R Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, Renaissance Services, added, "The Internal Audit department ensures that our corporate governance, risk management, internal controls, and other vital functions meet the highest standards. The independent expert's top rating has enhanced credibility and showcases the effectiveness of Renaissance's governance processes and controls. This rating sets the stage for the company's continued success as it serves its prestigious clients in Oman and beyond."



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LIFESTYLE

Sleep deprivation makes us less happy, more anxious

Sleep deprivation does more than just make us sleepy. According to a study released by the American Psychological Association that synthesised more than 50 years of research on sleep deprivation and mood, it may hinder our emotional functioning, diminish good emotions, and increase our risk of anxiety symptoms.

"In our largely sleep-deprived society, quantifying the effects of sleep loss on emotion is critical for promoting psychological health," said study lead author Cara Palmer, PhD, of Montana State University. "This study represents the most comprehensive synthesis of experimental sleep and emotion research to date, and provides strong evidence that peri-

ods of extended wakefulness, shortened sleep duration, and nighttime awakenings adversely influence human emotional functioning."

The study was published in the journal Psychological Bulletin.

Palmer and her colleagues, including co-lead author Joanne Bower, PhD, of East Anglia University, analyzed data from 154 studies spanning five decades, with 5,715 total participants. In all those studies, researchers disrupted participants' sleep for one or more nights. In some experiments, participants were kept awake for an extended period.

In others, they were allowed a shorter-than-typical amount of sleep, and in others, they were periodically awakened throughout the night. Each study also measured at least one emotion-related variable after the sleep manipulation, such as participants' self-reported

mood, their response to emotional stimuli, and measures of depression and anxiety symptoms.

Overall, the researchers found that all three types of sleep loss resulted in fewer positive emotions such as joy, happiness and contentment among participants, as well as increased anxiety symptoms such as a rapid heart rate and increased worrying.

"This occurred even after short periods of sleep loss, like staying up an hour or two later than usual or after losing just a few hours of sleep," Palmer said. "We also found that sleep loss increased anxiety symptoms and blunted arousal in response to emotional stimuli."

Findings for symptoms of depression were smaller and less consistent, as were those for negative emotions such as sadness, worry and stress.

One limitation of the study is that the majority of participants were young

adults - the average age was 23. Future research should include a more diverse age sample to better understand how sleep deprivation affects people at different ages, according to the researchers.

Other directions for future research could include examining the effects of multiple nights of sleep loss, looking at individual differences to find out why some people may be more vulnerable than others to the effects of sleep loss, and examining the effects of sleep loss across different cultures, as most of the research in the current study was conducted in the United States and Europe, according to the researchers.

"Research has found that more than 30 percent of adults and up to 90 percent of teens don't get enough sleep," Palmer said. -ANI