

MINISTRY, ASYAD SIGN PACT TO FUND SCHOLARSHIPS

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation signed an agreement of cooperation with Asyad Group to fund scholarships in the logistics field for General Education Diploma (GED) graduates from the School Year 2021/2022. **>A5**



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HM ISSUES ROYAL DECREE

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik has issued a Royal Decree No. 4/2022 on the ratification of an agreement between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and Qatar on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of income and capital tax evasion, signed in Doha on 22 November 2021, after presenting the same before the Shura Council. Article (1): ratifies the above-mentioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and takes effect from its date of issue. **-ONA**



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COVID-19

Oman reports 1,619 infections, 2 deaths

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Over 1,600 new infections of COVID-19 were reported in Oman on Wednesday as two more people succumbed to the disease. The Ministry of Health figures showed that while 350 people recovered from the disease yesterday, the number of new infections was 1,619.

This means that since the start of the pandemic, 316,472 people have tested positive for the dis-

ease, while 303,112 have recovered. Unfortunately, 4,124 people have so far died from COVID-19. About 121 patients are currently hospitalised for COVID-related complications, with 42 of them admitted in the 24 hours leading up to Wednesday. 15 people are in intensive care. The Ministry of Health has reminded people to continue to practice all necessary measures against COVID-19, while advising them to get fully vaccinated and/or boosted.



HEALTH

Organ transplant centre to be set up by Ministry of Health

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As part of measures needed to set up the National Centre for Organ Transplantation, Minister of Health, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Saidi, met with members of the Board of Directors of the Omani Association for Organ Transplantation.

The meeting looked to enhance joint cooperation between the two organisations by developing a national programme for organ transplantation, within the framework

of setting up such a centre.

Also discussed were plans to establish a national conference for organ transplantation, which the association aims to hold early next year, and launching awareness campaigns about the importance of starting organ donations from deceased patients after their demise, so that people could know about the high waiting lists for organs such as the heart, lungs, and pancreas. These organs cannot be donated while their donors are alive.



OIL AND GAS COMPANIES GO GREEN TO PROTECT ENVIRONMENT

760,000

Petroleum Development Oman set up the Al Nimr Water Treatment Project to treat 760,000 barrels of water per day, that are brought up as part of the oil extraction process at the Nimr oilfields in the deserts of southern Oman.

Petroleum Development Oman is among the industry pioneers in sustainability

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oil and gas companies in Oman are increasingly adding green practices into their operations, to help sustain the environments in which they operate over the long-term.

While some choose to recycle

the water brought up to the surface during oil extraction by building wetlands that help local species of animals and birds thrive while reducing desertification, others are setting up facilities that produce far fewer pollutants during the process of oil refining.

Among the industry pioneers

in environmental sustainability are Petroleum Development Oman, which set up the Al Nimr Water Treatment Project to treat 760,000 barrels of water that is part of the oil extraction process at the Nimr oilfields in the deserts of southern Oman.

"This natural treatment system consists of a passive oil-water separator, 380 hectares of surface flow wetlands and 300 hectares of evaporation ponds and has been instrumental in reducing the amount of hydrocarbon-polluted produced water being disposed to the deep well aquifers," said PDO in a statement.

"The NWTP, being a gravity flow system, uses minimal fossil fuel for its operation and therefore results in an enormous saving in energy consumption compared to the conventional, energy-intensive disposal method of pumping the water more than 1.5 km below ground into deep aquifers under high pressure," it added.

PDO planted more than 1.2 million seedlings to create the wetland which has become a desert habitat for close to 100 species of birds, including flamingos, sand martins, cuckoos, wagtails, barn swallows, red-necked phalaropes, and black-crowned sparrow larks,

as well as insects, small reptiles and fish. The reeds themselves form a wetland covering around 2.4 million square metres of previously arid desert. They are irrigated by water that is a by-product of oil production activities in Nimr.

The project has treated about a billion barrels of produced water, and recovered more than half a million barrels of oil since operations began in 2010. The Nimr project has received multiple awards, including the Large Energy Project award at the Emirates Energy Awards that were held in Dubai, along with PDOs partner Bauer Nimr LLC. **>A5**



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TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES



OMAN Pact for fruit market in Khazaen City inked

1 Project financing deals were signed and financial closure completed as part of efforts to relocate the fruit and vegetable wholesale activities from Al-Mawaleh Central Market to Khazaen Central Market in Khazaen Economic City. **>A2**

WORLD Germany logs over 100,000 COVID cases

2 Germany reported 112,323 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, the latest new 24-hour record and the first daily tally of over 100,000. The national disease control organisation, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), published the figures early in the morning. **>A6**

MARKET Artificial Intelligence facilities highlighted

3 Oman Data Park (ODP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), organised a workshop on Nebula AI at Muscat Novotel Hotel. **>B1**

EVENT

Leadership and sustainability among topics for Global HSE event in Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Leadership, technology and sustainability are to be the three main topics of discussion at the eighth edition of the Global HSE conference and exhibition, which is to begin in Oman on 13 February.

Organised under the theme "Excellence in HSE - leadership, sustainability, technology", the conference will be held under the patronage of Dr Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumhi, the Minister of Energy and Minerals, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

"A number of local and international speakers, experts, technicians, specialists and academics are expected to participate to introduce their experiences in the field of HSE," said a Ministry of Energy and Minerals statement.



This is "in addition to a number of regional and international countries, and more than 50 companies from different local and international organisations to highlight the latest technologies and experiences related to HSE, such as devices, equipment, and modern system applications."

The objectives of the conference are to continue the traditions of creating sustainable platforms for the HSE sector, emphasise leadership commitments and the use of technology, and to focus on sustainable goals for organisations, given the challenges of the current market.

PRAYER
TIMINGS

Dhuhr.....	12:23pm
Asr.....	3:28pm
Maghrib.....	5:50pm
Isha.....	7:04pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....	5:32am

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Deals for fruit, vegetable market in Khazaen Economic City inked

The agreements were signed in pursuance of the Royal directives that called on the private sector and businessmen to invest in local opportunities in all sectors to boost Oman’s position as an attractive and leading investment destination

MUSCAT: As part of the efforts focused on relocating the fruit and vegetable storage and wholesale activities from Al-Mawaleh Central Market in the Wilayat of A’Seeb to Khazaen Central Market in Khazaen Economic City in the Wilayat of Barka, the project financing agreements were signed, and its financial closure was completed.

The first agreement concerned the shareholders’ capital subscription while the second was the bank financing agreement with Sohar Islamic Bank signed under the patronage of Eng. Issam Saud Al Zadjali, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and in the presence of a host of local dignitaries, government officials and representatives of private agencies and companies engaged in the import and trade of fruit and vegetables in Al-Mawaleh Fruit and Vegetable



Central Market. The agreements were signed in pursuance of the Royal directives that called on the private sector and businessmen to invest in local opportunities in all sectors to boost Oman’s position as an attractive and leading investment destination.

The first agreement was concluded to complete the equity subscription with Oman Infrastructure Fund (Rakiza), Salim & Partners LLC, Al Kalbani Group and Khazaen Development and Investment Company, as shareholder partners in Khazaen Fruit and Vegetable Central Market SAOC, which will fund, develop and manage the new market in Khazaen Economic City.

Bank financing

The bank financing agreement was signed between Sohar Islamic Bank and Khazaen Fruit and Vegetable Central Market SAOC to provide financing facilities for the new market project.

Commenting on the signing of the two agreements, Eng. Kalat Ghulam Al Balushi, Board Chairman of Khazaen Economic City, said, “The signing of both agree-

ments marks the completion of the project capital subscription and total financing amounting to about OMR40 million which will be allocated to the development, establishment and operation of the Khazaen Central Market. We are happy with this strategic partnership with major partners from the private sector, and we highly value and appreciate the trust of the government, represented by the Muscat Municipality, and its support in enabling the private sector to play its part in the development of quality and national projects that contribute significantly to achieving food security and an economic revenue for the country.

The project proves to be relevant to the main pillars of Oman Vision 2040 as to its empowerment of the private sector to be a major driver of the national economy. As soon as we signed the agreement with Muscat Municipality to relocate the fruit and vegetable warehousing and wholesale activities from Al-Mawaleh Fruit and Vegetable Central Market to Khazaen Fruit and Vegetable Central Market in May 2021, we immediately proceeded to the appointment of a consultant

to prepare the engineering drawings and tender documents for the construction works. In November 2021, local companies were invited to participate in the construction works tender and as per the project’s timeline, the implementation tender will be awarded in the first quarter of this year”.

Objective

Eng. Kalat affirmed that “the main objective of relocating the fruit and vegetable warehousing and wholesale activities to the new market is to improve the performance and quality of work in the fruit and vegetables sector and to provide new modern and advanced integrated logistics facilities including air-conditioned wholesale and retail market and the centralised cold and dry storage of various fruit and vegetable products to serve growing consumer demand for fresh fruits and vegetables in the Sultanate of Oman, which is increasing at more than 10 percent p.a.

The new market will serve as a marketing and logistics platform that attracts investors and local, regional and international companies operating in the fruit and

vegetable sector. The new central market is one of the main components of Khazaen Food City, which contributes to strengthening Oman’s food security system in line with the national strategy for food security”.

“This financial closure confirms the significant role of the private sector investment companies in creating opportunities, studying their economic feasibility and structuring them as investment products that attract investors and businessmen, and endeavouring to complete the capital subscription and provide bank financing to develop and operate these projects” he added.

The new fruit and vegetable market in Khazaen Economic City consists of high-quality logistics facilities and services, such as air-conditioned wholesale market and trading floor; the cold storage facilities, truck sales area, onion and potato sorting and selling sheds, dry warehouses, agricultural products reception building, forklift operation station, ten gates for customs inspection and plant quarantine, administration offices for the companies working in the market, agriculture samples examination laboratory under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, seven gates for entry of trucks, in addition to public services that include banking services, truck parking, and a mosque. The market will also include retail outlets to cover the incoming demand from the surrounding areas of the city.

The new market area is significantly larger than the area of the current market in the Wilayat of A’Seeb and can be extended in the future to cater for the expected growth. In addition to the market connection to a 100,000 square meters truck rest area, its location on the Expressway in proximity to A’Suwaiq and Sohar ports, and Khazaen land port, is one of its success factors. The market will be

a nucleus for the establishment of an integrated city for food industries that includes the manufacturing, packaging and preservation of foodstuffs.

The new market will also contribute to attracting international companies specialised in food supply chains, which will enhance Oman’s position as a regional and international foodstuffs manufacture and distribution hub, by leveraging Oman’s strategic location and robust logistics structure, in Oman, in general, and Khazaen Economic City, in particular.

Khazaen is one of the largest public-private partnership project in the Sultanate of Oman. It is the latest integrated economic city being developed in the Wilayat of Barka in the Governorate of South Al Batinah. The city is strategically located near the capital, Muscat, and is part of Greater Muscat, according to the urban strategy approved by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. It is about 30 minutes away from Muscat International Airport, and almost two hours from Sohar Port. In the future, the city will be linked through its land port by the railway to the city of Sohar to facilitate the transportation of goods from Sohar port to Khazaen land port directly.

Land port

In addition to the central fruit and vegetable market, the Economic City hosts Oman’s latest land port, which was opened in December 2021, and includes areas designated for small and medium industries and logistics services. The city will also accommodate multi-space housing units that meet all demands, recreational facilities, retail outlets, international schools, and modern health care centers - which will contribute to creating communities that meet all living and recreational needs of the residents of this promising economic city. **-OMA**

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SENIOR SPECIALIST
OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY

التخصصات

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- الولادات الطبيعية والقيصرية
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- تنظير الرحم التشخيصي والجراحي
- جراحات المناظير لـ
 - كيس المبيض
 - بطانة الرحم
 - تكيس المبايض
 - ورم عضلي
 - الحمل خارج الرحم
- استئصال الرحم بالمنظار
- استئصال الرحم البطني والمهيلي
- إصلاح قاع الحوض
- فحص سرطان عنق الرحم (مسحة عنق الرحم)
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THIS SPARKLING concert at the Royal Opera House Muscat celebrates Giuseppe Verdi's great genius, with arias and duets selected from some of his most popular works, such as Nabucco, Il Trovatore and many others. In the world of opera, Verdi is recognised as the leading composer of nineteenth-century Italian opera and universally admired for a richness and depth of dramatic characterisation in musical expression, an innovation with which he transformed traditional Italian opera. Singers from those performing in Rigoletto are accompanied by the Orchestra and Chorus of Fondazione Arena di Verona under the baton of Jan Latham-Koenig.

The concert is enhanced by the participation of the Omani Opera Choir Group, an elite choir of Omani singers who have received a vigorous training in classical singing and represent the capacity and depth of Oman's cultural development.

The Fondazione Arena di Verona is an acclaimed company, hailing from Italy. Famous throughout the world for their season of outdoor productions in the Arena, where performances have taken place for 1990 years since its construction in 30 AD between the reign of Augustus and the reign of Claudius.

The arena is the largest Roman amphitheatre still in use and the Fondazione celebrates 98 Opera

The concert is enhanced by the participation of the Omani Opera Choir Group, an elite choir of Omani singers who have received a vigorous training in classical singing and represent the capacity and depth of Oman's cultural development.

Seasons and 107 years since the first edition of the Festival. The programme for the concert honouring Verdi touches on some of the most beautiful moments across his opera canon.

All visits to the opera house are conducted under the guidelines of the Supreme Committee responsible for measures to tackle the development of Covid-19. Social distancing is maintained throughout the building and the wearing of facemasks is mandatory.

For more details, download the app or check the ROHM website.



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Oman, Austria to boost expertise in digital field

The two sides reviewed ways of enhancing bilateral relations and cooperation in the economic field



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister received here on Wednesday Dr. Margarete Schrambock, Federal

Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs in Austria.

The two sides reviewed ways of enhancing bilateral relations and cooperation in the fields of economy, digital technology and exchanging expertise.

During the meeting, a presen-

tation was given on the Foreign Ministry's role in utilising knowledge and technology through its cooperation with Oman's regional and international partners.

The meeting was attended by a number of senior officials from both sides. -ONA

MEETING

Minister receives Pakistani special assistant to the PM

MUSCAT: Dr. Mahad Said Ba'Owain, Minister of Labour received here on Wednesday Sayed Zulfikar Bukhari, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The two sides reviewed areas of cooperation between the two countries in the field of labour and ways of enhancing them to serve the joint interests. -ONA



PROJECTS

FROM A1 Green energy is being used to power facilities

The team has also won the Best MENA Oil & Gas HSE Project at ADIPEC 2012, GCC and National Winner in the Sustainability Category at the MEED Quality Awards for Projects 2012, and the Global Water Award in 2011.

A similar project is being set up by French company Suez, in collaboration with two Omani oil and gas firms: Al Shawamikh Oil Services and Merit National Investment. The contract to Suez was also awarded by PDO, and involves the company setting up a wetland system to treat, on a daily basis, 40 million litres of water produced from oilfields in Rima, also located in the south of Oman.

"A series of basins will be built over a period of two years, seeded with different species of algae," said Cyril Courjaret, Suez CEO for Africa, Middle East, Near East, and Central Asia. "The produced water will circulate through these basins and become purified by biological actions, which consist of biodegradation by microalgae and bacteria.

"The succession of varying wetland environments, with different flow speeds and depths of water, develops these different mechanisms for pollutant absorption and will naturally treat the

produced water," he added. "Once cleaned, the produced water will be disposed into 300-hectare ponds to be naturally evaporated beneath the Omani desert sun."

Both local Omani companies have a 24.5 percent stake in the Rima treatment project, with Suez holding the remaining 51 percent. The joint venture between the three companies will continue over a 20-year period.

"Many current practices involve disposing of water by drilling wells deep into the surface for this purpose, however, these are not environmentally friendly," said Al Shawamikh CEO Dr Aflah Al Hadhrami. "However, this project for purifying water and diverting it towards environmentally friendly uses does not use any methods that are harmful for our environment.

"Furthermore, additional green energy is used to power our facilities," he added. "This will reduce the contamination of groundwater resources, and there is an option to purify water of this project which will be used for farming and agricultural purposes. We will also continue to expand and participate in similar projects in future."

Meanwhile, a new petroleum refining plant being built in Duqm

by Canada Business Holdings (CBH) will generate 99 percent less sulphur than the levels currently accepted by the oil and gas industry. Sulphur dioxide and other compounds can affect both people's health and the environment. At high concentrations, sulphur pollutants can harm trees and plants by damaging foliage, decreasing growth, and even contribute to acid rain, which can harm sensitive ecosystems.

The refinery marks CBH's first foray into Oman, and Moses Solomon, who serves as the company's chairman and CEO, says the availability of transportation fuel produced through environmentally sustainable methods will automatically create demand for it.

"We shall build and they will come," he said, speaking to Times of Oman. "The technology owned and applied by us makes the green and clean refinery, by definition, a natural destination of choice for the fuel oil global consumers.

"The refinery will produce the finest and best products made by the most advanced technology worldwide," added Solomon. "Our technology is not a copy from elsewhere, and we are proud to establish the refinery in Oman. We hope it becomes a landmark for Duqm."

AGREEMENT

Ministry, Asyad sign pact to fund scholarships



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation signed an agreement of cooperation with Asyad Group to fund scholarships in the logistics field for General Education Diploma (GED) graduates from the School Year 2021/2022.

The agreement was signed by Dr. Rahma Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi,

Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Eng. Abdulrahman Salem Al Hatmi, CEO of Asyad Group.

The agreement embodies the keenness of the two sides in enhancing cooperation in academic fields and providing the labour market with specialised graduates in logistics. -ONA

PAKISTAN SCHOOL

Election for BoDs held

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Pakistan School Muscat held an election for its Board of Directors 2022 in which Ameer Hamza was elected as chairman unopposed.

Additionally, Muhammad Qaiser Nawaz was elected as Vice Chairman and Muhammad Amer Irfan as Director of Finance.

Other elected members of the Board of Directors are Muhammad Irshad, Aamir Masood, Muhammad Moazzam Khan (President SMC, Pakistan School Musannah), Mukhtar Ali (President SMC, Pakistan School Nizwa).

The board consists of eight members, including the Chairman, Vice Chairman and senior principal to run the affairs of Pakistan Schools in Oman.

150TH SESSION

Oman takes part in WHO meeting

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, took part in the meeting of World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Executive Council's 150th session which kicked off via videoconferencing yesterday.

Oman's delegation was represented by Dr. Fatma Mohammed Al Ajmi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Financial and Administrative Affairs.

The meeting discussed the WHO's programme budget of the period 2020-2021 and the expected funding of proposed



programmes for the period 2022-2023.

The Executive Council is the authority tasked with executing

WHO decisions and policies. It also presents advice and recommendations on the international organisation's draft decisions. -ONA



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CORONAVIRUS CASES

Germany logs more than 100,000 COVID cases for first time

BERLIN: Germany reported 112,323 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, the latest new 24-hour record and the first daily tally of over 100,000. The national disease control body, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), published the figures early in the morning.

The country's weekly incidence rate has now reached 584.4 new infections per 100,000 people over a seven-day period, the RKI reported. The institute registered 239 deaths connected to COVID, a reduction from the 384 reported on the previous Wednesday.

The hospitalisation rate rose, but only slightly, to 3.17 people per 100,000 per week, versus 3.13 one week ago. The omicron variant was comparatively slow to start spreading in Germany by European standards, but in recent weeks, the country has experienced an increase in case numbers similar to those seen in several nearby countries such as France, the Netherlands and the UK. France, for instance, with roughly 15 million fewer inhabitants, reported more than 460,000 cases on Tuesday. Italy, with almost 60 million people to Germany's roughly 83 million, logged more than 228,000.

As of this week, omicron accounts for over 70% of new cases across Germany. Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said on RTL television late on Tuesday that he expected the latest omicron-fueled wave to peak around the middle of February. Germany has tightened restrictions in recent days to curb the spread of the virus, limiting access to bars and restaurants to those who have received their booster jabs or citizens who are tested. **ow**

Indonesia replaces ‘sinking’ Jakarta with Nusantara as new capital

The lawmakers approved the shift from Jakarta to Kalimantan, a jungle-covered area on the east of Borneo island

SINKING CAPITAL: President Joko Widodo first announced the capital would be relocated in 2019, citing concerns over Jakarta's environmental and economic sustainability.

JAKARTA: Indonesia on Tuesday replaced sinking capital Jakarta with Nusantara, as Jakarta is prone to flooding amid climate change.

The lawmakers approved the shift from Jakarta to Kalimantan -- a jungle-covered area on the east of Borneo island.

The new name translates to "archipelago" in the Indonesian language, reported CNN. Concerns over the sustainability of the congested and rapidly sinking political centre of Jakarta prompted the need for new capital, and the nation's House of Representatives officially passed a bill on Tuesday regarding the relocation.

"The relocation of the capital city to Kalimantan is based on several considerations, regional advantages, and welfare. With the vision of the birth of a new economic centre of gravity in the middle of the archipelago," said Suharso Monoarfa, the country's Minister of National Development Planning, according to Indonesia Parliament TV, reported CNN.

President Joko Widodo first announced the capital would be relocated in 2019, citing concerns over Jakarta's environmental and economic sustainability.

Jakarta sits on the swampy ground near the sea -- making it especially prone to flooding -- and is one of the fastest-sinking cities on Earth, according to the World Economic Forum. The former capital has been dropping into the Java Sea at an alarming rate due to the over-extraction of groundwater.

It is also one of the world's most overpopulated urban regions. It is home to more than 10 million people, with an estimated 30 million in the greater metropolitan area, according to the United Nations.

On Tuesday, the bill to relocate the capital was passed by approvals from eight fractions and only one fraction rejecting it, according to the chairman of Indonesia's House of Representatives Puan Maharani. Indonesia's Parliament comprises nine groups of political parties known as fractions, reported CNN.

Legislators have stressed the importance of careful consideration of the new development's environmental impact. According to data from the National Planning and Development Agency, the total land area for the new capital city will be around 256,143 hectares (around 2,561 square kilometres) -- almost all of it converted from the forest area. Indonesia owns the majority of Borneo, the world's third-largest island, with Malaysia and Brunei each holding parts of its northern region.

Sri Mulyani, Indonesia's Minister of Finance, said in a press conference on Tuesday there will be five stages of development in the new capital city.

The first stage is expected to begin in 2022 and run through 2024, with development expected to last until 2045, Monoarfa said, reported CNN.

Previous estimates have said the ambitious project would likely cost around 466 trillion rupiahs (USD 32 billion), CNN Indonesia reported. **ANI**

5G TECHNOLOGY

US telecom giants delay 5G after airlines' warning

WASHINGTON: Telecommunications firms AT&T and Verizon said on Tuesday they would again delay launching new 5G technology near key US airports after the country's largest airlines warned of severe disruption to operations if companies proceeded with rolling out the service.

The decision from the companies came as the Biden administration tried to broker an agreement between the telecoms giants and airlines over the 5G launch.

Biden seeks a permanent solution

The firms said they would still launch their 5G programs on Wednesday but would delay turning on fifth-generation cell towers within a 2-mile radius of runways. The two companies did not say for how long.

President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the decision by AT&T and Verizon "will avoid potentially devastating disruptions to passenger travel, cargo operations, and our economic recovery, while allowing more than 90% of wireless tower deployment to occur as scheduled." Biden added his administration would continue to explore ways of finding a permanent solution.

Airlines already halting flights

Some major international airlines, however, had already rushed to tweak schedules or even cancel flights to the US amid safety concerns on the eve of the rollout, despite AT&T and Verizon pausing parts of the deployment.

Emirates said it would suspend flights to nine destinations in the United States as of Wednesday January 19, the planned date for the widespread 5G rollout.

All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines said they would also cancel some flights.

AT&T -- the world's largest telecommunications company and the largest provider of mobile telephone services in the US -- and Verizon have already twice delayed the launch of their new C-Band 5G service, due to warnings from airlines and airplane manufacturers concerned that the new system might interfere with their ability to gauge altitude. **ow**

FIRST APPEARANCE

Taliban PM urges international recognition for government

KABUL: Taliban leader and acting prime minister of Afghanistan, Mohammad Hassan Akhund, called on the international community to recognise the Taliban government during a news conference in Kabul on Wednesday.

The broadcast was his first major appearance since assuming the role in September and came as the hardliner conservative administration struggles with a faltering economy and continued violence with other militant groups.

"I ask all governments, especially Islamic countries, that they should start recognition," Akhund -- who is one of the founders of the Taliban -- said at the conference.

No foreign government has yet recognized the Taliban as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan, although several have taken steps to normalize relations.

Taliban seeks development funds

The Taliban blames the current economic crisis on the freezing of billions of dollars' worth of Afghan funds by Western nations led by the United States.

Development aid, which once formed the basis of the central Asian country's economy, has also been cut off.

International aid is still entering the country to help fight the ongoing humanitarian crisis, but governments are wary of proping up the Taliban regime by providing the necessary support.

Western countries are still waiting to see if the Taliban lives up to its promise of not repeating some of the extreme brutalities it exercised during the group's last stint in power between 1996 and 2001. Women's rights and human rights in general are at the top of the agenda.

Long-term prospects

"Short-term aid is not the solution; we must try to find a way to solve problems fundamentally," Akhund said.

The economic woes and harsh winter have already plunged millions of Afghans into poverty.

"We do not want anyone's help. We don't want it for the officials. We want it for our public," the acting prime minister said.

"I call on Muslim countries to take the lead and recognize us officially. Then I hope we will be able to develop quickly," he added.

The Taliban seized power in August, following the withdrawal of most international troops. The seizure sparked a chaotic departure of remaining US forces as well as the evacuation of tens of thousands of Afghans who attempted to flee from the Taliban's restrictive and harsh rule. **ow**

TELECOMMUNICATION LINKS

Communications could be down for ‘4 weeks’ following Tonga volcanic eruption

NUKU'ALOFA: An underwater cable that provides the Pacific island nation of Tonga with most of its telecommunication links with the rest of the world will need at least a month to be repaired following the recent volcanic eruption, the New Zealand government said on Wednesday.

The Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai underwater volcano erupted on Saturday dispersing a thick layer of ash across large parts of the island nation and causing a destructive tsunami that was felt as far away as Peru, Chile and the United States.

Multiple complications

International mobile phone network operator Digicel said it had set up an interim connection via satellite, but this would be "limited and patchy, covering about 10% of usual capacity."

However, the lack of digital and telecom communications is not the only problem facing Tonga.

An aircraft laden with water, generators and hygiene kits is ready to fly from New Zealand, but cannot take off until the runway at the main island's international airport is cleared of a thick layer of volcanic ash. Australia also has aircraft ready to fly.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that a blanket of ash 5 to 10 centimeters (2 to 4 inches) thick had accumulated on the runway. This can prove dangerous to modern aircraft as the ash can gather inside the engines. "The ash has proven more difficult to clear than was expected," said Jonathan Veitch, Fiji-based UN coordinator on the crisis.

It is expected that the runway will be cleared later on Wednesday.

Aid missions on their way

New Zealand also dispatched two military ships on Tuesday that are expected to arrive on Friday.

The HMNZS Aotearoa is carrying bulk water supplies as well as a desalination plant capable of processing 70,000 liters of water a day. Survey and diving teams are also on their way onboard the HMNZS Wellington.

Another ship from Australia is also planning to set sail soon.

Coronavirus is yet another complication for the island, as Tonga is one of the few countries that has not recorded any COVID outbreaks, prompting fears about the importation of infections from outside aid. **ow**

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SPORTS



Oman showjumping championship set for January 28-29



SHOWJUMPING: The first round of a female riders competition will be held in preparation for a future GCC female horse riders championship.

This was unveiled yesterday at a press conference held on Olympic Committee and Sports Associations premises

MUSCAT: As many as 110 horse riders, representing 12 countries, will contest the second round of Oman Masters International Showjumping Championship,

which will be organised by Mojo Equestrian Centre (Barka) on 28 and 29 January 2022.

This was unveiled yesterday at a press conference held on Olympic Committee and Sports Associations premises in Al Ghubra (Muscat). Khalid Mohammed Al Saifi, Director of Equestrian Activities Department (Oman Equestrian Association), said that the one-star championship will be held in pursuance of a partnership between Oman Equestrian Association and private stables, both local and international. Al Saifi explained that the Association accords significance to Olympic sports, notable showjumping. He welcomed the competitors, wishing them an enjoyable experience.

Meanwhile, Hassan Mahboob Hashmani, CEO of the Showjumping Championship, said that the second round sees an increase in

participating countries representing Oman, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Britain, the United States, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Canada, Italy, Iraq and Morocco. The first round of a female riders championship will be held in preparation for a future GCC female horse riders championship, he added.

In his turn, Majid Hamad Al Hassani, Technical Director of the Showjumping Championship, said that the tournament will be held in accordance with the laws accredited by Oman Equestrian Association. This international championship paves the way for an Arab competition in November 2022, he said, noting that the event comes within the context of Group 7 contest in which the riders strive to gather points to qualify for international Olympics and championships. **ONA**

RETIREMENT



Sania Mirza reveals 2022 season will be her last

MELBOURNE: India's first women's tennis superstar, Sania Mirza on Wednesday announced her retirement plans, confirming that the 2022 season will be her last.

The Indian tennis player has won six Grand Slams and has reached the summit of the WTA doubles ranking. Mirza is also the first Indian to break into the top 30 in the WTA singles ranking. Mirza announced her retirement plans after her opening-round loss in women's doubles event at the ongoing Australian Open.

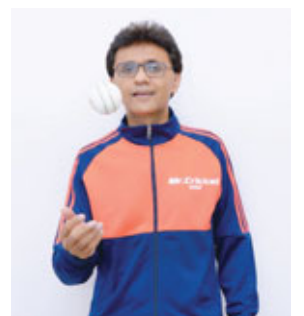
The 35-year-old after her match said: "There's a few reasons for it. It's not as simple as 'okay I'm not going to play'. I do feel my recovery is taking longer, I'm putting my 3-year-old son at risk by travelling so much with him, that's something I have to take into account. I think my body is wearing down. My knee was really hurting today and I'm not saying that's the reason we lost but I do think that it is taking time to recover as I'm getting older."

"Also for me to find that motivation everyday to come out. The energy is not the same anymore. There are more days than there used to be where I don't feel like doing that. I've always said that I will play until I enjoy that grind, the process which I'm not sure I'm enjoying as much anymore." **ANI**

COMMENTARY

Meet Manjot Kalra, the hero of India's Under-19 World Cup in 2018

Anis Sajan, Vice Chairman, Danube Group



India in the last one decade has had several cricketers who after their exposure in the Under-19 World Cup, have gone on to become big names like Yuvraaj Singh, Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill, Prithvi Shaw.

It was pleasure to interact with India's upcoming cricketing talent Manjot Kalra, whose claim to fame is his match-winning 101* against Australia in the 2018 ICC U19 World Cup final in New Zealand, an effort that gave India its record fourth title win.

Talking about the match against Pakistan, where he scored a significant 47, when I asked him about his experience of facing the fast bowling of Shaheen Shah Afridi, he said that it was the biggest platform for him. Given the history of both the countries, the match was all the more important as all the eyeballs would be on them. Manjot said, "It was our first international match and that too against Pakistan, the thought itself gave us goosebumps. However once we started playing, the nervousness settled down. And facing the bowling of Shaheen Shah Afridi was a great experience."

We then spoke about the match against Australia, when he scored a whopping 86. Kalra mentioned that he missed the century in that match by just 14 runs after getting out in the middle order. Nonetheless, his performance for the match was decent enough despite the wicket being flat. He made up for that missed century in the finals against Australia by scoring 101 off 102 balls, and clobbered

eight fours and three sixes to help India win the contest. Reminiscing about the iconic match, he said, the massive turnout of the Indians to watch them play their first World Cup final gave them the jitters and both he and his opening partner and team captain Prithvi Shaw took a while to settle on the pitch. "The biggest moment for me in that match was when the crowd was cheering for me at 99 and waiting with baited breath to score my first century," Manjot is the second Indian U19 player to score a century in the U19 World Cup.

Describing his feelings at the time, he said, "It was indeed a special feeling for me being applauded all the way to the dressing room but being hugged and appreciated by the Wall, our coach Rahul Dravid, was the highlight."

On being asked as to who was his favourite Indian player, he said it was none other than King Kohli and he would like to imbibe Kohli's fitness and temperament. I am sure with Dravid now being the head coach of team India and given Manjot's talent and temperament we'll be able to see him playing more games not only in IPL but also for Team India.

Here's wishing the birthday boy Manjot Kalra good luck for his future!

CRICKET ROUND-UP

Waqar steers IAS to exciting victory, Rafique stars in thrilling Sunlight win

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Rao Waqar's solid 57 not out helped IAS Engineering and Construction to a 3-wicket victory against AER International Trading and Contracting in a 50-over Premier Division League game at OC Turf 1 in Amerat on Friday.

AER struggled to score freely and was bowled out for 161 in the 47th over due to superb bowling by Haythim Bahar who claimed 3 for 12 and Khaled Rashid, Imran Muhammed and Waseem Akhtar who took two wickets each. Rubel Satter topscored with 28.

Riding on Waqar's marathon 103-ball 57, AER reached the target in 40.2 overs, scoring 162 for 7. Arsalan Bashir (36) and Hammad Mirza (35) were its other main scorers. Rubel Satter bagged 2 for 22.

Brief Scores (Premier Division 50 overs): AER 161 all out in 46.5 overs (Rubel Satter 28 - 2x4, Haythim Bahar 3-12, Rashid Khalid 2-32, Imran Muhammed 2-37, Waseem Akhtar 2-26) lost to IAS 162 for 7 in 40.2 overs (Rao Waqar 57 - 4x4, Arsalan Bashir 36 - 5x4, Hammad Mirza 35 - 4x4, Aamir Kaleem 2-45, Rubel Satter 2-22) by 3 wickets.

Rafique stars in Sunlight win

Rafique Mujib's fluent 53 off 39 aided Sunlight to a nail-biting 9-run win over Orient Travels Abu Amin Metal in an A Division T20 League match at OC Turf 2 on Saturday.

Apart from Rafique's top knock, Nasir Siddiqui (38) and Ishtiaq Muhammed (36) batted well too, helping Sunlight to 172 for 5 in 20 overs. Tanveer Rana and Tauseef Ahmad claimed two wickets each.

Orient Travels fought hard to reach 153 for 7 in 19 overs, requiring 19 runs to win in the final over. Veteran Hafiz Irfan save the day for Sunlight, conceding only 10 runs and restricting Orient Travels to 163 for 7. Adil Khan topscored with 40. Rajesh Devashya and Ilyas Afreedi picked up two



wickets each.

Brief Scores (A Division T20): Sunlight 172 for 5 in 20 overs (Rafique Mujib 53 - 4x4, 2x6, Nasir Siddiqui 38 - 2x4, 3x6, Ishtiaq Muhammed 36 - 1x4, 1x6, Tanveer Rana 2-24, Tauseef Ahmad 2-31) beat Orient Travels Abu Amin Metal 163 for 7 in 20 overs (Adil Khan 40 - 4x4, Rajesh Devashya 2-25, Ilyas Afreedi 2-29) by 9 runs.

Avinash, Neil shine for Royal Gulf

Excellent all-round show by Avinash Sharma and brilliant batting by Neil Paily were the highlights of Royal Gulf's huge 106-run victory against OCT Al Nahdha in an F Division T20 League game at OAC 3 ground in Seeb on Friday.

Royal Gulf posted a big 198 for 7 on the board thanks to top knocks from Neil (59), Avinash (45) and Vineesh Raj (38). Sharif Al Balushi claimed three wickets whereas Arif Al Balushi bagged two.

OCT Al Nahdha failed to make a match of it, collecting a disappointing 92 for 8 in 20 overs. Tibin Thomas and Avinash bowled exceptionally well, taking three wickets each.

Brief Scores (F Division): Royal Gulf 198 for 7 in 20 overs (Neil

Paily 59 - 8x4, Avinash Sharma 45 - 7x4, Vineesh Raj 38 - 6x4, Sharif Al Balushi 3-40, Arif Al Balushi 2-14) beat OCT Al Nahdha 92 for 8 in 20 overs (Zakariya Bakhsh 21 - 2x4, Tibin C Thomas 3-24, Avinash Sharma 3-14) by 106 runs.

Brief Scores (Women's League): Wadi Kabir Women 65 for 5 in 20 overs (Shreya Suresh 20 - 2x4) lost to Muscat Women 66 for 2 in 7 overs (Bhakti Shetty 13) by 8 wickets.

Brief Scores (Junior League U19): Pakistan School Muscat U19 104 all out in 36 overs (Abdullah Iftikhar 24 - 2x4, 1x6, Muhammad Asad 24 - 4x4, Aditya Gurumukhi 2-2, Arjun Suresh 2-21, Glen Alexei 2-14) thrashed by Indian School Muscat U-19 105 for 0 in 11.4 overs (Aditya Gurumukhi 54 - 7x4, Aditya Girish 27 - 3x4) by 10 wickets.

Brief Scores (Junior League U16): Indian School Al Seeb 228 for 6 in 30 overs (Aneek Chakrovorty 111 - 7x4, Vishwas 55 - 2x4, Kavish Rajeshkumar 3-39, Hemanath Balasubramanian 2-27) trounced ISWK-A 160 all out in 26.5 overs (Hemakesh Balasubramanian 43 - 8x4, Atharvashrikant Akojwar 41 - 5x4, Rajesh 2-22, Vaishnav Raj 2-27) by 68 runs.

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MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,216.82 points, up by 0.53 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.51 per cent at 514.60 points. Oman & Emirates Holding, up 8.77 per cent, was the top gainer while, SMN Power Holding down 8.77 per cent, was the top loser.

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الخدمات المالية الإسلامية

Oman Data Park committed to boost digital transformation by using AI

The workshop targeting all government entities came within the framework of Oman Data Park's national efforts that aim at contributing to accelerating the Sultanate digital transformation, through utilising the Artificial Intelligence applications

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman Data Park (ODP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), organised a workshop on Nebula AI at Muscat Novotel Hotel.

It highlighted the Sultanate's infrastructure readiness for Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an embodiment of Oman's Vision 2040, and the digital transformation strategy announced by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, which aim at promoting and accelerating the digital transformation of the

government sectors and services in Oman in line with the global technical development.

Above 30 ministries, authorities and establishments participated in the workshop. The workshop targeting all government entities came within the framework of ODP's national efforts that aim at contributing to accelerating the Sultanate digital transformation, through utilising the AI and the cost-effective and efficient support available through Oman Data Park's Nebula AI infrastructure which is powered by Nvidia and hosted in Oman.

The delivered content of the workshop included an AI transformation roadmap for government



Maqbool Al Wahaibi



Khalil Al Maawali

entities, their cyber security solutions, a framework for creating an AI project within the public sector and highlighted the action of the national programme for adopting Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies in the Sultanate.

The holding of the workshop comes in light of the Sultanate's interest in accelerating the adoption of Artificial Intelligence, while the Sultanate has designated a National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies in the year 2020, within the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology.

In his welcoming speech at the

opening of the workshop, Eng. Maqbool Al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, stressed that the holding of this workshop is considered as an embodiment of Oman Data Park's efforts to contribute to the success of the Sultanate's National Program for Artificial Intelligence. Nebula AI aims at enhancing the productivity of the targeted sectors for economic diversification, improving the human resources capabilities in Artificial Intelligence, adopting Artificial Intelligence applications in the infrastructure sectors, and the governance of Artificial Intelligence applications and advanced

technologies in accordance with a human-centred vision.

ODP's partnership with Nvidia gives the ability for Government and private entities in Oman to avail world's best processing equipment and technologies in the field of AI. Oman now has the best Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Deep Learning capabilities online and hosted in Oman and ODP can tailor the required AI applications for different verticals. Furthermore, the given technologies are available on an OPEX model enabling cost-effective implementation for the entity, and ODP also offers plug and play AI solutions for many verticals.

Al-Wahaibi added that ODP's keenness to provide its services to the public sector is backed by the confidence of government entities in the professionalism of Oman Data Park in providing various solutions related to Artificial Intelligence, Cloud services, Web hosting, and Cyber Security services, including their Security Operations Centre services and Network Operations Centre services which are operated around the clock, seven days a week.

In the same context, Al Wahaibi affirmed ODP's capabilities to provide its specialised professional services to the various administrative units of government agen-

cies in the Sultanate in the cloud services fields and security assessment services, that aim at identifying, evaluating technical weaknesses, and setting preventive measures to protect them from external and internal cyber threats related to information technology.

Eng. Khalil Al Maawali, a member of the National Programme for Artificial Intelligence team, gave a visual presentation highlighting the Sultanate's integrated national action plan for Artificial Intelligence and advanced technologies. His session explained the activities under this national action plan including, the setting of policies and legislation to adopt AI and advanced technologies, including capacity-building, research, innovation, industrialisation, investment, and supporting the establishment of emerging companies.

The integrated national action plan for AI and advanced technologies in the Sultanate also includes coordination and cooperation between stakeholders in the public, private and academic sectors, to share requirements related to AI and advanced technologies, integrating with existing projects and initiatives, and coordinating with local and advanced international organisations and bodies related to the topics concerned.

PRICE

Oil hits 7-year high as tight supply bites

NEW YORK: Oil prices on Tuesday climbed to their highest since 2014 as investors worried about global political tensions involving major producers such as the United Arab Emirates and Russia that could exacerbate the already tight supply outlook.

The risk added a premium to prices during the session. Brent crude futures rose \$1.03, or 1.2 per cent, to settle at \$87.51 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures ended \$1.61, or 1.9 per cent, higher at \$85.43 a barrel.

Both benchmarks touched their highest since October 2014, and some Opec sources say \$100-per-barrel oil is not out of reach.

UAE oil company ADNOC said it had activated business continuity plans to ensure uninterrupted supply of products to its local and international customers after an incident at its Mussafah fuel depot.

Russia has built up a large troop presence near Ukraine's border, stoking fears of invasion. US and German officials have discussed ways to deter Russia, which could include halting the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to central Europe.

At the same time, producers within the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries are struggling to pump at their allowed capacities under the Opec+ agreement with Russia and allies to add 400,000 barrels per day each month.

Opec on Tuesday stuck to its forecast for robust growth in world oil demand in 2022 despite the Omicron coronavirus variant and expected interest rate hikes. -BNA

AGREEMENT

Omantel, SQU cooperate to boost digital economy

MUSCAT: Omantel, the first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider in the Sultanate, announced that it will continue supporting scientific research and innovation in the Sultanate by extending its research partnership with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

The telecom company will lend its weight, for the fifth consecutive year, to the research scholarship initiative, the Omantel Research Fund. The fund will cover deserving and

pathbreaking research topics in the field of ICT and Nanotechnology.

The agreement was signed by His Highness Sayyid Dr Fahad bin Al Julanda Al Said Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and Talal bin Said Al Mamari CEO Omantel.

The support is part of Omantel's CSR Pillar, 'Education' which aims at contributing to a digital competent society in which everyone has equitable access to quality education, including technical and

vocational skills. It aligns with the company's commitment to the nation and aims to support Oman's march toward a knowledge-based economy.

The funding by Omantel will contribute to the government's efforts to boost Oman's ranking in Unesco's Global Innovation's University/Industry Research Collaboration Index, Knowledge Creation Index and the Gross Expenditure on R&D Financed by Business Enterprise as a Percentage of Total

Gross Expenditure on R&D.

The support also contributes towards the country's effort in meeting United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 9, which aims to spur innovation and drive sustainable industries that work for everyone, and Goal 17 related to partnerships, especially the public-private partnerships, and indirectly towards Goal 4 on the quality of education.

Saba bint Said Al Busaidi, Senior Manager Corporate Affairs at

Omantel said, "Omantel is proud to be an enabler in Oman's economic growth. Omantel is always looking for opportunities for contributing to the country's intrinsic and global objectives in every sphere. The association with SQU in this regard has been a long and fruitful one, and we are confident that such initiatives will act as a catalyst for more and more people to take up relevant research, the results of which can be applied to boost efficiency, productivity and national growth."

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MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Oman & Emirates Holding, up 8.77 per cent, was the top gainer while, SMN Power Holding down 8.77 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,216.82 points, up by 0.53 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.51 per cent at 514.60 points. Oman & Emirates Holding, up 8.77 per cent, was the top gainer while, SMN Power Holding down 8.77 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Al Omaniya Financial Services were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded while Omantel were the most active in terms of turnover. A total number of 806 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR3.38 million, with more than 16.6 million shares changing hands. Out of 46 traded securities, 23 advanced, 5 declined and 18 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net buyers for OMR259,000 while

GCC and Arab investors were net sellers for OMR252,000 followed by foreign investors for OMR7,000 worth of shares. Financial Index closed at 6772.42 points, up by 0.72 per cent. Prices of Oman & Emirates Investment, Muscat Finance, Taageer Finance, Al Sharqia Investment, and Al Omaniya Financial Services were up by 8.77 per cent, 5.26 per cent, 3.8 per cent, 3.33 per cent, and 3.03 per cent respectively. Industrial Index closed at 5914.89 points, 0.69 per cent. Prices of National Aluminium, Jazeera Steel Products, Al Maha Ceramics, Oman Flour Mills, and Oman Cement were up by 3.54 per cent, 0.49 per cent, 0.45 per cent, 0 per cent, and 0 per cent respectively. Services Index was by 0.43 per cent before closing at 1659.93 points. — United Securities

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

INDICES							
Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff.	Diff%	
MSX 30 INDEX	4,240.74	4,217.22	4,239.04	4,216.82	22.21	0.53	
FINANCIAL INDEX	6,775.14	6,725.94	6,772.42	6,724.19	48.23	0.72	
Industry Index	5,953.37	5,914.89	5,914.89	5,955.97	-41.08	-0.69	
Services Index	1,659.93	1,654.06	1,659.93	1,652.78	7.15	0.43	
MSX Shariah Index	516.23	514.06	516.23	514.60	1.63	0.32	
MSX TR INDEX	5,103.12	5,074.82	5,101.07	5,074.34	26.73	0.53	

Trading Summary							
Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
16,600,035	3,388,209	806	22,412,738,489	23	5	18	46

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PD	LAST BD	LAST OFFER	PDA VALUE	MARKET CAP	
REGULAR MARKET																
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	503,076	29,969	27	0.059	0.060	0.059	0.060	0.057	0.003	5.263	0.059	0.059	0.060	0.100	18,428,780
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIA INV	149,911	13,915	29	0.092	0.093	0.092	0.093	0.090	0.003	3.333	0.092	0.092	0.093	0.100	8,570,000
OM0000002077	AL OMANIYA FIN S	2,391,867	324,290	81	0.132	0.137	0.132	0.136	0.132	0.004	3.030	0.136	0.136	0.140	0.100	39,703,183
OM0000002200	AHLI BANK	125,000	15,239	5	0.122	0.122	0.121	0.122	0.119	0.003	2.521	0.122	0.115	0.122	0.100	237,858,211
OM0000001525	OMAN INVST&FIN	1,888,294	300,818	97	0.180	0.183	0.159	0.181	0.159	0.002	1.258	0.159	0.159	0.160	0.100	38,157,000
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	30,000	2,728	5	0.091	0.091	0.090	0.091	0.090	0.001	1.111	0.091	0.089	0.091	0.100	18,200,000
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	500,000	188,000	10	0.376	0.376	0.376	0.376	0.374	0.002	0.535	0.376	0.368	0.376	0.100	244,755,030
OM0000003036	OMAN TELECOM	675,880	526,098	14	0.776	0.780	0.776	0.780	0.776	0.004	0.515	0.780	0.778	0.780	0.100	565,000,000
OM0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PROD.	187,470	76,430	17	0.406	0.406	0.406	0.406	0.406	0.002	0.493	0.406	0.398	0.410	0.100	50,958,368
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	9,500	4,218	2	0.444	0.444	0.444	0.444	0.442	0.002	0.452	0.444	0.438	0.444	0.100	24,420,000
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SER	882,535	395,315	33	0.448	0.448	0.444	0.448	0.446	0.002	0.448	0.444	0.440	0.448	0.100	105,911,680
OM0000002786	BANK MUSCAT	455,504	239,801	18	0.536	0.538	0.536	0.536	0.524	0.002	0.382	0.528	0.526	0.528	0.100	1,880,173,741
OM0000001400	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	33,356	23,616	4	0.708	0.708	0.708	0.708	0.708	0.000	0.000	0.708	0.704	0.000	0.100	111,510,000
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	9,000	2,756	3	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.000	0.000	0.306	0.304	0.308	0.100	204,519,620
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	7,975	1,946	2	0.244	0.244	0.244	0.244	0.244	0.000	0.000	0.244	0.236	0.243	0.100	80,732,941
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	212,700	94,439	9	0.444	0.444	0.444	0.444	0.444	0.000	0.000	0.444	0.430	0.444	0.100	97,680,000
OM0000003398	SOHAR INT. BANK	1,065,200	114,797	34	0.114	0.115	0.114	0.114	0.114	0.000	0.000	0.114	0.114	0.115	0.100	340,867,101
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	6,340	805	3	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.128	-0.001	-0.781	0.127	0.127	0.130	0.100	10,795,000
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDSTR	200,700	200,700	16	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.010	-0.010	-0.990	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.100	89,700,000
OM0000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	518,752	104,136	25	0.205	0.205	0.199	0.201	0.217	-0.016	-7.373	0.199	0.199	0.204	0.100	40,200,000
Total	20	9,772,990	2,660,016	434												

Parallel Market																
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	22,431	1,386	4	0.062	0.062	0.060	0.062	0.057	0.005	8.772	0.060	0.060	0.062	0.100	7,556,250
OM0000003281	TAGEER FINANCE	1,702,149	140,284	82	0.080	0.083	0.080	0.082	0.079	0.003	3.797	0.083	0.083	0.083	0.100	20,794,380
OM0000001319	ALUMINIUM PROD.	208,452	36,094	39	0.114	0.121	0.114	0.117	0.113	0.004	3.540	0.118	0.118	0.120	0.100	3,927,860
OM0000004925	ALBATHINAH POWER	65,000	3,185	10	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.048	0.001	2.083	0.049	0.048	0.049	0.100	33,069,484
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	450,000	22,050	12	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.048	0.001	2.083	0.049	0.048	0.050	0.100	33,069,484
OM0000001152	OMAN NAT ENG	1,091,477	116,271	63	0.106	0.108	0.106	0.107	0.105	0.002	1.905	0.106	0.106	0.107	0.100	13,910,000
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	288,770	15,857	18	0.059	0.059	0.059	0.059	0.058	0.001	1.724	0.059	0.059	0.060	0.100	20,599,520
OM0000007407	DHOOFAR GENERATING	281,438	16,857	27	0.067	0.068	0.067	0.067	0.066	0.001	1.515	0.067	0.067	0.068	0.100	14,890,080
OM0000004788	MADINA TAKAFUL	243,000	23,313	12	0.095	0.096	0.095	0.096	0.095	0.001	1.053	0.096	0.094	0.096	0.100	16,800,000
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	441,648	44,497	18	0.100	0.101	0.099	0.101	0.100	0.001	1.000	0.101	0.099	0.102	0.100	223,932,256
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	1,059,000	232,988	16	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.210	0.002	0.952	0.212	0.212	0.215	0.100	344,700,657
OM0000001178	MUSCAT GASES	249	41	1	0.163	0.163	0.163	0.161	0.161	0.000	0.100	0.163	0.000	0.163	0.100	4,830,000
OM0000001301	DHOOFAR CATTLE	5,128	323	1	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.000	0.000	0.063	0.059	0.065	0.100	5,093,550
OM0000001317	HSCB BANK OMAN	415,000	42,962	17	0.104	0.104	0.104	0.104	0.104	0.000	0.000	0.104	0.104	0.104	0.100	208,032,530
OM0000002549	BANK DHOOFAR	57,235	7,269	5	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.000	0.000	0.127	0.125	0.128	0.100	380,536,632
OM0000003125	GLOBAL INV H	36,770	2,537	5	0.069	0.069	0.069	0.069	0.069	0.000	0.000	0.069	0.069	0.070	0.100	13,800,000
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEER	23,000	1,728	4	0.075	0.076	0.075	0.075	0.075	0.000	0.000	0.076	0.074	0.076	0.100	15,223,863
OM0000004735	SEMBOCORP SALALAH	298	24	1	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.080	0.080	0.000	0.000	0.079	0.072	0.079	0.100	76,363,756
OM0000004776	TAKAFUL OMAN	5,000	355	2	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.071	0.064	0.071	0.100	7,100,000
OM0000005260	OMAN ARAB BANK	10,000	1,600	1	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.000	0.000	0.160	0.000	0.167	0.100	267,103,600
OM0000005983	PHOENIX POWER	113,800	5,690	5	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.000	0.000	0.050	0.050	0.051	0.100	73,130,073
OM0000006912	ARHIA INSURANCE	4,000	1,394	3	0.326	0.326	0.326	0.326	0.326	0.000	0.000	0.326	0.326	0.346	0.100	32,600,000
OM0000007084	MCT DESALINATE	12,000	1,044	3	0.087	0.087	0.087	0.087	0.087	0.000	0.000	0.087	0.087	0.089	0.100	13,532,885
OM0000001566	OMAN FISHERIES	89,100	4,722	5	0.053	0.053	0.053	0.053	0.055	-0.002	-3.636	0.053	0.053	0.055	0.100	6,625,000
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	104,100	5,413	27	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.057	-0.005	-8.772	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.100	10,381,051
Total	25	6,817,045	727,783	371												

B2B PLATFORM

Airport Show to showcase innovative products

DUBAI: A diverse range of technologically advance and innovative products will be displayed at the Airport Show 2022 in Dubai. The 21st edition of the event will be held from 17th to 19th May at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), according to a press release issued by the organisers on Wednesday. The world's largest airport industry B2B platform, organised by Reed Exhibitions Middle East,

will provide insights into the investments planned by the world's airports until 2040. Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority and Chairman of Emirates Airline & Group, and Patron of Airport Show, said, "The Airport Show has provided over the past two decades products and services to create most advanced aviation facilities in the world."

The press release noted that airports have kept up competing by continuously adopting cutting-edge technologies for a completely frictionless travelling experience. Innovative technologies and products are providing a wider degree of agility and flexibility for the airports as the number of passengers are gradually increasing and they prefer completion of their baggage handling operations outside the airports. -WAM

FUNDING

Opec Fund extends \$35 million loan to Vietnam to support SMEs

VIENNA: The Opec Fund is providing a \$35 million loan to Southeast Asia Commercial Joint Stock Bank (SeABank) to facilitate access to finance for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and women-owned businesses, and to promote climate funding for a sustainable economic recovery in Vietnam. The financing is part of the Opec Fund's COVID-19 response and will help bridge the funding gap for SMEs as well as contribute to environmental sustainability. Opec Fund Director-General Abdulhamid Alkhalifa commented, "We are pleased to partner with SeABank and join forces with international lenders to provide financing to support Vietnam's sustainable economic growth. Increasing access to finance for SMEs, especially women-owned businesses, will help reduce inequalities in line with the Sustainable Development Goals." SMEs account for 98 per cent of all enterprises and 50 per cent of employment in Vietnam and are the backbone of the country's economy. Women-owned businesses have been disproportionately affected. -WAM

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IMPROVING READING SKILLS THROUGH ACTION VIDEO GAMES

During a recent study, an Italian-Swiss team demonstrated that children’s reading skills can be improved through a novel child-friendly action video game. The findings of the study were published in the journal Nature Human Behaviour. Decoding letters into sound is a key point in learning to read but is not enough to master it. “Reading calls upon several other essential mechanisms that we don’t necessarily think about, such as knowing how to move our eyes on the page or how to use our working memory to link words together in a coherent sentence,” points out Daphne Bavelier, a professor in the Psychology Section of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (FPSE) at the UNIGE. “These other skills, such as vision, the deployment of attention, working memory, and cognitive flexibility, are known to be improved by action video games”, explains Angela Pasqualotto, first author of this study, which is based on her PhD thesis at the Department of Psychology and Cognitive Science of the University of Trento under the direction of Professors Venuti and De Angeli.

A CHILD-FRIENDLY ACTION VIDEO GAME TO SUPPORT LEARNING
With this in mind, a video game was designed that combines action video games with mini games that train different executive functions, such as working memory, inhibition and cognitive flexibility, functions that are called upon during reading. “The universe of this game is an alternative world in which the child, accompanied by his Raku, a flying creature, must carry out different missions to save planets and progress in the game”, Angela Pasqualotto adds. The idea is to reproduce the components of an action game, without incorporating violence, so that it is suitable for young children. “For example, the Raku flies through a meteor shower, moving around to avoid those or aiming at them to weaken their impact, while collecting useful resources for the rest of the game, a bit like what you find in action video games.” The scientists then worked with 150 Italian schoolchildren aged 8 to 12, divided into two groups: the first one played the video game developed by the team, and the second one played Scratch, a game that teaches children how to code. Both games require attentional control and executive functions, but in different manners.

The action video game requires children to perform tasks within a time limit such as remembering a sequence of symbols or responding only when the Raku makes a specific sound while increasing the difficulty of these tasks according to the child’s performance. Scratch, the control game, requires planning, reasoning and problem solving. Children must manipulate objects and logical structures to establish the desired programming sequence. “First, we tested the children’s ability to read words, non-words and paragraphs, and also we conducted an attention test that measures the child’s attentional control, a capacity we know is trained by action video games,” explains Daphne Bavelier. The children then followed the training with either the action video game or the control game, for six weeks, two hours a week under supervision at school. Children were tested at school by clinicians of the Laboratory of Observation Diagnosis and Education (UNITN). **LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENT IN READING SKILLS** Shortly after the end of the training, the scientists repeated the tests on both groups of children. “We found a 7-fold improvement in attentional control in the children who played the action video game compared to the control group”, says Angela Pasqualotto. Even more remarkably, the research team observed a clear enhancement in reading, not only in terms of reading speed, but also in accuracy, whereas no improvement was noted for the control group. This improvement in literacy occurs even though the action video game does not require any reading activity. “What is particularly interesting about this study is that we carried out three further assessment tests at 6 months, 12 months and 18 months after training. On each occasion, the trained children performed better than the control group, which proves that these improvements were sustained,” Angela Pasqualotto says. Moreover, the grades in Italian of the trained children became significantly better over time, showing a virtuous improvement in learning ability. “The effects are thus long-term, in line with the action video game strengthening the ability to learn how to learn,” says Daphne Bavelier. Within the framework of the NCCR Evolving Language and in collaboration with Irene Altarelli (co-author of the article and researcher at LaPsyDE, University of Paris), the game will be adapted into German, French and English. “When reading, decoding is more or less difficult depending on the language. Italian, for example, is very transparent - each letter is pronounced - whereas French and English are quite opaque, resulting in rather different learning challenges. Reading in opaque languages requires the ability to learn exceptions, to learn how a variety of contexts impacts pronunciation and demands greater reliance on memorisation,” comments Irene Altarelli. Will the benefits of action video games on reading acquisition extend to such complex learning environments as reading in French or English? This is the question that this study will help answer. In addition, the video game will be available entirely at home, remotely, as will the administration of reading and attention tests, in order to complement school lessons, rather than taking time out of school hours. - ANI



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ROUND-UP

Redtag empowers women to experiment with latest trends

A'anika, Redtag's latest capsule range, strikes a delicate balance between modern trends and traditional ensembles, empowering fashion-forward women to gear up for the opening of the GCC social scene

DUBAI: Redtag, the region's leading value fashion and homeware brand, has launched A'anika, a ladieswear range of modest apparel. A'anika is Redtag's earnest attempt to align with the socio-cultural evolution and progressive reforms, geared towards empowering women.

Homegrown value fashion brand Redtag has been championing modest ladieswear in the region for quite some time, but with A'anika, it is curating a signature collection. This initiative is expected to resonate with the fashion-conscious generation, especially at a time when the Middle East is reopening its outdoor activities after a prolonged closure. A'anika collection is currently available in selected stores and through WhatsApp shopping across the region.

"A dedication to Redtag's women customers, A'anika means "unique" in Arabic, and "gracious",



"brave", and "song" in other languages – which are metaphorical of our female clientele. This range is the by-product of multiple customer feedback we have received in recent months. Women shoppers sought a dedicated range of refreshingly modest apparel. So, after a fair amount of market study and interpretations of international high fashion, we are finally catering to their needs, just in time for the post-pandemic reopening. We also have a great A'anika collection lined up for Spring and Ramadan," said Jitender Advani,

Head of Fashion, Redtag.

As outdoor activities like cinema, mall experiences, office work, and dining resume, the need for variety and options in clothing has amplified in the region. Women, in particular, are seeking a sense of novelty and designs that are in sync with the region's continued reforms in dress codes. A'anika offers a complete outfit solution with layering options. The collection comprises blouses, trousers, dresses, and scarves that are both fashionable and comfortable.

On-trend silhouettes in jack-

ets and midi dresses, loose-fitting collections in earthy and neutral tones, everyday formal-casual combinations of beige, white, and black tops with complimentary striking prints are amongst the highlights. The A'anika range also accompanies footwear and accessories, including scarves, bags, and jewellery. Redtag has particularly emphasised the fabric quality, comfort, cuts, and lines, giving the collection a luxe feel, all while upholding its reputation for value pricing and affordability.

"At Redtag, we believe in timing;

we want to bring the right product to the right people at the right time. Progressive reforms in the GCC, combined with the systematic resumption of outdoor activities, created an opportune moment for the launch of A'anika. It is Redtag's way of celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women," added Jitender.

The recently launched hyper-convenience services like 'Anytime-Anywhere Exchange', 'Find Your Size', 'Fashion Stylists', and 'Free Home Delivery' testify to the brand's customer-centric ap-

proach. Redtag has even introduced WhatsApp shopping, besides expanding its eCommerce presence in the KSA. With these first-to-market services in the Middle East, along with its tiered loyalty programme – RT Rewards – which boasts over 15 million members, Redtag continues to cement its position as the leading value fashion and homeware brand in the region. Its contributions were recognised by Retail ME through the 'Most Admired Brand Campaign of the Year' award 2021.

POPULAR SPORTING EVENT

Less than a month to wait until Al Mouj Muscat Marathon returns

MUSCAT: The wait for the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon is nearly over, with just less than a month to go. Over the weekend of 11-12 February 2022, the runners will take their place on the starting line at Al Mouj Muscat and test their endurance.

Sabco Sports have teamed up with UFC Gym Oman to offer free public training sessions every Friday morning in the build-up to the race and runners of all ages have taken this opportunity to learn from professionals and improve their fitness. Taking place from 8am-9am at ABQ Seeb International School, coaches have given hundreds of runners help with training, nutrition and diet, and tips on how to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

"Excitement is building for the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon 2022 and we are delighted with the number of people across the world that have taken up the challenge to compete this year. The entire weekend will be a fun-filled festival of running which brings together communities from across the country, local schools and colleges, businesses and teams to support each other from start to finish," says Nic Cartwright, Managing Director of Sabco Sports, organisers of the event.

He added, "Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier lifestyle destination, is the perfect venue for the race and we have several surprises in store to delight spectators, visitors and guests throughout the weekend as we celebrate the dedication of the athletes and welcome the return of Oman's most popular sporting event."



The forthcoming event at Al Mouj Muscat features five different race distances to cater to a variety of fitness levels and experiences and each category has

received a very good turnout in terms of registrations. The 42km marathon 21.2km half-marathon and 10km runs are certified by world-running organisation

AIMS, aligning the event with International Association of Athletic Federation (IAAF) standards and adding to competitive runners' rankings. Participants in all races

will receive a commemorative t-shirt and a finisher's medal to mark their achievement.

Registration is still open and places are available in all races.

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ROUND-UP

Lexus launches all-new 2022 NX



The event offered viewers the convenience of viewing the launch of the NX from the comfort of their homes or wherever they were

MUSCAT: At a Lexus digital event, Saud Bahwan Automotive, unveiled the all-new 2022 Lexus NX, recently.

The event offered viewers the convenience of viewing the launch of the NX from the comfort of their homes or wherever they were. The event premiered on all the Lexus Oman social media pages on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Joining the event and sharing his views via a special video message was Chief Engineer Takeaki Kato. He said, “The new NX is designed to meet the diverse lifestyles of customers around the world with a complete renewal of its key strengths, including electrification, design, driving performance and advanced technologies to broaden its appeal.”

The NX programme has brought about a major change in Lexus’ ap-



proach to new vehicle development, applying digital modelling and computer techniques for smarter engineering that can achieve a higher level of quality assurance.

Lexus design enters a new period of evolution with the launch of the new NX while remaining true to its core L-finesse philosophy. At the front, the hallmark Lexus spindle grille plays a more integral role in the design. The elegant shape of the bonnet also supports good forward visibility from the driver’s seat. L-shaped daytime running lights are positioned above the headlights and have seamless surface illumination with a fade-out function when the driver uses

the turn indicators. The standard headlights are bi-beam LED-type with Automatic High Beam (AHB).

The rearview is distinguished by new L-shaped all-LED light clusters, and Lexus’ signature L-shaped light bar that spans the width of the vehicle. On the tailgate, the Lexus emblem has been replaced with the “LEXUS” name, creating a more modern and simpler look and strengthening the car’s identity.

The NX F SPORT models feature dark chrome exterior details, a mesh grille and 20-inch alloy wheels with a 10-spoke design inspired the wheels used on Lexus’ LC flagship coupe. There are also

new front and rear bumper designs with larger side vents cut into the front bumper. The meters on high-grade models are High Definition and their appearance can be customised; there is an exclusive meter design for the F SPORT models, featuring a tachometer and speedometer. Touch tracer switches on the steering wheel can be used to change or update the contents of the multi-information display without having to look away from the road ahead.

The new NX is the first model to feature Lexus’ Tazuna concept for the driver’s cockpit. It focuses on giving the driver direct, intuitive control of the vehicle, follow-

ing the principle of “hands on the wheel, eyes on the road”.

To help keep the driver’s attention focused on the road ahead, the primary sources of information – the multi-information display, multimedia screen, gauges, meters and optional head-up display – are grouped so they can be read at-a-glance.

Passengers enjoy a greater sense of space with the feeling of a luxurious lounge. Applying the Vital x Tech concept has created a cabin that is innovative, elegant and practical. The design, quality and finish exemplify the Lexus traditions of omotenashi hospitality and Takumi artisan craftsmanship, using

fine-quality materials and precision methods to ensure everything you see, touch and hear is perfect. Cabin illumination can be adjusted for ambient lighting in the footwells, door panels and centre console.

The NX is the first Lexus model to be fitted with an e-latch electronic door release system. This allows the door to be opened with a smooth, simple and near-silent motion.

Lexus has introduced two new petrol engines in the NX range, a 2.4-litre turbo and a naturally aspirated 2.5 litre. The 2.4-turbo, featured in the new NX 350, is engineered for high output and high torque, giving the driver a sense of flowing, uninterrupted power. Maximum power of 275 hp produced at 6,000 rpm, with peak 430 Nm of torque delivered from 1,700 – 3,600 rpm. The turbocharger is a new, high-efficiency unit that achieves power performance, fuel economy and emissions compliance with quiet operation. A new 8-speed Direct Shift automatic transmission replaces the 6-speed transmission previously featured in the NX. The 2.5-litre engine featured in the new NX’s hybrid-electric system is tuned to produce a combined output of 240 hp. The CVT transmission enhances acceleration performance and combines a smooth drive with excellent fuel efficiency.

Those wishing to catch up on the most happening digital launch event, that they missed, can view the event on Lexus Oman social media channels. The all-new Lexus NX vehicle is now on display at the Lexus showrooms.

ATTRACTIVE INTEREST RATES

Special offers and discounted rates for loan from BankDhofar



MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to provide the best services, products and financial solutions to its customers, BankDhofar announces special offers and discounted rates for the loans.

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housing and car loans the interest rate starts from 4.95%.

Commenting on the offer, Muhammad Al Raisi, Executive Manager – Assets Products Development and Bancassurance, said, “This offer highlights our endeavour to design the best financial solutions that cater to the various needs of our customers. We have all gone through tough times finan-

cially, due to COVID-19 which affected various aspects of our lives. Thus, we are offering our customers attractive interest rates on personal and housing loans.”

To avail of the offer, customers may visit the nearest BankDhofar branch to apply for a personal or housing loan during this period. More details on the terms and conditions and the eligibility are

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