



**HM THE SULTAN ISSUES
A ROYAL DECREE**

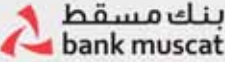
MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No. 61/2024 on the vocational training sector. Article (1) transfers to the Ministry of Labour all the specialisations related to vocational training from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Full story >A5



Founded 1975 · Volume 49 No. 194 | 16 Pages · Baisas 200 · Subscription OMR63 | ISO 9001:2008 Certified Company | Chairman/Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali | Printed & Published by Muscat Media Group

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THE HONOURABLE LADY, SPOUSE OF EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT HOLD MEETING



Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamad Al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman and Intisar El Sisi, Spouse of the Egyptian President held a meeting at Al Alam Palace yesterday. The meeting reviewed some topics of women's interest and means of enhancing areas of cooperation, in light of the fraternal bonds and the distinguished relations between the two countries and their peoples. The meeting was attended by some female Royal family members and senior female figures from both sides. **>A4**

OMAN RECORDS TRADE SURPLUS OF OMR6.63BN



The value of exports of goods rose by 10 percent to OMR18.611bn by end of September 2024



LANDMARK ACHIEVEMENT

Oman celebrates historic launch Of Duqm-1 rocket

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a landmark achievement for Oman and the Middle East, the Sultanate successfully launched its first experimental rocket, "Duqm-1," on Thursday.

This historic event was executed by Edaq, a subsidiary of the National Space Services Company (NASCOM), under the supervision of the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT). The launch is part of Oman's broader strategic vision to advance its space sector.

The rocket was launched at 10:05 AM local time from coordinates 18°N, 56°E, south of the Wilayat of Duqm.

Dr. Ali bin Amer Al-Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology at MTCIT, hailed the successful launch as a pivotal step in putting Oman on the global space sector map.

He emphasised that this milestone could attract international



investors and space companies to explore opportunities in Oman for space-related investments and activities.

The ministry is actively building strategic partnerships on local and international levels while formulating incentives to drive investment into the burgeoning

space sector.

Dr. Al-Shidhani expressed optimism that this launch would pave the way for establishing a dedicated spaceport in Oman and fostering initiatives to localise space technologies.

His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Kais Al Said, Founder and CEO of NASCOM, expressed his delight at the mission's success, stating: "We are immensely proud of this historic event. From the outset, our vision has been to position Oman as a leader in space exploration in the Middle East and establish the region's first spaceport. The success of this launch has garnered global attention, particularly within the international space community.

"We extend our gratitude to the MTCIT for their invaluable partnership, which has been instrumental in achieving this milestone as part of a national strategic vision to elevate Oman's space sector. NASCOM's objectives align with the ministry's ambition to make Oman a regional gateway to space." **>A5**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Real estate deals in Oman rise by 30.1%

1 The value of real estate deals in Oman increased by 30.1 percent to OMR2,943 million till the end of October 2024, latest NCSI data shows. **>A2**

OMAN Oman Air dismisses mass layoff rumours

2 Oman Air dismissed rumours circulating in the social media that the airline has fired a number of Omani staff. **>A3**

WORLD Bid to impeach South Korea President fails

3 A motion to impeach South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol failed after most ruling PPP party lawmakers walked out from the vote, according to media report on Saturday. **>A6**

MUSCAT: Oman's trade balance registered a surplus of OMR6.063 billion by end of September 2024 compared to a surplus of OMR5.611 billion during the same period in 2023.

Preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) pointed out that the value of exports of goods rose by 10 percent to OMR18.611 billion by end of September 2024 compared to OMR16.950 billion during the same period of last year. The value of goods imported increased by 10.9 percent to amounted to OMR12.178 billion by end of September 2024 compared to OMR10.979 billion during the same period of last year.

The increase in the value of exports is basically due to the increase in the value of Oman's exports of oil and gas up by 21.5 percent by the end of September 2024 to OMR 12.406 billion against OMR10.213 billion by the end of September 2023. The value of exports of crude oil increased by 7.6 percent to OMR 7.610 billion, compared to the same period in 2023. The value of exports of refined oil increased by 151.6 percent to OMR2.975 billion. The value of exports of LNG decreased by 7 percent to OMR1.822 billion compared to end of September 2023.

The NCSI data further reveals that the value of non-oil goods decreased by 14.1 percent to reach OMR 4.534 billion by end of September 2024 compared to OMR5.276 billion by the end of September 2023.

The value of metal products decreased by 27.3% to OMR1.307 billion compared to the same period in 2023, while the value of chemical industries products decreased by 25.1 percent to OMR575 million. On the imports of goods, the value of metal products amounted to OMR3.470 million by end of September 2024, an increase of 16.4 percent.

The UAE topped the list in trade of non-oil products which increased by 14.1 percent to OMR737 million by the end of September 2024 compared to the same period of 2023.

KSA came second in terms of non-oil Omani exports at OMR602 million followed by South Korea at OMR515 million. Iran came next in terms of re-export from Oman at OMR247 million followed by Kuwait at OMR99 million while China came next in the countries exporting to Oman at OMR1.294 billion followed by Kuwait at OMR1.230 billion. — **ONA**



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COMMENTARY

Tackling the new emerging
endemic of childhood obesity



DR. SALMA RASHID AL-KALBANI

CHILDHOOD obesity is a growing global public health issue, with the number of children aged 5-19 years old living with obesity predicted to rise from 158 million in 2020 to 254 million in 2030. This rise is attributed to sociodemographic and behavioural factors, as well as societal advancements and policies that foster an obe-sogenic environment. The East-ern Mediterranean region is ex-pected to see a rise in childhood obesity, with the prevalence of obesity in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries projected to range from 22% to 27% by 2030. The World Health Organiza-tion warns of a growing obesity rate in Eastern Mediterranean countries due to a nutrition transition linked to urbaniza-tion, fast food consumption, and sedentary lifestyles. The proliferation of ultra-processed fast-food retail outlets, particu-larly targeting young children, has led to increased consump-tion of unhealthy foods, which will reflect itself in adverse health outcomes.

In Oman, both adult and childhood obesity are endemic problems, with adult obesity increasing from 10.5% in 1990 to 23.2% in 2017, and child-hood obesity affecting 12.5% of children. In recent years,

there has been a substantial transformation in eating pat-terns in Oman, with a shift from the traditional diet to a Western diet rich in salt and fat and poor in nutrients, aided by economic growth, urbanization, and globaliza-tion. Ultra-processed fast-food retail outlets, both local and multinational corporations, have proliferated because of this transition, particularly in urban areas. Furthermore, the outlets' promotional activities, which specifically target young children, have a greater impact on their eating habits, dietary preferences, and food choices. Despite the notion that infre-quent fast-food consumption by parents may have a protec-tive effect on children's fast-food intake, research suggests that child-targeted fast-food advertising may mitigate that benefit.

Fast-food consumption is linked to obesity due to several factors, including unhealthy in-gredients, larger portion sizes, affordability, and availability. It is also linked to various non-communicable diseases and certain types of cancer, includ-ing breast and colorectal can-cers. Although the association between fast food and obesity is well established, its impact is variable across nations. A study in Oman found that those who consumed fast food more frequently are more likely to develop childhood obesity, which is consistent with the existing literature. Addressing fast-food regulation as part of a larger societal intervention is important to control childhood obesity and reverse the obesity trend in Oman.

The government has an ob-ligation to protect public health from the harmful effects of fast-food products, as they have negative health and economic

consequences on a short- and long-term scale. First, active measures should be taken to regulate fast-food retail outlet distribution near residential areas and educational facili-ties. Second, increasing public awareness of the negative health effects of consuming fast food on one's health, particu-larly among parents, teachers, and children. Third, fast-food advertising and promotion can have an immediate and long-term impact on children's health by influencing their food preferences and encour-aging fast-food consumption. Eliminating advertising, both offline and online, can curb fast-food consumption among this vulnerable group. Fourth, create a nationwide healthy meal program at school that prohibits serving fast food and other junk food in schools and promotes more healthy options. Raising children's awareness about healthy foods and the marketing strategies employed by food companies to sell unhealthy foods will assist them in making healthy deci-sions early in their lives.

The author is a senior specialist family medicine and public health doctor from Oman. She holds a bachelor's in health science, a degree of Doctor of Medicine (MD), a certificate of completion of training and specialty from the Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB), a membership from the Royal College of General Practitioners (MRCGP), an Arab Board certificate in family medicine, a master's in public health from University College Dublin (Hon.), and Diplomate Membership of Faculty Public Health Medicine (DFPH, Ireland).

Narang named India's
ambassador to Slovenia

Currently serving as the envoy of India to Oman, Narang is expected to assume his new role shortly



NEW DELHI: Amit Narang, an Indian Foreign Service (IFS) of-ficer of the 2001 batch, has been appointed as the next Amba-sador of India to Slovenia. Cur-rently serving as the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, Amit Narang is expected to as-sume his new role shortly.

"Shri Amit Narang (IFS: 2001), presently Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, has been appointed as the next Amba-sador of India to the Republic of Slovenia," the Ministry of Exter-nal Affairs said in a press release on Thursday.

He is expected to take up the assignment shortly, the MEA added.

Born on January 28, 1975, Narang assumed charge as Amba-sador of India to Oman on Octo-ber 24, 2021.

Before this appointment, Narang headed the Indian Ocean Re-gion (IOR) Division of MEA, han-dling India's bilateral relations with its key maritime neighbours, according to the Embassy of India in Oman.

Narang has also served as the Chief Vigilance Officer of the MEA and was also in charge of

India's consular and visa policy, dealing with interventions aimed at the welfare of the overseas In-dian diaspora.

As part of his career in the In-dian Foreign Service, Narang ob-tained an Advanced Diploma in Chinese language and has served twice in the People's Republic of China - between 2003-2007 when he worked on bilateral economic and commercial rela-tions, and again in 2016-18 when he served as the Deputy Head of Mission in Embassy of India in Beijing.

Narang was also India's lead negotiator at the United Nations for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

Narang also handled the United Nations portfolio in the

MEA between 2010-2013, and worked as Counselor at the Per-manent Mission of India to the United Nations in New York be-tween 2013-16.

During this time, he was a member of the Indian negotiating team for climate change, repre-senting India in the meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Cancun (Mexico), Durban (South Africa), Doha (Qatar), Lima (Peru) and Paris (France), culminating in the adoption of the Paris Agreement (COP21) in 2015.

During his tenure in New York, Narang was also closely associat-ed with the adoption of the land-mark UN Resolution designating June 21 as International Yoga Day, according to the Embassy of India in Oman.

NCSI

Real estate deals up by 30.1% in October 2024

MUSCAT: The value of real es-tate transactions in the Sultana-te of Oman increased by 30.1% to RO 2,943 million till the end of October 2024, compared to RO 2,261.8 million in the same period of 2023, according to the latest data released by the Na-tional Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

According to preliminary statistics issued by NCSI, fees collected for legal transactions amounted to RO 56.7 million till the end of October 2024, an in-crease of 2.1% compared to the corresponding period of 2023.

The traded value of sale con-tracts reached RO 913.4 million till the end of October 2024, and the number of sale contracts in-creased by 2.1% to 56,259, com-pared to 55,128 in the same pe-riod of 2023.

The value of mortgage con-tracts increased by 47.9% till the end of October 2024 to RO 2,018 million compared to RO 1,364 million during the same period of 2023. Meanwhile, the number of mortgage contracts decreased by 13.2% to 17,187 contracts from 19,800 contracts in the same period of 2023.

The traded value of barter con-tracts increased by 19.3% to RO 11.7 million till the end of October 2024 compared to RO 9.8 mil-lion in the same period of 2023. The number of barter contracts decreased by 4% to reach 1,135 till the end of October 2024 com-pared to 1,182 in October 2023.

The number of properties is-sued by the end of October 2024 decreased by 3.3% to 191,871, whereas the number of prop-erties issued to citizens of the GCC countries increased by 8.3% to 1,209 compared to 1,116 till the end of October 2023. -ONA

GLOBAL APPEAL

Oman Golf Trophy Grand Final: A premier
stage for sports diplomacy and trade



MUSCAT: The Oman Golf Trophy Grand Final, to be hosted across three of Oman's most prestigious golf courses, is set to blend sports-manship, networking, and Omani hospitality, attracting participants and guests from seven key interna-tional markets.

The event will feature over 80 players, including 48 winners from qualifying tournaments in Italy, Austria, Germany, India, South Africa, Japan, and France, where 5,500 players competed. Participants will join diplomats, business leaders, media profes-sionals, and members of Oman's national golf team, underscor-ing the event's ambition to foster long-term business, trade, and cultural relations.

Khalid Hashil Al Muslahi, For-

eign Ministry Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs, emphasised the broader purpose of the event. He said: "The Oman Golf Trophy Grand Final brings together the best of inter-national and local talent, uniting players and guests in a celebration of excellence, sportsmanship, and camaraderie. Leveraging Oman's global appeal, we aim to support national goals by connecting sec-tors through sports."

He highlighted Oman's strate-gic location, within a seven-hour flight of half the world's popula-tion, and its visa-free entry for over 100 countries as key ena-blers for global events, tourism, and business.

The tournament runs from De-cember 9-12, beginning at Ghala

Golf Club, followed by rounds at La Vie Golf Club and Al Mouj Golf. Guests will enjoy a cultural tour, visiting landmarks like Nizwa, Wadi Shab, and the Daymaniyat Islands, alongside networking din-ners at Muscat's Kempinski Hotel and Rozna Restaurant.

The opening round will be held at Ghala Golf Club on December 9 while competition resumes at La Vie Golf Club on December 11. The championship round will be held at Al Mouj Golf the next day, followed by the awards ceremony.

The event is a unique initia-tive spearheaded by the Foreign Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Herit-age and Tourism, and the Oman Golf Association.

The event is supported by an ar-ray of partners, including strategic partners Experience Oman, Omin-vest, and the Saud Bahwan Group. Bronze partners are the Kempin-ski Hotel Muscat, Lovera, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry, along with official sup-porters Aster Royal Al Raffah Hos-pital, Qatar Airways, SeaOman, Tanuf, and Visit Oman.

By combining world-class golf with cultural immersion and strategic networking, the Oman Golf Trophy aims to deepen ties between nations and showcase Oman's economic potential.

Through this initiative, Oman aims to establish itself as a hub for sports diplomacy, connecting cul-tures, and fostering international collaborations.





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OQEP conducts emergency management exercise



The exercise was conducted to evaluate the emergency and crisis systems

MUSCAT: OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) has conducted an emergency management Exercise in its Block 60 concession area – Bisat Field, implemented by the Emergency and Crisis Management Team in collabora-

tion with strategic partners from relevant governmental authorities and both local and international service providers

The exercise was conducted to evaluate the company's emergency and crisis systems, as well as the efficiency of communication and coordination among all relevant stakeholders and responders during large-scale emergencies. The exercise is a key part of the company's commitment to maintaining a high level of readiness and ensuring the safety and security of all employees and contractors, and company assets. The exercise featured a complex scenario with multiple elements to test response procedures, escalation processes and communication protocols. This simulation was of an oil well blowout (loss of well control) with potential escalations including gas leaks, oil spills, etc.

Several entities participated in the exercise, including the Ministry of Energy and Minerals the Royal Oman Police, the Oil and Gas Installations Security, the Directorate General of Police Aviation, the Public Authority for Civil Defense and Ambulance, the Ministry of Health, the Directorate General of Health Services in Al Dakhiliyah, the Environment Authority, and external entities such as Wild Well Control (USA) (WWC), among others, including contractors and service providers. These entities contrib-

uted expertise in well control and medical emergency response and coordinated with third parties and internal teams as needed.

It is worth noting that OQEP conducted similar scale exercises in its Block 60 concession in 2022 and in its Block 8 offshore concession area in Musandam in 2023 in close collaboration with relevant Government authorities, showcasing the company's commitment to maintaining best practices in health, safety, security, environment and emergency preparedness. These large-scale initiatives are held annually and provide a valuable opportunity for OQEP to evaluate and improve its emergency response procedures.

OMANISATION

Oman Air dismisses rumours of mass layoffs



Saleh Al-Shaibany

MUSCAT: Oman Air dismissed rumours circulating in the social media that the airline has fired a number of Omani staff.

"Contrary to reports circulating on various social media platforms regarding the dismissal of 1,000 employees, the company categorically denied this claim. No Omani employees have been terminated due to the restructuring," Oman Air said in a press statement.

The statement from the airline says Oman Air has been implementing a comprehensive transformation programme to redirect the company towards financial stability by improving operational efficiency and working towards future sustainability.

"However, there is a surplus of 365 employees, and the management is working with the relevant authorities to find alternative solutions for these surplus Omani employees. A severance package has been offered to those who were not assigned roles in the new structure, despite the significant associated costs, as a gesture of appreciation for their service. They have

been given sufficient notice of no less than four weeks to make a final decision without affecting their rights or employment benefits," the statement added.

The company confirms that it has developed a more effective organizational structure that aligns with industry standards in the aviation sector and meets the company's future needs.

This transformation process has involved various measures, including cost rationalisation, optimising the route network and fleet, and renegotiating several key contracts. It has also included reviewing the organizational structure and determining the optimal workforce size, skills, and competencies required to achieve sustainability in line with the company's needs.

"This structure was announced in several phases over the past 18 months. In the first phase, the company offered a severance package exclusively for Omani employees, which was utilized by a number of staff," the statement said.

During the restructuring, priority was given to Omanis for the available roles, result-

ing in the decision to terminate 426 expatriate employees. The Omanisation rate has improved since the transformation began, increasing from 74% to 78%, with most departments achieving over 90% Omanisation. The company is also striving to increase Omanisation in other departments, despite the aviation sector's need to rely on international expertise.

"It is worth noting that the company urgently requires global expertise to lead the current transformation process, while remaining committed to replacing them with national leadership by the end of the anticipated transformation period in late 2027," the statement said.

Believing in the importance of continuous communication, Oman Air has consulted with stakeholders involved in labour-related matters to ensure adherence to standards that uphold integrity. It reaffirms its commitment to enhancing the efficiency of its workforce, contributing to improved adaptability to change, strengthening its competitiveness, and boosting its ability to support the economic development of the Sultanate.



هيئة لتنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation, (The Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Article (11) of the Law for the Regulation of the Water and Wastewater Sector promulgated Royal Decree (No.40/2023) (the Sector Law), proposes modification to:

- The Schedule 2 (Charge Restriction Conditions) ("SCRC") of the Water Production, Water Transportation, Supply of Water, Wastewater Collection and Transportation, Wastewater Treatment and Disposal, Treated Effluent Transportation and Supply of Treated Effluent Licence (the "Licence") granted to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (the "Licensee").
- The Schedule 2 (Charge Restriction Conditions) ("SCRC") of the Water Production, Water Transportation, Supply of Water, Wastewater Collection and Transportation, Wastewater Treatment and Disposal, Treated Effluent Transportation and Supply of Treated Effluent Licence (the "Licence") granted to Dhofar Integrated Services Company S.A.O.C (the "Licensee").
- The Schedule 2 (Charge Restriction Conditions) ("SCRC") of the Water Production, Water Transportation, Supply of Water, Wastewater Collection and Transportation, Wastewater Treatment and Disposal, Treated Effluent Transportation and Supply of Treated Effluent Licence (the "Licence") granted to Centralized Utilities Company LLC (the "Licensee").

The modifications of the SCRC is required to facilitate implementation of new three-year price controls (effective from 1 January 2025) for the Licensees.

The draft Licence Modifications are available at the Public Register or the Authority's website at the addresses mentioned below.

Any person who has any objection to the grant of the Proposed Licence modifications shall submit details of their objection to the Authority within 28 days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Any objection submitted after the period stipulated in this Notice will not be considered. Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

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OMAN-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS

Honourable Lady and Egypt President's wife explore Oman's heritage at National Museum



MUSCAT: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamad Al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman and Intisar El Sisi, Spouse of the Egyptian President visited the National Museum today.

The Honourable Lady and the guest were greeted upon their arrival by Jamal Hassan Al Moosawi, Secretary General of the National Museum.

They toured the museum and were briefed about the National Museum's galleries and unique glimpses of the history and civilization of the Sultanate of Oman.

During the visit, the educational activities implemented by the museum's learning center were highlighted through presenting an artistic session for school students. It shed light on the historical Omani-Egyptian relations extending back to thousands of years through the export of frankincense to Egypt during the Pharaonic Era.

At the end of the tour, the Spouse of the Egyptian President recorded a word in the museum's senior visitors' register, in which she expressed her admiration over the displayed antiquities in the museum. -ONA



AT THE LUXURY PROPERTY SHOW IN SHANGHAI

The Sustainable City - Yiti to showcase sustainable living model

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sustainable City - Yiti is set to showcase its leadership in sustainable living at the Luxury Property Show (LPS) in Shanghai, one of China's premier events for luxury real estate. This participation marks the latest in a series of appearances at international and regional real estate exhibitions, reinforcing its position as a global model for net-zero living.

The Sustainable City - Yiti redefines the future of sustainable urban living. As the world's first net-zero community aligned with the UN's 2050 sustainability targets, it integrates cutting-edge solutions such as 100% renewable energy, comprehensive water recycling, and waste diversion from landfills.

Following its participation in prominent real estate events across UAE, Saudi, France, Germany, Greece, India, and Russia, The Sustainable City - Yiti continues to receive strong global interest, reflecting a growing demand for innovative and environmentally responsible community models. The rapid sell-out of Phase 1 underscores the appeal of its approach, while Phase 2 is already experiencing high demand.

"Our participation in LPS Shanghai is an exciting opportunity to share our innovative sustainability solutions with the Chinese market. With growing Chinese investment interest in Oman and the region, we look forward to demonstrating how The Sustainable City - Yiti combines environmental



responsibility with economic benefits, providing a thriving and self-sufficient community that aligns with global sustainability goals," said Mahmoud Shehada, Chief Sales and Marketing Officer at The Sustainable City - Yiti.

Developed as a collaborative

venture between Diamond Developers, a subsidiary of SEE Holding, and Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran), The Sustainable City - Yiti is setting a benchmark for sustainable community development in the region. Situated along Oman's coastline near Muscat, it is poised to become the largest operational sustainable community in the area, with a vision to achieve the world's first net-zero-emission city status by 2040. The project is anchored on six key pillars of sustainability - food, energy, water, products, mobility, and waste - and operates on 100% renewable energy. Additionally, it implements com-

plete water recycling, ensures full waste diversion from landfills, and achieves 80% self-sufficiency in food production.

Construction of The Sustainable City - Yiti is progressing steadily, with full completion targeted for 2026. Following LPS Shanghai, the project will continue to expand its international presence with engagements at major real estate events planned for 2025, further promoting its innovative approach to sustainable urban living.

The Sustainable City - Yiti is set to be the first net zero emission community in the world, realizing the UN 2050 net zero targets by 2040. Located 30km from cen-



tral Muscat, The Sustainable City - Yiti is a coastal development overlooking the Oman sea and is a joint venture between Diamond Developers, the masterminds behind The Sustainable City brand, and Oman Tourism Development Company, part of OMRAN Group.

Aligned with Oman's 2040 vision and designed to meet the highest social, environmental and economic sustainability standards, the live-work-thrive city follows the blueprint for low-emissions living, pioneered by The Sustainable City in Dubai.

Expected to be completed in 2026, The Sustainable City - Yiti will span approximately one mil-

lion square meters and accommodate over 10,000 people in villas, townhouses and apartments. The city will feature state-of-the-art facilities, urban farming, a central plaza with a mall, school and nursery, a rehabilitation center for people of determination, an indoor sports complex, access to a wide range of outdoor recreational activities, an equestrian center, two hotels and 132 luxury serviced apartments under the Nikki Beach brand. Through on-site educational facilities, The Sustainable City - Yiti also presents opportunities for research and learning, enabling the essential transfer of sustainability knowledge.



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His Majesty the Sultan issues a Royal Decree

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Thursday issued Royal Decree No. 61/2024 on the vocational training sector.

Article (1) transfers to the Ministry of Labour all the specialisations related to vocational training from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, as follows:

1. Providing technical and vocational training and linking it to the needs of the labour market.
2. Developing training curricula in accordance with approved professional criteria and levels, in addition to granting qualifications and encouraging on-the-job training.

Article (2) states that “allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of the vocational training sector in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation” shall be transferred to the Ministry of Labour.

Article (3) stipulates that “employees of the vocational training sector in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation” shall be transferred to the Ministry of Labour, along with their financial grades.

Article (4) states that “Annex No. (2) attached to Royal Decree No. 89/2020 on establishing the Ministry of Labour, defining its specializations and endorsing its organizational structure” shall be replaced with the annex attached to this decree.

Article (5) cancels Clause No. (14) of Annex No. (1) attached to the aforementioned Royal Decree No. 89/2020. It also stipulates that “vocational training sector” shall be cancelled from “Annex No. (2) attached to Royal Decree No. 98/2020 on amending the name of the Ministry of Higher Education as (Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation), defining its specializations and endorsing its organizational structure”.

It also cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (6) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **ONA**

DUQM-1 ROCKET

Launch a crucial step in advancing Oman’s space capabilities

< FROM A1 Dr. Saoud Al-Shoaili, Director-General of Policies and Governance and Head of the National Space Programme, underscored the significance of the launch as a crucial step in advancing Oman’s space capabilities. He said: “This successful experiment reflects Oman’s sustained efforts to develop its space sector. Leveraging our unique geographical location, we aim to attract investments and strengthen collaborations with the private sector. We look forward to undertaking more launches in the near future, contributing to our strategic objectives and enhancing Oman’s international standing in this rapidly evolving industry.”

Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said: “We congratulate the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology on the successful launch of Oman’s first experimental rocket. This milestone signifies a remarkable advancement in the Sultanate’s communications and information technology sector, setting the stage for a future driven by innovation and strategic geographical advantages.”

SNAIBI' HEALTH VILLAGE

WHO delegation

AL AWABI: A delegation from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Thursday visited important development projects and health initiatives, including Snaibi’ Health Village in the Wilayat of Al Awabi, South Al Batinah Governorate.

The visit was aimed at soliciting public about the best ways to support and implement such initiatives in a manner that suits the social environment.

The WHO team conferred with members of the Village Development Committee and sought measures to upgrade the standards of such initiatives. — **ONA**

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"Tender Announcement "

Supply of Food Parcels for the “Ramadan Iftar Program” for the Year 1446 AH / 2025 AD for Al Mahrah Governorate and Surrounding Areas in the Republic of Yemen

Tender No. 2/2024

Oman Charitable Organization (O.C.O.) announces a tender for the supply of 27,900 (twenty Seve thousand and nine hundred) food parcels for the “Ramadan Iftar Program” for the year 1446 AH / 2025 AD, and distributing them to all the districts of Al Mahrah Governorate and the surrounding areas according to the attached list of locations (16 locations).

Specialized merchants and suppliers wishing to submit their bids for this tender can obtain the terms and conditions from the Financial Department of Oman Charitable Organization against payment of nominal fees, during the period from Sunday 8 December 2024 to Wednesday 11 December 2024. The last date for bid submission and acceptance shall be Tuesday17 December 2024.

Bids shall be deposited in the tender box at the Financial Department, O.C.O. Headquarters Building at the Wilayat of Baushar, Muscat Governorate, Al Khuwair 33, Southern Street No. 47, near Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque.

Bids shall be placed in closed envelopes sealed with red wax and addressed to H.E. the Chairman of the Projects and Tenders Committee of O.C.O. before the specified date.

“O.C.O. is not obligated to award the tender in whole or in part or to consider the lowest price.”

Indian foreign secretary to visit Dhaka tomorrow

Indian Foreign Secretary will lead the consultations with Bangladesh and attend several other meetings during his visit



NEW DELHI: Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri will make a visit to Bangladesh on December 9 and meet his counterpart there, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday. Misri will lead the Foreign Office Consultations with Bangladesh and attend several other meetings during his visit. This comes amid strained ties between New Delhi and Dhaka following reports of several attacks on minorities, especially Hindus under the current interim government led by Muhammad Yunus. “The Foreign Secretary is

scheduled to visit Bangladesh on 9th of December. He will meet his counterpart and there will be several other meetings during the visit. Foreign Office Consultations led by Foreign Secretary is a structured engagement between India and Bangladesh. We look forward to this meeting,” MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in the weekly press briefing on Friday. Asked about the situation on ground in Bangladesh and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, MEA affirmed hope that the legal rights of the concerned individuals are respected and the trial is conducted in a “fair and transparent” manner.

“As far as situation on ground regarding the individuals you want, we want to reiterate our position again that they have legal rights and we hope that these legal rights will be respected and that the trial will be fair and transparent. They will get a fair and transparent trial,” Jaiswal further added. Chinmoy Krishna Das, who is associated with the Sammilita Sanatani Jagaran Jote, was arrested in Dhaka on November 25 on ‘sedition’ charges. The arrest followed a complaint file on October 31 by a local politician that accused Chinmoy Das and others of disrespecting Bangladesh’s national flag during a rally of the

Hindu community. On December 3, a Bangladesh court set January 2, 2025 as the next date of hearing in the case. The Chattogram court deferred the hearing on the bail petition of Chinmoy Krishna Das to January 2, The Daily Star reported. Chattogram Metropolitan Session Judge Saiful Islam set the new date for the hearing as the defence lawyer was absent from the court. Earlier on December 4, Press Secretary to the Chief Advisor of Bangladesh’s interim government, Shafiqul Alam, said that Foreign Secretary of two nations will hold talks on issues of mutual interest. Speaking to ANI, Shafiqul Alam said, “We were looking forward to the meeting of the visit of the Indian Foreign Secretary, the both Foreign Secretaries are going to talk issues of mutual interest and we hope these meetings are going to help deepen ties between the two neighbours.” On being asked about the ties with India, Alam said, “We think that our relations with India remain okay and we are trying to better our relationship. Both countries are trying to deepen our relationship and we hope in the coming days and coming months the relations will be much better.” -ANI

ON DOHA FORUM SIDELINES

India’s Jaishankar meets Qatari minister

DOHA: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday met Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal Al Thani and Minister of State, Ahmed Al Sayed on the sidelines of the Doha Forum. “Pleased to meet Qatari Minister of Commerce & Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal Al Thani and MoS Ahmed Al Sayed on the sidelines of the Doha Forum

today,” Jaishankar stated in a post on X. Earlier in the day, Jaishankar participated in the Doha Forum on the topic “Conflict Resolution in a New Era” In a post on X, Jaishankar said, “Pleased to participate in Doha Forum panel today on the topic “Conflict Resolution in a New Era” in Doha today along with PM & FM Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani of Qatar and FM Espen Bar-

th Eide of Norway. As the conflicts around us increase, the need of the hour is more diplomacy, not less.” Speaking at the Doha Forum, Jaishankar reacted to President-elect Donald Trump’s threat to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS nations, stating that India has “no interest” in weakening the US dollar. Jaishankar reflected on the positive relationship India had with the first Trump administra-

tion, highlighting the restart of the QUAD under Trump’s presidency. “We had a good relationship, a very solid relationship with the first Trump administration, yes there were some issues mostly trade related issues, but there were a whole lot of issues on which Trump was very international, and I remind people that it was actually under Trump that the QUAD was restarted,” he said. -ANI



Printed and published by:
Muscat Media Group
Post Box: 770,
Postal Code: 112



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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Ghana votes amid hopes of economic revival

ACCRA: Ghana has kicked off a presidential and parliamentary election on Saturday as the West African country hopes for an economic upswing after the worst financial crisis it has seen in a generation.



Twelve candidates have thrown their hats in the ring to succeed President Nana Akufo-Addo, who is stepping down next month after serving his two legally allowed terms. However, a close electoral contest primarily pits Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia — who is the chosen successor of Akufo-Addo’s New Patriotic Party (NPP) — against former President John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Voting began Saturday at 7 a.m. local (same UTC/GMT) and closes at 5 p.m., with some provisional legislative results expected to roll out later at night and on Sunday. The outcome of the presidential election is expected by Tuesday. Opinion polls show Mahama — who held the presidency from 2012 to 2016 — on course for a potential comeback. Mahama said he would “reset” Ghana and introduce a “24-hour economy,” stretching industrial hours to create jobs and more

production. He said he sees Bawumia as a continuation of policies that led to the country’s economic troubles. Mahama has also vowed to renegotiate the terms of a \$3 billion (£2.8 billion) International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout secured in 2023 to restructure Ghana’s debts. Meanwhile, the NPP is vying for an unprecedented third term under Bawumia. The former central banker — who led Akufo-Addo’s economic management team — has tried to distance himself from the flak over the government’s handling of the economy. Bawumia has stressed Ghana’s gradual recovery from the crisis, with economic growth surging by 6.9% year-on-year in the second quarter of 2024, making it the fastest rate in five years.

- DW

LAWMAKERS WALK OUT

Bid to impeach South Korea President Yoon fails



SEOUL: A motion to impeach South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol failed after most ruling PPP party lawmakers walked out from the vote. The motion was dropped without ballots being counted as the total votes did not reach 200, or the two-thirds majority required for it to pass. Opposition parties, which hold 192 seats in parliament, presented the bill after Yoon briefly declared martial law last week. Only three PPP lawmakers participated in the vote. Protesters in South Korea expressed frustration over the likely defeat of a motion to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol due to a boycott by most ruling party lawmakers. Nearly 150,000 people demonstrated around the National Assembly, according to police. Gasps of disappointment were already heard from the crowd after a bill to launch an investigation into first lady Kim Keon Hee was defeated. “I feel terrible that it has come to this today,” protester An Juncheol told the AFP news agency. “What the ruling party lawmakers did today — walking away from the vote — is nothing more than an attempt to cement their power and status, with no regard for the people.” The Korean Confederation of

Trade Unions (KCTU) also condemned Yoon’s attempt to impose martial law last week, according to South Korean daily The Korean Times. “Today, right here, we will mark the end of Yoon Suk Yeol,” KCTU leader Yang Kyung-soo said while speaking to a crowd in front of the National Assembly. “Let us ultimately punish him with even more powerful protests.” Opposition parties said they could propose another bill if the Saturday impeachment vote fails. Shin Dong-uk, a lawmaker of the ruling PPP, said that the party never prevented its lawmakers from voting in an impeachment hearing against President Yoon Suk Yeol, according to Reuters news agency. Most PPP lawmakers walked out of the hearing, with only one remaining in his seat. Two other PPP members later returned for the vote, according to South Korea’s Yonhap news agency. The opposition parties that put forward the motion to impeach Yoon need the support of at least eight ruling party lawmakers to reach the two-thirds majority required for the bill to pass. Nearly 150,000 protesters outside the South Korean parliament demanded President Yoon Suk Yeol resign as lawmakers voted in an impeachment hearing, according to a police estimate cited by

the Yonhap news agency. “Police estimated that around 149,000 people had joined the gathering as of 5:30 p.m. (0830 GMT) while organizers claimed the turnout was one million,” Yonhap said. South Korean parliamentary speaker Woo Won-shik, who belongs to the main opposition Democratic Party, called for ruling PPP party lawmakers to vote in an impeachment hearing. He made the comments after PPP members walked out of parliament, with only one party lawmaker remaining in his seat. “The Republic of Korea is a democracy that’s made of people’s blood and tears,” he said. “Are you not afraid of being judged by history, by the people, and by the world?” The PPP walkout left the National Assembly without enough members to reach the two-thirds majority needed to pass the impeachment motion. South Korea’s parliament rejected a bill proposing a special investigation into first lady Kim Keon Hee, Yonhap news agency reported. The measure was put forward alongside impeachment proceedings against President Yoon Suk Yeol, who briefly declared martial law last week. The bill was two seats short of the two-thirds majority required to pass, with 198 votes for and 102 against. -DW



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President Bashar Assad’s forces lose ground on multiple fronts

The forces loyal to the Syrian president are struggling to contain the rebels advancing from the north toward the city of Homs

DAMASCUS: The Syrian government lost control on Friday of the symbolic southern city of Daraa, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

“Local factions have taken control of more areas in Daraa province, including Daraa city... they now control more than 90% of the province, as regime forces successfully pulled out,” the UK-based war monitor said.

Rebel sources told the Reuters news agency that a deal was reached to allow senior army officials serving in the city to leave with safe passage to Damascus.

Daraa province was the cradle of the 2011 uprising against Syrian President Bashar Assad, but it returned to government control in 2018 under a ceasefire deal brokered by Russia.

The strain on Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces amid the rapid advance of Turkish-backed Islamist rebels to the north of Damascus began to show in other parts of the country on Friday.



With Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) forces nearing the country's third-largest city, Homs, and threatening to try to cut the capital off from its own coastline and ports, other armed groups took control of government facilities in

several provinces.

First, the Kurdish-led Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) said its forces had taken up positions in the few parts of Deir el-Zour city and the province of the same name that it did not previously

control.

Observers reported seeing large columns of Syrian troops departing the city in the direction of Homs and Damascus.

Later on Friday, first reports of armed groups seizing government facilities to the south of Damascus, in Daraa and Sweida provinces, began to emerge from groups like the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

US tells citizens to leave ‘while commercial options remain available’

US citizens in Syria should leave the country immediately, the State Department said late on Friday.

The announcement comes as Islamist-led rebels continue their offensive against President Bashar Assad's forces.

“The security situation continues to be volatile and unpredictable with active clashes between armed groups throughout the country,” the State Department said in a security alert posted on social media.

“The department urges US citizens to depart Syria now while commercial options remain available.”

Blinken calls for protection of minorities and civilians in Syria

US Secretary of State Antony

Blinken called for protecting civilians and minorities in Syria during a call with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on Friday.

“Secretary Blinken emphasized the importance of protecting civilians, including members of minority groups, across Syria,” State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

Blinken and Fidan also discussed the need for a political solution in Syria, according to the State Department, Miller added.

At least 370,000 displaced, UN says

At least 370,000 people have been displaced by fighting in Syria since November 27, the UN secretary-general's spokesperson said Friday, as rebel forces continue to gain ground.

“Since the escalation of hostilities, at least 370,000 men, women and children, boys and girls, have been displaced, including 100,000 who left their homes more than once,” UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

The fighting has also caused damage to infrastructure and disrupted the flow of urgently needed aid. Dujarric said that emergency shelters are reaching their limits and as a result, people have resorted to sleeping on the streets or in their cars in sub-zero temperatures as winter sets in. -**aw**

ST. NICHOLAS DAY

Zelenskyy condemns Russian attacks

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy again condemned Russia's relentless attacks, emphasising the devastating toll of its strikes on Ukrainian cities.

He highlighted the events that unfolded on St. Nicholas Day, underscoring the need for “strength” in the face of Russian terror. Sharing a post on X on Friday, Zelenskyy wrote, “Russia's words mean nothing, but their bombs and missiles speak volumes.”

Aerial bombs

“On the evening of St. Nicholas Day, aerial bombs in Zaporizhzhia hit a service station directly, cars with people inside. As of now, four people are known to be wounded and are receiving medical assistance. Tragically, the list of fatalities includes nine names. In Kryvyi Rih, a missile strike targeted an

ordinary city building, injuring 17 people and killing two. And these are just two Russian attacks on two Ukrainian cities in a single day,” the post further reads.

The Ukrainian President further criticised Russian President Vladimir Putin and said that he doesn't seek “real peace.”

Real peace

“Thousands of such strikes Russia has carried out during this war make it absolutely clear: Putin does not seek real peace—he seeks the ability to treat any country this way, with bombs, missiles, and all other forms of violence. Only through strength can we resist this. And only through strength can real peace be established. I thank everyone who is supporting Ukraine's efforts. May the memory of all the victims of Russian terror be eternal, Zelenskyy said on X. -**ANI**

JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Pakistan apex court to hear Imran’s probe petition on December 10

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has scheduled a hearing for December 10 on a petition filed by PTI founder Imran Khan, seeking the formation of a judicial commission to investigate the events of May 9, 2023.

A seven-member constitutional bench led by Justice Aminuddin Khan will preside over the case, according to a Supreme Court cause list issued on Friday, Dawn reported.

The petition stems from Imran Khan's demand for judicial commissions to probe two significant events: the riots that erupted following his arrest on May 9 and the PTI's “final call” protest on November 26.

On Thursday, the former prime minister posted on his X account, announcing a five-member negotiating committee tasked with addressing two key points: “release of under-trial political prisoners ...



establishment of judicial commission for transparent investigation of the events of 9th May and 26th November.”

The negotiation team, formed to

engage with the government, includes Omar Ayub Khan, Ali Amin Gandapur, Sahibzada Hamid Raza, Salman Akram Raja, and Asad Qaiser, reported Dawn.

On Friday, Imran reiterated his demands on X, stating, “We have two demands ... a commission should be formed under the senior-most judges of the Supreme Court to conduct an independent inquiry into the events of May 9 and November 26 ... unjustly imprisoned political prisoners should be released.”

Imran warned that if these demands were not met, “civil disobedience, reduction of remittances and boycott movement will be initiated” by the PTI.

His call for a judicial probe comes in the aftermath of his arrest on May 9, which triggered nationwide riots lasting over 24 hours, Dawn reported.

In addition to this case, another hearing is scheduled for December 11 on a separate petition filed by the PTI founder, alleging rigging in February's general elections. -**ANI**

CLIMATE

Why fertile land is turning into nonarable desert

BERLIN: Nearly one half of the planet's land mass is on the brink of turning into nonarable desert, according to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

These already-arid lands are marked by low rainfall yet support 45% of the world's agriculture. Now, extreme drought linked to human-made global heating is helping to transform this area into an infertile wasteland.

With one in three of the world's people living in these drylands, experts say that food insecurity, poverty, and mass displacement will accompany desertification.

The problem is so severe that a United Nations desertification conference (COP16) happening in Saudi Arabia in December is demanding that 1.5 billion hectares of the world's desertified land be restored by 2030. This is the area the UN says could be rehabilitated.

What is desertification?

Desertification is a form of land degradation by which fertile land loses much of its biological — and economic — productivity, and becomes desert.

Today, up to 40% of the world's land is already degraded, according to the UNCCD.

While climate change, deforestation, overgrazing, unsustainable agricultural practices, and urban



sprawl are key factors in desertification, a global drought crisis is exacerbating the problem.

Extreme drought and heat drives water scarcity and leads to soil degradation and the loss of crops and vegetation.

With 2024 set to be the hottest year on record, drought could impact 75% of the world's population by 2050, according to a UN report released on Tuesday.

Water scarcity further aggravates the impacts of deforestation. And fewer trees means fewer roots to bind the soil, thereby preventing erosion.

Meanwhile, social issues such as limiting women's ability to own land can also impact land and soil health. The UN notes that women more often invest in biodiverse food systems — as opposed to men who mostly focus on high-yielding monocultures that can quickly degrade land.

Severe land degradation and

desertification are impacting the Earth's ability to “support environmental and human wellbeing,” said a 2024 UNCCD report.

Degraded land can no longer support diverse ecosystems, or help regulate climate, water flows, and the production of nutrients vital for all life on the planet.

Healthy land also provides food security and a sustainable agricultural system, says the study.

But with so much fertile, productive land degraded each year, ongoing desertification is instead accelerating biodiversity loss, hunger and poverty.

Forced migration and conflicts over declining resources will be some of the further consequences.

“It is the land and soil beneath our feet that grows the cotton for the clothes we wear, secures the food on our plates, and anchors the economies we rely on,” noted Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UNCCD. -**aw**

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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DISC/2024/145	11 Kv Non-Load Reinforcement works in Dhalkut Area	22-Dec-2024	07-Jan-2025	52.500

- To purchase the tender document website via the link or the Barcode below:
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- Every company wishing to participate in this tender must attach with its bid a bid bond in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman. Any bid that does not contain the bid bond will be disqualified.
- The original bid bond must be submitted in an envelope sealed with red wax and addressed to the chairperson of the minor tender committee and written on outside the Tender name and the Tender number and it should be paced in the tender box in Nama Dhofar Services in Salaiah before 10:00 am of the last day for submitting Bids.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "isupplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
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SPORTS

Australia dominate India after Head's explosive ton in Adelaide

The batter's 140 off 141 balls, at a strike rate of 99.29, left India reeling as they took to the field in the final session of the second day in the pink-ball Test

ADELAIDE: Australia seized control of the pink-ball Test on the second day of the second Test against India, powered by Travis Head's explosive 140 and incisive spells from Pat Cummins and Scott Boland on Saturday. Head's 141-ball blitz, marked by a strike rate of 99.29, dismantled India's bowling attack, setting



up a 157-run first-innings lead. India's reply faltered under the floodlights, as they were reduced to 128/5 at stumps, trailing by 29 runs. Head entered with Australia under pressure at 151/4 after Jasprit Bumrah struck twice in quick succession. Nathan McSweeney

edged Bumrah for 38, and Steven Smith followed for 2, caught down the leg side. Undeterred, Head counterattacked with his trademark aggressive play, slashing boundaries square on the off side and launching massive sixes off R Ashwin, including a towering

110-metre strike. Head's first fifty came off 63 balls, and he needed just 48 more to reach his ninth Test century. He celebrated joyously, acknowledging the home crowd of over 51,000 and dedicating his ton to his newborn child. His partnerships with Marnus Labuschagne (65) and

Alex Carey (74) steadied Australia, though Labuschagne fell for 64, trapped at gully by debutant Nitish Kumar Reddy. India's pacers fought back late in the session. Mohammed Siraj's fiery spell yielded 4/98, including the crucial wickets of Carey, Mitchell Starc, and Scott Boland. Bumrah chipped in with 4/61, dismissing Pat Cummins and enduring a minor injury scare before recovering to bowl with venom. Australia were bowled out for 337 just after tea. Cummins and Boland then inflicted significant damage in the final session. Boland struck with his first ball to remove Yashasvi Jaiswal for 24, before dismissing Virat Kohli with a perfectly pitched delivery outside off stump. Cummins followed suit, hitting KL Rahul with a rising delivery and later castling Rohit Sharma with an unplayable peach, just before stumps. Rohit endured a tumultuous stay, surviving a no-ball dismissal from Starc before Cummins ended his innings emphatically.

Starc also accounted for Shubman Gill, bowling him with a trademark inswinger. Amid the carnage, Rishabh Pant offered a glimpse of resistance. The dynamic wicketkeeper-batter counterattacked with audacious strokes, including a reverse scoop and a falling scoop, racing to an unbeaten 28 off 25 balls. India, however, remain in dire straits, with their lower order needing to provide significant support on day three. Australia's decision to include Boland proved inspired, as the seamer complemented Cummins and Starc impeccably, raising questions about team composition for the Brisbane Test if Josh Hazlewood regains fitness. For India, the pink ball under lights has once again exposed frailties, and they now face an uphill battle to salvage the match. **Brief scores:** India 180 and 128/5 (Pant 28; Cummins 2-33, Boland 2-39) trail Australia 337 (Head 140, Labuschagne 64; Bumrah 4-61, Siraj 4-98) by 29 runs. - Agencies

FORMULA ONE



Norris on pole as McLaren secure 1-2 in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: Lando Norris will start from pole position for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday, the Briton leading team-mate Oscar Piastri on Saturday to secure a McLaren front row lockout on a weekend where the squad are hoping to clinch a long-awaited constructors' title. After Max Verstappen initially set a time strong enough for provisional pole during the first runs of Q3, it was Norris who surged ahead during the decisive final laps on an effort of 1m 22.595s, putting him 0.209s clear of Piastri. Carlos Sainz was third for Ferrari, while Nico Hulkenberg grabbed a sensational fourth in his last event for Haas. Verstappen ultimately had to settle for fifth, ahead of Alpine's Pierre Gasly in sixth and the Mercedes of George Russell in seventh. Verstappen missed a chance for fifth consecutive pole at Yas Marina. Fernando Alonso took P8 for Aston Martin, just beating Valtteri Bottas whose progression to Q3 earned applause from the Kick Sauber team, while Sergio Perez completed the top-10 in the Red Bull. Charles Leclerc's session came to an end in Q2 when his pace-setting final time was deleted for

track limits, putting him in P14, which will become a back-of-the-grid start owing to a 10-place grid penalty given on Friday. Yuki Tsunoda and Liam Lawson failed to progress for RB in 11th and 12th, while Aston Martin's Lance Stroll also departed Q2 in 13th and Kevin Magnussen was 15th in his last weekend racing for Haas. The big news from Q1 was that Lewis Hamilton suffered an early exit in his final qualifying session for Mercedes, the seven-time world champion ending the day in P18 after hitting a loose bollard that had been knocked onto the track by Magnussen. Also eliminated were Alex Albon for Williams in 16th, Kick Sauber's Zhou Guanyu in 17th, the other Williams of Franco Colapinto in 19th and Alpine's Jack Doohan ended his first F1 qualifying session in 20th position. After the pole, Norris said: "It was a perfect, perfect day for us, probably a little bit tougher than we were hoping for, we've been quick all weekend, we were pleased with the one-two but it was a bit trickier than what we would have liked. My lap in the end was strong and it was just how we wanted to end today."

SECOND TEST: NZ VS ENGLAND

England in driver's seat against NZ

WELLINGTON: England edged closer to ending their Test series drought in New Zealand since 2007-08 with a dominant performance on day two of the second Test at the Basin Reserve on Saturday. The highlight-packed day featured Gus Atkinson's hat-trick and Jacob Bethell's career-best 96, leaving New Zealand staring at a record-breaking fourth-innings chase with three days remaining. Resuming with a 155-run first-innings lead, England's bowlers made quick work of New Zealand's tail in the morning session. Atkinson and Brydon Carse each claimed four wickets, dismantling the hosts for 125 in under 45 minutes. Atkinson's hat-trick was the first at the Basin Reserve in Test history and capped a remarkable start to his career, making him the seventh player to achieve a hundred, a ten-wicket haul, and a hat-trick in just 10 Tests - well ahead of the next-quickest, Irfan Pathan (26 matches). It was the latest accolade in a stunning start to the 26-year-old's Test career, less than six months on from claiming a



12-wicket haul on debut. Atkinson also became the first Englishman to take a Test hat-trick since Moeen Ali at The Oval in 2017. Batting with intent, England built on their advantage with Bethell and Ben Duckett adding 187 for the second wicket at over five runs an over. Bethell showcased his class with a fluent 52-ball fifty, punishing loose deliveries from Nathan Smith and Will O'Rourke. However, nerves crept in as he

entered the 90s, and he eventually fell four short of a maiden Test century, edging Tim Southee behind. Duckett also missed out on a big score, deflecting a Southee delivery onto his stumps after a brisk 49. But England's momentum continued post-tea, with Joe Root (73*) and Harry Brook (50) piling on an untroubled 95-run stand. Brook registered his sixth 50-plus score in seven Test innings against New Zealand before holing out to Glenn Phillips. Root, celebrat-

ing his 100th Test fifty, anchored England's innings alongside Ben Stokes, who accelerated the scoring with an entertaining cameo. New Zealand's bowlers toiled fruitlessly, failing to bowl a single maiden across 78 overs. With a lead exceeding 500, England appear poised for a declaration, leaving New Zealand in a deep hole. **Brief scores:** England 280 and 378/5 (Root 73*, Stokes 35*) lead New Zealand 125 (Atkinson 4-31, Carse 4-46) by 533 runs. - Agencies

SECOND TEST: SA VS SRI LANKA

Resilient Sri Lanka fight back against SA

GQEBERHA: Sri Lanka displayed remarkable resilience against South Africa on the second day of the second Test at St George's Park, closing at 242/3 and reducing the deficit to 116 runs on Friday. Angelo Mathews (40*) and Kamindu Mendis (30*) held their ground at stumps, ensuring a steady finish for the visitors. Resuming at 269/7, South Africa's lower order made the most of the morning session. Kyle Verreynne, starting the day unbeaten on 48, converted his innings into a century, finishing with 105 not out.



His aggressive stroke play, including 12 boundaries and three sixes, helped the Proteas post a competitive 358. Verreynne's milestone moment came with a six off Asitha Fernando. Kagiso Rabada (23) offered crucial support. Lahiru Kumara starred with figures of 4/79. In reply, Sri Lanka's top order stepped up with determination. Openers Pathum Nissanka and Dimuth Karunaratne weathered the early challenge from South Africa's fiery pacers, putting together a 41-run stand. Though Rabada dismissed Karunaratne for 20, Nissanka stood tall, crafting a bril-

liant 89 laced with elegant strokes. He combined forces with Dinesh Chandimal (44) to propel Sri Lanka to 103/1 by tea. In the final session, Sri Lanka continued to chip away at the deficit. Nissanka narrowly missed out on a century, falling 11 runs short. Mathews and Kamindu ensured there were no late stumbles, putting up a 43-run partnership. **Brief scores:** South Africa 1st innings: 358 (Ryan Rickelton 101, Kyle Verreynne 105*; Lahiru Kumara 4/79) vs Sri Lanka 1st innings: 242/3 (Pathum Nissanka 89, Dinesh Chandimal 44). - Agencies

DUBAI TO BE THE VENUE

Oman coach Mendis confident ahead of Gulf Cup T20 title defence

MUSCAT: The Oman national cricket team is gearing up to defend their Gulf Cup T20 title as the tournament returns from December 13 to 21 in Dubai, UAE. Six teams - Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia - will battle it out at the ICC Academy Ground, with the final scheduled at the Dubai International Stadium. Oman's coach, Duleep Mendis, exuded confidence ahead of the team's departure for the UAE on December 11. Reflecting on Oman's recent achievements, he said, "The boys are full of confidence and have shown they can do well. We had a successful run in the Cricket World Cup League 2, which, although a 50-over tour-

nament, has added to our momentum. The recent win over the Netherlands in the T20 has further boosted the team's morale." With a new-look squad, Mendis expressed satisfaction with the team's readiness. "I'm hopeful that the boys will perform well and bring the trophy back. They've performed admirably recently, and I believe they're ready for the challenge," he added. Under the leadership of experienced skipper Jatinder Singh, Oman will begin their campaign against UAE on December 14. This will be followed by matches against Qatar (December 15), Kuwait (December 17), Bahrain (December 18), and Saudi Arabia (December 19).



The single round-robin format promises intense competition, culminating in the final on December 21.

Oman's victory in the inaugural Gulf Cup T20 last year remains a significant milestone, where they defeated the UAE in a thrilling fi-

nal. The team is eager to replicate that success and defend their title. The Gulf Cup T20 provides a platform for cricketing nations in

the region to showcase their talent and grow the sport. For Oman, it is an opportunity to solidify their reputation as a formidable cricketing side, especially after their international successes in recent years. As Oman embarks to defend the title, fans eagerly await to see if the team can once again rise to the occasion and bring home the trophy. **Oman's squad:** Jatinder Singh (captain), Aamir Kaleem, Ashish Odedera, Hammad Mirza, Mohammad Nadeem, Sufyan Mehmood, Mehran Khan, Shakeel Ahmed, Jay Odedera, Muzahir Raza, Karan Sonavale, Samay Shrivastava, Wasim Ali, and Vinayak Shukla.

CHINA'S FOREX RESERVES UP

China's foreign exchange reserves totaled 3.2659 trillion U.S. dollars at the end of November, up by 4.8 billion dollars, or 0.15 percent, from the end of October, official data showed on Saturday. > **B2**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The 18th Annual Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Forum concluded on Thursday, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by OQ Group, from 2 to 5 December. > **B2**

Muscat Stock Exchange index drops 186 points in November

The index closed at the end of trading in November at 4,563 points, reducing most of the gains it recorded during the current year after rising above the 4,840-point level in May 2024

MUSCAT: The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell by 186 points in November, recording the highest decline this year amid pressure from sales by foreign investment institutions and individual Omani investors, with weak demand and increased supply.

The index closed at the end of trading in November at 4,563 points, reducing most of the gains it recorded during the current year after rising above the 4,840-point level in May 2024.

The sectoral indices recorded a collective decline last November, led by the financial sector index, which lost 232 points and closed at 7,681 points. The industrial sector index declined by 202 points, the services sector index lost 84 points, and the Sharia index recorded a decline of about 22 points.

These declines coincided with the decline in the shares of many leading companies. Last month witnessed a decline in the prices of 61 securities, compared to 18 securities whose prices rose and 14 securities that remained unchanged at their previous levels.



from 32,835 deals to 32,535 deals.

OQ Exploration and Production topped the most traded companies in terms of trading value, after witnessing trading worth OMR81.6 million, representing 67 percent of the total trading value. OQ Gas Networks came in second place with OMR5.8 million, while Bank Muscat came in third place with trading worth OMR4.2 million, representing 3.5 percent of the total trading value.

The market value of securities listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange last month recorded losses of OMR29.2 million, falling by the end of November to OMR27.39 billion.

Oman Education and Training Investments Company's share topped the gainers, rising by 64 percent and closing at 1.80 riyals. Oman Financing Free Bonds 2020 came in second place, rising by 45 percent and closing at 80 baisas. Dhofar Food and Investment Company's share recorded a rise of 19 percent and closed at 81 baisas.

Last month, the annual general assembly of Oman Education and Training Investment Company approved, during its meeting on November 26, the distribution of cash dividends to shareholders in the amount of 60 baisas per share. The company recorded net profits of OMR7.7 million for the group and OMR7 million for the parent company in its fiscal year ending on August 31, compared to net profits of OMR2.9 million for the group

MSX breaks losing streak with modest gain in weekly trading

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani stock market posted a modest gain of 0.19% this week, marking a positive turn by breaking a streak of five consecutive weeks of losses, according to an industry expert.

"Market sentiment was primarily influenced by regional factors, with the OPEC+ meeting emerging as a key driver that led to oil price volatility and some market uncertainty," said Joseph Dahrhieh Managing Principal at Tickmill.

"While reduced geopolitical tensions in the region provided a degree of optimism, the market remains vulnerable to further decline given the prevailing downtrend," he added.

However, a potential catalyst for market recovery lies in the upcoming debut trading of OQ Base Industries scheduled for December 15, which has generated significant interest due to its substantial market size and the strong demand witnessed during its IPO phase.

"Meanwhile, oil price movements continue to be a crucial



factor influencing overall market direction," he said.

The Industrial Sector led the market performance with a gain of 1.51%, driven by strong performances from key companies. Oman Cable Industry emerged as the top performer with an 8% increase, while Asafa Foods

gained 2.95%, and Galfar Engineering and Contracting rose by 2.17%. These positive movements demonstrated the sector's resilience amid broader market uncertainties.

The Financial Sector experienced mixed results, declining by 0.25% overall. The sector's performance was notably impacted by Sohar International Bank's 2.19% decrease, given its significant market weight. Global Financial Investment also contributed to the downward pressure with a 2.41% decline. However, Bank Muscat provided a bright spot with a 1.19% gain, partially offsetting the sector's losses.

The Services Sector emerged as the weakest performer this week, declining by 0.63%. The sector's performance was particularly affected by OQ Exploration and Production, the market's most actively traded and heavily weighted stock, which dropped by 0.85%. More significant losses were seen in power companies, with Al-Batinah Power and Al Suwadi Power experiencing substantial

declines of 16.67% and 17.72%, respectively.

Looking ahead, OQ's IPO pipeline for 2025-2026 builds on its recent successes, including the \$2 billion IPO of its exploration and production business and the \$489 million listing of its methanol and LPG unit.

"These initiatives are set to transform the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) by enhancing market depth and trading activity," Joseph Dahrhieh Managing Principal at Tickmill.

"The company's successful debt reduction from \$13 billion to \$7 billion, coupled with its privatisation efforts aligned with Oman's broader plan to privatize 30 state assets, positions the market for increased foreign investment and improved liquidity."

"These developments are expected to play a crucial role in Oman's economic diversification strategy while establishing new standards for state-owned enterprise transitions in emerging markets and boosting Muscat Stock Exchange attractiveness," he further added.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

OCCI trade team concludes visit to Saudi Arabia

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani trade delegation from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has concluded its visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which included extensive field visits and meetings between Omani and Saudi business leaders, as well as efforts to establish trade partnerships between the two sides.

During the visit, the delegation toured the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce, where both parties explored ways to enhance commercial and economic cooperation between the two friendly nations. They reviewed Saudi Arabia's experiences with the Investor Voice Initiative, a key component of the National Investment Strategy that aims to convey investors' priorities and challenges, acting as a link between investors, the Ministry of Investment, and relevant entities. The Omani delegation also learned about the National Investment Strategy and its roadmap, aiming to improve the quality and volume of investment in the Kingdom, thereby contributing to economic development in line with Vision 2030.

The visit also included an exploration of the efforts of the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and a visit to the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Riyadh. His Excellency Sayyid Faisal bin Turki Al Said, Oman's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, emphasized the importance of working towards Gulf integration, highlighting the need to market Oman more effectively through forums and gatherings for large manufacturers with products not available in the Saudi mar-



ket. He noted that such events would enhance trade exchanges and increase Omani exports. The Ambassador also stressed the importance of unifying efforts with various governmental and private institutions, working with the embassy to promote Oman and its provinces in particular. He stated that these efforts would help build strategic partnerships that contribute to the development of the national economy.

The delegation visited the Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority (Monsha'at), where members received a comprehensive introduction to the authority, whose goals include organizing, supporting, and nurturing the small and medium enterprises sector in the Kingdom, following best global practices to boost productivity and increase their contribution to the local economy.

The delegation learned about the authority's mechanisms for preparing, implementing, and supporting programs and projects aimed at fostering a culture of en-

trepreneurship and innovation, diversifying financial support sources for enterprises, stimulating venture capital initiatives, and providing administrative and technical support to enhance the capabilities of enterprises in management, finance, marketing, human resources, and more. The visit also included meetings between Omani and Saudi business leaders to closely understand the sectors in which they operate and share their successful experiences.

Additionally, the delegation participated in the annual business community gala organized by the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce, held at the Riyadh International Convention and Exhibition Center. The event was attended by over 4,000 individuals, including ministers, senior officials from both the public and private sectors, as well as business leaders and representatives of accredited diplomatic missions in the Kingdom.

The participation aimed to enhance communication among business leaders and exchange



views on economic issues. The occasion also featured fruitful discussions between Omani and Saudi representatives regarding trade relations and economic cooperation, exploring ways to strengthen commercial ties between the two countries.

Engineer Said bin Ali Al Abri, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry Branch in North Al Batinah, stated in a press release to the Oman News Agency that the Omani trade delegation's visit to Saudi Arabia yielded fruitful results. The delegation conducted diverse visits to existing projects and institutions supporting entrepreneurship, with the Saudi side expressing a strong desire to establish partnerships with Oman. Several ideas were proposed to address the challenges faced by Omani exporters to Saudi Arabia.

Al Abri added that preliminary memorandums of understanding were signed between members of the Omani delegation and Saudi business leaders, paving the way for future cooperation. The delegation also had the opportunity to learn about strategic plans and agreements related to the General

Secretariat of the GCC, as well as insights into investment mechanisms in Saudi Arabia and the main incentives offered. This visit opened new horizons and provided diverse knowledge, including understanding how to start small and micro enterprises, along with innovation labs focusing on artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, the Internet of Things, and data analytics. Discussions also covered how to leverage traditional projects and convert them into sustainable, environmentally friendly initiatives.

The visit to the Riyadh Chamber and the bilateral meetings with Saudi counterparts provided an opportunity to strengthen cooperation and highlight the investment mechanisms and incentives offered by both Oman and Saudi Arabia. The delegation also visited the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council to learn about key strategic plans and agreements among member states, including the common Gulf market, and to discuss challenges facing Omani companies.

Alaa Ahmad bin Salmeen Al Kamshaki, a board member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry Branch in North Al Batinah, noted that the visit achieved its intended outcomes and strategic goals to strengthen economic, commercial, and investment relationships between Oman and Saudi Arabia. He emphasized the keen interest shown by the Saudi side and their sincere desire for mutual cooperation. He pointed out that such visits contribute to acquiring and transferring expertise to Oman, paving the way for a promising economy capable of competing globally.

UNCTAD REPORT

Global trade to hit record \$33 trillion in 2024

GENEVA: The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) projected global trade to reach a record US\$33 trillion in 2024, reflecting a US\$1 trillion increase compared to 2023.

This represents an annual growth of 3.3 percent, showcasing the resilience of global trade despite ongoing challenges.

According to UNCTAD's latest Global Trade Update, the robust growth in trade services, which increased by 7 percent this year, contributed significantly to this expansion, accounting for half of the overall growth.

Goods trade grew

In contrast, goods trade grew by a modest 2 percent, remaining below its 2022 peak.

The report highlighted challenges for developing economies, traditionally key drivers of global trade. These economies faced a 1 percent contraction in imports and a similar decrease in South-South trade during Q3 2024.

On the other hand, advanced economies led the quarter's growth, with stable demand driving a 3 percent rise in imports and a 2 percent increase in exports.

Despite obstacles, the report emphasised opportunities for developing countries to capitalise on high-growth sectors. Trade in ICT goods and clothing surged by 13 and 14 percent respectively in Q3 2024, underscoring the potential for diversification into value-added industries. — **WAM**

MARKET

OQ showcases digital transformation, sustainability efforts at GPCA Forum

Over four days, the forum explored challenges and opportunities in the petrochemical industry, attracting more than 2,700 participants from 43 countries, including experts and key stakeholders

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The 18th Annual Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Forum concluded on Thursday, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by OQ Group, from 2 to 5 December. Over four days, the forum explored challenges and opportunities in the petrochemical industry, attracting more than 2,700 participants from 43 countries, including experts and key stakeholders. The accompanying exhibition featured 110 local, regional and international companies. Discussions at the forum focused on the energy transition and modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to enhance the

petrochemical sector's capabilities. Topics included sustainability in the petrochemical industry, aiming to strike a balance between investment and the conservation of natural resources. Panel sessions examined innovation and its role in advancing the industry. Speakers, including officials and experts in the petrochemical field, explored strategies to meet environmental targets while maintaining profitability. They addressed pressures faced by producing and manufacturing countries, as well as companies operating in the sector, from global conglomerates, and discussed ways to safeguard the industry by maximising the efficient use of



natural resources. The forum also considered enhancing sustainability without compromising financial performance, avoiding additional burdens that might erode profits. Rising energy costs, carbon emissions linked to supply chains, and streamlining processes to improve sustainability were also key topics. OQ Group showcased its achievements, experiences, and initiatives in digital transformation during the 18th Annual Fo-

rum, aligning with its strategy to embrace global technological advancements and digitise operations across its facilities. These initiatives span various areas, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, the global SAP technology system, empowering local companies by connecting them with international firms, and enhancing the role of emerging small and medium-sized enterprises in the field of information technology.

The Group unveiled its ongoing digital projects, underscoring their importance for the future of its operations. It also highlighted sustainability as a key pillar of its strategic and investment decisions, prioritising initiatives to reduce carbon emissions, manage water resources, preserve biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and protect natural resources. Social investments and community initiatives that enhance sus-

tainability and deliver a positive environmental and social impact were also emphasised. OQ further outlined its commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 through strategic decarbonisation initiatives and investments in alternative energy sources. The Group detailed plans to reduce energy intensity, implement integrated energy management systems and support environmental and economic sustainability.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION

Rising vegetable oil quotations push Food Price Index higher

ROME: The benchmark for world food commodity prices rose in November to its highest level since April 2023, increasing by 0.5 percent from October, driven by surging international vegetable oil quotations, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) reported on Friday. The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of a set of

globally-traded food commodities, averaged 127.5 points in November, up 5.7 percent from a year ago while still 20.4 percent below its March 2022 peak. The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index increased by 7.5 percent in November from October, marking its second large increase in two months and 32 percent higher than its year-earlier level. Global palm oil prices climbed

further amid concerns about lower-than-expected output due to excessive rainfall in Southeast Asia. World soyoil prices rose on global import demand, while rapeseed and sunflower oil quotations increased as tightening global supply prospects affected their respective markets. Meanwhile, the FAO Dairy Price Index rose 0.6 percent in November, driven by increased global

demand for whole milk powder. Butter prices hit record highs due to strong demand and low inventories in Western Europe, while limited export availability pushed cheese prices higher. The FAO Cereal Price Index fell 2.7 percent, 8.0 percent below the same period last year. Wheat prices dropped due to weak global demand and strong Southern Hemisphere harvests. Maize

prices remained stable, with robust domestic demand in Brazil and Mexico offset by favourable weather in South America and reduced demand for Ukrainian supplies. The All-Rice Price Index declined 4.0 percent due to market competition, harvest pressures, and currency shifts. The Sugar Price Index decreased 2.4 percent, influenced by harvest activities in India and

Thailand and improved sugarcane crop prospects in Brazil following recent rains. The Meat Price Index dropped 0.8 percent, driven by lower pig meat prices in the EU amid ample supply and weak demand. Ovine and poultry meat prices declined slightly, while bovine meat prices held steady, balancing higher Brazilian and lower Australian quotations. — WAM

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ECONOMY

Indian industry welcomes CRR cut, anticipates rate cut

NEW DELHI: Industry bodies welcomed the overall RBI monetary policy announcements made on Friday. Commenting on monetary policy, Harsha Vardhan Agarwal, President, FICCI said while the Reserve Bank of India's stance on the repo rate was widely expected, the industry body welcomes the 50-bps cut in the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) rate. "This move is well-timed and practical and should help ease out the liquidity situation supporting credit and overall growth." "On the inflation front, the prices are expected to moderate in the latter part of the current fiscal year. We look forward to a cut in repo rate in the next policy statement," added Agarwal. Food prices have been driving the current spurt in prices and a seasonal correction is on anvil. It is pertinent to ensure a seamless supply-side framework through better planning, logistics and distribution management of food items leveraging careful monitoring of production data," Agarwal of FICCI said. Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), also welcomed the 50-bps cut in the cash reserve ratio, asserting that it will help ensure the availability of additional resources for all pro-



ductive sectors of the economy, especially in anticipation of a near-term tightening of systemic liquidity. "This was a specific CII ask along with a request for moderation in headline interest rates," Banerjee added. "However, we draw satisfaction from the overall statement that the neutral stance has been maintained and with the anticipated easing of inflation, we can expect rate cuts in the foreseeable future." With these measures, CII anticipates that there will be a better balance between growth and inflation management.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the 11th consecutive time, marking a continuation of its neutral monetary policy stance. The RBI downwardly revised GDP forecast for 2024-25 to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent earlier. The RBI Governor announced that the CRR has been cut by 50 basis points from 4.5 per cent to 4 per cent. This the Governor had said will infuse Rs 1.15 lac crore of liquidity into the banking system. Further, the retail inflation projection for 2024-25 has been hiked from 4.5 per cent to 4.8 per cent. — ANI

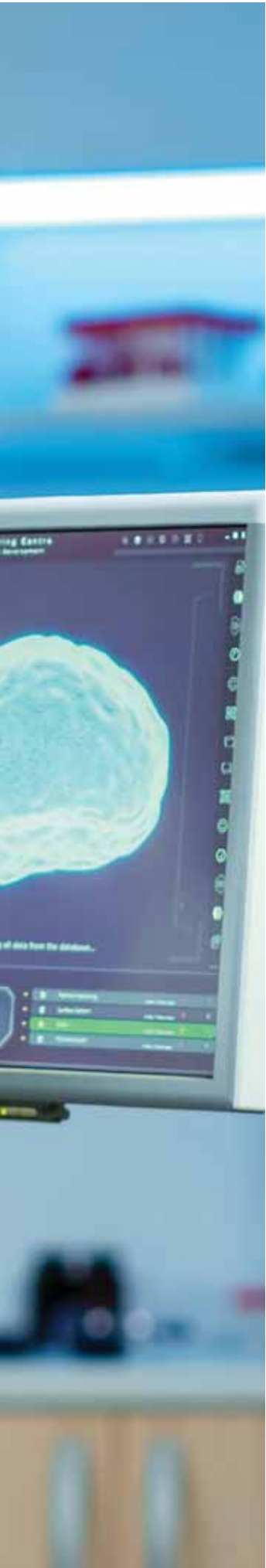
OCTOBER, OFFICIAL DATA

China's forex reserves rise

BEIJING: China's foreign exchange reserves totaled 3.2659 trillion U.S. dollars at the end of November, up by 4.8 billion dollars, or 0.15 percent, from the end of October, official data showed Saturday. According to a statement from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, both the U.S. dollar index and global financial asset prices climbed last month, affected by the monetary policies

of major economies, market expectations and macroeconomic data. **Combined effects** Due to the combined effects of factors such as currency translation and changes in asset prices, China's foreign exchange reserves expanded last month, according to the statement. The country's economic recovery is picking up momentum and

market confidence is improving, and these factors are conducive to maintaining the stable scale of the country's foreign exchange reserves, the administration further said. According to data released Saturday by the People's Bank of China, the country's gold reserves increased to 72.96 million ounces at the end of November, up from 72.8 million ounces a month ago. — Xinhua



BRAIN STIMULATION EFFECTIVENESS TIED TO LEARNING ABILITY, NOT AGE: STUDY

Their findings suggest that individuals with less efficient learning mechanisms benefit more from stimulation, while those with optimal learning strategies might experience negative effects

As we age, our cognitive and motor functions degrade, reducing our independence and overall quality of life. Research efforts to mitigate or perhaps eliminate this have resulted in technologies that hold a lot of promise.

Now, scientists led by Friedhelm Hummel at EPFL have identified an important factor affecting an individual's responsiveness to anodal transcranial direct current stimulation (atDCS). The team looked at how native learning abilities determine the effect of brain stimulation applied while learning a motor task. Their findings suggest that individuals with less efficient learning mechanisms benefit more from stimulation, while those with optimal learning strategies might experience negative effects.

Among these is non-invasive brain stimulation: a term encompassing a set of techniques that can affect brain functions externally and noninvasively, without the need for surgery or implants. One such promising technique, in particular, is atDCS, which uses a constant, low electrical current delivered via electrodes on the scalp

to modulate neuronal activity.

However, studies exploring atDCS have produced inconsistent results, which has prompted researchers to explore why some people benefit from atDCS while others don't. The problem seems to lie in our understanding of factors that may influence responsiveness to brain stimulation, leading to responders and non-responders; among these, age has been suggested as one important factor.

Some studies suggest further factors such as baseline behavioural abilities and previous training might be important considerations, but an interplay of these factors with behaviour has not been determined in detail, pointing to the need of refined predictive models of the effects of atDCS.

The researchers recruited 40 participants: 20 middle-aged adults (50-65 years old) and 20 older adults (over 65). Each group was further divided into those receiving active atDCS and those receiving placebo stimulation.

Over ten days, participants practised a finger-tapping task designed to study motor sequence learning at home while receiving atDCS. The task involved replicating a numerical sequence using a

keypad, trying to be as fast and as accurate as possible.

The team then used a machine-learning model trained on a public dataset to classify participants as either "optimal" or "suboptimal" learners, based on their initial performance. This model aimed to predict who would benefit from atDCS, based on their ability to integrate information about the task efficiently early during training.

The study found that suboptimal learners, who were seemingly less efficient at internalizing the task at the early stages of learning, experienced an accelerated accuracy improvement while performing the task when receiving atDCS. This effect was not limited to people of a certain age (e.g., older adults), with suboptimal learners being found among younger individuals as well.

In contrast, participants with optimal learning strategies, regardless of age, even showed a negative trend in performance when receiving atDCS. This difference suggests that brain stimulation is more beneficial for individuals who initially struggle with motor tasks. As such, atDCS seems to possess a restorative rather than an enhancing quality,

with important implications for rehabilitation.

"By leveraging different methods in Machine learning, we were able to untangle the influence of different factors on the individual effects of brain stimulation," said Pablo Maceira, the study's first author. "This will pave the way to maximize the effects of brain stimulation in individual subjects and patients."

The study implies that, in the long run, personalized brain stimulation protocols will be developed to maximise benefits based on an individual's specific needs, rather than a common trait such as age. This approach could lead to more effective brain stimulation-based interventions, targeting specific mechanisms supporting learning, especially in the view of neurorehabilitation, for which the main basis is the re-learning of lost skills due to a brain lesion (e.g., after a stroke or a traumatic brain injury).

"In the future, clinicians could apply a more advanced version of our algorithm to determine whether a patient will benefit from a brain stimulation-based therapy, to enhance the effects of neurorehabilitation and personalize treatment," said Hummel. ■

SPORTS

Man United are a massive club, not massive team, says coach Amorim

The club have not won the Premier League since Sir Alex Ferguson retired in 2013

LONDON: New head coach Ruben Amorim says Manchester United are “a massive club but not a massive team” as he tries to steer them back towards the top of the English game.

United have improved since Erik ten Hag was sacked on October 28.

But Wednesday’s 2-0 defeat at Arsenal, combined with results elsewhere, means they have climbed just one place in the Premier League table to 13th since Ten Hag’s exit.

Amorim, whose team next host Nottingham Forest on Saturday night admitted his side were second best at Arsenal - and that the game provided a reality check.

“That is very clear,” he said. “We are a massive club but we are not a massive team. We know it, so there is no problem saying it.”

That, however, does not mean the club should reset their targets, according to Amorim, who began work as United boss on November 11.

He said he accepts the storied history of the club means the demands will always be sky high.

“We’re not one of the best teams in the league,” he said. “We have to say and think that clearly.”

“But [in] our past, our club is maybe the best one in the league. So here we have a problem. We have to focus on the little details,



then we will improve as a team.”

At the start of his reign, Amorim said he wanted his players to work hard.

United’s players have, over the past few years, faced accusations of lacking effort, during a turbulent period which has brought the arrival and departure of a series of managers.

The issue presently is the number of games they are playing. Amorim has started his time at United with 11 games in 37 days - his old club Sporting have seven in the same period - which makes it impossible to develop fitness.

And not until that happens can supporters expect their team to be challenging again.

“If we want to win the Premier League, we have to run like mad dogs,” said Amorim. “Even with the best starting XI on the planet, without running they will win nothing.”

Amorim has told his players it is more important to applaud United fans after defeats than victories.

Striker Marcus Rashford left the field before the rest of his teammates after the defeat at Emirates Stadium, sparking criticism.

Asked about the incident, without naming Rashford directly, Amorim said it was important to acknowledge supporters who had backed their team. “We have to do it,” he said. “Especially when we lose. Everyone has to do it. It has to be like that.” - Agencies



Merseyside derby called off because of storm

LONDON: The Merseyside derby between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park on Saturday has been postponed on safety grounds because of severe weather caused by Storm Darragh.

An amber weather warning for strong winds was issued for Merseyside on Saturday morning amid disruptive conditions across the UK.

The game was called off after a meeting between both clubs and representatives from Merseyside Police and Liverpool City Council.

“Whilst we appreciate this will be deeply disappointing

for supporters, the safety of fans, staff and players is of paramount importance,” an Everton statement read.

Liverpool said the decision was “due to the risk to safety in the local area”.

The match was due to kick off at 12:30 GMT and be the final league derby between the two teams at Goodison before Everton move into a new stadium in 2025.

Liverpool are seven points clear of Chelsea and Arsenal at the top of the Premier League table, with both those teams set to play on Sunday - at Tottenham and Fulham

respectively.

Sean Dyche’s Everton are 15th in the top flight, five points clear of the relegation places.

Millions of people in parts of Wales and south-west England have been told to stay at home to avoid danger during the storm.

Forecasters have warned of winds of up to 90mph in some parts, while the Met Office issued its highest-level red warning to cover areas of western and southern Wales - where tens of thousands of homes are without power. - Agencies

FORMULA ONE



Lowdon to be Cadillac team principal for 2026 debut

ABU DHABI: Former Manor Formula 1 boss Graeme Lowdon will be the team principal of the new Cadillac team for its expected debut in 2026.

The 59-year-old has been instrumental in setting up the project, which has an agreement in principle to enter F1 as a works team of US car giant General Motors.

Lowdon ran the Manor team in F1 through various guises from its entry as Virgin in 2010 until 2015. He and partner John Booth



left before the team’s final season in 2016.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Grand Prix has been given a new contract that will keep it on the F1 schedule until 2030.

The race at the Shanghai International Circuit returned to the calendar this year for the first time since 2019. It fell off the calendar during the Covid-19 pandemic and stayed off longer than most events because of China’s singular handling of the disease. - Agencies

AUSTRALIAN TEENAGER

I’m just a kid: Gout after breaking 200m record

BRISBANE: Australian teenage sensation Gout Gout has entered the record books by becoming the fastest 16-year-old in history over 200m.

He ran the distance in 20.04 seconds during the Australian schools championships in Brisbane on Saturday, breaking the national record set by Peter Norman when he won silver at the 1968 Olympics.

Gout’s time is the fastest ever by a 16-year-old and the second fastest by an athlete under the age of 18 - behind Erriyon Knighton’s 19.84 as a 17-year-old in 2021.

“It’s pretty crazy,” said Gout.

“Right now I can’t process it, but I guess tonight when I go to bed, I’ll think about it. These are adults. And me, I’m just a kid, and I’m running them (down).”

“I’ve been chasing that record, but I didn’t think it would come this year. I thought it would come maybe next year, the year after that.”

Gout, who turns 17 later this month, ran the fourth-fastest 100m by an Australian with a time



of 10.04 on Friday.

At 6ft 2in, Gout’s speed and running style has earned him comparisons with Jamaican legend Usain Bolt.

Australian broadcaster ABC said Gout will travel to the United States next month to train with

Olympic 100m champion Noah Lyles.

The son of migrants from war-torn South Sudan, Gout lives in the Brisbane suburb of Ipswich.

The 2032 Olympics will be held in the Australian city, when Gout will be 24. - Agencies

22ND EDITION

BDO defeat KPMG to clinch Auditor’s Cup



MUSCAT: BDO edged past KPMG in the final to clinch the top honours in the 22nd edition of the Auditor’s Cup held at the Al Bahri Al Hail ground recently.

The annual tournament saw the participation of seven teams and was managed by Jazz Boys Club.

Crowe reached the Eliminator round and finished as second runner-up in the tournament.

BDO, making their fourth consecutive final appearance, won the title for the second time.

In the final, BDO won the toss and opted to field. KPMG posted a competitive total of 53 runs in six overs, losing four wickets. Mayank was the standout performer with 20.

In reply, BDO lost early wickets but Vishnu turned the game around with a blistering knock of 22 off just nine balls.

He was supported by captain Abu Hashim, who top-scored with 23, including three sixes and a four as BDO chased down the target in just 3.3 overs. Vishnu was named the Player of the Match.



Individual awards: Player of the Tournament: Abu Hashim (BDO), best batter: Abu Hashim, best bowler: Mayank (KPMG), best wicketkeeper: Arsalan (KPMG), Best dressed team: EY Black.

Special awards: Saqib (PwC), Bala (Crowe), and Nasfatullah (Crowe).

FOOTBALL

Inter Miami’s Messi wins MLS MVP award

MIAMI: Argentine superstar Lionel Messi has won Major League Soccer’s (MLS) Most Valuable Player (MVP) award.

The former Barcelona and Paris-Saint Germain forward helped Inter Miami to a record regular season points tally, before his side were beaten in the first round of the MLS Cup play-offs in November. The 37-year-old had a league-leading 36 goal contributions, scoring 20 goals and creating 16 assists.

The award comes despite injuries limiting Messi to just 19 regular season and two play-off appearances for Miami this year.

The league’s MVP is chosen by players, club technical staff



and journalists. Messi received 38.43% of votes, beating Columbus Crew’s Cucho Hernandez who got 33.7%.

The award, officially known as the Landon Donovan MLS MVP, has previously been won by former United States midfielder Donovan, Republic of Ireland’s Robbie Keane and Spain’s David Villa. - Agencies

Transformative potential of AI in the banking sector highlighted

BankDhofar Chief Information Officer Dr. Tariq Saleh Taha discusses the challenges, data privacy concerns, regulatory compliance, and the need for skilled talent

MUSCAT: Dr. Tariq Saleh Taha, Chief Information Officer, emphasises the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in the banking sector, citing its ability to enhance the customer experience, streamline operations and improve decision-making. AI can analyze vast amounts of data to provide personalised financial advice, automate routine tasks, and detect fraud in real time.

In Oman, while many banks are still in the early stages of adopting AI, the technology is already being used for virtual assistants, fraud detection, and operational efficiency. Dr. Tariq also highlights the challenges, including data privacy concerns, regulatory compliance, and the need for skilled talent, stressing that a strategic approach is crucial for successful AI integration.

Please share your thoughts on the potential benefits of using Artificial Intelligence in the banking sector in general?

Dr. Tariq: Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to revolutionise banking services in several ways, including market forecasting by analysing market trends, which contributes to making sound decisions in a short period of time, in addition to analysing customer data to provide financial advice and encourage them to accept the bank's products. AI-based systems and robots can also automate many operational processes, which in turn improves costs and reduces human errors.

Artificial intelligence systems contribute to providing improved services through chatbots and virtual assistants that speak different languages to listen to customers of

all nationalities and segments. AI based algorithms can also analyse transaction patterns to detect unusual activities that may indicate fraud, as well as manage risks by assessing credit risks by analysing huge amounts of data that can lead to better credit decisions.

How is the banking sector using artificial intelligence in the Sultanate of Oman?

Dr. Tariq: Most banks in Oman are in the early stages of exploring AI technologies, especially generative AI. Banks are exploring technologies that mostly revolve around virtual assistants, language processing, fraud detection, etc. Various banks are also using robotic process automation with AI capabilities, as well as using AI-based applications for "know your customer" across different digital accounts to achieve higher levels of automation and efficiency.

How can AI contribute to improving banking services provided to customers?

Dr. Tariq: AI systems enhance banking services by analysing customer data to provide specialized financial advice and encourage individuals to accept products, which contributes to creating a more convenient banking experience that meets the preferred needs of individuals.

Chatbots and virtual assistants powered by AI with text and voice capabilities in different languages can provide 24/7 support by answering customer inquiries and resolving problems quickly, ensuring that customers receive immediate assistance without waiting for human staff.

AI systems help understand customer behavior and preferences, which enables banks to engage with customers effectively, gain their satisfaction and loyalty, which enhances the overall customer experience.

What challenges can banks face when implementing AI technologies?

Dr. Tariq: AI systems often require large amounts of data, and given the sensitivity of banking data, this can raise concerns about how this data is stored and protected. Implementing AI also requires compliance with various laws and regulations, which can be challenging given both AI technology and regulatory frameworks.

Another challenge is that most banks operate on legacy systems that may not be compatible with modern AI technologies, so integrating AI with these systems can



be technically difficult and expensive. Developing AI solutions requires significant amounts of money, while banks are trying to invest in technology, infrastructure, and training. There is also a high demand for highly skilled talent who can develop, implement, and manage AI systems, so finding and retaining such talent can be difficult.

AI systems can also introduce operational risks in the form of incorrect results, which requires ensuring robust testing, effective monitoring, and contingency plans. In addition to challenges related to customer trust and acceptance, customers may have concerns about AI-based services, especially if they feel that their personal data is at risk or if they do not understand how AI decisions are made. Building trust and ensuring transparency is a major challenge. I believe that addressing these challenges requires a strategic approach, including investing in appropriate technology and ensuring compliance with regulations and legislation.

How AI can improve the customer experience in bank branches and on digital platforms?

Dr. Tariq: AI systems help branch staff deliver personalised services by analysing customer data and needs. They can also manage queues more efficiently by predicting peak times and optimising staff allocation, which helps reduce waiting times and improve the overall customer experience.

AI-powered outlets assist customers with routine tasks such as account inquiries, bill payments, transfer transactions, etc., freeing up staff to handle more complex tasks.

On digital platforms, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants with text and voice capabilities in different languages can provide round-the-clock support, answer queries, assist with trans-

actions, and resolve challenges, ensuring customers receive immediate assistance.

AI systems can analyse customer behaviour and transaction history to provide personalised and tailored financial advice about products, enhancing the relevance and value of services provided. AI algorithms also detect unusual transaction patterns and potential fraud in real-time, enhancing the security of customer accounts and providing peace of mind.

Banks are provided with more efficient, secure, and personalised services using AI systems, which ultimately enhances the overall customer experience, whether in branches or on digital platforms. Furthermore, AI can be used to automate routine tasks such as loan processing, account management, and compliance checks, which in turn speeds up these processes, reduces the likelihood of errors, and creates more user-friendly digital interfaces by analysing user interactions and feedback.

Which are the most prominent areas of the banking sector in which artificial intelligence is currently being used?

Dr. Tariq: AI is being used in various areas within the banking sector to enhance efficiency, security and customer experience such as fraud detection and prevention by analysing transaction patterns to detect and prevent fraudulent activities in real time. It also analyses customer behaviour to identify trends and preferences, enabling banks to improve their services and marketing strategies.

AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have text and voice capabilities in multiple languages and provide 24/7 customer support, handling inquiries, transactions and resolving issues instantly.

AI models enable creditworthiness assessment and risk management through big data analysis,

improving the accuracy and speed of credit scoring, and robots help automate tasks such as back-office operations, loan processing and compliance checks, enhancing operational efficiency and reducing human errors.

AI systems also help banks comply with various regulations by automating the process of monitoring and reporting compliance-related activities.

How can banks balance the imperatives of automation while also maintaining the human touch in the delivery of customer services?

Dr. Tariq: Balancing automation and the human touch in customer service is crucial for banks to ensure a seamless and satisfying customer experience, but with a set of key considerations such as a dual approach to customer service, where AI systems can handle routine inquiries and transactions, while humans focus on more complex issues, ensuring efficiency without compromising on personal service. Feedback mechanisms can also be created that help customers easily provide input on their experiences with both AI and human agents, contributing to the continuous improvement of automated and human interactions.

AI systems can easily escalate customer challenges to human agents through clear and easy options in chatbots, ensuring that customers always feel supported.

It also requires senior management in banks to regularly train employees to work alongside AI tools, enabling them to override AI decisions when necessary and provide personalised support, ensuring that human agents are well equipped to handle exceptions and provide a human touch. I believe that by thoughtfully integrating AI while maintaining a strong human element, banks can provide efficient, secure and personalized customer service that meets the diverse needs of customers.

How can banks ensure data privacy when using AI technologies? Are there potential risks involved, and how can they be dealt with?

Dr. Tariq: Ensuring data privacy while using AI technologies is important, and there are some ways to mitigate potential risks such as encrypting data during transmission to ensure personal information is protected from unauthorized access, and implementing some controls and systems can help to ensure that only authorized employees can access personal data.

Anonymising data before us-

ing it in AI models helps protect individual privacy by removing personal information from data sets. In addition, regular audits and assessments of AI systems are conducted to ensure compliance with data privacy regulations that identify potential vulnerabilities.

Some potential risks include unauthorized access to personal data leading to various breaches and frauds, where robust cybersecurity measures, regular security audits, and incident response plans can be used.

Navigating complex regulatory environments can be challenging, so banks should keep up to date with regulations, ensure compliance through regular audits, and work closely with legal experts.

Some individuals or organizations can tamper with AI models which in turn leads to biased decisions or financial fraud, so here it is necessary to secure AI models, monitor unusual activities and implement strong verification processes. I would like to point out that poor data accuracy and quality may lead to inaccurate AI results, so it requires high-quality data to achieve reliable AI results.

Please shed some light on BankDhofar's experience with artificial intelligence.

Dr. Tariq: BankDhofar is always a pioneer in applying and leveraging the latest technologies to add new value to customers, achieve sustainable growth, boost operational efficiency and enrich the overall customer experience. BankDhofar is one of the first banks in the Sultanate of Oman to implement an operations management platform, and introduce automation using robots that cover a large number of operations, which has led to positive developments in customer service, reducing human errors, speeding up the completion of operations, and enhancing internal controls. The bank has also benefited from applying artificial intelligence technologies in digital preparation and KYC "know your customer".

Currently, we are in the early stages of exploring the application of generative artificial intelligence, and enhancing the automation of operations, and I believe that there are many areas where we can benefit from the capabilities of artificial intelligence such as customer service, predictive analytics, offers and recommendations, fraud detection and risk management. We are also exploring the challenges of deploying artificial intelligence, particularly with respect to privacy and security.

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY

MCBS to organise major conference

MUSCAT: Under the Patronage of H.H. Dr. Adham bin Turki Al Said, Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS), in collaboration with the EuroMid Academy of Business and Technology, Turkey, is excited to announce the International Conference on Sustainable Practices in Business and Technology (ICSPBT'2024), scheduled for December 11-12, 2024, at MCBS, Muscat, Oman. This hybrid conference will bring together global experts, scholars, and industry leaders to engage in insightful discussions on economic sustainability, technological innovations, and sustainable business practices.

"We are thrilled to host this prestigious event, which will serve as a platform for knowledge exchange on critical global challenges in sustainability. At MCBS, we are committed to supporting innovative solutions that promote sustainable growth both locally and globally," said Dr. Moosa Al Kindi, Dean of MCBS.

The conference is dedicated to fostering the exchange of knowledge, innovative ideas, and discussions on the latest advancements in sustainable practices within business and technology. ICSPBT'2024 will provide a valuable platform for distinguished academicians, scholars, and researchers to connect, collaborate, and engage with peers from both national and international communities. This event aims to create a dynamic space where experts can



share their insights, explore practical solutions, and inspire new approaches to tackle pressing global sustainability issues.

In line with the goals of fostering global collaboration, the conference received an impressive 373 paper submissions from institutions around the world, showcasing the widespread interest in sustainability. The papers came from a diverse range of countries, including Oman, India, Indonesia, United States, Egypt, Nigeria, Malaysia, among other countries.

The conference will address critical global challenges in economics and sustainability, aiming to convene experts from diverse fields to exchange knowledge and insights on economic transformation and sustainable practices. The goal is to generate innovative solutions that support equitable worldwide economic growth while preserving our planet's resources for future generations. ICSPBT'2024 seeks to not only discuss these issues but also drive action toward creating a more sustainable and economically inclusive world.

Full story @ timesofoman.com/roundup

STRATEGIC MILESTONE

Omantel joins the nation in celebrating historic launch of Duqm-1, Oman's first scientific rocket

MUSCAT: Omantel joins the nation in celebrating the successful launch of Oman's first experimental rocket launch, Duqm-1. This landmark event, executed at Etlaq Spaceport - one of Omantel's strategic investments - in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, marks a significant achievement in the Sultanate's journey into space exploration and cutting-edge technology.

The launch took place in Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate, positioning Oman as the first Arab nation to inaugurate a space vehicle launch from its own land. This pivotal moment is part of the National Space Programme, aimed at leveraging Oman's geographical advantages to propel space science and technology. The initiative focuses on localising space expertise, fostering public-private partnerships, and attracting investments, thereby contributing to economic diversification and creating job opportunities.

Omantel is a key investor in Etlaq, a subsidiary of the National Aerospace Services Company (NASCOM). This strategic investment reflects Omantel's commitment to advancing technology and innovation, aligning with its vision to lead in emerging technologies and space solutions as part of its ambitious strategy, underscoring the company's transformation into a comprehensive technology provider.

Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, expressed his excitement: "We congratulate the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology on the successful launch of Oman's first experimental rocket. This milestone signifies a remarkable advancement in the Sultanate's communications and information technology sector, setting the stage for a future driven by innovation and strategic geographical advantages."

He further emphasised that this achievement aligns with Omantel's vision and strategic commitment to innovation: "The successful launch of Duqm-1 highlights Omantel's dedication to advancing beyond traditional telecommunications into cutting-edge technological systems. Our goal is to develop a seamless digital ecosystem that connects all segments of society, fostering collaboration, innovation, and sustainable growth, ultimately contributing to a brighter future for Oman."

Talal Al Mamari also praised the collaborative efforts, stating, "We take immense pride in Etlaq's achievements both locally and regionally. As a strategic partner in this pioneering space venture, Omantel is committed to driving technological advancement and national innovation by delivering smarter technological solutions across various sectors."

His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Qais Al Said, Founder and CEO of Etlaq, expressed his pride



in this historic milestone: "We are honored to witness the successful launch of Oman's first suborbital space rocket, a testament to the Sultanate's determination to achieve the ambitious goals of the National Space Programme and advance cutting-edge technologies."

His Highness added, "This success underscores the critical role of innovation and investment in space as drivers of technological progress and economic development. It strengthens Oman's international position in the space sector and highlights our commitment to a future driven by technological excellence and global col-

laboration."

Omantel's advanced solutions, including data centers, cloud computing, and AI-driven technologies, have greatly benefited Etlaq. As a key partner in the National Space Programme, Omantel supports government initiatives by fostering the development of space technology programs and applications through Etlaq.

Oman has strengthened its strategic position as a regional space hub, making significant strides in satellite and rocket launches. Guided by its visionary approach, Omantel actively contributes to this promising field, leveraging space technologies to overcome topographical challenges and enhance operational efficiency.

Omantel is exploring new opportunities to leverage space technologies across various sectors, including monitoring oil and gas pipelines, coastal surveillance, and processing satellite imagery. These technologies transform operations, enabling real-time monitoring and data analysis to enhance efficiency and security.

By utilising satellite data, Omantel is gaining valuable insights to enhance its 5G network and service offerings. This forward-looking approach positions Omantel at the forefront of technological innovation, shaping the future of the space sector in Oman.

Full story @ timesofoman.com/roundup

ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat inaugurates lighting project for Al Tadamun Sports Team

This initiative is designed to support local sports teams and enhance Oman’s sports infrastructure

MUSCAT: In line with its ongoing achievements and successes in the field of social responsibility, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to develop national teams and support the Omani youth.

Recently, the Bank celebrated the completion of the lighting project for Al Tadamun Sports Team in the Wilayat of Jalan Bani Bu Hassan in South Al Sharqiya Governorate, as part of its Green Sports programme.

This initiative is designed to support local sports teams and enhance Oman’s sports infrastructure. The celebration event was held under the patronage of the Honorable Dr. Aamir Nasir Al Mataani, Member of State Council, with the presence of Badr Mohammed Al Hajri, Assistant Regional Manager – Bank Muscat Branches in North Al Sharqiya Governorate, as well as Qais Hamad Al Rajhi, Head of Al Tadamun Sports Team.

A number of distinguished guests and team members also attended the event.

During the inauguration ceremony, Badr Mohammed Al Hajri, Assistant Regional Manager – Bank Muscat Branches in North Al Sharqiya Governorate, expressed his happiness about the successful execution of the lighting project for Al Tadamun Sports Team as part of the “Green Sports” programme. Badr Al Hajri congratulated the team for the successful completion of the project which will contribute to the development of the



main infrastructure of the team. The field will represent a suitable venue for the team to organize events and different cultural and sports activities contributing to the enhancement of their sports skills. Furthermore, a large segment of the Omani youth with different age groups are keen to join the events related to the sports and social arenas. Bank Muscat will

remain committed to serving the youth through its CSR programme “Green Sports” to keep pace with the developments that contribute to the growth of the sports teams all over the Sultanate.

Speaking on the occasion, Qais Hamad Al Rajhi, Head of Al Tadamun Sports Team, said: “I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bank Muscat for the

continuous support to enhancing the “Green Sports” programme. This programme represents a major social initiative for developing the youth’s talents and sports teams in the Sultanate. The fields of local sports teams constitute strategic and convenient areas to organize various sports and cultural events and sports activities. Therefore, the new lighting project

of Al Tadamun Sports Team was the dream of the team members while it has now become a reality that would provide the team with an ample opportunity to develop their talents and sports potential through hosting multiple sports and cultural events, activities, and competitions.”

The Green Sports programme is one of Bank Muscat’s CSR initiatives, which draws from the values of leadership and partnership to create a positive impact on the Omani society.

The programme aims to develop and provide a sustainable infrastructure for sports fields in the country.

The scope of Green Sports support for sports teams comprises four areas including greening of football fields with natural or synthetic turf, floodlights and water desalination equipment in areas facing water salinity.

Bank Muscat’s Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 203 teams with over 70,000 team members across the Sultanate.

A'SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY



Graduation celebration of new students marked

MUSCAT: A'Sharqiyah University in the Wilayat of Ibra in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate will celebrate the graduation of the tenth batch of its students under the patronage of His Excellency Al Fadl Al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.

The number of graduates with diplomas, bachelor's, and master's degrees exceeds 1,000 students in various specialisations and programs offered by the university from the College of Business Administration, the College of Arts and Humanities, the College of

Engineering, the College of Applied and Health Sciences, as well as the College of Law.

The events committee has completed all the preparations, organisational aspects, technical procedures, and logistical requirements for the graduation ceremony, which will be held at the university campus.

It is worth noting that the number of students enrolled at A'Sharqiyah University in the academic year 2024/2025 exceeded 9,000 male and female students, studying in its five colleges.

25-YEAR-OLD ENDURANCE ATHLETE

Europcar Oman and Bahrain sponsors adventurer Vedangi Kulkarni’s cycling expedition in Oman

MUSCAT: Europcar Oman and Bahrain is proud to announce its sponsorship of Vedangi Kulkarni, a remarkable 25-year-old endurance athlete, adventurer, writer, and public speaker, for her upcoming cycling expedition in Oman. Vedangi Kulkarni is set to embark on a thrilling journey through the scenic landscapes of Oman, showcasing her indomitable spirit and passion for adventure.

Vedangi Kulkarni is known for her extraordinary achievements, including becoming the youngest woman to circumnavigate the world on a bicycle at the age of 19/20, covering 29,000km in 160 days, mostly solo and unsupported. Her daring expeditions and unwavering determination have inspired many around the globe.

As part of our sponsorship, Europcar Oman and Bahrain will provide Vedangi Kulkarni with a Toyota Prado and a dedicated driver for 4-5 days starting from



December 4, 2024, ensuring a safe and comfortable journey through the rugged terrains of Muscat, Sur and Salalah. Additionally, Europcar will offer a specialized space for the transportation of her bike as and when, supporting her logistical needs for this challenging expedition.

Vedangi Kulkarni’s passion for adventure and her commitment to inspiring others to believe in themselves align perfectly with

Europcar’s ethos of enabling memorable and transformative experiences through travel. Her dedication to exploring new frontiers and pushing boundaries resonates with our commitment to supporting individuals who embody the spirit of exploration and resilience.

“I’m thrilled to have Europcar Oman and Bahrain as a sponsor for my cycling expedition in Oman,” said Vedangi Kulkarni.

“Their support will enable me to focus on the journey ahead and share my love for adventure with a wider audience. I look forward to pushing my limits and creating unforgettable memories in the beautiful landscapes of Oman.”

Vedangi Kulkarni’s entrepreneurial venture, “The Adventure Shed,” reflects her mission to make adventure accessible to all through practical advice and services, including an online course and Adventure Planning Blueprint. Her dedication to storytelling and deepening connections with the natural world through adventurous pursuits showcases her multifaceted approach to life and her passion for inspiring others.

Europcar Oman and Bahrain is honored to support Vedangi Kulkarni on her upcoming cycling expedition in Oman and looks forward to witnessing her remarkable journey unfold.

DAWOODI BOHRA COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Residents of Darsait celebrate Oman’s 54th National Day

MUSCAT: Oman’s 54th National Day was celebrated in a unique way by the Dawoodi Bohra community members, who organised a vibrant carnival fanfare for their Omani brothers, sisters and children from the neighborhood of Darsait, in Muscat.

The event, held at the Sahil Oman Football ground in Darsait, was attended by citizens of all ages, including Sheikhs and other prominent members of the Omani community, who were impressed by the meticulous planning and thoughtful execution. Around 1,000 attendees, including children with their mothers, grandparents and elders, enjoyed the pleasant evening at the open football ground.

Prominent Omani nationals, including the H.E. Hussain al Lawati and Sheikh of Darsait area, Shaikh Hashil Bin Khalfan Al Hasani, appreciated the efforts taken by the community members, commended their efforts to bring the neighbourhood residents under one platform and added that it was the first time that such a wonder-



ful event was organised in the neighbourhood.

He said, “Oman is a peaceful country and Omanis are known for their hospitality and welcoming nature to each and every one to this glorious nation.”

Majlis Al Shura council member H.E. Hussain Al Lawati, also took time on a weekend and interacted with the community members. He encouraged the organisers with his kind words and wished them, “the very best”.

Shaikh Khuzaima Yamani, from the Dawoodi Bohra community, said, “We believe in an inclusive

society and in fostering brotherly relations with one and all.”

The carnival offered a delightful array of Dawoodi Bohra delicacies, served to all guests along with an assortment of sweet and savory treats. The games on offer created an atmosphere of excitement and the winners took home several gifts as a reward.

One of the carnival’s highlights was the highly anticipated raffle draw which included 20 plus gifts and h created a buzz of excitement among the crowd.

The carnival also featured henna and face painting stalls, which

attracted many visitors, as well as stalls where local Omani women showcased their handicraft and their culinary skills and more.

Each and every individual left the carnival in high spirits urging the Dawoodi Bohra community to regularly organise such events in the future. The lively atmosphere and sense of camaraderie between the Dawoodi Bohra community and the local Omanis were palpable, and strengthened the already existing bond further. It was a heartwarming celebration that will be remembered for its excitement, joy and community spirit.







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