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ROHM TO HOST TWO CONCERTS OF PALESTINIAN ENSEMBLE

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will host two special evenings of classical music with the celebrated Palestinian ensemble Trio Joubran. Trio Joubran is a group founded by three brothers, Samir, Wissam, and Adnan, notably famous for their collaborations with the great Palestinian poet, the late Mahmoud Darwish. **>A5**



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HM THE SULTAN PRESIDES OVER CEREMONY TO LAY FOUNDATION STONE FOR OMAN CULTURAL COMPLEX



His Majesty viewed the cultural complex designs showcasing the project components

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday presided over a ceremony to lay the foundation stone of Oman Cultural Complex project and the building of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) at the Airport Heights in Muscat Governorate.

When His Majesty the Sultan arrived at the project's site, he was received by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of

Culture, Sports and Youth, Chairman of the Founding Committee of Oman Cultural Complex Project, and Dr. Hamad bin Mohammed Al Dhoyani, NRAA Chairman.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan viewed Oman Cultural Complex building's designs, that highlighted the components of the project.

The project is considered an embodiment of the Royal vision of His Majesty to establish a state-of-the-art cultural designation, a civil

isational accomplishment and a scholarly and institutional edifice of Oman's blessed renaissance.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan watched a visual presentation about the project and listened to a briefing about the building's innovative model. The project houses many institutions and facilities, including the National Library, the National Theatre, Children's Public Library, the House of Arts, the House of Cinema, the Literary Forum and the National Records and Archives Authority. It also comprises restaurants, cafeterias and a public park.

His Majesty the Sultan then laid the cornerstone marking the start of construction of Oman Cultural Complex—a building of about 80,200 square metres (sqm)

that will be constructed on land plot of 400,000 sqm, to the tune of OMR147.8 million.

Oman Cultural Complex seeks to promote cultural, literary, theatrical and research activities through the enhancement of relevant programmes aimed to expand the scope of engagement in highlighting Oman's cultural heritage and exploring the country's accomplishments.

The complex will provide services to scholars and researchers. It will help organise cultural events and programmes to develop vistas of cultural action that will focus on Oman's history and cultural identity. The ceremony was attended by some Royal Family members, ministers and senior officials. — **ONA See also >A2, A4**

HIGHLIGHTS

- The project is considered an embodiment of the Royal vision to establish a state-of-the-art cultural structure and an edifice of Oman's blessed renaissance.
- The complex will be set up with a fund of OMR147.8 million on a land plot of 400,000 sqm, where the buildings will occupy an area of 80,200
- It will house the buildings of the National Theatre, the National Library and the National Records and Archives Authority, in addition to eight other facilities.
- It will provide services for researchers and students through two institutions: the National Records and Archives Authority and the National Library.

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN HM's greetings conveyed in Kampala

1 Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah Al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council headed the Oman's delegation at the Third South Summit (G77+China) in Kampala on Sunday. **>A3**

WORLD US personnel injured in Iraq missile attack

2 A number of US personnel were evaluated for head injuries following a ballistic missile attack on Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq, the US CENTCOM said on Sunday. **>A7**



MARKET More spending on social sector in budget

3 Oman's budget, published in early January, indicates that the authorities will continue to pay down government debt, but increase social spending, says Fitch Ratings. **>B1**

WILAYAT OF BAUSHER

Joint GCC team carries out excavation work at Sanab village to collect artefacts

Times News Service

MUSCAT: A joint team from the GCC carried out excavation works in the Sanab village in the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate.

The aim of the excavation was to document the site and carry out survey work of the surrounding areas to collect the archaeological evidence.

Sanab is one of the fascinating villages in the Wilayat of Bausher that contains artefacts dating back to the first century BC.

It also has a number of heritage landmarks of the Islamic period including Sanab Tower, old houses, wadis, waterfalls, falajs and the farms of the village.

A meeting was held on the results of excavations at the site



and joint surveys and exploration works carried out at the site.

A ceremony was held after the end of 10 days of excavations on the premises of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism under the patronage of Ibrahim bin Said Al

Kharrousi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in the presence of a number of officials at the Ministry.

Ali bin Hamood Al Mahrooqi, Director of Archaeological Surveys and Explorations at the Min-

istry of Heritage and Tourism, said that the wilayat of Bausher contains important heritage sites dating back to the stone age.

The site at Sanab extends from the foot of the hill to the new residential area, he said, pointing to the contribution of the researchers from the GCC states in this excavation as part of the programme of the Secretariat General of the GCC.

He said that the participants exchanged expertise on excavations. Sultan Al Rasheed, the leader of the archaeological explorations team at the Heritage Authority in Saudi Arabia, said that the joint excavations were carried out after approval from the undersecretaries of heritages and museums in the GCC States. — **With ONA inputs**



This complex will serve as a lively space allocated for the collection, conservation and presentation of arts and cultural, modern and historical components of the Sultanate of Oman

MUSCAT: Oman Cultural Complex, a project whose construction was launched by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday, will serve as an added civilisational accomplishment and a major institutional edifice of modern Oman.

This complex, which will comprise the buildings of three main institutions in one installation, will serve as a lively space allocated for the collection, conservation and presentation of arts and cultural, modern and historical components of the Sultanate of Oman.

The complex will house the buildings of the National Theatre, the National Library, Children's Public Library, the House of Arts, the House of Cinema, the Literary Forum, the National Records and Archives Authority and galleries of modern arts, in addition to restaurants, cafeterias and a public park.

The complex will be set up with a fund of OMR147.8 million on a land plot of 400,000 sqm, where the buildings will occupy an area of 80,200 sqm.

The complex will promote cultural, literary, theatrical and research activities. It will enhance the national memory of the Sultanate of Oman's history and mod-



ern accomplishments.

The compound will include the National Theatre, the National Library, Children's Public Library, the House of Arts, the House of Cinema, the Literary Forum, the National Records and Archives Authority and galleries of modern arts, in addition to restaurants, cafeterias and a public park.

The objectives of the complex include advancing cultural and literary action, expanding the scope of the ministry's plans and activities and facilitating the implementation of the cultural strategy on serving the community.

The complex will supervise and follow up government and private cultural centres and institutions.

It will help build capacities and enable the institutions to perform their roles with efficiency and develop their plans and programmes in governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman.

It will also provide services for researchers and students through two institutions: the National Records and Archives Authority and the National Library.

The National Library at the Complex will be set up on an area of 23,500 sqm.

It will accommodate literary and intellectual produce, devise specifications and criteria, collect data, gather about one million books and exchange information locally and internationally. The Library will also boost the capacity of privately-owned bookshops and provide them with expertise.

The National Theatre will be constructed on an area of 16,500 sqm and its auditorium will provide space for 1,000 seats.

The Theatre will promote plans and programmes capable of bringing about a major shift in theatrical practice. It will enhance the role of theatre locally, regionally and internationally. It will also serve as a training institution for Omani youth.

The National Theatre will incorporate theatrical activity to cover student activities and study curricula. Acting in coordination with other departments concerned, the institution will contribute the follow-up of theatrical activities and make the theatre a useful instrument in serving government programmes and goals. This includes spreading public awareness and hosting local and international

theatre festivals.

The building of the House of Arts will occupy an area of 3,500 sqm. The institution will work to develop and improve the capabilities of young people, notably by studying the requirements for the advancement of folklore, developing the capabilities of young people in the field of modern arts, organising exhibitions and programme in the field of music and providing support to talents in this field.

The Literary Forum, whose building will come up on an area of 3,500 sqm, will contribute to the advancement of literary aspects, including holding of seminars, issuing books authored by member individual and organizations.

The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), whose building will occupy and area of 22,500 sqm, will focus on demonstrating cultural and historical aspects of the Sultanate of Oman.

This is envisaged through the encouragement of research and intellectual creativity and the documentation of achievements of ministries and other institutions of the State, as well as society's contribution to the national memory of Oman.

Among other objectives, the NRAA seeks to enrich educational curricula of general education and higher education. It will develop a modern system for the management of electronic records by implementing Oman's largest digital transition project codenamed "Access" ("Wusool") system.

The NRAA will also lend support to historical research and studies through its own publications, which aim to foster national values and cultural identity. Towards this objective, the NRAA will draft plans and programmes, organize documentary exhibitions to showcase scholarly research, as well as to intellectual, cultural, economic, social and other publications. **-ONA**





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COMMENTARY

Omanis celebrate Social
Protection Allowances



SALEH AL-SHAIBANY

Last week, over two million Omanis received the first monthly payment of the social protection allowances that will help them to keep up with the cost of living.

Citizens from the age of 60 start getting OMR115 a month. Also, children under the age of 18 get OMR10 a month while disabled Omanis get OMR130 a month. The widows also benefit from the new allowances, even if they have not reached the age of 60.

"The allowance is helping me to pay for my groceries. My late husband's pension was never enough and I used to struggle," Fatma Al Balushi, a 43-year old widow, said.

A 49-year old disabled man who lost a leg in a road accident in 2019, is also grateful. He could not continue with his work as a guard in a mall and was forced to accept 50 percent of his work pension because he did not complete the required number of years.

"The money helps a lot to pay the bills and as a disabled person, I am eternally grateful to the gesture of His Majesty the Sultan," Mohammed Al-Salmi, said.



The State Budget 2024 has allocated OMR560 million for the Social Protection Allowances to help Omani citizens who need financial assistance. Statistics show that about 60 percent of the recipients are children, 8 percent are people with disabilities while the rest are widows and pensioners. It is not surprising that the big majority are children because young Omani couples are prolific when it comes to child bearing.

According to statistics, an average Omani couple have five children. But it is not clear which category of recipients will benefit most. But social security experts estimate that

Omanis with young children will benefit more.

"Some young couples with five or six children are struggling to look after them. So they will benefit most from the extra cash. For them, the allowances are a gift from God to make ends meet," Rashid Al-Saifi, a Social Security Advisor, said.

He added that hopefully the new children allowances will not encourage newly-weds to produce more.

"My only hope is that this new children allowance will not make new couples think of producing a number of children. Or the ones married now will not be encouraged to have more babies," Khalid Al-Esri, a family counsellor, said.

He added that currently, nearly 40 percent of the Omanis are under the age of 18.

While experts fear the population explosion, economists say that the cash injected into the economy will benefit the local businesses and create employment.

"With over half a billion rials injected annually into the economy, that will have a very positive effect soon enough. My predictions the cash will create more businesses and expand existing trades. In return, more graduates will be employed or start their own businesses," said Feisal Al-Hattali, a retired government economist.

About 40,000 graduates leave schools, colleges and universities every year looking for employment. Currently, there is a reasonable backlog to fill for the graduates.

Overall, the Social Protection Allowances will be a big boost to the country and for everyone.

HM's greetings
conveyed at
Uganda Summit

Al Khalili underscored Oman's keenness to reflect its obligations by achieving the sustainable development goals 2030 (SDGs 2030)



Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah Al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. - ONA

by achieving the sustainable development goals 2030 (SDGs 2030).

This can be achieved through the country's development plans and programmes which are based on the principles of the right to development for all, eradicating poverty and providing a decent life for all segments of society.

Social protection

Further, Al Khalili said that the Social Protection System comes in harmony with Oman Vision 2040. The system is among Oman's priorities which are implemented through policies and programmes of social collaboration aimed at ensuring the sustainability of decent life and the stability of the family and society.

The Chairman of the State Council also noted that the G77 and China, which represent 80 percent of the world's population, should shoulder their responsibility by practicing political and legal pressure to stop the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and supporting the Palestinian right to a safe and dignified life. -ONA

KAMPALA: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah Al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation at the Third South Summit (G77+China), which kicked off in Kampala, Uganda on Sunday.

The summit was attended by

President Yoweri Museveni of the Republic of Uganda, with the participation of 134 leaders, in addition to heads of international organisations.

During his speech, the Chairman of the State Council conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his best wishes of success to the summit.

Al Khalili underscored Oman's keenness to reflect its obligations



FRIENDSHIP COMMITTEE

Oman and Korea
assert to boost
bilateral relations



MEETING: Khalid Hilal Al Maawali, Chairman of the Shura Council met on Sunday with Jung Chun-soo, Head of the Oman-Korea Parliamentary Friendship Committee and her accompanying delegation. - ONA

MUSCAT: Khalid Hilal Al Maawali, Chairman of the Shura Council received here on Sunday Jung Chun-soo, Head of the Oman-Korea Parliamentary Friendship Committee and her accompanying delegation, currently on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, Al Maawali underscored the bilateral relations in various fields, including the exchange of expertise in regu-

latory fields.

Future plans

The two sides highlighted the efforts exerted by the Oman-Korea Parliamentary Friendship Committee, its achievements and future plans.

The meeting was attended by several officials from the Shura Council and Kim Kiejoo, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman. -ONA

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His Majesty the Sultan views Oman Cultural Complex building designs







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TELEPHONE CALL

Oman, Türkiye stress need for de-escalation in Gaza

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Sunday held a telephonic conversation with Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye.

The phone call focused on the development of regional and global attitudes towards Israel's brutal aggression and illegal siege on the Gaza Strip, as well as the risk escalation in the region as a result.

The two agreed on the importance of intensifying political efforts to achieve a de-escalation, a ceasefire and resumption of humanitarian action to provide relief to the population in the Gaza Strip, as well as efforts to provide the population there with living needs.



They also looked into ways to support the voice of truth and achieve justice for the Palestinian people, in general, and to empower them with the right to self-determination.

The two sides stressed that Israel's persistent violation of rules

of the international humanitarian law and the United Nations Charter necessitate an immediate international response to address such violations—by all available means—and to hold Israel accountable for the breaches.

-ONA

ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY

Workshop to boost tourism

SALALAH: A workshop on the comprehensive strategy and the strategy of communication and identity in the Governorate of Dhofar kicked off on Sunday.

The four-day workshop discusses means of boost-

ing economic, tourism, logistics and food security resources in a bid to achieve sustainability.

The event, held in Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment, highlights the sectors of mining and

renewable energy. HH Sayyid Marwan Turki Al Said, Governor of Dhofar said that the goal of the comprehensive strategy for Dhofar is paving the way for accelerating the development process in the governorate.

-ONA

TRIO JOUBRAN

ROHM to host two concerts of Palestinian ensemble

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will host two special evenings of classical music with the celebrated Palestinian ensemble Trio Joubran.

Trio Joubran is a group founded by three brothers, Samir, Wisam, and Adnan, notably famous for their collaborations with the great Palestinian poet, the late Mahmoud Darwish.

Darwish chose Trio Joubran to give musical voice to his poets and wouldn't work with any other musicians. In 2018, the trio collaborated with Pink Floyd bassist Roger Waters for two of the tracks on their latest album, drawing inspiration from the words of Mahmoud Darwish.

The brothers are fourth generation oud artists, exhibiting a skill and connection with the oud



borne of generations of commitment to this ancient instrument. Accompanying percussionist, Youssef Hbeisch, joins the ensemble to draw out the voice of classical oud playing.

Sought after worldwide, Trio Joubran will perform two concerts, exploring songs from their acclaimed albums.

Their artistry carries a noble message of Palestinian identity to listeners from around the world. The concerts will take place at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts on Friday 2 and Saturday 3 February at 7pm.

To book your tickets please visit the box office or purchase them via the ROHM website or app.

OMAN LENS COMPANY

TRA issues licence for ground station connected to satellite

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority has issued a third-class licence to Oman Lens Company to establish a ground station connected to a satellite network.

This licence is considered the first in the Sultanate of Oman.

The licenced company will work to establish a ground station connected to the satellite network for monitoring, tracking and controlling satellites belonging to (Star. Vision Aerospace Limited network).

The licence will contribute to providing imaging services from space to collect and analyse satellite image data for



use in some applications, such as mapping, environmental monitoring, resource management, agriculture, and disaster management.

It is also worth noting that

granting this licence is consistent with the Authority's strategic objectives in enhancing local added value, enabling investment in innovative technologies and services, and localising technologies.

OSHRM

Paving the way for a more efficiently AI-driven future

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani Society for Human Resource Management (OSHRM), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, is set to host the seventh edition of its Annual Conference (HR_X) from February 12 to 14, 2024, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The themes for this edition will delve into leading the artificial intelligence revolution, navigating its ethics, and exploring its impact on the future of jobs. The conference will also address the transition from digital to artificial intelligence, diversity, fairness, inclusivity, and the evolving organisational culture in the era of artificial intelligence.

This announcement came during a press conference held on Sunday in the presence of officials from OSHRM and conference partners in this groundbreaking conference, aiming to shape the new future in the Sultanate of Oman.

The seventh edition of the conference will discuss the modernity of work, its tools, and components through workshops, dialogues, and presentations showcasing the latest developments in the human resources sector.

These include approved experiences and innovative solutions, all aimed at developing human resources, enhancing human capital, and adopting a new work culture in the future. This is crucial as it promotes new ideas, turning individuals into practitioners, decision-makers, and economically aware contributors.

The conference will also focus on several pivotal aspects, including the latest transformations in the business domain, innovative human resource techniques, employee engagement in strategic development, and forward-thinking in the future of business.

The conference aims to provide everyone with an opportunity to exchange ideas on cutting-edge topics, seeking to chart the roadmap for the future of work. By bringing together a community comprising hundreds of decision-makers, visionaries, and technologists on a shared platform, it also aims to present more intelligent approaches to work supported by innovative human resource technology. The conference will showcase the latest insights into business transformations led by global executive leaders from some of the world's most renowned institutions.

Furthermore, the conference will witness dialogues with the participation of experts, academ-



ics, and authors in the human resources sector, aiming to present rich experiences in terms of delivering insights and content, whether professionally or academically.

Dr. Ghalib bin Saif Al-Hosni, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OSHRM, has announced that the upcoming conference is strategically timed as Oman undergoes significant transformations in the human resources sector. This development aligns with global changes, underscoring the crucial importance of the sector. The seventh edition of the conference is designed to address these shifts, emphasising its relevance to the evolving landscape and the nation's pursuit of a new future.

Al-Hosni highlighted that the conference, with all its ideas and advancements, serves as a continuation of the successes of the six previous editions. These editions witnessed broad participation from academics, officials, thinkers, and decision-makers, with the total number of participants in the previous editions reaching approximately 4,000, and an expected increase to 900 participants this year.

He underscored OSHRM commitment to elevating the human resources sector, adapting to the current landscape, and leveraging the experiences and expertise shared during the conference.

Ashraf Al Mamari, Acting Group CEO at OQ has confirmed that the strategic partnership with the OSHRM is a testament to the esteemed directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in prioritising human resources in the Sultanate of Oman.

This initiative aims to achieve the targets outlined in Oman Vision 2040, recognising the significant role human resources play in steering the operations of state institutions. OQ is committed to prioritising human resources due to their vital importance in our investments and operations, and to lead the transformation in the energy sector.

Al Mamari stated, "Modern technologies have permeated all areas of work, reshaping the administrative landscape as we

enter the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and artificial intelligence. This is a focal point of the OSHRM 7th annual conference, organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour to enhance the utilisation of modern technologies in the Sultanate of Oman."

Faisal Hamoud Al-Siyabi, CEO of OSHRM, underscored the conference's significance in shedding light on the human element's importance and addressing challenges within Oman's human resources sector. He emphasized that the conference provides a crucial opportunity for active participation in decision-making processes.

Manal Amer Al-Harthi, a board member and head of the conference organising committee, declared, "As we celebrate the 7th year of the OSHRM conference, our aim is to elevate it to new heights. In a world abuzz with the latest technological trends, particularly the focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI), a topic currently dominating discussions at the ongoing World Economic Forum in Davos, we recognize the profound impact AI will have on businesses and society at large. Hence, we have chosen it as the overarching theme for our conference."

As the conference's popularity has grown over the years, the diversity of speakers and exhibitors, both Omani and international, has expanded significantly.

In addition to our esteemed local speakers, this year's lineup includes representatives from Google, LinkedIn, London Business School, Microsoft, Gartner, STC, SHRM, Etisalat, Riyadh Municipality, Sapient, and more.

The objective is to bring together a broad spectrum of views and opinions, creating an outcome that is not only valuable for the attendees but also positions our conference as a shining icon in the international HR conference circuit.

Anticipating an attendance exceeding 800, drawing insights from the experiences of over 60 speakers and benefiting from the solutions showcased in this year's exhibition, we are poised for another successful event."



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JAPAN AEROSPACE EXPLORATION AGENCY

Indian PM lauds Japan on successful moon landing

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday congratulated Japan for achieving its first soft landing on the moon and said that India is looking forward to the cooperation between the space organisations of the two countries.

Japan became only the fifth nation to successfully complete the soft landing on the moon in the late

hours of Saturday.

Taking to social media platform X, PM Modi said, “Congratulations Prime Minister @Kishida230 and everyone at JAXA on achieving Japan’s first soft Moon landing. India looks forward to our cooperation in space exploration between @isro and JAXA”.

PM Modi shared the post of his Japanese counterpart Fumio

Kishida who had congratulated everyone involved in the mission for the successful landing of the ‘Slim’ on the moon.

“It is very welcome news that the small lunar landing demonstration vehicle “Slim” (@SLIM_JAXA) has successfully landed on the moon, although detailed analysis is required as the solar cells are not generating electricity. We

would like to express our respect to everyone involved for their efforts thus far, and we will continue to support them as they take on further challenges,” PM Kishida posted on X. However, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency spacecraft’s solar cell is not generating electricity looming clouds of uncertainty over the success of mission. — **ANI**



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UN chief Guterres slams Israel over ‘heartbreaking’ death of civilians

At least 25,105 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip since Israel launched its offensive against the Palestinian group Hamas on October 7



GAZA: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday called the killing of civilians in the course of Israel’s offensive in the Gaza Strip “heartbreaking and utterly unacceptable.”

“Israel’s military operations have spread mass destruction and killed civilians on a scale unprecedented during my time as secretary-general,” Guterres said at the opening of a summit of the G77+China in the Ugandan capital Kampala.

His remarks come as health authorities in the Gaza Strip said more than 25,100 people had been killed during Israel’s offensive, which came in response to an attack by Hamas in southern Israel in which more than 1,100 Israelis were killed and 240 taken hostage.

The G77+China is a group of 134 developing countries that advocates for the interests of countries from the Global South.

Gaza death toll passes 25,100: Health Ministry

At least 25,105 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip since Israel launched its offensive against the Palestinian group Hamas on October 7, the Health Ministry in the Palestinian enclave said on Sunday.

In a statement, the ministry said some 62,681 people have also been wounded in the fighting.

The ministry, whose figures are deemed as largely accurate by the UN, among others, does not differentiate between militants and civilians in the casualty statistics

it provides. Israel’s assault on the Gaza Strip came in response to deadly raids by Hamas in the south of Israel in which some 1,100 Israelis died, mostly civilians.

Meanwhile in Cairo, a medic from Doctors Without Borders, or Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), has given first-hand perspective about the challenges and experiences he had while working in a Gaza hospital during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

During a press conference held here Friday, Enrico Vallaperta, an Italian intensive care nurse with the MSF who left Gaza on Thurs-

day, said he had worked in central Gaza’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital for several weeks amid very tough and dangerous conditions.

“When I arrived at the hospital, there were 650 patients and thousands of refugees living in the hospital and between the hospital building and its external walls,” Vallaperta told reporters.

He said the hospital was ordered by the Israeli army to evacuate 20 days after his arrival as the ground operation and bombing got closer, adding that evacuation orders were also sent to residential blocks 200 meters away from

the hospital, making the situation riskier for the staff, patients and refugees alike.

“We could not continue to work in a safe context. Deciding to evacuate means taking the staff out and leaving patients inside because we can move 700 patients to nowhere as there is no safe place,” he revealed.

“We decided to move to the south of the Gaza Strip. Two days later, we faced another difficult situation as a bomb was dropped at the shelter where some of our staff and their families lived, yet fortunately, the bomb did not explode,”

Vallaperta recalled.

However, he said the daughter of one of the drivers of the MSF was killed in the attack, affirming there would have been a mass loss of lives if the bomb exploded.

“I left the south Thursday. Over the past 10 days before I left, I held some activities to support hospitals in the southern area,” Vallaperta added.

He stressed that the situation there is getting worse every day as getting food and healthcare is extremely challenging.

For her part, Helen Ottens-Patterson, MSF’s emergency coordinator in Cairo, said MSF had provided medical services, including surgery, post-operative care, maternal health, pre- and post-natal care, in addition to physiotherapy, and mental health care, in several hospitals scattered all over the Gaza Strip.

“Our mission in Egypt is mainly to support our activities in Gaza with supplies,” she added.

She noted that MSF had sent 107 tonnes of medical assistance into Gaza, most of which were medical supplies and food.

Meanwhile, Enas Abu-Khalaf, MSF head of communications for the Middle East, called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip that will spare the lives of civilians, restore the flow of humanitarian assistance, and re-establish the healthcare system in the war-torn territory.

“After more than three months of the war, the suffering of Palestinians trapped in Gaza can no longer be put into words,” Abu-Khalaf told reporters.

— Agencies

HIGHLY CONTESTED ELECTIONS



Felix Tshisekedi sworn in as president of Congo for second term

KINSHASA: Felix Tshisekedi was sworn in for the second term as the President of Democratic Republic of the Congo following highly contested elections in December last year, according to media report.

“I am taking back the baton of command that you entrusted to me. We want a more united, stronger and prosperous Congo,” Tshisekedi (60) said during the inauguration ceremony in the capital on Saturday.

“I am aware of your expectations,” he declared, referring among other things to unemployment, youth, women’s rights and national cohesion.

With tensions simmering in the vast nation’s volatile eastern provinces, the leader known as ‘Fatshi’ picked Kinshasa’s 80,000-capacity Martyrs sports stadium for the inauguration ceremony.

Tshisekedi was first sworn in as president in January 2019, after a controversial victory against Joseph Kabila, according to Al Jazeera.

He won the first time promising to improve living conditions in the DRC - which boasts mineral riches but has a largely impoverished population of 100 million - and put an end to 25 years of bloodshed in the east.

Although, he did not succeed in achieving those promises, this time he campaigned strongly on his first-term achievements such as free primary medication, asking for another mandate to “consolidate” the progress.

The Congolese president made a landslide victory in the December 20 elections winning more than 70 per cent of the vote. The election had more than 40 per cent turnout, with some 18 million people voting, Al Jazeera reported.

Even before the results were announced in late December, opposition candidates - including businessman Moise Katumbi who finished behind Tshisekedi with 18 per cent of the vote - rejected the results and called on the population to mobilise. — **ANI**

VIDEO MESSAGE

Haley raises concerns over Trump’s ‘mental fitness’ after he ‘confuses’ her with Pelosi

WASHINGTON DC: Indian American leader and Republican leader Nikki Haley attacked former US President Donald Trump while raising concerns over his ‘mental fitness’ after the former President confused her with former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, according to media report.

In a video message of X, Haley said, “Last night, Trump is at a rally...and he’s going on and on, mentioning me multiple times as to why I didn’t take security during the Capitol riots, why I didn’t handle January 6 better. I wasn’t even in DC on January 6. I wasn’t in office then.”

“They’re saying he got confused, that he was talking about something else, he’s talking about Nancy Pelosi, he mentioned me multiple times in that scenario,” she added. The former UN Ambassador said that someone at the position of the US President dealing with so much pressure has to be ‘mentally fit’ for the job.

“The concern I have is, I’m not saying anything derogatory, but when you’re dealing with the pressures of a presidency, we can’t have someone else that we question whether they’re mentally fit to do this,” she further stated.

This comes after Trump appeared to make the gaffe about the former South Carolina Governor Haley and the former House Speaker Pelosi at a rally on Friday while talking about the January 6 riots at the US Capitol, according to The Hill. “By the way, they never report the crowd on Jan 6. You know Nikki Haley, Nikki Haley, Nikki Haley, you know, they -- do you know they destroyed all of the information, all of the evidence, everything, deleted and destroyed all of it. All of it,” Trump said.

“Because of lots of things ... like



In a video message on X, Haley said, “Last night, Trump is at a rally...and he’s going on and on, mentioning me multiple times as to why I didn’t take security during the Capitol riots, why I didn’t handle January 6 better. I wasn’t even in DC on January 6. I wasn’t in office then.”

Nikki Haley is in charge of security -- we offered her 10,000 people, soldiers, National Guards, whatever they want. They turned it down. They don’t want to talk about that. These are very dishonest people,” he added.

Meanwhile, Trump and Haley will go head to head on January 23 in the New Hampshire primary,

the next stop in the battle for the GOP presidential nomination.

This comes after Trump registered a comprehensive victory at the Iowa caucuses this week winning 20 of the 40 delegates. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis came a distant second with eight delegates and former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley finishing not

much behind with seven delegates.

According to a poll average from Decision Desk HQ and The Hill, Trump is currently 10.6 points ahead of Haley in the race in the Granite State.

Earlier on Friday, Haley hit back at Trump over his remarks questioning the former UN Ambassador’s eligibility to run as president.

“I know Trump well. He gets into name calling when he feels threatened and insecure. I’m not going to waste any energy on that,” she posted on X (formerly Twitter).

This came after Trump launched a new series of attacks on Haley on his social media platform Truth Social. Trump misspelt Haley’s first name, ‘Nimarata’ as ‘Nimrada’ and also questioned her eligibility to run for president due to her parents’ citizenship status at the time of her birth. — **ANI**

US personnel injured in missile attack on Iraq base



The US military said its Iraqi base had been struck by militants with rocket and ballistic missile fire

BAGHDAD: A number of US personnel were being evaluated for potential head injuries following a ballistic missile attack on Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Sunday.

Multiple ballistic missiles and rockets were launched by militants on the airbase at 6:30 p.m. local time (1530 GMT/UTC) Saturday, it said.

A loose alliance of groups calling itself the "Islamic Resistance of Iraq" claimed responsibility for Saturday's attack, as with many of the others recently.

The militants say the intensified strikes are a response for US support of Israel against Hamas.

Most missiles intercepted, possible head injuries
"Most of the missiles were intercepted by the base's air defence



systems while others impacted on the base," CENTCOM wrote.

"Damage assessments are ongoing. A number of US personnel are undergoing evaluation for traumatic brain injuries. At least one Iraqi service member was wounded," it said.

The attack, and the use of ballistic missiles not just rockets, marks an escalation compared to other recent attacks of this kind.

Attacks more frequent amid Gaza conflict

Since the Israel-Hamas war began in October, the US military has reported attacks 58 times on its assets in Iraq and another 83 times on facilities or troops in Syria, mainly with rockets or rudimentary drones.

Relatively small contingents of

US troops remain in both countries following its operations against the so-called "Islamic State," in a bid to stop the group's resurgence.

The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq that Iraq was "in danger of further being drawn into conflict" amid the fighting in Gaza and again urging "all sides to exercise maximum restraint."

Earlier on Saturday, the US conducted airstrikes against a Houthi anti-ship missile that was aimed into the Gulf of Aden and was prepared to launch, the US Central Command said.

Washington said its forces determined the missile presented a threat to merchant vessels and US Navy ships in the region and therefore struck and destroyed

the missile in 'self-defence'.

Recently, the US carried out another round of attack against the Houthis in Yemen, destroying three anti-ship missiles in the Red Sea. The White House confirmed in a statement that this was the fourth preemptive action taken by the US military amid boiling tensions in the Red Sea.

Notably, the US redesignated the Yemeni group as a "terrorist" organisation in response to its continuing attacks and threats to shipping and imposed sanctions on it. The designation does not go into effect for 30 days.

The Houthis said the designation will not affect its operations to prevent Israeli ships or vessels heading to Israel from crossing the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. -Agencies

CHARTERED AMBULANCE



Russian aircraft crashes in NE Afghanistan

MOSCOW: An aircraft — suspected to be a Russian chartered ambulance — is believed to have crashed in a mountainous province of northeastern (NE) Afghanistan, local authorities there said on Sunday.

After Afghani police reported a plane crash, Russian aviation authorities revealed an aircraft carrying six people had disappeared from their radar screen over Afghanistan on Saturday evening.

The flight was a charter ambulance from India via Uzbekistan to Moscow on a French-made Dassault Falcon 10 jet manufactured in 1978, they said in a statement. It had refuelled in India having come from Thailand.

India's civil aviation authority clarified that the aircraft was not a scheduled commercial flight or an Indian chartered plane and that they awaited more details.

The aircraft is said to have crashed in the Badakhshan province which borders China, Tajikistan, and Pakistan. However, the exact location of the crash is still unknown.

"The plane has crashed but the location is not known yet. We have sent teams but they have not arrived yet," Zabihullah Amiri, head of the provincial information department said without giving further details.



"We were informed by local people in the morning."

The province is home to part of the Hindu Kush mountain range and Afghanistan's highest peak, Mount Nushaq, at 7,492 metres (24,580 feet) high.

However, an official from the Indian Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the top regulator for flight services in the country, confirmed that it was not an Indian plane.

"We have got confirmation from Air Traffic Control and other aviation bodies regarding the plane that was involved in the crash. It was identified as a Moroccan-registered aircraft," the official added.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation, too, informed that the aircraft that crashed in Afghanistan was neither an "Indian Scheduled Aircraft nor a Non-Scheduled (NSOP)/Charter aircraft". -Agencies

UST-LUGA

Fire breaks out at Russia's gas terminal

ST PETERSBURG: A fire broke out at Russian independent natural gas producer Novatek's terminal in the port of Ust-Luga in the Leningrad Region, TASS reported citing the region's governor, on Sunday.

"There are no reported casual-

ties as a result of a fire at Novatek's terminal in the port of Ust-Luga. The staff was evacuated... A high alert regime has been introduced in the Kingisepp district," Governor Alexander Drozdenko said.

The governor also said that the Russian Emergencies Ministry

and local firefighting units were at the scene to douse the fire, as reported by TASS.

The Marine Traffic website previously noted the presence of up to five fuel tankers, displaying flags from Panama, Gabon, Liberia, and Greece, anchored near the

Ust-Luga port.

Novatek's official website provided insights into the Ust-Luga Complex, emphasising its role as a gas condensate fractionation and transshipment facility situated at the all-season port of Ust-Luga on the Baltic Sea. -ANI

LEGALLY SEPARATED

Divorced for a few months now: Sania's sister confirms

NEW DELHI: Retired Indian tennis star Sania Mirza's sister, Anam Mirza, on Sunday confirmed the former's divorce from former Pakistan cricketer Shoaib Malik, saying that they were legally separated for 'some months'.

Taking to her personal handle on Instagram, Anam, who is married to former India skipper Mohammad Azharuddin's son Assaduddin, confirmed Sania's divorce from Shoaib, posting, "Sania has always kept her personal life away from the public eye. However, today the need has arisen for her to share that Shoaib and she have been divorced for a few months now. She wishes Shoaib well for his new journey ahead!"

The statement comes a day after the former Pakistan all-rounder tied the knot with Pakistani actress Sana Javed.

Taking to his Instagram handle, the former Pakistan all-rounder shared several pictures of his nuptials with the divorced Pakistani actress.

Sana, too, took to her social media handles to share dazzling images from their 'Nikaah' ceremony.

The newlyweds shared the images from the wedding ceremony



with the caption, "And We created you in pairs".

Shoaib and Sania got married in 2010 and have been staying in Dubai ever since. They announced the birth of their son, Izzaan Mirza Malik, in 2018.

Sana became a household name in Pakistan with her exploits in the show-business space, Sana made her television debut in 2012 with 'Shehr-e-Zaat' and later on appeared in several other shows. She received recognition for her portrayal of the titular role in the romantic drama 'Khaani'.

The former batting all-rounder

who contributed handsomely to many of Pakistan's memorable wins, Shoaib made his international debut in 1999 in ODIs.

Over the course of an illustrious cricketing career during which he also captained the national team across formats, Shoaib scored a whopping 7534 runs in 287 ODIs. In T20Is, he featured in 124 matches, aggregating 2435 runs at a strike rate of 125.64.

The 41-year-old also played 35 Test matches, scoring 1898 runs. He played his last international game for Pakistan against Bangladesh in 2021. -ANI

HARD LANDING

Small plane lands on Virginia road

VIRGINIA : A small commuter plane that took off from Dulles Airport near Washington, DC, landed on a Virginia roadway, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation in a post on social media, CNN reported.

Southern Airways Express Flight 246 made a hard landing on Route 606 after departing Dulles International Airport, in Virginia, at around 12:50 pm local time on Friday.

Seven people were on board. The flight was travelling to Lancaster Airport in Pennsylvania, the Federal Aviation Administra-

tion said in a statement

The agency said it is investigating the incident.

Blocking all lanes

Virginia transportation officials said the plane was blocking all lanes of the Loudoun County Parkway at Arcola Mills Drive.

"At 12:51 p.m., Virginia State Police responded to a call about a small, private aircraft making an emergency landing in the DIREX lanes of the Loudoun County Parkway. No injuries have been reported. State police are on the scene," the department told CNN

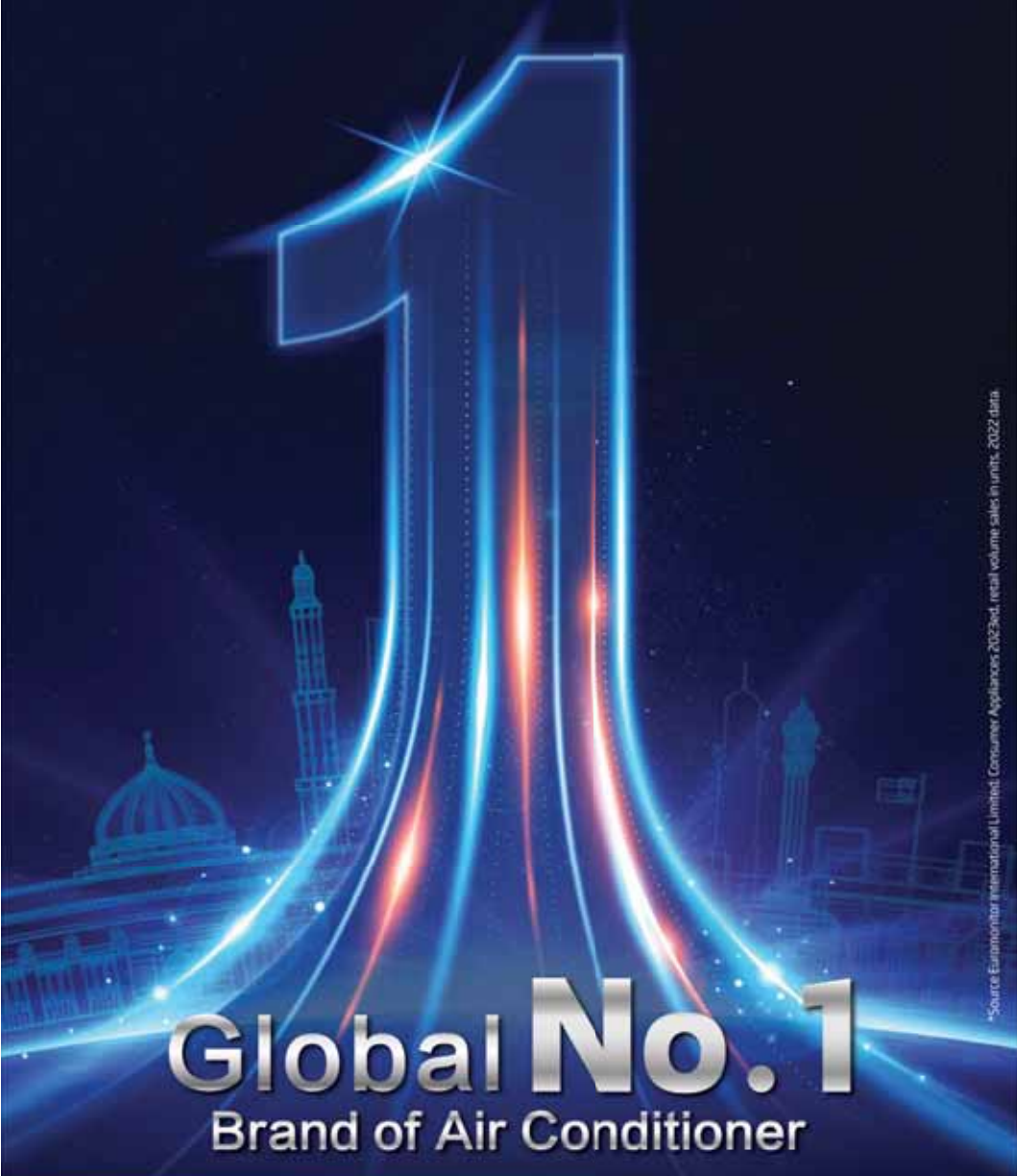
in a statement.

The airport said in a statement: "Dulles Airport received reports at around 12:50 pm of a departed aircraft landing off airport property on a nearby roadway. The aircraft was identified as Southern Airways Express flight 246. Responders from Loudoun County are managing the scene, and Dulles Airport remains open for takeoffs and landings."

Information from the tracking site FlightAware shows the plane only climbed about 800 feet for about two minutes before landing on the roadway. -ANI



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SPORTS



Thailand hold Oman to a goalless draw

Red Warriors' hopes of advancing to knockout stage now hangs in balance with a game left against Kyrgyz Republic

MUSCAT: Oman's hopes of advancing to the knockout stage of AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 were dented when they were held to a goalless draw by Thailand in a Group F match on Sunday. The 0-0 draw, however, boosted Thailand's hopes of advancing to the knockout stage as they collected a point to take their tally to four while the Red Warriors earned their first point from two games. Thailand now take on three-

		
6	SHOTS	6
1	SHOTS ON TARGET	2
69.8	POSSESSION	30.2
0	YELLOW CARDS	1
0	RED CARDS	0

time champions Saudi Arabia, their final group stage opponents while the draw means Oman's hopes hang in the balance with the West Asian side to play Kyrgyz Republic in their concluding tie. The top-two sides from six groups along with four third-best teams will make it to the last-16 round. A win for Saudi Arabia against Kyrgyz Republic later in the night will ensure Saudis and Thais book their direct berth into the last-16. While Thailand showed slightly more initiative in the early minutes of the game, both teams began the match with a measured ap-

proach and avoided too many of fensive forays. The War Elephants had their first chance when a 15th minute corner kick from Teerathon Bunmathan was headed towards the Oman goal by defender Elias Dolah. However, the attempt was cleared to safety by midfielder Abdullah Fawaz after being initially punched away by goalkeeper Ibrahim Al Mukhaini. Oman began to find their footing, Issam Al Subhi receiving Jameel Al Yahmadi's cross at an opportune position inside the box but had his left-footed shot to the centre of the goal blocked by Thai

goalkeeper Siwarak Tedsungneon. The West Asian side closed the half strongly but couldn't find a breakthrough as they took the stalemate into the break. A more determined Thailand side took the field in the second half and there a window of opportunity opened when Suphanat Mueanta intercepted an overhead cross from Oman's Arshad Al Alawi and charged forward into the Oman box but was met by the steely figure of defender Ahmed Al Khamisi. Almost immediately after, Oman skipper Harib Al Saadi tore through the Thai defence but despite warding off as many as four white shirts, had his attempt blocked by the Thai custodian. The Branko Ivankovic-led Oman came to life as the clock hit the 70th minute and began to pile pressure on the Thai defence line, most notably with Khalid Al Breiki's free-kick finding Al Subhi inside the six yard box but his attempt was deftly parried away by the goalkeeper. Oman's frustration grew as the minutes ticked away and when the final whistle was blown, it was Thailand who were clearly the happier of the two sides. (With inputs from www.the-afc.com)

Djokovic enters quarters in style



MELBOURNE: Top seed Novak Djokovic moved ominously into the Australian Open quarter-finals with a ruthless thrashing of French 20th seed Adrian Panarin on Sunday. Djokovic, chasing a record 25th Grand Slam title, claimed a dominant 6-0, 6-0, 6-3 win in one hour and 44 minutes. "The first two sets were the best I have played in a while," Djokovic said. The 36-year-old will face 12th seed Taylor Fritz in the quarter-finals after the American beat last year's finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas. Later on Sunday, Italy's Jan-nik Sinner secured his last-eight spot with a 6-4, 7-5, 6-3 win over world No.15 Karen Khachanov. He will take on fifth seed Andrey Rublev next after the Russian prevailed in a gruelling five-set tussle to knock out Alex de Minaur and end Australia's hopes of a home singles champion. Rublev battled cramp as he closed out a 6-4, 6-7 (5-7), 6-7 (4-7), 6-3, 6-0 win over 10th seed De Minaur. An 11th title in Melbourne would take Djokovic clear of Margaret Court's all-time record number of 24 Grand Slam wins. "The last couple of days have been really good," Djokovic said. "It is going in a positive direction health-wise and tennis-wise so I am really pleased with where I am at the moment. Up next for Djokovic is Fritz, who beat Greek seventh seed Tsitsipas 7-6 (7-2), 5-7, 6-3, 6-3

to reach his first Australian Open quarter-final. **Gauff and Sabalenka through to last eight** Coco Gauff says she often forgets she is still a teenager after becoming the youngest woman to reach the Australian Open singles quarter-finals since 2008 on Sunday. The 19-year-old American booked her spot in the last eight by sweeping past Poland's Magdalena Frech 6-1, 6-2. "I've lived so many lives in the last four years that I just feel older than 19," US Open champion Gauff said. Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka continued her own serene progress by beating Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 6-2. Sabalenka will face ninth seed Barbora Krejickova, who fought back to beat Mirra Andreeva 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 and end the 16-year-old's impressive run in Melbourne. "Sometimes I forget my age. I know I'm not going to be a teenager anymore," said Gauff, who is the youngest player to reach the Melbourne quarter-finals since Poland's Agnieszka Radwanska. "When I'm looking at the other girls on tour who are 16, 17, and now coming up, they just feel so young and I feel so old. "I know I'm not that old, but I definitely do forget my age a lot." In her first Melbourne quarter-final, Gauff will face Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk after the world No.37 easily beat Russian qualifier Maria Timofeeva 6-2, 6-1. - Agencies

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CHINA'S 2023 GDP RISES
Beijing's regional gross domestic product (GDP) reached almost 4.4 trillion yuan (about \$618.26 billion) in 2023, up 5.2 percent year on year. Beijing's general public budget revenue surpassed 600 billion yuan in 2023, an increase of 8.2 percent year on year. > **B2**

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSM INDEX ENDS HIGHER
The MSX index closed at 4,604.54 points, up by 0.38 percent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.17 percent at 441.89 points. Takaful Oman, up 6.82 percent, was the top gainer while, National Gas, down 3.70 percent, was the top loser. > **B2**

Oman 2024 budget signals increased social spending

Overall Oman's spending is expected to remain prudent, with key current expenditure items generally growing in line with nominal gross domestic product, Fitch Ratings said

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's budget, published in early January, indicates that the authorities will continue to pay down government debt, strengthening the sovereign's resilience to potential shocks, but increasing social spending will slow the pace of debt reduction in 2024, says Fitch Ratings.

"Fitch's treatment of certain budget items differs from that of the authorities, but the official figures suggest the fiscal surplus may be slightly larger than our previous projections in 2023, and slightly smaller in 2024. We now forecast the surplus to fall to 1.8



percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024, from an estimated 3.3 percent in 2023, based on the budget data and our latest oil price assumptions. In our December sovereign data comparator, we had projected the surplus would remain broadly stable at 2.1 percent of GDP in 2024, from 2.2 percent in 2023."

"The overall effect on Oman's credit metrics should be broadly in line with the assumptions we made when we upgraded the sovereign's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to 'BB+' from 'BB', with a Stable

Outlook, in September 2023," the rating agency said.

The smaller surplus in 2024 will partly reflect a projected one percent drop in oil output, in line with the recent reduction of the country's OPEC+ production quota, as well as a modest weakening in international oil prices, which will weigh on revenues. The budget projects non-oil revenue growth to be driven by stronger economic activity, with no significant new revenue raising measures being announced.

The government plans to widen the social safety net, which will

add about one percent of GDP to spending and was reflected in our assessments in September. "Fuel subsidy costs will remain considerable, at about 0.7 percent of GDP in 2024, though we expect the government would scrap the subsidy should global energy prices fall. The authorities also plan to keep public capex broadly stable in 2024," Fitch said in a statement.

"Overall, we expect spending to remain prudent, with key current expenditure items generally growing in line with nominal GDP. The budget gives no indication of significant backtracking on recent



fiscal consolidation measures, and we expect further modest progress on electricity price reform."

"Meanwhile, the public finances will benefit from slightly lower debt service costs in 2024 following liabilities management operations that the government has conducted since 2022," the rating agency said.

The government will use part of the surplus to continue debt repayment. Oman's use of the revenue windfall from high oil prices to reduce debt and spread maturities was a driver of our decision to upgrade its ratings in September, the rating agency said. "However, we expect the pace of debt reduction to ease in 2024, with government debt/GDP falling to around 33

percent in 2024 from 36 percent in 2023.

This will be driven not only by the smaller surplus, but also by the authorities' plans to channel some of the surplus to Oman Future Fund to support economic development," Fitch said.

Economic diversification efforts will face significant hurdles and it will take time for us to assess their record. In the meantime, Oman's public finances will remain vulnerable to global oil price shocks – albeit less than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic. External debt maturities remain significant at \$6 billion per year for the government and state-owned enterprises combined, although less burdensome than in recent years.

FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 2023

Dubai continues its economic surge with 3.3% GDP growth

DUBAI: Dubai has registered a 3.3 percent rise in the real gross domestic product (GDP) in the first nine months of 2023, further demonstrating its economic strength, resilience and robust growth potential. The achievement reflects the city's sustainable development strategies and its continued dynamism as a leading global economic powerhouse.

From bustling tourism hubs to tech-powered communications networks, Dubai's economic landscape illustrates the depth and wide-ranging nature of its diversification.

Accommodation and food services activities witnessed a remarkable 11.1 percent growth, solidifying Dubai's position as a global tourism leader.

Transportation and storage services followed suit, surging by 10.9 percent, highlighting the emirate's role as a prominent international logistics hub.

The information and communications sector, with a 4.4 percent increase, underscores Dubai's commitment to embracing cutting-edge technologies and fostering a thriving knowledge economy. This multifaceted growth across diverse sectors provides further evidence of Dubai's economic stability and adaptability.

Reflecting on the emirate's recently released economic data, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown

Prince of Dubai and Chairman of Dubai Executive Council, applauded Dubai's continued economic attractiveness.

"Dubai's sustained economic growth is a testament to the vision and strategic directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai," Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed said.

"This success is the result of the harmonious collaboration between all of Dubai's economic stakeholders, including its public and private sectors. It is also a reflection of Dubai's favourable economic climate, robust world-class infrastructure, pro-business regulations and deep talent pool which together consistently draw in a diverse array of investors and entrepreneurs from all corners of the globe," he added.

Dubai's economic engine saw vibrant activity in the first nine months of the past year, as revealed by the latest figures from the Dubai Data and Statistics Establishment. Real estate soared by 4 percent, while financial and insurance activities surged 2.7 percent. The knowledge economy excelled with a 2.6 percent increase in education, while electricity, gas, water and waste management activities grew by 2.2 percent. Manufacturing saw a 2.2 percent surge, and the city witnessed a 1.9 percent rise in professional services. – **WAM**

OMANI-SAUDI BUSINESS FORUM



Forum discusses means of boosting economic relations and investments

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Sunday organised the Omani-Saudi Business Forum.

The forum discussed means of enhancing the joint cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in the economic and investment areas. It also explores ways to activate the agreements and strategic partnerships between the Omani and Saudi companies.

On the sidelines of the forum, a number of memorandums of understanding related to cooperation in the field of construction and legal consultations were signed between private sector companies in both countries.

Through a number of working papers, the event reviewed investment opportunities and incentives in the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, potentials of investment in special economic zones and free zones, and investment opportunities in the fields of housing and the real estate sector. – **ONA**



MARKET

MSM index ends higher



Takaful Oman, up 6.82 percent, was the top gainer while, National Gas, down 3.70 percent, was the top loser on Sunday's trading session

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,604.54 points, up by 0.38 percent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.17 percent at 441.89 points. Takaful Oman, up 6.82 percent, was the top gainer while, National Gas, down 3.70 percent, was the top loser.

Shares of Bank Nizwa were the most active in terms of number of shares traded while Bank Muscat were the most active in terms of turnover.

A total number of 688 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of OMR3.33 million, with more than 18.59 million shares changing hands.

Out of 41 traded securities, 14 advanced, 12 declined, and 15 remained unchanged.

At the session close, foreign investors were net sellers for OMR64,000 while GCC & Arab investors were net buyers for OMR40,000, followed by domestic investors for OMR24,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,438.92 points, up 0.1 percent. Prices of Takaful Oman, Sohar International Bank, National Bank Oman, Oman United Insurance, Ahli Bank were up by 6.82 percent, 1.87 percent, 1.85 percent, 1.10 percent, 0.63 percent respectively.

Prices of Al Sharqia Investment, Muscat Finance, OMINVEST, Al Anwar Investment, Bank Muscat were down by 2.86 percent, 2.22 percent, 1.50 percent, 1.37 percent, 0.37 percent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,513.91 points, up 0.32 percent. Prices of Jazeera Steel Products, Raysut Cement, Oman Cement, Galfar Engineering were up by 1.76 percent, 1.67 percent, 0.66 percent, 0.65 percent respectively. Prices of National Gas, Al Jazeera Services, Phoenix Power, Ooredoo, OQ Gas Networks were down by 3.70 percent, 3.26 percent, 1.82 percent, 1.32 percent, 0.67 percent respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.08 percent before closing at 1,562.44 points.

Prices of OIFC, Renaissance Services, Abraj Energy, SMN Power Holding were up by 3.75 percent, 3.19 percent, 1.99 percent, 1.41 percent respectively. Prices of National Gas, Al Jazeera Services, Phoenix Power, Ooredoo, OQ Gas Networks were down by 3.70 percent, 3.26 percent, 1.82 percent, 1.32 percent, 0.67 percent respectively.

— United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff%
MSX 30 INDEX	4,629.81	4,585.83	4,604.54	4,587.06	17.47	0.38
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,490.89	7,417.03	7,438.92	7,431.72	7.20	0.10
Industry Index	5,514.16	5,496.35	5,513.91	5,496.35	17.57	0.32
Services Index	1,569.49	1,561.16	1,562.44	1,561.16	1.28	0.08
MSX Shariah Index	444.12	440.58	441.89	441.12	0.76	0.17
MSX TR INDEX	6,102.64	6,044.68	6,069.33	6,046.30	23.03	0.38
FINANCIAL TR IDX	8,173.93	8,093.34	8,117.23	8,109.37	7.86	0.10
SERVICES TR IDX	1,746.05	1,736.78	1,738.20	1,736.78	1.42	0.08
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	5,890.49	5,871.47	5,890.23	5,871.47	18.77	0.32
FIXED INCOME INDEX	991.33	991.33	991.33	991.33	0.00	0.00

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
18,590,272	3,328,870	688	23,937,733,355	14	12	15	41

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 21

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF. (BD)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BD	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET															
OM0000003234 RENAISSANCE SERVICES	310,000	130,200	23	0.420	0.420	0.420	0.420	0.407	0.013	3.194	0.420	0.388	0.420	0.100	99,292,200
OM0000003398 SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	4,331,737	466,290	50	0.107	0.110	0.106	0.109	0.107	0.002	1.869	0.110	0.110	0.110	0.100	595,999,847
OM0000001483 NATIONAL BANK OMAN	5,325	1,451	2	0.270	0.275	0.270	0.275	0.270	0.005	1.852	0.275	0.270	0.275	0.100	447,135,248
OM0000002176 JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS	17,000	4,913	2	0.289	0.289	0.289	0.289	0.284	0.005	1.761	0.289	0.289	0.300	0.100	36,095,510
OM0000004248 SMN POWER HOLDING	332,415	23,731	12	0.071	0.072	0.071	0.072	0.071	0.001	1.408	0.072	0.071	0.074	0.100	14,373,763
OM0000001087 OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	1,201	333	2	0.277	0.277	0.277	0.277	0.274	0.003	1.095	0.277	0.270	0.277	0.100	27,700,000
OM0000001749 OMAN CEMENT	200	61	1	0.304	0.304	0.304	0.304	0.302	0.002	0.662	0.304	0.301	0.310	0.100	100,585,304
OM0000001152 OMAN NATIONAL ENGINEERING & INVESTMENT	37,000	4,144	6	0.112	0.112	0.112	0.112	0.112	0.000	0.000	0.112	0.112	0.113	0.100	16,800,000
OM0000001681 OMAN EMIRATES HO.	50,000	2,350	3	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.000	0.000	0.047	0.047	0.000	0.100	5,728,125
OM0000002168 AL ANWAR CERAMIC	328,249	52,515	13	0.160	0.160	0.159	0.160	0.160	0.000	0.000	0.160	0.161	0.160	0.100	35,200,000
OM0000002374 UNITED FINANCE	68,710	3,916	2	0.057	0.057	0.057	0.057	0.057	0.000	0.000	0.057	0.057	0.057	0.100	20,299,256
OM0000002549 BANK DHOFAR	100,132	16,021	8	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.000	0.000	0.160	0.150	0.160	0.100	479,418,230
OM0000003026 OMAN TELECOM	68,154	97,231	71	1.090	1.093	1.090	1.090	1.090	0.000	0.000	1.090	1.081	1.090	0.100	817,500,000
OM0000004788 MADINA TAKAFUL	34,700	2,984	6	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.000	0.000	0.086	0.085	0.086	0.100	15,050,000
OM0000005005 ALMAHA CERAMICS	323	63	1	0.196	0.196	0.196	0.196	0.196	0.000	0.000	0.196	0.196	0.000	0.100	10,780,000
OM0000002796 BANK MUSCAT	3,282,890	879,882	77	0.270	0.270	0.267	0.268	0.269	-0.001	-0.372	0.268	0.268	0.268	0.100	2,011,714,413
OM0000003968 OOREDOO	1,180,449	354,332	48	0.304	0.304	0.300	0.300	0.304	-0.004	-1.316	0.300	0.302	0.300	0.100	195,283,269
OM0000001533 OMINVEST	774	356	1	0.460	0.460	0.460	0.460	0.467	-0.007	-1.499	0.460	0.460	0.465	0.100	307,448,096
OM0000002440 AL SHARQIA INVESTMENT HO.	70,000	3,352	2	0.067	0.068	0.067	0.068	0.070	-0.002	-2.857	0.068	0.068	0.075	0.100	6,120,000
OM0000002226 ALJAZEERA SERVICES	69,200	14,507	12	0.214	0.214	0.208	0.208	0.215	-0.007	-3.256	0.208	0.208	0.210	0.100	12,730,489
Total	20	10,318,459	2,060,633	343											
Parallel Market															
OM0000004776 TAKAFUL OMAN	60,000	2,703	5	0.044	0.047	0.044	0.047	0.044	0.003	6.818	0.047	0.045	0.048	0.100	11,750,000
OM0000008934 ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	1,686,119	515,019	42	0.304	0.309	0.303	0.308	0.302	0.006	1.987	0.309	0.308	0.309	0.100	227,221,600
OM0000001418 RAYSUT CEMENT	67,084	8,050	5	0.120	0.122	0.120	0.122	0.120	0.002	1.667	0.122	0.120	0.122	0.100	24,400,000
OM0000008868 THE PEARL REIF	118,536	14,225	6	0.120	0.121	0.120	0.121	0.120	0.001	0.833	0.121	0.120	0.122	0.100	61,480,529
OM0000003521 GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING	650,000	100,750	1	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.154	0.001	0.649	0.155	0.151	0.155	0.100	31,462,899
OM0000002200 AHLI BANK	4,408	719	3	0.167	0.169	0.159	0.159	0.158	0.001	0.633	0.159	0.159	0.173	0.100	373,595,537
OM0000001178 MUSCAT GASES	11,000	990	3	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.000	0.000	0.090	0.090	0.099	0.100	2,700,000
OM0000001902 AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING	5,005	225	1	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.000	0.000	0.045	0.044	0.049	0.100	3,825,000
OM0000002366 AL BATINAH DEVELOPMENT & INV. HO.	591	51	1	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.000	0.000	0.086	0.079	0.091	0.100	2,580,000
OM0000003661 VOLTAMP ENERGY	8,960	1,366	2	0.152	0.152	0.152	0.152	0.152	0.000	0.000	0.152	0.150	0.152	0.100	12,373,218
OM0000004420 BANK NIZWA	4,359,444	418,526	54	0.096	0.097	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.000	0.000	0.096	0.095	0.096	0.100	214,747,491
OM0000004735 SEMBCORP SALALAH	1,047	93	2	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.000	0.000	0.089	0.088	0.090	0.100	84,956,904
OM0000007811 MUSANDAM POWER	200	58	1	0.292	0.292	0.292	0.296	0.296	0.000	0.000	0.292	0.287	0.292	0.100	20,835,440
OM0000001079 OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	27,988	63,811	9	2.280	2.288	2.280	2.288	2.288	-0.001	-0.044	2.288	2.280	2.289	0.100	205,233,600
OM0000009072 OQ GAS NETWORKS	611,304	90,627	164	0.149	0.149	0.149	0.149	0.149	-0.001	-0.671	0.149	0.148	0.149	0.100	640,932,340
OM0000008447 OMAN REIT FUND	1,000	87	2	0.088	0.088	0.086	0.088	0.089	-0.001	-1.124	0.088	0.086	0.089	0.100	41,464,402
OM0000001772 ALANWAR INVESTMENT	247,212	18,025	9	0.073	0.073	0.072	0.072	0.073	-0.001	-1.370	0.072	0.072	0.074	0.100	14,832,000
OM0000005963 PHOENIX POWER	3,105	169	5	0.055	0.055	0.054	0.054	0.055	-0.001	-1.818	0.054	0.050	0.054	0.100	78,980,479
OM0000001590 MUSCAT FINANCE	35,000	1,540	2	0.044	0.044	0.044	0.044	0.045	-0.001	-2.222	0.044	0.044	0.045	0.100	13,514,438
OM0000001160 NATIONAL GAS	146,000	11,339	17	0.080	0.080	0.077	0.078	0.081	-0.003	-3.704	0.078	0.077	0.078	0.100	6,630,000
Total	20	8,044,013	1,249,274	334											

ECONOMY

China's 2023 GDP rises to \$618 billion

BEIJING: Beijing's regional gross domestic product (GDP) reached almost 4.4 trillion yuan (about \$618.26 billion) in 2023, up 5.2 percent year on year.

Beijing's general public budget revenue surpassed 600 billion yuan in 2023, an increase of 8.2 percent year on year, and the city's surveyed urban unemployment rate stood at 4.4% last year, the Chinese News Agency (Xinhua) reported.

Consumer price index

Beijing's consumer price index remained largely stable in 2023. The income growth of Beijing residents kept pace with economic expansion last year, while various indicators such as per capita regional GDP and overall labour productivity remained the highest among provincial-level regions nationwide.

— ONA

LATEST INVESTMENT

Google to invest \$1 billion in London-based data centre



LONDON: Google will invest \$1 billion on building a data centre just outside of London, the U.S. technology giant said on Thursday, in its latest investment in Britain as it meets growing demand for internet services in the region. The data centre, located on a 33-acre site bought by Google in 2020, will be located in the town of Waltham Cross, about 15 miles north of central London, the Alphabet-owned, opens new tab company said in a statement.

According to Reuters, the British government, which is pushing for investment by businesses to help fund new infrastructure, particularly in growth industries like technology and artificial intelligence, described Google's investment as a "huge vote of confidence" in the UK.

"Google's \$1 billion investment is testament to the fact that the UK is a centre of excellence in technology and has huge poten-

tial for growth," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said in the Google statement.

The investment follows Google's \$1 billion purchase of a central London office building in 2022, close to Covent Garden, and another site in nearby King's Cross, where it is building a new office and where its AI company DeepMind is also based.

It also comes weeks after Microsoft, opens new tab unveiled plans to pump 2.5 billion pounds (\$3.2 billion) into Britain over three years, including in growing its data centre capacity, to under-

pin future AI services.

"This new data centre will help meet growing demand for our AI and cloud services and bring crucial compute capacity to businesses across the UK while creating construction and technical jobs," Alphabet Chief Financial Officer Ruth Porat said in the statement.

Google, which employs over 7,000 people in Britain, also said that waste heat generated from the data centre would be an opportunity for energy conservation that can benefit the local community. — BNA

FUNDING IN THE WORLD

Shortfalls may challenge Germany's generosity

BERLIN: Germans are the best tipplers in Europe. They leave the most money most regularly, a YouGov survey reported last summer. In fact, even if the service at the restaurant or bar was terrible, almost one-fifth of Germans say they'll still leave some extra cash.

The German government has a similar reputation for generosity. When it comes to the state funding things like social welfare, health, the arts and foreign aid, Germany often shows up near the top of the list.

Germany is often described as having one of the world's most comprehensive social welfare systems. It regularly spends between 25% and 30% of national income, or gross domestic product (GDP), on things like pensions, health care, unemployment payments and other benefits. That puts it near the top of the list in Europe.

The country is also the world's second-largest donor of what is known as official development assistance, or ODA: government aid for development and welfare in developing nations. Germany spent €32 billion on this in 2022, making it the second-largest in terms of funding in the world and fourth-largest donor for ODA as a percentage of national income.

One of the reasons Germany has been able to spend so freely is because its export-driven economy has been strong. But over the past year, Germany has seen sluggish growth. The German economy shrank by 0.3% in 2023 and was the only European economy



not to grow last year. This year is not expected to be much better.

Recently, the UK publication The Economist once again described the country as "the sick man of Europe."

Among other issues, analysts say, Germany suffers from too much bureaucracy, a lack of state investment in innovation and infrastructure and high energy prices. And the retirement of around 2 million baby boomers within the next five years means there are questions about who will pay for Germany's ever-growing pension bill.

Another issue that some point to as increasingly problematic is Germany's "debt brake." The German constitution says the state may not borrow more than 0.35% of the country's national income annually. Opinion on whether this is good for the country or not is divided. Some — including members of the Social Democrats (



LIFESTYLE

A recent study from the Stanford School of Medicine, California, USA, suggests that smartwatches can assist medical professionals in identifying and diagnosing abnormal heart rhythms in children.



The results are based on an analysis of electronic health data for children with heart conditions who are being treated at Stanford Medicine Children's Health. The study was published in Communications Medicine.

In the course of four years, 145 times, "Apple Watch" was cited in patient medical records. Of the patients whose medical records referenced the smartwatch, 41 had irregular cardiac rhythms that were verified using conventional diagnostic techniques; 29 of these kids received a diagnosis for the first time for their ar-

rhythmias.

"I was surprised by how often our standard monitoring didn't pick up arrhythmias and the watch did," said senior study author Scott Ceresnak, MD, professor of pediatrics. Ceresnak is a pediatric cardiologist who treats patients at Stanford Medicine. "It's awesome to see that newer technology can really make a difference in how we're able to care for patients."

The study's lead author is Aydin Zahedivash, MD, a clinical instructor in pediatrics.

Most of the abnormal rhythms detected were not life-threatening, Ceresnak said. However, he added

that the arrhythmias detected can cause distressing symptoms such as a racing heartbeat, dizziness and fainting.

Skipping a beat, sometimes

Doctors face two challenges in diagnosing children's cardiac arrhythmias, or heart rhythm abnormalities.

The first is that cardiac diagnostic devices, though they have improved in recent years, still aren't ideal for kids. Ten to 20 years ago, a child had to wear, for 24 to 48 hours, a Holter monitor consisting of a device about the size of a smartphone attached by wires to five electrodes that were adhered to

the child's chest. Patients can now wear event monitors -- in the form of a single sticker placed on the chest -- for a few weeks. Although the event monitors are more comfortable and can be worn longer than a Holter monitor, they sometimes fall off early or cause problems such as skin irritation from adhesives.

The second challenge is that even a few weeks of continuous monitoring may not capture the heart's erratic behavior, as children experience arrhythmias unpredictably. Kids may go months between episodes, making it tricky for their doctors to determine what's going on.

Connor Heinz and his family faced both challenges when he experienced periods of a racing heartbeat starting at age 12: An adhesive monitor was too irritating, and he was having irregular heart rhythms only once every few months. Ceresnak thought he knew what was causing the racing rhythms, but he wanted confirmation. He suggested that Connor and his mom, Amy Heinz, could try using Amy's smartwatch to record the rhythm the next time Connor's heart began racing. -ANI

SMARTWATCHES CAN DETECT
ABNORMAL HEART
RHYTHMS IN CHILDREN:
STUDY

SPORTS

AC Milan players walk off after alleged racist chants

Italian Serie A match briefly suspended as Milan eke a narrow 3-2 win over Udinese

MILAN: AC Milan's 3-2 win at Udinese was briefly suspended on Saturday after alleged racist abuse from home fans towards Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan.

Maignan alerted the referee before leaving the pitch after the half-hour mark, followed by his team-mates.

The incident took place shortly after Milan midfielder Ruben Loftus-Cheek had given the visitors the lead with a low first-time shot inside the post.

The Serie A match was restarted after about 10 minutes.

"I said we cannot play football like this. It is not the first time it has happened this way," Maignan told Sky Sports Italy.

"They must hand out very strong sanctions, because talking no longer does anything.

"We have to say that what they are doing is wrong. It is not the whole crowd, most fans want to cheer on their team and jeer you. That's normal, but not this."

He added: "What happened in the first half is that at the first goal-kick I heard monkey noises, I said nothing.

"The second time I went to get the ball, I heard it again. I told



the fourth official and my bench what happened. "I was angry, because this isn't the first time it has happened. I did not want to play, but we are a family and I could not leave my team-mates like that."

AC Milan posted on X: "There is absolutely no place in our game for racism: we are appalled. We are

with you, Mike."

League leaders Inter Milan replied: "We are brothers of the world, against all forms of discrimination. By your side."

Milan match-winner Noah Okafor told DAZN: "These things have nothing to do with football and they hurt, there is no such

thing as black or white. We are all the same."

France keeper Maignan, 28, was beaten three minutes later by a Lazar Samardzic shot before Florian Thauvin put Udinese in front in the 62nd minute.

But Milan snatched victory when substitute Luka Jovic net-

"We have to implement an automatic forfeit for the team whose fans have committed racism and caused the match to be abandoned as well as worldwide stadium bans and criminal charges for racists"

Gianni Infantino
FIFA President

ted a rebound with seven minutes left and Okafor made it 3-2 in stoppage time from close range.

Milan are third in Serie A, six points behind leaders Inter Milan and four adrift of second-placed Juventus, who both have a game in hand.

FIFA president wants tougher action on racism

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has called for the implementation of an automatic forfeit of games for teams whose fans commit racist abuse.

It follows incidents which he described as "totally abhorrent" at Udinese and Sheffield Wednesday on Saturday. Infantino said in a post on X that there should be harsher punishments.

"As well as the three-step process (match stopped, match re-stopped, match abandoned),

we have to implement an automatic forfeit for the team whose fans have committed racism and caused the match to be abandoned, as well as worldwide stadium bans and criminal charges for racists," he said.

"FIFA and football shows full solidarity to victims of racism and any form of discrimination. Once and for all: No to racism! No to any form of discrimination!

"The events that took place in Udine and Sheffield on Saturday are totally abhorrent and completely unacceptable.

"The players affected by Saturday's events have my undivided support.

"We need all the relevant stakeholders to take action, starting with education in schools so that future generations understand that this is not part of football or society." - Agencies

PREMIER LEAGUE

Gunners reignite title bid with easy win over Palace

LONDON: Arsenal reignited their Premier League title challenge by thrashing struggling Crystal Palace 5-0 at Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

The Gunners' fight at the top had faltered towards the end of last year as they lost three of their past five Premier League games.

But, after heading off to Dubai for a week-long winter break, Mikel Arteta's side returned reinvigorated as a Gabriel header, Dean Henderson own goal, Leandro Trossard finish and two late Gabriel Martinelli strikes sealed the three points.

The first two goals came from corners, with the opener coming in the 11th minute when Gabriel nodded in before the defender's header from another set-piece struck Crystal Palace goalkeeper Henderson to deflect into the back of the net.

The visitors offered little in response. Instead Arsenal added to their lead in the second half when Trossard was sent one-on-one with the goalkeeper and kept his cool to finish confidently.

With Palace already well beaten, Martinelli added further sheen to the win with two goals in injury time, both swept into the far corner. The win moves Arsenal up to third, two points behind leaders Liverpool but having played a game more than Jurgen Klopp's side. Crystal Palace, meanwhile,



remain 14th in the table.

In another game on Saturday, Ivan Toney marked his return from an eight-month ban for breaking gambling rules by scoring with his first shot as Brentford registered a controversial victory in a five-goal (3-2) thriller with Nottingham Forest.

It was Toney's first goal in 266 days since he scored the equaliser against Forest in the corresponding fixture last season on 29 April.

After running to the bench to celebrate his goal, Toney raised a

shirt proclaiming 'For You Uncle Brian', which is believed to be in honour of a family member.

It ended a run of one win in eight points for Brentford, who climbed above their opponents into 14th spot.

Defeat ended a four-match unbeaten run for Forest and left them four points above the relegation zone at the end of a week that began with them being charged for breaking the Premier League's Profit and Sustainability rules. - Agencies

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Dala scores double to help Angola defeat Mauritania

BOUAKE: Gelson Dala scored twice as Angola beat Mauritania 3-2 in a Group D match played in the Ivory Coast city of Bouake on Saturday to close in on the last 16 of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Forward Dala reacted smartly to the rebound from a corner to put his side ahead, firing a shot against the turf and into the roof of the net.

Sidi Amar levelled for the Lions of Chinguetti with a dazzling run and finish two minutes before half-time.

Dala and Gilberto both struck to make it 3-1 before Aboubakary Koita's spectacular consolation for Mauritania.

The result means Angola are guaranteed to advance with a point against Burkina Faso, who also have four points and drew 2-2 with Algeria earlier on Saturday, when the leaders meet in their final group-stage game on Tuesday.

They will also be certain to go through if they lose and The Greens do not beat Mauritania in their decider.

Dala's opener gave his side the lead for 13 minutes, Amar slaloming through defenders on his way inside the penalty area to slam in an emphatic reply.

Gilberto should have restored Angola's lead in first-half add time when Niasse's parry from



Dala's attempt fell kindly for the midfielder, but he was left with a look of disbelief on his face after blazing over the crossbar.

The Palancas Negras had gone nine AFCON games without a win stretching back to 2012, but Dala and Gilberto soon put them on course to change that with two goals in four minutes after the break.

Dala ended a fine run by steering the ball in neatly and his teammate added the finishing touch to a spell of Angola trickery inside the box, cutting inside to arrow in their third via Lamine Ba's attempted block.

Mauritania remain winless in all eight AFCON games they have

played but the 105th-placed team in the world can savour what will be one of the most eye-catching goals at the tournament, courtesy of Koita's glorious thunderbolt from outside the penalty area.

Their chances of progressing depend on victory against Algeria. Having lost 1-0 to Burkina Faso in their opener, they must then hope to finish as one of the four best third-placed teams in Ivory Coast - as must any of their rivals if they end the group campaign in third spot.

In another match, Tunisia were held to a 1-1 draw by Mali in Group E at Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium in Korhogo, Ivory Coast, on Saturday. - Agencies

T20I SERIES

Spinners star in Pakistan's consolation victory over NZ

CHRISTCHURCH: Pakistan avoided a whitewash in the five-match T20I series against New Zealand with a dominant display with the ball, as they salvaged some pride with a 42-run victory at the Hagley Oval on Sunday.

Pakistan's spin attack which has been underwhelming throughout the five-match series rose to the occasion, with Mohammad Nawaz and Iftikhar Ahmed leading the charge and Usama Mir providing the ideal backup.

Zaman Khan and Nawaz provided the ideal start to the visitors in the powerplay by removing Rachin Ravindra (1) and Finn Allen (22). Wickets fell at regular intervals thereafter.



With two wickets in hand, Glenn Phillips (26), shifted gears in the end, scored a four and then a maximum to keep NZ in the chase.

But skipper Shaheen Afridi's pace got the better of Phillips and then bowled Lockie Ferguson to avoid a whitewash.

Nawaz scalped two while giving away 18 runs and Iftikhar ended the game with three wickets for 24. Their spells played a crucial role in restricting New Zealand to 92 in 17.2 overs.

Earlier, a clinical spell with the ball saw New Zealand restrict Pakistan to a paltry score of 134/8.

After winning the toss and electing to bat, Pakistan's bid to hand Haseebullah Khan a debut didn't reap the award. Tim Southee drew the first blood in the first over of the game by dismissing Haseebullah for a three-ball duck.

Former Pakistan skipper Babar Azam looked rustic throughout his knock of 13 off 24 deliveries before losing his wicket to leg-spinner Ish Sodhi.

Mohammad Rizwan chipped in with a handy contribution of 38 runs in the same number of balls. Fakhar Zaman entertaining 33 saw him score four sixes and a single boundary. Abbas Afridi in the 19th over, sent the ball into the stands twice in Matt Henry's over to push the visitors' score to 134.

Brief scores: Pakistan 134-8 (Mohammad Rizwan 38, Fakhar Zaman 33; Tim Southee 2-19) beat New Zealand 92 in 17.2 overs (Glenn Phillips 26; Iftikhar Ahmed 3-24, Mohammad Nawaz 2-18). - ANI

INDIA VS ENGLAND

Brook to return home from tour for personal reasons

LONDON: Yorkshire batter Harry Brook is to fly home from England's tour of India for personal reasons. Brook, 24, was expected to be in England's XI for the opening Test of the five-match series which starts in Hyderabad on Thursday.

The England and Wales Cricket Board said on Sunday that Surrey's Dan Lawrence has been picked as Brook's replacement.

England's final Test of the tour begins in Dharamsala on 7 March. It is not clear if Brook could return to play a part later on in the series.

Due to the length of the tour, England, who are currently travel-



ling from Abu Dhabi to Hyderabad, will leave India between the second Test (Vizag, 2-6 February) and the third (Rajkot, 15-19 February).

The fourth Test will take place in Ranchi from 23-27 February.

Lulu Hypermarket launches ‘Let’s Grill’ to celebrate local cuisine and talent

The first ‘Let’s Grill’ event took place on 19 January and 20 January, and was inaugurated by Ali Khalfan Said Alhasani, Member of the Shura Council – Representative of Bousher State

MUSCAT: Lulu Hypermarkets retail chain inaugurated the first ‘Lulu Let’s Grill’ weekend event that took place near the outlet at Bousher. The all-evening BBQ extravaganza is a platform for Omani chefs to step into the limelight and grill-up some of the favourite local recipes. The first ‘Let’s Grill’ event took place on Friday 19 and Saturday 20 January and was inaugurated by Ali Khalfan Said Alhasani, Member of the Shura Council – Representative of Bousher State.

“The event is a celebration of Omani culinary standards and a testament to the vibrant flavours that our local SMEs bring to the table,” said Mr Ananth AV, Director, LuLu Hypermarkets Oman. “At Lulu, we believe in nurturing and promoting Omani talent. Our BBQ challenge in particular is designed to highlight the incredible talent within Oman. By providing a platform for these passionate individuals, we aim to not only tantalize taste buds but also bolster the growth of SMEs in Oman.”

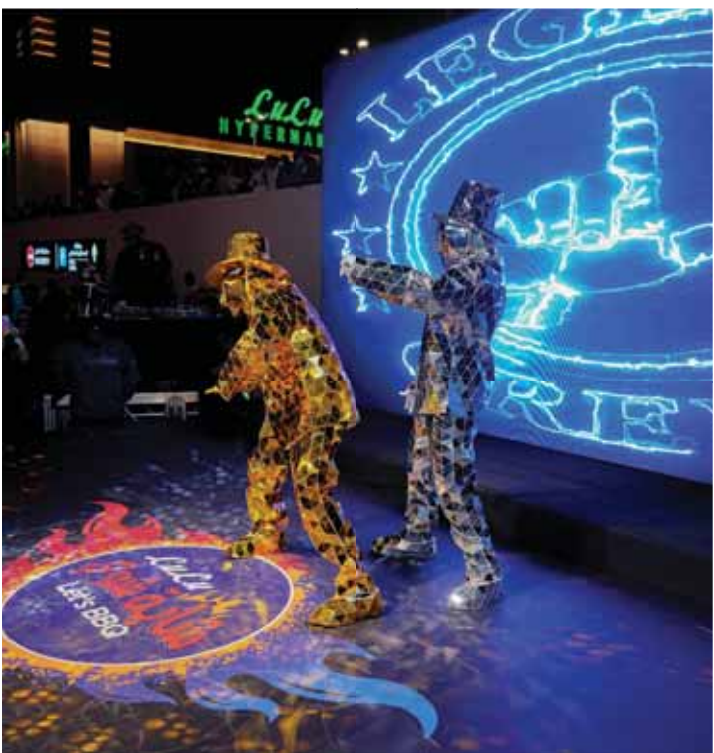
The entire event is designed around wholesome family fun with interactive entertainment, stage performances and loads of giveaways, besides a delicious variety of food for all. A highlight of the first event was live performances by talented Omani dance troupe – Legend Crew. Another special milestone was the creation of the longest pizza in Oman that delighted onlookers.

The culinary adventure will continue for the whole family as a series of events in different locations, taking advantage of the salubrious outdoor weather in Oman.

Shabeer KA, Regional Director, Lulu Hypermarkets remarked, “We view the event from a larger perspective than a great evening outdoors, with food and entertainment. It is a celebration of cultural diversity, entrepreneurship and the rich tapestry of flavours.”

“To ensure wider participation, we are taking ‘Let’s Grill’ nationwide to other prominent Lulu Hypermarket locations as well,” he continued. “Lulu Mall of Muscat followed by Lulu Al Amerat in the capital area; with plans for the interior regions subsequently.”

“We hope the event will be an inspiration and a launchpad for passionate, enterprising Omani chefs and culinary enthusiasts,” he concluded.



BANKDHOFAR OFFICIALS VISIT THE OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM

Abdul Hakeem Al Ojaili, CEO of BankDhofar and a number of the executive management team visited The Oman Across Ages Museum, where they were welcomed by Eng. Al Yaqdhan Abdullah Al Harthi, Director General of the Museum. During the visit, they were briefed on the museum's facilities and exhibition halls that narrates the history of Oman and its renaissance. They also discussed aspects of cooperation and investment opportunities between them. — Supplied picture

ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat awarded Best Private Bank Award 2024 by Global Finance

The prestigious award emphasises the Bank’s leadership position in delivering unique services to its customers



MUSCAT: In recognition of its excellence in providing diversified and outstanding wealth management services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been awarded the Best Private Bank in Oman for 2024 by Global Finance, a well-known publication specialized in reporting financial and banking developments.

The award sheds light on the high professional standards achieved by the Bank, in accordance with international standards and practices.

It is an acknowledgment of the effective role of the Bank in providing unique services and enriching wealth management solutions,

catering to diverse needs of Private Banking customers.

The selection results came after extensive consultations with corporate financial executives and bankers, banking consultants and analysts across the world.

Expressing his pride on this achievement, Abdulnasir Al Raisi, General Manager, Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, delivered his thanks to Global Finance for recognising the Bank as the Best Private Bank in Oman.

The continuous and consecutive recognition of Bank Muscat reflects its leadership position in delivering the best banking services and facilities to its customers.

Bank Muscat Private Banking customers enjoy an exclusive banking experience through a suite of diversified banking and investment solutions including dedicated Private Banking centres, dedicated relationship managers for banking as well as wealth management, catering to their expectations with an endeavor to deliver excellence in all aspects.

The Bank’s efforts to maintain highest standards of professionalism, when servicing the Private Banking customers, especially for their wealth management needs, have been regularly applauded by pioneering institutions around the globe.

Al Raisi took this recognition as an opportunity to thank Bank Muscat’s customers for their continuous confidence in the Bank’s services and facilities that satisfy their various banking needs and enhance their banking experience.

The recognition further solidifies Bank Muscat’s position as a leader in the banking sector in the Sultanate and adds to its long-standing success. Over the years, the Bank has remained committed to its strategy of providing the best services and banking products to suit all segments of society and meet their aspirations.

With a wide range of retail, corporate, wholesale and investment

banking services in addition to asset management and Private Banking offerings, Bank Muscat provides its customers with reliable, dynamic and innovative banking services and products, aiming to uphold market leadership and to maintain a high level of commitment to offering customers developed services that cater to their various present and future banking needs. Bank Muscat has an independent Private Banking branch at the Head Office and Private Customer Service Lounge in Bank Muscat MSQ Branch, backed by a team of experienced and dedicated Relationship Managers and a strong product team, which offers its customers global investment options across asset classes.

Furthermore, Bank Muscat offers Private banking customers a complete suite of investment options in global asset classes through its wealth management platform and through tie-ups with international counterparties. Its robust execution platform is backed by a team of experienced and dedicated Relationship Managers providing options to customers based on their individual preferences and market conditions.

The range of solutions offered to customers includes stocks, bonds, ETFs and mutual funds across global markets, along with other

customised investment options.

Bank Muscat Private Banking also offers selective exposure to Private Equity Funds, Real Estate Funds and Commodity ETFs, Offshore Banking and Portfolio Management through globally reputed counterparties. Private Banking customers also receive regular research reports and briefings covering investment ideas, global macroeconomic outlook and updates on key economic and geographic events impacting the performance of various asset classes.

Private Banking customers can avail further offerings provided by the Bank including an exclusive Private banking VISA Infinite credit card, VISA Platinum debit card, customised credit solutions including luxury car and yacht finance, along with competitive rates for deposits, loans and foreign exchange.

The customers can enjoy one percent cashback rewards on all transactions made through Private Visa Infinite credit card, which facilitates unlimited access to the card holder along with 1 guest, across 1,000+ airport lounges globally, complimentary chauffeur service to and from Muscat International Airport, special offers at over 900 luxury hotels around the world, multi-trip travel insurance and access to a Global Concierge Service.

MAZDA SERVICE DRIVE 2024



Free check-up for your Mazda by Japanese experts

MUSCAT: Mazda proudly announces the Mazda Service Drive 2024, a distinguished event exclusively for Mazda owners in Oman, scheduled for the 24th and 25th of January at Al Hail Service and Ghala Service centres from 9 am to 5 pm. This initiative represents Mazda’s dedication to offering unparalleled vehicle care through the expertise of its professional engineers from Japan.

On the spotlight in this Mazda Service Drive, 2024 are Osada and Sakuma, highly esteemed engineers from Mazda’s Japan headquarters in Hiroshima. These experts will be present at the event, ensuring meticulous care and expert attention to every Mazda vehicle. This event is tailored to cater to a range of Mazda models, from the city-friendly Mazda 2 and the elegant Mazda 6 to the versatile Mazda CX-5, and the most powerful Mazda CX-90. Each model will undergo a comprehensive 52-point check-up, a critical service to maintain optimal vehicle condition and preempt any potential issues. Attendees of the Mazda Service Drive 2024 are set to enjoy several exclusive benefits. Each participant will receive a complimentary engine oil coupon, redeemable on their next service visit, and a free car wash, ensuring their Mazda leaves both mechanically sound and aesthetically pleasing. Additionally, a substantial discount on labor, a variable

parts discount, and many more exclusive offers are waiting for them.

The service drive also includes a free tyre check-up and personalised advice from Mazda’s engineers, providing invaluable insights into maintaining vehicle health. This aspect of the service underscores Mazda’s dedication to not only delivering superior service but also to educating and supporting its customers.

As anticipation builds among Mazda owners across Oman, the Mazda Service Drive 2024 stands not just as a service appointment, but as an experience, a congregation of car enthusiasts, and a reflection of Mazda’s dedication to excellence. This is an amazing opportunity for Mazda owners to ensure their vehicle continues to epitomise the performance and enjoyment that is characteristic of Mazda. This event is a golden opportunity that should not be missed. Mazda owners are encouraged to seize this chance to give their vehicles the expert care they deserve. Book your appointment now for the Mazda Service Drive 2024 and ensure your Mazda is maintained to the highest standards, ready to deliver the exceptional performance you’ve come to expect. Don’t let this opportunity pass you by – join Mazda Service Drive 2024, and be part of an experience that celebrates the very essence of what it means to be a Mazda owner.

MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT

Saud Bahwan Automotive wins prestigious award from Petroleum Development Oman

MUSCAT: Recently Saud Bahwan Automotive was honoured with the prestigious Health Safety and Environment (HSE) Milestone Award from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The award recognised Saud Bahwan Automotive’s 30 years in service, across three PDO locations in Oman, clocking 2.2 million man hours without any Loss Time incident (LTI).

Receiving the award from PDO officials was Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group.



High levels of safety standards

This award is a testament to Saud Bahwan Automotive’s unwavering passion and commitment to employee well-being and its continuous efforts to upholding high levels of safety standards and excellence by fostering a deep sense of responsibility among its workforce.

Sharing his thoughts on this milestone award, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, said, “This recognition holds profound significance for us as it recognises our unwavering passion and commitment to the highest levels of safety standards and excellence across Petroleum Development Oman locations for 30 years.”

Across our operations

“This milestone achievement highlights the resilience and dedication of our staff in tirelessly fostering a culture of safety and responsibility across our operations. We strongly believe that for all our participants across Petroleum Development Oman locations, safety is paramount and each one should responsibly follow the safety measures to ultimately contribute to the greater goal of achieving an environment free of any incident. This award celebrates the success of that commitment,” he further added.







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