



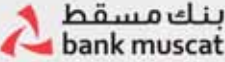
1MN FLOWERS FROM 20 COUNTRIES BLOOM IN MUSCAT NIGHTS

MUSCAT: Over one million flowers of more than 200 varieties from as many as 20 countries including the USA, the Netherlands, Kenya, Malaysia and South America are exhibited at the Muscat Flower Festival. The month-long event is the first-ever festival organised this year by Muscat Municipality. **>A4**



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AIR SERVICES AGREEMENT

HM the Sultan issues three Royal decrees

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik yesterday issued three Royal decrees reading as follows:

Royal Decree No. (67/2024) on ratifying the air services agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Suriname signed on 23 October 2024 in Kuala Lumpur.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree

shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue.

Royal Decree No. (68/2024) on ratifying the air services agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Uganda signed on 23 October 2024 in Kuala Lumpur.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from

its data of issue.

Royal Decree No. (69/2024) on ratifying the air services agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Seychelles signed on 23 October 2024 in Kuala Lumpur.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue. — **ONA**

DEPUTY PM FOR DEFENCE AFFAIRS RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF JORDAN



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison yesterday Tharwah Hamad Neimat, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries. They also exchanged views and discussed several topics of mutual interest. — **ONA**

OMANI FIRM SETS UP CENTRE TO DEVELOP DRONES AND ROBOTS

Ankaa Space and Technology will develop drones and robots for use in the fields of agriculture, housing and urban planning



MUSCAT: Ankaa Space and Technology, an Omani firm registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), began to establish the first centre for developing drones and robots for use in the fields of agriculture, housing and urban planning. The company is also establish-

ing an urban observatory platform deemed the first of its kind in the Middle East.

Mohammed Salim Al Riyami, CEO of Ankaa Space and Technology company, said, "To carry out its programmes, the company joins hands with a number

of government institutions and private establishments like the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning."

He added that the company also works with NASA to conduct

field visits for Omani students and joins hands with OQ to conduct advanced research in the field of robotics. The activities include programming drones and artificial intelligence (AI) applications to serve various sectors, he explained. — **ONA**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES



OMAN

Distance learning in some schools today

1 The Ministry of Education announced that morning classes in government and private schools will be shifted to distance learning on Thursday in the wilayats of Al Khabourah, Al Suwaiq in the Governorate of North Al Batinah, as well as the wilayats of Barka and Al Mussanah in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, due to the predicted rains. **>A2**

OMAN

People urged to vote in Oman Nation drive

2 People of Oman can now cast their vote for their favourite Oman Nation brand visual identity, one of the several engagement phases within the broader NationBrand development project. **>A3**

WORLD

UNGA adopts key cybercrime pact

3 The UN General Assembly has adopted the Convention against Cybercrime, a landmark global treaty aimed at strengthening international cooperation to combat cybercrime. **>A7**

26TH ARABIAN GULF CUP

Jaber hails players' efforts after win over Qatar

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman coach Rasheed Jaber expressed his delight after his team secured a crucial 2-1 victory over Asian champions Qatar in a Group A match of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup in Kuwait on Tuesday.

The win puts Oman on the brink of the semi-finals, and Jaber wasted no time in praising his players' resilience.

"We achieved an important and difficult victory that we were in dire need of and this victory was achieved against a strong team that has good players and is the champion of the Asian Cup in the past two editions," Jaber said.

He commended his players' efforts both offensively and defensively. "Oman players made a great effort in this match, both defensively and offensively, by exploiting the opportunities in front of the goal in the best way," the coach added.

Jaber emphasised the significance of the victory, particularly as Oman prepares for their next challenge against the UAE on Friday.

"This was an important and

hard-fought win against a strong side. Our players executed their roles brilliantly to secure these vital three points," he said.

"This victory will boost Oman's confidence as we aim to qualify for the semi-finals."

The result leaves Qatar in a must-win situation in their final group-stage encounter against Kuwait. Qatar coach Luis Garcia expressed disappointment over the result but remained hopeful for their remaining fixtures.

"We began well with an early goal but then lost our rhythm. In the second half, we created several chances but were unlucky not to at least equalise," Garcia said.

"I believe the players did what they had to do and they cannot be held responsible for the loss."

Garcia stressed the importance of correcting mistakes before Qatar's next match.

Kuwait beat UAE with late comeback victory

Earlier on Tuesday night, Kuwait staged a dramatic 2-1 comeback victory over the UAE at the Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium,



keeping their semifinal hopes alive. The UAE took an early lead, with Kayo Kanido scoring just five minutes after kickoff. A well-placed long ball found Kanido, who lobbed the ball over Kuwaiti goalkeeper Khaled Al Rashidi, putting the UAE 1-0 up.

However, Kuwait responded quickly, with Muhammad Dham capitalising on a defensive blunder by UAE's Khalifa Al Hamadi. Dham intercepted a poor clearance and scored to level the score at 1-1.

The second half saw UAE's

defence under pressure as they played with ten men after Kwamii Oton was sent off for a second yellow card in the 87th minute. With the clock ticking down, Khalifa Al Hamadi made another crucial error, misplaying a pass back to the goalkeeper.

Kuwaiti substitute Maaz Al Essaimi pounced on the mistake, evading the goalkeeper and scoring the match-winning goal in the final moments of the match. The win was Kuwait's first in the tournament, following a 1-1 draw with Oman in their opener.

Following Oman and Kuwait wins, the stage is set for a thrilling conclusion to the group stage on Friday, with Oman and Kuwait both needing just a draw in their final matches to advance to the semi-finals. Oman, runners-up at the last edition in Basra, Iraq, will face the UAE at Jaber Al Mubarak Stadium, while Kuwait will play Qatar Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium. Both teams are tied atop the group with four points each, and a draw in either match will secure their places in the next round.



4 dead as Azerbaijan passenger plane crashes in Kazakhstan

A7

OMAN

PRAYER
TIMINGS



Dhuhr.....12:12pm

Asr.....3:13pm

Maghrib.....5:33pm

Isha.....6:49pm

Fajr (Tomorrow).....5:27am

Programmes and services for beneficiaries highlighted

The meeting touched on several aspects related to integration and partnership between different public, private and community institutions



SUR: The Ministry of Social Development highlighted its services and programmes for beneficiaries in a meeting held in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah.

The meeting by the Ministry of Social Development also touched on several aspects related to integration and partnership between different public, private and community institutions.

This took place during the meeting of Dr. Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, Minister of Social Development with Dr. Yahya Badr Al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah, Walis of the governorate and members of the social committee in the Municipal Council of South Al Sharqiyah.

Moreover, the Minister of Social Development, Dr. Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, also visited the Al Wafa'a Rehabilitation Centre for People with Disability and the Sur Autism Unit. The Minister also visited some homes of beneficiaries of activities, programmes and services offered by the ministry.

-ONA

BILATERAL COOPERATION

VISITS

Lt. Gen Shraiqi meets Saudi Arabia minister

Turkish official learns about MSC, MTC tasks

MUSCAT: Lt. Gen Hassan Mohsin Al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs on Wednesday received Khalil Ibrahim Salamah, Deputy Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources for Industrial Affairs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and his accompanying delegation.

The two sides reviewed several topics of mutual interest and explored ways to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry and several senior officers of the Royal Oman Police (ROP). -ONA

MUSCAT: Prof. Erhan Afyoncu, Rector of the National Defence University of the Republic of Türkiye and his accompanying delegation on Wednesday visited the Maritime Security Center (MSC).

The delegation was greeted upon their arrival at the MSC by Commodore Adil Hamoud Al Bussaidi, Head of the MSC.

Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the Omani maritime environment.

They also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. Meanwhile, Prof. Erhan Afyoncu, Rector of the National Defence University of the Republic of Türkiye also visited the Military Technological College (MTC). Upon the delegation's arrival at the college, they were received by the Acting Commandant of the MTC.

The visiting delegation were briefed about the MTC. -ONA





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WEATHER

Distance learning in some schools due to rains today

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education announced that morning classes in government and private schools will be shifted to distance learning on Thursday in the wilayats of Al Khabourah, Al Suwaiq in the Governorate of North Al Batinah, as well as the wilayats of Barka and Al Mussanah in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, due to the predicted rains.

Take precautions

The Civil Aviation Authority has called on everyone to take precautions and not to cross wadis or go to the sea as heavy to moderate rains are expected to hit some parts of Oman on Thursday. Heavy to moderate rains are expected to hit in the coastal areas of the governorates of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, and Muscat with a rainfall of varying intensity (15-35 mm), accompanied by active winds that can lead to flowing wadis. There are chances of rain in the governorates of Musandam, Al Dakhiliyah, North al Sharqiyah, and South al Sharqiyah, with rainfall amounts ranging from 5-15 mm. The height of sea waves on all coasts of the Sultanate of Oman will be between 1.5 - 2.5 metres.

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People encouraged to vote in Oman Nation brand visual identity campaign

The campaign begins from 26th December until 29th December 2024 for Omani citizens and Oman-based residents

Times News Service

MUSCAT: People of Oman can now cast their vote for their favourite Oman Nation brand visual identity, one of the several engagement phases within the broader NationBrand development project. Beginning from today, Thursday 26th December, through to Sunday 29th December 2024, Omani citizens and Oman-based residents can visit the official Oman nation brand website www.omanbrand.om and vote for their favourite of

three Oman Nation brand visual identities. Each of the visual identities takes the form of a branded logo that delicately unites both traditional and contemporary Omani design elements derived from rigorous research by a Creative Committee of Omani creative professionals. The voting campaign is an op-

portunity for the people of Oman to play an active role in the selection of the visual identity that will accompany the nation's long-term nation branding strategy – which represents an exciting new chapter in Oman's national story, which the people of Oman can be proud to share with the world. The voting process is designed

to be simple, easy, and convenient. Participants will need to visit www.omanbrand.om on their mobile phone or desktop computer; register their personal details; select the Oman Nation brand logo which they feel best represents the Sultanate's authentic story previously shaped through a series of engagement initiatives around

Oman; and cast their vote. Speaking about the campaign, Eng. Aisha Mohammed Al Saifi – Director of Oman's Unified Promotional Nation Brand Project, and Vice President for the National Program for the Development of Private Sector and Foreign Trade (Nazdahr) stated: "I encourage all Omanis and all Oman-based residents to go and vote in this campaign. Your individual votes are incredibly important, because they will bring the Oman Nation strategy to life with an authenticity that truly represents the people of Oman and our inherent set of values and aspirations. This is a vital first step for the ongoing nation branding strategy, and your vote ensures we can proudly and collectively showcase the Omani story to the world." Following voting, the winning logo will be revealed to the public in early-2025; and subsequently be used as the visual identity for the entire Oman Nation brand strategy. The development of the three visual identity options selected for the campaign was the result of a close collaboration be-

tween both Omani and international expertise, and an extensive 12-month research and development phase, which included a total of 500 surveys, 128 interviews, and numerous focus groups and street consultations with both Omani citizens and residents, across the country. Furthermore, 5,500 international surveys were carried out, and over 3.8 million search engine keywords were analysed to understand the current perceptions of Oman, and to determine how the Oman Nation brand strategy could best be implemented. The visual identity voting campaign forms one of the first of a series of public engagement initiatives planned for the Sultanate's long-term nation branding strategy, which plans to positively impact how Oman is perceived globally by its international peers, and to leverage this for the benefit of the country's economy and society, and long-term growth and development. The strategy will also serve to differentiate Oman from other countries, and correct any misconceptions about Oman.

CHAired BY MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Meeting reviews procedures for Oman's participation in global conferences

MUSCAT: Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Sciences yesterday held its first meeting, chaired by Dr. Madiha Ahmed Al Shaibani, Minister of Education, Chairperson of the Commission. The meeting discussed ways of providing international organisations with examples about Oman's efforts in the fields of education, culture and science. It reviewed procedures for Oman's participation in global conferences related to education, culture and science. During the meeting, the members of the Commission's General Assembly were briefed about the objectives and activities of international organisations. The meeting discussed na-

tional bodies' needs for activities and services of international organisations. It looked into the most appropriate ways to benefit from the programmes provided by those organisations, notably within the context of Oman Vision 2040. The meeting was attended by HH Sayyida Dr. Muna Fahd Al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Cooperation at Sultan Qaboos University, Dr. Abdullah Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary for Education (Deputy Chairman of the Commission) and representatives of national bodies and institutions related to the activities of international organisations (like the UNESCO, the ISESCO and ALECSO). -ONA

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Shura Council receives delegation from the National Defence University of Türkiye

MUSCAT: Taher Mebkhou Al-Janibi, Deputy Chairman of the Shura Council, received yesterday a delegation from the National Defence University of the Republic of Türkiye, as part of their current visit to the Sultanate of Oman. Their visit to the Council aims to learn about its legislative powers and roles. During the meeting, the strong historical relations between the two countries in various fields were discussed. The conversation then turned to the Shura Council's journey, its roles, and the powers granted to it by the Basic Law of the State and the Oman Council Law. The discussion covered the legislative process for bills referred to the Council and those proposed by the Council itself. His Excellency also addressed the monitoring tools available to Shura Council members and the working mechanisms in place, in

accordance with the provisions of the Oman Council Law. He highlighted the Council's effective role in national decision-making and its contribution to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The delegation was also briefed on the work mechanisms of the Council's permanent committees, the system of ordinary sessions in the Council, and the role of the General Secretariat in providing the necessary technical support to Council members. As part of the visit, the delegation was introduced to the modern technologies used in the Council's deliberation hall, where the ordinary sessions are held, and also toured other areas of the Council, including the Oman Council Library. The meeting was attended by a number of Council members, Khalid Sultan Al-Jabri, Mohammed Salem Al-Sulaimani, and Ahmed bin Said Al-Balushi.

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1 MILLION FLOWERS

FROM 20 COUNTRIES BLOOM IN MUSCAT NIGHTS



By Khalid Orabi

Strolling through a sea of vibrant flowers at the Muscat Flower Festival, visitors are greeted by an explosion of colours and fragrances that has transformed Qurum Natural Park into a botanical masterpiece.

Featuring over a staggering one million flowers from more than 20 countries, the festival brings together blooms from the USA, the Netherlands, Kenya, Malaysia, and South America, offering a unique blend of nature and design.

The festival, part of the ongoing Muscat Nights Festival, was inaugurated on December 23, 2024, by Ahmed Al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality. It continues until January 21, 2025, providing visitors with a stunning showcase of floral creativity.

The Muscat Flower Festival marks the first-ever floral event of its kind organised by Muscat Municipality. Hanan Al Shuraiki, an engineer at the Landscaping and Parks Department and the festival supervisor, shared the journey behind the event.

"The idea began in 2020 when we planted 5 million seasonal flowers and developed designs

Muscat Flower Festival is open daily during Muscat Nights from 4pm to mid-night at Qurum Natural Park

for the festival. However, it was postponed due to the demise of Sultan Qaboos bin Said," she said.

In 2023 the concept was revived and presented to Muscat Municipality Chairman Ahmed Al Humaidi, who welcomed it warmly, setting the stage for this year's event. To ensure world-class designs, the municipality collaborated with Pico Group of Singapore, known for their expertise in creating large-scale showcases.

"We floated tenders and selected Pico Group based on their experience in this field," Hanan added.

The floral designs, a collaborative effort between international and Omani designers, include contributions from Madhavi Khimji of Oman.

Barnabas Chia, Project Director of Pico Group, expressed pride in being part of the festival.

"We are honoured to curate



and produce this unique showcase in Muscat, celebrating the city's natural beauty and vibrant community. This event would not have been possible without the support of local and international partners, talented designers, and a dedicated team.

"We hope the festival becomes a cherished tradition and a key feature of the Muscat Nights calendar," he said.

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the festival also fosters community engagement by involving 50 local SMEs specialising in flowers. This initiative highlights the Municipality's effort to create opportunities for local businesses while elevating the event's impact. Reflecting on the festival's

cultural significance, Madhavi Khimji emphasised its connection to Oman's identity. "The Muscat Flower Festival expresses the spirit of the Sultanate of Oman and celebrates its rich hospitality," she said.

Festival details

The Muscat Flower Festival is open daily from 4:00pm to mid-night at Qurum Natural Park.

It forms part of the broader Muscat Nights Festival, with activities and attractions also hosted at Al Naseem Public Park, Al Amerat Public Park, Seeb Beach, and the Oman Automobile Association grounds, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Seeb Beach, and Wadi Al Khoud.



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Oman, KSA explore means of enhancing industrial integration

The two sides also reviewed means of facilitating exports and further boosting the supply chains

MUSCAT: Qais Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion yesterday received Eng. Khalil Ibrahim Ibn Salamah, Deputy Minister for Industry Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). During the meeting, the two sides explored means of enhancing trade exchange and industrial integration between Oman and the KSA. They also reviewed means of facilitating exportats and further boosting the supply chains. The meeting touched on challenges facing exporters in the two countries. It also underscored the importance of furnishing a milieu that stimulates economic cooperation and strategic integration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The meeting was attended by



Dr. Saleh Said Masn, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, Ibrahim Saad Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

to the Sultanate of Oman, Eng. Abdulrahman Al Thukair, CEO of the Saudi Export Development Authority, Eng. Al Badr Fouada, Deputy Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources for Industrial

Development of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah Mohammed Al Sadhan, Vice Governor of the Saudi Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority for Operations and several officials from both sides. - ONA



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Oman attends Arab social affairs ministers' meeting

MANAMA: Represented by the Ministry of Social Development, the Sultanate of Oman yesterday took part in the 44th session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs. The session was hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain. Oman's delegation was represented by Sheikh Rashid Ahmed Al Shamsi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Development. The session discussed preparations for the Arab Summit, the 2nd World Summit for Social Development and the 3rd World Summit for Persons with Disabilities, scheduled to be held in 2025. The session touched on topics of relevance to the family, childhood, the elderly and social policies.

The session also reviewed the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and other unstable countries. It laid emphasis on the need to provide humanitarian assistance where necessary, address development challenges in the Arab region and consolidate joint social development action.-ONA

SAUDI ARABIA

Omani-Saudi joint military drill 'Solidarity 1' concludes

RIYADH: The Omani-Saudi Joint Military Exercise "Solidarity 1" concluded in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Wednesday. The drill saw the participation of a force from Oman Coast Regiment of the 23rd Infantry Brigade, Royal Army of Oman (RAO), and a force from the 2nd regiment of the 20th Brigade of the Royal Land

Forces of the KSA. Implementation of the drill was part of a training plan adopted by the RAO to maintain a high level of performance and the combat ability of its units. It was also in pursuance of an annual training programme implemented in cooperation with GCC, Arab and friendly countries to serve the overall national objectives. -ONA



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TENDER COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENT

Global Mining Group - Dhofar Governorate
Invitation for Prequalification of Specialized Companies

Global Mining Group, Salalah, invites companies and consultancy offices to prequalify for the Restructuring and Institutional Development Project, aimed at enhancing institutional performance and aligning with best practices.

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- Company Profile:** A brief overview, including relevant activities and services.
- Commercial Registration and Licenses:** Valid and aligned with the required activity.
- Previous Experience:** A list of similar projects and tests of success.
- Team Profiles:** CVs and relevant certifications.
- Supporting Documents:** Evidence of competence and ability to execute the project.
- Impact Vision:** A proposal on the project's expected impact on group performance

Important Notes:

- Submissions will be evaluated, and only shortlisted companies will be notified.
- Shortlisted companies will receive the tender document (Terms of Reference).
- Submission deadline: (5 January 2025).

Contact Information:
Email for submissions and inquiries: (mininggroup@gmc.om)
Mobile: 90603974 • Phone: 23219355

29 SURVIVED

4 dead as Azerbaijan passenger plane crashes in Kazakhstan

AKTAU: A passenger plane flying from Azerbaijan to Russia crashed near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan, killing four people, Al Jazeera reported, citing health officials and medical workers.

29 people, including two children, survived the crash and were hospitalised, according to Azerbaijan's Emergency Ministry, Al Jazeera reported.

Flight number J2-8243, an Embraer 190 aircraft with 62 passengers and five crew members on board, was forced to make an emergency landing on Wednesday



about 3km (1.8 miles) from Aktau.

Al Jazeera quoted Russian news agency Interfax as saying that there may be more survivors and quoted medical workers at the scene as saying that four bodies have been recovered.

The ministry said fire services had put out the blaze. It said 150 emergency workers were at the scene.

According to preliminary reports, the plane requested landing at an alternative airport before the accident due to heavy fog in Grozny, Al Jazeera's reported.

"Unfortunately, Azerbaijan's President Aliyev was forced to leave St Petersburg (where he had a summit). Putin has already called him and expressed his condolences in connection with the crash of the Azerbaijani plane in Aktau," Al Jazeera quoted Kremlin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov as saying.

"We deeply sympathise with those who lost their relatives and friends in this plane crash and wish a speedy recovery to all those who managed to survive," he added. Russia's Federal Agency for Air

Transport, Rosaviatsiya said in a statement that preliminary information suggested the pilot had decided to make an emergency landing after a bird strike.

Authorities in Kazakhstan said a government commission had been set up to investigate the crash and its members were ordered to fly to the site and ensure that the families of the dead and injured were getting the help they needed.

Kazakhstan's authorities were investigating the crash and are looking into possible angles that could have led to this situation. -ANI

UNGA adopts landmark cybercrime agreement

The agreement on the legally binding treaty marked the culmination of a five-year effort by UN Member States

NEW YORK: The United Nations (UN) General Assembly has adopted the Convention against Cybercrime, a landmark global treaty aimed at strengthening international cooperation to combat cybercrime and protecting societies from digital threats.

The agreement on the legally binding treaty marked the culmination of a five-year effort by UN Member States, with inputs from civil society, information security experts, academia and the private sector.

The resolution containing the Convention was adopted without a vote by the 193-member General Assembly.

President of the General Assembly Philemon Yang highlighted the importance of the new



Convention.

"We live in a digital world, one where information and communications technologies have enormous potential for the development of societies, but also increases the potential threat of cybercrime," he said.

"With the adoption of this Convention, Member States have at hand the tools and means to strengthen international cooperation in preventing and combating cybercrime, protecting people and their rights online," Yang added.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the adoption of the Convention, the first international criminal justice treaty to have been negotiated in over 20 years.

"This treaty is a demonstration of multilateralism succeeding during difficult times and reflects the collective will of Member States to promote international cooperation to prevent and combat cybercrime," his spokesperson said in a statement.

The statement added that the

Convention "creates an unprecedented platform for collaboration" in the exchange of evidence, protection for victims and prevention, while safeguarding human rights online.

"The Secretary-General trusts that the new treaty will promote a safe cyberspace and calls on all States to join the Convention and to implement it in cooperation with relevant stakeholders," the statement added.

Ghada Waly, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also described the adoption of the treaty as a "major victory" for multilateralism.

"It is a crucial step forward in our efforts to address crimes like online child sexual abuse, sophisticated online scams and money laundering," she said.

Waly reiterated the UN commitment to support all nations in signing, ratifying and implementing the new treaty, as well as providing them with the tools and support they need to protect their economies and safeguard the digital sphere from cybercrime.

The Convention against Cybercrime will open for signature at a formal ceremony to be hosted in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2025.

It will enter into force 90 days after being ratified by the 40th signatory. -ONA

ST. PETER'S BASILICA

Pope appeals for peace in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan



VATICAN: Pope Francis used his midday "urbi et orbi" ("to the city and the world") blessing to appeal for a halt to fighting, or at least improved conditions for civilians, in the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan.

"May the sound of arms be silenced in war-torn Ukraine," he said from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica.

"May there be the boldness needed to open the door to negotiation and to gestures of dialogue and encounter, in order to achieve a just and lasting peace."

Speaking about the conflict in Gaza, Francis called the humanitarian situation "extremely grave."

"May there be a ceasefire, may the hostages be released and aid be given to the people worn out by hunger and by war," he said, calling for the "doors of dialogue and

peace to be flung open."

The 88-year-old Argentine pontiff also made reference to Sudan's civil war and ensuing famine.

"May the Son of the Most High sustain the efforts of the international community to facilitate access to humanitarian aid for the civilian population of Sudan and to initiate new negotiations for a ceasefire," Francis appealed.

The previous evening, Francis had urged people at a Christmas Eve mass to think of "the wars, of the machine-gunned children, of the bombs on schools or hospitals," after another year of conflict. Ukraine, which used to celebrate Christmas on January 7 along with the Russian Orthodox Church, is celebrating its second Christmas in December after a change in the law to move to the Western calendar. -DW

DUTCH COURT

5 convicted over clashes in Amsterdam

AMSTERDAM: A Dutch court has convicted five men for their involvement in the November 8 violent clashes between Israeli football fans and pro-Palestinian protestors in Amsterdam following a series of skirmishes, Al Jazeera reported on Tuesday.

The violence occurred between the groups surrounding a UEFA Europa League match between Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv and the Netherlands' Ajax Amsterdam.

The Amsterdam district court found the men guilty of offences including kicking Maccabi Tel Aviv fans in the street. -ANI

PAKTIKA PROVINCE

Toll rises to 46 in Pakistan airstrikes on Afghanistan

KABUL: The death toll from the Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan's Barmal district of Paktika province has risen to 46, with six people left injured so far, with the majority of victims being women and children, as reported by Khaama Press, citing reports from Taliban authorities.

According to Khaama Press, the Taliban authorities had condemned the airstrike, which they claim targeted four areas in Afghanistan on December 24.

The Pakistani military said the airstrikes were aimed at bases of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the region, resulting in the deaths of several militants and

the destruction of four TTP bases, Khaama Press reported, citing the Pakistani media outlets close to the Pakistani Army.

However, the Taliban's Ministry of Defence argued that the strike also hit "Waziristani refugees," disputing the claim that only militants were targeted.

This escalation in violence has sparked tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the Taliban warning of retaliation, Khaama Press reported.

The Pakistani Taliban, or Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has increased its attacks on Pakistani forces in recent months, with Pakistan accusing



the Afghan Taliban of providing shelter to these militants, Khaama Press reported.

Enayatullah Khwarazmi, a spokesperson for the Taliban Ministry of Defence, denied the Pakistani claims and posted on X that "civilian people, mostly Wa-

ziristani refugees," had been killed in the airstrike.

Khwarazmi added that "several children and other civilians were martyred and wounded" in the attack, though no official casualty figures were provided. Sources reported that at least 15 bodies, including women and children, have been recovered, and the death toll is expected to rise as search efforts continue.

The Waziristani refugees are civilians who had been displaced by military operations in Pakistan's tribal areas. However, Pakistan maintains that many TTP commanders and fighters have fled to Afghanistan, where they are

reportedly being protected by the Afghan Taliban in border provinces, Khaama Press reported.

Tensions between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban have been building for some time, fuelled by the ongoing presence of TTP militants in Afghanistan. While Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of harbouring these militants, the Taliban insists it is not collaborating with the group.

The incident further threatens regional stability and peace efforts, underscoring the need for urgent diplomatic dialogue to prevent more casualties and address the underlying issues fuelling the conflict. -ANI

LACK OF TOURISTS

Sombre Christmas in Bethlehem in the shadow of Gaza war

GAZA: According to the Christian Christmas story, Jesus was born in a lowly stable in Bethlehem because there was no more room in the local inns. Around 2,000 years later, almost all of Bethlehem's 5,000 hotel rooms are empty.

There is a lack of tourists, which is not only a problem for the hotels, but also for local stores. Ramzi Sabella runs a small store within sight of the Church of the Nativity. He can personally remember almost every tourist who has come through the door this year. "There was a guest from Nigeria here a few weeks ago," he recalls.

He's normally very busy, especially during the Christmas period. Christian pilgrims from all over the world buy chargers for cell phones and selfie sticks from him. But in times of war, everything is different. "Now only a few locals come by sometimes, and they usually buy the cheapest products. They don't have any money either," Sabella told DW.



Residents are leaving Bethlehem

Since the outbreak of the war in the Gaza Strip, the economy in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where Bethlehem is located, has suffered a massive slump. Tourism has been the city's main source of income for decades but according to the local hotel association, the

bed occupancy rate has fallen from around 80% shortly before the war to just 3% today.

The mood is also gloomy on the large Nativity Square in front of the Church of the Nativity. Normally, loud Christmas music blares out from here through the entire old town of Bethlehem. But this year there is silence: No Christmas car-

ols, no Christmas tree, no decorations. Only a few journalists have come to the square to report on the sad event.

This is already the second year that Christmas has been overshadowed by the Israel-Hamas war. According to local authorities, almost 500 families have emigrated from Bethlehem in recent

months — a considerable number given that the population is only around 30,000. And these are just the official figures. Many more, the remaining residents say, have left on temporary tourist visas and are trying to eke out a living abroad with odd jobs.

'A message to the whole world'

But growing poverty is only one part of the story. No one here feels like celebrating anyway, since tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip. "We are praying in silence this year — and we want to send a message to the whole world," explains Issa Musleh, a priest at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Bethlehem. "We deeply condemn what is currently happening in Gaza."

The mood in Bethlehem and the rest of the West Bank has become increasingly tense since the outbreak of the war. It's a tension felt by the 50,000 or so Christians as well as the Muslim majority in the

region under Israeli occupation.

Especially now at Christmas, everyone should remember that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to call people to peace, said the Greek Orthodox priest. According to the United Nations, more than 700 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since the war began. In the same period, 23 Israelis have died in the violence.

Under these circumstances, Christians in the region are finding it harder than ever to believe in the hopeful Christmas message. Yet the people of Bethlehem have long proven that peaceful coexistence is possible, says waiter Nadeem, as he watches the sombre events in front of the Church of the Nativity from his empty café at the top of a nearby hill.

He is a Muslim, but goes to a Christian university. Before the war, he often traveled to Israel, just a few kilometers away, where he had many Jewish friends. "Actually, we all want the same thing," says Nadeem: A simple life in peace. -DW

CHINA FISCAL SPENDING
China's Finance Ministry vowed to step up fiscal spending and government bond issuance in 2025, providing stronger support to bolster economic stability. The country will adopt a more proactive fiscal policy next year (2025), and ensure the fiscal policy is continuously forceful and impactful. — **ONA**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS LOWER
Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index (30) yesterday lost (5.6) points, comprising a decline by (0.12 %) to close at (4479.95) points, compared to the last session, which stood at (4485.54) points. > **B2**

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

InnoTech concludes its FabTech Mobile Lab Programme

MONDAY: In partnership with bp Oman and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, InnoTech concluded the FabTech Mobile Lab programme in a closing ceremony, held under the patronage of Hamad Khalfan Al Rashdi, Advisor to the Minister of Education, for Administrative Affairs.

The FabTech Mobile Lab programme is considered as the first mobile lab of its kind in Oman, and over the last five years, the lab embarked on tours targeting school students in the governorates of Muscat, Al Dhahirah, and Al Dakhiliyah, as well as university students and those interested in modern manufacturing techniques and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

During this time, the mobile lab visited approximately 80 schools, organised 12 training camps, and participated in over 10 educational events and festivals.

Engineer Othman Al-Mandhri, Founder and CEO of InnoTech, highlighted that: "The lab focused on empowering students to transform their ideas into projects or models using modern manufacturing techniques. It helped students learn how to use engineering design software, 3D printers, and laser cutting machines to turn their designs into tangible products. We hope this experience has inspired the next generation of innovators and designers."

Supporting education
Ibrahim Al Hinaï, Social Investment Manager at bp Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, commented: "This programme reflects bp Oman's commitment to supporting education that helps people develop transferrable skills needed for careers in energy and other sectors. This programme supported their educational journey by offering the latest tools and technologies, in line with the advancements in modern educational techniques worldwide. Throughout its operation, approximately 10,000 students benefited from the programme by joining the lab during school tours, summer camps, or participating in educational festivals and events."

In addition, the lab also provided employment opportunities for Omanis, including three full-time positions for the administrative team and engineers responsible for training students and visitors. Moreover, the programme offered part-time positions to several photographers and trainees, reflecting InnoTech's commitment to supporting Omani talent.



India's real GDP growth to remain steady at 6.5%

A critical recommendation from the latest EY Economy Watch report is that the combined debt of the central and state governments should not exceed 60 per cent of the country's nominal GDP



NEW DELHI: India's real GDP growth is projected to remain steady at 6.5 per cent for the financial years 2025 and 2026, according to the latest EY Economy Watch report.

The report highlighted key fiscal and economic measures that could sustain and boost this growth trajectory.

It said, "In the medium-term, India's real GDP growth prospects can be kept at 6.5 per cent per year provided the GoI accelerates its capital expenditure growth in the remaining part of the current fiscal year and comes up with a medium-term investment pipeline with participation from the Government of India and state governments"

A critical recommendation

from the report is that the combined debt of the central and state governments should not exceed 60 per cent of the country's nominal GDP. This limit would require each level of government to cap their debt at 30 per cent of GDP.

"The combined debt-GDP ratio target should be retained at 60 per cent but divided equally between GoI and states at 30 per cent each," it said.

The report also emphasized the importance of balancing current income and expenditure at both the central and state levels to improve national savings.

Achieving a national savings rate of 36.5 per cent of GDP in real terms, coupled with an additional 2 per cent contribution from foreign investments, could elevate the total investment level to 38.5 per cent. This level of investment is expected to support a steady economic growth rate of 7 per cent annually.

The report also called for significant reforms in the Fiscal



Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act to ensure fiscal discipline while supporting India's growth ambitions.

One key recommendation is to make balancing the revenue account a priority for both the central and state governments. This

would eliminate government saving's, freeing up resources for productive investments essential for sustained growth.

It further proposes a fiscal deficit target of 3 per cent of GDP for both central and state governments. However, the central government should retain flexibility, allowing the fiscal deficit to range between 1 per cent and 5 per cent of GDP to manage unforeseen challenges like economic slowdowns.

The report highlights the importance of balanced fiscal policies and robust investments from households, businesses, and the public sector. With these measures, India is well-positioned to achieve long-term growth and economic stability. — **ANI**

INDIA

Retailers seek technology platform to stay competitive

NEW DELHI: The Federation of Retailer Association of India (FRAI), a representative body of lakhs of micro, small and medium retailers, organised an event in the national capital on Tuesday, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced technology support from the government for kirana stores.

They argued that such support would enable the kirana stores to remain competitive amidst the increasing competition from quick commerce companies like Swiggy Instamart, Blinkit or Zepto.

The retailers under FRAI called upon the government to provide local kirana stores with a technology platform that would allow them to compete on equal terms with quick commerce players, creating a level playing field.

The retailers acknowledged the shift in consumer preferences towards faster delivery and competitive pricing and expressed their willingness to adopt new technologies, become more efficient and provide better services to the customer. They also stressed that without government support for a level the playing field, it would be difficult for small retailers to compete with the deep resources of larger e-commerce players. At the event, FRAI members said they highlighted the growing threat of organised players and emphasized that the rise of e-commerce and quick commerce platforms is putting the very existence of traditional kirana stores at risk. These retailers, as per the FRAI, have already suffered humungous financial setbacks in the last couple of years and are barely managing to sustain livelihood in the given the high inflationary condition. — **ANI**

IEA REPORT

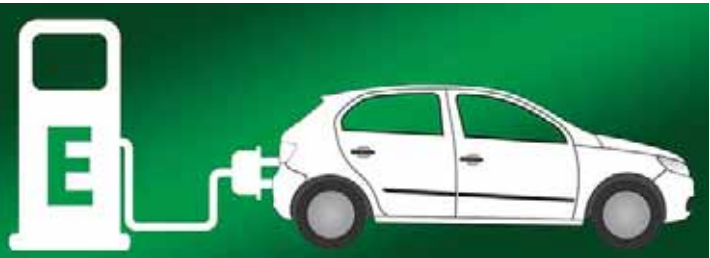
China accounted for 80% of global EV sales growth in 2024

NEW DELHI: China accounted for nearly 80 per cent of Electronic Vehicle growth globally, with EV sales jumping from over 3 million in the first half of 2023 to more than 4 million during the same period in 2024, according to a report by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

As per the report, over 7 million electric cars were sold globally in the first six months of 2024, marking a 25 per cent rise compared to the same period in 2023. The report also noted that the share of electric vehicles (EVs) in the global car fleet is expected to reach around 5 per cent by the end of 2024.

China's dominance
Despite China's dominance, other markets also witnessed growth. EV sales outside China rose by over 10 per cent, with significant increases in countries like Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and regions such as the Middle East and the Caspian.

However, in developed markets, the performance was mixed. The European Union saw flat EV sales, with a decline in Germany balanced by a modest rise of around



3 per cent in other EU countries. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom recorded a 15 per cent growth in EV sales, and the United States saw an increase of nearly 10 per cent.

It said "While sales in the European Union remained flat, with a decline in Germany offsetting a rise elsewhere of around 3% on average".

The report also emphasised on the increasing popularity of plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) over battery electric vehicles (BEVs), which made up over 35 per cent of total EV sales in the first half of 2024.

A key trend in the report is the growing preference for PHEVs over battery electric vehicles (BEVs). In China, sales of PHEVs surged by 70 per cent, largely driven by range-extended electric vehicles (REEVs), which offer longer driving ranges due to larger batteries. It said "In China, the PHEV sales increase was largely driven by range-extended electric vehicles (REEVs) which have longer driving ranges due to larger batteries".

The average range for REEVs stands at 130 kilometers, compared to 80 kilometers for standard PHEVs. Similarly, in the United States, PHEV sales grew by 25 per cent, while BEV sales increased by only 5 per cent.

The report also highlighted the need for improved recharging infrastructure to address range anxiety, a significant factor influencing EV adoption. As the EV market expands, investments in charging facilities will play a crucial role in sustaining growth. — **ANI**

GSM ARENA

Samsung launches new durable Sonic the Hedgehog-themed microSD cards

WASHINGTON: Samsung has teamed up with SEGA to release a new line of highly durable microSD cards themed around the popular Sonic the Hedgehog franchise.

As per GSM Arena, the newly launched Sonic the Hedgehog PRO Plus microSD series combines both speed and resilience, making them an attractive choice for gamers and tech enthusiasts alike.

Four distinct variants
The new Sonic-inspired microSD cards are available in four distinct variants, each representing an iconic character from the Sonic the Hedgehog series.

The memory cards feature vibrant colours and are designed to cater to different storage needs:

- 128GB - Knuckles the Echidna (Red icon)
- 256GB - Tails (Yellow icon)
- 512GB - Sonic the Hedgehog (Blue icon)
- 1TB - Shadow the Hedgehog (Black icon)

All four variants are A2-rated microSD cards, providing impressive sequential read and write speeds of up to 180 MB/s and 130 MB/s, respectively, making them perfect for fast data transfer and storage-intensive applications.

Beyond their gaming-inspired design, these Sonic the Hedgehog PRO Plus microSD cards are built to withstand harsh environments and extreme conditions. Users can rely on these cards for durability, as they are capable of enduring: Submersion in 3 per cent saltwater for up to 72 hours at depths of up to 1 meter without damage. As per GSM



Arena, they can also endure high temperatures, magnetic fields, and X-rays, ensuring the data remains safe even in challenging circumstances; can drop resistance from heights of up to 4.8 meters (approximately 16 feet), making them ideal for use in rugged situations. These cards are designed for those who need reliable storage in even the harshest conditions, from outdoor adventures to working in demanding environments. — **ANI**

MARKET

MSX index ends lower

The trading value in yesterday's session stood at OMR11,321,684, comprising a rise of 266.8%, compared to the last session

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index (30) yesterday lost (5.6) points, comprising a decline by (0.12 %) to close at (4479.95) points, compared to the last session, which stood at (4485.54) points.

The trading value yesterday stood at OMR11,321,684, comprising a rise by 266.8%, compared to the last session, which stood at OMR3,086,952.

The report released by MSX

pointed out that the market value went up by 0.072% to reach about OMR27.23 billion.

The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached OMR54,000, comprising 0.48%.

The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached OMR430,000, comprising (3.80%). The net non-Omani investment decreased by 3.32% to OMR376,000). – **OMA**

STRATEGIC ACQUISITION

Mubadala buys majority stake in GMSC and IDS

ABU DHABI: Mubadala Investment Company has acquired an 80% stake in Global Medical Supply Chain (GMSC) and Al Itihad Drug Store (IDS) from GlobalOne Healthcare Holding (GHH), with GHH retaining a 20% stake.

This strategic acquisition enhances Mubadala's footprint in the healthcare logistics and pharmaceutical distribution sectors, aligning with the UAE's vision to establish a robust life sciences infrastructure.

Founded in 2015, GMSC provides comprehensive end-to-end supply chain services for medical products, including demand planning, procurement, logistics, inventory management, warehousing, and maintenance.

GMSC serves over 200 medical facilities, including hospitals and clinics across the UAE. With a dedicated team of medical supply chain specialists, GMSC sources a broad array of products from almost 400 suppliers, ensuring a reliable supply chain for all medical needs.

IDS, established in 1987, stands as one of the leading distributors of pharmaceutical and consumer healthcare products in the UAE. Distributing over 1,000 products from over 40 leading suppliers, IDS services every hospital, and all, or at least most pharmacies and supermarkets within the UAE. It boasts a vast portfolio that spans multiple therapeutic categories. – **WAM**

OMAN STOCKS														
MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE														
INDICES														
Index				High				Low				Value	Prev. Value	Diff
MSX 30 INDEX				4,492.78				4,479.44				4,485.54	4,485.54	5.59
FINANCIAL INDEX				7,550.78				7,527.78				7,535.84	7,535.84	-8.05
Industry Index				5,168.04				5,130.66				5,140.14	5,132.14	8.00
Services Index				1,711.24				1,702.77				1,708.97	1,704.05	4.92
MSX Shariah Index				409.63				408.12				408.12	408.30	-0.18
MSX TR INDEX				6,292.13				6,273.45				6,274.17	6,282.00	-7.83
FINANCIAL TR IDX				8,578.47				8,552.34				8,552.34	8,561.48	-9.15
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX				5,962.70				5,919.57				5,930.50	5,921.27	9.23
SERVICES TR IDX				2,047.73				2,037.60				2,045.02	2,039.13	5.89
FIXED INCOME INDEX				1,067.21				1,067.21				1,067.21	1,067.21	0.00
Trading Summary														
Volume	.....	Turnover	.....	Trades	.....	Market Cap	.....	Up	.....	Down	.....	Equal	.....	Sec. Traded
98,090,780	.....	11,321,684	.....	3,175	.....	27,227,977,564	.....	11	.....	10	.....	24	.....	45
SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25														
RIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR	PREV CLOSE	DIFF BD	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BD	LAST OFF
REGULAR MARKET														
OM0000004735	SEMBOCORP SALALAH	4,000	392	1	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.094	0.004	4.255	0.098	0.095	0.100
OM0000002275	SHELL OMAN MARKETING	2,960	1,776	2	0.600	0.600	0.590	0.590	0.580	0.010	3.448	0.600	0.600	0.620
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	30,000	1,950	3	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.064	0.001	1.563	0.065	0.064	0.066
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	18,852	6,023	9	0.319	0.320	0.319	0.319	0.319	0.000	0.319	0.319	0.319	0.100
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	201,985	50,900	8	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.000	0.252	0.251	0.252	0.100
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.	852,937	68,788	33	0.081	0.081	0.080	0.081	0.081	0.000	0.081	0.081	0.081	0.100
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	22,097	8,264	2	0.374	0.374	0.374	0.374	0.374	0.000	0.374	0.340	0.376	0.100
OM0000004788	MADINA TAKAFUL	9,417	759	3	0.081	0.081	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.000	0.080	0.079	0.081	0.100
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	32,000	2,016	6	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.000	0.063	0.063	0.064	0.100
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	410,650	26,282	8	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.000	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.100
OM0000008934	ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	219,576	60,598	33	0.276	0.276	0.275	0.276	0.276	0.000	0.276	0.274	0.276	0.100
OM0000009072	QO GAS NETWORKS	1,143,609	150,018	118	0.131	0.132	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.000	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.100
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	42,250	9,689	12	0.230	0.230	0.229	0.229	0.230	-0.001	-0.435	0.229	0.214	0.230
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	36,014	13,612	11	0.378	0.378	0.376	0.378	0.380	-0.002	-0.526	0.376	0.376	0.100
OM0000003396	SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	177,355	23,184	8	0.131	0.131	0.130	0.130	0.131	-0.001	-0.763	0.130	0.130	0.131
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	6,674	6,384	12	0.832	0.832	0.826	0.826	0.834	-0.008	-0.857	0.826	0.826	0.837
OM0000002188	ALANWAR CERAMIC	13,500	1,229	3	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.092	-0.001	-1.067	0.091	0.084	0.091
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	4,250	999	1	0.235	0.235	0.235	0.235	0.240	-0.005	-2.083	0.235	0.227	0.250
Total	18	3,228,326	432,862	273										
Parallel Market														
OM0000002648	NATIONAL FINANCE	12,872	1,729	2	0.132	0.135	0.132	0.135	0.125	0.010	8.000	0.135	0.125	0.135
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING	19,938	1,596	4	0.080	0.082	0.080	0.082	0.079	0.003	3.797	0.082	0.080	0.082
OM0000001509	DHOFAH INTERNATIONAL DEV & INV HO.	2,500	575	1	0.230	0.230	0.230	0.230	0.222	0.008	3.604	0.230	0.200	0.244
OM0000009908	QOBASE INDUSTRIES (SPZ)	92,459,544	10,332,374	2,689	0.109	0.113	0.108	0.113	0.110	0.003	2.727	0.113	0.112	0.113
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	12,100	923	3	0.075	0.077	0.075	0.077	0.075	0.002	2.967	0.077	0.077	0.100
OM0000008447	OMAN REIT FUND	382,113	29,611	27	0.080	0.082	0.080	0.082	0.081	0.001	1.235	0.082	0.078	0.089
OM0000009759	QO EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION	1,482,435	481,809	108	0.325	0.326	0.325	0.325	0.324	0.001	0.309	0.325	0.325	0.100
OM0000001368	CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL INDUSTRIES	5,000	225	1	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.000	0.045	0.043	0.045	0.100
OM0000001400	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	1,578	679	2	0.430	0.430	0.430	0.430	0.430	0.000	0.000	0.430	0.428	0.000
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	12,700	533	2	0.042	0.042	0.042	0.042	0.042	0.000	0.000	0.042	0.042	0.000
OM0000002267	GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS	6,742	1,484	4	0.220	0.222	0.220	0.220	0.220	0.000	0.000	0.222	0.222	0.100
OM0000003661	VOLTAMP ENERGY	207	83	3	0.400	0.420	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.000	0.000	0.400	0.400	0.100
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	33,976	3,306	7	0.098	0.098	0.097	0.097	0.097	0.000	0.000	0.097	0.097	0.100
OM0000005005	ALMAJRA CERAMICS	78,148	10,131	9	0.128	0.128	0.128	0.128	0.128	0.000	0.000	0.128	0.128	0.100
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	224,211	13,073	9	0.059	0.059	0.058	0.058	0.058	0.000	0.000	0.058	0.058	0.100
OM0000007084	MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION	12,895	860	3	0.066	0.067	0.066	0.067	0.067	0.000	0.000	0.067	0.066	0.070
OM0000007910	AMAN REAL ESTATE	8,555	787	2	0.092	0.092	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.000	0.000	0.090	0.090	0.100
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	1,400	475	1	0.339	0.339	0.339	0.339	0.340	-0.001	-0.294	0.339	0.335	0.339
OM0000008710	BARKA DESALINATION	3,700	448	2	0.121	0.121	0.121	0.121	0.122	-0.001	-0.820	0.121	0.000	0.127
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	82,309	5,268	8	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.065	-0.001	-1.538	0.064	0.064	0.100
OM0000007290	ARABIA FALCON INSURANCE	750	85	1	0.113	0.113	0.113	0.113	0.125	-0.012	-9.600	0.113	0.113	0.113
Total	21	94,824,673	10,886,052	2,888										
RUSSIAN DEPUTY PM														

Russian gas exports to Europe rise in 2024

MOSCOW: Total exports of Russian gas to European countries in 2024 were 18-20% higher than last year (2023), Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak stated yesterday.

In January-November, supplies of both pipeline gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) exceeded 50 billion cubic meters, Russia's Interfax news agency cited Novak as

saying. "Despite all the statements and sanctions pressure because gas is a highly ecological product it is in demand. And Russian gas is the most cost-efficient, both in terms of logistics and the price," Novak said.

Around half of Russian gas to Europe flows via the Ukrainian route.

– **OMA**



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IMMERSIVE INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE

Omran becomes exclusive sponsor of Oman Adventure Tourism Book project

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to promote Oman's natural beauty and enhance tourism initiatives, Omran Group has signed an exclusive sponsorship agreement to support the issue of the second edition of the Oman Adventure Tourism Book. This collaboration underscores Omran Group's commitment to showcasing the Sultanate's rich tourism offerings.

Authored by Omar Ahmed Al Busaidi, the book reflects a seven-year endeavor to create a comprehensive archive of over 40 adventure tourism destinations across Oman. Designed for adventure enthusiasts and explorers, it highlights breathtaking natural sites through engaging content that combines entertainment and education.

Speaking about the initiative, Sultan bin Suleiman Al Khudoori, Asset Manager at Omran Group and Acting CEO of the Najm Project, said: "Omran Group's support for the Oman Adventure Tourism Book aligns with our mission to advance the promotion of Oman's diverse adventure tourism potential. This initiative reinforces our role as a leader in sustainable tourism development and highlights the natural and cultural diversity of the Sultanate, strengthening its position as a premier global tourism destination." Author Omar Ahmed Al Busaidi added: "This project caters to Oman's adventure tourism sector, focusing on activities like hiking, wadi exploration, and caving. It documents various sites across Oman's governorates through a comprehensive suite of resources, including guides and maps, spotlighting the unique natural attractions and activities available."

As the author highlighted, this project represents a comprehensive initiative to document and enhance the adventure tourism sector. It encompasses a range of printed and visual publications. The printed materials include a

main book that catalogs the most significant tourist destinations for adventure enthusiasts and explorers. In partnership with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the project will produce a series of guidelines targeted at companies and professionals in the adventure tourism sector. Additionally, detailed maps covering mountain trails and caves will be produced.

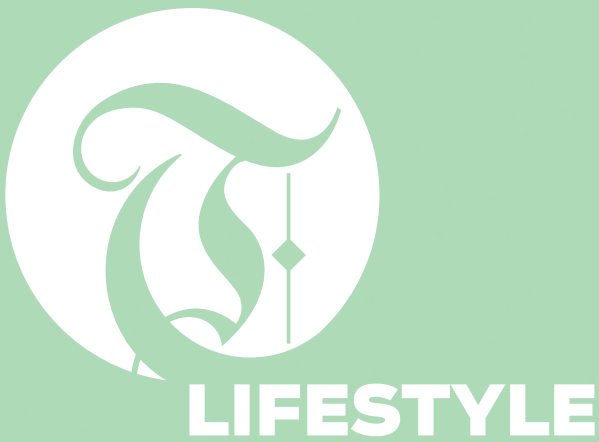
The visual publications will include the production of 20 documentary videos that offer a unique visual perspective of adventure destinations in an artistic manner. Additionally, documentary content utilising augmented reality (AR) technology will be produced to provide an innovative and interactive experience for the audience.

Adventure tourism is a vital pillar in enhancing Oman's global tourism profile. The Sultanate's geographical diversity—ranging from vast deserts and towering mountains to stunning beaches

and awe-inspiring wadis—makes it a prime destination for activities such as mountain climbing, caving, camping, and diving.

This sector also supports sustainable development by promoting responsible tourism, creating job opportunities, encouraging entrepreneurship, and driving positive socio-economic impacts within local communities. Moreover, adventure tourism offers visitors an authentic experience of Oman's natural beauty and cultural heritage, further solidifying the Sultanate's reputation as a sustainable tourism destination that caters to travelers seeking exceptional and thrilling experiences.

Omran Group continues to collaborate with stakeholders and partners to position Oman as a leading destination for adventure tourism. By leveraging the country's unique natural assets, the group aims to create sustainable, eco-friendly experiences for exploration enthusiasts.



WHATSAPP



FOR OLD ANDROID

SMARTPHONES

IN 2025

More specifically, devices running on Android KitKat or older operating systems will no longer be able to run the popular instant messaging app

Meta has announced that it will end support for WhatsApp on older Android smartphones starting 1 January 2025. More specifically, devices running on Android KitKat or older operating systems will no longer be able to run the popular instant messaging app.

While the reason for this change isn't fully clear, its most likely due to hardware limitations of old devices. Android KitKat was released back in 2013, which means devices that run on that operating system will have comparatively weaker hardware.

Meta mentioned that it is discontinuing support for these older devices because they lack the hardware capabilities to support the apps evolving features and functionalities. As WhatsApp continues to add new features, such as AI functionalities, it needs more powerful hardware to ensure a smooth user experience.

Some of the popular phone models that will be affected by this change include Samsung Galaxy S3, Samsung Galaxy Note 2, Samsung Galaxy S4 Mini, Motorola Moto G (1st Gen), Motorola Razr HD, and Moto E 2014.

The decision will also affect phone models from HTC, LG, and Sony.

This isn't the first time Meta has announced plans to end support for older devices. A few months ago, the company announced that it would stop supporting iPhones running on iOS older than version 15.1.

The decision to end support for older devices is likely to affect a significant number of users, particularly in developing countries where older phones are still common. - **ONA**

SPORTS

Golden generation: Oman’s U-13 golfers shine bright at GCC meet

Oman Golf Association (OGA) Vice-Chairman Faiz Mohammed Riaz is ‘proud’ of the youngsters’ performances and is hopeful that they will continue to bring more laurels for the nation in the future

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman’s young golfers struck gold as 11-year-old Yusuf Al Rumhi claimed a historic individual gold and, alongside Taimur Al Busaidi, secured the top honours in the prestigious 2024 Under-16, Under-13, Ladies, and U-16 Ladies GCC Golf Championships, which concluded at the Ghala Golf Club on Monday.

The budding talents, led Oman to a remarkable haul of six medals at the GCC championships. The impressive achievement marked a significant milestone for the sport in the Sultanate, highlighting the progress of golf under the dynamic leadership of the Oman Golf Association (OGA).

Competing against strong teams from the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, Oman’s young stars, Yusuf and Taimur, dazzled with gold medals in the U13 category.

Yusuf, from an illustrious golfing family, continued the legacy of the Al Rumhi name.

As the son of Oman No.1 golfer Azaan Al Rumhi and grandson of a passionate golfer Mohammed Al Rumhi, Yusuf has showcased his talent from a very young age.

His impressive performance earned him the individual gold in the U-13 category with a total score of 169. Yusuf’s composure and precision not only secured him the top honour but also played a crucial role in helping Oman clinch the team gold.

He teamed with Taimur, who secured second place with a score of 174, and the duo led Oman to victory with a combined team score of 343 - comfortably ahead of Bahrain (411) and Saudi Arabia (424).

The silver lining

However, the U13 stars weren’t the only ones shining. Oman’s U-16 boys displayed exceptional skill and determination, with Adam Al Barwani earning individual silver and Pransh Jagwani securing bronze. Qatar’s Daniil Sokolov won the gold.

Adam and Pransh’s combined efforts, alongside Faris Al Busaidi, earned Oman a hard-fought team silver, with a total score of 490, just behind Qatar (480).

In a historic debut, Oman’s U-16 girls -Miraeri Sampat and Yasmin Al Kathiri - also displayed remarkable skill, securing the bronze in the team category, underscoring the country’s rising prominence in youth golf. UAE claimed the gold, followed by Saudi Arabia.

The Ladies team, consisting of Omaima Al Hajri, Ikhlas Al Waili, and Sheikha Al Ghaithi, finished



Matter of immense pride, says Faiz Mohammed Riaz
Reflecting on the team’s monumental achievements, Faiz Mohammed Riaz, Vice-Chairman of the Oman Golf Association (OGA), expressed his delight. “It gives me immense pride to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Team Oman for their outstanding performance at the GCC Golf Championships. “Winning the gold medal in the Under-13 category and securing the silver medal in the Under-16 category are remarkable achievements that showcase the talent, dedication, and sportsmanship of our young athletes.”

“It gives me immense pride to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Team Oman for their outstanding performance at the GCC Golf Championships. Winning the gold medal in the Under-13 category and securing the silver medal in the Under-16 category are remarkable achievements that showcase the talent, dedication, and sportsmanship of our young athletes.

Faiz Mohammed Riaz
Vice-Chairman

the silver medal in the Under-16 category are remarkable achievements that showcase the talent, dedication, and sportsmanship of our young athletes. “These victories reflect that the future of golf in Oman is incredibly bright, and we are witnessing the emergence of a new generation of champions,” he said. “I also want to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants, coaches, and officials from the GCC nations who made this

championship a true celebration of golf and camaraderie. Your passion and commitment are the driving forces behind the success of this event.” Faiz added, “A special thanks goes to the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, the Oman Olympic Committee, the Arab Golf Federation, and the staff of Ghala Golf Club for their unwavering support and meticulous organisation. “Their efforts ensured a world-

class experience for all involved. As we close this chapter of the 2024 Under-16, Under-13, Ladies, and U-16 Ladies GCC Golf Championships, we remain committed to fostering excellence in the sport and look forward to welcoming you back for more events in the future.”

His Highness Sayyid Hamoud bin Kais Al Said graced the closing ceremony, honouring the dedication and efforts of all participants in the presence of Arab Golf Federation and OGA officials

While the UAE claimed the top spots in the women’s categories, with standout performances from players like Anca Mateiu (ladies U-16 winner) and Lara Al Chaib (ladies winner), Qatar secured the U16 boys’ team gold.

Ahmed Al Jhdhamy, OGA General Secretary, emphasised the importance of grassroots development. “Our success today is the result of years of foundational work. The results in this championship confirm that Oman is ready to compete at the highest levels in the Gulf.”

With the OGA’s continued investment in youth development, these results signal the dawn of a golden era for Omani golf. As Oman’s golden generation sets their sights on future challenges, they are poised to leave an indelible mark on the international golfing stage.



IN PICTURE



Outdoor light show in Ontario, Canada

This picture shows the light installations and decorations at a light show in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. Featuring 16 magical-themed exhibition areas, the outdoor light show named 'The Holidays At Illumi' kicked off on November 15, 2024, and will last until January 5, 2025. Xinhua



People celebrate white Christmas Eve in West Vancouver

Visitors are pictured at a ski resort on Cypress Mountain in West Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. With no snowfall in the Metro Vancouver region this year, people headed to nearby mountains to celebrate a white Christmas Eve. Xinhua



Christmas celebrated at school in Ayutthaya, Thailand

An elephant in Christmas-themed costumes helps distribute presents to students during a Christmas celebration at a school in Ayutthaya, Thailand. Xinhua



NBA: Los Angeles Lakers vs Detroit Pistons

Los Angeles Lakers' Hachimura Rui (left) dunks against Detroit Pistons' Simone Fontecchio during the 2024-2025 NBA regular season match between Los Angeles Lakers and Detroit Pistons in Los Angeles, the United States. Xinhua



NCPA stages performances to celebrate 17th anniversary

A performance is staged at a hall of the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Beijing, capital of China. NCPA staged 15 performances and more than 50 activities on its open day to celebrate its 17th anniversary. Xinhua



Neo Hum Bridal Couture Week kicks off in Lahore, Pakistan

Models present creations on the second day of the Neo Hum Bridal Couture Week in Lahore, Pakistan. Xinhua

ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat honoured for inclusive initiatives and CSR programmes

The event, hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, was held under the patronage of H.E. Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shaibania, Minister of Education

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, a leading financial services provider in Oman, recently took part in a celebration organized by the Ministry of Social Development to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The event, hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, was held under the patronage of H.E. Madiha bint Ahmed bin

Nasser al Shaibania, Minister of Education, and attended by numerous dignitaries, government and private sector officials, and NGO representatives.

During the ceremony, Bank Muscat was honoured by the Ministry of Social Development for its commitment to social responsibility initiatives and programmes that enhance the participation of people with disabilities, as well as for its support and successful implementation of initiatives benefiting this important segment of society. Zuwaina Abdullah Al Sharji, Assistant General Manager Central Operations & Change Management, received the award on behalf of the Bank.

The celebration aimed to emphasize the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities, aligning with the visionary goals of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Oman Vision 2040, which promotes the creation of a more inclusive society in Oman, ensuring the rights and well-being of all citizens.

The Bank is keen to collaborate with the Ministry of Social Development and other government and private sectors entities and civil associations concerned with the disabled through its CSR initia-



tives and programmes.

This commitment is evident in providing necessary equipment to help them easily perform their daily life tasks in partnership with different NGOs.

Also, earlier this year, Bank Muscat organised the “Himam Marathon,” a pioneering sports event in Oman for individuals

with physical, visual, and hearing disabilities, as well as those with autism spectrum disorders and Down syndrome.

The marathon seeks to empower and integrate participants into society, reflecting the principles of Oman Vision 2040, which advocates for dignified and sustainable living for all.

To advance financial inclusion, Bank Muscat is implementing a comprehensive development plan to offer diverse services and facilities tailored to all customers, including those with hearing, visual, and physical disabilities. The Bank aims to equip its branches with the appropriate facilities, particularly for individuals with disabilities, as

well as ensuring these facilities are also provided in all new branches opened.

These branches are also characterized by corridors, reception desks, parking lots, waiting areas, staircases and elevators, and special entrances that are designed to facilitate the service of customers with disabilities. They are equipped with modern technologies, such as the 13 interactive kiosks, helping the disabled customers to complete their transaction by their own. The Bank initially launched the first in Oman ATM with voice instructions at Al Noor Association for the Blind.

Furthermore, the Bank has implemented a programme to train 150 employees in sign language, distributed across various branches, and another group of 96 employees trained to assist customers with diverse disabilities.

Bank Muscat also offers the “Maliyat” programme, a free online platform delivering financial literacy courses tailored for the community, including those with hearing and visual disabilities. The platform includes digital tools and sign language to facilitate access to essential financial management skills and informed spending decisions.

BY THE WORLD GOLF AWARDS



Al Mouj Golf celebrates 8th consecutive win as ‘Oman’s Best Golf Course’ for 2024

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Golf has once again been named “Oman’s Best Golf Course” for the year 2024 by the World Golf Awards. This marks the eighth consecutive win and the tenth overall, reaffirming Al Mouj Golf’s standing as Oman’s leading golfing destination beyond compare.

“Receiving this award for the tenth time is a tremendous honor for us,” said Nasser Al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat. “It reflects our unwavering dedication to providing an exceptional golfing experience. This recognition not only celebrates our team’s hard work but also highlights the unique appeal of our course. We are excited to continue enhancing our facilities and services to attract golfers from around the world.”

Al Mouj Golf is renowned for its exceptional facilities, including a stunning seaside links-style course designed by legendary golfer Greg Norman. The first of its kind in Oman, Al Mouj Golf offers a challenging and sustainable golfing experience that attracts players from around the globe. The course’s unique design and breathtaking ocean views have significantly contributed to Oman’s reputation as a burgeon-

ing golfing and tourism hub.

Beyond the greens, Al Mouj Golf is a haven for over 170 bird species, with natural water lakes and efficient irrigation systems highlighting its green credentials and commitment to sustainability. This eco-conscious approach has earned multiple environmental accreditations, underscoring the course’s role in conserving the environment.

“We invite golfers and tourists worldwide to discover the beauty and challenge that Al Mouj Golf offers,” added Al Sheibani. “Our goal is to showcase the best of Omani hospitality and elevate the country’s standing as a must-visit destination for golf enthusiasts. This award motivates us to continue setting new standards of excellence.”

Being the only course in Oman to win this prestigious title eight years in a row, Al Mouj Golf continues to set the benchmark for golfing excellence in the region. The consistent recognition by the World Golf Awards underscores the course’s dedication to providing an unparalleled experience that seamlessly blends world-class amenities with the natural beauty of Oman’s coastline.

Al Mouj Golf invites golfers and tourists alike to experience firsthand the exceptional quality of its facilities. Whether you’re a seasoned golfer seeking a new challenge or a visitor looking for a unique leisure experience, Al Mouj Golf promises an unforgettable journey.

Al Mouj Golf, located in Muscat, Oman, is a world class golf complex designed by the legendary Greg Norman, which features a championship 18-hole course, promising an exceptional golfing experience. The course has been ranked in Today’s Golfer’s ‘Top 100’ golf courses for two consecutive years, becoming only one of the two courses in the region to receive the accolade, and has received the 2023 Golf Course of the Year recognition from Asian Tour Golfers. Al Mouj Golf has a picturesque layout with the Hajjar mountain range providing a backdrop to the first links-style course in the nation. Beyond golf, the complex offers a diverse range of amenities, including a restaurant with versatile event spaces and is conveniently located a 10-minute drive from Muscat International Airport. For additional news and information, click here.

Al Mouj Muscat is a destination without an equal. It has redefined urban living in the region with an impressive portfolio of oceanfront residential properties, luxury and authentic hospitality, elegant Business Parks, award-winning architecture and well-designed landscapes.

A warm and diverse community at the heart of Oman’s capital, Al Mouj Muscat created a sense of belonging for over 8,000 residents from 85 nationalities who now call it home. With a vibrant dining and retail district, residents and visitors alike are able to enjoy a wide range of culinary experiences in a lively oceanfront setting.

Al Mouj Muscat provides an exclusive lifestyle that urges families and individuals to live life to the fullest, do better, see more and live richer. For work or leisure, residents and visitors can stay, dine or relax at seven luxury hotels, including Kempinski and The St. Regis, experience boating in Oman’s largest Marina, or awaken their sense of play at an 18-hole championship golf course that’s listed in the world’s top 100.

At Al Mouj Muscat, every moment spent, every opportunity explored, is life Inspired.

STATE-OF-THE-ART SHOWROOM

Genesis hosts exclusive customer meet in Muscat

MUSCAT, Oman: The OTE Group, the exclusive distributor of Genesis automobiles in Oman, recently hosted an elegant customer meet event at its state-of-the-art showroom in Muscat. The event served as a platform to showcase the brand’s latest luxury collection, with the Genesis GV70 taking center stage as the star attraction of the evening.



The Genesis GV70, a stunning blend of dynamic performance and sophisticated design, was the focal point of the gathering, capturing the admiration of attendees. Guests were given an up-close look at the premium SUV, which epitomizes Genesis’ commitment to delivering luxury, technology, and comfort.

The event, presided over by the Director of OTE Group, was a celebration of luxury and exclusivity, drawing a premium audience, including loyal Genesis customers, business elites, and distinguished guests. Adding to its grandeur, the evening garnered widespread coverage by prominent media outlets and leading social media influencers in Oman, amplifying the event’s impact and reach.

The carefully curated evening also featured an engaging lineup of entertainment, enhancing the luxurious atmosphere and leaving attendees with a memorable experience. Guests had the opportunity to interact with the Genesis team, gain insights into the brand’s philosophy of combining elegance with advanced technology, and learn more about the lineup’s innovative features.

Speaking at the event, the Director of OTE Group remarked, “The Genesis brand represents a new era of luxury and sophistication in the automotive industry. With the GV70, we are raising the bar for what our customers can expect from a premium SUV. We are delighted to host this event, bringing our customers closer to the exceptional craftsmanship and performance that define Genesis.”

Genesis continues to lead the way in automotive innovation,

achieving the highest overall ranking in the J.D. Power U.S. Tech Experience Index (TXI) Study for the fourth consecutive year. This recognition highlights Genesis’ dedication to integrating cutting-edge technology and advanced safety features into its vehicles, further solidifying its position as a pioneer in luxury automotive excellence.

As the official distributor of Genesis in Oman, OTE Group continues to demonstrate its commitment to providing a premium ownership experience, supported by its world-class showroom and aftersales services. The Genesis showroom in Muscat stands as a testament to this commitment, offering customers an unmatched ambiance to explore the brand’s exquisite range of vehicles.

For more information about the Genesis GV70 or to schedule a visit to the showroom, customers can contact the Genesis team at OTE Group.

As the exclusive distributor for Genesis in Oman, OTE Group boasts an extensive and diverse business portfolio spanning global automotive brands, auto ancillaries, electronics, home appliances, manufacturing, financing, and training institutes. The Group maintains a global presence across 15 business verticals through over 30 companies. As a privately owned corporation with well-established credentials, OTE Group prides itself on its over 2000 employees and an extensive network in Oman, comprising over 200 customer touchpoints.

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