

HM THE SULTAN GREETES SENEGALESE PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Macky Sall of the Republic of Senegal on the occasion of his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and his best wishes of good health and happiness to President Sall and the people of Senegal further growth and prosperity. — **ONA**



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RAMADAN PRAYER TIMINGS	
DHUHR	12:15pm
ASR	3:42pm
MAGHRIB	6:28pm
ISHA	7:40pm
FAJR (APRIL 5)	4:39am

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Trial operation begins for crude oil distillation unit at Duqm Refinery

DUQM: Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company, OQ8, have announced the start of the trial operation for the crude oil distillation unit at Duqm Refinery. This step paves the way for operational readiness for all Duqm Refinery units, the most significant investment project in the refining and petrochemical industries sector. The refinery has a capacity of 230,000 barrels per day, with its design based on a hydrocracking unit and a petroleum coke unit. It will produce liquefied petroleum gas, naphtha, jet fuel, diesel, sulphur, and petroleum coke upon operation. Hilal Ali Al Kharusi, CEO of the

Commercial, Refining and Petrochemical Sector at OQ and Chairman of OQ8's Board, stated that the trial operation of Duqm Refinery is a development that moves forward according to the set plan. The trial operation goes through several phases before reaching maximum capacity, followed by commercial operation, which is expected by the end of 2023. He added that all support units in the project, which has reached a completion rate of 97.5 percent, have been operated, taking into account the priority of safe operation for all units. He continued, "The company has carried out several exercises to evaluate the efficiency of the inte-



grated emergency response plan, the emergency handling system, in addition to evaluating fire-fighting, rescue, containment of hazardous materials, and the followed security procedures."

Al Kharusi explained that the trial operation coincides with the progress made in the Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage project, one of OQ's projects, which has completed the main construction works of its first phase and successfully received two crude oil ships. Additionally, Marafiq, a subsidiary of OQ and Thai Gulf Energy Development has completed the power and water station. This station will provide 326 megawatts of electricity and 36,000 cubic meters of industrial water daily, supplying energy and water to the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries (OQ8) as well as the Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTTCO). **>A3**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Ministry of Information organises key meeting

1 Represented by the Government Communication Centre, the Ministry of Information on Monday organised its 19th meeting titled "Government Media Agenda—the Planning and the Outcome". **>A3**

WORLD Can cities go climate neutral by 2030?

2 As governments across the world have promised to stop polluting carbon emissions by 2050, 100 cities — including capitals Paris, Madrid and Amsterdam — have pledged to get there by 2030 — just seven years from now. **>A6**

MARKET Refinery products output jumps by 44%

3 Total refinery products in Oman grew by 44 percent at the end of February 2023, compared to the same period in 2022, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). **>B1**

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SEES RISE IN LOAN APPLICATIONS



Since its inception in 1997 till date, the bank has provided over 37,000 loans worth more than OMR1bn, said the ODB Chairman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman Development Bank (ODB) has witnessed an increase in the number of applications for development loans, the bank's chairman said in an exclusive interview. ODB since its inception in 1997, has till date provided over

37,000 loans worth more than OMR1 billion. "It has been providing 4,000 loans with a value exceeding OMR70 million annually in revitalising the economy and in creating new job opportunities," Eng. Muhammad Al-Ghassani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of ODB, told to *Shabiba FM*.



"This increase in the number applications has led to a delay in granting of loans. We are studying the issues relating to it and it is the bank's endeavour to reduce the percentage of non-perform-

ing projects from 20 percent to 12 percent by the end of this year," Eng. Muhammad Al-Ghassani said. Elaborating about the main sectors that ODB has helped in financing, he said that, "The manufacturing sector accounted for the largest share of financing, receiving 32 percent of the lending portfolio, valued at over OMR59 million. The loans disbursed focused in localising industries in Oman and reducing foreign imports. The other sectors financed by the bank included food security sector, tourism, education, logistics and mining because of their developmental impact in stimulating the economy. He said that the government

established a development bank for providing loans and financing to individuals and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), despite the risks and high cost of financing for such projects. "ODB is supported by the government and therefore they offer a lot of flexibility with regard to lending to SMEs and companies despite high risks and with lower benefits than any other commercial banks," he added. Regarding the loan ceiling being offered by the ODB, Eng. Muhammad Al-Ghassani said that previously the ceiling was at OMR1 million, but after the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the loan ceiling had been raised to OMR5 million. **>A5**

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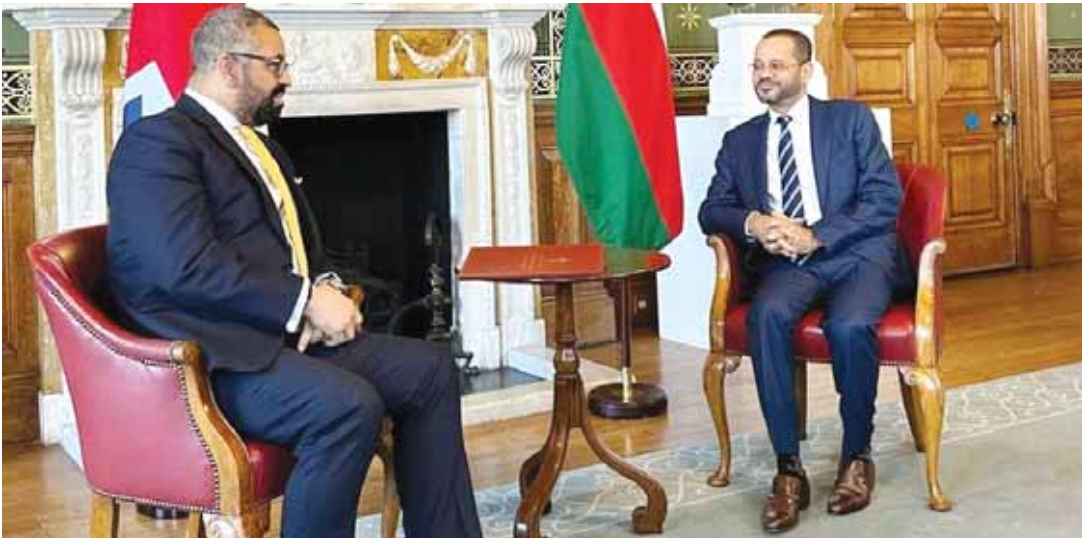


Oman and UK explore investment opportunities in renewable energy

The leaders reviewed the existing relations of friendship and cooperation between the two countries during the meeting

LONDON: Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister met with James Cleverly, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of United Kingdom (UK) at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on Monday.

The meeting also explored opportunities for new partnership and investment in renewable energy projects, technical education



and innovation.

The two sides affirmed their interest in encouraging the development of nascent companies, small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The two sides also commended the works and efforts of the strategic consultation team and the joint working group in advancing cooperation programmes between the two countries, and exploring further opportunities for partnership, financial and economic cooperation.

The two sides also exchanged viewpoints on regional and international issues and latest developments. They also agreed to continue backing all endeavours aimed at consolidating peaceful approaches and enhancing pillars of security and stability.

The meeting was attended by Badr Mohammed Al Mantheri, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UK, and officials from both sides. -ONA



GOVERNORATE OF NORTH AL BATINAH

Transport Ministry starts dualisation of 14.5km Al Khabourah road project

AL KHABOURAH: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology began to implement the dualisation of the road link of Al Khabourah carriageway in the Governorate of North Al Batinah.

The 14.5km link starts at Al Batinah Expressway intersection and ends at the Wilayat of Al Khabourah roundabout along Al Batinah Highway.

The project work includes raising the efficiency of the existing road from a single road to double with two lanes of traffic in each direction and the construction of culverts to drain out rainwater.

In addition, erecting on the road concrete and metal barriers traffic safety, guiding regulations and warning paints according to the standard specifications approved in the road design guide in the Sultanate of Oman.

The project stems from a plan to establish a link between Al Batinah Highway and Al Batinah Expressway. This is being realised by raising the efficiency of existing road links or constructing new links, in accordance with traffic studies on the overall road network that is supervised by the Ministry. -ONA



KNOWLEDGE OMAN



Giving-back programme for community held

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As part of its annual community giving back programme that is specifically organised during the holy blessed month of Ramadan, Knowledge Oman, the leading community knowledge sharing platform, held an exclusive interactive lecture for the Military Technological College, that attracted over 400 college students and faculty members.

Yousif Al Hassani, a coach in international protocol, was also hosted at the event to share a speech on 'The impact of charisma on relationships'.

"Knowledge Oman is committed to supporting the community giving-back programme for the fifth year running after the positive impact the programme continues to have on the society, specifically the youth. Our multinational voluntary team are as excited as ever to do their part in uplifting the next generation."

The idea behind the interactive event was in alignment with the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan, in which the purpose is about giving back to the community.

The interactive talk with the students and faculty members aimed to introduce to the attendees "the different types of personalities, and the impact of charisma on these relationships, especially with the rewards one is given during the blessed month of Ramadan."

Since 2008 Knowledge Oman has actively introduced various initiatives that positively impact society through projects that encourage love, care and support for children, the elderly, and the disadvantaged.

Knowledge Oman Talks hope to bridge the gap between academia and society, to develop skills that can positively contribute towards the development of society, and cultivate loving attitudes in individuals which will allow them to access their potential to change the world.

ISC DECCANI WING

Iftar at Clock Tower to be organised on April 7

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Ramadan and the atmosphere around have already taken a hue of calm and compassion, with the faithful making elaborate preparations for the holy month.

Ramadan in Oman is also a time for charitable deeds, with many individuals and organisations donating food, clothes and other essentials to those in need.

The Hyderabad Community has been holding its annual iftar at clock tower for over 2 decades now. Since the formation of the ISC Deccani wing, the wing has taken the lead and has been organising the event. This popular public event will be held on April 7. Thousands attend the gathering and this time around preparations are on to make it special as it is returning after three years.

Speaking about the event, Ismail Baig, Co-Convener of Decani Wing, said, "The community iftars are great ways to foster social integration amongst various communities fasting in Ramadan who reside in the Sultanate of Oman. It's a happy feeling to be able to serve as well as create a sense of togetherness and unity amongst community members in Oman. ISC Deccani Wing has ensured continuous organisation of the event except for last three years due to the pandemic."

He added: "This year we are expecting over 3,500 fasting people to attend our iftar. It gives great happiness to be able to serve as well as create a sense of togetherness and unity among community members in the sultanate. Over 100 volunteers will be working and serving attendees, ensuring that the event goes well and our guests feel at home and comfortable."

Baig informed that the wing gets all possible support from Muscat Municipality for the conduct of the event.

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Media should highlight role of govt institutions

The Minister of Information stressed the importance of propagating information through official accounts and other media sources



MUSCAT: Represented by the Government Communication Centre, the Ministry of Information today organised its 19th meeting titled “Government Media Agenda—the Planning and the Outcome”.

Held in the presence of Dr. Abdullah Nasser Al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and representatives of communication and media departments, the gathering discussed the extent to which the government media agenda improves government communication.

During the meeting, Dr. Abdullah stressed the importance of propagating information through accounts, platforms and other media, the impact of this on the recipient and the need to highlight the role and efforts of government institutions.

The gathering included a visual presentation on a draft agenda launched in 2017 by the Government Communication Centre in conjunction with government institutions.

The discussions covered the mechanism of espousing the draft agenda project, its significance and the gains that government institutions and the Government Communication Centre can achieve through commitment to the government media agenda.

The project of the draft agenda lists media activities and events that are organised or hosted by government institutions in Oman. The objective is to help achieve appropriate communication planning through coordination with other institutions, so that media plans and joint projects and important activities could be promoted through different means of media, including digital media.

This is in addition to ensuring that key events do not coincide, to bring about an organised government action and to realise high-quality media appearance.

The meeting envisaged the dissemination of the government agenda through government communication platforms and

social media, so that members of the public could get informed about government activities and events that take place during each month. This agenda will constitute a reference for the media to explore and publish related details. This approach will facilitate the archiving and documentation of the most prominent government activities.

The meeting also reviewed the main projects and events that the Government Communication Centre dealt with in cooperation with government institutions from November 2022 to March 2023. It also took note of the Centre's participation in international events and the communication plans that the Centre supervised during the same period.

The Government Communication Centre organises meetings in a regular manner with the prime aim of exchanging experiences, addressing challenges in the field of government communication and enhancing media practices.

— ONA

QQ has operations in 17 countries

< FROM A1 Al Kharusi affirmed that these projects are interconnected, and their completion represents a positive development and a significant step in enhancing investments in the Duqm Special Economic Zone.

Duqm Refinery and Petrochem-

ical Industries is a joint venture between OQ Group and Kuwait Petroleum International.

Integrated energy company OQ is a global integrated energy company with roots in Oman.

OQ has operations across 17 countries that covers the entire

value chain from exploration and production of oil and gas, refineries and petrochemicals to marketing and distribution of end-user products reaching more than 60 countries worldwide.

OQ Alternative Energy focuses on investments in renewables and green hydrogen in Oman. — ONA



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OQ'S GREEN INITIATIVE

Pact signed to plant 250,000 wild trees

MUSCAT: OQ, the global integrated energy group, on Monday signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) to plant 250,000 seedlings of wild trees.

This agreement aims to enhance efforts to expand the green area by planting 10 million wild trees as part of OQ's Green Initiative. The Agricultural Development Fund will oversee and follow up on the implementation of this agreement.

The agreement was signed by Dr. Saud Hamoud Al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; and Talal Hamid Al Awfi, OQ Group CEO.

On this occasion, Dr. Saud expressed his appreciation for OQ's efforts to enhance the pursuits of governmental entities in expanding the green area in the Sultanate of Oman through its green initiative.

The initiative aims to promote public awareness about the importance of vegetation and effectively contribute to supporting these efforts to achieve their desired objectives, the minister added.

He highlighted the effective cooperation between the Ministry and OQ in many initiatives including the projects of propagating economic types and varieties of fruits and combating



pesticides using drones.

This agreement will contribute to planting a quarter of a million wild seedlings as part of the project to plant 10 million trees in Oman.

The project aims to strike a balance between environmental components and reduce carbon emissions. The concerted efforts of the government and the private sector would result in achieving this objective.

OQ seeks to enhance efforts to expand the green area through the social investment programme, in which the environment is the main pillar.

The agreement embodies the social investment pillar and seeks to implement OQ's green initiative launched by the Group in an attempt to contribute to the environmental sustainability efforts by supporting many qualitative agricultural and environmental projects.

— ONA



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Ramādān

» IFTAR TIMING

6:28 pm



» PRAYER TIMINGS

Dhuhr	12:15 pm
Asr	3:42 pm
Maghrib	6:28 pm
Isha	7:40 pm
Fajr (April 5)	4:39 am

» CUISINE



RAMADAN FOOD TRADITIONS IN TURKIYE

By Firdaus Noorain

In Turkiye, apart from all the Ramadan traditions that are followed, cooking a heart-warming and delicious meal is a significant aspect of their culture. From the popular Doner Kebab, Pide, Kuzu Tandir and Kofte, to Lahmacun, Turkish Seekh Kebab, Iskender Kebab, Yaprak Sarma, and Spice Meatballs, the flavours of Turkish cuisine is truly myriad. The unlimited variants of Kebabs and Koftes, that one can find in almost every nook and corner of Turkiye, are served with Pide breads or baguettes along with mashed potatoes, green chickpea and legumes that are served in soup-like consistency. Red lentil soup, rice, yoghurt, and mint soup, and lentil and potato soup are some of the favourite soups served during Iftar. Bread is served with almost every item and hence bakeries in Turkiye are open throughout the day and night during Ramadan. Turkish cuisine is largely the heritage of Ottoman cuisine and it is often said that in Turkiye they can prepare hundreds of recipes from a simple eggplant.

» HEALTH



MUST-HAVE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES DURING RAMADAN

RAMADAN is the perfect time to adopt better eating habits that can benefit us and others. While drinking enough water is essential during Ramadan, it's also important to eat foods rich in water that will release into the body and gradually replenish the cells throughout the fasting period. Some of the hydrating foods that will help you feel energetic and healthy. Having 2-4 juicy fruits per meal is ideal

for the fasting month. Fruits like watermelon can hydrate as effectively as water. While cantaloupes keep the blood sugar stable, cucumbers are very nutritious and boast the highest water content of any other solid food. Oranges, grape fruits and strawberries also regulate blood sugar. Tomatoes are full of water so try to include them in you Iftar menus as much as you can. Radish can be ideal as

a salad during Iftar. Leafy green vegetables are nutritious and vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, and spinach provide a very healthy break to the fast. Since fruits are rich in fibre it helps one to feel full and ensures proper digestive functioning. It also helps to maintain a moderate weight. Fruits like apples, melons, citrus fruits, berries and avocados help to maintain a healthy weight.

» IFTAR RECIPE

BLUEBERRY GINGER DATES COOLER

Recipe by Anupma Nagvanshi



INGREDIENTS

- Water: 500ml
- Blueberries: 70g
- Dates paste: 1 tbsp
- Ginger: 2 tbsp
- Sugar: 30g
- Crushed ice
- Soda: 60ml
- Mint: for garnishing

to a boil.

- Add 30g of sugar and date paste and cook for 10 - 15 minutes.
- Remove it from heat and cool for 1 hour.
- Now strain it and refrigerate it for 2-3 hours.
- In a serving glass, add crushed ice, prepared syrup, and some soda.
- Garnish with mint and blueberries.
- Serve chilled.

PREPARATION

- Take a deep pan, add 500ml of water, 70g of blueberries, and 2 tbsp of ginger, and bring it

» WORDS OF WISDOM

“Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah . Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful’” [Quran 39:53]

Another verse of the Holy Quran that reminds us of the greatness of Allah's mercy, this is another source of inspiration for those who need the gentle reminder that Allah will always be there for us. Knowing that with sincere repentance, Allah can and inshallah will forgive us, this verse is another reminder of the greatness of Allah's mercy and compassion.



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OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

Corporate governance strengthened

<FROM A1 He said, “In addition to this, the bank’s capital ceiling was increased to OMR250 million from the earlier OMR100 million with the fields and activities funded by the bank also being expanded. Also the bank now offers incentives for even those projects that are established outside the Muscat Governorate. The number of the subsidised loans disbursed has also been increased from 5,000 to 15,000.”

Regarding the financial sustainability of the ODB, Al-Ghassani said that the bank must sustain its business from its activities by itself.

“The bank has set its operational plan for the next three years until the year 2025, which is a very ambitious plan. It has set a target to achieve a growth rate of not less than 15 percent with the size of a lending portfolio expected to exceed OMR300 million by the end of 2025. The target set is a great challenge and requires a radical change in the way the bank operates,” he added.

He elaborated that the bank has strengthened its corporate governance and seeks to further raise the operational efficiency by restructuring the policies and procedures so that we can reduce the time period for obtaining approvals.

“We are working to improve the flexibility and to raise the quality of service provided to the customers. We are aiming to upgrade our customers’ satisfaction with the use of modern technologies and by reducing operating expenses along with launching new products. All of these initiatives will help the financial sustainability of the bank,” he added.

Regarding the procedures and



the demand for more facilities and fewer conditions and guarantees, Al-Ghassani said that the delay in lending now is due to several reasons, including the turnout of a large number of borrowers from the various branches of the banks.

Hesaid:“These18branchesare distributed across the various governorates of the Sultanate. The number of loan applications exceeded the bank’s expectation leading to a delay in the approvals. On the other hand, at times delay can be because the bank is looking for those projects that are sustainable and do not falter. It is very important for us that any project funded by the Oman Development Bank do not fail.”

Al-Ghassani revealed that there are few cases where applications are made to the Oman Development Bank for obtaining financing for a specific project. “However, they use it for some other projects, and there are now cases in the courts in such instances. This is one of ways of

misusing public money, and we discovered many such projects that were funded by the bank but they did not exist on the ground. It is the duty of the bank to ensure that such explicit violations do not happen,” he added.

Regarding the zero interest rate in some types of financing offered by the ODB, Al-Ghassani explained that there are products offered by the bank for job seekers without interest rates, and the loan amount starts from OMR5,000 and the upper limit is OMR15,000 for those who have a capital project in this field.

He said: “Currently the bank has 6,000 borrowers who have availed this type of products offered by the bank and default rates are very few because of their commitment to these projects.”

Al-Ghassani said that the bank is set to launch new products for job seekers, in cooperation and partnership with the Ministry of Labour (MOL), and an announcement will be made in due course soon.

GREEN TERRACES

Rose harvest season kicks off in Al Jabal Al Akhdar

AL JABAL AL AKHDAR: Rose harvest season has kicked off in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdar, Governorate of A’Dakhiliyah. The green terraces at an altitude of more than 3,000 metres are covered with more than 5,000 rose trees on an area of 7 to 10 acres. The amount of rose water produced from those trees is estimated at 28,000 litres.

Ali Saif Al Shukaili, Assistant Director of Heritage and Tourism in Governorate of A’Dakhiliyah, said that the rose harvest season in Al Jabal Al Akhdar ushers in a state of tourism diversity and allows tourists to have a close look at



traditional and modern methods of distilling rose water.

The season runs from the end of March and continues until mid-April every year. It is typically associated with the distillation of rose water, which serves as a key

component of ornamental products, aromatics and sweets and Omani coffee, Al Shukeili added.

He pointed out that the ministry attaches great importance to encouraging investment in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, notably by attracting tourism projects like tourist resorts, hotels and guesthouses.

Such projects augment the local community’s gains from the tourism movement activity, he observed.

Al Shukaili said that the Tourist Services Centre on Al Jabal Al Akhdar Road provides guidance about how best a tourist can benefit from the rose harvest season. -OMA



Ministry of Defence

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Defence invites MOD registered suppliers to participate in the following tender:

Subject	Tender Number	Last Date for Inquiries	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Documnet Price per copy (RO)
SUPLY OF IRONMONGERY	06/2023	01/05/2023	08/05/2023	109 RO
SUPLY OF PAINTS ASSOCIATED ITEMS	07/2023	01/05/2023	08/05/2023	108 RO
SUPLY OF ROPE HOSE CLAMP PAPER ABRASIVE AND LUMBER	08/2023	01/05/2023	08/05/2023	142 RO
SUPLY OF GENERAL ITEMS	09/2023	01/05/2023	08/05/2023	183 RO

- Tenders documents and terms may be obtained on payment from the office of the Secretary of the Tender Committee, gate No. 14 of MAM Camp between 0900 to 1300 hrs on the working days.
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Auction Announcement

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender:

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The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from decomment fees - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - For payment procedure and to obtain the document, please contact us via e-mail Contract@medcoman.com 24588600 – Ext: 8577 - 8726
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UR Submission	- The contractors should stamp all the unit rate contract pages - The contractors, after reading and accepting the prices, terms, and conditions of the contract, shall submit a “Request: of Participation Letter” addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CO - A list of proposed staff with their Identity documents and Qualification/ experience documents and CVs. - A list of bidder details in manufacturing and repair work /or major maintenance projects similar to our scope. - Participants must provide a company profile that clarifies the business definition with information about the company’s ability. The company’s expertise and ability to provide high-quality service must also be provided - Valid registration, Ministry of Commerce, and Industry, ESR certificate, and VAT Certificate - All the required documents should be submitted only throug email Contract@medcoman.com
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Ramadan Iftar Program

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “He who provides a fasting person something with which to break his fast, will earn the same reward as the one who was observing the fast, without diminishing in any way the reward of the latter.”

The Oman Charitable Organization is pleased to announce that it will receive donations for Ramadan Iftar Program in Sultanate of Oman for the year 1444 AH AD 2023

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Perfect homecoming: Kohli



After 4 years, I couldn't have asked for better game, says Bangalore's star batter after his team's facile win over Mumbai Indians

BENGALURU: After registering a thumping eight-wicket victory over Mumbai Indians (MI) on Sunday, chase master Virat Kohli said that the win against five-time champions at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium was the perfect homecoming for the Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) and they couldn't have asked for a better game to do it. Kohli's unbeaten 82 and Faf du Plessis' 73 helped Royal Challengers Bangalore register an easy victory to start their Indian Premier League (IPL) 2023 campaign with victory. The former India captain's unbeaten knock came off 48 balls, which was decorated with six boundaries and five maximums. During his inning, Kohli also locked a personal milestone as he completed 800 boundaries in the IPL.

Speaking during the post-match presentation, Kohli said: "I thought it was a phenomenal win, a perfect homecoming after four years. "I couldn't have asked for a better game. We bowled well for the first 17 overs but then credit to their batters, especially Tilak [Verma] who batted really well. It was a very comprehensive win and we wanted to win with balls to spare as it will benefit the net run-rate (NRR). Phenomenal, it was a packed crowd, every seat was full when we walked in here." With figures of 3-0-5-1 after three overs, Mohammed Siraj set the tone and left Mumbai at 20 for three after 5.2 overs. "The new ball was tricky, that's where we shifted the momentum, they can ride on that momentum from the last two overs of their

batting but the way we started nullified all that momentum. We kept the pressure on the bowlers," added Kohli. Bangalore's leg-spinner Karn Sharma returned with two wickets conceding 32 runs in his four overs spell. Kohli said: "I think he was a phenomenal, phenomenal spell from him, that's brave bowling after getting the left-hander out [on Karn Sharma]. He was bowling so well for us last year but he couldn't play. Even in the nets he was not getting hit for sixes, hats off to him for coming and playing after so long, to perform against such a strong MI side at the Chinnaswamy is great for him." Kohli said that RCB need to build on the momentum from the opening victory for the rest of the tournament. "I wanted to mention this for a while - after Mumbai Indians who have five titles and Chennai Super Kings who have four, if I'm not wrong, we are the third team to have qualified the most times to the playoffs - 8 times. Take one game at a time and try to be a balanced side which we are and we would look to execute our plans as we did tonight," he said. -ANI

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE VS MUMBAI INDIANS

That's how you chase a target: Faf du Plessis

BENGALURU: Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis, who scored 73, praised his match-winning 148-run opening partnership with Virat Kohli (82 n.o.) after the team's eight-wicket win over Mumbai Indians at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Sunday and said "that's how you chase a target." "And that second innings, if you want to know how to chase a target, that's how you do it. If you took pace off the ball, it wasn't too easy to play and there was something in it for the spinners but as a batter, if you got into good positions you could score runs,"



du Plessis said in a post-match presentation. Du Plessis added that it was "special" to play in Bengaluru.

"My first time playing here as a home player and it is special, especially batting with Virat Kohli. Energy bounces off him," Du Plessis said. The RCB captain added that the squad will have "confidence" going into their upcoming encounter against Kolkata Knight Riders on April 6 at Eden Gardens after Sunday's victory. "You have to stay with the youngsters, I still work hard to be able to move around like I could in the young days. The confidence this gives, all of us are confident players. This start will be huge for us as a team," he said. -ANI



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QUOTE OF THE DAY



“Obviously at this level, pressure is different, but then the poor guy has just kept 20 overs; you can’t pass a judgement on him so quickly.”

SOURAV GANGULY
Delhi Capitals director of cricket, on Sarfaraz Khan’s wicketkeeping after fans’ critical reactions

TODAY’S MATCH



VS



Delhi Capitals

Gujarat Titans

6pm, Delhi

POINTS TABLE

TEAM	P	W	L	T	NR	NRR	PTS
RR	1	1	0	0	0	+3.600	2
RCB	1	1	0	0	0	+1.981	2
LSG	2	1	1	0	0	+0.950	2
GT	1	1	0	0	0	+0.514	2
PBKS	1	1	0	0	0	+0.438	2
CSK	2	1	1	0	0	+0.036	2
KKR	1	0	1	0	0	-0.438	0
MI	1	0	1	0	0	-1.981	0
DC	1	0	1	0	0	-2.500	0
SRH	1	0	1	0	0	-3.600	0

CSK: Chennai Super Kings, DC: Delhi Capitals, GT: Gujarat Titans, KKR: Kolkata Knight Riders, LSG: Lucknow Super Giants, MI: Mumbai Indians, PBKS: Punjab Kings, RCB: Royal Challengers Bangalore, RR: Rajasthan Royals, SRH: Sunrisers Hyderabad

MOEEN’S MAGIC AT CHEPAUK



The Chennai all-rounder picked 4/26 to derail the chase of Lucknow Super Giants as Dhoni’s Super Kings bagged their first win of the season

CHENNAI: Chennai Super Kings’ Moeen Ali spun magic with his arm as he claimed his best IPL haul of 4/26 to derail a strong chase by Lucknow Super Giants at the M A Chidambaram stadium, popularly known as Chepauk, on Monday.

Chennai Super Kings blasted 217, the highest score of the season so far, but were outmuscled in the powerplay by Lucknow Super Giants as the latter went one better than the Chepauk record in the IPL to put themselves in a fantastic position at 80 for 1.

But once Moeen gave them the early breakthrough, Dhoni switched back to his trademark ‘spin it to win it’ mantra. The Su-

per Kings’ spin duo of Moeen and Mitch Santner had magical figures of 5 for 46 off eight overs to turn the game around sensationally.

Moeen, who wasn’t called upon to bowl in their tournament opener, finished with 4 for 26; KL Rahul (20), Kyle Mayers (53) and Marcus Stoinis (21) among his victims. The Moeen effect covered up for a nightmarish start for the seamers, most notably for Impact Player Tushar Deshpande and Deepak Chahar, who conceded 55 in four wicketless overs between inside the first 10 overs.

But Deshpande redeemed himself with a knockout blow of Nicholas Pooran, who threatened to pull off a coup with an 18-ball

32, with Super Giants needing 62 off 25. Chennai Super Kings finally closed out to eventually win by 12 runs to pocket their first two points as Lucknow was restricted to 205/7.

Earlier, a second successive half-century by Ruturaj Gaikwad and his century stand with Devon Conway powered Chennai Super Kings to a massive 217/7.

After being put to bat first, Chennai were off to an explosive start. The second over delivered by Avesh Khan saw Conway smashing him for two fours and five runs came through extras.

Gaikwad also looked in fine touch, smashing Krishnappa Gowtham for three sixes in the

fifth over, which cost 20 runs. Chennai crossed the 50-run mark in 4.4 overs. The powerplay ended on an explosive note as the sixth over saw Conway smashing three fours to Wood and Gaikwad hitting the pacer for a six. At the end of the powerplay, Chennai scored 79/0.

Gaikwad brought up his second straight 50 of IPL 2023 in just 25 balls, which consisted two fours and four sixes. Spinner Ravi Bishnoi got the big scalp of Gaikwad who was dismissed for 57 off 31 balls. Conway was joined by Shivam Dube but the former departed when Mark Wood got his first wicket. Conway’s 47 off 29 balls comprised five fours and two sixes. Shivam Dube’s cameo of 27

runs included a four and three sixes before falling to Bishnoi.

Moeen Ali smashed Avesh Khan for three fours in a row in the 15th over to power Chennai but Bishnoi got his third wicket, when he dismissed Moeen for 19. Chennai crossed the 200-run mark in 18.4. MS Dhoni’s three-ball stay saw him hit two consecutive sixes as Chennai ended their innings at 217/7 with Ambati Rayadu unbeaten at 27 off 14 balls. Bishnoi and Wood got three wickets each.

Brief scores: Chennai Super Kings: 217/7 (Gaikwad 57, Conway 47; Bishnoi 3/28, Wood 3/49) beat Lucknow Super Giants 205/7 (Mayers 53, Pooran 32; Moeen 4/26, Santner 1/21).

MUMBAI INDIANS

Can’t keep dwelling on Bumrah’s absence: Mumbai captain

BENGALURU: It was a Sunday night that Mumbai Indians would like to forget as they were thumped by Royal Challengers Bangalore at the M Chinnaswamy stadium.

After the loss, Mumbai Indians’ skipper Rohit Sharma had to field the inevitable questions around the gap losing Jasprit Bumrah leaves in his side. Rohit insisted that ‘Mumbai can’t dwell on that’.

He said: “For the past six to eight months, I am used to playing without Jasprit Bumrah [for India too]. Of course, this is a different set-up.

Someone needs to put their hand up and come in to fill that place. We can’t keep dwelling on it. You can try and control the things that are in your control and those that are not in your control, you can’t do that. Injuries are not in your control.

“The other guys that we have are talented. It’s just that they haven’t played a lot of IPL. We need to give them the support.”

Defending 171, each of Mumbai’s bowlers - save for experienced leg-spinner Piyush Chawla whose four overs went for only

26 - had an economy rate in excess of eight. Their 11.2 overs of fast bowling - which included the likes of Jofra Archer, Cameron Green and Jason Behrendorff - went at a rate of 11.29 runs per over.

It was not just their bowling that let five-time champions Mumbai down. They had crumbled to 48 for 4 in the ninth over after being asked to bat and could get past 170 only because of rookie Tilak Varma’s partnerships with Nehal Wadhwa and Arshad Khan. Varma stayed unbeaten on 84 off 46 balls.

Rohit heaped praise on the youngster for “showing courage and being brave” in the middle.

“He [Tilak] is a very positive person, quite talented as well,” Rohit said.

“Some of the shots he played, in the first game of the season, he showed a lot of courage. That is something we spoke of - we want to be brave and courageous in the middle. We didn’t start well, and it was always a catching up game. Hats off to Tilak to get us to a competitive total,” he added. -ANI



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KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Shakib opts out of IPL

DHAKA: International engagements and personal reasons have forced Bangladesh and Kolkata Knight Riders’ all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan to opt out of IPL 2023, *ESPNcricinfo* reported on Monday.

Shakib informed his franchise about this development on Sunday.

Shakib is set to be involved in a busy few weeks for Bangladesh. He and keeper-batter Litton Das already missed Knight Riders’ first match of the season, against Punjab Kings. The two are also part of Bangladesh’s squad for a one-off Test match against Ireland that begins on Tuesday. This will be followed by a tour of the UK, where Bangladesh are set to play three ODIs against Ireland.

It is understood that Shakib told Knight Riders that he would be busy playing for Bangladesh in this period, and also mentioned that he has “personal issues to attend to”, which would keep him away from the IPL.

OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES

The price of Oman oil has increased, with prices for delivery by June 2023 reaching \$84.11, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil rose by \$6.52. - **ONA**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS LOWER

The MSX index closed at 4,791.90 points, down by 0.42 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.00 per cent at 482.70 points. Dhofar Generating, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while Oman Qatar Insurance, down 8.60 per cent, was the top loser.

Refinery products output increases by 44% in Oman

The total production of regular motor fuel (91) at the end of February surged by 82.8 per cent

MUSCAT: Total refinery products in the Sultanate of Oman grew by 44 per cent at the end of February 2023, compared to the same period in 2022, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total production of regular motor fuel (91) as of the end of February 2023 surged by 82.8 per cent; to reach 2,848,800 barrels, compared to the same period last year; it stood at 1,558,200 barrels.

Sales of regular motor fuel (91) also increased by 22.4 per cent to reach 2,233,400 barrels as of the end of February 2023, compared to 1,824,000 barrels during the same period in 2022. Exports of the same fuel also rose by 100 per cent, to reach 584,400 barrels.

The NCSI statistics indicated that the production of premium fuel (95) increased by 3.4 per cent as of the end of February 2023, reaching 1,777,800 barrels, com-



pared to 1,718,800 barrels in the same period last year.

Its sales fell by 0.3 per cent to reach 1,857,600 barrels, compared to 1,863,500 barrels whereas its exports dropped by 92.4 per cent to 35,000 barrels.

The statistics showed that the production of gas oil (diesel) increased by 38.3 per cent in February 2023 to reach 5,525,400 barrels, compared to 3,994,500 barrels. Sales of the same also rose by 11 per cent, to reach 2,273,100 barrels, compared to 2,047,500 barrels. Exports of gas oil (diesel)

grew by 60.2 per cent, to reach 3,008,500 barrels.

The sales, production and exports of jet fuel climbed by 65.4 per cent, 61.6 per cent and 51.8 per cent, respectively, as of the end of February 2023, compared to the same period last year.

The NCSI statistics also showed that liquefied petroleum gas (LNG) production rose by 62.9 per cent, to reach 1,285,700 barrels, compared to 789,100 barrels during the same period last year. Sales of LNG also increased by 37.2 per cent, to reach 1,435,700 barrels, compared to the

same period last year, which stood at about 1,046,600 barrels, while its exports reached 96,100 barrels.

As far as the petrochemical sector is concerned, the production and exports of gasoline surged by 176.6 per cent and 291.7 per cent, respectively.

Production and exports of paraxylene also soared by 356 per cent and 316.9 per cent, respectively as of the end of February 2023.

Polypropylene production and exports rose by 80.4 per cent and 110.4 per cent, respectively, while its sales dropped by 12.7 per cent. - **ONA**

IDC REPORT

ICT spending to top \$3.4bn by 2026 in Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Information and communications technology (ICT) spending in Oman is set to reach \$3.23 billion in 2023 and \$3.49 billion by 2026, according to the latest predictions by International Data Corporation (IDC).

Announcing its regional forecasts for the year ahead, IDC revealed that it expects telecommunications services spending in Oman to increase, with ICT spending set to grow from \$1.30 billion in 2023 to \$1.42 billion in 2026. This aligns in support of Oman's endeavour to build ICT infrastructure to reduce the digital divide through its National Broadband Strategy, which envisions providing broadband service to more than 90 per cent of urban areas by 2030.

"To navigate storms of disruption, organisations in Oman will need to invest in strengthening their digital resiliency so they are better positioned to succeed in new market environments as conditions continue to change," says Jyoti Lalchandani, IDC's group vice president and regional managing director for the META region.

"Regardless of what the economy throws at us over the coming



12 months, the implementation of further digitalisation in critical areas such as customer experience, operations, and financial management — together with a more rapid shift to a 'digital business' approach — will be key to separating the thrivers from the survivors. To this end, we expect to see digital transformation spending as a share of overall IT spending continues to grow, reaching \$1.42 billion in 2026, up from \$1.30 billion in 2023," he added.

In a digital-first economy, where an enterprise's competitiveness is tied to its digital business model, leaders will avoid wholesale cutbacks in tech. Further, new tactics will be employed as tech leaders seek to realise maximum business value from their tech investments. In Oman, spending on Enterprise IT will reach \$0.55 billion and consumer spending will reach \$0.70 billion in 2023.

SUPPORTIVE AVENUE

More than 150 entrepreneurs to take part in Souq Al Wathbah



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The SMEs Development Authority and Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, have teamed up to organise Souq Al Wathbah for this year at the Bank Muscat head office at Airport Heights. The souq will be held for three days, from Thursday, April 6 to Saturday, April 8.

This annual CSR initiative aims to provide a supportive avenue for home-based projects and entrepreneurs allowing them to display their different products and expand their relationships through

networking with other entrepreneurs to exchange expertise for the sake of business development.

More than 150 entrepreneurs, small and start-up businesses will participate in this year's edition of Souq Al Wathbah, where various products encompassing fashion, health and beauty products, home decorations and accessories, food and beverages, traditional wares and perfumes will be showcased at competitive prices. The three-day Souq will be open from 8 pm to 12 midnight.

Since its first launch, the Ramadan Souq constitutes one of the key steps to supporting small and

start-up businesses and is one of the most important forums for entrepreneurs. It also comes within the strategies of both the SMEs Development Authority and Bank Muscat to support Omani entrepreneurs and SMEs and startups. The Ramadan Souq is expected to witness excellent participation from the public and the media, especially as it is one of the well-known souqs held during the month of Ramadan.

Bank Muscat is committed to implementing its strategic plans to support SMEs.

For this particular purpose, it has launched many other initia-

tives including Al Wathbah Academy, Al Wathbah Businesswomen's Forum etc. Al Wathbah SME department offers a comprehensive suite of tailor-made finance solutions and non-financial services targeted at small and medium enterprises in the areas of education, coaching, networking opportunities and workshops.

Bank Muscat is continuously partnering with both government agencies and the private sector to promote entrepreneurship in Oman, particularly amongst the youth, as part of its focus on supporting the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

MARKET OPTIMISM

Oil prices jump, markets narrow odds on Fed hike

SYDNEY: Oil prices surged on Monday after Saudi Arabia and other Opec+ producers announced a surprise round of output cuts, a potentially ominous sign for global inflation just days after a slowdown in US price data had boosted market optimism.

Brent oil futures jumped \$3.94 to \$83.83 a barrel on news output would be cut by around 1.16 million barrels per day. US crude climbed \$3.84 to \$79.51 but was off its early peak of \$81.69.

The change comes before a virtual meeting of an Opec+ ministerial panel, which includes Saudi Arabia and Russia, according to Reuters.

"The involvement of the largest Opec+ members suggests that adherence to production cuts may be stronger than has been the case in the past," said Vivek Dhar, an energy analyst at CBA.

"That means that oil markets may potentially see around 1% of global oil supply or more being curtailed from May."

The latest reductions could lift oil prices by \$10 per barrel, the head of investment firm Pickering Energy Partners said on Sunday. Goldman Sachs lifted its forecast for Brent to \$95 a barrel by the end of the year and to \$100 for 2024.

"Today's surprise cut is consistent with the new Opec+ doctrine to act pre-emptively because they can without significant losses in market share," Goldman said.

"While surprising, this cut re-



flects important economic and likely political considerations."

The surge in energy costs somewhat overshadowed Friday's slower reading for core US inflation, which had seen Wall Street ended the month on a strong note.

S&P 500 futures dipped 0.3 per cent on Monday, while Nasdaq futures lost 0.6 per cent. EURO-STOXX 50 futures eased 0.1 per cent, while FTSE futures added 0.1 per cent.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan eased 0.4 per cent.

Chinese blue chips rose 0.7 per cent, brushing off a Caixin/S&P survey of manufacturers which showed a surprise drop in sentiment to 50.0 in March and sat at odds with strength seen in service surveys last week.

Japan's Nikkei edged up 0.5 per

cent, though a survey of its manufacturers came in just under forecasts. There was better news from the final Jibun Bank Japan manufacturing survey, which improved to 49.2 in March from February's 47.7, the slowest contraction since November.

The jolt to inflation expectations saw yields on US two-year Treasuries rise 4 basis points to 4.11 per cent, while Fed fund futures pared back expectations for rate cuts later in the year.

The market nudged up the probability of the Federal Reserve hiking rates by a quarter point in May to 61 per cent, from 48 per cent on Friday, and had 38 basis points of cuts priced in by year-end.

That in turn helped the dollar gain 0.5 per cent on the Japanese yen to 133.44, while the euro eased almost 0.5 per cent to \$1.0789. - **BNA**

S&P GLOBAL

India's manufacturing sector hits 3-month high in March

NEW DELHI: India's manufacturing sector expanded in March and registered the quickest in three months at 56.4 during the month against 55.3 in February, according to S&P Global.

According to S&P Global, India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 55.3 in February to 56.4 in March, signalling the strongest improvement in operating conditions in 2023 so far.

S&P Global said, "India's manufacturing sector posted a remarkable performance at the end of the final fiscal quarter, as the growth of factory orders and production quickened to the strongest in three months."

It added with pressure on supply chains subsiding and raw material availability improving, input cost inflation retreated to its second-lowest mark in two-and-a-half years.

"Subsequently, goods producers concentrated on rebuilding their stocks. Robust increases in buying levels in recent months supported a near-record accumulation of input inventories in March," the report added.

March data highlighted a further upturn in new business placed with Indian manufacturers. Moreover, the rate of expansion was sharp and the quickest in three months.

Firms suggested that marketing efforts bore fruit. Demand resilience and competitive pricing were also cited as growth drivers,



PMI: According to S&P Global, India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 55.3 in February to 56.4 in March, signalling the strongest improvement in operating conditions in 2023 so far. - Photo used for illustrative purpose only

the report added.

According to S and P Global, continuing the trend that has been recorded monthly for a year, new export orders rose in March. The rate of expansion quickened from February, though remained slight and historically subdued.

"Ongoing improvements in total sales volumes underpinned another increase in production," the report said, adding, "Output rose at the quickest pace since last December and one that outpaced its long-run average."

Demand resilience also encouraged firms to rebuild their input inventories, the report said. "Stocks of purchases rose at a sharp rate that was one of the strongest seen in over 18 years of data collection," it added.

Pollyanna De Lima, Econom-

ics Associate Director at S&P Global Market Intelligence, said: "Underlying demand for Indian goods remained strong in March, underscored by the quickest upturn in factory orders for three months. Hence, production continued to expand at a robust clip and firms stepped up their stock-building efforts."

"Companies reported abundant capacity among themselves and their suppliers. Pending workloads expanded only marginally in March, hindering job creation. As for supply chains, improved availability of raw materials among vendors resulted in shorter delivery times and retreating price pressures. Overall, input costs rose at the second-slowest rate since September 2020," Pollyanna De Lima said. - **ANI**

WHY MORE CONSUMERS ARE CONSIDERING LAB-GROWN DIAMONDS

Whether you're popping the question and looking for the perfect engagement ring or you want to gift yourself a piece of timeless jewellery, you may be wary about purchasing a diamond. Not only does diamond mining harm the environment, human rights abuses associated with the industry may have you thinking twice about sporting this type of bling. The good news? Technology advances are changing the game.

"Lab-grown diamonds are quickly gaining popularity, and there's a good reason for that -- they have the exact same physical and chemical properties as naturally occurring diamonds, but are ethical, sustainable and much more affordable," says Jay Grdina, CEO of Adamas One based in the US, a lab-grown diamond manufacturer that produces near flawless, single-crystal diamonds for gemstone and industrial applications.

If you don't know much about lab-grown diamonds, let these answers to some of the most commonly asked questions serve as your guide to a growing industry:

Are lab-grown diamonds, "real" diamonds? Yes. Lab-grown diamonds have the exact same composition as Earth-mined diamonds and are certified and graded using the same process, one that assesses each gem by cut, color, clarity and carat.

Why is diamond mining harmful?

Traditional diamond mining is inefficient. For every carat of diamond mined, nearly 100 square feet of land is disturbed and almost 6,000 pounds of mineral waste is created. This has wreaked ecological havoc throughout Africa and other parts of the world. What's more, the industry is plagued by forced labor, child labour and human rights abuses, and mined diamonds are often sold to finance war, and organised crime. For these reasons, mined diamonds are often referred to as "conflict diamonds" or "blood diamonds." On the other hand, lab-grown diamonds don't support mining malpractices and have a much

smaller carbon footprint.

Will I have the same choices when shopping for lab-grown diamonds? Like naturally-occurring diamonds, lab-grown diamonds come in different colours, shapes and sizes, allowing you to get the exact look you want.

How are lab-grown diamonds made?

The two primary methods for creating diamonds are the high-pressure-high-temperature (HPHT) method and the chemical vapour deposition (CVD) method. Adamas One employs a patented CVD method and proprietary technology to produce high-quality, high-purity Type IIA diamonds in a few weeks or less.

What are the other benefits of lab-grown diamonds? No diamond is free, but due to the shorter supply chain, lab-grown diamonds can be anywhere from 30-60% less expensive than mined diamonds, making them a far more accessible gemstone alternative. And because diamonds are one of the toughest substances on the planet, they have a number of important industrial applications, including computing. As a result, lab-grown diamonds have the potential to help drive down costs for devices too, and make this industry more green and ethical.

"A growing number of consumers today know that luxury and symbols of love don't have to come at the cost of human lives or the health of the planet," says Grdina. "Fortunately, there is no longer a need for people to compromise their ethics when buying and wearing the jewellery they love." -Statepoint

“

Lab-grown diamonds are quickly gaining popularity, and there's a good reason for that — they have the exact same physical and chemical properties as naturally occurring diamonds, but are ethical, sustainable and much more affordable.



LIFESTYLE



Benzema's hat-trick in Real Madrid win



The French striker hit three goals in a span of seven minutes against Real Valladolid as Real cut Barcelona lead at the top to 12 points

MADRID: Karim Benzema scored a first-half hat-trick in the space of seven minutes as Real Madrid hammered Real Valladolid 6-0 at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Sunday.

Carlo Ancelotti's side are 12 points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona.

The hat-trick moved Benzema up to 14 league goals this season

and second on the list of top scorers - three behind Barca's Robert Lewandowski.

Rodrygo's opener from a smooth counter-attack after 22 minutes opened the floodgates as Benzema took charge at the Santiago Bernabeu, netting a first half hat-trick for Real Madrid for the first time in his career.

Benzema scored his first with a diving header from a Vinicius Jr cross while narrowly avoiding a collision with the far post and the Brazilian also created the second with a simple pass for the French striker to score from the edge of the box.

The 35-year-old completed his hat-trick when he adjusted his run into the six-yard box to turn on the spot and scoop a Rodrygo cross that was behind him to score while his back was towards goal.

It was the fastest Madrid hat-trick in a La Liga game since Fernando Hierro's three goals in six minutes in a 7-0 win over Espanyol in April 1992.

Rodrygo claimed another assist in the second half when Marco Asensio played a one-two pass

with the Brazilian forward before firing home and Eden Hazard created the final goal as he pinched the ball from a loose pass and found Lucas Vazquez.

Valladolid, who fell to a second straight La Liga defeat, are 16th, a point above the relegation zone.

It was a morale-boosting win for Madrid, who are practically out of the title race, but face Barca on Wednesday in the Copa del Rey semi-final second leg.

Ancelotti was able to bring off key players including Benzema and Vinicius and introduce some players who have barely played recently including Eden Hazard.

The Belgian, making his first La Liga appearance since September, set up Vazquez's injury-time goal. - Agencies

Newcastle climb to third with victory over Man United



LONDON- Newcastle United leapfrogged Manchester United into third place in the English Premier League table after a 2-0 win on Sunday.

The Magpies produced a terrific display at a raucous St James' Park to leave their opponents without a win - or a goal - in their past three top-flight games.

Newcastle were thwarted by David de Gea's excellent first-half double save, the Spaniard showing quick reactions to deny Joe Willock after clawing away Alexander Isak's header.

Willock wasted another glorious chance after finishing wildly but the former Arsenal midfielder

was in the right place to nod home the opener after Bruno Guimaraes' cross was headed across goal by Allan Saint-Maximin.

Manchester United, who failed to register an attempt on target in the first half, have not tasted victory in the Premier League since ending their six-year trophy drought at Wembley in February.

Wout Weghorst fired an early chance into the side netting but the Red Devils were second best to a Newcastle side that showed far more urgency.

The hosts deservedly doubled their lead in the 88th minute with a well-placed header by substitute Callum Wilson. - Agencies

ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP

SA inch closer to World Cup spot in India

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa solidified their claims for a direct qualification in the 2023 ICC Cricket World Cup to be held in India this year with a 2-0 series win over the Netherlands after a 146-run victory in the second ODI in Johannesburg on Sunday.

Star batter Aiden Markram compiled a brilliant 175 from 126 deliveries as South Africa posted an imposing total of 370/8 in their 50 overs. David Miller also scored a brilliant 91 of 61 balls with six boundaries and four sixes. Netherlands never looked in a position to reach the South Africa total as pacer Sisanda Magala (5/43) collected career-best figures and the visitors were all out for just 224 in the 40th over.

The win ensured South Africa claimed the three-match series 2-0, but more importantly moved past the West Indies and into the eighth and final spot on the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League standings.

The top 8 teams at the end of the Super League qualify automatically for the World Cup to be held later in India this year. 11th-placed Ireland are now the only team that can overtake Proteas. Ireland have three more matches remaining against Bangladesh in the Super League that will be held next month and a series sweep by Ireland could still see South Africa sent to the Qualifier. - ANI

FRENCH LEAGUE

Messi booed in PSG's defeat at home to Lyon



PARIS: Lionel Messi's name was met by whistles and boos from some Paris St-Germain (PSG) fans before they fell 1-0 to Lyon, their seventh defeat of 2023 at home, on Sunday.

The Argentine, linked to his previous club and Spanish giants Barcelona when his contract expires this summer, has seen two Champions League last-16 exits in his two seasons at the club.

Whistles could be heard as his name was announced beforehand, although some fans chanted

his name in support.

Lyon forward Bradley Barcola scored the only goal as PSG were booed off.

The game kicked off 10 minutes late as Lyon's bus could not fit under a bridge so they had to drive around the capital.

Alexandre Lacazette had earlier struck a post with a penalty for the ninth-placed visitors.

Kylian Mbappe, PSG's all-time top scorer, almost rescued a point late on, but his shot was saved.

The perennial French champi-

ons are now only six points above Lens and Marseille with nine games left.

PSG have lost seven of their 18 matches in all competitions since the end of the World Cup, having been unbeaten in all 22 games before the break.

Messi is in talks with PSG about extending his contract, but Barcelona have also approached him about a return to the club where he spent the bulk of his career. He has scored 29 goals in 67 games for the club. - Agencies

DISMISSALS



Graham Potter



Brendan Rodgers

Chelsea, Leicester sack their coaches

LONDON: English Premier League clubs, Chelsea and Leicester City, sacked their respective coaches Graham Potter and Brendan Rodgers, on Sunday.

Chelsea took the decision after their 2-0 defeat at home to Aston Villa on Saturday, during which the fans at Stamford Bridge sang "you don't know what you're doing" at Potter.

The defeat leaves Chelsea 11th in the English Premier League, with little chance of qualifying for Europe next season and just 10 days before they play Real Madrid in the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

Potter arrived at Chelsea from Brighton on September 8 and signed a five-year contract, but leaves the club after winning just seven of his 22 league games in charge.

Chelsea have confirmed former

Brighton defender Bruno Saltar, who moved as a coach to Stamford Bridge with Potter, as their interim replacement.

Potter was the second Premier League coach to be sacked on Sunday after Leicester City also ended their four-year relationship with Brendan Rodgers earlier in the day. Leicester's decision came in the wake of their 2-1 defeat to Crystal Palace on Saturday.

That result was their fifth defeat in six league games and saw the club drop into the relegation zone with just ten games left in the season.

The decision ends the former Liverpool and Celtic coach's four-year stay at the club, during which he led them to the 2021 FA Cup and consecutive fifth-place finishes in his first two seasons in charge. - Xinhua

OMAN CRICKET PREMIER DIVISION



Renaissance clinch third spot

MUSCAT: Renaissance Cricket Team finished third in the recently-concluded 2022-23 Oman Cricket (OC) Premier Division after they defeated Yalla Shabab by four wickets in the third place playoff.

Batting first, Yalla Shabab were restricted to 149 in 38.4 overs. Imran Ali was the most successful bowler with 4/25. Renaissance chased down the target, scoring 152/6 in 32.5 overs with Hammad Mirza's 38 of 46 balls.

Following the conclusion of the season, Mirza emerged as team's best batter, having scored a total of 320 runs in 13 innings and was followed by Shubo Pal, who scored 265 in 12 innings. Bilal Muhammed was the team's best bowler, having picked 15 wickets in 9 innings and was followed by Fawad Ali's 11 wickets in 10 innings.

Nisal Fernando, head coach of the Renaissance CT said, "This is the second consecutive year that

we have finished among the top three. I attribute the success to team discipline and mentorship from senior players. I thank the Renaissance management and colleagues across all departments for their support. A word of thanks also goes out to Oman Cricket chief development officer Du-leep Mendis, OC board, OC staff, ground staff and to all competing teams for pushing us to deliver beyond our own expectations."

HOW EUROPE’S DROUGHTS AFFECT TOURISM

Much of Europe is experiencing persistent drought.
From Italy to Spain, holiday makers face restrictions as a result.

Italy’s Lake Garda has a new tourist attraction — visitors can now walk to Rabbit Island (Isola dei Conigli), a tiny outcrop in the middle of the lake, instead of having to take a boat.

The lake’s devastatingly low water levels have exposed sand banks and stones that forms a path from the shore to the outcrop, which is also known as San Biagio Island.

Yet, the tourist novelty underlines a disastrous ecological situation in northern Italy. The region has become so dry that the water level of Lake Garda, Italy’s largest lake, is only half of what it normally is at this time of year.

The most dramatic effect of climate change

“Northern Italy is currently experiencing a dry period that has already lasted two years,” says Mattia Gussoni, a meteorologist with the weather forecasting service Il Meteo. This winter, he says, has seen unusually high temperatures and low precipitation.

“Even in the Alps, there has been below-average rainfall and very little snow,” he says, and the previous winter saw a similar situation. This has led to a water scarcity in the region, that is also affecting the Po, Italy’s longest river, and a vital source of water for agriculture.

The tourist board responsible for Lake Garda is trying to avoid making the situation appear overly dramatic.

“Fluctuations in the level of Lake Garda are normal,” says Natasha Bontadi, the lake’s public relations officer in the Trentino province. The lake, which has an average depth of 133 metres (436 feet), is the country’s most important drinking water reservoir and is therefore constantly monitored. Currently, all water sports are allowed, and ferries



are running to schedule.

Last summer, communities around Lake Garda put water saving measures in place such as a ban on the filling of private pools. Water restrictions are likely to go into effect again this year, Bontadi says, adding a campaign is currently being prepared to raise tourists’ awareness of the issue.

River cruise with a bus

North of the Alps in Switzerland and Germany, tourism operators are also planning ahead for low water levels during the European summer.

“The Rhine River will probably have low water for the most part,” says Daniel Thiriet, vice president of IG RiverCruise, a Europe-

an interest group for river cruise companies.

Similarly to last year, he says, it will probably be necessary to transport passengers by bus at some critical points on the Rhine where the water is too low for boats to pass. “We are used to planning something like this,” Thiriet says. “So the low water levels won’t take us by surprise.”

Too little precipitation this winter has also impacted Europe’s ski resorts, particularly those at lower altitudes. Just over half of Switzerland’s ski slopes now rely on artificial snow, according to the Swiss cable car association. And in France’s Jura region in the east of the country, where the mountains are well below 2,000 metres (6,560 feet) and there are numerous ski resorts, the number of tourists in February was 69 percent below the average of the past five years.

The Spanish region of Catalonia is also in the thralls of a prolonged dry spell. “The situation



in Barcelona is dramatic,” says Alfons Puertas, a meteorologist at the Observatori Fabra weather station, located in the mountains above the city. The past two years have been the driest since records began in 1914, he says. In 2022, the average rainfall wasn’t even half of the typical rainfall per year of 621 millimeters (24 inches).

Numerous reservoirs, which supply drinking water Barcelona among other things, have reached historic lows.

Where is the water?

Catalan authorities put the first austerity measures in place a few months ago. These include a cancellation of the Font Mágica fountain spectacle that typically includes a music and light show and draws crowds on summer evenings in Barcelona. The fountain will stay dry until further notice.

Meanwhile, the situation has eased somewhat on the popular Spanish vacation island of Mal-

lorca. Large parts of the island were affected by drought in recent years, and there were fears that the upcoming tourist season could completely exhaust the already scarce water resources.

At the end of February, however, Storm Juliette moved across the island, bringing with it abundant rain and even snow. Some weather stations recorded five times the average rainfall. After months of falling water levels, Mallorca’s reservoirs are now at 90% capacity.

The future is dry

But back in northern Italy, meteorologist Mattia Gussoni doesn’t expect the drought to break. The upcoming summer threatens to be “very difficult,” he says, especially considering that it would have to rain for more than a few days to make up the water deficit.

“It would have to rain through the entire spring for that to happen,” he says. “We’re dealing with the most dramatic effect of climate change here.” -BW

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ROUND-UP

Mazda launches its enticing ‘So Generous, it’s Inspiring’ campaign

Whether you’re looking for a sleek and stylish sedan or a rugged and reliable SUV, Mazda has a wide range of models, which includes the Mazda 6, Mazda CX-30, Mazda CX-9 and Mazda CX-5

MUSCAT: Mazda Oman launched its exciting ‘So Generous, it’s Inspiring’ campaign, which started on March 13. It’s an exciting opportunity for all the motorists in Oman who want to purchase a stylish and powerful Mazda this season. Cash gift starting from OMR1,050 to OMR3,900, and AAA roadside assistance valid for the first three years from the date of retail purchase. You can obtain an IINJAZ service package for 5 years or 100,000



kilometres (whichever comes first) by paying OMR200 (plus VAT) for only the new Mazda model purchased from Towell Auto Center. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details). Whether you’re looking for a sleek and stylish sedan or a rugged and reliable SUV, Mazda has a wide range of models, which includes the Mazda 6, Mazda CX-30, Mazda CX-9 and Mazda CX-5.

Mazda 6: Sophistication and style
The Mazda 6 is a sedan that exudes

sophistication and style while offering an impressive range of features and specifications. With its elegant design, luxurious interior and state-of-the-art safety features, the Mazda 6 stands out from its competitors in its class. The Mazda 6 strikes the perfect balance between performance, comfort, and style, making it the top choice for discerning drivers seeking a practical yet classy sedan. The Mazda 6 is starting from OMR8,450 (after cash gift), so what are you waiting for? Don’t miss an opportunity to drive luxury with a statement on the wheels.

Mazda CX-30
The Mazda CX-30 is a stylish SUV

and it is built with a modern design that exudes confidence on the road. Its innovative features such as adaptive LED headlights, lane departure warnings, and a 360-degree camera make driving this car a safe and enjoyable experience. The Mazda CX-30 is also equipped with an efficient Skyactiv engine, which delivers excellent fuel economy without compromising on performance. So, what are you waiting for? This is your time to crossover to the next level with Mazda CX-30 by availing cash gift offer, starting from OMR8,650 (after cash gift).

Mazda CX-9
The Mazda CX-9 is a turbocharged

7-seater SUV that combines style, performance, and practicality. It is equipped with Mazda’s i-Activ all-wheel-drive system that provides excellent traction and stability in any road condition. The CX-9 features a sleek and modern exterior design with a spacious and luxurious interior that can accommodate up to seven passengers comfortably. So, why not level up the thrill with Mazda CX-9 - turbocharged 7-Seater SUV, starting from OMR11,900 (after cash gift).

Mazda CX-5: Mid-segment SUV
The Mazda CX-5 is a mid-segment SUV that offers an impres-

sive combination of style, performance, and comfort. The CX-5 offers a range of advanced safety features, such as blind spot monitoring, rear cross-traffic alert, and lane departure warning.

Standout option
Its comfortable and spacious interior, advanced infotainment system, and excellent fuel economy make it a standout option in the highly competitive SUV segment in the country. So, experience the fusion of elegance and toughness with the Mazda CX-5 starting from OMR9,350 (after cash gift). In Oman Mazda vehicles are brought to you by Towell Auto Centre.

FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP



Toyota Gazoo Racing shines at 1000 Miles of Sebring

MUSCAT: Toyota Gazoo Racing (TGR) dominated the opening round of the 2023 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) to earn a one-two victory in the 1000 Miles of Sebring in the face of strong Hypercar competition. The No. 7 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar of Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi, and José María López claimed a hard-fought victory after 239 laps at the home of endurance racing in the United States. After an exciting race-long battle at the front, World Champions and 2022 Le Mans winners Sébastien Buemi, Brendon Hartley, and Ryo Hiramawa completed a perfect result for (TGR) by finishing second in the No. 8 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar. Relentless consistency, flawless team operations and strong tyre management combined as TGR overcame the challenge of several new Hypercar rivals joining this year’s championship to lap all competitors twice and earn the team’s 40th WEC victory. The team was immediately in the fight at the front when the green flags waved in Florida. Buemi set a new Hypercar race lap record as he and Conway edged clear of the competition. At the two-hour mark, little separated the GR010 HYBRIDS and their gap over the chasing pack was enough to keep them

ahead through the first driver changes. As half distance approached, Kobayashi moved the No. 7 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar to the front and soon after, early in the fifth hour, he handed over to López. Hiramawa took the wheel of the second-placed No. 8 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar to resume an intra-team battle for victory, with the pair now a lap clear of the competition. After Kobayashi and Buemi returned to their respective cockpits, the gap at the front began to grow during the seventh hour. As the sun set on Sebring, Conway ticked off the remaining laps without taking risks and Hartley reduced the gap steadily. Conway crossed the line in the No. 7 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar, just 2.168 secs ahead of Hartley to conquer the biggest-ever top-class grid for a WEC season-opener and earn maximum race points. Akio Toyoda, President of Toyota Motor Corporation and TGR Team Founder, “Congratulations and thank you to all the drivers and team members who finished this important first round with a one-two finish. Even if the car changes and the number of rivals increases, I once again feel that racing is a team effort. Since Kamui became Team Principal, the power of the team has definitely grown stronger.”

MILESTONE

Howden Insurance Brokers Oman celebrates 5th anniversary in style

MUSCAT: Howden Insurance Brokers, Oman celebrated its 5th anniversary in Oman. This milestone celebration was attended by Ahmed Al Maamari, VP – Insurance Sector, Capital Market Authority, Sheikh Salim Saad Bahwan – Director of OTE Group of Companies & Chairman of Howden Oman. A large number of prestigious clients of Howden Oman & Crème de la crème of Oman Insurance Industry were present to celebrate this special occasion with the Howden Oman team. Senior Management Team of Howden Group - Jose Manuel Gonzalez (JMG), Howden Group CEO, Sonia Caamano, CEO International Growth Markets, Richard Mockett Regional CEO for Howden Middle East & Africa region, Howden Specialty Team from UAE office, Howden Guardian team from Abu Dhabi office were present on the occasion. Howden’s growth journey in Oman in a short span of 5 years is a matter of great pride. Howden Oman has established itself as a challenger insurance broker for SMEs & Large Corporates, Financial Institutions, Manufacturing Industry etc by providing comprehensive and cost-effective insurance solutions. JMG – CEO – Howden Group confirmed that the foundation for Howden Oman is solid & strong for future growth. He also said we must celebrate milestones like this with our clients and business partners. Howden Broking Group established in London in 1994 has grown to be the largest international independent insurance broker headquartered outside the USA. Howden’s Broking operations in Oman were established in 2017 by acquiring a majority stake in a local broker New Generation Insurance and joining forces with Sheikh Saad Suhail Bahwan, Chairman



of OTE Group of Companies as the JV partner for Howden Oman. Based in Muscat, Howden Oman is led by Rajiv Arora, CEO & Shareholder of Howden Oman, an insurance industry veteran with over 36 years of experience working in the Middle East and India. Sonia Camaano – CEO of the International Growth market complemented that the Howden Oman office is one of the greatest inspirations for other Howden offices as it truly has no borders. Oman’s business is growing by collaborating with various global offices of Howden Group to bring expertise for the best interest of clients. Over 35% of the Howden Group is owned by Howden employees. As an employee-owned business, Howden has the flexibility to react to an ever-changing world and the freedom to act with their client’s best interests at heart. Howden’s long-term mindset always looks to leverage the power of insurance to shape the future, of their clients & communities. Risks are getting more complex every day, however, continuous strategic investments made by Howden in technology & exper-

tise are allowing them to make data-driven decisions. Howden’s specialist teams have the global resources to handle even the most challenging risks. Howden Group combines the knowledge of a specialist broker, the agility of a start-up, and the scale and experience of an established international business. Howden’s teams around the world are experts with autonomy – trusted to innovate and relied upon to deliver. Howden takes pride in being an insurance broker with a difference. Their principles have helped them to stand out, as the Howden team is always thriving to try harder for their clients. Richard Mockett, Regional CEO of Howden Middle East & Africa said, Howden believes that Insurance can and should be part of the solution to the societal and environmental challenges that we face. Hence, Howden is focused on creating new insurance products to move the industry forward. Howden’s innovations – from the Red Cross volcano cat bond to microinsurance in Tanzania – are designed to help support vulnerable communities, encourage the

use of renewable energy, and facilitate economic growth. Howden is committed to bringing specialist insurance knowledge to their customers. Investing in Omani talent & providing them with a training platform, help them build their insurance career. Challenge the status quo for the benefit of the Clients to build a sustainable business. He would wish to be part of the next bigger milestone which is celebrating the 10th anniversary of Howden Oman on an even bigger stage with a bigger Howden Oman team. As a business, our actions and attitudes have far-reaching consequences. Howden’s CSR work engages with all their people across the globe in giving back to their local communities, and they have started measuring global environmental and societal impact to improve wherever they see an opportunity. Rajiv Arora – CEO & Shareholder of Howden Oman mentioned, “We want Howden to be the kind of business we all feel proud of. That means ensuring our culture, actions and policies reflect our values so that everyone can thrive.”



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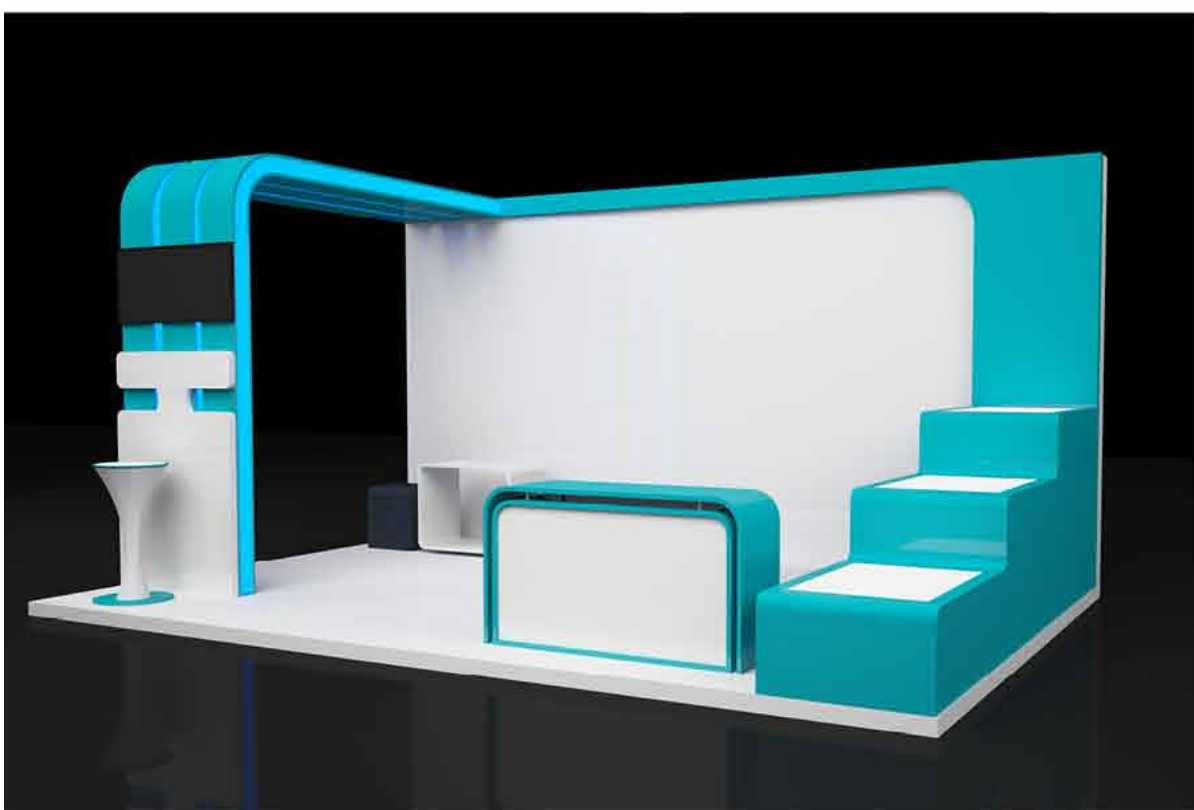
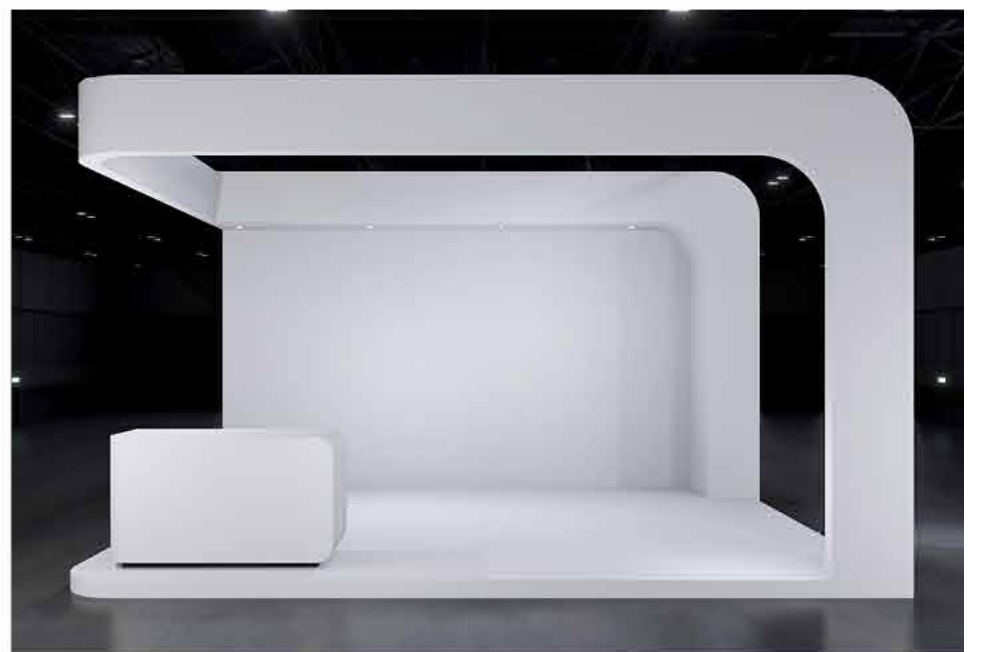
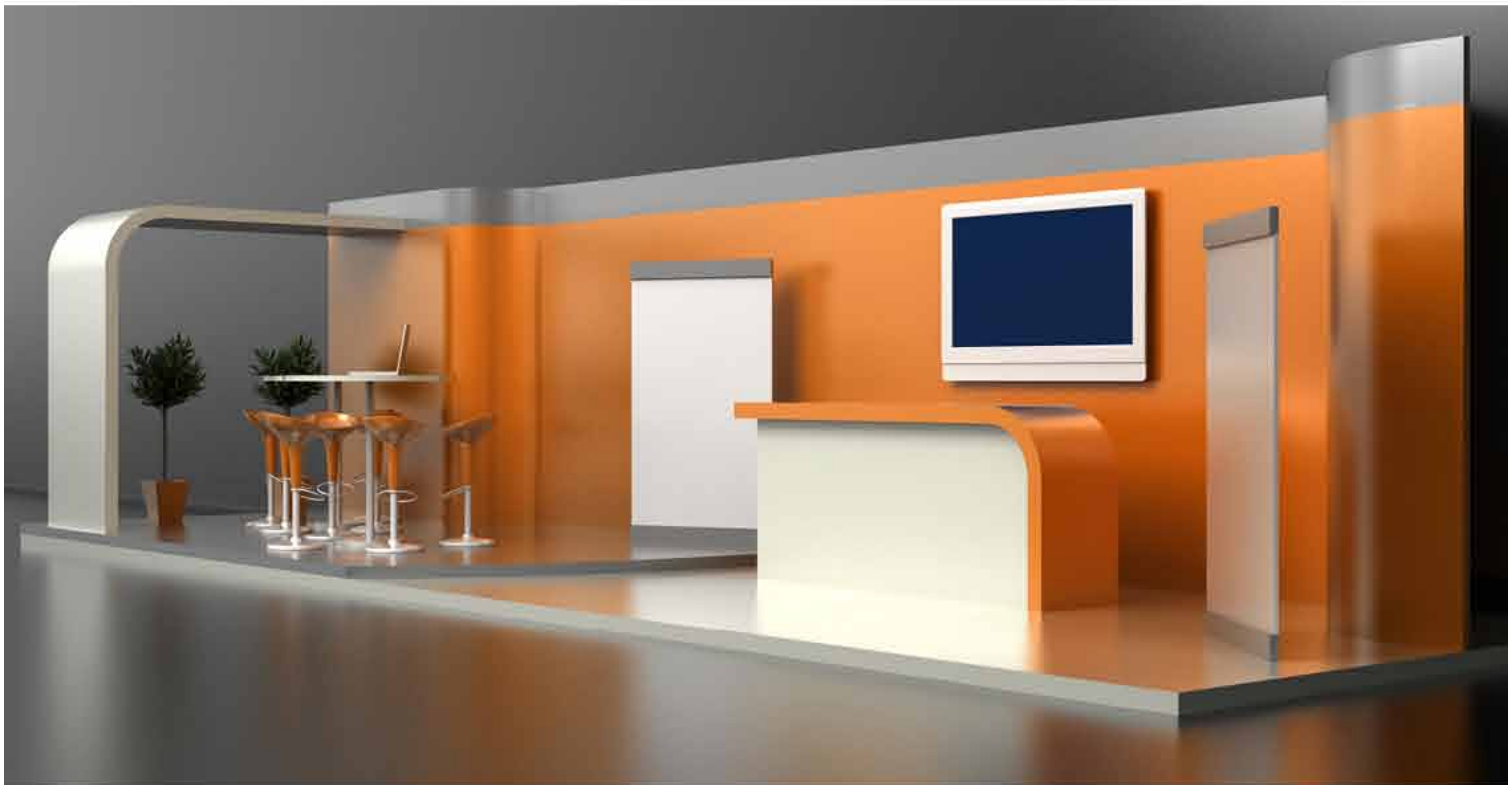
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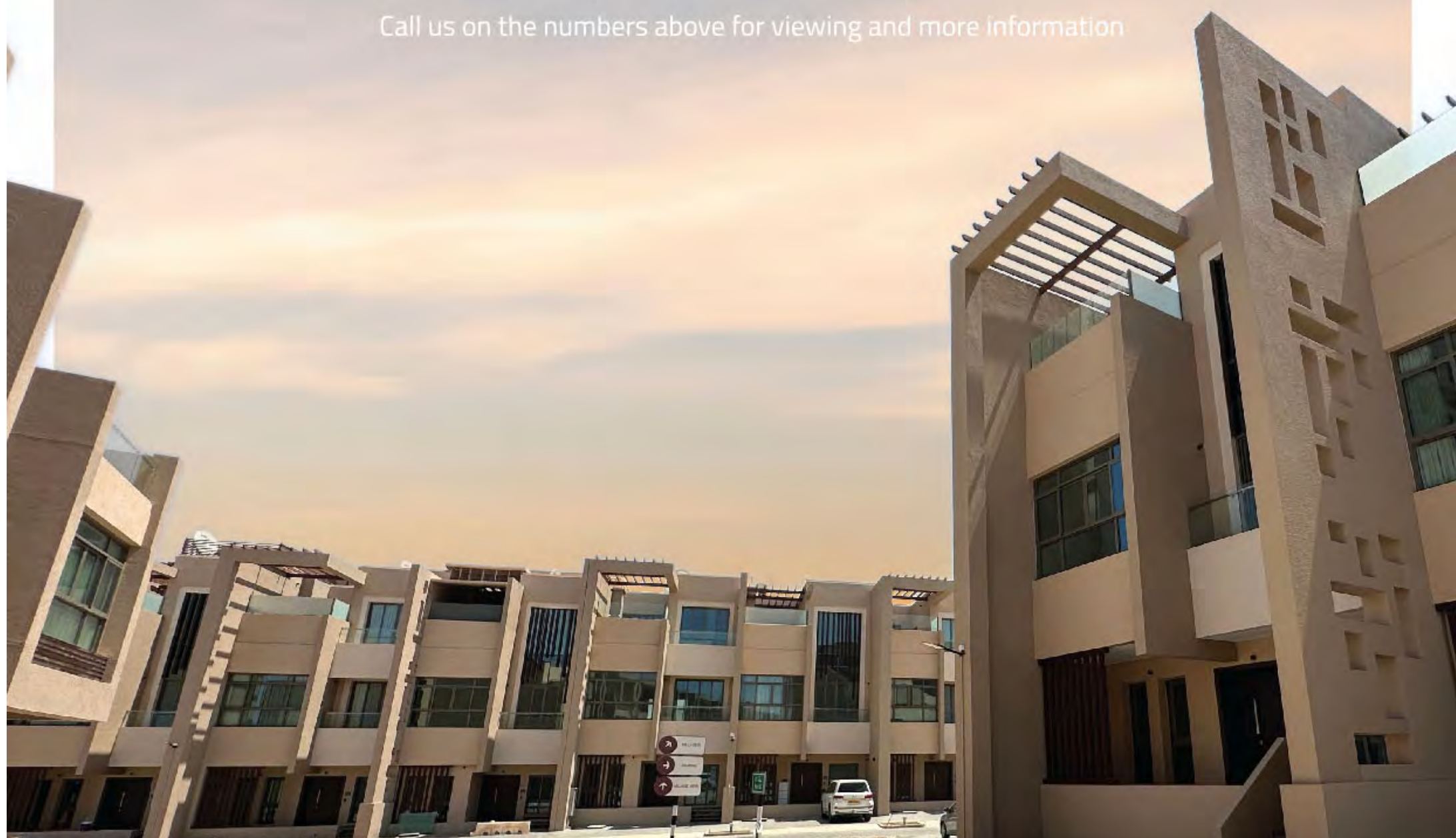


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