



HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN SENDS GREETINGS TO IRAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulation to Dr. Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and wishes of good health and happiness to the president and for his country's people further progress and prosperity. **-ONA**



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HM THE SULTAN IN UNITED KINGDOM ON A PRIVATE VISIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left for the United Kingdom (UK) on a private visit on Thursday. May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys and grant him good health and wellbeing. **-ONA**



OMAN REPORTS TRADE SURPLUS OF OMR6.99BN

Mineral products had the highest value among the non-oil commodity exports from Oman, increasing by 20.3 percent to reach OMR2.5 billion

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's trade balance registered a surplus of OMR6.997 billion at the end of November 2023 compared to a surplus of OMR9.587 billion during the same period in 2022, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Statistics further indicate that merchandise exports declined by 11.4 percent and reached OMR20.636 billion at the end of last November compared to OMR23.289 billion in the same period in 2022.

The total value of merchandise imports to the Sultanate of Oman decreased by 0.5 percent to OMR13.639 billion at the end of November 2023 compared to OMR13.702 billion during the same period in 2022.

The decline in the value of exports was mainly due to the decline in the value of the Sultanate of Oman's oil and gas exports by 17.7 percent to OMR12.525 billion at the end of November 2023, to OMR15.215 billion at the end of November 2022.

On the other hand, the value of the Sultanate of Oman's exports of crude oil amounted to OMR8.9 billion by the end of November 2023, recording a decrease of 17.3 percent compared to the same pe-



Industrial day special supplement with this issue



est value among non-oil commodity exports, reaching an increase of 20.3 percent to OMR2.5 billion, followed by ordinary metals and their products, with OMR1.2 billion, which decreased by 11.1 percent. With a decline of 30.3 percent, the exports of chemical products and related items reached OMR929 million.

The value of Oman's exports of plastic and its products, rubber and its products also dipped by 21.6 percent to OMR814 million, while exports of live animals and their products increased by 23 percent to reach OMR365 million, and the value of exports of other products reached OMR948 million.

In terms of re-export operations from Oman, its value increased to OMR1.3 billion, or 11.1 percent, at the end of November 2023. The value of re-exports in transport equipment recorded an increase of 5.2 percent to OMR377 million the export of machinery, appliances, electrical equipment and their parts reached OMR361 million, registering an increase by 18.5 percent.

>A2

riod of the previous year.

The value of refined oil exports declined by 23.5 percent to OMR1.3 billion. The value of the LNG supply fell by 15.7 percent and reached OMR2.3 billion compared to OMR2.7 billion at the end of November 2022.

Statistics further revealed a decline in the value of non-oil merchandise exports by 1.4 percent at the end of November 2023, to reach OMR6.767 billion, compared to OMR6.866 billion at the end of November 2022.

Mineral products had the high-

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN WHO recognises Sur as healthy city

1 The World Health Organisation has awarded Sur city the recognition certificate for the second time in a row as a healthy city after meeting all the international criteria for a healthy city. Sur has now qualified for approval as a training centre for other cities in Oman. **>A3**

OMAN Heavy rains forecast in Oman from today

2 The Oman Metrology has issued an alert of heavy rains in the Sultanate of Oman from Sunday evening. The effect of air depression is expected to begin from Sunday morning with heavy cloud formation accompanied by scattered thunderstorms. **>A2**

MARKET Nama Water gears up to treat wastewater

3 Nama Water Services pursues to implement the best international practices for wastewater treatment and reuse as part of Oman's strategic approach to minimise groundwater depletion and contribute towards the environmental sanitation. **>B1**



Caleb Ewan clinches opening stage of Tour of Oman

A8

ISSUANCE OF VISAS

Over 20% dip in Bangladeshi expats' arrival after visa ban

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The number of arrivals of Bangladeshi nationals to Oman dropped by over 20% since Oman banned the issuance of visas for them across all categories from October 31, 2023.

According to a report from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, (NCSI), the number of Bangladeshi nationals arriving in Oman stood at 22,312 at the end of December, 2023.

While in September, the number of Bangladeshi arrivals stood at 28,201 - making a drop of over 20 percent in the last three months.

In a circular issued on October 31, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) suspended the issuance of visas

across all categories for Bangladeshi nationals.

In a statement, the ROP said, "The ROP, within its review of the policies for obtaining some types of visas, announces the suspension of the conversion of all types of tourist and visit visas to work visas for all nationalities coming to the Sultanate of Oman, as well as the issuance of all types of new visas for Bangladeshi citizens, effective Tuesday (October 31, 2023) till further notice."

Soon after the visa ban, the Embassy of Oman in Dhaka issued a statement saying that the visa ban will be 'temporary in nature.' The embassy said that the decision was taken after a comprehensive periodical review



by relevant Omani authorities of existing laws regulating the expatriate labour market 'to ensure that it meets the current demands, maintain its stability and to protect the rights of expatriate workers and their employers in

accordance with the law'.

According to the embassy, "The relevant authorities are exerting all efforts to complete the review process as quickly as possible, after which they will resume issuing visas in accord-

ance with the guidelines during the review process.'

One of the reasons for the temporary suspension, the embassy stated, is to resolve the issue of an increasing number of laid-off workers in the market who resort to working illegally without having full legal protection and rights. "The review will ensure that workers and employers' rights are fully protected."

Sirajul Haque, Chairman of Bangladesh Social Club Oman, hoped that visas for Bangladeshi nationals would open soon. "We are very hopeful that the visas of some sectors will be opened very soon as there are a lot of people who are willing to come to Oman and work," he said.

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تطبق الشروط والأحكام

Oman marks annual day of noted Omani figures

The first important Omani historic event included in this programme is the 350th anniversary of the establishment of Jibreen Fort

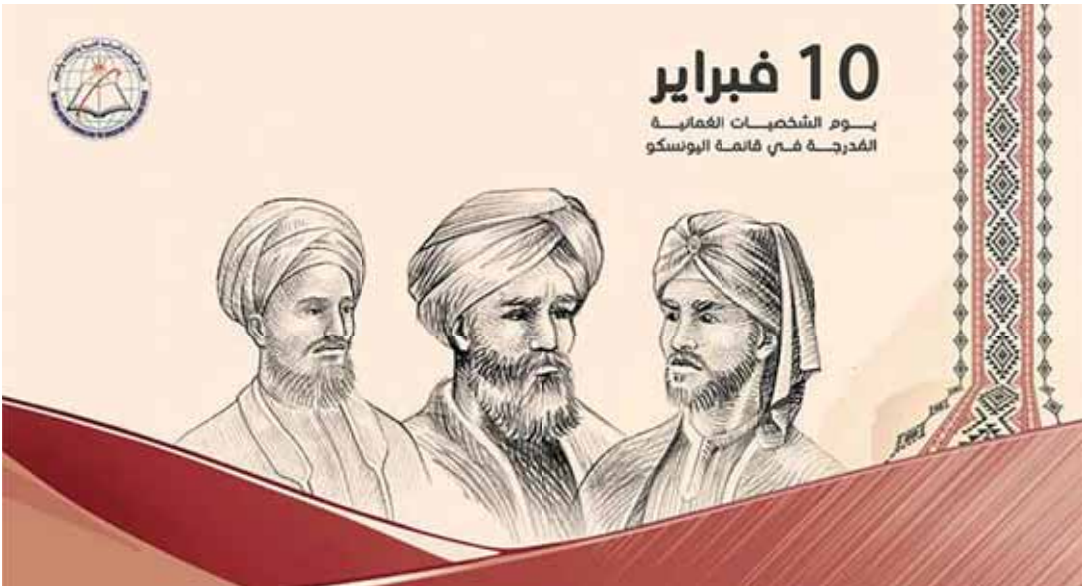
Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman celebrates the annual day of globally influential Omani figures listed in Unesco list, which falls on February 10 of each year.

The celebration aims to shed light on the cognitive and scientific legacy of the influential Omani figures at the local and global levels.

The first important Omani historic event included in this programme is the 350th anniversary of the establishment of Jibreen Fort.

The Sultanate of Oman has succeeded in including seven Omani figures and one historic event in the Unesco Programme for Important Historical Events and Globally Influential Personalities, namely: the linguist Al Khalil bin Ahmed



Al Farahidi in 2005, and the doctor and pharmacist Rashid bin Omairah Al Hashimi Al Rustaqi in 2013, and Nouredine Al Salmi, an Omani polymath, encyclopaedist and social reformer was included in the Unesco list in 2015.

The socialite, Sheikh Nour Al Din Abdullah bin Humaid Al Salmi, and doctor and physicist Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Muhammad Al Azdi, nicknamed Ibn Al Dhahabi, and Omani poet Nasser bin Salem Al Rawahi, nicknamed Abu Muslim Al Bahlani, were included in 2019, and Omani navigator Ahmed bin Majid Al Saadi in 2021.

In the meetings of the Admin-

istrative and Financial Affairs Committee of the forty-second session of the General Conference of Unesco, which was held in November last year, the Sultanate of Oman was able to include two new cultural elements in this programme, namely: the 350th anniversary of the establishment of Jibreen Fort, and the 150th anniversary of the death of the historian and literary poet Hamid bin Muhammad bin Raziq.

Dr. Ahlam bint Hamoud Al Jahwari, a researcher and writer of history and a member of the board of Historical Association of Oman, said that the Sultanate of Oman has remarkably contrib-

uted to building human civilisations across history and succeeded through Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in listing several cultural elements in the various programmes of the Unesco.

She said that the Sultanate of Oman has set 10 February every year for celebrating the Omani personalities listed with UNESCO. This date coincides with the Sultanate's joining the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (10 February 1972), she added, pointing to the significance of organising research competitions and seminars on such personalities.

His Majesty sends greetings to Pope

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulation to Pope Francis of the Vatican, on the National Day of the Vatican.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and wishes of good health and happiness to Pope Francis and for his country's people further progress and glory.

El Salvador
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of

congratulations to President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador on the occasion of re-electing him as a president for a new presidential term.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Bukele to achieve aspirations of the people of El Salvador. His Majesty also wished the friendship relations between the two countries further progress and growth.

Heavy rains forecast for Oman today

MUSCAT: The Oman Metrology issued a an alert of heavy rains in the Sultanate of Oman from Sunday evening.

The effect of air depression is expected to begin from Sunday morning, with clouds formation accompanied by scattered thunderstorms.

The Civil Aviation Authority, said: "Heavy thunderstorms are likely to be accompanied by active winds and hailstones in the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, South Al Batinah,

Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah from Sunday evening till Monday. The Civil Aviation Authority calls on everyone to exercise caution during thunderstorms, not to cross valleys, avoid low-lying places, and not to go to the sea.

Heavy rains accompanied by hailstones ranging between (30 - 60 mm), will lead to the flow of valleys and reefs, active downward winds speed will range between 15 - 35 knots (28 - 64 km/h).

Sea waves rise on the coast of Musandam Governorate and the Sea of Oman will range between 1.5 - 3 metres.

Metal products had the largest value of merchandise imports

<FROM A1 The value of live animals and products from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also increased to OMR103 million, by 77.4 percent.

On the other hand, metal products had the largest value of merchandise imports to the Sultanate of Oman, reaching OMR3.8 billion at the end of last November, declining by 4.6 percent, followed by machinery, appliances, electrical equipment and their parts at OMR2.1 billion, recording a growth of 7.5 percent by the end of November 2023.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) topped the trade exchange transactions in non-oil exports, as their value at the end

of November 2023 amounted to about OMR981 million, an increase of 29.7 percent from the end of November 2022, while the United Arab Emirates (UAE) topped the trade exchange transactions in re-exports from the Sultanate of Oman, where the value of re-exports amounted to OMR465 million at the end of last November.

Exports to Oman
The United Arab Emirates also ranked first in the list of the highest countries exporting to the Sultanate of Oman, with a value of OMR3.6 billion, a decrease of 8.6 percent from the end of November 2022. - ONA

ITHCA Group invests in US firm GSME for development of semiconductor chips

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a historic move, the ITHCA Group has reaffirmed its dedication to technological progress by investing in the US-based semiconductor design and service company, GSME, marking a significant milestone for the Sultanate of Oman.

This groundbreaking investment is structured into two phases, with the initial phase completed in 2023 and the subsequent phase finalised in February 2024, coinciding with the successful development of the first two test chips, Oman-1 and Oman-2, entirely crafted by Omani engineers during their training.

ITHCA's strategic investment in GSME not only represents a noteworthy financial achievement but



also signifies a remarkable technological advancement for Oman.

This pioneering initiative underscores the nation's commitment to nurturing innovation and emerging as a prominent player in the global semiconductor industry. Moreover, it highlights ITHCA's

steadfast dedication to investing in cutting-edge technologies and leveraging local Omani talent to drive the design activities within the company.

The agreement between the ITHCA Group and GSME was officially signed by Engineer Said

bin Abdullah Al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group, and Engineer Farhat Jahangir, CEO of GSME.

Engineer Said bin Abdullah Al Mandhari emphasised that this strategic investment in GSME marks a significant financial milestone and technological leap forward for the Sultanate of Oman.

He reiterated that this investment, a first of its kind in Oman, underscores the nation's commitment to fostering innovation and emerging as a key player in the global semiconductor arena.

Additionally, Al Mandhari underscored ITHCA's dedication to investing in emerging technologies and cultivating high-value ICT capabilities and human capital, thereby contributing positively to the national economy and human resources.

Need to boost private sector in GCC for growth: Al Rawas

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Faisal bin Abdullah Al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Federation of GCC Chambers, stressed the significance of boosting cooperation among the private sectors of the GCC States for growth of trade and investments and for speedy execution of joint projects.



He said that the future outlook of the GCC States envisages the importance of the private sector.

He said that there are projects that deserve the attention and care of the Federation of GCC Chambers as they contribute to the achievement of economic integration.

The Board of Directors of the Federation of GCC Chambers started the 23rd session of meeting on Saturday.

He also pointed to the significance of efforts to strengthen the march of the Federation of GCC Chambers, which started in 1979.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Omani businessmen began a visit to Manama on Saturday to strengthen economic, trade and investment relations between the two countries.

The delegation, headed by Eng. Ridha bin Juma Al Saleh, a member of the Board of Directors of

the OCCI, consists of a number of members of the Chamber's Board of Directors and representatives of Omani companies operating in education, health, foodstuffs, infrastructure, jewellery, real estate, hotels, tourism, logistics and fishing.

Eng. Ridha bin Juma said that the delegation of Omani businessmen will meet with a number of officials in the public and private sectors in Bahrain.



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Fertility Centre to become a boon for childless couples

The centre, which will officially open on 14 February, has a specialised medical team with extensive experience in the field of fertility and pregnancy assistance



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Fertility Centre at Al Wattayah Obstetrics and Gynecology Complex is the first government centre specialising in fertility in the Sultanate of Oman. It represents a glimmer of hope and a journey towards motherhood and desired fatherhood to help couples overcome the problems of pregnancy and childbirth.

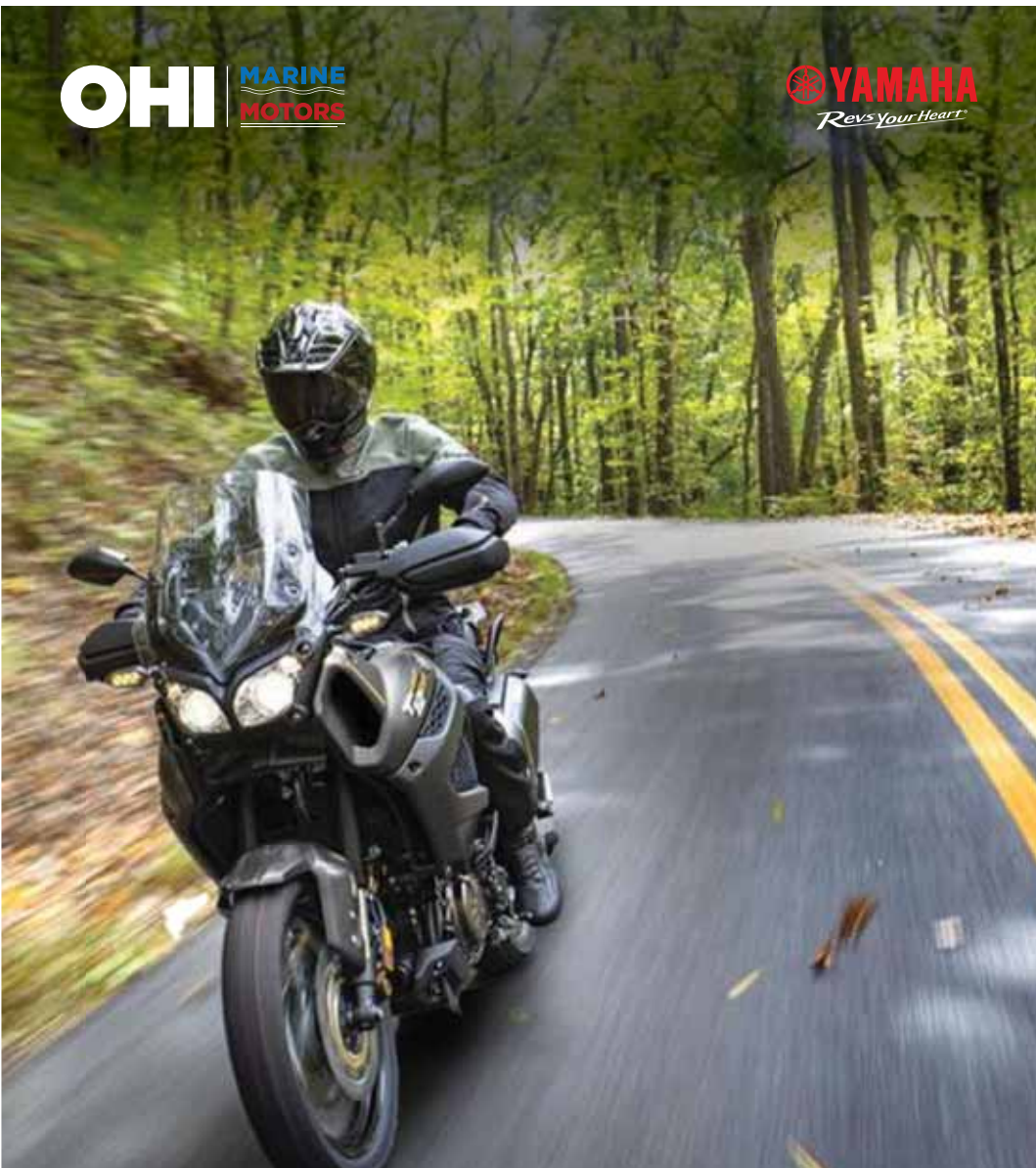
Specialised medical team
The centre, which will officially open on 14 February, has a specialised medical team with extensive experience in the field of fertility and pregnancy assistance. The team is equipped with the latest technology to provide free medical care services of high quality with professionalism. During the first year of its opening, the centre seeks to receive and treat 1,000 cases, with the number rising to 1,500 cases in the second year.

In-vitro fertilisation is used in cases of obstructed fallopian tubes or ovulation disorders or infertility of unknown cause with failure of other procedures and treatments.

Low sperm count
The centre can also treat infertility in males with low sperm count or severe weakness in sperm motility. In vitro fertilisation operations will be performed according to internationally accepted conditions for the success of techniques and increase in pregnancy rate, the most important of which is that the mother's age should not exceed 42 years when registering for treatment for the birth of a healthy child, and the woman's body mass index should not exceed 35, which would have a positive impact on the success of treatment, which will include women of ages 43 and 44 having good ovarian reserve that will be confirmed with test results. The mother's age is the main factor controlling the chances of

Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) success. As a woman gets older, the success rates decrease, and the success rate of ICSI at the age of 40 is very low compared to the success rate at the age of thirty or twenty.

Preservation services
The centre will provide preservation services by preserving reproductive cells, such as eggs and sperm, for the benefit of groups suffering from diseases and disorders that affect their fertility, such as cancer patients, before starting treatment that affects fertility. The Fertility Centre will receive cases referred from obstetrics and gynecology departments from all hospitals and government health complexes from all governorates, from urology clinics treating male infertility, from reproductive endocrinology clinics in the Royal Hospital and Al Wattayah Complex, from endocrine clinics, and from oncology centres to preserve eggs, sperms or embryos.



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RECOGNITION

WHO's healthy city certificate for Sur



Times News Service

SUR: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has awarded Sur city the recognition certificate for the second time in a row as a healthy city after meeting all the international criteria for healthy city. Dr. Hilal bin Ali Al Habsi, Wali of Sur and chairman of Sur Health City Committee, said that by this recognition, the city has qualified for approval as a training centre for other cities of the Sultanate of Oman interested in joining the healthy list programme. He said that the visit of the WHO delegation, last November, to the Sultanate of Oman for evaluation of Sur Health City for the second time and renewal of the recognition of the city sets a new

stage and cements the efforts for boosting the health of the society and provision of a safe and healthy life for all. He also hailed the efforts of the government departments and the private sector which played a major role for renewal of this international recognition. The initiatives of Sur Health City amounted to 14 different initiatives established on 80 criteria of evaluation in the field. The initiatives comprised Sur; the green city; Sur Souqs; social welfare, the marinas; empowerment and competency building initiative; the seafronts and Wad Health Village initiative among others. It is worth mentioning that the first recognition of Sur Health City at the Sultanate's level was in 2018. **ONA**

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Duqm Refinery worth over OMR3.5 billion inaugurated



His Majesty the Sultan and the Emir of Kuwait unveiled the curtain, marking the historic moment of opening the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries

DUQM: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq presided over the opening of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZAD) on Wednesday in the presence of Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.

When the two leaders arrived at the project's site, they were received by Sultan bin Salim Al Habasi, Minister of Finance, Dr. Imad Mohammad Al Ateeqi, Kuwait's Minister of Oil, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al Nasser Al Sabah, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Eng. Ahmed Hassan Al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Mulham bin Basheer Al Jarf, Board Chairman of OQ Group.

After that, His Majesty and the Emir of Kuwait watched an interactive visual presentation titled (Journey of Energy) delivered by a group of young national cadres.

The presentation focused on the stages of setting up the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries project, to be the largest joint investment project between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait, combined between the Omani OQ Group and the Kuwait Petroleum International Company, with a capital exceeding OMR3.5 billion. The presentation also highlighted the economic importance of the refinery.

Meanwhile, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority gave a speech during which he affirmed that the joint project reflects the deep-rooted and distinguished relations binding Oman and Kuwait.

The project is a result of collaborative efforts from both sides, said Al Murshidi, who pointed out that it is the largest investment project between two Gulf countries in the refineries and petrochemicals sector, at a cost exceeding OMR3.5 billion (USD9 billion).

He added that the foundation stone of the project was laid by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq in 2018.

He explained that the project is the first Gulf refinery to rely on imported crude oil for its operations. He further noted that it is expected to contribute to raising the total refining capacity of the Sultanate of Oman to 500,000 barrels per day, an increase of 230,000 barrels per day.

Al Murshidi concluded: "In conjunction with the opening of the Duqm Refinery, two other projects were completed: The Marafiq Company project, which supports the refinery in terms of energy and water, with an investment amounting to OMR196 million, and Oman Tank Terminal Company, which supports the refinery's work in terms of storing oil in Ras Markaz, with an investment of OMR200 million."

In his turn, Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al Nasser Al Sabah, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, gave a speech during which he affirmed that the commercial operation of the Duqm Refinery - the largest joint Gulf project - indicates the distinguished ties between Oman and Kuwait.

He added: "After reaching full commercial operation of the refinery, It will discharge and refine Kuwaiti crude oil and Omani oil, achieving the strategic objectives of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, which stipulates entering into investment opportunities with global partners to develop



its refining capacity in promising markets with the aim of reaching a refining capacity of 425,000 barrels of oil per day by 2025".

He pointed out that today's celebration is not the last station on the road to success, but rather it is a worthy pause to appreciate the efforts of the male and female workers at the Duqm Refinery to complete the progress.

He further noted: "The challenges facing the oil and gas industry

are not easy, the most important of which is the global trend towards energy transformation, which requires working together to ensure the safe and profitable operation of the refinery in order to become a global hub for innovation and leadership in the global refining industry."

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and the Emir of Kuwait unveiled the curtain, marking the historic moment of opening the Duqm

Refinery and Petrochemical Industries.

After that, the two leaders went on tour of the main control room of the refinery to learn closely about the various operations of the refinery.

They were also briefed on the production capacity that boosts the refining position of the Sultanate of Oman to exceed 500,000 barrels per day, and achieves the maximum benefit from petroleum

materials. On this occasion, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah accepted two commemorative gifts from the management of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company.

After that, the Emir of Kuwait recorded a word in the senior visitors' register. He valued this co-operation of His Majesty, the government and the Omani people, which, he described, translates the Kuwaiti-Omani partnership, especially in investing in the petrochemical industries and crystallises current and common future visions, looking forward to more partnerships that consolidate the advanced relations between the two countries and serve interests of their peoples.

At the end of the opening ceremony, a commemorative photo was taken to His Majesty the Sultan, the Emir of Kuwait and a group of staff from the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company.

The ceremony was attended by some Royal Family members, ministers, the official delegation accompanying the Emir of Kuwait, some CEOs of Oman Investment Authority's firms, CEOs of oil companies, sheikhs and dignitaries of Al Wusta Governorate. -ONA

Salalah Rotana Resort: The jewel in tourism crown of the Sultanate

Salalah Rotana Resort recently announced its commitment to obtaining certification from UNESCO, reinforcing its dedication to global sustainability standards

In an exclusive interview to Khaled Orabi, the reporter of *Al Shabiba*, the sister publication of *Times of Oman*, Ahmed Afifi, Hotel Manager of Salalah Rotana Resort, described his stint in the hospitality industry in the Middle East, spanning from Egypt to Iraq and now in the Sultanate of Oman.

He gave insights into the booming tourism season, sustainability initiatives, and the resort's commitment to providing unparalleled experiences to guests.

Afifi emphasised the resort's commitment to environmental sustainability with focus on preserving the natural beauty. The resort prioritises the use of eco-friendly materials, aligning its practices with global environmental concerns.

Highlighting Salalah Rotana's pivotal role in meeting the needs of travellers seeking sustainable accommodations, Afifi explained about the use of eco-friendly materials, underscoring the resort's dedication to environmental preservation as a preferred choice for environmentally conscious travellers.

In a significant move, Salalah Rotana Resort recently announced its commitment to obtaining certification from UNESCO, reinforcing its dedication to global sustainability standards.

Additionally, the resort received the prestigious Hospitality Sustainability Certification, showcasing its commitment to creating an eco-friendly hospitality experience.

Salalah Rotana continues to set new standards in sustainable hospitality, offering guests not only a luxurious retreat but also an opportunity to contribute to a greener and more responsible future.



Exceptional entertainment activities

Afifi also disclosed that Salalah Rotana offers an exciting array of activities and entertainment for guests of all ages, ensuring an immersive experience. From daily to weekly events, the resort guarantees a captivating experience, including noteworthy amenities for guests to savour every service. He highlighted the resort's state-of-the-art fitness centre, among the best in the city, and its renowned health spa.

Hawana Salalah: A tourism hub

Salalah Rotana Resort is an integral part of Hawana Salalah, the largest tourism destination in the region. This strategic location significantly contributes to the growth of the tourism industry in Oman. The symbiotic relationship between the resort and Hawana Salalah ensures guests to have access to countless attractions and experiences, enriching their stay.

Hawana Salalah boasts a stunning 7-kilometre long sandy beach, providing guests with a tranquil coastal haven. With thousands of palm trees, it epitomises Salalah's natural beauty, creating a haven for those seeking peace and wnatural splendour.

Technological advancements for guest comfort

Afifi explained how Salalah Rotana leverages technology to enhance guest experiences. From seamless check-ins to personalised services, the resort embraces innovation to make every guest's stay more comfortable and enjoyable.

International partnerships and market expansion

Afifi expressed gratitude and appreciation for the valuable partnerships with international travel agencies from various European countries. He outlined the resort's proactive approach to exploring new markets, with a strong focus on Scandinavian countries for the coming year. The recent launch of weekly flights from Hungary underscores Salalah Rotana's commitment to expanding its global reach.

Oman: A beloved destination

Afifi shared encouraging news about the positive reception from visitors coming from Hungary. Oman has captured their hearts, emerging as one of their favorite destinations.

This sentiment aligns with the resort's vision to make Salalah a global attraction.

HUMAN RIGHTS

OHRC takes part in food justice meet

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The delegation of the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), headed by Professor Dr. Rashid bin Hamad Al Balushi, Chairman of the Committee, concluded its participation in the international conference on 'Food Justice' from a human rights perspective in Doha.

Then meeting was held under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman bin Jassim Al Thani, Chairman of the Council, Foreign Minister of Qatar.

The conference, organised by the Qatar National Human Rights Commission, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the United Nations Development Programme Office, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the League of Arab States, aimed to provide a global dialogue platform for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, building capacities and reviewing legislation, policies, plans and programmes concerned with food justice, and developing frameworks for those working in the field of food and human rights.

The Chairman of the Omani Human Rights Commission chaired the third session of the second day.

He also presented a working paper in which he spoke about the role of national human rights institutions, non-governmental organisations, civil society and stakeholders in implementing the right to food and food justice, the role of the Omani Human Rights Commission in cooperating with contractual, non-contractual and regional mechanisms, and developing the role of the committee through monitoring, documentation and writing reports.

Dr. Rashid bin Hamad Al Balushi indicated that the OHRC monitored the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in promoting the right to food, as the Sultanate ranked third in the Arab world in the 2022 World Food Security Index report issued by the British magazine the Economist in 2023.

The Committee also monitored strengthening the system of food security during the past years.

ance of National Human Rights Institutions, the United Nations Development Programme Office, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the League of Arab States, aimed to provide a global dialogue platform for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, building capacities and reviewing legislation, policies, plans and programmes concerned with food justice, and developing frameworks for those working in the field of food and human rights.

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The Committee also monitored strengthening the system of food security during the past years.

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FOREIGN MINISTRY

Condolences

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry has expressed its condemnation and denunciation over the bombings that targeted the Balochistan region.

Oman expressed its sincere condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Islamic Republic of Pakistan and wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured.

NORTH AL SHARQIYAH

Winter events

Times News Service

MUSCAT: North Al Sharqiyah Winter 2024 activities witnessed an unparalleled turnout of visitors to Bidiya Public Park, the venue for the events that began on January 20, 2024 and continued until February 10, under the general supervision of the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate and in partnership with a number of public and private sector institutions and members of the local community.

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Malnutrition threatens 700,000 children in Sudan, warns UNICEF

The UN body has identified severe acute malnutrition as the most dangerous form, saying it was threatening 3.5 million children

KHARTOUM: The United Nations' children's agency UNICEF warned on Friday of the risk of malnutrition looming over war-torn Sudan's children, amid a shortage of aid reaching the country. James Elder, spokesperson for UNICEF, told a press conference in Geneva that tens of thousands of malnourished children could die this year.

Sudan's military, under the lead-

ership of General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, has been embroiled in a vicious, 10-month fight for power with its paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who are led by Burhan's number two, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

What did UNICEF say? Elder said that over 700,000 children are likely to suffer "from the deadliest form of malnutrition this

year," due to the past 300 days of fighting. "UNICEF won't be able to treat more than 300,000 of those without improved access and without additional support," Elder said. "In that case, tens of thousands would likely die."

He identified severe acute malnutrition as the most dangerous form, saying it was threatening 3.5 million children. This form of malnutrition makes a child 10 times more likely to die from diseases like cholera and malaria.

The UN agency is appealing for \$840 million (€778.68 million) to help just over 7.5 million children in Sudan this year. Elder deplored the lack of funds collected in previous appeals.

"Despite the magnitude of needs, last year the funding UNICEF sought for nearly three-

quarters of children in Sudan was not forthcoming," he said.

Elders also sounded the alarm regarding a "500% increase" in murders, sexual violence and recruitment of child soldiers in just one year, describing the numbers as "just the tip of the iceberg."

"That equates to terrifying numbers of children killed, raped or recruited," he said.

The conflict, ongoing since mid-April 2023, has rendered half of Sudan's population, some 25 million, in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Over 1.5 million are meanwhile estimated to have fled to neighboring countries. On Wednesday, the UN appealed for \$4.1 billion to meet the humanitarian needs of those stuck in Sudan as well as those who sought asylum elsewhere. — DW



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Senegal

Protesters clash again with security forces

DAKAR: Senegalese security forces clashed with protesters on Friday as frustration continued over the postponement of the presidential election.

Police in riot gear fired tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets in an attempt to stop the protesters from reaching Place de la Nation in Dakar.

According to the AFP news agency, a student protesting the delayed election died during the clashes, which saw demonstrators throw stones at the police and set fire to tires.

The presidential election scheduled for February 25 was delayed by President Macky Sall until December.

Protesters were also seen holding signs with slogans such as "Macky Sall is a dictator."

"We are ready to give our lives so that the people can be freed, so that Senegal can rid itself of Macky Sall," one protester told Reuters news agency.

Thierno Alassane Sall, one of the 20 candidates who had been due to vie for the presidency, added to AFP: "The situation is deplorable. We came to pray and we got gassed. It's intolerable. Senegalese must show their anger, and not just on social media."

Sall announced the postponement of the election on February 3 because of an alleged dispute



between parliament and the Constitutional Council over potential candidates who were not allowed to participate in the vote.

Having claimed in July 2023 that he would not stand for another term as Senegal's president, the decision to delay the election was viewed as a "constitutional coup" Sall used to keep himself in power.

Despite drawing criticism from the United States and European Union, the parliament backed the president's call on Monday but only after security forces stormed the chamber and removed some opposition deputies, who were unable to cast their votes.

Access to mobile data networks had been blocked since early on Monday, a move that also provoked protests. — DW



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Split Decision



Pakistan election: Imran, Sharif both claim victory

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan claimed victory in the country's general election in an audio-visual message created using artificial intelligence and shared on his X social media account.

In the message, Khan rejected rival Nawaz Sharif's earlier claim to victory. Khan called on his supporters to celebrate a win that was achieved despite what he calls a crackdown on his party.

Independent candidates backed by Khan won the most seats in Thursday's national election, despite him being in jail and his party barred from the polls.

Ex-PM Nawaz Sharif declares victory, but trails Khan loyalists

Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has claimed victory in national elections, with his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party emerging with the largest share of the vote.

Pakistan's Election Commission said official results showed that independent seats backed by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had won around 70 of the 265 seats being contested.

However, the biggest party standing directly was PML-N on 60 seats — well short of the 133

needed to achieve a majority.

Sharif said it would have been good to have obtained a clear majority, but that it was clear that his party didn't have the numbers to govern outright.

He said he would reach out to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which has so far notched up about 40 seats, to speak about a possible coalition.

"We can't hold elections again and again," he said in comments carried by Pakistan's Dawn news outlet.

"All the institutions in this country, every one, should together play a positive role in bringing Pakistan out of this crisis," Nawaz said.

"This is everyone's Pakistan, not just PML-N's. Everyone should sit in harmony and bring Pakistan out of the difficulties."

The February 8 elections have failed to end the political turmoil that has plagued Pakistan for almost two years.

Pre-election opinion polls had predicted a clear win for former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in the 342-strong National Assembly, Pakistan's lower house of parliament. But the incarcerated ex-premier's party failed to secure a simple majority, according to unofficial results.

PTI-backed candidates are projected to win a little over 100 seats, while Khan's main rival and three-time former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League is likely to bag around 80.

The Pakistan People's Party, headed by Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, has outperformed expectations by securing 50 to 60 seats and will likely be able to get the prime minister of its choice.

In the coming days and weeks, the Muslim-majority South Asian country will see intense political negotiations for a coalition government. As Khan's candidates contested the polls as independents because the Supreme Court decided to take away their electoral symbol, their loyalty to their leader will now be tested. If some chose to side with Khan's political rivals, there would be no chance of the PTI returning to power.

"Imran Khan will be handling the party matters from jail. Khan's party will form a government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and will likely be in opposition in the National Assembly. Despite his party gaining a considerable number of seats, his legal cases will reach a logical conclusion," Qamar Cheema, a political analyst in Islamabad, told DW.

— Agencies

United Nations ‘extremely worried’ about the fate of civilians in Gaza

Over 1 million people are sheltering in Rafah, as Israel’s ongoing ground offensive against Hamas has pushed people from population centres in the north near Gaza City southwards to the Egyptian border



UN rights experts say West Bank hospital killings could be war crime

A group of UN experts on Friday said an undercover Israeli military operation at a hospital in the occupied West Bank that killed three alleged Palestinian militants could be considered a war crime.

On January 29, three Palestinian men were killed at the Ibn Sina hospital in the restive city of Jenin by Israeli commandos disguised as medical workers and Muslim women.

Israel maintains the three men were part of a terrorist cell and were planning an imminent attack.

The experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, said in a statement that “under international humanitarian law, killing a defenceless injured patient who is being treated in a hospital amounts to a war crime.” One of the men killed was being treated for injuries received during an Israeli airstrike, it said.

“By disguising themselves as seemingly harmless, protected medical personnel and civilians, the Israeli forces also prima facie committed the war crime of perfidy, which is prohibited in all circumstances,” the statement added.

“We call on Israel to conduct an effective investigation,” the experts said, and urged “procedures to prevent future arbitrary killings and provide reparations to the victims.”

If Israel fails to do so, the experts said they would call on the International Criminal Court prosecutor to investigate the case.

— Agencies

GAZA: As Israel draws up its plan for military operations in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, the UN has said it is “extremely worried” about the fate of civilians there.

“What is clear is that people need to be protected, but we also do not want to see any forced mass displacement of people, which is by definition against their will,” UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

Over 1 million people are sheltering in Rafah, as Israel’s ongoing ground offensive against Hamas has pushed people from population centers in the north near Gaza City southwards to the

Egyptian border.

“The unprecedented density of Rafah’s population makes it nearly impossible to protect civilians in the event of ground attacks,” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on Friday.

“The congestion in Rafah has reached a point where normal routes are blocked by tents set up by families seeking any flat, clean space available.”

Egypt has already expressed concern that Palestinians would be forced across the border.

In December, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel must take full control of the roughly 14-kilometre long Gaza

Strip border corridor with Egypt to ensure a “demilitarization” of the area.

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UN’s Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, said “there is a sense of growing anxiety, growing panic in Rafah because basically people have no idea where to go.”

Palestinian Authority condemns Rafah offensive

The office of Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority, which maintains partial rule in the occupied West Bank, has condemned plans for an Israeli offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

“Taking this step threatens security and peace in the region and the world. It crosses all red lines,” a statement said.

Earlier on Friday, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had instructed the military to prepare a plan for evacuating Palestinian civilians from the southern Gazan city, while at the same time eliminating the remaining Hamas militant battalions located there.

It was not made immediately clear to where the civilians would be evacuated.

Abbas’ office also claimed Israel intends to displace the Palestinian people from Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has previously stated that Israel’s interest is to eliminate Hamas from Gaza. He has said it does not seek to displace Palestinians from the enclave, and has no plans for long term occupation or governance of Gaza.

Rafah, on the Egyptian border, is the furthest point south for Gazan civilians to evacuate as Israel continues its offensive against the Hamas militant group.

Over one million people are said to be sheltering there. The US warned yesterday that a military operation in the city without due planning for civilians would be a “disaster.”

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

US President ‘willfully retained’ documents, to not face charges

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden “willfully retained” classified documents after serving as vice president, but he will not face criminal charges for taking them, the US Justice Department said.

Special Counsel Robert Hur said he decided not to pursue criminal charges because Biden cooperated with his investigation and would likely prove a sympathetic defendant at trial.

“We have considered that, at trial, Mr. Biden would likely present himself to a jury, as he did during our interview of him, as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory,” Hur wrote.

Biden said he was pleased that a special counsel concluded an investigation into his handling of classified documents without bringing charges.

“I was pleased to see they reached the conclusion I believed all along they would reach – that there would be no charges brought in this case and the matter is now closed,” Biden said in a statement



released by the White House.

“I cooperated completely, threw up no roadblocks, and sought no delays,” the statement added.

In a fiery speech later on Thursday evening, Biden said some of the special counsel’s statements about his memory and that he willfully retained any classified documents are wrong.

“There’s even reference that I don’t remember when my son died. How in the hell dare he raise that?” Biden told reporters at the White House, adding that “my

memory is fine.”

Biden also insisted he believes he is the most qualified person to serve as president.

The White House also said it was “pleased” that the special counsel’s investigation was over, but objected to “inaccurate and inappropriate comments.”

“We disagree with a number of inaccurate and inappropriate comments in the Special Counsel’s report,” Biden’s White House lawyer, Richard Sauber, said in a statement. -BW

IRANIAN AMBASSADOR TO INDIA

Chabahar Port an important example of growing India-Iran cooperation

NEW DELHI: The Iranian ambassador to India, Iraj Elahi, on Friday said the cooperation and collaboration between the two countries in the development of the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor is a testament to the growing bilateral ties.

Speaking to ANI at the Iranian embassy in the national capital on Friday, the envoy said, “Economic relations between Iran and India are developing across sectors. The cooperation between the two countries in the development of Chabahar port, as the golden gateway connecting nations along the Indian Ocean to Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the cooperation in the International North-South Transport Corridor are important examples of the growing cooperation and bilateral ties.”

The Chabahar port in Iran is seen as a key component of India’s connectivity initiatives, holding immense significance as it provides a viable and shorter route for trade between India, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.

INSTC is a multi-modal transportation route linking the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran and onward to northern Europe via St Petersburg in Russia.

The INSTC envisages the movement of goods from Mumbai (India) to Shahid Beheshti Port - Chabahar (Iran) by sea, from Chabahar to Bandar-e Anzali (an Iranian port on the Caspian Sea) by road, and then from Bandar-e Anzali to Astrakhan (a Caspian port in the Russian Federation) by ship across the Caspian Sea, and after that from Astrakhan to other regions of the Russian Federation and further into Europe by Russian railways.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the Islamic Republic of Iran in New Delhi on Friday, the envoy added, “The relations between Iran and India have a long history. Beautiful Persian poems are still read in every corner of India. India, like a kind nanny, has preserved the Persian language in its heart throughout the

centuries, and the Persian poets of India have made a great contribution to the elevation of our poetry. The valuable action of the esteemed Indian government in recognising the Persian language as one of the nine official languages in the educational policy of India deserves appreciation and respect.”

He also underscored the importance of India-Iran coordination at multiple regional and global levels, saying that the interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in South Africa opened doors for a new phase or chapter in cooperation between the two nations.

“Iran and India have important coordination and cooperation at the regional and international levels. The presence of Iran and India in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and BRICS shows the cooperation of the two countries at the international level,” the envoy stated.

-ANI

BUSINESS JET

Plane crashes on Florida highway, two killed

WASHINGTON: A small plane crash took place on Florida highway on Friday afternoon, leaving two people dead, Fox News reported, citing the Collier County Sheriff’s Office, which confirmed

it to the publication.

The plane, a Bombardier Challenger 600 business jet, crashed on Interstate 75 in Naples, Florida, with five people on board.

The airplane departed from Ohio State University Airport at 1 p.m. ET, according to FOX 35.

The pilot requested an emergency landing at Naples Airport (where the jet was going), claiming that both engines had failed. -ANI



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SPORTS

Ewan sprints to stage 1 win

Australian star made a stunning dash to the line on the opening stage of the Tour of Oman on Saturday

MUSCAT: Australian sprint star Caleb Ewan of Team Jayco AlUla won the opening stage of the 13th edition of 2024 Tour of Oman which began on Saturday at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah.

The 29-year-old produced an impressive show in the 181.5 km distance race which concluded at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center to claim the stage one honours.

The stage looks to be the only real opportunity for the sprinters at this year's race, and the teams with fast men in their ranks made no mistake in bringing back the early breakaway for a bunch kick finale. Team Jayco AlUla were never far from the front of the pack in the closing kilometres as they battled for road position while guiding Ewan into the finish.

As his teammates peeled off the front one by one, Ewan bided his time before launching his devastating kick for the line. Once he made his move, there was no catching the diminutive sprinter as he raced clear to take a memorable victory.

On a slightly rising final straight, the Australian 'Pocket Rocket' got the better of Bryan Coquard (Cofidis) and Alexander Kristoff (Uno-X Mobility).

Syritsa Gleb from Team Astana Kazakhstan won the white jersey for the best young rider while Oscar Pelegri Ferrandis of Burgos-BH team claimed the golden jersey (most active and aggressive rider) on opening day.

Ewan finished the race within the shortest time as he clocked four hours 23 minutes and 28 seconds. This allowed him to clinch the red jersey and he also claimed the green jersey following his highest general points in the race till now.

Speaking after the race, Ewan said: "It is a special moment for me finally as this victory is the first win for me in this season. I had few opportunities so far this year



but I did not manage to win. "I am happy with this triumph and looking for more in the forthcoming races. In general, the race was pretty easy but the hard part was in the middle with some climbs beside some wind at the end of the race."

He added: "The weather is very nice in Oman as it is not cold and it is not hot as well. It is the perfect weather for the riders to compete

and show their top skills. It is expected to rain in the coming few days based on the weather predictions, but we hope as riders to have suitable climate to vie properly in the race."

On the race, Ewan said: "There was a breakaway at the start and then one of my teammates, he really controlled it well with

Team DSM-Firmenich PostNL and then it came back pretty



easy in the end. There was quite a lot of wind so we thought maybe there was going to be some crosswinds, but in the end it was just a headwind most of the day.

In general, the race was pretty easy, but the hard part of it was probably judging the finish line that was slightly uphill, so you just needed to time the sprint right.

This was the only sprint of the race, so no more stage opportuni-

ties for me, but we have Davide [De Pretto] here who can do a good GC so we'll be working for him from now on."

Later the chief guest, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of the Automotive, Construction Equipment, and Renewable Energy cluster in MHD, handed the awards to the top winners in presence of Sheikh Faisal Al Qasimi, President of the Arab Cycling Federation and Saif

Al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association.

On Sunday, the second stage of the 170.4 km tour will start from As Sifah and will conclude in Qurriyat. The stage profile features some climbs in Arqi.

2024 Tour Of Oman - Stage One: 1. Caleb Ewan (Team Jayco AlUla) 4:23:28, 2. Bryan Coquard (Cofidis), 3. Alexander Kristoff (Uno-X Mobility).

EMBEZZLEMENT CHARGES

World Aquatics chief in the dock

MUSCAT: World Aquatics (FINA) president Husain Al Musallam is under spotlight after allegations surfaced that there has been millions of dollars embezzled during his tenure as chief of Asian Aquatics (formerly Asian Amateur Swimming Federation).

The shocking revelation was made in a letter last week, addressed to current Asia Aquatics president Sheikh Khalid Badar Al Sabah, by the secretary general of the continental federation Taha Al Kishry from Oman. In the letter, which *Times of Oman* has seen, Al Kishry, who is also the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) secretary general, said that "millions of dollars are missing from the accounting books of Asia Aquatics".

Al Kishry said: "The support funds were released by the Public Authority for Sport in Kuwait for Asia Aquatics and amounted to USD 1mn per year from 2016-19. They have gone missing during the presidency of the current World Aquatics chief."

'Clarity on matter important' He added: "Clarity on this matter is of prime importance for maintaining the integrity and well-being of our esteemed federation."

Al Kishry has made a request to the Asia Aquatics president Al Sabah to address the matter during the upcoming Asia Aquatics Congress in Doha, Qatar, on February 12 and the letter alleging misappropriation of the funds have been sent to all 45 member nations of the continental federation.

Meanwhile, Al Musallam has also been referred to the Kuwait

Ethics Commission by the Kuwait Olympic Committee (KOC) president Sheikh Fahad Al Sabah. The KOC chief has also written to the Kuwait Minister of State for Youth Affairs, to refer the matter of Al Musallam to Public Prosecution and Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) in public interest following a disclosure that a company owned by a close relative of his was awarded contract during the third Gulf Games in Kuwait in May 2022.

Suspension

The latest charges surfaced soon after the Aquatics Integrity Unity on January 30, 2024, suspended Al Kishry, a senior sports administrator and World Aquatics Bureau member, for 18 months on charges of violations of World Aquatics Integrity Code articles 5 and 9.

The suspension precludes him from taking part in any Aquatic-related activities on behalf of World Aquatics, Asia Aquatics, Arab Aquatics, Oman Aquatics and any other World Aquatics continental organisation, member and recognised body. Soon after, Al Kishry approached Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) and in a press statement vehemently denied the "false" charges against him and termed them "unjust, malicious and arbitrary".

He alleged that the charges have been framed by the World Aquatics chief after the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) elections last year when Oman didn't support Al Musallam and voted for Sheikh Talal Al Sabah, who won the election. However, the IOC did not recognise the election.

AFC ASIAN CUP

Afif's hat-trick in Qatar's title triumph

DOHA: Akram Afif scored a hat-trick of penalties as Qatar won their second consecutive AFC Asian Cup title after defeating Jordan 3-1 in the Qatar 2023 final at a packed Lusail Stadium on Saturday.

Though Yazan Al Naimat's equaliser gave first time finalists Jordan a flicker of hope, Afif's coolness and Qatar's overall superiority saw them defending the title they won in emphatic fashion in 2019 comfortably.

Afif's hat-trick, the first of the tournament, took his tally to eight as he won the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Yili Top Scorer Award.

Ahead of the kick-off, Iraq legend and former captain Younis Mahmoud unveiled the AFC Asian Cup trophy in front of a capacity crowd at the Lusail Stadium, warming the fans up nicely for the final.

Qatar settled the faster with Afif almost catching Jordan napping in the fifth minute when he waltzed through the defence but goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila was quick off his line to thwart the danger.

Afif had another crack at goal two minutes later when Lucas Mendes did well on the right flank before sending his cross into the six-yard-box but the Al Sadd forward fired a low drive straight into the arms of Abulaila.

Qatar continued to pressure the Jordanian defence with Hasan Al Hydos threatening a delightful through ball to Almoez Ali, who was stopped in his tracks by an alert Mahmoud Al Mardi.

Limited to just counter-attacks, Jordan's Nizar Al Rashdan whipped a long ball for Ali



Olwan, with the forward setting up Yazan Al Naimat, who forced goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham to parry his powerful drive from above the box.

Jordan struggled to match Qatar's intensity and paid the price in the 22nd minute following Abdullah Nasib's clumsy challenge on Afif, who coolly slotted home the ensuing penalty to take his tournament tally to six which also confirmed him as the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Yili Top Scorer.

Jordan, having had to play second fiddle for the majority of the half, could have equalised just before the break but Mousa Tamari saw his effort from inside the box blocked by Mohamed Waad, with the Montpellier forward then failing to find the

target from close range, sending Olwan's cross over the bar.

That, however, was a prelude to what was to come from Jordan in the second half as they took the game to Qatar.

Barsham, who had a quiet game in the opening period, had to be on his toes with Olwan threatening in the 56th minute with an acrobatic effort before the shot-stopper denied Ehsan Haddad three minutes later from close range. Jordan poured bodies forward and came close again in the 61st minute when Al Tamari was denied by the post with Al Rawabdeh hitting the side netting on the rebound, but their persistence was finally rewarded in the 67th minute.

An unmarked Al Naimat showed excellent ball control

inside the six-yard-box when he collected Haddad's cross from the right flank before rifling his effort into the bottom corner.

The increased tempo paid dividends in the 73rd minute when Qatar were awarded a second penalty following Mahmoud Al Mardi's foul on Ismaeel Mohammad, with Afif again making no mistake from the spot to restore Qatar's lead.

There was no respite for Jordan as they conceded their third penalty after goalkeeper Abulaila was judged to brought down Boualem Khoukhi after a VAR review, with Afif stepping up once more to convert from the spot to complete his hat-trick in the fifth minute of added time and hand Qatar their second AFC Asian Cup title. (Inputs from www.the-afc.com)

'MUSTADEEM 4' PROGRAMME

'Mustadeem 4' programme aims to support the agriculture sector in Oman by providing independent solar energy systems for 54 Omani farms and greenhouses in the Wilayats of Al Suwaiq and Al Khaburah; areas that were previously affected by Cyclone Shaheen.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



ENERGY SHARES IN MSX

Energy and communications companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded new gains during the week that pushed the services sector index higher by 2.2 percent.

Oman's natural gas production and imports increase by 3.6%

Industrial projects accounted for 58.7 percent of natural gas uses in Oman until the end of December 2023

MUSCAT: The total domestic production and import of natural gas in the Sultanate of Oman until the end of December 2023 amounted to about 53.92 billion cubic metres, an increase of 3.6 percent compared to the same pe-

riod in 2022, which amounted to 52.61 billion cubic metres.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that industrial projects accounted for 58.7 percent of natural gas uses in the

Sultanate of Oman until the end of December 2023. The industrial projects in Oman used 31.63 billion cubic metres of natural gas.

The total use of natural gas for oil fields reached 13.52 billion cubic metres, power generation stations 8.77 billion cubic metres, and projects in industrial areas used 259.70 million cubic metres of natural gas.

It is noteworthy that the non-associated production of natural gas - including imports - amounted to 42.94 billion cubic metres while the associated production amounted to 10.98 billion cubic metres. - **ONA**



WORLD TRAVEL & TOURISM COUNCIL



WTTC President's visit to Oman amplifies Omran's global tourism leadership

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a historic stride for global tourism leadership, Julia Simpson, President & CEO of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), has concluded her strategic visit to Oman, facilitated by Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), an affiliate member of WTTC.

Spanning from February 6 to 9, 2024, this milestone visit underscores Oman's rapid advancement in the tourism sector, perfectly aligned with WTTC's vision for sustainable growth.

Tourism growth and economic impact in Oman

Under the guidance of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in partnership with Omran Group and key stakeholders, Oman's tourism sector has achieved unprecedented growth, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, the country welcomed a total of four million visitors. This growth significantly contributes to the national economy, aligning with Oman's Vision 2040 economic plan, which targets raising tourism's contribution to GDP from 2.6% to 6%-10%.

Omran's strategic role

As the country's primary driver in tourism development, Omran Group, valued at nearly \$1.5 billion and managing over 4,000 hospitality keys, is pivotal in shaping Oman's tourism future. The group's strategy integrates economic growth and diversification, respecting and harmonising with Oman's rich cultural and natural heritage. Omran Group's approach encompasses independent operations, collaborations with government, private sector, SMEs, and local communities, focusing on positive environmental and societal impacts and preserving traditional culture and values.

Statements from dignitaries

Julia Simpson, during her visit, praised Oman's significant progress in tourism, driven by Omran Group's strategic initiatives, which aligns with WTTC's principles of sustainable and inclusive growth in global Travel & Tourism. Additionally, Dr. Hashil Al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, emphasised

Oman's tourism sector has achieved unprecedented growth, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, Oman welcomed four million visitors

the Group's commitment to the National Tourism Strategy 2040, focusing on nurturing a skilled workforce and promoting sustainable tourism development.

During her visit, Julia Simpson, WTTC President & CEO said: "It has been an absolute pleasure discovering this beautiful destination which continues to attract travellers from around the world. Last year, we saw a significant boost in international arrivals, up by a third on the previous year, highlighting Oman's truly global appeal. Our recent Economic Impact Report forecasts that Oman's Travel & Tourism sector will grow four times faster than the national economy over the next 10 years. The National Tourism Strategy 2040 will support the sector's significant economic growth."

Future prospects and international engagement

The future of Oman's tourism sector is promising, with an anticipated annual growth of 7.4 per cent from 2023 to 2027. Ranked among the top 20 global destinations in 2023, the country is poised to elevate its global presence further. As the Official Guest Host Country at ITB Berlin 2024, Oman, through Omran Group's participation, is set to showcase its growing tourism potential on the world stage. This strategic participation and visit by Julia Simpson, also opens avenues for exploring potential collaboration with WTTC to host one of its prestigious events in Oman, further reinforcing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a prominent player in the global tourism arena.

NOVEMBER 2023

Assets of Islamic banks and windows rise by 11.7% to OMR7.2 billion

MUSCAT: The total assets of banks and Islamic windows combined increased by 11.7 percent to reach OMR7.2 billion at the end of November 2023 in the Sultanate of Oman compared to the same period in 2022.

The total balance of financing granted by units practicing Islamic banking increased by 11.7 percent to reach OMR5.9 billion.

Deposits at Islamic banks and windows also recorded an increase of 10.9 percent, reaching about OMR5.4 billion by the end of November 2023. - **ONA**



SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT

Nama Water initiates treated effluent network in Shakhakhit region in Barka

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a concerted effort to promote sustainable water management practices and bolster agricultural sustainability, Nama Water Services has embarked on an ambitious project to establish a treated effluent network in the Ash-Shakhakhit region of Barka, Oman.

Aligned with Oman's strategic vision to mitigate groundwater depletion and enhance environmental sanitation, Nama Water Services aims to implement international best practices for wastewater treatment and reuse. The utilisation of treated effluent water for crop irrigation not only conserves groundwater resources but also fosters the expansion of green areas and contributes to food security.

Abdulkarim bin Mohammed bin Zahir Al Hinai, Senior Operation and Maintenance Manager at Nama Water Services, underscored the significance of the project in preserving groundwater reserves and augmenting agricultural productivity. Collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth & Water Resources, the initiative reflects Nama's commitment to utilizing treated water for irrigation purposes.

"At a total cost of OMR2.3 million and an execution timeframe of one full year, the project, which has been assigned to Al-Matar Group Company, entails more than 40 km of pipelines with diameters ranging from 63mm to 500mm to supply treated effluent water to around 60 farms in the initial phase. 54 applications have been made so far to connect farms with treated effluent water," Al Hinai added.

He elaborated, "We have plans for expanding the treated water network to cover the entire area stretching from Sultan Qaboos Street towards Al-Batinah North Governorate and to accommodate the area located along Al-Batinah Highway Street on the opposite side. The plan is designed to ensure connecting more than 200 farms, in line with the project's objective of increasing the number of farms utilising the treated water, and also reflecting on the keenness of the Ministry to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by



increasing the agricultural areas and promoting the food security in the Sultanate of Oman."

Al Hinai has also explained, "The project is supervised by a joint committee comprising Nama Water Services and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth & Water Resources. Nama Water Services oversees the execution of the project through the establishment of the network and connection of the treated effluent water, noting that the utilization of the treated water will be free of charge for the first year and the connection application will be processed for a nominal fee. Moreover, the ministry is working to promote awareness among farmers of the importance of utilising treated water, and soil testing before and after connecting the water besides its role of spreading knowledge of the crops that can be irrigated by treated effluent water. The focus will be placed on the fruitful crops, except the leaf ones.

He has also pointed out, "There are future water treatment projects, including an agreement which has been already made with the Al-Amerat plant to supply treated water to a neighbouring agricultural area. The com-

pany has been also considering linking the Barka plant with the line heading to Al-Seeb with a possibility of connecting treated effluent water to Al-Seeb farms besides the connection from the Barka plant to the Agriculture Research Center in Barka.

A fundamental project Several farmers benefiting from the project expressed their pleasure in delivering treated water to their farms. They highlighted that the project would contribute to bringing some abandoned farms to life again after being unsuitable for farming; due to the soil salinity; resulting from water salinisation. It holds promise for increasing crop productivity and therefore promoting food security in the Sultanate of Oman.

Sultan bin Rashid AlKalbani, a farm owner benefitting from this vital project, expressed his appreciation to the government, represented by Nama Water Services, for developing this network to support farmers by supplying treated effluent water to their farms. Al Kalbani explained, "The project will promote cultivation of fruits and vegetables to cover the needs of local markets and contribute to food security."

"The project assumes particu-

lar importance in this area, where most farms have recently been affected by soil salinity, making farms unsuitable for cultivation. This has led farmers to be reluctant, abandon their farms, and consider converting them to other uses, including residential and industrial purposes; due to the lack of irrigation water and high freshwater prices," Al Kalbani stated.

He further pointed out, "Implementation of this project will set the farms again on the right track as it will bring them to life and stimulate their production cycle. This has also been manifested by the high turnout of farmers for connecting their farms with treated effluent water. It inspires optimism for extending green areas, maximising production and diversification of crops. It will also help to raise the farmers' income and positively reflect on their quality of life. Consumers would also benefit from this project through crop affordability and accessibility."

Explaining the high turnout of farmers to utilise the effluent water, Hamoud bin Saif AlRaqadi, a farm owner, has stressed that the high demand from farmers for the use of treated water is attributed to the shortage and salinity of groundwater. Both Ash-Shakhakhit South and Abu Al Nakheel South regions are renowned for many farms with a variety of crops. However, most farms have been deserted due to salinisation. Only a few farmers managed to keep parts of their lands; given the expenses of the water desalination.

The newly treated effluent water network will mark a new beginning in restoring the farms, expanding the green areas with different yields, and increasing crop and livestock production.

MARKET

MSX sees investors' interest in energy and communications shares

During the week, the services sector index rose by 35 points and closed at 1,627 points, recording the only increase among stock market indices



MUSCAT: Energy and communications companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded new gains during the week that pushed the services sector index higher by 2.2 percent. The shares of banks, financial and industrial companies declined, which pushed the benchmark index of the stock exchange and other sectoral indices to a decline. During the week, the services sector index rose by 35 points and closed at 1,627 points, recording the only increase among stock market indices, while the main index fell by 16 points and closed at 4,546 points. The financial sector index recorded the highest declines, losing 144 points while the industrial sector index declined by 42 points and the Sharia index recorded a fall of 3 points. The positive news for electric power and water production companies spread an atmosphere of optimism about the companies' improved performance during

the current year and their ability to continue distributing profits to their shareholders. Al Suwadi Power Company and Al Batinah Power Company said in two separate disclosures that they were able to refinance the commercial loan, and accordingly they will be able to distribute future dividends. Al Batinah Energy shares and Al Suwadi Energy shares witnessed daily purchase orders with the maximum allowable rise in one session, which is 10 percent, which prompted stock exchange management to raise the percentage to 20 percent on Tuesday. Al Suwadi Energy shares closed at 35 baisas, rising by 52.1 percent, and Al Batinah Energy shares rose by 50 percent and closed at 30 baisas. The two shares witnessed the execution of only 9 deals worth OMR10,000 as investors held on to the shares, while daily orders at the highest price exceeded 10 million shares. SMN Power Holding Company

said that Al Rusayl Power Company, a subsidiary of the company, had received an offer to extend the current power purchase agreement (PPA) with Nama Power and Water Purchase Company from February 4 to March 31, 2024. The extension agreement has been officially signed. The company's shares rose during the week by 6.5 percent and closed at 82 baisas. Dhofar Electricity Generation shares rose by 6.6 percent and closed at 48 baisas, Sembcorp Salalah shares rose to 101 baisas, rising by 5.2 percent, Barka Water Desalination shares rose by 4.3 percent and closed at 120 baisas, and Barka Water and Power shares rose by 2.2 percent and closed at 46 baisas. In the telecommunications sector, Ooredoo's stock rose by 8.5 percent and closed at 332 baisas, and witnessed trades worth OMR1.9 million, while Omantel's stock was able to rise during trading

MSX index declines in weekly trading

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani stock market concluded the week on a negative note, marking its fourth consecutive week of declines, according to an analyst. The main index retreated by 0.36 percent and could continue to slide toward new lows if sentiment remains pessimistic," said Daniel Takieddine, CEO Mena BDSwiss. "However, the market recorded smaller losses than during the previous few weeks and could stabilise to a certain extent if conditions improve. The shorter trading week saw range-bound price movements as well as weaker trading volumes and mixed sector performances," he further added. The financial sector weighed significantly on the market's performance for a second week in a row and declined the most, shedding 1.96 percent over the whole week with several banks retreating. The National Bank of Oman recorded losses exceeding 6.5 percent while Sohar Bank, Bank Nizwa, and Ahli Bank also closed in the red. The industrial sector also faced setbacks, declining by 0.77 percent, and continued to seesaw, trading mostly in a range over many weeks. Among individual stocks, Jazeera Steel Products and Almaha Ceramic experienced drops of 2.81 percent and 5.08 percent respectively. The service sector helped the market limit its losses thanks



to its strong gains this week. Services stocks climbed 2.25 percent, closing for the third successive week in the positive territory. Ooredoo emerged as one of the top performers and most traded stocks, securing an 8.5 percent gain. Other stocks like Sembcorp Salalah recorded strong performances as well. Investors could monitor the market for new IPOs after OQ's plan to float two of its units. The operations could help attract more investors and could boost trading volume and performances across the board on the Omani stock market. "However, geopolitical tensions in the region could remain a source of risks for the Muscat stock market as investors could remain cautious," Daniel said. "Oil prices could also impact sentiment while they remain well below last year's peak, although this week's rebound could positively affect the stock market if gains continue," he further added.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES

India's forex reserves at 1-month high of \$622.47bn

NEW DELHI: India's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$5.736 billion to \$622.469 billion in the week that ended on February 2, 2024, hitting a month high, the latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India showed. During the week, India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the biggest component of the forex reserves, rose by \$5.186 billion to \$551.331 billion, the central bank's weekly statistical data showed. Gold reserves during the week rose by \$608 million to \$48.088 billion. In the calendar year 2023, the RBI added about \$58 billion to its foreign exchange kitty. In 2022, India's forex kitty slumped by \$ 71 billion cumulatively. Forex reserves or foreign exchange reserves (FX reserves), are assets that are held by a nation's central bank or monetary authority. It is generally held in reserve currencies, usually the US Dollar and, to a lesser degree, the Euro, Japanese Yen, and Pound Sterling.



In October 2021, the country's foreign exchange reserves touched an all-time high of about \$645 billion. Much of the decline, though marginal on a cumulative basis, since then can be attributed to a rise in the cost of imported

goods to one riyal and 90 baisas, but it was unable to maintain this level and closed stable at its previous level, which was one riyal and 81 baisas in trades worth OMR1.1 million.

The week witnessed four trading days, with the stock market closing for the Isra and Miraj holiday on Thursday. The trading value during the week amounted to OMR11.8 million, compared

to OMR34.3 million in the previous week. The number of transactions executed decreased from 4,218 deals to 3,542 deals, and the market value of the securities declined. -ONA

STOCKS

Wall Street waltzes past its latest milestone as S&P 500 closes above 5,000

NEW YORK: More gains for US stocks on Friday sent Wall Street to its latest record, milestone and winning week. The S&P 500 rose 0.6 per cent and finished a day above the 5,000 level for the first time. It's the 10th record in less than a month for the index, which closed its 14th winning week in the last 15 to continue a romp that began around Halloween. The Nasdaq composite jumped 1.2 per cent to pull within 0.4 per cent of its own all-time high, which was set in 2021. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was a

laggard a day after setting its own latest record. It slipped 54 points, or 0.1 per cent, the Associated Press (AP) reported. Milestones like the S&P 500 at 5,000 don't carry much weight for a market that's supposed to move on hard numbers like interest rates, profits and revenue. But they can juice up the animal spirits of a market that can also be prone to emotional moves. Wall Street's rally got going with hopes that cooling inflation would get the Federal Reserve to dial down the pressure by cutting interest rates. -BNA

SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Nafath Renewable Energy, bp Oman conclude fourth cycle of 'Mustadeem' programme

MUSCAT: In partnership with bp Oman and in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Nafath Renewable Energy held a closing ceremony marking the conclusion of the fourth cycle of the 'Mustadeem 4' programme, held under the patronage of Saud bin Hamoud Al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources. The programme aimed to support the agriculture sector in Oman by providing independent solar energy systems for 54 Omani farms and greenhouses in the Wilayats of Al Suwaiq and Al Khaburah; areas that were previously affected by Cyclone Shaheen. The programme offered 30 job and training opportunities for different specialisations, and included 10 training sessions and workshops, benefiting 800 university and college students as well as the community. The workshops raised their awareness about renewable energy and agricultural sustainability. The programme also created three partnership opportunities with Omani small and medium enterprises (SMEs) contributing to the national in-country value. Dr Masaod Al Azri from Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources further commented, "This partnership between the ministry, bp Oman and



Nafath Renewable Energy served as a bridge to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040, reinforced by the determination to protect our natural environment and develop our renewable energy sector." Abdullah Al Saidi, CEO of Na-

fath Renewable Energy, further added, "We have completed the fourth cycle of the 'Mustadeem' programme with great success which marks our commitment to achieving environmental, economic, and social sustainability

by utilising renewable energy to reduce the negative impacts on our environment and promote local development and sustainability." Ibrahim Al Hinai, Social Investment Manager at bp Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar commented: "The programme is a great example of partnership between the private and government sectors to support our community and promote sustainable development. "We're supporting Omani farms and local produce by utilising renewable energy, which ultimately will reduce electricity costs and increase local farming production. This programme reflects our vision at bp Oman to reimagine energy for our society and environment and strives towards modern technologies and innovative solutions in renewable and low carbon energy."

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LIFESTYLE



GENE EDITING OFFERS HOPE TO PATIENTS WITH INHERITED DISORDERS: STUDY

According to the lead researcher, a single treatment with a groundbreaking gene-editing therapy changed the lives of a group of patients suffering from a hereditary ailment.

Patients from New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom have hereditary angioedema, a genetic disease that causes severe, painful, and sudden swelling attacks. These disturb normal activities and have the potential to cause airway damage and death. Researchers from the University of Auckland, Amsterdam University Medical Center, and Cambridge University Hospitals have successfully treated over ten patients with CRISPR/Cas9 technology, with preliminary findings just published in a leading journal. “It looks as if the single-dose treatment will provide a permanent cure for my hereditary angioedema patients’ very disabling symptoms,” said principal investigator Dr Hilary Longhurst, who is both a clinical immunologist at Auckland Hospital Te Toku Tumai and an honorary associate professor at the University of Auckland. “Plus, of course, there is huge potential for development of similar CRISPR/Cas9 treatments for other genetic disorders.” Globally, it is estimated one in 50,000 people have hereditary angio-

edema, however, because it is rare, it is often not correctly diagnosed. In the phase one study, there were no serious or lasting side effects from the single infusion, which took place over two to four hours under clinical supervision from late 2021 and onwards. The investigational therapy, called NTLA-2002, utilises in vivo CRISPR/Cas9 technology to target the KLKB1 gene, which is responsible for producing plasma prekallikrein. By editing this gene, the therapy reduces the levels of total plasma kallikrein, effectively preventing angioedema (swelling) attacks. The trial, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, demonstrated a dose-dependent reduction in total plasma kallikrein protein with reductions of up to 95 per cent achieved. A mean reduction of 95 per cent in angioedema attacks was observed across all patients through to the latest follow-up. The patients from the initial study will be followed up for a further 15 years to continue to assess long-term safety and efficacy. A larger and more robust, double-blinded, placebo-controlled phase two trial is under way and a Phase 3

trial is planned to start in the second half of 2024. Dr Danny Cohn, from the Department of Vascular Medicine at the Amsterdam University Medical Center, says these promising results are a step forward for this group of patients. “We’ve never been closer to the ultimate treatment goal of normalising hereditary angioedema patients’ lives and offering total control of the disease,” said Dr Cohn. Dr Padmalal Gurugama, consultant in clinical immunology and allergy at Cambridge University Hospitals, UK says the gene editing therapy has the potential to significantly improve patients’ lives. “Hereditary angioedema can cause patients severe swellings and intense pain which can be life-threatening as well as restricting normal activities, such as going to work or school. “Because it is often misdiagnosed, many patients undergo unnecessary treatments and invasive procedures.” The therapy affects only the patient and is not passed on to their children, who still have an even chance of inheriting the disorder. The studies have been funded by US

company Intellia Therapeutics, which chose New Zealand to lead the research as, at that time - late 2021, it had relatively fewer COVID-19 cases than other countries. So far, the only approved CRISPR therapy, CASGEVY, is for sickle cell disease and beta-thalassemia. However, CASGEVY is an ex vivo CRISPR therapy, where the cells are taken from the patient and edited outside of the body and then reinfused, whereas NTLA-2002 is an in vivo CRISPR therapy, where the targeted gene editing occurs directly within the body. CRISPR technologies are being used to develop treatments for a wide range of diseases, such as genetic disease, cardiovascular disease, cancer and autoimmune diseases. See Intellia’s website. One New Zealand patient, Judy Knox, said, “Having had the CRISPR/Cas9 therapy has been like a medical magic wand, it’s changed my life.” Before she was diagnosed, Judy would get abdominal swelling with vomiting and severe pain that could last several days. Dental surgery could prompt dangerous swelling in her mouth, includ-

ing her tongue and palette, and her throat which was excruciatingly painful and threatened to suffocate her. Once diagnosed Judy, who is a nurse in Whangarei, carefully managed her androgen medication and was prepared to increase it (within the prescribed dose) to deal with any flare-ups. In recent years supply of this medication was not always reliable which became a very real concern for her. Judy knew that there were emergency medications available in New Zealand that, although funded, were still extremely expensive. When the opportunity to participate in the study came up, she wasted no time volunteering and was one of the first people in the world to receive the CRISPR/Cas9 therapy in a clinical research centre in New Zealand. “I put my hand up and said, ‘I’ll do it.’ And because it was beneficial to others.” Another factor was her concern about the continuing availability of the drugs she needed. Now she has weaned herself off her medicines and feels she has a ‘whole new life.’ For anyone contemplating the therapy, she said, “Go for it, because it works.” -ANI

SPORTS

AFCON final: Cracker on the cards

A mouth-watering summit clash between Nigeria and hosts Ivory Coast will conclude the 2023 AFCON in Abidjan on Sunday

ABIDJAN: The moment has arrived for the champions of African football to be crowned on Sunday when the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) concludes with an enticing duel between Nigeria and hosts Ivory Coast.

In a tournament that featured plenty of surprise results, two nations familiar with success stand at the end with three continental titles for Nigeria and Ivory Coast looking to move level after two previous conquests.

The Super Eagles advanced from the semi-finals after defeating South Africa 4-2 in a thrilling penalty shootout while tournament hosts Ivory Coast booked their place in the showpiece game after edging DR Congo 1-0 on Wednesday night.

The two sides will meet in the final for the second time in the tournament having already played each other once in a group game.

Nigeria emerged then as the winners after William Troost-Ekong netted a penalty to hand the Super Eagles a 1-0 victory.

Despite being a tournament full of twists, turns and upsets, the final will be contested by two sides that have previously won AFCON.

Nigeria are three-time winners, lifting the trophy in 1980, 1994 and 2013, while Ivory Coast have been



crowned champions twice, in 1992 and 2015.

The Alassane Ouattara Stadium in Abidjan will host the highly anticipated final.

Despite the array of outstanding talents on the Nigerian roster, the three-time AFCON champions were pegged as outsiders to clinch the title heading into the tournament.

Those reservations stemmed from the performances of Jose Peseiro's side in the build-up to the AFCON finals, which left plenty to be desired.

However, the Super Eagles have squashed doubts about their ability to go the distance, mounting a dominant unbeaten streak en route to the showpiece event.

Ivory Coast's sensational run to the final has left many people scratching their heads as to how they achieved the feat, considering their topsy-turvy group phase performance.

After back-to-back defeats against Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea, the Elephants dismissed head coach Jean Louis Gasset due to 'insufficient results'.

Ivory Coast handed the reins to former Reading midfielder Emerse Fae temporarily, and that decision marked a significant turning point for the hosts, who are now one match away from a third AFCON title.

The Elephants are also on the cusp of becoming the first AFCON hosts to win the title on home turf since Egypt in 2006, where coincidentally, they finished as runners-up after losing 4-2 on penalties to the Pharaohs.

Nigeria vs Ivory Coast head-to-head

Riding a two-game winning streak



over Ivory Coast, including a 1-0 success in the group stage, Nigeria are looking to repeat history in Sunday's AFCON final.

Their previous victory over

A second-half penalty from William Troost Ekong was enough to seal a narrow victory for Nigeria last time out. But Sunday's meeting promises a cracking contest between two sides determined to be crowned kings of the continent.

Nigeria's 2023 AFCON campaign mirrors their 2013 triumph, where they settled for a share of the spoils in the curtain raiser before clinching the title in South Africa.

After their 1-1 draw against Equatorial Guinea in their AFCON opener, Peseiro tweaked his side's system, and his revised 3-4-3 set-up has been a game-changer for the Super Eagles.

The revamped system propelled the Super Eagles to four consecutive victories en route to the final, although they needed penalties to edge South Africa in a highly dramatic semi-final contest.

Peseiro's side have demonstrated defensive astuteness through their journey in the knockout stage by keeping four consecutive clean sheets and are now within touching distance of a fourth AFCON crown.

Written off after a shocking 4-0 thrashing by Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast clawed their way back from the brink of elimination, qualifying for the knockout stages as one of the best third-placed teams.

Since surviving that scare, the hosts have raised their game significantly and buoyed by the home support, they've survived several nail-biting encounters.

Their capacity to respond to setbacks has been particularly impressive, coming from behind in the last 16 and quarter-final matches against Senegal and Mali, respectively.

That fighting spirit and unwavering mental fortitude will be crucial when they come up against a dogged Nigerian side brimming with confidence. - Agencies

AFCON 2023

Burkina Faso dismiss French coach Vekud after AFCON exit

ABIDJAN: Burkina Faso are looking for a new coach after choosing not to renew the contract of coach Hubert Velud following their last-16 exit at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). The Stallions were beaten 2-1 by Mali in a tense knockout tie on 30 January, days after finishing second in Group D behind Angola but ahead of 2019 champions Algeria.

Runners-up in 2013, the Burkinabe - who have never lifted the Nations Cup trophy - had reached the semi-finals in 2017 and at the 2021 edition of the tournament two years ago.

In a statement, the country's football federation (FBF) said its executive committee "noted that results fell short of the expectations of the Burkinabe people" and reassured fans of its "desire to continue to ensure that the national flag is raised at the highest level in future events".

"To do this, it is undeniable that the management [of the Stallions], observed during this Nations Cup is out of phase with the ambitions of the executive committee," the FBF statement added.

At this year's Nations Cup in Ivory Coast, Frenchman Velud - who signed a two-year contract in April 2022 - finally took charge of a game after qualifying with a third different country for the tournament.

He was unable to lead Togo in



2010 after the team withdrew on the eve of the finals following the gun attack by separatists in the Angolan enclave of Cabinda, during which he was shot in the arm and his assistant, Amalete Abalo, and the team's media officer, Stanislas Ocloo, lost their lives.

The 64-year-old then helped Sudan reach the 2021 Nations Cup, which was delayed a year because of the coronavirus pandemic,

only to be sacked weeks before the finals in Cameroon following a bad performance in the Arab Cup.

The FBF said it is already planning for both the 2025 Nations Cup and 2026 World Cup, with the latter's next qualifiers taking place in June.

The West Africans have four points after their first two World Cup qualifiers, and are two points behind Group A leaders Egypt.

Velud is the eighth coach to

have left his position since the beginning of this year's Nations Cup, which climaxes on Sunday when hosts Ivory Coast meet Nigeria in the final.

He joins Jean-Louis Gasset (Ivory Coast), Chris Hughton (Ghana), Djamel Belmadi (Algeria), Jalel Kadri (Tunisia), Tom Saintfiet (Gambia), Rui Vitoria (Egypt) and Baciro Cande (Guinea-Bissau) as having departed their roles. - Agencies

MARCH GAMES



China cancel two Argentina friendlies amid Messi backlash

BEIJING: Chinese officials have cancelled two Argentina friendlies that were due to take place in the Asian country after Lionel Messi did not play for Inter Miami in a match in Hong Kong, BBC Sport reported on Saturday.

The world champions were set to face Nigeria in Hangzhou and the Ivory Coast in Beijing in March.

Fans in China were angered when the Argentina captain did not play for his club against a Hong Kong XI on Sunday.

Messi, 36, said he could not play because of a groin injury.

However, his non-appearance drew widespread criticism in China when he then featured off the bench three days later against Vis-

sel Kobe in Japan.

"Beijing does not plan, for the moment, to organise the match in which Lionel Messi was to participate," the Beijing Football Association said on Saturday.

When the Hangzhou match was cancelled on Friday their sports bureau said: "Given the reasons that everyone knows, according to the competent authorities, the conditions for the event to take place are not met."

Fans in Hong Kong jeered Inter Miami co-owner David Beckham and chanted for their money back after Messi did not take to the pitch.

They have since been promised a 50 percent refund by match organisers Tatler Asia. - Agencies

INDIA VS ENGLAND TESTS



India's star batter Kohli to miss rest of England series

MUMBAI: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the squad for the remaining three Tests of the five-match series against England, with star batter Virat Kohli set to miss the remaining matches as well due to personal reasons.

Kohli had earlier missed the first two Tests. Now, his absence is extended to three more games. His last appearance came in the T20I series against Afghanistan earlier in January.

"Virat Kohli will remain unavailable for selection for the remainder of the series due to personal reasons."

"The Board fully respects and supports Mr. Kohli's decision," said a statement from the board on Saturday.

Shreyas Iyer has been left out of India's squad for the remaining three Tests against England.

Sarfraz Khan and Rajat Patidar are also a part of the series.

The participation of batter KL Rahul and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is subject to their fitness, said BCCI. Both had missed the

second Test, Jadeja with a hamstring injury and Rahul with a quad niggle.

Mohammed Shami, who had missed the first two Tests due to injury, continues to sit out.

Bengal seamer Akash Deep got his maiden Test call-up.

The five-match Test series against England currently stands at 1-1.

The third Test starts on February 15 in Rajkot, before the teams move to Ranchi for the fourth game from February 23.

The fifth and final Test will

be played in Dharamsala from March 7.

After a 28-run loss in the first Hyderabad Test, India won the second Test at Visakhapatnam by 106 runs.

Squad: Rohit Sharma (captain), Jasprit Bumrah (vice-captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, KL Rahul, Rajat Patidar, Sarfraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep. - ANI

REDTAG launches new homeware collections

REDTAG begins its Ramadan specials with festival-themed dinnerware and deluxe furnishings, along with exclusive offers to welcome shoppers to a season of prayer, celebrations and reflection

MUSCAT: REDTAG, the Middle East's leading fashion and homeware brand, known for its superior quality, value-based pricing, and styles with a cultural twist, is back with Ramadan collections that have struck a chord with customers over the years. Arriving just in time as preparations for Ramadan commence, the new homeware collections



comprise festival-themed dinnerware and deluxe furnishings for decor-rich Iftar hosting and ambient settings. Decorative cushion covers in off-white and natural earthtones are embellished with leafy golden motifs or applique works to radiate the festive spirit. Throw pillows in embossed velvet and geometrical patterns add the right contrast and colourful cheer to the living room. Staying true to its value-centric approach, REDTAG has launched homeware products characterized by craftsmanship, functionality, and affordability. The Ramadan homeware will be accompanied by exclusive offers, marking REDTAG's long-standing tradition of welcome deals with new collections. Shehbaz Shaikh, Chief Retail Of-



ficer of REDTAG, said that Ramadan gives us an opportunity to design homeware at the intersection of tradition and modernity. "The new homeware collections are a product of our homegrown advantage, awareness of global trends, and core competencies in quality, value-based pricing, and craftsmanship. It will induce a festive spirit in homes and a sense of Ramadan readiness in its inhabitants." Craftsmanship is evident in exotic dinnerware consisting of serving trays, brass cutlery, and porcelain bowls in ivory white with golden edges. Decorated trays and luxury hammered-style glass cloches can house Suhoor and Iftar treats for indulgence in the Ramadan after-hours. Ceramic plates with golden leafy imprints will leave the guests



feeling special, only for the new collection's deluxe beddings to say the best is yet to come. The Ramadan homeware collection's highlight is beddings in stunning colours like powder blue and with imperial-style embroidery work in gold. The grandeur of the beddings perfectly complements tulle curtains in sober colours and the exquisite bell-jar glass fabric-shaded bedside table lamps. "The colour gold appears across the Ramadan homeware collection, symbolizing the festival's radiance on our culture and communities," explained Shaikh. The Ramadan homeware collection, accompanied by REDTAG's ongoing 'New Lower Prices' initiative, promises customers a season of value shopping.



Europcar Oman and Bahrain wins 3 'Customer Favourite Awards'

MUSCAT: Europcar Oman & Bahrain, a leading mobility services company has recently achieved a remarkable feat by winning three Best Customer Service Awards for 2023! These accolades highlight the company's commitment to excellence and its dedication to providing unparalleled service to customers. Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport in Oman and Bahrain International Airport were recognized by world leading popular online platforms Rentalcars.com and booking.com, reaffirming the exceptional customer experience offered by Europcar in these locations. This remarkable achievement (over 10 car rental companies

operate at each of the three airport locations) can be attributed to the company's employee-centric approach and their relentless pursuit of customer satisfaction. Europcar's success story in Oman and Bahrain is undoubtedly linked to their focus on employee well-being. The company understands that satisfied employees translate into satisfied customers. By creating a positive work environment, Europcar empowers its employees to go above and beyond to ensure customer satisfaction. This focus on employee well-being results in a motivated and dedicated workforce that consistently delivers exceptional service.

SHARIA-COMPLIANT

Experience world-class service with Meethaq Islamic banking savings account



MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking, from Bank Muscat, solidifies its dedication to financial inclusion with a progressive savings account. This account is designed to provide customers with a range of Sharia-compliant product and services, aligning seamlessly with Meethaq's ongoing commitment to excellence. Meethaq encourages customers to open a savings account that cater to vari-

ous customer segments, including the elderly who can conveniently receive their social benefits while enjoying an array of various advantages. Demonstrating leadership in customer-focused solutions, the savings account helps customers achieve their long-term objectives and also contributes to fostering a robust savings culture in Oman. Key features of the Meethaq savings account

include a competitive rate credited to the customer's account on a monthly basis, no minimum balance requirement for profit eligibility, free life Takaful for customers maintaining an average balance of RO 30,000, no minimum balance fee and Debit Card with a daily cash withdrawal limit of RO 600 on local ATMs. Moreover, customers benefit from the convenience of managing their accounts seam-

lessly through 24x7 electronic banking services, enjoy global purchases at millions of Visa endorsed shopping outlets, pay bills for electricity, water, telephone, internet and school fees. Opening a Meethaq savings account is a hassle-free experience, supported by a straightforward documentation process and the flexibility of multiple currencies, including OMR, USD, AED and GBP.

POPULAR LUXURY BRAND

Get more from every drive with Lexus Hybrid Electric range



MUSCAT: Lexus has pioneered the Hybrid Electric technology becoming a popular luxury brand that takes luxury ownership experiences to all-new levels. The Lexus Hybrid Electric range revolutionises luxury with its bold performance and fuel-efficient driving experiences. In Oman, the Lexus Hybrid Electric range includes the ES, LS, LC, NX and RX. The Lexus ES Hybrid has an impressive design language that makes a lasting impression. From the headlights to the sleek profile, the ES Hybrid is a head-turner from every angle. The Lexus ES Hybrid is available with two powertrain options. The ES Hybrid is automatically charged either by petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord. Furthermore, it hosts number of advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional car and does not require special fuel. The ES Hybrid offers an impressive 24.1 km/L mileage. The LS is available with a 3.5-liter V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System that combines the internal combustion engine with the electric traction system to produce 354 hp. The LS Hybrid is fitted with a compact, lightweight, lithium-ion hybrid battery. It is 20 percent smaller than the nickel-metal hydride unit featured in the previous Lexus LS

600h, yet has a higher power density. Using lithium-ion technology has also reduced the component's weight, helping reduce the car's overall mass, thus supporting overall fuel economy of 16.1 km/l, emissions performance and handling balance. The Lexus LC500 Hybrid is a powerful, emotionally stirring realization of the vision of Lexus master driver Akio Toyoda for a flagship production coupe that echoes the spirit of the hand-built Lexus LFA supercar and delivers the visual impact of the Lexus LF-LC concept. The LC is the first Lexus hybrid to use a compact, lightweight lithium-ion battery. The battery pack fits neatly between the rear seats and the luggage compartment and has a high-power density. Lexus developed a new Multi Stage Hybrid System specifically for the LC500 Hybrid. Like other Lexus hybrid configurations, the Multi Stage Hybrid System teams the gasoline engine with two electric motors/generators, but similarities end there. The Atkinson-cycle 3.5-liter V6 gasoline engine uses D-4S direct fuel injection, and lightweight valve train components allow a 6,600-rpm redline, with Dual VVT-i ensuring ample torque across the engine speed range. The LC Hybrid offers an impressive mileage of 17.1 kmpl. The fifth-generation RX Hybrid has been completely reim-

aged to deliver greater style, comfort and performance with a choice of three powertrains, two of which are electrified. Complementing the RX Hybrid's distinctive design is a thrilling drive personality imbued by a hybrid-electric system pairing a 2.4-liter turbocharged engine with an electric motor which provides a combined power of 366 hp mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission. The Lexus NX Hybrid makes a fine mark with its sleek and distinctive design that makes it stand out instantly. Adding to this dynamic design is the NX's hallmark spindle grille. The front design features 3-eye LED headlights incorporating Lexus' first slim Adaptive High-beam System (AHS). The NX is equipped with a hybrid-electric system that combines two power sources consisting of a 2.5-liter petrol engine and two electric motors producing 240 hp. The hybrid-electric system is also mated to a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT). All Lexus Hybrid vehicles are available with 8 years/160,000km battery warranty (whichever is earlier). In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000km (whichever is earlier) and 1st year 2 free pickup and drop for periodic service and 24 hours free on-road assistance from e-Fetch for 3 years.

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ROUND-UP

A tasteful celebration ‘From Shangri-La with Love’ campaign

Couples are invited to immerse themselves in a romantic journey featuring specially crafted dining experiences, exclusive dinner affairs, and alluring stay offers under the umbrella campaign ‘From Shangri-La with Love’

MUSCAT: To celebrate the month of love, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, unveiled a series of Valentine’s experiences for couples. Nestled in a dual resort complex, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and the adults-only clifftop retreat, Shangri-La Al Husn has lined up special romantic activities from February 11 to 17.



Couples are invited to immerse themselves in a romantic journey featuring specially crafted dining experiences, exclusive dinner affairs, and alluring stay offers under the umbrella campaign From Shangri-La with Love. Diners are invited to indulge their senses in a gastronomic delight within the resort’s four specialty venues. Bait al Bahr, Capri Court, Aangan by Rohit Ghai, and Sultanah beckon with enticing 4

or 5-course set menus, inclusive of welcome bubbles, chocolates, and roses on the house, from OMR 40 per person. This culinary journey is available throughout the Valentine’s week, from 11 to 17 February, creating an unforgettable atmosphere of togetherness. For those seeking an intimate dining experience, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah offers the Dine by Design, whether it’s a beachfront or garden setting, couples can enjoy a romantic 4-course seafood set menu at OMR 160 per couple or go the extra mile with a tailored dining experience over the clifftop of Shangri-La Al Husn, featuring a 5-course set menu paired with a bottle of bubbles, against the spectacular backdrop.

Al Tanoor at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah serving cuisines from the Arabian Gulf region, sets the stage for a romantic buffet dinner on February 14 at only OMR 29 per person, creating the perfect ambiance for a heartwarming celebration. Sultanah, the fine dining venue is poised to host a special Valentine’s Edition –the Jazz & Grill evening on February 15 at OMR 60 per person. Guests are welcome to extend the celebration by availing tasting menus at Capri Court and Aangan by Rohit Ghai, available from February 18 to March 9. Local residents of Oman can extend the celebrations with an exclusive staycationbetween February 11 and 17 at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, from OMR 110 per night. It offers stays inclusive of breakfast and a romantic dinner for two in any dining venues of their choice, a romantic turn down service in room, and more at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah. Shangri-La Al Husn also offers a relaxed escape including breakfast, a romantic dinner, pre-dinner drinks with canapé at OMR 170 per night for two.



MEDICAL EDUCATION



Badr Al Samaa holds CME on advanced orthopaedics

MUSCAT: Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, largest private healthcare group of Oman, under the banner of Badr Treatment Abroad, a facilitation wing focusing on ensuring advanced treatments are done in Oman and provide assistance in treatment abroad organised Continuing Medical Education (CME) event focused on the latest advancements in orthopaedics.

This educational initiative aimed to provide healthcare professionals with valuable insights into emerging trends, innovative treatments, and best practices in orthopaedic care.

The CME was attended by managing directors of Badr Al Samaa, Abdul Latheef Uppala and Dr. P A Mohammed, Executive Director of Badr Al Samaa, Moideen Bilal, Guests of Honour, Professor Jalaluddeen MV and Dr. Ahmed Rizwan CM, senior management of Badr Al Samaa, and doctors.

Moideen Bilal presented the welcome note. He said that Badr Al Samaa has the vision of providing every advanced medical treatment in Oman and we are taking all possible initiatives to ensure that such services are made available here in Oman.

4 well qualified and renowned Orthopaedicians from India presented various topics in the CME and shared their successful cases. Dr. Latheesh Leo, Hand & Micro Surgeon, presented the topic Hand and Microsurgery: beginning with the end in mind.

Dr. Sandeep Shibli, Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon presented on Paediatric Orthopaedics: pushing beyond boundaries. Dr. Hashir Safwan U, Spine and Scoliosis Surgeon presented on Uncomplicating the Curve: Scoliosis. Dr. Navaneeth S Kamath, Orthopaedic Oncology Surgeon presented on Then & Now: Limb Salvage in Orthopaedic Oncology. All the sessions were followed by interactive sessions and had good participation from the doctors present.

Managing Directors of Badr Al Samaa, Abdul Latheef Uppala and Dr. P A Mohammed in a joint statement said that Badr Al Samaa under its Badr Treatment Abroad program has a vision that the people of Oman requiring high end surgical interventions need not to travel abroad, Badr Al Samaa will felicitate the process of making the best surgeons across the world and advanced technology available within Oman to add to the convenience and cost saving for the deserving patients.

Guests of Honour, Professor Jalaluddeen MV and Dr. Ahmed Rizwan CM in a joint statement said that the orthopaedics surgery and many other medical specialties have evolved a lot in recent years and expressed happiness in collaborating with Badr Al Samaa to introduce these advancements in Oman and benefit the patients who are otherwise required to wait for long time or have to travel abroad for such treatments.

LAUNCH OF UNIQUE EDITION

Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition revealed exclusively at Range Rover House

DUBAI: The Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition – a breathtaking example of bespoke curation inspired by the heritage of the Arabian Gulf – has been revealed to an exclusive audience at Range Rover House in Abu Dhabi.

Set along the spectacular shores of the Arabian Gulf, Range Rover House provided the ideal backdrop for the SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition, allowing select guests to experience the essence of Range Rover and enjoy a curated luxury experience.

Influenced by the region’s long association with the Arabian Gulf and seaborne trade, the Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition’s unique colour combination is inspired by the long, rich tradition of pearl diving, an integral part of the history and culture of the region.

Professor Gerry McGovern OBE, Chief Creative Officer, JLR, said: “Taking inspiration from the heritage of the Arabian Gulf the Range Rover SV Sadaf edition is a sublime example of Range Rover’s peerless DNA; beautifully crafted, understated and highly desirable.”

Range Rover designers took inspiration from the unique colours of the natural pearls and the seashells that contain them to create the Range Rover Bespoke SV Sadaf Edition. An exclusive ‘glass pearl flake’ white gloss exterior paint, inspired by the white of seashells, provides a deep and sophisticated finish, paired with a pearlescent contrast roof that complements the seashell-toned exterior colour and 23-inch Diamond Turned SV wheels with gloss dark grey contrast and matching inserts. On the bonnet, beautifully sophisticated two-piece hand crafted metal script badging is finished in 24k gold and black chrome, for a jewellery-like finish.

Inside, a bespoke interior has been meticulously crafted in duotone leather, featuring semi-aniline Perlino front seats, while the upper section of the dashboard and the rear seats are covered in



Liberty Blue near-aniline leather that reflect the blue colour of the Arabian Gulf. Natural Cream Ash Burr veneer with contrasting stitching and bespoke embroidery highlight the exclusivity of the vehicle. The treadplates feature the ‘Sadaf Edition’ wordmark alongside a ‘1 of 20’ designation.

Bruce Robertson, Managing Director of JLR MENA said: “The

Middle East is one of the most important markets for JLR and Range Rover.

“Our clients in the region have a unique taste and know exactly what they are looking for in a vehicle that fits their lifestyle. The Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition not only shows that we listen to our clients and strive to satisfy their discerning tastes, but

also it truly exemplifies the capabilities of SV Bespoke and demonstrates how we can go above and beyond their expectations”.

The Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition is powered by Range Rover’s 615ps V8 twin-turbo mild hybrid petrol engine. It is exclusively available for sale in the Middle East region with production limited to just 20 units.

Heightening its exclusivity, clients will receive a custom-made sculpture, designed by renowned Emirati conceptual designer and sculptor Matar Bin Lahej, who gained worldwide fame for his design and calligraphy work that wraps the Museum of the Future building in Dubai.

Range Rover House is a unique destination held at the Anantara Santorini Abu Dhabi, an exclusive new destination in Abu Dhabi set to open its doors in mid-February 2024. The Santorini-inspired hotel exemplifies the natural beauty of reductive design which is synonymous with Range Rover.



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OMAN INDUSTRY DAY



SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

C1 | SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2024

INDUSTRIAL SECTOR CONTRIBUTES TO OMAN'S GROWTH AND PROSPERITY

MUSCAT: The industrial sector is an essential pillar of economic diversification in Oman Vision 2040. It is an engine of growth and a vital engine for other economic sectors.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion chose the slogan "Factory Automation and Artificial Intelligence" to celebrate this year's Omani Industry Day, which is annually held on February 9.

With the aim of continuing the growth process in the prosperous era to broader horizons and sustain-

able development, Dr. Saleh Said Masn, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, said that the government believes in the importance of the industrial sector and its desire to make the Sultanate of Oman a leading investment destination.

In a statement to the Oman News Agency, he stressed that the manufacturing sector continues to contribute effectively to the national economy, as its contribution to the gross domestic product reached 9.3 percent at the end of September 2023, equivalent to OMR2.45 billion at constant prices.

Omani workers

The number of Omani workers in the sector and those insured reached more than 33,000, while direct foreign investments in the industrial sector amounted to more than OMR1.4 billion.

Dr. Saleh Said Masn added that it has become necessary for the Omani industrial sector to adopt modern technologies to enhance its efficiency, diversify its products and raise their quality, and improve environmental and economic sustainability, with the acceleration of the global shift towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

He confirmed that the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion will work to implement a set of initiatives, including automating Omani factories, adopting artificial intelligence technologies, and moving toward a circular economy. During this year's Industry Day ceremony, some specific projects will be announced that aim to raise the sector's productivity and reduce operational costs by adopting practical programmes to automate factories and raise their operational efficiency.

16.7 %

The contribution of industrial activities to the GDP at current prices

8.1 %

Contribution of manufacturing industries

1.4 BN OMR

Foreign investment volume in the manufacturing industries

By the end of the third quarter of 2023





Total volume of investments in Madayn’s industrial cities surpasses OMR7.4 billion

MUSCAT: Engineer Daoud bin Salem Al-Haddabi, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), confirmed that the celebration of Omani Industry Day, which the Sultanate of Oman celebrates annually on the ninth of February.

This year, Madayn continues to achieve increasing growth rates in its various digital indicators, and to expand in various governorates by developing new industrial cities or developing existing ones, thanks His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said and his patronage to the industrial sector, and his generous continuous directives to provide appropriate investment environment for the localisation of investments in line with the objectives of “Oman Vision 2040”.

The CEO of Madayn said in a statement to the Oman News Agency that the volume of investment added to Madayn in 2023 exceeded OMR207 million, bringing the total volume of investment in all its industrial cities, including the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) and the Al Mazyouna Free Zone, to more than OMR7.4 billion.

He added that the number of nationalised projects reached 2,063 projects in various stages (including existing, under construction, and those for which land was allocated), with 55,242 workers in these projects, of whom national cadres constitute 38 percent. The total area under the industrial cities affiliated with Madayn reached about 163.2 million square metres, of which 33.6 million square metres have been rented.

Engineer Daoud Al-Haddabi pointed out that the Madayn Entrepreneurial Complexes Project was the latest value-added initiative offered by Madayn in cooperation with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority to support owners of entrepreneurial ideas and small and medium enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman, where the idea was to provide complexes for ready-made model factories in industrial cities. To empower the industrial sector and localise more investments, as this project aims to empower SMEs in the industrial sector, and to find vital locations for them in the various industrial cities affiliated with Madayn, which leads to linking these institutions operating in the industrial sector with promising business opportunities and reducing costs. Productivity of these factories and accelerating production processes in addition to increasing and improving production efficiency. Madayn, in cooperation with the Authority, has begun to actually implement

this project, with the design process completed, the consultant has been selected, and the construction tender for the complex in Nizwa Industrial City has been issued. Work is underway on the executive plan for the complex and details of the designs and works. Construction in the Rusayl Industrial City is currently underway between the two sides to implement the royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

Work for the two industrial complexes in the Musandam Governorate, specifically in the Maahas Industrial City in the Wilayat of Khasab and the Saih Al-Wasat Industrial City in the Wilayat of Madha is also underway.

Engineer Dawoud Al-Haddabi further confirmed that Madayn continues to pay great attention to the digital transformation sector and works in accordance with the directions of the national vision and the general framework of the unified government digital transformation program approved by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in accordance with the latest plan for the period (2021-2025).

Madayn has been able over the past two years to achieve many achievements in this aspect, and this is reflected in its continuous progress in the evaluation carried out by the Ministry within the programme of proficiency in government digital transformation, where Madayn reached by the end of the year 2023 to 74 percent within the green level, up from 62 percent a year ago, and 52 percent two years ago, which confirms that the digital transformation in Madayn is on the right path, and the administration has directed all those working on the project To work on the development aspects mentioned in the Ministry’s report.

He stated that one of the most prominent digital systems implemented by Madayn during the executive plan for digital transformation (2021-2025) is the new administrative and financial system for managing all of the organisation’s resources and raising internal operational efficiency in the work environment, gradually replacing a number of previous administrative systems.

The new Masar electronic platform for investor services, through which one can apply for all the services provided by Madayn to its clients, where 43 various services have been launched, including services specific to investment, contracts, or permits, in addition to general services related to operations and inspection, and they are



The total area under the industrial cities affiliated with Madayn reached about 163.2 million square metres, of which 33.6 million square metres have been rented.

available to investors.

Existing or potential employees from anywhere in the world, and also the My Services platform, which provides internal services for employees, through which they can access all the services provided by the various departments according to the administrative divisions in the organisational structure, whether in the main office or the industrial cities, where 101 services were launched.

In addition to other systems, such as the deposit system related to managing all aspects of work in the Al Mazyouna Free Zone, it includes 52 electronic services distributed between deposit, clearance, storage, maintenance, destruction, and manufacturing operations in the free zones, and the geographic mapping system (Explore platform), where Madayn applies geographic mapping systems. Since 2009, it has been one of the first government institutions to implement a system for displaying lands, sites, products, and types of industrial activities in an integrated mapping system. During the first year of the digital transformation plan, a comprehensive restructuring of the geographic mapping system took place, allowing the display of land categories and investment opportunities in industrial cities, and

Darba e-learning platform, which is concerned with providing various training programs and workshops for employees, which currently includes a diverse library of about (2,500) titles that vary between specialized and administrative programmes that vary in terms of content and duration of implementation of each program, and a system of interfaces and statistical reports that works to provide a unified interface for all indicators. Main city of Madayn; whether related to investors, property, working human resources, or products, in addition to the presence of a correspondence system related to managing all correspondence and documents that are exchanged internally or with government and private agencies, while providing the electronic signature and seal feature, and applying the standards of the Documentation Authority and the approved classification of data, while providing the possibility Mobile access.

Engineer Daoud Al-Haddabi explained that Madayn is constantly working to improve the efficiency of the investor services system

in all its industrial cities through Masar service centres, which aim to raise the level of services provided to investors by accelerating and simplifying procedures, and strengthening relations with partners to provide integrated services to the investor and consolidate the relationship with him in order to It provides a safe business environment, in addition to providing accurate statistical data for investors. The number of visitors to these centers in various industrial cities during the year 2023 exceeded 60,000 visitors, while during the same year more than 55 thousand various services were provided in record times. The average duration reached in One of the cities is 3 minutes away, and specialists in Madayn are currently working on developing a new interactive system to receive reports and quickly respond to them in line with modern technologies.

He said that the corporation’s electronic system for managing entrances to industrial cities, “Nafez Madayn,” provided a system of advanced technological solutions that brings together the latest developments in smart gate systems, software applications, and advanced infrastructure, in order to harness them to improve the flow of operations through management, control, and monitoring of the entry of trucks, cars, and individuals into industrial cities. Madayn has begun implementing this system in three industrial cities so far, namely Rusayl, Sohar and Nizwa. During the year 2023, the system recorded more than 5.6 million entry movements in these three cities, and more than 1.14 million truck movements. The system currently has more than 35,000 registered trucks and equipment, in addition to registering more than 7,500 transport companies, more than 8,000 individual carriers, and 45 service providers. Given the success of

the system’s experience in several aspects related to facilitating entry processes, codifying and providing goods statistics, weighing, and communication, the system is working Madayn is currently working with partners to expand the experiment and apply it in the rest of its industrial cities.

He stressed that Madayn places the occupational safety and health control system among its priorities to provide an integrated business environment in its various industrial cities, and the organisation works for this by intensifying its efforts to reduce accidents, injuries and occupational diseases, in addition to promoting the goals and principles of health and environmental awareness for all business owners. And investors, in this regard, during the years 2022 and 2023, the Corporation carried out 5,689 health inspections in various industrial cities, and 4,870 operations on health, safety and environmental systems, in addition to 854 inspections to assess risks and activate procedures for obtaining an insurance policy. The specialists in Madayn also carried out In cooperation with the relevant authorities during the year 2023, 362 emergency and evacuation plans were conducted for the corporation’s administrative buildings and industrial facilities.

On the other hand, he explained that Madayn seeks to build a better environment for living and working to ensure the continuity of preserving the environment and protecting it from air, soil and water pollution in response to the challenges facing the environment as a result of various forms of pollution and climate change, as Madayn’s vision aims to encourage environmental awareness and achieve zero carbon emissions by The year 2050, especially in the industrial sector by improving and developing technology related to clean energy, as Madayn works in cooperation with partners to enhance awareness among investors in various industrial cities to encourage them to use safe, sustainable and innovative alternative sources by focusing on several axes, including hazardous and non-hazardous waste management. Hazardous waste, discharge of liquid waste into the marine environment, emissions of air pollutants, noise emissions, use and handling of chemicals (storage, transport and loading of chemicals), storage of hazardous materials, building demolition and asbestos disposal, land pollution, water and energy consumption. - OMA

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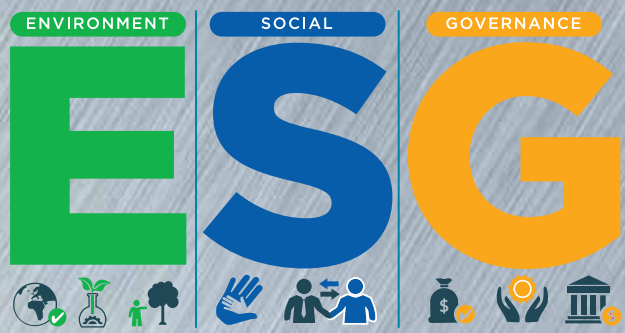
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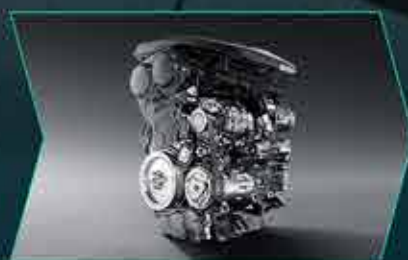
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DRIVE-E 2.0TD T5 TURBO ENGINE
0-100KM/H 6.7S



FOUR DRIVING MODES
ECO | COMFORT | SPORTS | OFF ROAD



FINGERTIP TOUCH
ELECTRIC TAILGATE



SAP+
SEMI AUTO PARKING



Showroom - Ghala Heights, Muscat

EMI mentioned are of the base models, subject to 20% down payment & calculated @5.25% reducing interest PA from Bank Muscat for a tenure of 8 years (conditions apply) & subject to approval. Vehicle shown are for illustrative purposes. Specifications subjected to change without notice. For more details, please visit our showroom. Offer valid only for private vehicles. Not available on fleet. Ministry & Taxi / Rental / commercial car purchases.

☎ 71611137

🌐 lynkcooman.com

📱 @lynkcooman

FROM SHANGRI-LA with Love

From 11 - 17 February



LOVE BY THE BEACH

Stay includes breakfast, dinner or a credit of OMR 50 per couple, in-room turn down, early check in and late check-out.

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah
From OMR 110++ per couple per night



SEASON OF LOVE

Stay includes breakfast, romantic dinner or credit of OMR 60 per couple, mini bar, afternoon high tea, pre-dinner drinks and more!

Shangri-La Al Husn
From OMR 170++ per couple per night



EXCLUSIVE CLIFFTOP DINNER

A dreamy bespoke dinner on the spectacular clifftop of Shangri-La Al Husn, one of the most iconic and Instagrammable spots in Muscat.

5-course set menu with a bottle of bubbles
OMR 250 per couple



DINE BY DESIGN

A special experience by the beach or in the privacy of our gazebo in the garden.

4-course set menu with a bottle of bubbles
OMR 160 per couple



CUPID-APPROVED DINNER

Romantic 4-course menu with a welcome glass of bubbles

Bait Al Bahr, from 6pm - 11pm
Capri Court, from 7pm - 11pm
OMR 40 per person, per venue



CASTLE ROMANCE

Toast to love with a sumptuous 5-course set menu paired with a welcome glass of bubbles.

Aangan by Rohit Ghai, from 6:30pm - 10:30pm
OMR 45 per person

Sultanah, from 7pm - 10:30pm
OMR 60 per person

Shangri-La Al Husn welcomes guests over 16 years old.



VALENTINE'S BUFFET 14 February

A generous spread, designed to make your heart skip a beat.

Al Tanoor, from 6:30pm - 10:30 pm
OMR 29 per person



JAZZ & GRILL SPECTACLE 15 February

A barbecue overlooking the Gulf of Oman, on the terrace of Sultanah.

Sultanah, from 7pm - 10:30pm
OMR 60 per person



LAYERS OF LOVE 18 February - 9 March

Tasting menu with signature dishes from Capri Court and Aangan by Rohit Ghai.

OMR 19 net per person, per venue

Extra savings for Shangri-La Circle members in Oman:
20% on food and beverages, up to 30% on wellness, spa and leisure activities

☎ 2477 6262 📞 79269247