

Times

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OF OMAN



50

YEARS OF LEGACY

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HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM HIGHLIGHTS SHURA COUNCIL’S ENHANCED ROLE IN NATION-BUILDING



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met with the Chairman of the Shura Council and members of the Shura Council Office at Al Barakah Palace on Thursday. At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty praised Allah for His blessings and abundance bestowed upon Oman, its loyal people and residents. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant continuous prosperity to this blessed land, to bless everyone with health and well-being, and to crown all benevolent efforts with success and guidance. **ONA • Details on >A4**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN
Non-oil sectors' contributions rise

1 Oman's non-oil sectors continue to play their vital role in economic growth. **>A2**

OMAN
New vehicle for public transport made

2 Karwa Motors has announced the production of a new bus. **>A3**

WORLD
Cambodia, Thailand agree on ceasefire

3 Cambodia and Thailand have agreed to an 'immediate ceasefire'. **>A7**

OMAN BOOST INVESTOR CONFIDENCE WITH MAJOR COMMERCIAL, JUDICIAL REFORMS



Oman's judicial sector has recorded major progress in litigation efficiency, cost reduction

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In recent years, the Sultanate of Oman has stepped up efforts to strengthen its commercial judicial system, aiming to create a fair, efficient and investor-friendly legal environment that supports economic growth and boosts investor confidence. A cornerstone of these efforts is the establishment of specialised judicial mechanisms, most notably

the Investment and Trade Court, introduced by the Supreme Judicial Council as part of wider reforms aligned with Oman Vision 2040. The initiative reflects the Sultanate's commitment to modernising legislation, enhancing legal stability and improving the overall business climate. Oman's legal and judicial sector has recorded significant progress in litigation efficiency, cost

reduction and judicial credibility. Institutional reforms have played a central role in enhancing the reliability and independence of the judiciary. Under Royal Decree No. 35/2022, the Supreme Judicial Council was restructured and placed under the direct supervision of His Majesty the Sultan. The move established the Supreme Judicial Council as an independent authority responsible for managing judicial affairs away from executive influence, while granting it expanded powers to oversee courts and judges, adopt objective selection mechanisms, and ensure continuous training and professional development. **>A5**

Security and Safety Wins Best Rebranding Video at TOMI 2025



MUSCAT: Security and Safety was awarded Best Rebranding Video at The Oman Marketing Impact Awards (TOMI), recognising a powerful visual transformation that marked a new chapter for one of Oman's most trusted security solutions providers. The rebranding introduced a modernised logo and refreshed visual identity that reflect the company's evolution, innovation, and forward-looking vision—while staying true to its legacy of trust built since 1988. Brought to life through a compelling video narrative, the new identity highlighted Security and Safety's expert team, cutting-edge technology, and



commitment to creating secure, reliable environments. By seamlessly bridging heritage with progress, the rebranding video captured the brand's renewed promise of excellence, earning Security and Safety top honours for Best Rebranding Video at TOMI 2025. The trophy was presented by His Highness Sayyid Suhaib Bin Barghash Bin Said Al Said. TOMI 2025, organised by Muscat Media Group, took place on 10th December at Crowne Plaza Qurum, Muscat, bringing together over 200 marketing professionals from Oman and the MENA region in a celebration of creativity, strategy, and impact.

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COMMENTARY

Understanding key protections for minority shareholders under Oman’s Commercial Companies Law

In corporate governance, fairness often depends on protecting those with less control. Oman’s Commercial Companies Law promulgated under Royal Decree 18/2019, offers strong protections for minority shareholders, particularly in joint stock companies, where power can concentrate among the majority.

Speaking exclusively to the Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Founding Partner of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, a leading law office in Oman, explained that “a minority shareholder may hold fewer shares, but the law ensures their voice cannot be ignored. The law grants minority shareholders specific rights that enable them to participate meaningfully in company decisions and hold the board accountable where necessary.”

He added that, “Shareholders holding at least 10% of the capital of a joint stock company have the right to request the board



DR. MOHAMMED IBRAHIM AL ZADJALI, Founding partner of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm

to convene a general meeting to discuss the specific matters. If the board fails to issue the invitation within 30 days, the shareholders may approach the company’s auditor, who shall then convene the meeting directly.”

He further stated that “Shareholders holding at least



5% of the shares in a joint stock company may request the Concerned Body to suspend a general assembly resolution if it violates the law, the company’s articles, or prejudices their rights. The process for challenging resolutions involves a precise sequence of actions.

Initially, a request for suspension must be submitted to the Concerned Body within 5 working days of the resolution’s adoption. Once the Concerned Body issues a suspension deci-

sion, any interested party is then required to institute a case for invalidation before the competent court and notify the Concerned Body with a copy thereof, both actions within 5 working days of the date the suspension decision was issued.”

“Oman’s approach ensures that minority shareholders are not merely spectators. Their rights are protected by structure, not chance,” he concluded.

(Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm (info@mohammedibrahim.net), (+968 244 87 600) was established 18 years ago and is serving clients through its offices in Muscat and Sohar, as well as operating on a request basis in other areas. It offers legal representation across a wide range of practice areas that include Labour Law, Corporate, Commercial, Contracts, Banking and Finance, International Trade, Foreign Investment, Insurance, Maritime Law, Construction and Engineering Contracts, International Arbitration, Intellectual Property and more).

FOURTH EDITION

Registration for ‘Together We Advance’ Forum ends today

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The registration phase for the fourth edition of the “Together We Advance” Forum, organised annually by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers under the high directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, will conclude today.

Strong interaction

This year’s registration has witnessed strong interaction and wide participation from a broad segment of citizens.

The forum, scheduled to take place on February 8–9, 2026, aims to reinforce the principle of community partnership in decision-making and to strengthen effective communication between the government and society.

It seeks to overcome challenges, address difficulties, and keep pace with national aspirations by involving citizens in the journey of

development through their constructive visions and proposals in support of government policies and programmes.

The forum also aims to clarify government directions and priorities at each stage, while enhancing transparency by informing society of public policies, initiatives, and programmes.

Broad representation

The General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers will review and screen applications submitted by those wishing to attend the forum in accordance with criteria designed to ensure broad representation from all segments of society across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, and from diverse academic and professional backgrounds.

Following the selection process, shortlisted participants will be notified via SMS to confirm their attendance.

Contributions of non-oil sectors to GDP at constant prices reach 73.3%

The value added of non-oil activities also increased to about OMR21.0 billion by the end of the third quarter of 2025, compared to OMR20.4 billion during the same period in 2024

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The non-oil sectors in the Sultanate of Oman continue to strengthen their pivotal role in supporting economic growth and achieving financial sustainability, recording a gradual increase in their contribution to the gross domestic product during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025), reflecting the effectiveness of economic diversification policies and the progress of the objectives of the “Oman 2040” vision.

The Ministry of Economy reported that the contribution of non-oil sectors to the GDP at constant prices reached 73.3 percent by the end of the third quarter of 2025, compared to 72.5 percent in 2024.

The value added of non-oil activities also increased to about OMR21.0 billion by the end of the third quarter of 2025, compared to OMR20.4 billion during the same period in 2024.

Meanwhile, the real growth rate of these activities recorded 3.4 percent by the end of the third quarter of this year, compared to 4.2 percent in 2024.

Dr. Salem bin Abdullah Al



Sheikh, the official spokesperson for the Ministry of Economy, said that economic diversification in the Sultanate of Oman continues to consolidate its position as a fundamental pillar of financial and economic sustainability, noting that non-oil revenues have witnessed remarkable growth during the past years in light of the continued recovery of economic activities.

He explained that the volume of non-oil revenues increased from about OMR2.7 billion in 2020 to OMR3.507 billion in 2024, while the approved non-oil revenues in the 2025 budget amounted to about OMR3.573 billion, an increase of 1.5 percent compared to the 2024 budget.

These revenues include OMR680 million from value-added tax and excise tax, OMR656 million from corporate income tax, OMR800 million from dividend distributions of companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority, in addition to OMR1.4 billion from various government fees.

He affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman continues to make progress in enhancing financial sustainability, raising the efficiency of public finances and the tax system, expanding the non-oil revenue base, in addition to diversifying project financing sources and promoting

the attraction of technologies and investments with high added value to the economy.

Regarding foreign direct investment, he noted that the Sultanate of Oman has recorded continuous growth over the past years, supported by improved growth prospects, economic diversification, and a higher level of confidence following the credit rating upgrade.

The cumulative total of foreign direct investment increased by 18 percent during 2024 compared to 2023, and its cumulative total exceeded OMR30.3 billion by the end of the first half of 2025, achieving a growth rate of 12.8 percent compared to the same period in 2024.

He affirmed in a statement to the Oman News Agency that the positive performance of the non-oil sectors has maintained the continuity of the growth of the national economy in line with the targets set during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan and the targets of the “Oman 2040” vision to reduce dependence on oil.

The national economy has gained resilience and the ability to overcome international challenges such as the slowdown in global economic growth and the exacerbation of inflation, in addition to the changes in energy markets that

led to a reduction in crude oil production in accordance with the coordination between the countries of the “OPEC Plus” group, and the decline in the contribution of the oil sectors to the gross domestic product since 2023.

The contribution of these sectors turned from a positive growth of 8.6 percent in 2022 to 0.1 percent in 2023, then declined by 2.7 percent in 2024, and recorded 0.3 percent by the end of the third quarter of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024.

He added that the average GDP growth rate reached 3.4 percent during the first four years of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, approaching the targeted average growth rate of 3.5 percent, while the Ministry of Economy, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank indicate that the GDP growth rate at the end of this year may range between 2.2 percent and 3 percent, and will continue to rise in the medium term during the next development plan.

He explained that the economic and investment policies during the Tenth Plan focused on laying strong foundations to ensure sustainable growth, enhance the productivity of the economy, and deepen its reliance on innovation and its integration with the global economy, thereby enhancing its



competitiveness and ability to keep pace with technological developments and global changes and the opportunities and challenges they bring.

These policies achieved tangible progress in expanding the base of economic diversification, developing production structures, value chains, production and supply, and benefiting from local content, in addition to empowering the private sector, small and medium enterprises, and startups, and raising the contribution of private investment in high value-added economic sectors.

He pointed out that various economic activities received broad support from government support and stimulus packages, which pushed the economy towards recovery and growth, noting that boosting investment and development spending and operating many strategic projects had a multiplier effect on raising growth rates in non-oil sectors.

He explained that the national programs, projects and policies related to the priority of economic diversification and financial sustainability in the economy and development axis targeted, during the first phase of the “Oman 2040” vision, a group of sectors that represent a driving force for economic diversification and other sectors that are integrated and supportive of the sectors of economic diversification.

The criteria for selecting the specific sectors as pillars of economic diversification were based on their ability to expand and grow, their contribution to financial

sustainability, the provision of job opportunities, the support for the growth of other sectors and the increase of non-oil exports of goods and services.

He pointed out that the National Economic Diversification Programme “Tanwee” has contributed to developing production structures, maximising added value and increasing returns in promising economic sectors such as manufacturing, transport and logistics, tourism, fisheries and mining.

The commencement of the Integrated Economic Cluster Project for cold chains in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm represents a qualitative leap in developing supply chains within five integrated economic clusters that will be implemented, which aim to promote balanced development in the governorates, exploit their competitive advantages and attract investments to the sectors targeted in the economic diversification strategy.

He stated that the first phase of implementing Oman Vision (2021-2025) succeeded in bringing about a positive transformation in the macroeconomic and business environment, and consolidating the foundations of financial sustainability by strengthening the state’s financial position, raising the credit rating, increasing the efficiency of public spending, rationalizing spending, and reducing public debt to safe limits.

The Sultanate of Oman also made progress in diversifying revenue sources, stimulating the private sector, and attracting local and foreign direct investments to expand the financing of new projects and provide job opportunities.

The official spokesperson for the Ministry of Economy affirmed that the prospects for economic diversification during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan 2026-2030 remain supportive of achieving the targets of financial and economic sustainability, while continuing to achieve national targets and strengthening international cooperation and strategic partnerships with sisterly and friendly countries.

NEUROCATHETERISATION

Khoula hospital doctors successfully carry out complex surgery

SOHAR: A specialised medical team from Khoula Hospital has successfully performed an urgent interventional procedure at Sohar Hospital to treat a complex case involving an abnormal entanglement between cerebral arteries and veins, using advanced interventional neuroradiology (neurocatheterisation) techniques.

The case began when the patient was admitted to Sohar Hospital after experiencing recurrent neurological symptoms that required comprehensive diagnostic examinations.

Initial assessments revealed a complex cerebral vascular malfor-

mation, a rare and highly delicate condition that necessitates specialised medical intervention.

Accordingly, direct coordination was established with Khoula Hospital, a national referral centre for such advanced procedures, to develop a joint treatment plan aimed at ensuring the best possible outcome.

The procedure was carried out at Sohar Hospital using neurovascular catheterisation, a precise, minimally invasive technique performed through the blood vessels without the need for conventional open surgery.

This approach significantly re-



duces procedural risks and shortens the recovery period.

The intervention was completed successfully, with the medical team effectively treating the vascular malformation, resulting in a marked improvement in the patient’s clinical condition.

Dr. Ali bin Khalfan Al-Balushi, Senior Consultant in Neurology and Interventional Neuroradiology at Khoula Hospital, said that the success of the procedure reflects the advanced level of healthcare services in the Sultanate of Oman and underscores the importance of integrated cooperation among healthcare institutions.

He noted that exchanging expertise and complementing roles between hospitals ensures the provision of specialised, safe, and high-quality healthcare for patients.

He added that such collaboration contributes to enhancing the efficiency of national medical personnel and optimising the use of available medical resources and advanced technologies across healthcare institutions in Oman.

He also pointed out that Sohar Hospital is equipped with qualified medical teams specialised in neurology and interventional neuroradiology. -CNA

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FOR MORE

TOMI 2025 Awards Minara Cooking Oil for Best Product Video



MUSCAT: Minara Cooking Oil was awarded Best Product Video at The Oman Marketing Impact Awards (TOMI), recognising a compelling visual story that captured the evolving preferences of today's health-conscious consumers.

As lifestyles increasingly shift towards wellness—particularly among millennials—the campaign highlighted Minara's premium light frying oil, which blends the goodness of olive oil with everyday cooking convenience.

The product continues to stand for a balanced way of life, delivering meals that are both nutritious and full of flavour.



Through a clean, engaging and informative product video, the brand successfully brought together health benefits, taste and modern cooking habits, earning Minara Cooking Oil top honours for Best Product Video at TOMI 2025.

The trophy was presented by His Highness Sayyid Suhaib Bin Barghash Bin Said Al Said. TOMI 2025, organised by Muscat Media Group, took place on 10th December at Crowne Plaza Qurum, Muscat, bringing together over 200 marketing professionals from Oman and the MENA region in a celebration of creativity, strategy, and impact.

OMAN AIR

Inaugural flight from Moscow

Times News Service

SALALAH: Oman Air has celebrated the arrival of its inaugural flight from Moscow to Salalah, marking the official launch of direct seasonal air services connecting the Russian capital.

The milestone was commemorated with a welcome ceremony at Salalah Airport, presided over by Dr. Ahmed bin Mohsen Al Ghassan, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality and attended by senior officials and representatives from Oman's aviation and tourism sectors.

Social media platforms are key to building trust, bridging gaps

Every digital interaction consciously or unconsciously amplifies content through dissemination algorithms



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Honesty, objectivity, truthfulness, and responsible, conscious engagement with societal issues through traditional and social media platforms are among the key factors that contribute to building trust, bridging gaps, overcoming challenges, and finding constructive solutions.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik had emphasised during his meeting with the Chairman and members of the State Council Office on the importance of engaging with societal issues and addressing challenges through accurate and responsible messaging across media and social media platforms reflects a firm approach to promoting effective communication, enhancing transparency, and clarifying national efforts, achievements, and gains.

Several specialists and stakeholders told the Oman News Agency that adherence to these principles when addressing issues raised in the media and social networking platforms is of critical importance, particularly given the openness of these spaces and the potential for irresponsible discourse.

Dr. Sabra bint Saif Al-Harasiya, an academic and educational researcher, said that engagement with media and social media is no longer an isolated individual act.

She explained that the impact of words today extends beyond the speaker, shaping public opinion, influencing social harmony, and reshaping collective awareness. Every digital interaction, she noted, contributes—consciously or unconsciously—to amplifying content through dissemination algorithms.

She added that content does not exist in a vacuum, but rather operates within a social and cultural environment shaped by accumulated posts, interaction patterns, and levels of public awareness. Consequently, responsibility becomes collective, as repeated individual behavior turns into a phenomenon, and multiplied phenomena reshape public discourse.

Dr. Al-Harasiya stressed the importance of shared standards governing digital interaction, balancing freedom of expression with the protection of societal values. Such standards, she said, are built through cultural and institutional consensus rather than individual decisions, making responsible digital behaviour a societal value rather than a personal choice.

She pointed out that the speed at which misleading content and rumors spread often outpaces institutional correction efforts, especially amid limited critical verification skills among many users. This can confuse public opinion and influence debate before facts are fully clarified.

She emphasised that freedom of expression must be exercised through organised and responsible dialogue, noting that expression is a social practice with real implications for public opinion and social relations.

While freedom of expression in the digital space is a fundamental right, it is inseparable from ethical and behavioural responsibility.

Dr. Al-Harasiya highlighted that Omani society is characterised by balanced discourse and respect for differing opinions—both offline and online.

This balance, she said, is reflected in measured language and constructive management of disagreement, serving as a cultural asset that can be further strengthened in digital spaces to ensure that freedom of expression remains a conscious and constructive practice.

Rashid bin Abdullah Al-Shidhani, a public opinion researcher, stated that responsible communication enhances trust, reduces the gap between government and society, and limits the spread of misinformation.

This, he said, strengthens social cohesion, raises public awareness, promotes a culture of dialogue, and contributes to national unity and stability.

He explained that citizens' awareness forms the foundation of social cohesion. Responsible engagement with societal issues helps convey accurate messages to concerned authorities without confusion, increasing opportunities for meaningful public participation in decision-making.

Al-Shidhani noted that government institutions in the Sultanate of Oman have adopted participatory approaches to decision-making through dialogue initiatives, enhanced government communication, and community forums, all of which support informed policymaking.

He warned that rumours and misconceptions undermine trust, distort societal awareness, and threaten national identity and values, stressing the need for swift, transparent, and accurate responses to prevent their spread.

For his part, Dr. Ahmed Murad, a social media activist, said that irresponsible handling of issues often stems from rushing to address matters before all details are clear or presenting them from a single perspective. He noted that professional and ethical responsibility requires verifying information from official sources and examining all aspects before forming opinions.

He added that credibility lies not in being the first to comment, but in being the most accurate and informed. He cautioned against exaggerating crises for engagement, explaining that such practices undermine trust and produce negative outcomes.

Lawyer Hamoud bin Abdullah Al-Mukhaini explained that the Basic Law of the State provides the constitutional framework for freedom of expression in the Sultanate of Oman. Article (35), he said, guarantees freedom of opinion and expression “within the limits of the law,” reflecting a legislative philosophy that balances freedom with responsibility.

He clarified that while individuals have the right to express opinions, criticize institutions, and raise complaints publicly, this right is subject to legal safeguards that protect reputation, dignity, privacy, and public order. Article (16) of the Information Technology Crimes Law, he noted, criminalizes defamation, slander, and violations of privacy through digital means.

Al-Mukhaini added that digital media platforms are required to be licensed by the Ministry of Information and are subject to the Media Law issued by Royal Decree No. 58/2024, which regulates content, combats misinformation, and upholds public morals without imposing prior censorship.

He emphasised that official bodies should interact positively with issues raised on social media, encouraging constructive criticism and treating these platforms as digital channels for receiving complaints and identifying solutions—without prejudice to legal accountability for abuses.

He concluded that Omani law protects the “voice of society” as long as it is exercised responsibly, respecting truth, privacy, and human dignity.

He noted that initiatives such as the “Tajawub” digital platform provide structured channels for submitting complaints and demonstrate how digital interaction can evolve from random discourse into an effective institutional tool that enhances trust and social stability.

GROWING DEMAND

Karwa manufactures a new vehicle for public transport

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Karwa Motors has announced the production of a new bus designed to meet the requirements of mass transportation with high efficiency, focusing on performance and safety.

The move comes as part of the company's efforts to strengthen the automotive industry in the Sultanate of Oman and keep pace with the growing demand for public transport vehicles.

The launch of the new bus reflects Karwa Motors' commitment to providing practical and safe transportation solutions that meet the needs of government entities and institutions in the Omani market.

The new vehicle, named the “Karwa Minibus,” has a seating capacity of 14 passengers and has been designed to suit a wide range of transportation requirements, with particular emphasis on operational efficiency and safety standards.

Dr. Ibrahim Ali Al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors, stated that the production of the new bus represents an important addition within the company's plans to support the industrial sector by offering products that meet the demand for mass transportation in the Sultanate of Oman and for export markets.

He noted that the production of the Karwa Minibus marks a step toward building a national automotive industry capable of meeting market needs with high efficiency and quality.

He added that localising the manufacture of mass transportation vehicles is a key pillar in providing safe and reliable transport solutions that align with the requirements of government agencies and institutions. He stressed the company's commitment to designing its products in accordance with operational standards suited to the working environment in Oman, with a strong focus on safety, reliability, and operational efficiency.

Karwa Motors places significant emphasis on after-sales services through an extensive network of 23 service stations across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The company is also working to expand its exports to around 10 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Algeria, Iraq, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, with future plans to export to Jordan, Egypt, and Tanzania.

-With ONA inputs



HM the Sultan meets Chairman, members of Shura Council Office



His Majesty expressed his satisfaction with the level of cooperation between the government and the Shura Council

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met at Al Barakah Palace on Thursday with the Chairman of the Shura Council and members of the Shura Council Office.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty praised Allah for His blessings and abundance bestowed upon Oman, its loyal people and residents. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant continuous prosperity to this blessed land, to bless everyone with health and well-being, and to crown all benevolent efforts with success and guidance.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the Council's progress, its working mechanisms and the growing effectiveness it has demonstrated in fulfilling its roles. This progress serves to enhance national participation and aligns with the requirements of comprehensive development.

His Majesty emphasized the importance of the perspectives and proposals put forth by the Shura Council in advancing national endeavors and supporting the state's strategic directions to achieve the nation's interest and serve its citizens.

His Majesty expressed his satisfaction with the level of cooperation between the government and the Shura Council, which is considered a fundamental partner within the state's framework of action. The Basic Law of the State and the Council of Oman Law have endowed the Shura Council with wide-ranging powers to fulfill its mandated objectives. His Majesty stressed the importance of enhancing this collaborative partnership, working in a unified team spirit and seeking common ground to prioritise the interests of the nation and its citizens above all else.

His Majesty the Sultan underscored the importance of the Shura Council performing its anticipated role in raising public awareness on existing challenges, medium and long-term goals and the measures and decisions taken to attain them. His Majesty emphasized the importance of safeguarding the national-level accomplishments and gains that have been achieved.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Hamad bin Said Al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Sheikh Al Fadhil bin Mohammed Al Harthy, Secretary General of the Council of Ministers and Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs. -OMA



COMPETITIVE INDUSTRIAL HUB

Oman succeeds in shaping renewed industrial identity

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani industrial sector is witnessing rapid progress across legislative, production, and investment fronts, as the Sultanate of Oman has succeeded in shaping a renewed industrial identity that places manufacturing at the core of national economic policies.

This transformation has strengthened Oman's position on the global economic map and reinforced its role as a competitive industrial hub.

The industrial renaissance has been marked by the launch and inauguration of several major strategic projects, including the Karwa Motors factory in the Duqm Special Economic Zone, the Sanvira Carbon plant in Dhofar Governorate, as well as the Duqm Refinery and the Liwa Plastics Industries Complex. The sector also witnessed the completion of construction of the United Solar factory for polysilicon production, supporting the localization of supply chains linked to the solar panel industry.

In the field of pharmaceutical security, factories operated by Flex, Dhofar, and Menagen pharmaceutical industries were launched. These projects have contributed to increasing industrial output, transferring advanced technologies, localising supply chains, and attracting national talent.

Economic indicators reflect the scale of the sector's transformation,



with industrial output recording an annual growth rate of 7 percent. Industrial exports exceeded OMR7 billion by the end of 2024, while foreign direct industrial investments reached approximately OMR2.8 billion. The number of Omanis employed in the industrial sector rose to more than 57,000 workers.

At the international level, the Sultanate of Oman's industrial progress has been praised by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which described Oman as one of the emerging industrial countries.

UNIDO commended the acceleration of high-tech industries and the development of advanced value chains, noting that the Industrial Strategy 2040 represents a model for harnessing innovation and localizing technology.

Dr. Saleh bin Said Masan, Un-

dersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, affirmed that the next phase, coinciding with the launch of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, will focus on smart manufacturing and the adoption of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies to ensure sustainability and transform the sector into a key engine of economic diversification.

Meanwhile, Eng. Khalid Salim Al Qasabi, Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, reported record growth in industrial license applications, supported by enabling programmes such as Itqan and the Smart Production Factories initiative. He noted the activation of new tools, including the Industrial Observatory and the Tasnee platform, to regulate sector procurement and enhance local content.



Regarding downstream industries, Engineer Said Mohammed Al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, explained that the company has established a strong base for downstream industries by attracting high-quality investments and raising Omanisation rates to record levels, thereby increasing



local added value to the national economy.

For his part, Engineer Omar Al Balushi, CEO of the Omani Aluminium Rolling Company, stated that the past five years have represented a pivotal phase for the Omani industrial sector, marked by qualitative transformations and tangible achievements that have



strengthened Oman's position as a promising regional industrial center. He emphasized that supportive government policies and continuous institutional backing have driven growth, particularly in the aluminum sector, which has recorded rising production and export volumes alongside expanded operational capacities and infrastructure.

Additionally, Nasser bin Sulaiman Al Azri, CEO of Vale Oman, affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman provides an ideal environment for long-term industrial investments, supported by clear competitive advantages. He noted that the company continues to invest annually in developing advanced industrial capabilities serving global steel markets and is implementing expansion plans to further strengthen its operations in the region.

ISLAND OF SICILY

Mount Etna emits light ash, sporadic explosions in Sicily

ROME [ITALY]: Mount Etna on the Italian island of Sicily witnessed renewed volcanic activity yesterday, marked by the emission of incandescent material and limited amounts of ash from the volcano's north-eastern crater.

In a statement, Italy's National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology said that winds pushed the eruption cloud towards the north-east, with light ashfall re-



corded in the coastal town of Taormina and the Piano Provenzana area, which includes ski slopes.

The institute reported intermittent explosions at the Bocca Nuova crater, during which incandescent material was ejected to heights of several tens of metres above the crater rim.

The regional civil protection agency temporarily raised the alert level as a precaution against

the possible occurrence of lava fountains.

Most active volcano

Mount Etna is Europe's most active volcano, standing at around 3,400 metres high. It experiences frequent eruptions throughout the year and is subject to continuous monitoring, with its height and summit shape changing as a result of eruptions. -ANI/WAM



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Can dogs really sense danger?

Research shows what canines really can sense — and how social media and human projection fuel belief in their

NEW YORK: Countless clips of heroic dogs rescuing humans are circulating on social media. But do dogs really have a magical sixth sense, or are their “superpowers” simply biology that's being given outsized significance by their human owners?

Spectacularly staged rescue videos get millions of clicks on social media, whether they are real scenes, cleverly edited clips or AI illusions.

Psychologically, this is confirmation bias at work. People remember conspicuous dog behavior before an accident but forget all the times the dog reacted similarly without incident.

The desire to believe in a special bond with one's own pet and its unique abilities makes belief in canine clairvoyance even more convincing.

Superior senses

Dogs have senses that are far superior to those of humans. They hear much higher frequencies, are sensitive to vibrations, changes in air pressure and weather, and have a sense of smell that is around 10,000 to 100,000 times stronger than that of humans.

Studies on epilepsy, diabetes and cancer show that they can detect the slightest biochemical changes in the body — in sweat or breath, for example. They also register the



smallest changes in the behavior and emotions of their caregivers, such as muscle tension, breathing rhythm and the smell of stress.

In a study by Neil Powell of Queen's University Belfast, 19 family dogs reacted significantly differently to sweat samples from epilepsy patients in the phase

shortly before a seizure versus control samples.

Assistance dogs for diabetes or cancer are not guided by supernatural forces. Instead, they detect physiological signals such as heart rate, breathing rhythm, stress hormones, and what are known as VOC patterns (volatile organic

compounds), combinations of organic molecules that reflect a person's state of health. A dog learning to sniff out coronavirus in a Thai labA dog learning to sniff out coronavirus in a Thai lab

A biological explanation

Canadian psychologist Stanley

is why a dog may become restless shortly before a bridge begins to sway or a vehicle skids on a wet road, Coren wrote. What appears to be a “sixth sense” is therefore primarily a physiological advantage. Dogs react earlier to stimuli that are already present but not perceptible to humans.

Dogs can't predict car accidents

Other animals also have much more powerful senses than humans. A team led by Martin Wikelski from the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior equipped cows, sheep and dogs in Italy with sensors and observed significantly increased activity before several earthquakes, especially among animals in stables.

Apparently, they react to micro-vibrations or electrical effects in rock layers. “This is not a premonition but a reaction to physical stimuli,” Wikelski explained in an email to DW.

However this does not allow for reliable predictions. “Dogs can certainly do a lot, but warning of car accidents seems practically impossible to me, except perhaps when it comes to the nervousness of owners that could lead to accidents,” Wikelski said.

He emphasized that data is needed to separate myths from real abilities. “Such anecdotes would have to be verified with transmitters attached to the animals—as we did in our studies on earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.”

Most incidents of doggy sixth sense can usually be explained by coincidence, retrospective interpretation or a dog's ultra-sensitive reactions to real stimuli.

Dogs can notice unusual noises, screeching tyres, traces of smoke or their owner's anxiety seconds before these factors become perceptible to humans. If the dog then displays stress behaviour — panting, whining, urging — it is easy to see this as an early warning in retrospect. -DW

VERDICT DELIVERED

Former Malaysia PM Najib jailed for 15 more years in major 1MDB case

KUALA LUMPUR [MALAYSIA]: Former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak has been sentenced to 15 years in prison after being convicted in a major corruption case linked to the 1MDB scandal. The verdict was delivered by the Kuala Lumpur High Court on Friday, Al Jazeera reported.

Najib, 72, was found guilty of illegally transferring 2.2 billion Malaysian ringgit (about USD 543 million) from the state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) into his personal bank accounts. The court convicted him on four charges of abuse of power and 21 charges of money laundering.

Delivering the judgment, Judge Collin Lawrence Sequerah rejected Najib's defence that the case was politically driven.

“The contention by the accused that the charges against him were a witch hunt and politically motivated were debunked by the cold, hard and incontrovertible evidence against him that pointed towards the accused having abused his own powerful position in 1MDB, coupled with the extensive powers conferred upon him,” the judge said.

Najib misused his roles as prime minister, finance minister and chairman of 1MDB's advisory board to divert public funds for



personal benefit more than a decade ago, Al Jazeera reported.

For the abuse of power charges, he was sentenced to 15 years in jail, while each of the money laundering charges carries a five-year sentence. All the jail terms will run at the same time.

This is Najib's second conviction related to the scandal. In 2020, he was found guilty of misusing nearly USD 10 million from the fund and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. That sentence was later reduced to six years.

Last year, Najib apologised to Malaysians for his role in the 1MDB controversy. However, during the trial, he claimed that he had been misled by fugitive financier Jho Low, who has been on Interpol's wanted list since 2016. -ANI

LACK OF ENTHUSIASM

Munich surfers abandon attempt to restart famous Eisbach wave

BERLIN: A months-long effort to restore Munich's famous “Eisbach” wave is being disbanded, the Surf Club Munich has announced. The group cited excessive red tape and a lack of enthusiasm for the project from the city government.

“The administration does not want to regulate surfing on the Eisbach, but to prevent it,” the association said in a statement. They pointed to “administrative obstruction” in their mission to bring the wave back after it disappeared in October during a routine cleaning process.

How did land-locked Munich become a surfing hotspot?

The Eisbach is a small tributary of the Isar river that flows through Munich's famous English Garden city park.

A series of concrete reinforcements underneath the stream in the 1970s led to the creation of a strong current near a bridge in one area of the park.

Local surfing legend Walter Strasser has been credited in local media with coming up with the idea to place a plank at a specific angle where the current was strongest, creating a wave large enough for surfing.

Over the years, Strasser and his wave gained more and more renown in the surfing community, and the area became a hotspot for the sport.

Earlier in December, Strasser told local newspaper the Münchener Abendzeitung that he had tried to work with Mayor Dieter Reiter to restore the wave, but



had been met with ambivalence.

“I have so much experience with the Eisbach. I know exactly what the problem is. I could have fixed it within weeks, with very little funding,” he told the paper. “But the city told me they didn't need me.”

The Eisbach was also closed for two months after a 33-year-old surfer died in April. After her surfing line became trapped around her leg, she was pulled under the water and stuck underwater for nearly 30 minutes under rescue services were able to reach her.

The strong current had pre-

vented bystanders from coming to her aid.

Although paramedics were able to reanimate her on the riverbank, she died later that same day in a Munich hospital.

The incident was the first such deadly event at the Eisbach, and prompted what authorities called a thorough safety review before the wave reopened at the end of June. A specific cause for the accident was never found, however.

Illicit reopening

The news that the Surf Club Mu-

nich has given up its official attempts to reopen the wave come just a few days after some surfers illegally set it back up with a wooden plank and used it clandestinely over the holidays.

But this construction was not permanent, and authorities have made it clear that surfing is currently prohibited.

Although Surf Club Munich has dropped its study of how to restart the wave on a constant basis, they maintained that the debate would continue despite “becoming political.” -DW

CHINA'S MAGLEV HITS 800 KM/H IN SECONDS

A major breakthrough in high-speed transport was achieved on Friday in China. East Lake Laboratory in Hubei, central China, announced that its test of Maglev line successfully accelerated a 1.1-tonne model train to 800 km/h in just 5.3 seconds. -Xinhua



MISHIMA PLANT

Man arrested for stabbing 15 Yokohama rubber factory employees in Shizuoka

SHIZUOKA [JAPAN]: Police on Saturday arrested one man in connection with a stabbing attack at the Mishima Plant of Yokohama Rubber Co. in central Japan, injuring a total of 15 employees, Kyodo News reported.

According to Kyodo News, the suspect was identified as 38-year-old Masaki Oyama, who had previously worked at the factory, a source familiar with the case said.

The incident occurred on Friday afternoon at around 4:30 pm, when an emergency call reported multiple people stabbed and a liquid dispersed inside the facility.

Oyama, a resident of Mishima in Shizuoka Prefecture, is currently unemployed, and authorities suspect he used a survival knife, suggesting a strong intent to kill, Kyodo News reported.

A total of 15 male employees, aged between their 20s and 50s,



were injured in the attack and taken to the hospital, all conscious.

Eight sustained stab wounds, while the remaining seven were possibly harmed by the liquid, according to the fire department, Kyodo News reported.

Sources confirmed that Oyama had previously been employed at

the Mishima factory and lived in a nearby employee dormitory.

Yokohama Rubber's Mishima Plant, which manufactures car tyres, employed approximately 980 people as of 2024. The factory is located approximately 1 km from the Mishima city office.

While Japan is known for its low levels of violent crime, reflected in a low homicide rate and strict firearms regulations, isolated incidents continue to occur.

Past cases include the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe in 2022, as well as a shooting and stabbing spree in 2023 that left four people dead, including two police officers, for which a man was sentenced to death in October.

Recently, a 43-year-old man was charged with attempted murder following a knife attack at Tokyo's Toda-mae metro station. -ANI

Cambodia, Thailand agree on truce after weeks of border skirmishes



Both sides reiterated their commitment to refrain from the threat or use of force and reaffirmed their adherence to the July 28 ceasefire arrangement

PAILIN: Cambodia and Thailand have agreed to an "immediate ceasefire" effective from 12:00 noon (local time) on Saturday as part of a joint effort to de-escalate tensions along their shared border following weeks of intense clashes, which resulted in the death of over 100 people and the displacement of over half a million.

According to a Joint Statement issued following the 3rd Special General Border Committee (GBC) Meeting held at the Prum-Ban Pak Kard International Point of Entry between the two nations, both sides noted "the importance



of conducting discussions on the peaceful settlement of disputes in an atmosphere of trust, sincerity, good faith, fairness, and mutual respect in accordance with the purpose and principles of the United Nations Charter, the ASEAN Charter and Treaty of Amity and

Cooperation in Southeast Asia, paving the way for a new chapter of peace and cooperation between the two nations."

Both sides recalled the ASEAN Chair's Statement from the Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on December 22, in Kuala

Lumpur, Malaysia. They reiterated their commitment to refrain from the threat or use of force and reaffirmed their adherence to the July 28 ceasefire arrangement and other bilateral agreements.

Under the de-escalation measures, both sides agreed to "an im-

mediate ceasefire after the time of signature of this Joint Statement with effect from 12:00 hours noon (local time) on 27 December 2025, involving all types of weapons, including attacks on civilians, civilian objects and infrastructures, and military objectives of either

side, in all cases and all areas."

"Both sides must avoid unprovoked firing or advancement or movement of troops towards the other side's positions or troops. This agreement must not be violated under any circumstances," the statement added.

The statement further reaffirmed obligations under the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines and outlined cooperation on humanitarian demining through the Joint Coordinating Task Force. Both sides also pledged enhanced cooperation to combat transnational crimes, including cyber scams and human trafficking.

"Both sides reaffirm their obligations under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mine and on Their Destruction (Ottawa Convention). Both sides will work together through the Joint Coordinating Task Force (JCTF) on Humanitarian Demining in accordance with the agreed Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to make timely progress on demining efforts along the border," the statement read.

"Both sides agree to adhere to the Action Plan for Cooperation on the Prevention and Suppression of Transnational Crimes, including Cyber Scams and Human Trafficking," it added. -aw

IN HOMS

Attacks against places of worship, civilians unacceptable: UN chief

GENEVA [SWITZERLAND]: UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Saturday condemned the terrorist attack which took place during the Friday prayer at the Ali Bin Abi Talib Mosque in Homs in Syria. He offered condolences and wished for the speedy recovery of the injured.

In a post on X, Guterres said, "I strongly condemn the deadly terrorist attack during Friday Prayers at the Ali Bin Abi Talib Mosque in Homs, Syria. Attacks against civilians and places of worship are unacceptable. My condolences to the families of those killed and my sympathy to all those injured, wishing them a prompt and full recovery."

At least eight people were killed, and 18 were injured following an explosion at the Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque in Syria, SANA reported on Friday.

Citing officials at the Syrian Health Ministry, SANA said that eight people were killed and 18 others injured in the blast, according to preliminary figures.

It further mentioned that the victims were moved to the Karam al-Louz Hospital in Homs.

According to SANA, the Interior Ministry said internal security units deployed to the site and established a security cordon around the mosque in the Wadi al-Dahab district of Homs, central Syria.

The relevant authorities launched an investigation and have begun collecting evidence to



track down those responsible for the criminal act.

A security source told SANA that initial investigations indicate the explosion was caused by explosive devices planted inside the mosque.

Soon after the explosion, the Syrian Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the terrorist blast which struck the mosque during Friday prayers and resulted in the deaths and injuries of innocent civilians.

The Ministry said in a statement that the cowardly act is a blatant assault on human and moral values, reflecting the desperate attempts to destabilise Syria and undermine the resilience of the Syrian people, as reported by SANA.

It further mentioned that the statement reiterated Syria's determination to continue combating terrorism in all its forms, stressing that such crimes will not deter its continued efforts in reinforcing security, safeguarding the people, and holding perpetrators accountable. -ANI

14-YEAR-RULE

Cote d'Ivoire poll held amid opposition boycott

BERLIN: Cote d'Ivoire, also known as Ivory Coast, was holding a legislative election on Saturday, two months after President Alassane Ouattara won reelection with his RHDP party.

The 83-year-old Ouattara won

his bid to extend his 14-year-rule in an October vote marred by accusations of silencing opposition politicians through arbitrary arrests and election bans.

Protests calling for a more free presidential election were met

with a brutal police crackdown that left eleven people dead and dozens of opposition supporters jailed. Despite polls opening an hour late in the capital Abidjan due to torrential rains, voters queued to pass their ballots in what ob-

servers considered a two-horse race between the ruling RHDP and the main remaining opposition party PDCI-RDA.

The RHDP is expected to maintain its majority in the 255-seat legislature. -aw

Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Ibri Regional Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in following Tenders :-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for collection of tender document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender fee (Non Refundable)
4930/2025	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF BIO EQUIPMENTS (PHISIO) FOR IBRI REGIONAL HOSPITAL	22/01/2026	Before 9.00 Am on Tharsday 28/01/2026	Specialized Companies (SME) registered with Tender Board	-SME: 10 R.O

Notes :-

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website : <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document .
- Regional Ibri Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accept or reject any tender.

<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
Any Clarification you may contact via
Telephone : 24402200 - Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

SPORTS

England end 15-year drought with win in fourth Ashes Test

Jacob Bethell scored 40 as the visitors chased down 175 on a chaotic second day in Melbourne

MELBOURNE: A fighting England won their first Test on Australian soil in 15 years on Saturday, restoring their battered pride with a gutsy four-wicket victory to clinch a chaotic fourth Ashes clash that was all over inside two days.

The pumped-up tourists dismissed Australia for 132 soon after lunch in front of a bumper 92,045 crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, following the 20 wickets that tumbled on day one.

It left them chasing 175 to win, with Harry Brook unbeaten on 18 and Jamie Smith on three seeing them home for the loss of six wickets to huge roars from their travelling "Barmy Army" of fans.

Jacob Bethell contributed 40 and Zak Crawley 37.

"A good feeling, a tough tour up to now," said England skipper Ben Stokes. "After the build-up to the Test, a lot thrown our way, to put in a performance on the back of all that, and beat a very good Australian team, a lot of credit has to go to players, staff and management for keeping the focus on cricket."

"Very proud. We showed bravery and were courageous."

England crashed in the first three Tests and came to Melbourne under enormous pressure amid questions about their limited preparations and allegations of excessive drinking during a mid-series beach break.

But they finally came good and will head to Sydney for the fifth and final Test brimming with confidence. England had not won a Test in Australia since January 2011 at Sydney, losing 16 and drawing two since, and openers Crawley and Ben Duckett had a clear objective



to snap the streak - play ultra-aggressive "Bazball" style.

Duckett hit a boundary off Mitchell Starc in his first over while Crawley slammed Michael Neser for a six and a four in successive balls. They brought up a whirlwind fifty opening partnership but next ball Duckett was bowled by a Starc yorker for 34.

Fast bowler Brydon Carse then strode to the middle as a surprise No.3 in place of Bethell. But England's pinch-hitting experiment failed as Carse lasted only eight balls before skying Jhye Richardson to Cameron Green.

Crawley fell lbw to Scott Boland after a gritty knock and Bethell was caught by Usman Khawaja from the same bowler. Richardson trapped Joe Root lbw for 15 and Starc accounted for Ben Stokes for

two, but by then only 10 runs were needed and Brook and Smith completed the job. "It was a tricky one, a quick game," said Australia captain Steve Smith.

"If we had got 50-60 more in both innings then things might have been different. The wicket played as expected, but once the ball softened, it didn't quite behave the way I'd hoped."

"When you see 36 wickets fall in two days, that probably tells you it did a bit more than intended," he added of the MCG pitch.

Australia resumed on 4-0 in their second innings after an explosive opening day of searing pace saw 20 wickets fall with the hosts dismissed for 152 and England just 110.

It was the most wickets to tumble on the first day of an Ashes Test

since 1909, and eclipsed the 19 on day one of the series opener in Perth.

Nightwatchman Boland edged Gus Atkinson to wicketkeeper Smith but the bowler left the field soon after clutching his left hamstring. Josh Tongue came into the attack on a hat-trick after bagging the last two Australia wickets on day one, but Jake Weatherald whipped his full ball for three.

Weatherald needed a decent knock to cement his spot at the top of the order, but he failed again, bowled by Stokes for five leaving a delivery that nipped back.

Travis Head was joined by Marcus Labuschagne but he only made eight, caught by Root in the slips off Tongue.

Head was in good touch before being bowled on 46 by a peach of a delivery from Carse that beat the outside edge, and when Khawaja (0) and Alex Carey (4) departed in the space of nine balls the momentum was back with England.

After reaching lunch at 98-6, Green (19) became the seventh wicket to fall with the score on 119, edging a rising Stokes ball to Harry Brook at slip.

Carse bagged Neser and Starc without scoring and Richardson fell to Stokes with the last four wickets tumbling for 13 runs, leaving Steve Smith unbeaten on 24.

Tongue was named man-of-the-match for his 5-45 in Australia's first innings and 2-44 in the second. "It is what dreams are made of," said Tongue of playing in a

ENGLAND SKIPPER STOKES

'MCG pitch would get hell if produced elsewhere'

MELBOURNE: Captain Ben Stokes says people would raise "hell" if the Melbourne pitch on which his England team beat Australia inside two days had been produced in another part of the world. The 10mm of grass left on the surface resulted in 36 wickets falling in six sessions at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) and the highest score by a batter on either side was Travis Head's 46.

When asked what feedback on the pitch he would provide to match referee Jeff Crowe, Stokes said: "Not the best."

He said: "With 36 wickets in less than two days and no total over 200, I think you can read into that a lot. If that was another condition somewhere else and that happened, you probably would get a pasting."

The all-rounder was perhaps hinting towards the criticism of pitches in Asia that can turn excessively and create short Tests.

When it was put to Stokes he was making that inference, he replied: "Those are your words, not mine."

He added: "I'm pretty sure if that was somewhere else in the world there'd be hell on. It is not the best thing for games that should be played over five days but we played a type of cricket that ended up getting the job done."

Speaking after his side were beaten, Steve Smith said he was "not sure" why MCG head



groundsman Matthew Page had opted to leave so much grass on the pitch for the Boxing Day Test - a marquee event in the Australian sporting calendar. Page will talk to the media on Sunday.

"We let them judge it and do what they see fit," said Smith.

"I said before the game it looked like it was going to offer a fair amount and it probably did more than we thought it was going to. It's tough as a groundsman, always looking for the right balance. Maybe if he took it from 10mm to eight it would have been a nice, challenging wicket, maybe a little bit more even. Groundsmen are always learning and maybe he'll take something from that."

"You have a world-class attack and the ball is moving a considerable amount. Your job is to get on the right side of the result."

Boxing Day Test and getting five wickets. "I have put in the hard work, playing for England, that's what you want to do as a boy. Unbelievable feeling to win a Test at the MCG."

England's victory was a second two-day Test of this Ashes after the series opener in Perth was also done inside 48 hours.

This is the first Test series between any opponents to include

two two-day Tests since 1896.

In chasing 175 to win by four wickets, England ended a run of 18 Tests without a victory in Australia.

Brief scores: England 110 (Brook 41, Neser 4-45, Boland 3-30) and 178/6 (Bethell 40, Richardson 2-22) beat Australia 152 (Neser 35, Tongue 5-45, Atkinson 2-28) and 132 (Head 46, Carse 4-34, Stokes 3-24) by four wickets. - Agencies

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INDIAN RUPEE WEAKNESS

The Indian rupee is expected to show more weakness going ahead into 2026, according to a report by MUFG, a global financial group. In a report earlier this month, it forecast more weakness for the Indian rupee. >B2

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CBO DATA



Broad money supply in Oman
grows by 3.6% to OMR25.7bn

MUSCAT: Broad money supply in the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a growth of 3.6 percent on an annual basis, reaching approximately OMR25.7 billion by the end of October 2025.

Statistics issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) indicated that this increase was due to a rise in narrow money by 7.3 percent and a rise in quasi-money by 2.1 percent, which consists of the sum of savings and time deposits in Omani rials plus certificates of deposit issued by banks, in addition to margin accounts and all

foreign currency deposits in the banking sector.

Statistics further showed that during the same period, cash in the public decreased by 0.13 percent, while demand deposits increased by 8.7 percent.

Regarding the interest rate structure of conventional commercial banks, the weighted average interest rate on Omani Rial deposits decreased from 2.709 percent in October 2024 to 2.559 percent in October 2025, and the weighted average interest rate on Omani Rial loans decreased from

5.628 percent to 5.444 percent during the same period.

As for the average interest rate in the overnight interbank lending market, it recorded a decrease of 4.014 percent in October 2025 compared to 4.681 percent in October 2024.

This came as a result of the weighted average interest rate on repurchase operations falling to 4.734 percent compared to 5.790 percent during the same period last year, in line with the policies of the US Federal Reserve.

- ONA

NCSI DATA

Real estate price index in
Oman rises by 17.3 percent

MUSCAT: The real estate price index in the Sultanate of Oman recorded an increase of 17.3 percent in the third quarter of 2025 compared to the same quarter of 2024.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the commercial real estate price index rose by 14.6 percent, driven by a 19 percent increase in commercial land prices, while retail shop prices fell by 8.5 percent, and industrial land prices saw a 5.5 percent increase.

The residential property price index achieved clear growth in the third quarter of 2025, with a rate of 18.7 percent compared to the third quarter of 2024, as residential land prices increased by 19.6 percent, residential apartments by 22.4 percent, in addition to the growth of villa prices by 16.5 percent, while the prices of other houses decreased by 0.5 percent.

At the governorate level, Muscat Governorate recorded the highest growth rate in residential land prices in the third quarter of this year at 48.3 percent, compared to the same quarter of last year, fol-



lowed by Musandam Governorate at 29.7 percent, then Al Dakhiliyah Governorate at 12.3 percent, South Al Batinah Governorate at 8.7 percent, North Al Batinah Governorate at 8.1 percent, while Dhofar Governorate recorded an increase of 4 percent.

In contrast, some governorates witnessed a decrease in residential land prices, as Al Dhahirah Gover-

norate recorded a decrease of 25.8 percent, followed by Al Buraimi Governorate with a decrease of 24.6 percent, then Al Wusta Governorate with a decrease of 13.3 percent.

The index also decreased in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate by 4 percent, and in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate by 2.2 percent.

- ONA

RBI DATA

India's forex
reserves
increase by
\$4.4 billion

MUMBAI: India's foreign exchange reserves rose in the third week on December by nearly \$4.4 billion to \$693.3 billion, according to the Reserve Bank of India data released on Friday.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday announced a major liquidity infusion through a long-term dollar-rupee swap, aimed at easing liquidity conditions in the financial system.

Swap auction

In a press release, RBI said it will conduct a USD/INR Buy/Sell swap auction of USD 10 billion with a tenor of three years. "The auction is scheduled to be held on January 13, 2026, between 10.30 am and 11.30 am."

Under the swap arrangement, banks will sell US dollars to the RBI in the near leg and simultaneously agree to buy back the same amount of dollars at the end of the three-year period.

The near-leg settlement will take place on January 15, 2026, while the far-leg maturity date is January 16, 2029.

Bids in the auction will be placed in terms of the swap premium, quoted in paisa up to two decimal places.

The auction will follow a multiple-price format, meaning successful bidders will be allotted amounts at the premium they have quoted, subject to the cut-off premium decided by the RBI.

Only Authorised Dealer Category-I banks will be eligible to participate in the auction, as per the RBI. The minimum bid size has been fixed at USD 10 million, with bids allowed in multiples of USD 1 million thereafter.

The results of the auction will be announced on the same day, the RBI said.

The central bank also clarified that swaps undertaken under this auction cannot be cancelled or modified, and participating banks will be exempted from ISDA documentation requirements for these transactions. - ANI

Banking shares push financial
sector index to 9,962 points

The Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed mixed performance in the week, with the prices of 37 securities declining, compared to 35 securities whose prices rose and 21 securities that remained unchanged at their previous levels



MUSCAT: Banks attracted investors in during the week's trading on the Muscat Stock Exchange, returning to the forefront before the end of trading in 2025, benefiting from the buying interest of local investment funds and institutions.

Trading in bank shares during the week amounted to OMR82.6 million, representing 46.9 percent of the total trading value witnessed by the Muscat Stock Exchange during the week, which amounted to OMR175.9 million.

Bank Muscat led these trades worth OMR46.6 million, followed by Bank Sohar International with trades amounting to OMR30.8 million and Bank Dhofar reported trades worth OMR2.3 million.

These trades came at a time when investors are rebuilding their investment portfolios ahead of the end of this year's trading and the announcement of financial results for companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The investors' appetite for bank

stocks was reflected in the financial sector index, which recorded a rise of 249 points during the week and closed at 9,962 points, up by 2.5 percent. The National Bank of Oman's stock recorded the highest rise among the seven banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, rising by 9.4 percent and closing at 186 baisa. The Oman Arab Bank's stock rose by 5.9 percent and closed at 178 baisa. The Bank of Muscat's stock rose to 341 baisa, up by 3 baisa. The shares of Bank Sohar International, National Bank of Oman, and Bank Nizwa each recorded a rise of one point, while the Bank of Dhofar's stock closed stable at 148 baisa.

The Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed mixed performance in the week, with the prices of 37 securities declining, compared to 35 securities whose prices rose and 21 securities that remained unchanged at their previous levels. The value of trading decreased by 16.3 percent to fall to OMR175.9 million, compared to OMR210.8 million in the week before, and the number of transactions executed decreased from more than 19,000 transactions to 17,222.

The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded an increase of 15 points and closed at 5,956 points, the industrial sector index rose by 4 points, and the Sharia index recorded an in-

MSX ends the week with small gains

Times News Service

Muscat: The Omani stock market closed with small gains, rising by 0.26%. The market stabilised overall ahead of the final trading sessions of the year, but remained on course to finish the year on a high note, according to an industry analyst. "The MSX distinguished itself as one of the top performers in the region this year," said Hani Abuagla, Senior Market Analyst, XTB Mena. The market found some support as oil prices rebounded during the week due to renewed supply risks. Tensions rose following the US Coast Guard's interceptions of Venezuela-linked tankers, while delayed repairs at Russia's Novorossiysk/CPC terminal impacted crude exports.

"However, the medium-term outlook for oil remains bearish as the oversupply narrative continues to weigh on regional sentiment, which



could fuel downside risks for the Omani and regional markets," he further added.

Market sentiment was also bolstered by optimism surrounding US Federal Reserve monetary policy, with markets pricing in two potential rate cuts in 2026. This is expected to benefit the Omani economy and the MSX throughout the coming year. Sector performance remained mixed throughout the week, with the Financial sector leading the gains at 2.75%. Performance among major lenders was positive, as Bank Muscat rose by 0.89%, Sohar International Bank climbed

crease of one point, while the services sector index declined by 14 points and closed at 2,429 points, affected by the decline in the shares of Ooredoo, Omantel, Asyad Shipping, OQ Exploration and Production and a number of other shares.

OQ Group shares saw high trading volumes last week, with OQ Basic Industries trading at OMR21.4 million, OQ Gas Networks trading at OMR19.4 million and OQ Exploration and Production trading at OMR18.6 million. The three companies accounted for 33.8 percent of the total trading value on the Muscat Stock Exchange during the week. - ONA

0.61%, and the National Bank of Oman edged up by 0.27%. Notably, Al Anwar Investment significantly outperformed the broader sector with a sharp increase of 11.54%.

The Industrial sector concluded the week nearly flat, posting a marginal gain of 0.06%. Positive performances were seen in OQ Base Industries, which rose 0.53%, and Oman Cables Industry, which increased by 1.00%.

The Services sector ended the week in the red, declining by 0.57%. Performance in the telecommunications space was particularly weak, with Oman Telecom falling by 1.68% and Ooredoo decreasing by 2.02%. Looking ahead to 2026, new IPOs could attract new investments and help drive the market to the upside," said Hani Abuagla. "A steady supply of quality assets could enhance market diversification and increase the exchange's attractiveness to foreign investors," he further added.

T

MARKET

Syria to launch new currency in January 2026



DAMASCUS: Syria's central bank has announced that a new national currency would be introduced on Jan. 1, 2026, with a process to exchange the existing notes set to begin on the same date.

Governor of the Central Bank of Syria, Abdul Qader Husrieh, said a 2025 presidential decree authorizes the launch of the new currency, describing the move as a turning point that will mark the beginning of a new economic and

monetary phase for the country.

According to the Syrian Arab News Agency, the decree grants the central bank the authority to determine the timetable and locations for exchanging the old currency.

Husrieh said detailed implementation instructions would be issued by the central bank ahead of the launch, with an emphasis on simplifying procedures during the exchange process. **UNA**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Xinjiang's outside investment hits over 1 trillion yuan mark in 2025

URUMQI: China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region attracted over one trillion yuan from outside the region in 2025 for the first time, injecting strong momentum into its high-quality economic development, according to the regional department of commerce.

Total funds that arrived from outside the region reached approximately 1.07 trillion yuan (about 152.08 billion U.S. dollars) this year, a year-on-year increase of 13.9 percent.

A total of 4,511 projects were implemented this year, spanning a more diversified range of industries.

Key sectors such as green energy, advanced manufacturing and new materials, modern logistics, high-quality fruits and vegetables and livestock products, as well as cultural tourism, emerged as particularly attractive areas of investment.

Such characteristic and advantageous industries collectively drew about 900.7 billion yuan in external investment, marking a significant increase of 16.3 percent.

Private investment served as the primary source of funding, accounting for nearly 70 percent of the total with about 730.7 billion yuan. It was mainly directed toward wind and solar power, real



estate and commercial logistics. Investment from state-owned enterprises amounted to approximately 334.9 billion yuan.

To support Xinjiang move onto a path of high-quality development, the central government has allocated over 200 billion yuan in paired-assistance funds for Xinjiang since 2012. Official data showed that Xinjiang's GDP has grown at an average annual rate of 7.04 percent since 2012.

In 2024, it expanded by 6.1 percent, surpassing 2 trillion yuan for the first time.

- The combined scale of China's exchange-traded funds (ETFs) has hit a record 6.02 trillion yuan

(855.6 billion U.S. dollars), up more than 2.2 trillion yuan from the end of last year, Shanghai Securities News reported Saturday, citing data from Choice, a financial information provider.

China introduced its first ETF in 2004. The market has expanded rapidly in recent years, with total ETF assets exceeding 4 trillion yuan in April this year and topping 5 trillion yuan in August.

Large ETFs have grown rapidly, with the number of funds managing over 10 billion yuan increasing to more than 120, up from just 66 at the end of last year.

In addition to strong asset growth, ETF product offerings

have continued to increase. The number of newly launched ETFs this year has reached a record high.

Commenting on the rapid expansion of ETF assets, Zhang Yanmin, general manager of the equity investment department at Southern Asset Management, said regulators have continued to encourage long-term capital to enter the market in recent years. Central Huijin and other long-term funds have repeatedly subscribed to broad-based ETFs to help stabilize the market, sending a strong signal to investors, he said.

Investor preferences are also changing. The "low-cost and more transparent" features of index funds align well with investors' needs, Zhang said. A growing number of institutional investors, such as insurers and pension funds, are using ETFs as part of their core allocations, while individual investors are gradually shifting from picking fund managers to picking investment tools.

He Jiang, head of the quantitative investment department at Minsheng Royal Fund Management, said the rapid growth of fund assets is reshaping the structure of the A-share market. Public funds are injecting large volumes of long-term, stable capital, helping improve overall stability and pricing efficiency. **-xinhua**

Indian rupee weakness to continue through 2026

The Indian rupee may appreciate modestly above the 90 level in 2026, targeting 90.80 by the September 2026 quarter

NEW DELHI [INDIA]: The Indian rupee is expected to show more weakness going ahead into 2026, according to a report by MUFG, a global financial group.

In a report earlier this month, it forecast more weakness for the Indian rupee. It expects the Indian rupee to appreciate modestly above the 90 level in 2026, targeting 90.80 by the September 2026 quarter.

"We have already been expecting INR to weaken and underperform, although we note FX outflow pressures have been more acute than we have anticipated thus far. Our forecasts also imply contin-



ued INR weakness against key FX crosses such as EUR (Euro), JPY (Japanese yen) and CNY (Chinese Yuan)," the report read.

It has also been asserted that higher import needs and soft net FDI may weigh on the Indian rupee.

Indian rupee breached the 90

mark against USD in early December, extending its depreciation run through sessions now, and in the process, hitting a fresh all-time low for the Indian currency.

"Our FX forecasts reflect our expectation for a wider current account deficit of 1.5 per cent of GDP and soft net FDI flows. These

should offset some improvement in portfolio inflows with our expectation of an eventual trade deal between US and India, where we assume tariffs will be lowered to 25 per cent from 50 per cent by early 2026," the MUFG report read.

Against that backdrop, MUFG expects RBI to intervene to cap

Rupee depreciation actively.

At the same time, it thinks the fundamentals ultimately imply some pressure for the Rupee to weaken, and as such for the RBI to eventually allow the Rupee to break above 90 over time.

Risks, however, tilt towards more Rupee weakness.

"Our forecasts are certainly sensitive to tariff assumptions. If a trade deal between the US and India to lower tariffs is not reached, the bias would tilt towards further INR weakness and more RBI rate cuts, even as India's domestic economy should continue to cushion India's overall GDP," it noted.

"It's important to emphasise we are not overly bearish on INR (Rupee) at current levels given cheaper FX (foreign exchange) valuations, coupled with stronger momentum for structural reforms which could over time unlock the binding constraints to growth. We have already seen India's government accelerate reforms such as simplification of the GST and consolidation of labour codes, policy moves which probably would not have been possible without the external shock from the 50 per cent tariffs. With the momentum on reforms picking up, coupled with re-

cent wins on state elections by the incumbent government, we think FX vol can remain reasonably contained unlike in past cycles."

MUFG raised India's GDP forecasts to 7.6 per cent for 2025-26 and 7.1 per cent for 2026-27, on the back of stronger domestic demand from GST tax cuts, better rural activity, and the assumption of a trade deal with the US by early 2026.

"From a growth perspective, the direct impact of tariffs on India's exports has been small so far, with some redirection of exports to markets such as the EU, China and the UAE. This is not to say that tariffs will not bite, and we think the longer tariffs stay at elevated levels the more prominent the negative impact will be. As a working assumption, we see tariffs lowered to 25 per cent in early 2026, down from the current 50 per cent, but higher than India's key export competitors. As such, while goods and services exports could soften, we think the downside should be capped by an expected trade deal," it has noted in the report.

The lagged impact of easier monetary policy should also provide some support to domestic demand in 2026, the MUFG report said. **-ANI**

PEAK OIL

6 TIMES

Why world can't break its fossil fuel habit

BERLIN: Peak Oil once struck fear into policymakers, businesses and consumers as a looming moment when the world might suck the last drops of black gold from the ground, like a straw reaching the bottom of a milkshake.

The idea was popularised in the 1950s by geologist M. King Hubbert, who warned that US oil production would follow a bell-shaped curve and eventually hit an unavoidable peak as fields matured and declined.

Climate change has flipped the narrative in recent years. Instead of fearing scarcity, the debate now centers on when demand will finally peak, as the shift to electric vehicles (EV) and other clean energy gathers pace.

At the same time, political pushback, from delays to combustion-engine car bans to rollbacks of EV subsidies, is casting doubt on how fast that transition from fossil fuels will actually happen.

Two opposing views have emerged about when global oil demand will start to decline.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), a Paris-based body representing major oil-consuming



nations, projects that demand will flatten to around 102 million barrels per day (bpd) by 2030. In its World Energy Outlook 2025, published last month, the IEA's main Stated Policies Scenario assumes governments follow through on ambitious energy and climate goals.

OPEC, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, takes the opposite view. In its latest long-term outlook, the oil producer group forecasts that demand will continue to rise for decades and sees no peak before 2050, projecting consumption will reach nearly 123 million bpd by mid-century.

The two organisations do, however, share one underlying concern: supply is becoming harder to

sustain. OPEC believes robust demand growth will justify steady investment to ensure ample reserves from its members for decades to come. The IEA, by contrast, offers a more restrained outlook.

Under pressure from the Trump administration, the agency reinstated its more conservative Current Policies Scenario, which was dropped in 2020 and is based on current laws and observable trends that fall far short of climate ambitions.

This scenario suggests supply growth will slow after 2028 as non-OPEC sources like the United States, Brazil, Guyana and Canada wane. That would leave supply reliant on Middle East OPEC countries like Saudi Arabia, the United

Arab Emirates and Iraq.

Oil demand could, meanwhile, rise to 113 million bpd by 2050 if climate pledges remain unimplemented, the IEA warned.

Franziska Holz, deputy head of the energy, transportation and environment department at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin), thinks reinstating the conservative scenario is a "positive" as it proves that the world is "not on track with our climate targets ...[and] not fast enough in replacing fossil fuels in our energy mix."

Holz quipped that the "Americans had probably not intended that" when they leaned on the IEA to reinstate the more cautious scenario.

New oil discoveries hit rock bottom

When it comes to Peak Oil, both organisations point to the same underlying risk: oil supply won't take care of itself. Older fields are declining fast and without steady investment, production from existing sites will drop by about 8% a year, the IEA warned last month. **-ow**

India's electronics production rises

NEW DELHI [INDIA]: India saw a ramp-up of electronics production by 6 times and export increasing 8 times in the last 11 years, Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw said, lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Electronic goods production rose from Rs 1.9 lakh crore in 2014-15 to Rs 11.3 lakh crore in 2024-25. Exports during the period rose from Rs 0.38 lakh crore to Rs 3.3 lakh crore.

PLI Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing (LSEM) attracted over Rs 13,475 crore worth of investment, with a production of Rs 9.8 lakh crore achieved, the Union minister reported through a series of posts on X.

According to the Minister, the growth in electronics manufacturing in India should be credited to PM Modi's vision of developing a comprehensive ecosystem. Electronics manufacturing creat-



ed 25 lakh jobs in the last decade.

"This is the real economic growth at the grassroots level. As we scale semiconductors and component manufacturing, job creation will accelerate," one of the X posts read.

PLI (LSEM) is driving manufacturing, jobs, and exports in the electronics sector.

Over 1.3 lakh jobs have been created in the last 5 years, the minister said, noting that both global and Indian manufacturers participated in the growth story.

Electronics is now India's third-largest export category, climbing from seventh place. **-ANI**



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Cost Accountant, B.Com with 15 yrs exp in Oman. Can join urgently, Contact: 7733 6141
Indian (M), 28, Accountant with overall exp. 3 yrs valid D/L. Contact: 78624277
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Indian male, Sr. Accountant (M.com & MBA finance), having 10 years of Oman experience up to finalization. valid D/L Mob : 97524285, Bobyky@gmail.com
Accountant looking for job. Contact: 75024166

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Accountant available immediate joiner, Indian male, B.Com, 10+ yrs exp (4 yrs Oman) Expert in Tally & Accounts Contact: 91417133
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SOUTHERN TRANSITIONAL COUNCIL

Saudi Arabia urges STC to withdraw from Yemeni governorates after warning airstrikes

RIYADH/ADEN: Saudi Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman Al Saud on Saturday warned the Southern Transitional Council (STC) to withdraw from military camps in two Yemeni governorates and hand them over to local authorities, a day after Saudi warplanes conducted warning airstrikes on STC-affiliated military sites.

It was time for the STC, at this sensitive stage, to prioritise reason, wisdom, the public interest and unity by responding to Saudi-Emirati mediation efforts, ending the escalation, withdrawing from military camps in the two governorates and handing them over peacefully to the National Shield Forces and the local authorities, the Saudi minister wrote on X.

Also on Saturday, spokesperson of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen Turki Al Maliki said any military movements that undermine de-escalation efforts would be dealt with to protect civilians, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

He added that the airstrikes, which were carried out at the request of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) Chairman Rashad Al-Alimi, aimed at ensuring the withdrawal of STC forces, handing over military camps to the National Shield Forces, a Saudi-backed Yemeni force, and enabling local authorities to carry out their duties.

Tensions in Yemen escalated on December 3 when STC forces took control of Hadramout following clashes with pro-government



units. The STC later expanded its presence into the eastern province of Al-Mahrah without reported resistance and has since recruited local forces in both provinces, despite repeated calls by the Yemeni government and Saudi Arabia for de-escalation.

Following the latest STC military expansion, Saudi Arabia

conducted airstrikes on Friday targeting STC sites, including several belonging to the Hadrami Elite Forces in the Ghayl bin Yamin area near key oil fields. No casualties or damage to military equipment were reported.

PLC Chairman Rashad Al-Alimi on Saturday welcomed the Saudi-led coalition's measures to curb what he described as destabilizing actions by the STC in the two governorates.

In a statement on social media platform X, Al-Alimi praised the coalition's swift response to his request for immediate measures to protect civilians and restore security, saying the actions were taken in line with recommendations of Yemen's National Defense Council.

The STC has not issued an official response to the latest statements from the PLC chairman, the Saudi defense minister, or the Saudi-led coalition. However, the Aden-based pro-secession group said on Friday that it remains open to coordination or arrangements that safeguard what it described as shared interests with Saudi Arabia and the aspirations of southern Yemen's population.

The STC added that its recent military deployments in eastern Yemen were aimed at countering security threats from militant groups and expressed surprise over the Saudi airstrikes targeting its Hadrami Elite Forces. It warned that such actions would neither advance dialogue nor de-

ter southerners from pursuing what it described as their legitimate rights.

Formed in 2017, the STC seeks self-determination and eventual independence for southern Yemen. Despite joining the Saudi-led coalition and integrating into the internationally recognized government of Yemen in 2022, the group continues to push for southern separation. The STC has accused previous Yemeni governments of politically and economically marginalizing the south, a claim that Yemeni authorities deny.

Yemen has been mired in conflict since 2014, when Houthi forces captured Sanaa and large swathes of the north, prompting a Saudi-led coalition to intervene in 2015. -Xinhua

UAE-PAKISTAN

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed pays maiden official visit to Pakistan as UAE President

ISLAMABAD: President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, paid an official visit to Pakistan on Friday, at the invitation of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, marking his maiden visit to the country in his capacity as UAE President.

The UAE leader was accorded a warm and cordial welcome on arrival. His aircraft was escorted by a formation of JF-17 fighter jets as it entered Pakistani airspace. At Nur Khan Airbase, the UAE President and the accompanying high-level delegation were received by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, along with senior cabinet members and government officials, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

During the visit, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed held substantive talks with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The two leaders exchanged views on further strengthening the longstanding fraternal relations between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. They reviewed progress in ongoing areas of co-operation and explored ways to deepen engagement across a broad range of sectors.

Both sides underscored the importance of expanding collaboration in economic cooperation, investment, energy, infrastructure development, information technology, and people-to-people exchanges. -AFP

Zelenskyy plans to meet Trump on Sunday

Kyiv and Washington have worked up a 20-point peace plan that has been sent to Russia

Kyiv: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he plans to meet with US President Donald Trump this Sunday in Florida.

Zelenskyy earlier posted to social media that a meeting would take place in the coming days (see below).

But Ukrainian media and others earlier reported a meeting between the two leaders was likely going to take place on Sunday, at Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida.

Trump is spending his Christmas break there.

"This meeting is specifically for the purpose of finalising everything as much as we can," Zelenskyy said.

Kyiv and Washington have worked up a 20-point peace plan that has been sent to Russia.

The meeting between Zelenskyy and Trump comes after a flurry of diplomatic activity last weekend in Miami.



Poland shuts two airports as Russia strikes Ukraine

Poland has temporarily closed two of its airports following an overnight Russian attack on Ukraine.

Operations were suspended on Saturday at the Rzeszow and Lublin airports in Poland's south-east after Polish forces scrambled fighter aircrafts over the Russian strikes, the Polish Air Navigation Services Agency said in a statement X.

Explosions heard in Kyiv

The Russian military has carried out a large-scale overnight attack on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv,

Ukrainian officials said in the early hours of Saturday.

"Explosions in the capital. Air defense forces are operating. Stay in shelters!" Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitschko posted on Telegram.

Ukraine's air force activated a countrywide air raid alert, saying that drones and missiles were spotted over several regions in the country.

News agencies AFP and Reuters cited reporters on the ground as saying they heard loud explosions in the capital city.

The attack comes ahead of a weekend meeting between

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and US President Donald Trump, announced by Zelenskyy.

'Blood, life and death' embodied Russia, North Korea bond, Kim says

North Korea's Kim Jong Un said his country had shared "blood, life and death" with Russia during the course of the war in Ukraine.

In his new year's greetings to Russia President Vladimir Putin, Kim labeled 2025 as a "really meaningful year" for the relations between the two countries, which became even stronger due

to them "sharing blood, life and death in the same trench."

Pyongyang sent troops to fight for Russia in its war in Ukraine, as well as sending artillery shells, missiles and long-range rocket systems.

Analysts say Moscow is in return providing North Korea with financial aid, military aid and food and energy supplies.

Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz told Ukrainethat Europe was "unwaveringly by your side" as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy prepared for fresh talks in Washington on ending the war with Russia. -DW

PARIS

France: 3 women stabbed in Paris metro, suspect arrested

PARIS: Police in France arrested a man suspected of injuring three women with a sharp weapon in different metro stations in the capital Paris, according to prosecutors.

The three women were attacked at three different locations along the Line 3 of the Paris metro, a line that also stops at the city's center.

The French Interior Ministry said the suspect had aimed at a woman's back, before carrying on and attacking a second victim in the leg minutes later. A third victim was later injured in the back.

Two of the victims were taken to hospital but were not in critical condition, authorities said.

What do we know about the suspect?

France's Interior Ministry said in a statement cited by the French AFP news agency that the suspect is a 25-year-old Malian national known to the police. He was imprisoned in 2024 for aggravated theft and sexual assault convictions.

The suspect was required to leave France after being released in July this year. But a missing consular travel document prevented the deportation.

He was identified using surveil-



lance camera footage.

France Interior Minister Laurent Nunez took to his X account to praise the authorities for promptly apprehending the suspect, adding that the quick arrest was due to video surveillance and police's "ex-

ceptional knowledge of the area."

European capitals are preparing for the end of year celebrations with increased vigilance, amid recent attacks and uncovered plots targeting religious festivities and gatherings. -DW

BEIT SHE'AN

Palestinian held over deadly stabbing incident in Israel

TEL AVIV: A Palestinian man rammed his car into a man and then stabbed a young woman in northern Israel, killing both, police said on Friday.

In retaliation, Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz quickly ordered military action in what he said was the assailant's hometown in the occupied West Bank.

The attack began on Friday afternoon in the northern city of Beit She'an, in the Jordan Valley.

Police said the Palestinian man crashed his vehicle into people, killing one man and injuring a teenage boy.

He then sped onto a highway, where he fatally stabbed the woman and injured another person near the entrance to the city of Afula.

Authorities said the alleged attacker, a 34-year-old Palestinian, was shot and is in a stable condition in the hospital.

The Israeli military said the suspect had "infiltrated into Israeli territory several days ago."

Israeli President Isaac Herzog said that he was shocked by the "horrific killing spree."

Katz orders retaliation by military in West Bank



Israeli police later said the attacker was a resident of Qabatiya and had taken his employer's vehicle to carry out the attack.

Defence Minister Israel Katz ordered the military to launch an operation in the northern West Bank city.

Katz said that he'd told troops to "act forcefully and immediately" against what he called "terrorist infrastructure" in the Qabatiya. "Anyone who aids or sponsors terrorism will pay the full price, he said.

It's common practice for Israel to launch raids in Palestinian attackers' hometowns, which Israel defends as helping to locate militant infrastructure and preventing future attacks. Human rights watchdogs say these actions con-

stitute collective punishment.

Later Friday, the military said its soldiers had launched an operation in Qabatiya.

Rising violence fuels West Bank tensions

Friday's attack took place just days after Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian teenager in the Qabatiya area.

The military has launched a probe after footage emerged showing the teenager not posing any threat or throwing anything at soldiers who shot him.

Friday's incident also came a day after an Israeli military reservist dressed in civilian clothes rammed his vehicle into a Palestinian man in the West Bank. -DW



Rahul Das

MUSCAT: You don't need a long-haul flight to Africa to come face-to-face with giraffes, watch cheetahs run or wander alongside lemurs. A short road trip from Oman unlocks a world of wildlife at Al Ain Zoo, one of the Middle East's largest and most immersive zoological destinations. Located just 350 kilometres from Muscat, Al Ain Zoo offers Omani citizens and residents an unforgettable wildlife escape—perfect for families, nature lovers and weekend explorers seeking something beyond the usual city break. Home to nearly 4,000 animals, the zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) as well as the most recent World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) accreditation, a mark of international standards in animal care, conservation and education.

From Desert Vision to Global Conservation Hub
Founded in 1968 under the guidance of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the UAE's founding father and a pioneer of environmental conservation, Al Ain Zoo began with a simple but urgent mission: to protect endangered desert species such as the Arabian oryx and houbara bustard. More than five decades later, that mission has grown into a comprehensive conservation programme supporting endangered species through scientific breeding, rehabilitation, veterinary care and public education. Today, the zoo stands as a sanctuary where conservation meets community engagement.

Hands-On Wildlife Experiences
Unlike traditional zoos, Al Ain Zoo invites visitors to engage. Guests can attend sand cat keeper talks, observe Amur tiger enrichment sessions, encounter reptiles up close or enjoy interactive bird pop-ups and monkey enrichment activities. Each experience is designed to deepen understanding of wildlife behaviour and the importance of protecting vulnerable species—making the visit as educational as it is entertaining.

Into the Wild: Al Ain Safari
The crown jewel of the experience is Al Ain Safari, the world's largest man-made safari. Set across expansive terrain, the safari allows visitors to witness animals roaming in environments that closely resemble their natural habitats. From African lions and white rhinos to giraffes and African gazelles, the diversity is striking. The safari is also home to African antelopes, multiple species of oryx, eland and lechwe.

Learning Beyond the Exhibits
Beyond animal encounters, visitors can step into the Sheikh Zayed Desert Learning Centre, an architectural and educational landmark within the zoo. Designed by world-class experts, the centre blends interactive exhibits, multimedia displays and immersive storytelling to explore the UAE's desert ecosystems and biodiversity. Cultural guides, trained extensively in environmental interpretation, offer visitors authentic insights into the region's natural heritage. Even the building's design reflects its purpose, with colours inspired by the Arabian oryx, helping regulate temperature while symbolising the zoo's origins.

Protecting the Planet's Rarest Species
Speaking to Times of Oman, Saeed Rashed Abdullah Al Zaabi, Senior Animal Keeper, highlighted the zoo's role in global conservation. "Endangered species at the zoo include the Addax, Scimitar-horned Oryx, Egyptian Vulture, Cheetah, Saker Falcon, Dama gazelle and sand cat," he said.

A Journey People Won't Forget
Whether it's watching a cheetah run, feeding the giraffes or exploring a safari landscape, Al Ain Zoo delivers moments that stay with visitors long after the drive back home. It's a place to explore, play, discover—and create memories people won't stop talking about, all just a few hours from Muscat.



‘I’m not retiring’: Kipchoge plans marathon world tour

The 41-year-old Kenyan two-time Olympic champion is to complete a marathon on all seven continents over the next two and half years

NAIROBI: For more than two decades, Eliud Kipchoge ran with history on his back and won almost everything there was to win. He rewrote what the human body was believed capable of and became, by near-universal agreement, the greatest marathon runner ever. Now the 41-year-old says the chase for medals and validation is over.

“What I am doing is not retiring,” he says. “I am evolving. I am running for purpose.”

Kipchoge plans to take his running to the edges of the world with the Eliud Kipchoge World Tour - not to prove his greatness, but to give it away.

Over the next two and a half years, the two-time Olympic champion will complete a marathon on all seven continents

“Running is the most universal sport,” he told *Newsday* on the BBC World Service.

“It connects us all. With this project, I want to compete not only for records, but for the people.

“I want to inspire, to give back, and to remind everyone that no human is limited.”

Kipchoge became the third man to defend an Olympic marathon title with gold at Tokyo 2020

To understand the significance of this moment, it helps to understand the magnitude of Kipchoge’s success.

As well as those Olympic titles, Kipchoge’s honours have included



a world title, 11 World Marathon Major victories and two official world records.

In one of sport’s most impressive feats, he became the first person to break the two-hour marathon barrier under special conditions in Vienna in 2019, clocking an unofficial time of one hour, 59 minutes and 40 seconds.

“If I look at the last 23 years, the highlight was making history,” he says.

“Not winning medals, but even breaking world records, but opening the minds of people around the world to believe that they are not limited in anything they are doing.”

That belief has become the anchor of his next chapter.

The tour will operate under Eliud’s Running World, a long-term platform designed to promote participation in running while supporting global causes.

Each marathon will raise funds for the Eliud Kipchoge Foundation, which focuses on education,

environmental sustainability and health.

Kipchoge hopes to raise \$1m (£739,000) at every stop, with projects tailored to local needs.

In Kenya, his vision includes building libraries across all 47 counties. In other cities, he wants the tour to leave behind tangible benefits, not just memories.

“I want to leave a legacy of education,” Kipchoge says.

“There is knowledge in books. If we want to think with the outside world, we need to get knowledge and understand how other people are thinking.”

Running a marathon in the extreme Antarctic cold is not something Kipchoge sees as a stunt, but as a statement.

“It is about pushing your limits,” he explains. “I want to show the world that you can still push your limits in anything, even in the toughest conditions.”

Asked whether he is pushing himself too hard, his answer is

characteristically direct.

“Life is about pressing on,” he says.

“The moment you stop pressing, it is no longer life.”

‘Nobody protects young athletes’

Kipchoge announced the end of his Olympic career after failing to finish the marathon at Paris 2024

Kipchoge’s shift in mindset has been shaped not just by his success, but by what he has seen around him.

In recent years, he has become increasingly outspoken about the welfare of thousands of athletes who train as hard and dream as big as top stars but are left with little protection when they fall short.

“I am not satisfied with how athletes are being handled or how they are being paid,” he says.

“The sports world is making huge profits, but very little goes to the athlete.”

He believes the system creates

a dangerous divide. Elite athletes earn disproportionately, while the majority struggle to survive - often without education, guidance or long-term support.

“It’s a real concern. And it’s a huge gap. If you do not appreciate somebody, they will move away,” Kipchoge says.

“And if they move away without knowledge, which is a real window for exploitation.”

“Young people want to support their families. They want a better life. But nobody protects them.”

For Kipchoge, the issue is about systemic failure.

“Talent does not look like talent if you do not nurture it,” he says.

Kipchoge argues that federations, agents and governing bodies have failed to invest properly in education, mentorship and safeguarding, particularly for athletes who do not immediately succeed.

“A diamond is just a stone,” he says.

“If it is crafted well, it becomes

something valuable. If it is not, it remains just a stone.”

In 2023, Kipchoge became the first man to win the Berlin Marathon five times following victories in 2015, 2017, 2018, and 2022

Kipchoge has long advocated for clean sport, warning that the pressure to succeed quickly has contributed to doping and ethical shortcuts.

“People want quick riches,” he says.

“They do not see beyond sport. They do not value longevity.”

He believes sport should be treated as a profession with a long horizon, not a gamble.

“If we teach young people to think about life beyond sport, to leave a clean legacy, then the sport will benefit,” he says.

That philosophy extends beyond athletics.

Kipchoge has spoken about mentoring athletes in other disciplines including boxing, judo and rugby, particularly in communities where sport can provide structure, purpose and opportunity.

“We want to give young people options,” he says.

“Sport can change society, but only if it is handled in the right way.”

Even in lighter moments, Kipchoge’s values surface. Asked who he would choose for a no-pressure jog anywhere in the world, his answer is not another athlete.

“Barack Obama,” he replies. “Because he is a real human being.”

Between footballing greats Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, Kipchoge chooses Ronaldo - not for flair, but for work ethic.

“He works hard every day to improve his talent,” Kipchoge says.

It is a familiar theme. Kipchoge values discipline over glamour, process over outcome and purpose over applause.

Kipchoge says his world tour will not erase the competitive fire that defined his career. But the meaning behind that fire has changed.

“I have nothing more to prove to the world,” he says.

“What I want now is to sell the spirit of running to the next generation.” - Agencies

BANGLADESH PREMIER LEAGUE

Coach Zaki dies of heart attack before BPL game

DHAKA: Mahbub Ali Zaki, a renowned fast-bowling coach in Bangladesh, died on Saturday after suffering a heart attack before Dhaka Capitals’ Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) game against Rajshahi Warriors at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Zaki, who was the Capitals assistant coach, collapsed during his team’s pre-match routines. He was taken to hospital, where authorities pronounced him dead shortly afterwards. He was 59. The match went ahead as scheduled, with the players, coaches and match officials observing a minute’s silence for Zaki.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), where Zaki was employed for the last 17 years, posted on social media: “Following his playing career, Mahbub Ali Zaki dedicated himself to coaching and player development.

He joined the BCB in 2008 as a High Performance coach and went on to make a significant contribution to the growth



of pace bowling in the country through his work.”

Zaki was a specialist pace-bowling coach in the BCB’s game development department. He first came to prominence for his work with Taskin Ahmed in 2016, when the bowler was reported for an illegal bowling action. Zaki worked closely with many fast bowlers in the country, apart from liaising with the various overseas bowling coaches who worked with the Bangladesh team.

An affable character, Zaki wanted to open a fast-bowling academy in Bangladesh, similar to the MRF Pace Foundation in India. - Agencies

PREMIER LEAGUE

Dorgu helps Man Utd sink Newcastle

LONDON: Badly depleted Manchester United clung on to climb back into the Premier League’s top five as Patrick Dorgu’s stunning volley proved enough to beat Newcastle 1-0 at Old Trafford on Friday.

Missing seven senior players through injury and international duty including skipper Bruno Fernandes, Ruben Amorim’s side also lost Mason Mount at half-time.

But despite Newcastle having 66% possession and Lewis Hall’s thunderous strike bouncing down off the underside of the bar, Eddie Howe’s side could not come up with a leveller as their dismal recent form continued.

In fairness, Dorgu’s first Manchester United goal was worthy of winning any game.

As Diogo Dalot’s long throw was cleared to the edge of the Newcastle area, Dorgu strode confidently forward and hit the loose ball as it dropped, giving goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale no chance as he touched it into the corner.

Newcastle ended the game camped around their opponents’ box. But the home side stood firm to claim only their second clean



sheet of the season, and win without Fernandes for the first time since March 2022.

In contrast, Newcastle have now lost six of their past nine away games.

Dorgu gave a glimpse of his potential at Hampden Park last month when he calmly tucked

home a late equaliser that would have qualified Denmark for the World Cup at Scotland’s expense were it not for the dramatic ending in Glasgow that sent Steve Clarke’s men to the finals instead.

Amorim’s first signing as Manchester United head coach, Dorgu has flattered to deceive in the left

wing-back role, occasionally being a real weapon, at other times looking out of his depth in one of the key positions in the 3-4-3 grand plan.

On the night Amorim chose to select an orthodox back four for the first time, he moved Dorgu over to the right side of attack and effectively asked him to provide the threat Amad Diallo and Bryan Mbeumo were responsible for prior to departing for the Africa Cup of Nations. He did not let his boss down.

Aside from his goal - Dorgu had the confidence to usher Manuel Ugarte away from the ball as he lined up his shot - he was in the way when Fabian Schar’s goal-bound effort, one of numerous Newcastle chances, was deflected for a corner.

If someone was going to burst forward and stretch the Newcastle defence, the former Lecce player was generally the man.

His last surge downfield was six minutes into stoppage time - his legs must have been burning - as Manchester United clung desperately to only their second clean sheet of the season. - Agencies

SCOTTISH LEGEND

Nottingham Forest to rename stand in honour of ‘great hero’ Robertson

LONDON: Nottingham Forest are to rename a stand at the City Ground to honour their “great hero” John Robertson, who died at the age of 72 this week.

Robertson scored the only goal when the club retained the European Cup by beating Hamburg in 1980, having also delivered the cross from which Trevor Francis netted the winner the previous season against Malmö.

The winger also won the First and Second Division titles, the UEFA Super Cup, two Football



League Cups, the 1978 FA Charity Shield and the Anglo-Scottish Cup with Forest.

Forest owner Evangelos Marinakis said the John Robertson Stand would be a “lasting recognition of his extraordinary contribution to our club”.

“This week is one of profound sadness for everyone connected with Nottingham Forest as we come together to mourn the passing of John Robertson - a true legend of this great club in every sense of the word,” Marinakis

said in a statement. “I extend my sincerest condolences to his family, his friends, and all who loved him.

“Today, I have recommended to the Board that the Bridgford Stand be renamed ‘The John Robertson Stand’ in his honour and in lasting recognition of his extraordinary contribution to our club, so that his legacy - and our great hero - will forever be remembered.”

The City Ground already has stands named after former manager Brian Clough and former

goalkeeper and assistant manager Peter Taylor.

In 2015, Robertson topped a poll by the Nottingham Post of fans’ all-time favourite Forest players.

He also earned 28 caps for Scotland, scoring a winning goal against England in 1981, and also netted against New Zealand at the 1982 World Cup. He went on to become former Forest team-mate Martin O’Neill’s assistant manager at Wycombe Wanderers, Norwich City, Leicester City, Celtic and Aston Villa. - Agencies

Mali stall progress of Morocco

AFCO hosts hit the front thanks to Brahim Diaz's spot-kick in the first half but were forced to settle for just a point after Sinayoko's leveller ended Morocco's world record-winning run of 19 matches

RABAT: AFCO hosts Morocco missed the chance to guarantee their spot in the last 16 of the Africa Cup of Nations after Lassine Sinayoko's second-half penalty earned Mali a 1-1 draw with the hosts on Friday.

The match was a tale of two spot-kicks, with Brahim Diaz giving Morocco the lead from a penalty deep in first-half injury time and Sinayoko replying on 64 minutes.

The stalemate at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in the capital Rabat ended Morocco's world record winning run which had been taken to 19 matches with their 2-0 victory over Comoros in



the tournament's opening game.

It also means Morocco have not yet confirmed their place in the knockout phase, although they are on top of Group A with four points from two games.

Mali come next on two points alongside Zambia, who drew 0-0 with minnows Comoros earlier in Casablanca.

Morocco next face Zambia on Monday, and a victory in that match against the 2012 champions will ensure that the hosts go through as group winners.

"We'll look back at the second half and see what the problem was but we didn't play the way we did in the first half. We didn't impose our game and had to drop off. The penalty changed the game a bit," Morocco midfielder Azzedine Ou-nahi told broadcaster beIN Sports.

"We go into the third game with the same approach, to win the game and finish top of the group."



Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi, the African player of the year, was again an unused substitute as he continues his recovery from an ankle injury suffered playing for

Paris Saint-Germain at the start of November.

Mbappe watches on
His former PSG teammate Kylian



Mbappé, the current Real Madrid superstar and France skipper, was among the spectators in the crowd of 63,844 and appeared to be wearing a Morocco shirt with Hakimi's number two on it.

With Hakimi on the sidelines, Mbappé's Real Madrid teammate Diaz was the main attraction on the pitch – the little number 10 forced a good save from Mali goalkeeper Djigui Diarra on 17 minutes and then played a key part in the penalty which led to the opening goal just before the interval.

Mali defender Nathan Gassama brushed the ball with his hand as he tried to stop Diaz dribbling past him inside the box, and the referee eventually awarded a spot-kick following a lengthy look at the pitchside VAR monitor.

Morocco's Soufiane Rahimi had a spot-kick saved against Comoros, but this time Diaz sent the goalkeeper the wrong way for his

second goal of the tournament.

However, Walid Regragui's side, the best team in Africa according to the FIFA rankings, could not build on that as Mali won a penalty of their own just after the hour mark.

Sinayoko went down under a clumsy challenge by Jawad El Yamiq, and 29-year-old Cameroonian referee Abdoul Abdel Mefire awarded the penalty after eventually being called over to check his screen.

Auxerre striker Sinayoko, having been booked apparently for something he said to the referee, kept his cool to stroke in the reward and restore parity.

Morocco substitute Youssef En-Nesyri was denied by a good Diarra save and Mali then held on through 10 minutes of stoppage time for a point, as the final whistle was greeted with jeers from the home fans. - Agencies

DEFEATED SOUTH AFRICA

Salah's penalty sends Egypt into AFCON knockout stage



AGADIR: Mohamed Salah scored as 10-man Egypt beat South Africa 1-0 in Agadir on Friday to become the first qualifiers for the knockout stage of the Africa Cup of Nations.

The Liverpool star converted a penalty on 45 minutes, and South Africa were denied a spot-kick late in the second half when Yasser Ibrahim appeared to handle the ball inside the box. Egypt were reduced to 10 men in first-half added time when right-back Mohamed Hany was shown a second yellow card for a stamp, followed by a red.

After two rounds in Group B, record seven-time champions Egypt have six points and are guaranteed

a top-two finish and a place in the round of 16. South Africa have three points, and Angola and Zimbabwe one each after they drew 1-1.

The first chance fell to Salah after 11 minutes, but he could not move forward quickly enough to connect with a low cross from Hany. Midway through the opening half a pattern had developed – Egypt were pushing forward regularly while South Africa defended with calmness and solid tackling.

A rare South Africa attack ended disappointingly as Lyle Foster struck a weak shot that was saved by 37-year-old Mohamed El Shenawy. Salah was being closely



policed by Aubrey Modiba and as half-time drew near the Liverpool star retreated into the Egyptian half in order to retain possession.

Then, as the Egypt captain chased a loose ball with Khuliso Mudau, the South African right-back raised his left arm, striking the left eye of Salah. Amid Egyptian protests, the Burundian referee viewed the incident on a VAR monitor and pointed to the penalty spot. A lengthy delay before the kick was taken could not have eased the nerves of Salah, but he converted the penalty as Ronwen Williams dived in the wrong direction. - Agencies

AFCON GROUP A

Comoros hold Zambia to draw

CASABLANCA: Chances were at a premium as Comoros and Zambia played out the first goal-less draw of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in a low-key match in Casablanca on Friday.

The key moment came midway through the first half when Comoros striker Myziane Maolida thought he had scored the easiest of goals, walking the ball into an empty net from five yards out after fantastic wing play from Rafiki Said.

However, Mauritian referee Ahmad Imtehz Heeralall correctly ruled the effort out after a Video Assistant Referee intervention spotted a foul in the immediate build-up, with Yacine Bourhane making a poor late challenge and standing on Owen Tembo's foot.

While the Coelacanths were largely the better side throughout, much of the second half was a non-event.

Comoros again had the best chance, Faiz Selemani heading a deep cross onto the roof of the net with Zambia goalkeeper Willard Mwanza stranded in no man's land after coming off his line and getting nowhere near the delivery.

The result will be more to Comoros' liking, leaving them with one point ahead of their final Group A match against Mali back in Casablanca on Monday.

Zambia, who have two points,



will likely have to beat host nation Morocco in their simultaneous closing game in Rabat to reach the last 16.

After putting in a commanding performance in their opening-night 2-0 defeat against Morocco, Comoros goalkeeper Yannick Pandor was rarely tested this time around. The AFCON newcomer was, however, fortunate to escape embarrassment early on after overplaying inside his own area, luckily getting the bounce of the ball after being tackled by Leicester City striker Patson Daka.

Before having his goal ruled out, Maolida had seen a far-post effort blocked on its way into the net by sliding centre-back Dominic Chanda. Zambia's best effort of the opening 45 minutes came when Kings Kangwa sent a dipping left-foot drive just over the

bar from the edge of the box.

The result for Chipolopolo extends a remarkable AFCON run of 12 games without a victory at the tournament since they were champions back in 2012.

Despite a flurry of late pressure during second-half added time, in which they forced a succession of free-kicks and corners, there was never much chance of Moses Schinone's side repeating the heroics with which they snatched a late 1-1 draw against Mali in their opening match.

The result means Zambia will have to summon the spirit of 2012 if they are to take something against Morocco. But Comoros will fancy their chances of beating Mali and making it out of their group, just as they famously did on their AFCON debut in 2021 when they shocked Ghana. - Agencies

AFCON GROUP B

Angola share the spoils with Zimbabwe to earn their first points

MARRAKECH: Talismanic forwards Gelson Dala and Knowledge Musona both scored as Angola and Zimbabwe each earned their first point with a 1-1 draw in Group B at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Marrakech.

Dala, who netted four times at the 2023 finals, rifled Angola in front from To Carneiro's chipped delivery as part of an incisive move, but returning Zimbabwe legend Musona masterfully controlled Bill Antonio's arrowed pass to equalise with a ruthless finish during first-half added time.

Warriors goalkeeper Washington Arubi made an alert close-range save shortly after the break to prevent Jonathan Buatu from restoring his side's lead from David Carmo's knockdown.

Angola counterpart Hugo Marques also reacted excellently to tip Tawanda Chirewa's strike behind late on, followed by a vital block by Carmo to stop Prince Dube from guiding the ball over the line from the ensuing corner.



Arubi was called into action again late on, first to keep out a curling effort from Milson and then to punch away Fredy's free-kick.

Both teams play their final group-stage matches on Monday, when Zimbabwe face South Africa in Marrakech and Angola meet

Egypt in Agadir.

Gelson Dala scored his 16th goal in 46 international appearances.

New Zimbabwe coach Mario Marinica had called upon his side to show greater compactness and game management after their 2-1 defeat by Egypt in their opener on



Monday, when the Warriors led at half-time but were beaten by Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah's 91st-minute winner.

Defender Divine Lunga and prolific 35-year-old forward Musona, who returned to the fold in March after announcing his inter-

national retirement in 2022, were among Marinica's fit-again players against Angola, while winger Antonio and forward Macauley Bonne, who plays in England's eighth tier for Maldon & Tiptree, also came in.

Antonio spurned an excellent

early chance by lifting a shot high over the target after closing in on goal, with Dala also finishing wastefully when well placed shortly afterwards.

Zimbabwe's injury troubles continued when Cincinnati defender Teenage Hadebe had to be replaced by Brendan Galloway, and there was a delay later in the first half while Marques received treatment and a head bandage following a clash of heads with Lunga.

Appointed in October, Angola coach Patrice Beaumelle, who won the competition as an assistant coach with both Zambia in 2012 and Ivory Coast in 2015, saw his side go closest as both teams pushed for a late winner, forcing Zimbabwe to scramble clear after Arubi spilled Milson's drive in the final minute.

With no winner materialising, these teams will need an upset in their final fixtures of the group stage to secure a position as one of the four best-placed teams among the six groups in Morocco. - Agencies

ROUND-UP

ISUZU Oman strengthens customer engagement in Salalah through major ‘Customer Connect’ networking event

An exclusive evening in Salalah reinforcing Isuzu’s commitment to partnership, reliability, and long-term customer relationships

SALALAH: As part of its ongoing Customer Connect initiative, Isuzu Oman successfully hosted an exclusive networking event in Salalah, bringing together valued customers and key stakeholders for an evening focused on engagement, collaboration, and shared success.

The event witnessed strong participation from Isuzu customers across Salalah and the wider Dhofar region, offering a platform for open dialogue and direct interaction with the Isuzu Oman team. The gathering reflected Isuzu’s continued focus on staying closely connected with its customers, understanding their operational requirements, and strengthening long-term partnerships built on trust and performance.

During the event, Isuzu customers shared valuable inputs and insights based on their ownership and operational experiences. The feedback highlighted the importance of reliability, uptime, and long-term support – key areas that continue to guide Isuzu’s approach to product development



and customer service in Oman.

Customers attending the event also shared positive feedback on their overall ownership experi-

ence, highlighting the dependability, durability, and efficiency of Isuzu trucks and pickups in supporting day-to-day business oper-

ations. Many expressed appreciation for Isuzu’s consistent product quality and its ability to deliver vehicles that perform reliably under

demanding working conditions across the region.

Speaking during the event, a member of the Isuzu Oman team

reaffirmed that the Customer Connect initiative plays a key role in fostering transparent communication with customers. He emphasized that direct engagement enables Isuzu to better understand local market needs and continuously align its product offerings and services with customer expectations, particularly in regions with diverse operating environments such as Dhofar.

The Isuzu Customer Connect initiative continues to be well received by both retail and corporate clients, as it demonstrates the brand’s commitment to being more than just a vehicle manufacturer.

Through such initiatives, Isuzu reinforces its role as a long-term partner that supports customers throughout their ownership and business journey.

Isuzu also reiterated its dedication to engineering vehicles that are built to last and deliver consistent performance across diverse applications. With operations in over 150 countries worldwide and the number one market share in more than 37 countries, Isuzu’s global footprint stands as a strong testament to its proven reliability and leadership in commercial vehicles.

About OTE Group

OTE Group is the exclusive distributor of Isuzu vehicles in Oman and one of the Sultanate’s most established business conglomerates with decades of experience in the automotive sector.

Through a strong nationwide sales and service network, OTE Group continues to provide comprehensive aftersales support, genuine parts availability, and customer-focused services, reinforcing Isuzu’s promise of quality and reliability across Oman.

PEOPLE, PLACE, AND PLANET

Sustainable festivities at Alila Resorts Oman: A celebration crafted by hand and guided by heart

MUSCAT: With every festive season, Alila Resorts Oman reimagines celebration through a lens of purpose, creativity, and care for the planet—where sustainability is not a statement, but a shared way of life.

Across Alila Jabal Akhdar and Alila Hinu Bay, festive décor and experiences have been thoughtfully crafted by in-house teams using repurposed materials, natural elements, and conscious design—reflecting Alila’s deep commitment to people, place, and planet. Alila Jabal Akhdar: Festivities Rooted in the Mountains Perched over 2,000 metres above sea level in the Al Hajar Mountains, Alila Jabal Akhdar brings festive magic to life through ingenuity and collaboration.

Guests are welcomed by a glowing festive entrance framed from leftover iron and illuminated with energy-efficient lighting. A striking Christmas tree—crafted from 1,780 recycled plastic bottles collected during a mountain clean-up initiative by the team—stands as a powerful symbol of transformation and collective responsibility. Additional installations, including a six-metre illuminated tree created using extension cables and fairy lights, and a handcrafted sleigh formed from repurposed iron and finished with natural jute rope, showcase the creativity of the engineering and housekeeping teams.

Every detail tells a story—of materials saved, skills shared, and colleagues coming together beyond their daily roles to create something meaningful. Complementing the décor, select handcrafted festive pieces are available for purchase, encouraging guests to take home a keepsake with purpose.

The celebrations are further elevated by moments of community and gratitude—from festive gatherings to the joyful voices of a children’s choir echoing through the mountains, and through meaningful gestures that extend beyond the



resort, such as giving select mattresses and cushions a new home within communities in need—creating an atmosphere that is both intimate and uplifting.

These efforts build upon the resort’s broader sustainability journey, including its EarthCheck Gold Certification, and long-standing commitment to regenerative hospitality.

Alila Hinu Bay: A natural, coastal celebration

Along the untouched shores of Dhofar, Alila Hinu Bay embraces a quieter, nature-led approach to festive celebrations. Here, décor draws inspiration from the surrounding landscape—featuring natural textures, understated elegance, and minimal intervention—allowing the beauty of the coast to take centre stage.

Festive moments are designed

to feel organic and unforced, aligning with the resort’s philosophy of barefoot luxury and mindful living. Thoughtful lighting, locally inspired details, and low-impact celebrations create a warm sense of togetherness without excess.

Celebrating with purpose

At both resorts, sustainable festivities are a reflection of Alila’s belief that luxury today must be conscious, inclusive, and rooted in authenticity. These celebrations honour not only the festive season, but also the dedication of colleagues whose creativity and craftsmanship bring the spirit of Alila to life.

As guests gather to celebrate, they become part of a story where joy is shared, resources are respected, and meaningful moments are created—naturally.

For reservations and more infor-

mation, visit www.alilajabalakhdar.com and www.alilahinuabay.com

Festive Landing Page Link: Alila Jabal Akhdar

<https://www.hyatt.com/alila-hotels-and-resorts/en-US/mctal-alila-jabal-akhdar/festive-season-at-alila-jabal-akhdar>
Alila Hinu Bay
<https://www.hyatt.com/alila-hotels-and-resorts/en-US/sllal-alila-hinu-bay/festive-season-at-alila-hinu-bay>

About Alila

The hallmark of Alila hotels is the combination of innovative design and luxury in unique locations, set apart by an unprecedented level of private space, crafted artisanship, personalized hospitality, and bespoke journeys. In support of sustainable tourism, Alila hotels adopt EarthCheck op-

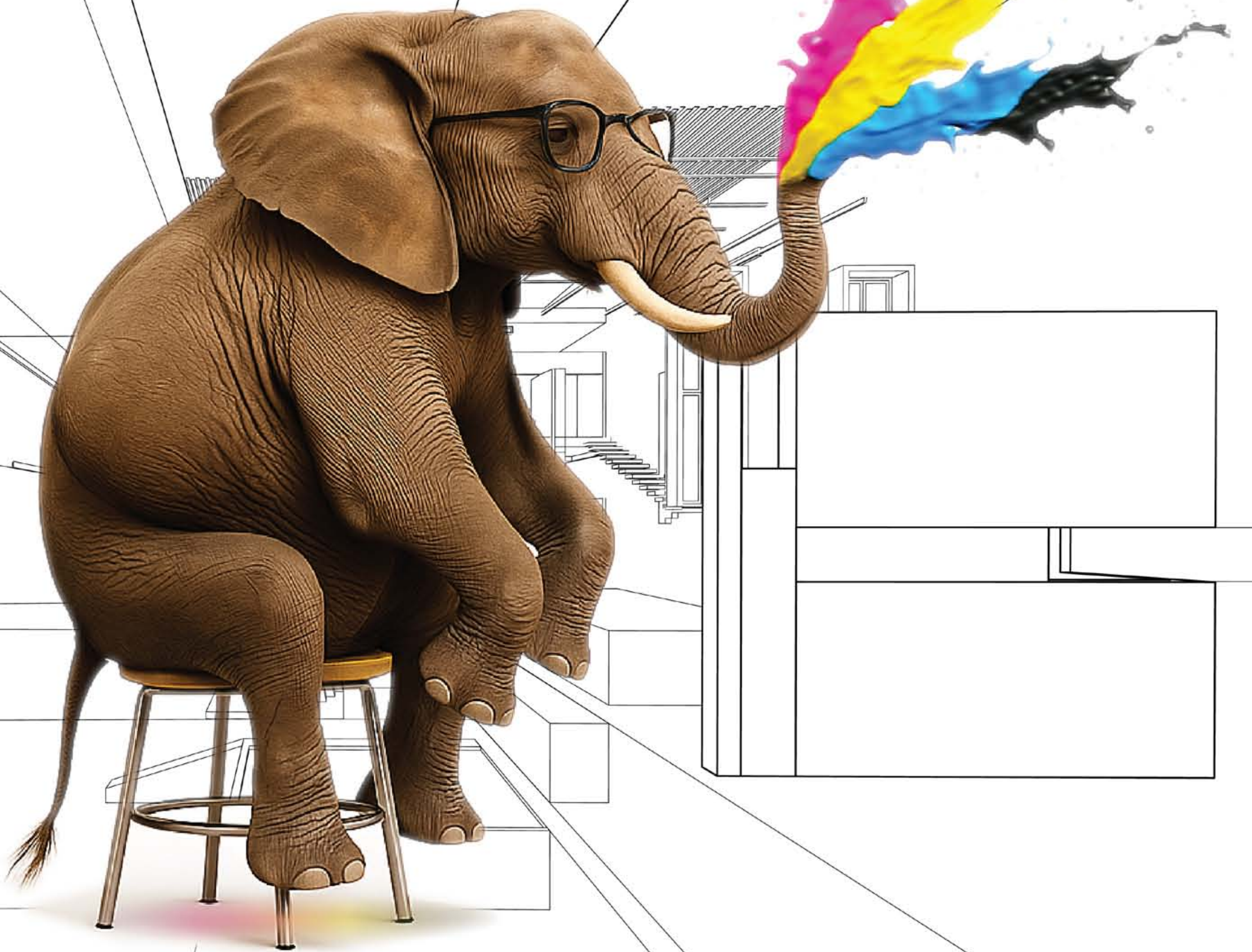


erating standards, integrating the natural, physical and cultural elements of their environments. To stay at any Alila hotels and resorts is to embark on a destination experience – be it in recreating the flavours of the local cuisine, enhancing your well-being through ancient healing arts or the thrill of adventure sports, you will rediscover the luxury of living at Alila hotels. For more information, visit alilahotels.com, follow us on Instagram @AlilaHotels or like us on Facebook.

Hyatt Hotels Corporation, headquartered in Chicago, is a leading global hospitality company guided by its purpose – to care for people so they can be their best. As of September 30, 2024, the Company’s portfolio included more than 1,350 hotels and all-inclusive properties in 79 countries across six continents. The Company’s offering includes brands in the Timeless Collection, including Park Hyatt®, Grand Hyatt®, Hyatt Regency®,

Hyatt®, Hyatt Vacation Club®, Hyatt Place®, Hyatt House®, Hyatt Studios, and UrCove; the Boundless Collection, including Miraval®, Alila®, Andaz®, Thompson Hotels®, Dream® Hotels, Hyatt Centric®, and Caption by Hyatt®; the Independent Collection, including The Unbound Collection by Hyatt®, Destination by Hyatt®, and JdV by Hyatt®; and the Inclusive Collection, including Impression by Secrets, Hyatt Ziva®, Hyatt Zilara®, Zoëtry® Wellness & Spa Resorts, Secrets® Resorts & Spas, Breathless Resorts & Spas®, Dreams® Resorts & Spas, Hyatt Vivid Hotels & Resorts, Alua Hotels & Resorts®, and Sunscape® Resorts & Spas. Subsidiaries of the Company operate the World of Hyatt® loyalty program, ALG Vacations®, Mr & Mrs Smith™, Unlimited Vacation Club®, Amstar DMC destination management services, and Trisept Solutions® technology services. For more information, please visit www.hyatt.com.

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