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NAMA WATER SERVICES AWARDS OVER OMR40MN WORTH PROJECTS TO SMES

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MADAYN

Sohar Industrial City attracts 55 new investment offers



SOHAR: Sohar Industrial City, affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has attracted 55 applications for investment in 2023.

Of this, 45 projects were localised and would be established spanning over an area of 461,000 square metres.

Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Mayasi, Director General of Sohar Industrial City, said that the plastic industries complex at Sohar Industrial City received five agreements in 2023 bringing the total investments in the complex to OMR22 million. With seven projects being established, over an area of 80,000 square metres, the project would help in creating 200 jobs in its initial phase.

He said that Madayn's significant progress has been in completing Sohar Industrial City's seventh phase development project, reaching an impressive 98.6 percent completion rate.

The project includes a road network of 32 kilometres with street lighting poles, drinking water, a wastewater and a wastewater treatment station with a capacity of 2,000 cubic metres. Other development works at the project include a flood protection wall, irrigation network and two water supply tanks with a total capacity of 2,700 cubic metres, he added.

He further mentioned that the 'Masar' service centre in Sohar Industrial City provides a streamlined investment hub offering a unified system. The centre offers simplified procedures for investors to obtain all approvals, permits and licences necessary for their investment projects in a one-stop shop within a certain time. - **ONA**

OMANI BANKS' PROFITS JUMP TO OMR453.5 MILLION IN 2023

The preliminary financial results showed an increase in the profits of all seven banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The profits of Omani banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) jumped by 18.6 percent in 2023 to reach OMR453.5 million compared to OMR382.3 million in 2022.

Oman's banking sector benefited from many local economic indicators, rise in economic growth, foreign trade, volume of investments, increase in government revenues, and the increase in government spending, which contributed to the recovery of many sectors, last year.

The preliminary financial results showed an increase in the profits of all seven banks listed on the MSX. Bank Muscat recorded the highest profits at OMR212.4 million in 2023 compared to OMR200.7 million in 2022.

Sohar International Bank came in second place with a profit of OMR70.3 million in 2023 compared to OMR34.9 million in 2022. This rise came after Bank Sohar acquired HSBC Oman in a



merger deal announced in 2022 and completed in mid-2023. Under the merger deal, HSBC Bank Oman was dissolved, its shares were cancelled and all its assets and liabilities were transferred to Bank Sohar International.

The National Bank of Oman (NBO) came in third place with its profit increasing by 20.3 percent to OMR58 million in 2023 compared to OMR48.2 million profit

in 2022.

Bank Dhofar came in fourth place after its profits rose to OMR38.7 million in 2023 compared to OMR34.2 million in 2022.

The profits of the ahlbank increased to OMR36.4 million in 2023 from OMR33.1 million in 2022, while the profit of the Oman Arab Bank increased to OMR20.5 million in 2023 from about OMR16.2 million, and Bank

Nizwa, which operates in accordance with Islamic law, recorded a growth in its profits by 13 percent from to OMR17.2 million in 2023 from OMR15.5 million recorded in 2022.

The assets of Omani banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange rose to OMR38.8 billion in 2023 compared to OMR33.7 billion at the end of 2022, recording a growth of 14.9 percent. **>A5**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Indian embassy marks Republic Day

1 The Embassy of India in Muscat celebrated the 75th Republic Day with a flag unfurling ceremony on Thursday on January 26, 2024. Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman unfurled the national flag in the presence of over 500 participants, including members of the Indian community. **>A4**



OMAN First partial anterior corneal transplant

2 In a two and a half hours operation, a specialised medical team of the eye department of Al Nahdha Hospital in the Sultanate of Oman, succeeded in performing the first partial anterior corneal transplant for a 28-year-old patient suffering from keratoconus. **>A3**

SPORTS Netherlands outplay India 7-2 in the final

3 History was made at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Saturday night as the first-ever women's champions of the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024 were crowned. The Netherlands proved too good for India as they cruised to a 7-2 win in the summit clash. **>A8**



**Al Mouj Muscat
marathon 2024
winners announced**

A2

OMAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Ivankovic's four-year stint as Oman football coach comes to an end

MUSCAT: Oman Football Association (OFA) hardly took a few minutes on Thursday to decide the fate of the senior team's national head coach, Branko Ivankovic.

Moments after Oman drew with Kyrgyz Republic 1-1 in a Group F match of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, which resulted in the elimination of the Red Warriors from the continental showcase event, the OFA tweeted that they would be ending the contract with the coach.

It was an expected decision from the OFA after the national football governing body and its board members felt the heat following the unimpressive display of the national team at the AFC Asian Cup.

Much was expected from Ivankovic and the team at the Doha tournament after the Croatian led the Red Warriors to a runner-up finish



in the 25th Gulf Cup in Basra, Iraq, last year in January. Iraq lifted the trophy with a 3-2 victory over Oman after extra-time.

Ivankovic, 69, was appointed Oman coach in January 2020 and his four-year stint saw him lead the Red Warriors in a total of 46 games. His report card as a coach

saw him register 22 wins, 10 draws and 14 defeats, giving him a success rate of 47.83.

'Not the desired result'

Speaking after the draw against Kyrgyz Republic, Ivankovic said: "Unfortunately, we did not achieve the desired result, which was vic-

tory and qualification. We were the better team for most of the match, and had many opportunities, but we did not exploit them well."

He added: "Mistakes happen in football and despite predominantly being in control, we ended up conceding because of miscommunication in the final third.

"Kyrgyz Republic, on the other hand, had a good goalkeeper in their midst and also took advantage of their one golden opportunity."

Asian Cup debacle

Ivankovic went into the Asian Cup on the back of wins against China and the UAE in friendlies but despite an impressive start in the opening match against Saudi Arabia, they lost narrowly 2-1. However, it was the goalless draw against Thailand that set the team

in reverse gear. Pressure mounted on the coach to deliver in a do-or-die game against Kyrgyz Republic.

Oman led the game with an early goal in the 8th minute through Muhsen Al Ghassani but an 80th minute equaliser put paid to the dreams of Oman to advance into the Round of 16. It may be recalled that Oman had reached the last 16 round in the last edition of the Asian Cup in the UAE in 2019.

Historic win against Japan

The Croatian had replaced Dutchman Erwin Koeman in 2020.

One of the highlights during Ivankovic's tenure in Oman was the historic 1-0 win over much-higher ranked Japan (World No.24) in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualifier on 2 September, 2021, in Osaka, Japan. The other

major achievement was Oman's runner-up finish at the 25th Gulf Cup in Basra last year.

Ivankovic's previous experience in Asian football saw him lead Iran to a third-place finish in the 2004 AFC Asian Cup before leading them to the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

He also won the 2010 Chinese Super League with Shandong Luneng before moving to Saudi Arabia with Al Ettifaq.

Ivankovic coached UAE's Al Wahda in 2012 and after a brief stint with Dinamo Zagreb, he took charge of Persepolis FC and steered them to three consecutive league titles and the final of the 2018 AFC Champions League.

The veteran coach took charge of Saudi Arabia giants Al Ahli in June, 2019 but left after three months before arriving in Oman.

PRAYER
TIMINGS

Dhuhr.....12:25pm
Asr.....3:33pm
Maghrib.....5:55pm
Isha.....7:08pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....5:31am

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Al Mouj Muscat marathon 2024 winners anounced

In the 1 km competition for children, Tariq Birakader took first place, second place went to Mishari Al Balushi, and third place went to Osama Al Bahri

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Al Mouj Muscat marathon 2024 competitions concluded on Saturday, January 27,2024, which witnessed wide participation of Omani and foreign athletes living in the Sultanate of Oman. Abdullah Al Quraini won first place in the 5km marathon competition, Salem Al Rashidi won second place, while third place



went to Nasr Al Naabi. In the 3km competition, Wis-sam Al Mahrami won the first place, Shaheen Ghouri came in second, while Zaid Al Dhamri won third place. In the 2km competition, Turki Al-Sudairi won the first place, second place went to Aws Al Fahdi, and third place was bagged by Malik Ahmed. In the 1-kilometre competi-tion for children, Tariq Birakader took first place, second place went to Mishari Al Balushi, and third

place went to Osama Al Bahri. Khalid bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Chairman of the Board of Direc-tors of SABCO Sports Company (the organising company for the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon), said that the Al Mouj Muscat Mara-thon is the largest event of its kind for community participation in the Sultanate of Oman. Al Busaidi added: "We are proud as an organising company for this marathon in cooperation with the relevant parties repre-

sented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Omani Ath-letics Federation, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman Sail, Al Mouj Muscat, and commercial sponsors." The Al Mouj Muscat Marathon was accredited in 2018 as one of the most prominent sporting events in the region by the Asso-ciation of International Marathon and Distance Races, and was also accredited by the World Athletics Federations.

Oman welcomes ICJ resolutions on Israeli aggression

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the resolutions of the International Court of Jus-tice (ICJ) in The Hague issued on Friday regarding the lawsuit filed by the Republic of South Africa against the Israeli occupying state regarding Israel's clear, deliberate and large-scale violation of its legal and humanitarian obligations to Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG). In a statement issued by the Fore-ign Ministry, Oman stressed the importance of adherence to these resolutions and the need to im-mediately stop all forms of Israeli aggression against Gaza Strip and

the rest of the occupied Palestin-ian territories. It also underscored the need to lift the siege imposed on Gaza in a way that guarantees safe entry for all types of humani-tarian needs. In the statement, Oman called on the international community to oblige Israel - the occupying state - to halt the military operations and acts of genocide against the Pales-tinian people. Oman also expressed its deep appreciation to the Republic of South Africa for its honourable stance in standing with human rights and justice and its adop-tion of filing this lawsuit before the court. -ONA



‘Jalab’ farm — a picturesque destination in Musannah

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The ‘Jalab’ farm in the village of Musannah in Wadi Bani Kharous in the Wilayat of Al Awa-bi in the South Al Batinah Gover-norate witnesses heavy footfall of tourists during the winter season. It is one of the important tour-ist destinations in the governorate due to its unique geometric forma-tion and agricultural lands that are irrigated in the traditional way. It is one of the oldest traditional farms in the wilayat. “Jalab” farm is famous for grow-ing several types of agricultural crops, especially during winters, including garlic, onions, cabbage, cauliflower, zucchini, cucumbers, potatoes, eggplant, peppers, toma-toes and other vegetables, in ad-dition to growing corn, wheat and animal feeds.

The people in the Jalab region practice farming and irrigation in the traditional way, as many citizens of the village work in ag-riculture fields in order to pass the culture to future generations and preserve it. The visitor to Jalab farm can see the agricultural terraces and enjoy the pristine nature that the place is famous for, as well as visit (Jalab Coffee), which is managed by ambitious Omani youth in the village and where coffee and vari-ous juices are served, as it adds the aesthetic touch to the place. The agricultural terraces con-tribute to stimulating domestic tourism, as they are a picturesque view that attracts tourists. Visitors to the place can also enjoy viewing the towering moun-tains, trees, and wild plants above the farm.





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Islamic banking services

Partial anterior corneal transplant done at Al Nahdha



The National Organ Transplant Programme seeks to localise the corneal transplant service through an eye bank

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a two and a half hours operation, a specialised medical team of the eye department of Al Nahdha Hospital, succeeded in performing the first partial anterior corneal transplant for a 28-year-old patient suffering from keratoconus.

Dr. Haitham bin Hilal Al Mahrouqi, senior specialist in corneal transplants, cataracts and vision correction at Al Nahdha Hospital, explained that a corneal trans-

plant may be total or partial, but partial transplants have several advantages, including fewer complications and a faster recovery period after the operation.

Al Mahrouqi said that the result of the body's rejection of the transplanted cornea is less and the life span of the cornea is longer. There is a global trend to perform this type of operation due to the great advantages, he said, adding that not all cases need partial transplants, but some do require full corneal transplants.

Al Mahrouqi stressed that performing this type of operation in the Sultanate of Oman reflects the competence of the Omani cadres, who are qualified to perform this type of operation and ensure the quality of healthcare provided to patients.

He said that when corneal transplant operations were restarted 3 months ago, 25 complete cornea transplant operations were undertaken.

The cases that require partial corneal transplant operations are due to the presence of a disease in part of the cornea, such as scars

in the cornea or keratoconus, or the presence of some genetic diseases, pointing out that the body's rejection of a partial corneal transplant is at a lower rate of up to 5 percent compared to a total transplant which may reach between 15 and 20 percent.

Rejection is also due to other reasons that require continuous follow-up with the specialist doctor, and proper use of the medication.

The National Organ Transplant Programme seeks to localise the corneal transplant service in Oman through an eye bank to collect and preserves corneas from donors within the Sultanate of Oman during the next five years to achieve self-sufficiency and provide this service in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and not be limited to Muscat.

Restarting corneal transplant operations at Al Nahdha Hospital contributed to achieving many positives, including localising the service and achieving self-sufficiency in corneal tissue with the presence of qualified national cadres.

Forecast Rain likely over parts of Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman may be affected by a low trough on Sunday.

Oman Meteorology said: "It is expected that clouds will form and flow over the Musandam Governorate with scattered rains ranging between (10-20 mm) expected."

There are chances of forma-

tion of clouds and scattered rains over parts of the Al Hajar Mountains and the coasts of the Sea of Oman. Low clouds and fog may form late at night and early morning over the parts of the governorates of Musandam, Al Dhahirah, South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta, Dhofar, and along the coast of the Sea of Oman.



MINISTRY OF LABOUR

Over 20 expats held for violating Labour Law



Times News Service

MUSCAT : More than 20 expatriates were arrested for violating the provisions of the Labour Law in the Wilayat of Seeb, Muscat Governorate, Ministry of Labour (MoL), said.

In a statement, the Ministry said: "In order to follow up on the expat workforce and the extent of their commitment to the provisions of the Labour Law and the regulations issued in implementation thereof and to combat the indiscriminate selling practiced by the expat workforce in the Wilayat of Seeb, the Ministry of Labour, represented by the joint inspection team, with the support of the Muscat Municipality and the Royal Oman Police, conducted an inspection campaign

that resulted in the arrest of 22 workers for violating the provisions of the Labour Law. Legal measures are being taken against them."

Three arrested for theft

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested three expats for stealing air conditioning equipment from a house in the Wilayat of Sinaw, North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The ROP said: "The North Al Sharqiyah Governorate Police Command arrested a person of Asian nationality for stealing air conditioning equipment from a house in the Wilayat of Sinaw, and arrests two other people who disposed of the stolen items. The legal procedures have been completed against them."

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Indian expatriates in Oman celebrate 75th Republic Day



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Embassy of India in Muscat celebrated the 75th Republic Day with a flag unfurling ceremony on the morning of January 26, 2024. Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman unfurled the National flag in the presence of over 500 participants, including members of the Indian community and guests.

The day started with a floral tribute at the Gandhi Statue within the embassy campus by Ambassador Amit Narang and Ms Divya Narang, spouse of the Ambassador.

Following this, the National Flag was unfurled, and the students of Indian School Bousher sang the national anthem. The envoy read out excerpts from the President of India's address to the nation on the eve of the Republic Day. The event concluded with students from Indian School Bousher singing two patriotic songs.

In continuation of the Republic Day celebrations, a grand reception will be hosted by the Embassy on the evening of January 28, 2024.

Celebrations at ISG
The 75th Republic Day of India

was marked by Indian School Al Ghubra with pride and dignity. The programme began with the school band playing the National Anthem of India. The band continued with a piece based on raag 'Yaman' and invigorating marching tunes - titled 'Kadam Kadam Badhaye Ja' and 'Vijay Bharat'.

The students of grade 8 presented a choral rendition titled 'The Glorious Reminiscence' which highlighted the values and principles on which the nation was founded. Avi Pandya of 9C played a soulful rendition of 'Vande Mataram' and 'Vaishnava Janatho' on the keyboard. This was followed by the school choir singing the song - 'Hum Honge Kamayab' which conveyed positivity and hope for a future.

A video presentation highlighted the far-sighted vision and tireless striving of the members of the constituent assembly who gave India the constitution which lies at the heart of the nation. The school choir regaled the audience with the number 'One World' which resonates with the theme 'Vasudev Kutumbakam' meaning the world is one family - One Earth, One Family One Future. The event concluded with the Principal Papri Ghosh saying a prayer for the peace and prosperity of the nation.



SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE



‘Tahayem Winter Season’ opens in the Wilayat of Jalan bani Bu Hassan

JALANBANIBUHASSAN:The ‘Tahayem Winter Season’ opened on 25 January in the Wilayat of Jalan bani Bu Hassan of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, under the patronage of Dr. Saud bin Hamoud Al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the presence of the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The minister stressed the significance of the event in showcasing the economic movement and potentials in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, thanks to the activities of the ‘Tahayem Winter Season’ which fit all sectors of the society, which makes it a qualitative addition for tourism activities in all wilayats of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, which culminated in the selection of Sur as Capital for the Arab Tourism for the year 2024.

He said that the Tahayem Winter Season comes within the framework of boosting the role of the various economic sectors in the support of diversification and achievement of sustainability in the governorates and holding the

activities and events attractive to visitors.

The minister expressed his delight over the efficient participation of the ministry in the Tahayem Winter Season through the international exhibition for dates and honey.

The opening ceremony started with a tour in the various sections and corners of the Tahayem Winter Season and the opening of the international exhibition for dates and honey, which saw the participation of 180 companies operating in the field of production of dates and honey and international and local packing companies followed by a tour in the innovation corner, the children corner and the games area.

Mohammed bin Ali bin A’kaak, Wali of Jalan bani Bu Hassan and chairman of the organising committee of Tahayem Winter Season said that the main objective for organising the event is to showcase the tourism potentials and environment diversity in Jalan bani Bu Hassan, tourism promotion and attraction of investments. — ONA

Ministry to announce integrated action plan

The programme seeks to implement the initiatives of fiscal sustainability for improvement of the financial indicators of general budget of the state

MUSCAT: The National Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development Programme, supervised by the Ministry of Finance, will unveil on Monday in a press meeting an integrated action plan, the strategic pillars and initiatives of the parties supporting the implementation of the plan.



Fiscal sustainability
The programme seeks to implement the initiatives of fiscal sustainability for improvement of the financial indicators of the general budget of the state.

It aims to make the financial sector the key enabler for achievement of Oman Vision 2040 targets, through upgrading the competitiveness rate and provision of finance options that fit the various categories and expanding the financial market.

The plan for development of the financial sector in cooperation with other related parties has been approved.

The plan included initiatives and actions aimed to empower the financial sector to achieve the economic and investment targets of Oman Vision 2040.

— ONA

REGIONAL EVENT

Oman to host insurance industry meet

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is all set to host a regional event on Arab and international insurance industry.

The event is titled “The 34th General Arab Insurance Federation Conference” organised by Oman Insurance Association and the Secretariat General of Arab Insurance Federation in cooperation with the Capital Market Authority (CMA) from 18 to 21 February.

Over 2,000 participants
Sayyid Nasser bin Salim Al Busaidi, Chairman of Oman Insurance Association stressed the significance of the conference expected to see the participation of over 2,000 participants.

The conference would discuss the key issues and developments in the insurance industry and the international standards in the field among other issues, he said pointing to that the conference



is an opportunity for exchange of experiences of the participating countries on the natural disasters insurance and digital insurance.

The insurance market of the Sultanate comprises 18 insurance companies including one concerned with reinsurance. The size of the insurance market is almost OMR500 million and the insurance sector assets amount to OMR1.197 billion. — ONA

MSX-LISTED BANKS

Bank Muscat tops list of banks in terms of assets

<FROM A1 Bank Muscat topped the list of banks in terms of assets after its assets increased from OMR12.7 billion in 2022 to OMR13.6 billion in 2023, Sohar International Bank came in second place with its assets rising to OMR 6.7 billion in 2023 compared to OMR4.1 billion at the end of 2022.

The National Bank of Oman was ranked third with its assets at OMR4.8 billion in 2023 compared to OMR4.3 billion at the end of 2022.

The assets of Bank Dhofar also increased from to OMR 4.7 billion at the end of 2023 to OMR4.3



billion while the assets of Oman Arab Bank increased from about OMR3.7 billion in 2022 to OMR4 billion in 2023. The assets of the National Bank increased from about OMR3.1 billion in 2022 to OMR3.3 billion in 2023 and Bank Nizwa's assets increased from OMR1.4 billion in 2022 to OMR1.6 billion in 2023. — ONA



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US approves sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey



Turkey will receive 40 new F-16s and upgrades to 79 of the jets in its existing fleet, the State Department said in a press release

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday finalised the \$23 billion sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey after Ankara ratified NATO membership for Sweden, the State Department said.

Turkey will receive 40 new F-16s and upgrades to 79 of the jets in its existing fleet, the State Department said in a press release. As part of the US law, the State Department notified Congress of the arms deal, as well as a separate \$8.6 billion (€7.9 billion) sale of 40 F-35 aircraft to Greece — Turkey's neighbour with which it shares a long and often tense history. Bringing an end to a months-long political tug-of-war, Turkish lawmakers voted on Tuesday to support Sweden's accession to the NATO military alliance. The decision was finally sealed on Thursday evening with the publication of the so-called accession protocols in the Turkish Official Gazette. NATO member Hungary still needs to give its approval for Sweden's bid to finally go through. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had linked his country's approval to fighter jet deliveries from the US, among other conditions.

Advanced military aircraft The F-16, produced by US arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin, is one of the most advanced military aircraft in the world. It can be used for both air defense and attacking ground positions. It is also able to fly at very low altitudes and in different weather conditions. Ukraine is also keen to get its hands on the fighter jets. There have been reservations in the US Congress after a number of its members had repeatedly made it clear that they wanted to prevent the deal as long as Ankara was blocking Sweden's accession to NATO. While the US government does not need lawmakers' approval to go ahead with the sale, Congress does have the power to block it. The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Democrat Ben Cardin, said on Friday that he would permit the F-16 sale to Turkey but that it was "not a decision I came to lightly."

"My approval of Turkey's request to purchase F-16 aircrafts has been contingent on Turkish approval of Sweden's NATO membership," Cardin said. Cardin pointed to other issues that gave him cause for concern, including Turkey's human rights record, its lacking cooperation in holding Russia accountable for its invasion of Ukraine and its involvement in tensions in the Middle East. "My concerns have been strongly and consistently conveyed to the Biden administration as part of our ongoing engagement, and I am encouraged by the productive direction of their discussions with Turkish officials to address these issues," the lawmaker said. — DW

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Venezuela's top court upholds ban on opposition candidate

CARACAS: Venezuela's Supreme Court upheld a ban on Friday that prevents opposition leader Maria Corina Machado from running for president. The ruling is a blow for the prospect of free elections in the country later this year — a key condition of a normalisation deal signed with the US last October. Machado had already been banned from holding public office for 15 years, and on Friday the court said she would remain disqualified "for being involved... in the corruption plot orchestrated by the usurper Juan Guaido."



Guaido had claimed to be the legitimate interim president of Venezuela in 2019 and was recognized by some foreign governments as such, but he was forced into exile in 2023. Machado slammed the ruling on Friday. "Maduro and his criminal system chose the worst path for them: fraudulent elections. That's not going to happen. Let no one doubt it, this is to the end," she said on social media. Machado, a former lawmaker and industrial engineer, who handily won the opposition's primary election with more than 90% of the vote.

Because the primary was organised independently of Venezuela's electoral authorities, she had been able to run despite the 15-year ban on holding office. Machado insisted throughout the campaign that authorities had had not officially notified her of the ban. Following this, she took her case to the Supreme Tribunal of Justice in December to argue that the ban was null and void, and sought an injunction to protect her political rights. Friday's decision also confirmed the disqualification of two-time presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, who was seen as a possible stand-in for the opposition. — DW

Renewed Renaissance Day Sale

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Trump must pay \$83.3mn damages in defamation case

WASHINGTON: A US jury on Friday ordered former US President Donald Trump to pay \$83.3 million (€76.7 million) in damages for defaming writer E. Jean Carroll. The writer has accused Trump of destroying her reputation as a trustworthy journalist by denying in 2019 he raped her nearly three decades ago. Jurors spent Friday hearing closing arguments in the case. Carroll's lawyer had pushed for Trump to pay "dearly" for defaming Carroll and denying he raped her. The ordered payment was broken down to \$18.3 million in compensatory damages and \$65 million in punitive damages. In a post on his social media platform Truth, Trump said he will appeal the verdicts in the



Carroll defamation case. He described the Friday verdict as "ridiculous." **What happened during the session?** Friday's session lasted less than three hours. During the trial, the former president was heard muttering

that the case was a "con job" and "witch hunt," claiming he still did not know who Carroll was. The judge asked him twice to stay quiet. Trump left the courtroom during the closing argument by Carroll's lawyer, Roberta Kaplan. He then returned for his own lawyer's argument. — DW

Kenya high court rules against plan to deploy police to Haiti

NAIROBI: The Kenyan government says it intends to challenge a court ruling against its decision to deploy a contingent of police officers to Haiti at the head of a UN-backed law-and-order mission to the Caribbean nation. Nairobi's High Court reached the ruling earlier on Friday. The international community and the Haitian government had long been seeking a multinational force to help combat rising gang violence which saw almost 5,000 people murdered last year alone. Many countries had been wary of supporting Prime Minister Ariel Henry's unelected administration — governing in the aftermath of the former president's assassination — and intervening in a nation where previous missions had been dogged by human rights abuses. But months of fruitless appeals, Kenya stepped forward last July, saying it was doing so in "solidar-



ity with a brother nation." The UN Security Council had approved the mission in October, but the plans are now on hold after Justice Enock Chacha Mwita ruled that Kenya's National Security Council, which is led by the president, does not have the authority to deploy regular police outside the country. "Any decision by any state

organ or state officer to deploy police officers to Haiti ... contravenes the constitution and the law and is therefore unconstitutional, illegal and invalid," he said, handing down the ruling at Nairobi High Court. Via a spokesman, the Kenyan government responded that, while it "respects the rule of law," it had "made the decision to challenge the high court's verdict forthwith." It added: "The government reiterates its commitment in honoring its international obligations." Ekuru Aukot, the opposition politician who challenged the deployment, said he was prepared for a long fight. "We will still be waiting for them at the court of appeal, and we will go all the way to the Supreme Court," he told the French AFP news agency. "They should be thanking me for saving the government this embarrassment." — DW

Halting support for UNRWA poses humanitarian risks to Palestinians

Biden’s Middle East adviser Brett McGurk was in Doha this week to discuss the possibility of another hostage deal between Israel and Hamas

RAMALLAH: A senior Palestinian official on Saturday urged countries that have announced the suspension of support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) to reconsider their decisions to avoid political and humanitarian risks.



Hussein Al-Sheikh, secretary-general of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, said on the social media platform X that “especially at this time, amid the ongoing (Israel’s) aggression against the Palestinian people, we are in desperate need of support from this international organisation.” The United States and Canada on Friday announced a temporary suspension of their new funding for the UNRWA after Israel accused some of the UN agency’s employees of participating in the attack launched by Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, 2023.

The UNRWA, established as a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly in 1949, serves to support the relief and human development of Palestinian refugees and is entrusted with the mission of providing humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestinian refugees in the agency’s operational areas until a just and lasting solution to their plight is achieved.

Biden discusses Gaza with Qatari and Egyptian leaders US President Joe Biden spoke with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Egyptian President Abdel Fatah el-Sissi regarding the ongoing war in Gaza, the White House reported late on Friday. In both calls, the leaders agreed that the release of Israeli hostages from Gaza would be essential to securing peace in the region. “Both leaders affirmed that a hostage deal is central to estab-

lishing a prolonged humanitarian pause in the fighting and ensure additional life-saving humanitarian assistance reaches civilians in need throughout Gaza,” the White House said in a statement following Biden’s call with his Qatari counterpart. Biden also thanked el-Sissi for “Egypt’s important role in this process.” The US and Egyptian presidents “also discussed intensifying efforts to further increase the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance into and throughout Gaza,” the White House said. The statement comes as Biden’s Middle East adviser Brett McGurk was in Doha this week to discuss the possibility of another hostage deal between Israel and Hamas. A previous deal, mediated by Egypt and Qatar, saw a pause in fighting in Gaza in exchange for the release of about 100 hostages who were taken by Hamas in their attacks on October 7.

— Agencies

DIRECTOR-GENERAL WTO UAE ambassador presents credentials

ABU DHABI: Jamal Jama Al Musharakh, Permanent Representative of the UAE to the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva, presented to Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), his credentials as the UAE’s Permanent Representative to the organisation. During Al Musharakh’s meeting with Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, they discussed several topics, including the UAE’s hosting of the 13th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, scheduled to be held in Abu Dhabi in February 2024. The two sides also reviewed ways to enhance cooperation between the UAE and the organisation. Furthermore, the Ambassador emphasised the importance of this international event to the UAE, which reaffirms the country’s esteemed position within the international community in leading dialogue and coordination between more than 164 member countries of the WTO. — ANI

MERCHANT SHIPS

Suez Canal traffic drops by more than 40%



TAIPEI: The traffic volume of the Suez Canal dropped by more than 40 per cent as Yemen rebels repeatedly attacked merchant ships. According to United Nations data, the Yemen rebels’ Commercial traffic through the Suez Canal has dropped by more than 40 per cent in the past two months since the Houthis attack, sparking United Nations concerns about global trade. Jan Hoffman, president of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), told reporters today, “We are very concerned that attacks on shipping in the Red Sea will exacerbate global trade tensions and add to existing trade disruptions caused by geopolitics and climate change. More serious.” The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development said that in the past two months, ships were diverted from the Red Sea to South Africa’s Cape of Good Hope, resulting in a 42 per

cent drop in traffic through the Suez Canal. Egypt’s Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean and Red Sea. **Transported by sea** Hoffman said that more than 80 per cent of international trade in goods is transported by sea. “Sea transport is indeed the lifeline of global trade.” According to data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the number of container ships passing through the Suez Canal each week has decreased by 67 per cent compared with the same period last year, and more than 20 per cent of global container trade passes through the Suez Canal. “Considering that it was mainly large container ships that were diverted from the Suez Canal, the decline in container traffic was even greater,” Hoffman said. Oil tanker traffic fell by 18 per cent, and bulk ship traffic carrying grain and coal also fell by 6 per

cent. While natural gas transportation was flat. Overall, 12 per cent to 15 per cent of global trade, or approximately 20,000 ships, pass through the Red Sea every year, travelling between Europe and Asia. The situation is getting more serious as other international maritime trade routes are also in danger of being disrupted. Since Russia invaded Ukraine two years ago, the movement of goods through the Black Sea has been severely restricted, sending global grain prices soaring. In addition, drought in Central America has caused water levels in the Panama Canal to drop, significantly reducing traffic through this important route. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development warned: “Long-term disruption of major trade routes will disrupt global supply chains, leading to delivery delays, increased costs and potential inflation.” — ANI/CNA

RICH CULTURAL DIVERSITY

75th Republic Day parade showcases India’s ‘Nari Shakti’

NEW DELHI: The parade on the momentous platinum celebrations of India showcased ‘women-led development at Kartavya Path boosting the ‘Viksit Bharat’ envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. ‘Nari shakti’ took centerstage as women soldiers marched down the Kartavya Path on the occasion of the 75th Republic Day on Friday. President Droupadi Murmu commenced the celebrations on Friday by unfurling the national flag at Kartavya Path. President Murmu and her French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, who is the chief guest at this year’s Republic Day celebrations arrived at Kartavya Path in the “Traditional Buggy”, a practice which made a comeback after a gap of 40 years. The cultural extravaganza at Kartavya Path highlighted the diversity and vibrancy of India’s cultural tapestry, captivating the audience with a fusion of artistic expressions from across the country. Viksit Bharat’s rich cultural diversity and the ‘Aatmanirbhar’ military prowess were the themes that graced Kartavya Path apart from the dominating theme of ‘nari shakti’ in the 90-minute parade. The 75th Republic Day March Past began on Kartavya Path with the proud winners of the highest gallantry awards, the Param Vir Chakra and the Ashok Chakra, following Parade Commander Lieutenant General Bhavnish Kumar. For the first time, an all-women contingent of the Armed Forces Medical Services marched on Kartavya Path, led by Major Srishti Khullar, with Capt Amba Samant from the Army Dental Corps, Surg Lt Kanchana from the Indian Navy, and Flt Lt Dhivyapriya from the Indian Air Force. French troops and aircraft also



participated in the “Platinum Republic Day Parade” at the Kartavya Path. The French Foreign Legion music band, led by Captain Khourda, consisting of 30 musicians is marched first, playing the Legion’s anthem called “Le Boudin”. The recipients of Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar showcased their achievements during the 75th Republic Day parade. The first army contingent leading the mechanized column was that of the 61 Cavalry led by Maj Yashdeep Ahlawat on the occasion ‘Aavaahan’, encompassing an exquisite symphony of a variety of Indian musical instruments from across the country was at the forefront of the grand ceremonial parade. The distinguished band comprising 112 women artists played a variety of folk and tribal percussion instruments, becoming a powerful symbol of women’s strength and prowess. As many as 16 states and Union Territories also displayed their heritage diversity with the help of cultural performances and tableaux. The Indian Navy tableau also highlighted the themes of ‘Nari Shakti’ and ‘Atmanirbharta’, also showing aircraft carrier INS Vikrant and Navy ships Delhi, Kolkata and Shivalik and Kalavari Class Submarine. The Indian Space Research Organization’s (ISRO) tableau showcased the Chandrayaan-3 as its primary highlight. The tableau featured the launch of Chandrayaan-3 as well as its successful landing on the south pole of the moon. ‘Nalanda Maha Vihara’, surmounted by the G20 Logo formed the front portion of the tableaux of Ministry of External Affairs Ministry, that rolled down Kartavya Path. The Election Commission of India showcased the ‘India - Mother of Democracy’ theme in its tableau. The Ladakh tableau

for the Republic Day parade this year on Friday featured girls playing ice hockey. The Central Armed Police women’s personnel exhibited their prowess of ‘Naari Shakti’. 265 women bikers on motorcycles showcase bravery and valour and determination of the Indian women who are deployed across the length and breadth of the nation providing “Sarvatra Suraksha”. Indian Air Force (IAF) pilots conducted awe-evoking acrobatics during a fly-past with advanced light helicopters comprising one Prachand Helicopter and three Rudra helicopters to conclude the grand ceremonial parade. Spectators were dazzled with the scintillating air show that served as the grand finale of the ‘Platinum Republic Day’ function. It comprised 54 aircraft including three from the French Air and Space Force, 46 from the Indian Air Force, one from the Indian Navy and four helicopters from the Indian Army. — ANI

World leaders extend greetings to India on 75th Republic Day

NEW DELHI: World leaders, including heads of state and ministers, extended greetings to India on its 75th Republic Day. Republic Day was celebrated nationwide and at missions across the world on January 26. French President Emmanuel Macron, who was the chief guest at the Republic Day parade in Delhi, extended wishes to people on social media platform X. In a post on X, Macron stated, “My dear friend @NarendraModi, Indian people, My warmest wishes on your Republic Day. Happy and proud to be with you. Let’s celebrate!” Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese extended his greetings on the occasion of 75th Republic Day and said that both countries have an opportunity to celebrate the depth of their friendship on their ‘shared’ national days. “Warm wishes to the people of India as you celebrate Republic Day. On our shared national days, we have an opportunity to celebrate the depth of our friendship. Australia and India have never been closer,” Albanese posted on X. The Australian PM further called India-Australia bonds “lifelong and intergenerational,” adding that the Indian diaspora in Australia is the lifeblood of

the friendship between two nations.” Republic Day is an opportunity to celebrate India’s extraordinary success across more than seven decades of independence. Since Independence, India has drawn on the vitality and diligence of its people to build a modern nation defined by innovation and success,” Albanese said in the message. He said that both countries have an opportunity to celebrate the depth of their friendship on their ‘shared’ national days. “Importantly, ours is a relationship with a bright future. As we together honour and cherish the region we call home, we are united in advancing and preserving an open, inclusive, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific,” Albanese further stated. “On Republic Day, I’m delighted to send my congratulations to all who celebrate the great achievements of the Republic of India,” he added. Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal extended Republic Day wishes to India and expressed confidence over the strengthening of India-Nepal ties. Britain’s King Charles III extended Republic Day wishes to India on Friday and expressed confidence in strengthening India-UK ties. — ANI

SPORTS

Dutch women on top of the world

The Netherlands outplay India 7-2 in the final to lift the first FIH Hockey5s World Cup at the Hockey Oman Stadium on Saturday night

MUSCAT: History was made at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Saturday night as the first-ever women's champions of the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024 were crowned.

The Netherlands proved too good for India as they cruised to a 7-2 win in the summit clash of the event that began on January 24.

The Dutch women were at their imperious best as they hammered six goals at the end of first half. India fought back in the second half as they scored two goals but the Dutch were never threatened as they rounded off the final with another goal in the second half.

For the Dutch, Janneke van de Venne (2', 14'), Bente van der Veldt (4', 8'), and Lana Kalse (11', 27') scored a brace each while Benninga Sosha (13') had a goal to her credit. For India, Jyoti Chhatri (20') and Pisal Dadaso Rutaja (23') scored.

A total of 16 teams took part in the women's competition with the men's action set to begin from Sunday. The final of the men's



event will be held on January 31.

Earlier in the third-place bronze medal playoff, Poland defeated South Africa 4-2.

Classification matches were held on Saturday to decide the final placings with hosts and debutant Oman finishing at the bottom as they lost 11-3 to Zambia in the 15th-16th playoff game.

It was still a heartening display by the hosts, who were playing at the biggest stage for the first time

and had begun learning hockey only 20 months back.

Uruguay finished fifth after a 8-4 victory over Malaysia while Ukraine took the seventh spot with a 6-0 win over New Zealand.

United States were 2-0 winners over Namibia to end ninth and lift the Challenger Trophy.

The Challenger Trophy was contested by the eight teams that did not make it to the quarter-finals. The Challenger tournament

INDIA VS ENGLAND: FIRST TEST

Pope's 148 leads England's spirited fightback on day 3

HYDERABAD: Ollie Pope's counter-attacking century and a 112-run stand with Ben Foakes helped England claw back after Jasprit Bumrah and Ravichandran Ashwin's tremendous spells left visitors frustrated on the third day of the ongoing first Test match here at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium on Saturday.

At stumps, England were 316/6 - a lead by 126-run - with Pope (148) and Rehan Ahmed (16) unbeaten.

Earlier Pope and Ben Foakes put up a strong rearguard to frustrate India and the pair added 112 for the sixth wicket. In the 67th over Axar Patel got the breakthrough when he removed Foakes for 34.

Perhaps crucially, Pope was dropped on 110 and will return on Sunday with the opportunity to set India a testing target.

All of this after Jasprit Bumrah's scintillating spell of reverse-swing bowling helped reduce



England to 163-5 and in danger of wasting a good start to the day.

India managed only 15 runs in the morning session, bowled out for 436, with Joe Root taking two wickets in two balls to end with 4-79. Overall, the hosts lost their last three wickets for no runs but still had a lead of 190.

Brief scores: England 246 & 316/6 (Ollie Pope 148*, Ben Duckett 47; Jasprit Bumrah 2-29) vs India 436 (Ravindra Jadeja 87, KL Rahul 86, Yashasvi Jaiswal 80; Joe Root 4-79). - ANI

AUSTRALIA VS WEST INDIES: SECOND TEST

Smith holds firm to give hosts edge in Brisbane

BRISBANE: Australia need another 156 runs with eight wickets remaining to beat West Indies on day four of the day-night second Test in Brisbane.

Having been set 216 for a 2-0 series win, the hosts rweached 60-2 at the close with Steve Smith 33 not out on Saturday.

West Indies had earlier been dismissed for 193 as they set a target. No.3 Kirk McKenzie made 41, Alick Athanaze 35 and Justin Greaves 33, while Nathan Lyon and Josh Hazlewood both took three wickets.

West Indies will likely be without seamer Shamar Joseph, who took 5-94 on debut in the first

Test last week, on day four after he was hit on the toe while batting by Mitchell Starc. He was helped from the field after retiring hurt as last man out for three.

Without him, Alzarri Joseph had Usman Khawaja taken down the leg side for 10 while Marnus Labuschagne was caught at third slip off Greaves' pace. Cameron Green reached the close unbeaten on nine while Smith's score was his best effort since moving to the top of the order at the start of the series.

Brief scores: West Indies 311 and 193 (Kirk McKenzie 41, Alick Athanaze 35; Josh Hazlewood 3-23, Nathan Lyon 3-42) vs Australia 289-9 decl and 60-2.

BREAK NEW GROUND



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ATTRACTS AI DEVELOPERS

The cloud computing arm of Alphabet Inc (GOOGL), said it had formed a partnership with startup Hugging Face to ease artificial intelligence (AI) software development in the company's Google Cloud.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX TRADING VALUE RISES

Trading value on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose last week to OMR20.9 million, recording a growth of 30.6 percent from its level a week ago, which amounted to OMR16 million.

Nama Water awards projects worth over OMR40mn to SMEs

The local value-added programme is one of these initiatives through which Nama Water Services aims to promote and create job opportunities, develop skills, reduce reliance on imports, and develop SMEs



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Certain works and projects have been designated to SMEs registered with Riyada, including connecting private and government facilities to the main water network, installing water meters, connecting private and government facilities to the main sewage network, connecting private and government facilities to the treated water network

Dr Barakat Al Busaidi
Senior Manager of Supply Chain Management



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services has always prioritised SMEs by designing tailored programmes.

The local value-added programme is one of these programmes through which Nama Water Services aims to promote and create job opportunities, develop skills, reduce reliance on imports, and develop SMEs.

The programme is meant to award tenders and purchase orders and the allocation of the work to SMEs as subcontractors by major contractors. In addition to this program, Nama Water Services is working on a training programme for SMEs in the field of preparing tenders and submitting them in a professional and integrated manner to guarantee the award of the tender.

Commenting on that, Dr Barakat Al Busaidi, Senior Manager of Supply Chain Management, said, “Nama Water Services is one of the leading companies in supporting SMEs. The total value of contracts and purchases awarded to SMEs last year exceeded OMR40 million. The Procurement Department is responsible for contracts worth less than OMR50,000, while the Contracts Department is responsible for tendering, evaluating, and awarding contracts that

exceed OMR 50,000.”

“In 2023, the purchase orders awarded to SMEs exceeded OMR5 million, while the contracts awarded by the Contracts Department exceeded OMR9 million.” Al Busaidi explained, and he added that Nama Water Services has provided significant support to SMEs registered with Riyada by assigning them as subcontractors by the contractors of significant projects. All companies that have been awarded large tenders are committed to allocating at least 10 per cent of the value of the project to SMEs. Thus, Nama Water Services follows up and supervises to ensure that this percentage is achieved. The total value of contracts awarded to subcontractors registered with Nama exceeded OMR11 million.

Al Busaidi elaborated, “At Nama Water Services, we provide training opportunities for SMEs that we see are capable of executing some projects but face difficulties in reading and preparing the tender documents and complying with the conditions therein. The training covers three fields: health and safety to ensure the safety of workers in these institutions, developing and submitting error-free proposals that maximise competitiveness, and in-depth technical training covering the required



connections, equipment, and procedures for integrating properties into the existing water and wastewater network. Three water and wastewater network connection tenders worth OMR400,000 have been awarded to implement the work in the properties served by the network.”

Highlighting the projects as-

signed to SMEs registered with Riyada, Al Busaidi noted: “Certain works and projects have been designated to SMEs registered with Riyada, including connecting private and government facilities to the main water network, installing water meters, connecting private and government facilities to the main sewage network, connecting private and

government facilities to the treated water network. We have also assigned projects of allocating leak detection works in the main network or internal networks, in addition to other works, such as transportation and customs clearance.”

Dr Barakat Al Busaidi concluded that the company's plans for 2024 regarding the support of

SMEs registered with Riyada include scaling up the total amount of the awarded tenders from OMR50,000 to OMR500,000. In addition, the company will form a committee to work on training and developing SMEs in the field of internal leak detection. The company will also increase the volume of allocated work to SMEs.

BRIEFS

Yangtze River Delta region reports foreign trade growth



BEIJING: The total value of imports and exports in the Yangtze River Delta region, China's foreign trade hub, reached 15.17 trillion yuan (US\$2.14 trillion) in 2023, data from China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) showed. The figure released indicated a rise in the region's contribution to the country's overall import and export value, which now accounts for 36.3 percent, as reported by China Central Television. The Yangtze River Delta region, one of the most vibrant, open and innovative city clusters in China, has reaped major benefits and matured into a pacesetter of high-quality development from its integrated development, which was elevated as a national strategy by Chinese President Xi Jinping five years ago. -WAM

Vietnam tourism contributes to socio-economic recovery

HANOI: Vietnam won 54 prizes at the 2023 World Travel Awards - Asia and Oceania region last year, positioning the country's brand on top of the global tourism map and turning travel to the Southeast Asian nation into a bright spot in terms of socioeconomic recovery, Vietnam News Agency (VNA) reported. According to the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism (VNAT), Vietnam served 12.6 million foreign visitors and 108 million domestic tourists, up 57 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively. Total earnings from tourism activities hit 678 trillion VND (\$27.5 billion), 4.3 per cent higher than the plan. Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Nguyen Van Hung highlighted tireless efforts made by the government, ministries, localities, and businesses in reviving the industry, saying that several policies have been issued to help remove barriers and promote tourism recovery and development. -WAM

MALAYSIAN TRADE COMMISSIONER

Global Islamic finance market to reach \$4.9 trillion by 2025

HONG KONG: Yazrin Syakhairi, Malaysian Trade Commissioner, under the Trade Section of the Consulate General of Malaysia in Hong Kong (MATRADE), anticipated that the global Islamic finance market would reach \$4.9 trillion by 2025.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Asian Financial Forum (AFF) in Hong Kong, Syakhairi told the Emirates News Agency (WAM) that the Islamic finance market is witnessing significant and rapid growth worldwide, surpassing the size of \$2.2 trillion in 2022.

It is expected that the Islamic finance sector will grow by around 10 percent globally in 2023 and



2024, according to earlier estimates by Standard Poors Global Ratings.

Syakhairi explained that the AFF is the largest financial event

currently taking place, associated with the financial services industry, which is one of the largest industries in Hong Kong, one of the world's major financial cities.

He noted that Malaysia is participating in the event to share its expertise in finance, particularly in Islamic finance.

He mentioned that the forum is a good opportunity to highlight other financing tools such as Sukuk or Islamic bonds, in addition to the prevailing global trend towards green finance, which can then be listed on financial markets in Hong Kong, Dubai, and Kuala Lumpur.

In response to a question about

cooperation between the UAE and Malaysia in the financial sector, the Malaysian Trade Commissioner stated that the two countries have close and robust trade relations. He expressed hope for more collaboration and new initiatives with the UAE to increase and strengthen co-operation in the future.

Yazrin Syakhairi added that the UAE is witnessing significant development in the Islamic finance industry. He clarified that recent statistics indicate a noticeable growth in the size of this industry in the Middle East and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as its growth in other parts of the world. -WAM

INDIAN EQUITY MARKET

Foreign portfolio investors aggressively selling Indian stocks

NEW DELHI: Foreign portfolio investors have been aggressively selling Indian stocks, turning net sellers in the Indian equity market so far in January 2024, after making a beeline to accumulate domestic stocks during the past two months--November and December.

The latest data available from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) showed that the FPIs sold Indian stocks worth Rs 24,734 crore in January.

“So far in January, equities experienced FPI outflows as investors exercised caution on Ems (emerging markets), partly in response to rise in US yields,” CARE



Ratings said in a report.

“However, FPI inflows in debt have sustained, supported by India's inclusion in JP Morgan bond index and potential inclusion in

Bloomberg EM Local Currency indices, and have largely offset the equities outflows,” CARE Ratings added.

The selling of stocks by FPIs lately has led to some corrections in Indian benchmark stock indices. In December, especially, they made a beeline to invest in Indian stock markets, with a cumulative accumulation of Rs 66,135 crore.

To put it into context, the entire year saw an inflow of about Rs 171,107 crore, and notably, over one-third of it came in December. The strong inflow of funds from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) had then supported the bench-

mark stock indices to march towards all-time highs.

In November, the FPI inflow was Rs 9,001 crore, NSDL data showed.

Before November, FPI participation in Indian stocks was lukewarm, and they had turned net sellers. They sold Rs 14,768 crore and Rs 24,548 crore, in September and October, respectively. Before that, FPIs bought Indian stocks worth Rs 7,936 crore, Rs 11,631 crore, Rs 43,838 crore, Rs 47,148 crore, Rs 46,618 crore, and Rs 12,262 crore in March, April, May, June, July, and August respectively, data showed. -ANI

MARKET

Oman stock market trading value rises to OMR20.9 million



The shares of OQ Gas Networks, Omantel, Bank Muscat, Abraj Energy Services, and Sohar International Bank pushed the trading value to rise amid positive expectations

MUSCAT: Trading value on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose last week to OMR20.9 million, recording a growth of 30.6 percent from its level a week ago, which amounted to OMR16 million. The shares of OQ Gas Networks, Omantel, Bank Muscat, Abraj Energy Services, and Sohar International Bank pushed the trading value to rise amid positive expectations, and the five companies accounted for 65 percent of the total trading value.

The trading value of OQ Gas Networks shares amounted to OMR4.1 million, representing about 20 percent of the total trading value. Omantel witnessed trading worth OMR3.1 million, the trading value of Bank Muscat shares amounted to OMR2.7 million, while the trading value of Abraj Energy Services shares amounted to OMR2.5 million and Sohar International Bank witnessed trades worth OMR1.30 million, representing 6.2 percent

of the total trading value. The number of deals executed in the week increased by 38 percent from 3,557 deals to 4,915 deals. OQ Gas Networks and Abraj Energy Services accounted for 50.5 percent of the total number of deals executed. Abraj's shares rose to 318 baisas, up 16 baisas during the week, and OQ Gas Networks' shares rose to 150 baisas, up by one baisa during the week. The market value declined at the end of last week's trading to OMR23.83 billion, recording a weekly loss of OMR90 million. Affected by the decline in the market value of the bond and sukuk market last week, fell by OMR100 million to close the trading at OMR4.29 billion. In the week, the prices of 26 securities rose compared to 27 securities whose prices declined and 23 shares stabilised at their previous levels. The Oman and Emirates Holding Company shares recorded the high-

Muscat Stock Exchange sees weekly gains

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Oman stock market experienced a modest uptick this week, with the main index closing 0.44 percent higher. The main index recorded limited movements this week, trading within a range mostly, according to an analyst. "The market has stagnated to a certain extent over the last three weeks after an initial rebound at the start of the year. As a result, it could be exposed to another round of price corrections in particular after failing to reach new highs," George Khoury Global Head of Education and Research at CFI. "At the same time, trading volumes have been improving compared to the previous two weeks and returned to levels seen at the beginning of the year. Value traded improved as well but remained below the levels observed at the start of the month," he said.



Sector performances were mixed and were led by the financial sector which exhibited modest gains, climbing by 0.14 percent only. The services sector also recorded small gains with a 0.06 percent increase over this week and stabilised after strong losses during the previous week. The industrial sector however declined by 0.48 percent, returning to the negative territory after two weeks of gains. In the financial sector, stock

performances were mixed as well. The two most traded stocks in the sector moved in opposing directions, Sohar International Bank saw a 2.8 percent increase, while Bank Muscat experienced a 0.37 percent decline. In the services sector, Oman Telecom reported a 1.01 percent decrease, following two negative trading sessions after peaking in the middle of the week. Conversely, OQ Gas Networks showed a positive change of 0.67 percent, recovering some of the losses from earlier this month while Abraj recorded a strong 5.3 percent increase. Among industrial stocks, Oman Cables Industry saw a modest drop of 0.39 percent but maintained its strong bullish trend from 2021. Meanwhile, Galfar Engineering and Contracting and Al Anwar Ceramic posted gains of 1.3 percent and 3.13 percent, respectively.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Google Cloud partners with Hugging Face to attract more AI developers

WASHINGTON: The cloud computing arm of Alphabet Inc (GOOGL.O), said on Thursday it had formed a partnership with startup Hugging Face to ease artificial intelligence (AI) software development in the company's Google Cloud. Following the launch of generative AI tools focused on consumers from the likes of Microsoft (MSFT.O), opens new tab and Google parent Alphabet, large and small businesses have become interested in deploying AI for their own purposes - such as boosting an existing product or serving an internal need. The need to create AI software that is optimised for



specific tasks and needs prompted the partnership, Reuters reported. "It shows we are moving into a world where there's not just one model, but there as many models as

companies, Hugging Face Chief Executive Clem Delangue told Reuters in an interview. "Every company is training, fine tuning and optimising their own models, which is the direction that the field is taking." Rampaging demand for cloud-based AI computing suggests that at its current trajectory it will overtake the traditional cloud software market in the future, Google Cloud CEO Thomas Kurian said. The companies reached a revenue-sharing agreement, but did not disclose the terms. The arrangement will allow developers using Google Cloud's technical infrastructure to access and deploy Hugging Face's reposi-

tory of open source AI software, such as models and data sets. Hugging Face has grown into a central hub for open-source AI software, and signed a similar arrangement in February last year with Amazon.com's (AMZN.O), opens new tab cloud unit. The partnership coalesced because cloud customers have become more interested in modifying or building their own AI models versus using off-the-shelf options, Kurian said. One such example is ensuring against specific safety frameworks in place to secure against data leakage, or evaluate the quality of the model running. -BNA

WORLD BANK FORECAST

Brazilian economy continues to grow despite challenges

BRASILIA: Despite facing various challenges, the Brazilian economy has witnessed positive growth, consistent with global projections, with the country's economy rising by 3.1 percent in 2023, marginally higher than the 2.9 percent growth in 2022. According to the World Bank's latest forecasts, the Brazilian economy will experience a deceleration in growth in 2024 at a projected rate of 1.5 percent. This growth rate is predicted to rise to 2.2 percent in the following year, backed by expectations of falling inflation

and interest rates. The largest in Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil's economy is powered by various sectors, with the top contributors being the services and agriculture sectors, which are major sources of income, employment, and foreign exchange for the country. According to estimates, including those of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for 2023, Brazil's economy is the ninth largest in the world in terms of GDP, with a recorded AED2.13 trillion, surpassing Russia and Canada. -WAM

STOCK MARKET

Wall Street closes its 12th winning week in last 13 with a mixed finish

NEW YORK: Wall Street closed out its latest winning week with a mixed finish on Friday, as drops for technology stocks dragged on the market. The S&P 500 slipped 3.19 points, or 0.1 per cent, to 4,890.97. It's the first decline for the index after a six-day winning streak led it to set record highs for five straight days. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 60.30, or 0.2 per cent, to 38,109.43. The weakness for tech stocks, meanwhile, dragged the Nasdaq composite to a loss of 55.13, or 0.4 per cent, to 15,455.36. Intel chip stocks lower even though it reported stronger profit for the last three months of 2023 than analysts expected. It dropped 11.9 per cent after giving forecasts for revenue and profit for the start of 2024 that fell short of Wall Street's estimates. KLA, a supplier for the chip industry, also dragged on tech stocks despite reporting better quarterly results than expected. It sank 6.6 per cent after saying it still sees market conditions as challenging in the near term and giving a forecast for upcoming revenue that fell short of analysts' estimates. The US stock market nevertheless closed out another winning week as reports keep suggesting inflation is cooling while the economy continues to power higher. The unexpected backdrop has



hopes high that Wall Street's dream scenario can come true: one where a resilient economy drives profits higher for companies, while inflation moderates enough to get the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates many times this year. The latest report on Friday showed the measure of inflation the Fed prefers to use behaved just about exactly as expected in December. Overall inflation by that measure was 2.6 per cent during the month, matching November's rate. The Fed pays more attention to the inflation figure after ignoring prices for food and fuel, which can zigzag sharply month to month. That figure cooled to 2.9 per cent from 3.2 per cent and was a bit

better than economists expected. At the same time, spending by US consumers strengthened by more in December than expected. That helped calm worries that a resilient US economy, which has so far refused to fall into a long-predicted recession, would mean upward inflation pressure. The expectation is for the labor market to soften some in upcoming months, which would further cool pressure on inflation, but not enough to halt the economy's growth. That has the market looking forward to what EY Chief Economist Gregory Daco calls "the 'holy grail' of non-inflationary growth." Treasury yields yo-yoed in the bond market following the report but later rose modestly. The yield

on the 10-year Treasury edged up to 4.13 per cent from 4.12 per cent late Thursday. The Federal Reserve's next meeting next week will likely end with no change to interest rates, but traders are split on whether it could begin cutting rates in March. That would be a sharp turnaround from the last two years, when the Fed hiked its main interest rate to the highest level since 2001. It's trying to slow the economy and hurt investment prices enough through high interest rates to get inflation fully under control. Traders are betting the Fed will cut interest rates as many as six times this year, according to data from CME Group. That would be double what the Fed itself has indicated. Critics say that overzealousness may be setting financial markets up for disappointment after their big rallies in recent months. For now, though, the mood is still mostly ebullient on Wall Street. American Express jumped 7.1% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500, even though it reported weaker results for the latest quarter than expected. It gave forecasts for revenue and profit for the full year of 2024 that were stronger than analysts', while also announcing plans to boost its dividend payout to investors. -BNA

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SPORTS

Sabalenka retains crown

Belarussian overpowers China's Zheng Qinwen in the Australian Open women's singles final in Melbourne

MELBOURNE: Aryna Sabalenka underlined why she had long been considered the Australian Open favourite by overpowering Zheng Qinwen to retain the women's title on Saturday. Belarusian second seed Sabalenka won 6-3, 6-2 to claim her second Grand Slam singles trophy without dropping a set. With 12th seed Zheng backed by passionate Chinese support, a composed Sabalenka sucked the energy out of her opponent and the crowd in a fast start. She is the first woman to win back-to-back since Victoria Azarenka in 2013. Sabalenka, 25, who became the strong favourite after top seed Iga



Swiatek was beaten in the third round, emulated her compatriot Azarenka by completing victory in little over an hour. "It's been an amazing couple of weeks and I couldn't imagine lifting the trophy another time," said Sabalenka. Zheng, 21, was playing in her first major final and often looked overawed - by both the occasion and her opponent. "It's my first final and I'm feeling a little bit [of] pity but it was a good experience at the same time," said Zheng, who will move into the world's top 10 for the first time when the rankings are published on Monday.

"I feel complicated because I could have done better but I didn't in this match." Bopanna-Ebden clinch men's doubles title Also on Saturday, the second seeds, Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden, clinched their maiden men's doubles title as they defeated Italy's Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori 7-6, 7-5. Aged 43 years 329 days, India's Bopanna also became the oldest Grand Slam champion and will take over as world No.1 when the latest rankings are released on Monday. - Agencies

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

'One of my worst displays'

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic says the rare Australian Open defeat inflicted by semi-final opponent Jannik Sinner on Friday was "one of the worst" Grand Slam displays of his illustrious career. Serbia's Djokovic lost in Melbourne for the first time since 2018 as Sinner ended his 33-match winning streak. Serbia's Djokovic, 36, lost 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6-8), 6-3. The 24-time Grand Slam champion was aiming to move clear of Margaret Court in terms of all-time major triumphs. "It is not a very pleasant feeling playing this way," said Djokovic, 36. "But at the same time, credit to [Sinner] for doing everything better than me in every aspect of the game." Djokovic, who will remain as the men's world No.1 despite the four-set defeat, won



three of the four major tournaments last year in one of the best seasons of his career. "I guess this is one of the worst Grand Slam matches I've ever played," said Djokovic. Sinner, 22, faces Daniil Medvedev, who recovered from two sets down to beat Alexander Zverev, in Sunday's final. Russian third seed Medvedev, 27, won 5-7, 3-6, 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-5), 6-3 in a remarkable second semi-final which lasted four hours 18 minutes.



Klopp has 'no regrets' on his decision to leave Liverpool

LONDON: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp says he is "convinced" leaving the club is "right" and has "no regrets" about the decision. The German announced on Friday he would leave Anfield at the end of the season. Klopp, 56, said he realised his "resources are not endless" as his side continue to compete for four trophies this campaign. "With all the responsibility you have in this job, you have to be top of your game," Klopp said. "I've been doing this 24 years now. When you have the career I had it's almost impossible to start where I did and arrive at Liverpool. "I always invested everything I had. I realised my resources are not endless and I prefer to pack everything into this season and then have a break or stop or whatever. We're not young rabbits anymore and we don't jump as high as we did. I still think it's the right thing to do. I don't take these things lightly. I'm convinced it's right. I have no regrets but a lot of special memories."

THE FA CUP - FOURTH ROUND



Ake nets winner fo Man City

LONDON: Nathan Ake's late goal gave Manchester City their first victory in six visits to Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and a place in the FA Cup fifth round. City looked likely to have to settle a replay after missing a succession of chances before Ake scored

their first goal at this stadium after five successive defeats with two minutes left as Spurs keeper Guglielmo Vicario failed to hold Kevin de Bruyne's corner under pressure from Ruben Dias. It was a bitter blow to Spurs after a defiant rearguard action but

just reward for City, who had been the better side only to miss the opportunities that had come their way before Ake slotted the winner. Other results: Bristol City 0 Nottingham Forest 0, Chelsea 0 Aston Villa 0, Sheffield Wednesday 1 Coventry 1. - Agencies

OMAN CRICKET

Oman to host two major ACC events in 2024: OC boss

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) continues to make big strides on and off the pitch. While the national team is getting ready to compete in the ICC T20 World Cup this June in the tournament, co-hosted by West Indies and the USA, the national governing body, is also gearing to host two major Asian Cricket Council (ACC) tournaments in 2024. The revelation of Oman scheduled to host two major continental events was made by OC Chairman Pankaj Khimji at the OC annual awards ceremony (2021-22 and 2022-23) held at the Oman Cricket Academy grounds recently. Addressing Oman's cricket fraternity at the ceremony that included chief guest, Muhammad bin Basheer Al Jarf, Chairman of Omantel, Basil bin Ahmed Al Rawas, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, star performers of two seasons, various division winners, dignitaries, OC board members and players, Khimji said: "Oman Cricket has made big strides and is moving in the right direction. Over the past three years, the national team has won laurels for the Sultanate of Oman and domestic cricket has also seen great advancement as technology is being used to broadcast T10 and T20 domestic matches. "I am proud of the achievements we have made in the past three years. We promise to continue to fly Oman's flag high at the international stage. We will be hosting two ACC tournaments this year, with one of them to be the biggest ever staged by Oman towards the end of the year." The OC boss said that further details of the ACC events will be announced in future. Khimji shed light on the progress made by the national team over the past three years and said that the awards ceremony, which is an annual feature, couldn't be held due to the pandemic. "Our quality of cricket is growing and the performance of the national team has been exceptional. Our organisational abilities were put to test twice and we came out with flying colours. Firstly, we set up the world-class facilities for the ICC T20 World Cup in 2021 in just 91 days. We continue to upgrade our facilities to top-level standards. "Secondly, we were handed the project to set up the infrastructure facility for Oman Hockey Association (OHA) which successfully hosted the Paris 2024 Olympic Qualifiers recently and are now currently hosting the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024. We put up the facility in just



five months and the arena has been widely appreciated by the participating teams and FIH officials. I thank project head, Damodar Katti, and others related to project for successful completion of both the projects." Khimji had words of praise for national team captain Zeeshan Maqsood and pace bowler Bilal Khan and said: "I am proud of the them, national team, and the support staff that has brought excellent results under the guidance of chief coach Duleep Mendis" The OC boss singled out Oman chief curator Anoop Kandy and

head of umpiring committee Rahul Asher for praise for their excellent roles in their respective capacity. Khimji said that OC is running pilot projects in Omani and international schools and they have now a pool of nearly 700 students who are playing the game. Earlier, Mendis, who is also OC chief development officer, said: "We witnessed 56 senior teams, 28 junior teams and five women's teams in the 2021-22 season and 65 senior teams, 44 Junior teams and five women's teams in the 2022-23 season. We also success-



fully broadcasted the Premier Division in T20 and T10 format since 2021 across the globe and have proudly attained 3 million+ viewership in every season. We are striving towards broadcasting the 50-over format in the coming season." Mendis also spoke about the national team campaign from 2021 to the team's qualification to the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 and Oman's title win in the inaugural GCC T20 Cricket Championship held in Qatar in September 2023. Oman will compete in the T20 World Cup for the third time when it competes in

the 2024 T20 World Cup. At the T20 World Cup, Oman are clubbed along Australia, England, Namibia and Scotland in the mega-event that is projected to engage 5 billion plus viewership across the globe. On this occasion, Paul Sheridan, OC vice-chairman, also spoke about the board's activities and the progress of the game in Oman. Shoaib Khan, Kashyap Prajapati take MVP honours At the awards ceremony, Shoaib Khan and Kashyap Prajapati of Muscat CT were adjudged the Most Valuable Player (MVP)



cricketers in the top-flight Premier Division for the past two seasons. Shoaib was declared winner of 2021-22 season and Prajapati claimed the top honours for the 2022-23 season. On the occasion, Oman Cricket's long-serving secretary Madhu Jesrani was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award, which was received by his daughter and OC board advisor Vaishali Jesrani due to former's health issues. OC also honoured Rahul Asher, Vinod Babu, Harikrishna for their contribution to umpiring and Anoop Kandy as chief curator. Awardees: Cricketer of the Year 2021: Shoaib Khan. Cricketer of the Year 2022: Kashyap Prajapati. Season 2021-22: Winners: Premier Division: Oman Stallions, A Division: Zawawi Powertech, B Division: Douglas OHL, C Division: Ideal International, D Division: Ideal Technology, E Division: Israr Ghala, F Division: Earn Trust, U19: Oman Cricket Academy U19. Individual awards: Premier Division: Best Batter: Shoaib Khan, Best Bowler: Khawar Ali, Best All-Rounder: Aamir Kaleem. Season 2022-23: Winners: Premier Division: Muscat CT, A Division: Fagor FCC, B Division: Vanderlande, C Division: Khalsa United CT, D Division: Israr Ghala, E Division: Earn Trust, F Division: Skill Vision & NTS CT, G Division: Abeer Warriors, U19: Indian School Muscat. Individual awards: Premier Division: Best Batter: Kashyap Prajapati, Best Bowler: Hemal Tandel, Best All-Rounder: Ayaan Khan.

ROUND-UP

ahli Islamic opens first Islamic bank in Quriyat



Nestled in the iconic town of Quriyat, renowned for its rich history and breathtaking scenery, the new ahli Islamic branch will serve as a vital hub for facilitating Sharia-compliant financial services

MUSCAT: ahli Islamic announced the grand opening of its latest branch in the Wilayat of Quriyat. It is considered the first Islamic bank in the wilayat, which aims to offer premium Sharia-compliant banking products and services, catering to a diverse and discerning customer base. The launch event was conducted under the esteemed patronage of Sheikh Talal bin Saif Al-Hosni, Wali of Quriyat. Nestled in the iconic town of Quriyat, renowned for its rich history and breathtaking scenery, the new ahli Islamic branch will serve as a vital hub for facilitating Sharia-compliant financial services. The bank is committed to meeting the evolving needs of a growing customer base, capitalizing on the burgeoning opportunities in the region. With a host of tourism projects coming up in and around Quriyat, complemented by the increasing awareness of

Islamic banking, this new branch underscores ahli Islamic's mission to provide exceptional value to its shareholders by being accessible to people even in the far-flung areas of the Sultanate of Oman. **Experienced team** Noora Sultan, AGM - Head of Retail Banking at ahli Islamic, expressed gratitude during the opening ceremony, stating, "It is our immense pleasure to announce our venture into the ever-pleasant locale of Quriyat. Our new branch promises to provide innovative Sharia-compliant banking solutions in a state-of-the-art environment. Our experienced team is dedicated to exceeding expectations of individuals and businesses alike. As we continue to evolve, our expanding network of branches across the Sultanate of Oman is set to make a lasting impact on the Islamic banking industry." ahli Islamic assures its new

customers of its readiness to go the extra mile, contributing to the advancement of financial services and Islamic banking within the area. Inviting the people of Quriyat to embrace an unparalleled banking experience, Noora Sultan added, "As the first Islamic bank to provide Sharia-compliant services in Quriyat, we guarantee you integrity and our utmost dedication to delivering the best, surpassing your expectations. We eagerly anticipate welcoming new customers and forging everlasting ties with them." Through the establishment of this new branch, ahli Islamic reinforces its commitment to growth and innovation, reflecting enthusiasm for expanding into newer and grander horizons. Built on a foundation of trust and reliability, the bank signals its unwavering dedication and aims to provide its best for the people of Quriyat.

POPULAR ANNUAL DRAWING CONTEST



Saud Bahwan Automotive announces 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest

MUSCAT: Saud Bahwan Automotive recently announced the 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest. The hugely popular annual drawing contest, gives young minds a unique opportunity to showcase their drawing skills and stand a chance to win interesting prizes. The last date for submission is February 29, 2024. To participate, contestants can visit any Toyota showroom / service facility to collect the drawing sheets. The 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest is scheduled to be held across Saud Bahwan Automotive's Toyota showrooms across Oman. The event is open to all legal residents of Oman aged 15 years or under. The objective of the competition is to encourage dreams of young children and bring their inspirations to life on paper through their creative sketches. Like each year, this year too, the 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest has exciting prizes for winners. The winners of the national contest will be eligible to take part in the world contest. Conditions apply. Participants can draw their automotive imaginations using any paint including water colours, markers, and crayons. The sketch-

es must be drawn with hands only. Digitally created artwork will not be accepted. Artwork should include a background and should be submitted on entry forms available at any Toyota showroom / service facility. Judges will select winners based on originality of the art, the concept, artistic expression and colouring. All artworks should be submitted with an entry form signed by the participant and a parent or guardian. Since 2004, every year, through the Toyota Dream Car Art Contest with the theme 'Your Dream Car', Toyota aims to reach out to budding young artists around the world, to nurture the creativity of young dreamers while offering a creative opportunity to pursue their dreams. The competitions are open for participants from three age groups; under 8 years, 8-11 years and 12 - 15 years. Those interested in making the most of the 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest can log on to <https://www.toyota-dream-carart.com/meca/en/> to better understand what the contest is about by taking a look at previous submissions from participants across the region.

CORPORATE WELLNESS



Over 1,200 OQ employees join Al Mouj Muscat Marathon

MUSCAT: In a significant show of corporate wellness and community engagement, over 1,200 employees of OQ, the global integrated energy group, joined the ranks of participants in the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon, which took place on January 26 and 27. This participation underscored OQ's commitment to encouraging a healthy lifestyle among its employees and fostering a spirit of sportsmanship, in line with the group's corporate values. OQ continued its role as a key sponsor of Al Mouj Muscat Marathon this year, focusing on the 5-kilometre race category. This category was particularly welcoming to a wide range of participants, making it ideal for those new to the sport. This initiative was part of OQ's broader social investment programme, which places a strong emphasis on sports as a pillar. Annually, OQ sponsors various sports initiatives and events, contributing to the development of sports in Oman. OQ also provides facilities and organises activities to en-

courage its employees to engage in physical exercises. The group has signed numerous agreements and memorandums of cooperation to support and sponsor sports activities. For instance, OQ Exploration and Production, an OQ Group company, collaborated with the Directorate-General of Culture, Sports and Youth in Dhofar Governorate last year to fund the development of facilities at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Recreation. Moreover, OQ signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education to support the Oman School Sports Association, boosting sports activities in schools and providing essential equipment for around 250,000 students across various governorates. Last year, OQ Exploration and Production also sponsored the second edition of the School Beach Games Championship in Dhofar Governorate, organised by the Oman School Sports Association. In addition to supporting mass participation events, OQ takes

pride in sponsoring Omani sports champions on the international stage. The company backs motorsport champion Ahmad Al Harthy, who secured second place in last year's Le Mans race in France - one of the most challenging rounds in the FIA World Endurance Championship. OQ also sponsors shot put athlete Mohammed Al Mashaykhi in paralympics, where he has achieved notable rankings, and diver Omar Al Ghailani, who won first place in the AIDA Freediving World Cup. Furthermore, OQ organises annual sports competitions as part of its sports activities programme, such as the OQ Ramadan Football Championship, which sees participation from various companies and institutions. Culminating OQ's sports initiatives was its representation of Oman in the Socca World Cup 2022, held in Hungary. Competing alongside 43 national teams, OQ's participation was the sole representation from the Gulf Cooperation Council in this international tournament.

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ROUND-UP

Oman International Hospital launches state-of-the-art Stroke Unit to enhance patient care

Designed to meet the growing demand for specialised stroke care, this state-of-the-art facility represents an important milestone in the hospital's continued efforts to provide superior medical care

MUSCAT: Oman International Hospital announced the grand opening of its Stroke Unit, a dedicated facility aimed at revolutionising stroke care and improving patient outcomes.

Designed to meet the growing demand for specialised stroke care, this state-of-the-art facility represents an important milestone in the hospital's continued efforts to provide superior medical care.

The Stroke Unit is equipped with the latest diagnostic and treatment tools to ensure rapid and high-quality intervention following a stroke in the critical moments following the accident. The unit offers 24/7 monitoring



capabilities as well as specialised rehabilitation services to address the full spectrum of stroke care, including acute intervention and long-term recovery.

Dr Amal Al Hashmi, Senior Consultant Vascular Neurologist at OIH, expressed her enthusiasm for the new Stroke Unit, saying, "This unit represents a significant milestone in our efforts to improve patient care." "The Stroke Unit is a testament to our commitment to providing the highest standards of medical care and ensuring that our community has access to world-class stroke treatment."

The Stroke Unit consists of a comprehensive team of expert neurologists, ER physicians, radiologists, nurses, and rehabilitation specialists with extensive training in stroke management. The unit is strategically located for rapid access, ensuring minimal time from admission to intervention.

The latest imaging technologies, such as MRI and CT scans, enable precise diagnosis while innovative therapies and rehabilitation programs address the diverse needs of stroke survivors.

"Our commitment to the well-being of our community has led us to establish this state-of-the-art Stroke Unit," stated Marcelo Pereira, CEO of OIH. "Stroke is a time-sensitive medical emergency, and establishing a dedicated center allows us to provide fast and expert care, eventually saving lives and reducing long-term consequences."

OIH is a leading healthcare institution dedicated to providing exceptional medical care to the community. With state-of-the-art facilities, a skilled team of healthcare professionals, and a commitment to patient well-being, we strive to deliver top-notch medical services.

PREMIUM CREDIT CARD

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BankDhofar unveils Visa Signature Credit Card for priority customers

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, a pioneer in providing innovative financial solutions, introduced Visa Signature Credit Card. This premium credit card is designed to cater to the needs of its esteemed priority bank clients, offering an array of exclusive benefits and privileges.

BankDhofar's Visa Signature Card is more than just a card; it's a statement of luxury and a commitment to providing customers with an unparalleled banking experience. Key features which make this credit card stand out:

Exceptional Rewards: Cardholders will have access to an exceptional rewards program, with a remarkable 1.68% value back on international purchases and 1.12% on transactions made in Oman. Customers can earn points on every purchase, and redeem them for a variety of options, including travel, shopping, and more.

Global Concierge: Cardholders can experience the freedom to shop and travel internationally. The Credit Card, is widely accepted at millions of locations worldwide while enjoying the convenience of concierge services to assist with travel arrangements, dining reservations, and exclusive event access.

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Enhanced Security: BankDhofar prioritizes the security of our cardholders. The Visa Signature Credit Card is equipped with advanced security features, including EMV chip technology, providing peace of mind for every transaction.

Dedicated Support: Our Visa Signature cardholders enjoy priority customer support to address inquiries and concerns promptly. BankDhofar is committed to ensuring a seamless and personalised banking experience for each valued customer.

MHD Automobiles - Mopar introduces free brakes and suspension checkup campaign

MUSCAT: In a significant move to enhance the after-sales experience for Jeep, Dodge, and RAM owners in Oman, MHD Automobiles - Mopar announced the launch of the free brakes and suspension checkup campaign. Through this initiative, Mopar, the Stellantis after-sales brand, aims to improve customer safety and satisfaction.

Customers owning Jeep, Dodge, and RAM models are invited to avail themselves of a complimentary Brakes and Suspension Checkup at the MHD Automobiles Mopar Service Centre in Al Hail. This exclusive offer, valid until March 20, 2024, addresses the aftermath of winter adventures, ensuring vehicles are ready for the upcoming months.

The campaign provides a meticulous examination of brakes and suspensions and extends a 20% discount on selected parts for customers opting for service during this period. This initiative underscores MHD Automobiles' commitment to customer care, inviting even those who may have sought services elsewhere to experience the expertise of the authorized Mopar Service Centre.

Mohsin Hani Al Bahrani, Chief Executive Officer of MHD Automobiles, expressed the company's dedication to customer experience, stating, "At MHD, we believe that exceptional service is the foundation of a lasting relationship with our customers. Our Mopar Service Centre, with its well-trained experts and state-of-the-art facility, ensures the highest standard of care for every vehicle."

Customers are encouraged to take advantage of the free checkup. Off-roading and extended drives during the season can put additional stress on brakes and suspensions. The campaign not only identifies potential issues but also empowers customers with information about necessary repairs, maintenance, or part replacements for their vehicle's optimal performance and safety.

To schedule a complimentary checkup and experience the unmatched care provided by Mopar, customers can call 80022008.

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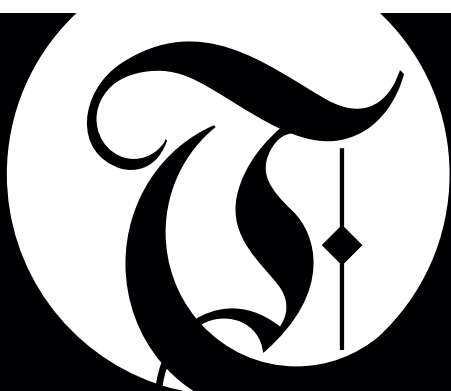
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LIFESTYLE

**RESEARCH SHOWS FURRY FRUIT
IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH - FAST**

WASHINGTON: Kiwi fruit has proven to be a powerful mood booster, and new research from the University of Otago demonstrates how quickly its effects can occur.

In a study, published in The British Journal of Nutrition, researchers found the furry fruit improved vitality and mood in as little as four days.

Co-author Professor Tamlin Conner, of the Department of Psychology, says the findings provide a tangible and accessible way for people to support their mental well-being.

“It’s great for people to know that small changes in their diet, like adding kiwifruit, could make a difference in how they feel every day.”

Vitamin C intake has been associated with improved mood, vitality, well-being, and lower depression, while vitamin C deficiency is associated with higher depression and cognitive impairment.

However, Professor Conner says limited research has assessed how quickly mood improvements occur

after introducing vitamin C supplements or whole food sources.

The researchers aimed to fill that gap with an 8-week dietary intervention of 155 adults with low vitamin C.

Participants took daily either a vitamin C supplement, placebo, or two kiwifruit. They then reported their vitality, mood, flourishing, sleep quality, sleep quantity, and physical activity using smartphone surveys. The researchers found kiwifruit supplementation improved vitality and mood within four days, peaking around 14-16 days, and improved flourishing from day 14. Vitamin C, on the other hand, marginally improved mood until day 12.

Lead author Dr Ben Fletcher, who conducted the research as part of his PhD at Otago, says understanding the nuances of when and how these effects occur day-to-day contributes to our knowledge of the potential benefits of vitamin C-rich foods and supplements on mental health.

“This helps us see that what we eat can have a relatively fast impact on how we feel.

“Our participants had relatively good mental health to begin with so had little room for improvement, but still reported the benefits of kiwifruit or vitamin C interventions,” he says.

He adds that, while vitamin C tablets showed some improvements, the study underscores the potential synergistic effects of consuming whole foods like kiwifruit.

“We encourage a holistic approach to nutrition and well-being, incorporating various nutrient-rich foods into your diet.”

In addition to the direct implications for individuals seeking to improve their mental well-being, Professor Conner says the study introduces a novel methodology in nutritional research.

“The use of intensive smartphone surveys offers a real-time understanding of the day-to-day changes in mood-related outcomes.” -ANI

