LET'S TALK
Times OF OMAN

HM ISSUES 2 ROYAL DECREES

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued two Royal decrees reading as follows: Royal Decree No. (13/ 2023) on ratifying a cooperation agreement in the field of shipping and ports between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of Bahrain, signed in Manama on 24 October 2022. >A2

HM THE SULTAN RECEIVES THANKS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of KSA Foundation Day. In the cable, King Salman expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's heartfelt sentiments and prayers, wishing His Majesty good health and happiness. He also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity. -ONA

Founded 1975 · Volume 48 No. 7 | 16 Pages · Baisas 200 · Subscription OMR63 | ISO 9001:2008 Certified Company | Chairman/Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali | Printed & Published by Muscat Media Group

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BOOK FAIR

'Cultural shows added a creative dimension'

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Satisfied with the success of the 27th Muscat International Book Fair, which concluded on Saturday, Dr. Abdullah bin Nasser Al Harrasi, Minister of Information, attributed it to the addition of new programmes including cultural activities.

Al Harrasi, who is also the chairman of the main committee of the Muscat International Book Fair, said: "The inclusion of cultural activities added a creative dimension to the fair. Without these activities, the fair would just become a place for selling books and inking deals between publishers."

The minister said: "The book fair's main aim is to boost reading habits in the society. At the fair, we showcased various genres of books and supported the publishers." >A3

EXCEPTIONAL EFFORTS TAKEN IN QUAKE-PRONE AREAS BY OMAN'S RESCUE MISSION

The 46-member Omani team stayed for 15 days in Turkiye before returning to Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The National Search and Rescue Team (NSRT) of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), which concluded its operations in the quake-hit Turkiye recently managed to rescue scores of people from the rubble and provided life-saving medical aid to more than 30 people during their 15-day mission.

The 46-member team, which was based in the Turkish province of Hatay, also rescued two people alive and recovered six bodies from the debris of buildings during the operations in Antalya, southern Turkiye.

Speaking to *Times of Oman*, Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed bin Hamoud Al Mahmoudi, the team leader, said: "The team carried out many search and rescue operations, provided emergency care to the injured, and found survivors from under the rubble in several locations in Hatay. Despite the challenges we faced, aftershocks from time to time, traffic congestion and bitter cold, our team took exceptional efforts during the mission."

Al Mahmoudi added: "Our team comprised experts (search and rescue teams, building engineers, specialists in operations, communications, doctors and paramedical personnel.

"We also carried specialised equipment for searching survivors, cameras and audio sensors to survey the collapsed sites and receive signals if any person is found alive under the rubble. We worked closely with the international search and rescue teams in accordance with the requirements of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Board."

Lieutenant Ali Al Farsi.

Al Mahmoudi said: "The National Search and Rescue Team is always fully prepared for any emergencies and disasters. The recent rescue mission in Turkiye gave our team new experience to work in such a calamity."

The Omani team leader said: "We had moments of joy for those that were reunited with families but there's also grief. It's an emotional rollercoaster. It's incredibly difficult to describe. Until you experience it, that's when you can only validate those feelings."

The death toll from the devastating earthquakes that recently struck Turkiye and Syria has climbed beyond 50,000 - and left many more people homeless. It has taken a terrible toll on mental health for those caught up in the tragedy, both directly and indirectly.

Following the catastrophic quake on February 6, the Oman rescue mission left for Turkiye on February 8 and returned on February 23 on board the Royal Air Force of Oman flight. >A5

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Indians top list of travellers in 2022

1 With over 147,000 Indians flying via Muscat Airport by the end of December 2022, they topped the list of passengers travelling through the airport, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information(NCSI). >A2

WORLD

Biden's cancerous skin lesion removed

2 US President Joe Biden's doctor said that a skin lesion removed from the president's chest in February was a basal cell carcinoma, a type of cancer. Biden required no further treatment, he said. >A7

MARKET

MSX index rises 50 points in February

3 The MSX index rose in February with the support of the shares of leading firms that attracted investors and increased by 50 points to close the trading session in February at 4,753 points. >B1

RISING CONNECTIVITY

More flights to India in summer

Times News Service

MUSCAT: With the summer season expected to see a jump in travellers, airlines are gearing up to provide better connectivity to India from the Sultanate of Oman.

The introduction of direct flights from the southern Indian city of Chennai to Muscat by budget air carrier, IndiGo, is set to provide more options not just to Chennai but also to other Indian cities and Sri Lanka.

Oman's national carrier, Oman Air, has also boosted its connectivity to India with the recent announcement of two new destinations to Indian cities of Lucknow and Thiruvananthapuram.

Oman Air's major network expansion in its summer schedule also introduces flights to Chittagong (Bangladesh) and Maldives.

Besides, the Chennai-Muscat flight, IndiGo hopes to capture a larger share of the international market and confirmed the opening of several new flights to the Middle East.

From March 26, IndiGo will start flying on Chennai-Muscat route, besides operating daily flights on the Abu Dhabi-Hyderabad, and Abu Dhabi-Chennai routes. It may be mentioned that IndiGo previously operated Chennai-Muscat route from 2016 to 2018.

In his remarks to *Times of Oman*, an airline representative from Muscat said: "We are happy to see the introduction of direct flights between Chennai and Muscat from March 26. Passengers will be allowed a baggage allowance of 30kgs besides 7kgs of hand luggage until final destination. The one-way fare between Muscat- Chennai is starting from OMR 44.

"Chennai will be IndiGo's fourth direct destination to Muscat. We already have direct flights to Mumbai, Kochi and Hyderabad. All our aircraft are operated with A320-NEOs."

The flight will depart from Chennai at 12:45am and arrive in Muscat at 3am. The return flight will depart Muscat at 4am and land in Chennai at 9.20am.

Oman Air's network expansion

With an aim to consolidate its network in the sub-continent, Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate, unveiled its summer schedule for 2023 recently. >A2

TOURISM FAIR

Oman to showcase its tourism capabilities, sites at ITB Berlin

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will take part in Berlin International Travel and Tourism Fair (ITB 2023) from 7 to 9 March 2023.

The Omani delegation will be led by Salim Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

ITB Berlin is the world's largest tourism industry fair. It brings together countries, tourist destinations, tour operators, airlines, travel agents, booking agents and hotels.

The Sultanate of Oman pavilion at ITB Berlin 2023 will showcase tourism capabilities and unique sites in the country, with the presence of entities concerned and companies which are promoting the Sultanate of Oman in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT).

The fair will include bilateral meetings between specialists in the Omani tourism sector and their counterparts abroad with the aim of promoting tourism exchange.

This edition of the Berlin International Travel and Tourism Fair 2023 (ITB), comes with the tourism sector's recovery from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

The statistical data for 2022, showed that the Sultanate of Oman received about 2.9 million visitors by the end of December 2022, recording an increase of 348.2%, compared with the same period of 2021.

The data also showed that the total hotel revenues in the Sultanate of Oman in 2022, reached OMR186 million. -ONA

OMAN

PRAYER TIMINGS

Dhuhr....12:24pm
Asr....3:45pm
Maghrib....6:16pm
Isha....7:26pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).... 5:10am

SHIPPING AND PORTS

His Majesty the Sultan issues two Royal Decrees

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Thursday issued two Royal decrees reading as follows:

Royal Decree No. (13/ 2023) on ratifying a cooperation agreement in the field of shipping and ports between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Kingdom of Bahrain, signed in Manama on 24 October 2022.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement as per the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

Royal Decree No. (14/ 2023) ascribes the public utility status to the project of (Ibri bypass road) and (Ibri-Ten'am) dual-carriageway in the Governorate of A'Dhahira.

Article (1) states that the project of (Ibri bypass road) and (Ibri-Ten'am) dual-carriageway in the Governorate of A'Dhahira, as defined in the memo and diagram attached to this decree, is henceforth deemed a public utility project.

Article (2) stipulates that the authorities concerned may expropriate, through direct implementation, the properties and lands necessary for the aforementioned project, along will the installations therein in accordance with the Public Utility Expropriation Law promulgated by the Royal Decree No. (64/ 78).

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

-ONA

SOHAR

Traditional long boat rowing race organised

SOHAR: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Omani Committee for Marine Sports in the Wilayat of Sohar, organised on Saturday a 30-foot traditional rowing boat race. A number of rowing teams in the wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate participated in the event.

The race started from the fishing port to the waterfront of the Silver Jubilee Park for a distance of four kilometres. The number of competitors reached 70 in all boats, with ten competitors in each boat with the team leader, competing to reach the finish line.

At the conclusion, the winners coming first were crowned, and they will represent the Sultanate of Oman team in the rowing race in the Emirate of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates during the coming period of this year.

-ONA

Oman airports see increase in traffic last year

Muscat International Airport turned out to be one of the favourites for Indian travellers as they topped the list of passengers flying through the airport

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman airports saw a surge in traffic in the past year with the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), recording a total number of 9,876,762 passengers, arriving, departing and transiting, by the end of 2022.

Muscat International Airport turned out to be one of the favourites for Indian travellers as they topped the list of passengers flying through the airport.

According to NCSI, a total of 147,032 Indian travellers used Muscat International Airport for arriving, departing and transiting by the end of December 2022. They were followed by Bangladesh travellers with 53,130 and Pakistan nationals (39,853).

128 percent increase

The number of incoming and outgoing international flights through Muscat, Salalah and Sohar airports increased by 128 percent and hit a mark of 65,220 flights by the end of December 2022.

During the same period in 2021, the total was 28,580, largely due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of arrivals through the airports of the Sultanate of Oman increased significantly by 133 percent while the number of departures increased by 109 percent. The incoming and outgoing international and domestic flights through Muscat International Airport increased by 107 percent, to reach 68,737 flights, carrying 8,602,791 passengers.

Salalah Airport recorded a significant increase of 71 percent in the number of international and domestic flights, as the number of flights through the airport reached 8,672 carrying 1,128,024 passengers.

The number of international and domestic flights departing and arriving from Sohar Airport were 813 flights with 78,482 passengers while the Duqm Airport recorded 650 incoming and outgoing domestic flights, and transported a total of 67,465 passengers.

In line with IATA report

The surge in traffic was also detailed in a recent report of International Air Transport Association (IATA) that recorded Middle Eastern airlines witnessing a 157.4% traffic rise in 2022 compared to 2021.

"Capacity increased 73.8 percent and load factor climbed 24.6 percentage points to 75.8 percent while December demand climbed 69.8 percent compared to the same month in 2021," the Geneva-based International Air Transport Association (IATA) said in its December 2022 report.

The report further said that the recovery in air travel continued in December 2022 and for the full year with total traffic in 2022 (measured in revenue passenger kilometres or RPKs) rising by 64.4 per cent compared to 2021.

"Globally, full-year 2022 traffic was at 68.5 percent of pre-pandemic (2019) levels. December 2022 total traffic rose 39.7 percent compared to December 2021 and reached 76.9 percent of the December 2019 level," it said in its report.

International traffic in 2022 climbed 152.7 per cent against 2021 and reached 62.2 percent of 2019 levels. December 2022 international traffic climbed 80.2 per cent over December 2021, reaching 75.1 percent of the level in December 2019.

FLIGHTS

Flights to new destinations

< FROM A1

The addition of four destinations, including two Indian cities, and increase in frequency of flights on certain Indian sectors, will bring a 60 percent increase in the number of flights from its hub in Muscat compared to the previous year.

This will provide the market with approximately 60,000 more seats weekly across its network.

The four new destinations being introduced for the summer schedule are: twelve-weekly flights from Muscat to Lucknow, India and five-weekly flights between Muscat and Thiruvananthapuram, India (from August); four-weekly flights from Muscat to Chittagong, Bangladesh (from March end); four-weekly flights from Muscat to Maldives (from June end).

Raising the frequency of the flights to different Indian cities, Oman Air will now operate double-daily flights to Mumbai (from March end, wide-body), double-daily flights to Chennai (from March end), double-daily flights to Kochi (from March end), double-daily flights to Kozhikode (from March end) and double-daily flights to Hyderabad (from March end).

A statement from Oman Air said that the expanded network and the new schedule demonstrates the company's ongoing efforts to contribute to the economy of the Sultanate of Oman while also exhibiting its drive for increased global reach through its award-winning services and products, along with its signature Omani hospitality both in the air and on the ground.

Bids for new oil, gas areas to be launched

A second 'Batch-2' will focus on offshore blocks and is planned to be launched by the end of Q2, 2023

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) has announced that it is preparing to launch two new bid rounds in the first half of this year.

The ministry tweeted on Thursday that "The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is in the preparation process to offer a new batch of oil and gas concession areas by the end of Q1 2023.

"The bid round will target onshore blocks as Batch -1, which offers onshore blocks containing a mixture of tested producing wells, discovered areas, as well as prospects and leads."

A second 'Batch-2' will focus on offshore blocks and is planned to be launched by the end of Q2, 2023.

In another tweet, also on Thursday, the ministry announced that it is in the preparation process to offer a new batch of mining concession areas in the first quarter of 2023.

This process would also include new concession areas targeting commodities like chromite, copper, limestone and others, the ministry added.

Mining concession rights awarded

Earlier on Thursday, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals signed a mining concession agreement with Knights Bay of Britain covering the mining concession rights to Block 21 in the Wilayat of Ibra in the Governorate of North A'Sharqiyah.

Under the agreement, the UK firm will extract nickel and its derivatives with high purity without any carbon emissions (zero carbon).

The agreement was signed by Eng Salim Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, with Brian Spratley, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Knights Bay.

Dr Salah bin Hafeedh Al Dahab, Director General of Investment at the ministry, said this agreement comes in line with the government's approach to allocate mining concession areas to develop investment in the mineral sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

This agreement is the first mining agreement with a foreign investor. He added that initial investments related to the exploration and appraisal phase are estimated at about US$25-30 million in the first three years, covering an area of 1,444 square kilometres.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Salah said this phase also includes geological surveys and the drilling of a number of exploratory and appraisal wells, as well as chemical analysis to confirm the quantities of mineral reserves according to approved international standards.

Through the agreement, Knights Bay will build, develop and process battery minerals (nickel and cobalt) in the Sultanate of Oman to meet the global demand for nickel through electric car manufacturers.

The signing ceremony of the agreement was attended by Mohsen Hamad Al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and the Chargés d'affaires of the British Embassy in Muscat. **(With inputs from ONA**

UN CONFERENCE

Minister of Economy leaves for Doha to take part in meeting

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Traik, Dr. Said bin Mohammed Al Saqri, Minister of Economy, left yesterday for Qatar to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, scheduled for today in Doha.

The conference aims to set new ambitious action programme for the least developed countries with the focus on investment in people in the least developed countries.

The conference aims to eradicate poverty, build capabilities, employ the power of science and technology and innovation to achieve the objectives of sustainable development and support transformation for achieving prosperity.

It also aims to boost the participation of the least developed countries in international trade and regional integration to fight climate change and environment deterioration and to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic for achievement of sustainable development through international efforts and partnerships.

The conference includes holding official sessions for heads of the delegations and other sessions on the sidelines of the conference. **-ONA**

RAISINA DIALOGUE

Sayyid Badr holds talks with Indian Minister Jaishankar

NEW DELHI: On the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, held meetings with counterparts of Oman, France, Singapore and Bangladesh.

Taking to Twitter, Jaishankar said that he met Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi.

"A warm meeting with FM @badralbusaidi of Oman this evening. Value his #G20FMM and #RaisinaDialogue2023 participation Our bilateral cooperation is growing from strength to strength," Jaishankar tweeted.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Foreign Ministry, took part in Raisina Dialogue, within the framework of Oman's participation in G20 meetings being held at the Indian capital, New Delhi.

Oman's delegation was represented in the dialogue by Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi.

Sayyid Badr spoke at a panel discussion entitled "A Region of Opportunities: From the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea" that addressed challenges and opportunities of the region with regard to energy dynamics, climate change, and regional and international cooperation.

In his speech, Sayyid Badr highlighted the importance of the Middle East region. He also touched on the lucrative opportunities for the region and the world as a result of the transition process from an economy that relies on fossil energy sources of oil and gas to a modern economy that relies on renewable and clean energy. These promising opportunities, the minister said, can be utilised through constructive cooperation among various countries, organisations and research institutions.

Sayyid Badr underscored the importance of intensifying efforts to tackle climate change related challenges to reduce carbon emissions, invest in renewable energy and green hydrogen, and encourage innovation.

27TH EDITION

Cameras used to record number of visitors at book fair

< FROM A1

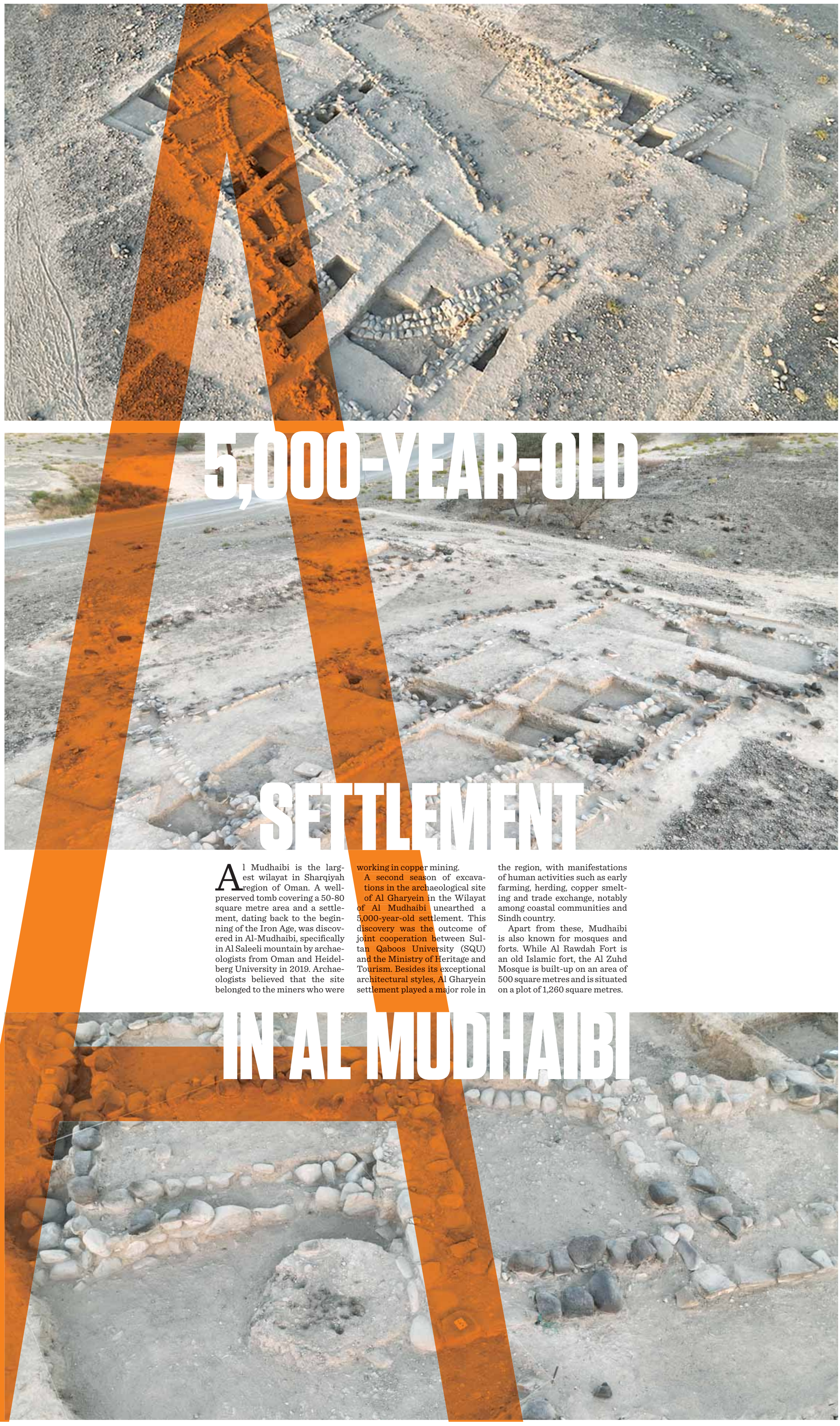
"This time we introduced a lot of activities, which have been welcomed by the public. There was a committee for organising the cultural activities and the activities were planned in coordination with the concerned authorities," Al Harrasi said.

Al Harrasi added: We had the delight to host the Cultural Week of Bahrain as part of the activities of the 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair. The week represented a qualitative addition to the activities. The Cultural Week of Bahrain included several activities which showcased many aspects including the country's rich heritage and culture of Bahrain including poetry and songs."

The minister said that he would "prefer to listen to the views of visitors to measure the success of the 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair". "Overall, I am quite satisfied with the tremendous efforts put in to make this edition of the fair a grand success," he said.

At this edition of the book fair, a smart technology that included cameras, was used to record the number of visitors.

OMAN



5,000-YEAR-OLD SETTLEMENT IN AL MUDHAIBI

Al Mudhaibi is the largest wilayat in Sharqiyah region of Oman. A well-preserved tomb covering a 50-80 square metre area and a settlement, dating back to the beginning of the Iron Age, was discovered in Al-Mudhaibi, specifically in Al Saleeli mountain by archaeologists from Oman and Heidelberg University in 2019. Archaeologists believed that the site belonged to the miners who were working in copper mining.

A second season of excavations in the archaeological site of Al Gharyein in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi unearthed a 5,000-year-old settlement. This discovery was the outcome of joint cooperation between Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. Besides its exceptional architectural styles, Al Gharyein settlement played a major role in the region, with manifestations of human activities such as early farming, herding, copper smelting and trade exchange, notably among coastal communities and Sindh country.

Apart from these, Mudhaibi is also known for mosques and forts. While Al Rawdah Fort is an old Islamic fort, the Al Zuhd Mosque is built-up on an area of 500 square metres and is situated on a plot of 1,260 square metres.

Economic, free, industrial zones boost Oman's economic growth

The projects and industries in these zones contribute to backing the In-Country Value of the national economy and increasing the volume of Omani exports to global markets

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) boosts the growth of Omani industries in its affiliated zones through the well-developed infrastructure that enables establishing various industrial projects.

In addition, the zones provide a set of incentives and facilities, so these projects and industries contribute to backing the In-Country Value (ICV) of the national economy and increasing the volume of Omani exports to global markets.

In this regard, Dr. Said bin Khalifa Al Quraini, General Manager of Investment Development in OPAZ, underscored the importance of the Council of Ministers' directives to promote Omani industries and develop a national policy aimed at reducing imports, increasing exports and enhancing ICV. Al Quraini explained that the industries in OPAZ affiliated zones have played a pioneering role in introducing the national product into the supply chains of large and transformative industries, and working to facilitate introducing a service system to involve SMEs and logistical services that support foreign projects. Such system also serves acquiring relevant skills and know-how, especially in the growing technological revolution towards using the artificial intelligence (AI) the industry, as well as building a skillful national workforce to provide many services for these projects.

Regarding the zones where industries are concentrated, Al Quraini indicated that the industrial cities all over the Sultanate of Oman host a number of national industries, given that they target the local and GCC markets. As for the special and free economic zones, they include more foreign projects, which in turn contribute to connecting and communicating with the global markets and strengthening the country's trade balance.

"The industrial cities and their economic growth in the governorates have contributed to empowering SMEs through the business opportunities offered by factories to these enterprises, generating job opportunities and supporting the In-Country Value", Dr. Said Al Quraini said on the important role of industrial cities in developing the governorates and their contribution to economic growth.

Further, the governorates strive to achieve economic diversification through setting up various industries and economic activities. They also integrate with the big projects operating in the different zones supervised by OPAZ. "The integration between Sohar Fee Zone, Port of Sohar and Sohar Industrial City has highly thrived the growth of commercial and economic movement in the Governorate of North Al Batinah in particular, as investments in these zones exceed over RO 11.7 billion in sectors of manufacturing and petrochemical industries, logistics and food services, and clean energy projects" Al Quraini pointed out.

On the other hand, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate witnessed commercial boom in the marble industry and its byproducts and spare parts used in oil concession areas, which contributed to the establishment of other businesses to support the factories specialised in this industry. However, in Salalah Free Zone and Raysut Industrial Zone in Dhofar Governorate, a number of pharmaceutical industries have concentrated, with investments value reaching OMR76.5 million.

"Al Wusta Governorate is home for the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), in which the volume of investments exceed over OMR3.6 billion, including Duqm Refinery and the Crude Oil Storage Park in Ras Markaz, in addition to hosting clusters of modern industries, most notably those related to renewable energy that received a great demand from a number of international companies to localise clean energy projects in SEZAD. Accordingly, an area spanning 250 square kilometres has been allocated for renewable energy projects and two projects, specialised in the production of green hydrogen, are already under preparation and construction", Al Quraini explained.

He further added that there is a high interest from other local and international companies to set up green energy plants due to their integration with clean energy-producing projects, including the green steel production project for the Jindal Company. This plant will integrate with projects producing green hydrogen for the manufacture of green steel and aluminium for export to many countries worldwide. Other factories include Karwa Motors, Duqm Hongtong Piping Factory, those specialized in food industries and many others.

Dr. Said Al Quraini confirmed that OPAZ is going on to strengthen the role of its affiliated zones in the various governorates.

This reflects OPAZ belief in the importance of integration in enhancing ICV and empowering SMEs. Moreover, it supports the efforts of governors in developing diversified economic sectors in the governorates in general, whether by transferring know-how and exchanging expertise to develop qualitative economic activities in line with the comparative advantage with each governorate. Besides, this could be achieved through the services provided by companies operating in OPAZ affiliated zones areas to individuals, SMEs, and local community entities. — ONA

OMAN'S RESCUE MISSION IN TURKIYE

< FROM A1

'We were looking for people still alive in the quake rubble'

Lieutenant Ali Al Farsi, an official in the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, who was part of the national search and rescue team, said: "Our mission lasted 15 days. We worked from early morning until midnight in search of survivors, using thermal devices to detect survivors under the rubble. We only slept for a few hours, usually not exceeding five hours. We were praying to God to help us to find survivors."

Speaking about the ground zero situation, Al Farsi said: "The constant siren of ambulances echoed through the rubble. Aid trucks, bulldozers and volunteers were all stuck in queues of traffic that stretched for miles. It was a state of utter chaos in the freezing cold. We were sleeping in tents as the aftershocks continued till the day we returned to Oman. The cloud of sadness hangs over everyone, with hopes diminishing of survivors as time passes by."

Al Farsi said: "It is not very easy to recover from the things you have seen. It is traumatic, and very dramatic as well." He added: "We were their last hope to find their loved ones. On all the streets outside the buildings family members were waiting for news so there was an emotional pressure too.

Main aim

"Our main aim was to look for people who were still alive in the rubble and rescue them. The devastation out there... is incredible. There were entire streets with collapsed buildings, others on their side."

Al Farsi said: "I don't think any training can prepare you for the emotional toll and the damage that we've seen. You do feel the pressure to perform. But finding someone was incredible. It's a really good feeling.

"There were so many people out on the ground... all the locals would come and there would be people everywhere just with anticipation and hope of finding somebody alive."

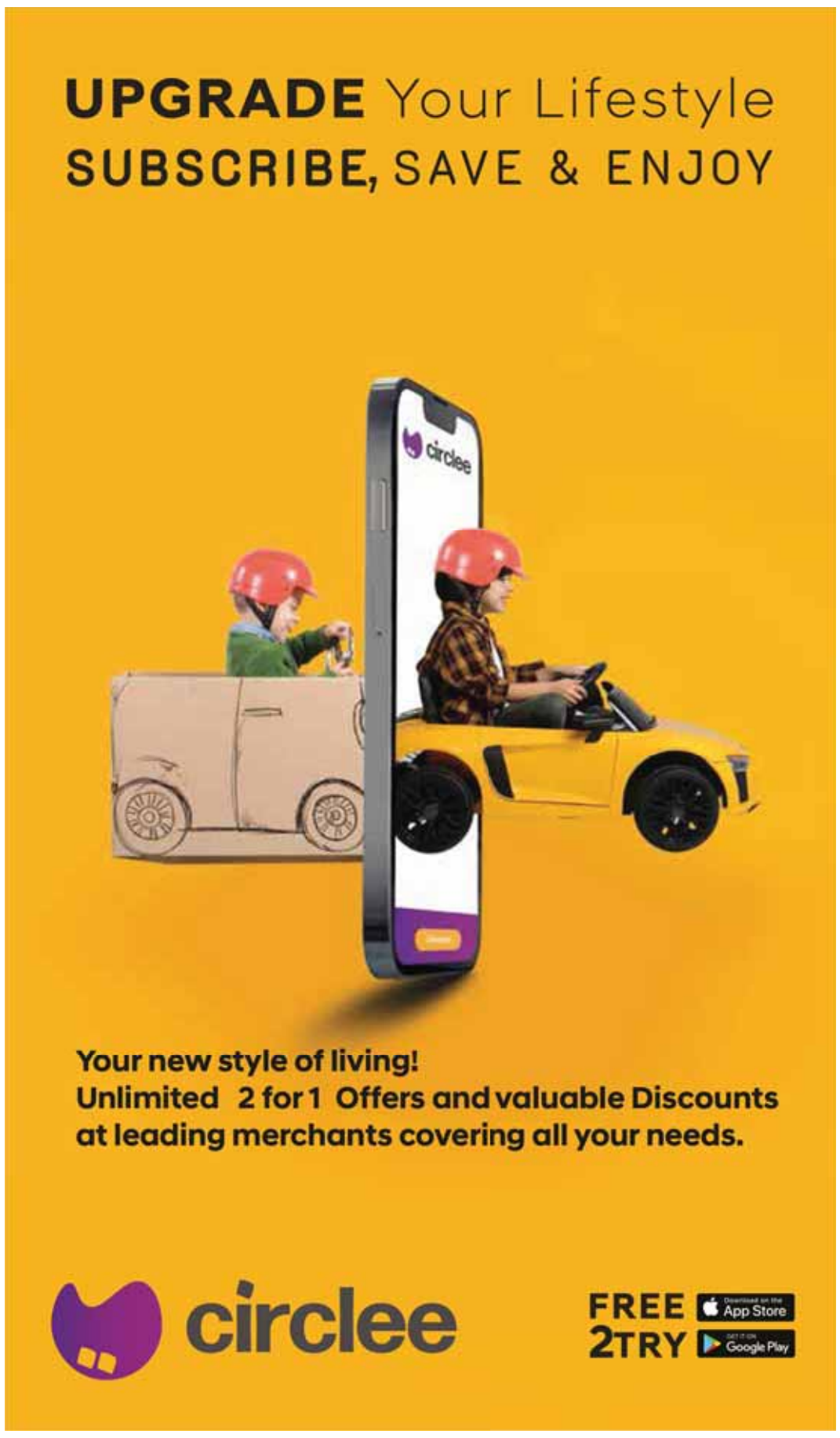
Nabil Al Shamli of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Agency (INSARAG) lauded the efforts made by the team from Oman.

"We dealt with one of the best teams in terms of organisation, coordination and professionalism. The team responded to a number of calls of assistance in a record time, aiding in the rescue of a number of people from the rubble and recovering several bodies.

The team has participated in several successful search and rescue missions in Oman and abroad and also been involved in the distribution of aid to the victims of the earthquake that struck Nepal in 2015.

According to recent reports, the operations in Turkiye and Syria have now reached the recovery and rehabilitation stage, with the focus on supporting those affected by the deadly quake.

WORLD



SAUDI ARABIA

Yoga in universities

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia is set to introduce yoga in its universities due to its significance for mental and physical health, according to a media report.

Several agreements will be signed with major universities in Saudi Arabia to support and promote yoga over the next few months, according to Saudi Yoga Committee President Nouf Al-Marwaai. – ANI

Times OF OMAN

Printed and published by:
Muscat Media Group
Post Box: 770,
Postal Code: 112

Founder: Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali
Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali
Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Anees bin Essa Al Zedjali
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FROM MARCH 8-11

Australian PM Albanese to embark on India visit

NEW DELHI: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese will embark on a state visit to India from March 8-11 to lock India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) deal while also upgrading the biletaral relationship.

"At the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, will pay a State Visit to India on 08-11 March 2023. He will be accompanied by Senator Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Tourism, and Madeleine King, Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, along with senior officials and a high-level business delegation," read a press release issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

This will be Albanese's first visit to India as prime minister. He will arrive in Ahmedabad on March 8, 2023, on the day of Holi, and also visit Mumbai on March 9 before heading to Delhi.

" In Delhi, Prime Minister Albanese will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhawan on March 10, 2023. Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Albanese will hold the Annual Summit to discuss areas of cooperation under the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, besides re-

gional and global issues of mutual interest," added the release.

Albanese will also call on President Droupadi Murmu.

India and Australia share warm and friendly relations based on common values and democratic principles. The strategic partnership between the two countries was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in June 2020, which has been strengthened and deepened through frequent high-level exchanges and enhanced cooperation across sectors.

Prime Minister Albanese's visit is expected to provide further momentum to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, added the release.

The two sides will carry out discussions on a variety of issues such as clean energy, tech, digital trade and procurements.

The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) came into force on December 29, 2022. Under the pact, Australia was to offer zero-duty access to India for about 96.4 per cent of exports (by value) from the day the agreement is enforced.

India will benefit from preferential market access provided by Australia on 100 per cent of its tariff lines, including all the labour-intensive sectors of export interest to India, such as Gems and Jewellery, Textiles, leather, footwear, furniture, food, and agricultural products, engineering products, medical devices and automobiles.

India, on the other hand, will be offering preferential access to Australia on over 70 per cent of its tariff lines, including lines of export interest to Australia, which are primarily raw materials and intermediaries such as coal, mineral ores and wines.

Earlier, the Australian PM also underscored the importance of defence partnership with India.

"I look forward to strengthening that as well, as well as on security issues. Operation Malabar, of course, will occur in the coming period, which we are hosting. We have much to talk about today,"

Full story @ timesofoman.com/world

A'SAFFA FOODS S.A.O.G الصفاء للأغذية

A'Saffa Foods S.A.O.G
P.O Box : 3436, PC: 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 22360250, Fax: 22360270

DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to welcome you to the 21st Annual General Meeting of your company and present the Director's Report and the Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2022.

Business Environment
The Sultanate of Oman is witnessing strong economic growth and significant improvement in the fiscal performance as result of the government's economic measures.

The Sultanate of Oman gives high priority to the food security of the country. The country has made significant progress on the food security initiatives, especially those related to agriculture, livestock, levels of local production, research and development, and improving the supply chain.

The rise in energy prices and the improvement in credit rating have played a major role in support, creating employing opportunities for the youth and finding adequate support in empowering them in various sectors to achieve these goals. This proves the success of the insightful vision implemented by the Government, which is supported by the encouraging results we are witnessing in the current period.

Business Performance 2022
The decline in the Corona pandemic globally and the tendency of the countries to lift restrictions and take precautionary measures have led to a positive change in the economic situation at the global and local levels.

However, because of Russia Ukraine war there was a steep increase in our feed raw material prices. Our major raw material prices increased by 50% to 100%. The management took the proactive decision to mitigate the impact of the high material prices by improving its sales and commercial activity, in addition to controlling the other cost.

We are thankful to the Government for Feed Subsidy. The approval was the on the purchases made from July 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022. The Feed Subsidy amount for this period was RO 170,000/-.This contributed to reducing some of the cost on the company.

Board of Directors decided to install solar power system to reduce the cost of the fuel & power. The company signed an Agreement with TotalEnergies Renewables Orient LLC to install the Solar system at the A'Saffa farm on built-operate-transfer (BOT) basis. The TotalEnergies has initiated the procedure to get the required approvals from the Authorities.

Financial Performance Review 2022
The company's Sales for the year 2022 made a significant improvement. The company achieved the sales of RO 56,927,441/- during the year under review as compared to RO 38,418,282/- during the year 2021 depicting a growth of 48%.

The financial performance summary is as follows :

	Parent Company 31-Dec-22	Parent Company 31-Dec-21	Group 31-Dec-22	Group 31-Dec-21
	OMR	OMR	OMR	OMR
Revenue	56,927,441	38,418,282	56,293,026	37,844,711
Gross Profit	12,778,267	7,748,942	13,376,548	8,753,977
Net Profit / (Loss) before loss of Associates & Tax	863,625	(3,205,254)	1,734,340	(1,932,533)

The share of loss of Associate company for the year ended December 31, 2022 was RO 821,691/- and tax was RO 81,022/-. It caused the net loss of RO (39,088) for the year ended December 31, 2022 as compared net loss of RO (2,895,247) for the preceding year.

Moreover a provision for impairment of investment in Associate company was made for RO 2,427,217/-. Therefore comprehensive loss for the year ended December 31, 2022 was RO (2,466,305) as compared to RO (2,899,672).

Subsidiaries

1) **A'Saffa Food Processing LLC**
A'Saffa Food Processing LLC achieved the sales of RO 4,567,511/- during 2022 as compared to RO 4,888,187/- in 2021 and net profit of RO 529,982/- during 2022 as compared to RO 866,864/- in 2021.

2) **A'Saffa Logistics LLC**
A'Saffa Logistics LLC achieved revenue of RO 1,091,819/- during 2022 as compared to RO 1,179,553 /- in 2021. Net realized gains of RO 208,113/- during 2022 as compared to RO 211,692/- in 2021.

Our Commitment to Shareholders
The company maintains the principle of sustainable development, taking into consideration the growing demand for food in the region. The objective of our work is to take business decisions that lend credibility to our social, economic and environmental responsibilities and to realise Oman's vision of food security in the country.

Outlook
The economic policies that Government has adopted to minimize the implications of the pandemic on the local economy, have proved successful in supplementing the infrastructure, attracting foreign capital, charting the course of 'Oman Vision 2040' and diversifying sources of income, which will lead to building a strong and organized economy.

Human Resources
A'Saffa Foods gives great importance to its human resources and provide the training and skill development programs to enhance their competence. The company recruits suitably qualified personnel and engages them in a motivational working environment, which reflects on the company's performance.

Corporate Governance
The company is committed to adhere to the Corporate Governance rules for Shareholders, employees, consumers and the society as a whole to ensure its sustainable success. A separate report on compliance to the Code of Governance for MSX listed companies is enclosed. Although no profits were made during this year, the company did not stop supporting such activities.

Corporate Social Responsibility
A'Saffa Foods is committed to its responsibilities towards society by supporting society- related events and projects because A'Saffa firmly believes that it is a part of society. The company's CSR activities are administered by its Corporate Social Responsibility committee.

The company has established a fund with the help of the office of the Minister of State & Governor of Dhofar. The office of the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar has formed a committee comprising of Government authorities and one representative of A'Saffa to manage the fund. The company getting regular update about the programs conducted to help the societies in Dhofar region.

Acknowledgement
On behalf of the Board of Directors and myself, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Shareholders, Investment Funds, Institutions, Companies, Customers, and the management and staff for their continued support to the company.

I would also like to thank the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth & Water Resources, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Finance for their great support to the company.

In conclusion, we are honoured to extend our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimour Al Said for his wise guidance in achieving sustainable development in the country.

Eng. Ali Hilal Ali Al Kuwari
Chairman

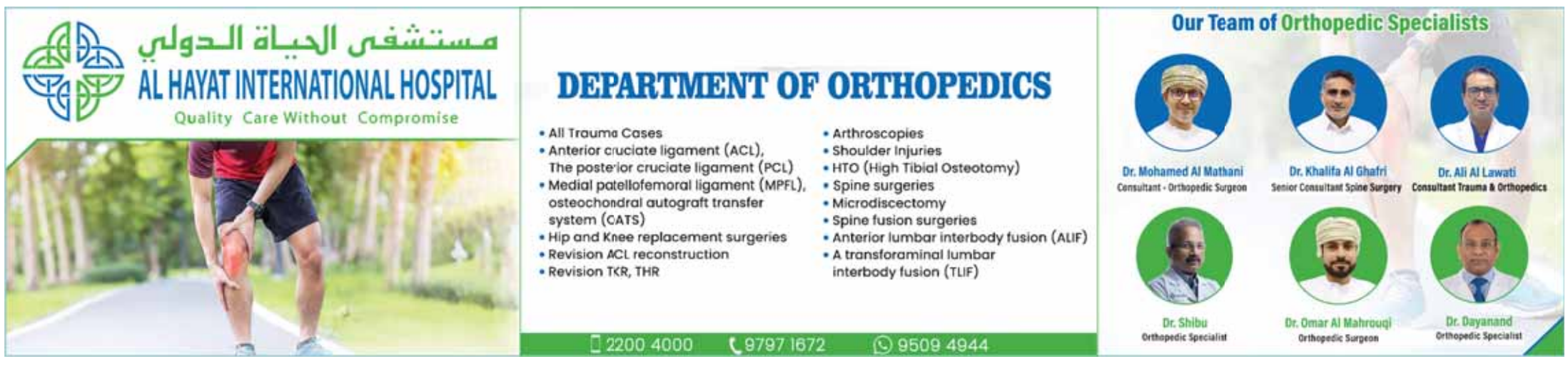
Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests that, in either Arabic or English, within 07 days of receipt of the request on the address mentioned above

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Parent Company		Group	
	2022 RO	2021 RO	2022 RO	2021 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	54,954,946	58,058,959	62,562,711	66,093,976
Capital advances	-	65,619	-	65,619
Right of use assets	1,033,296	1,341,731	1,562,263	1,909,016
Intangible assets	-	-	715	3,160
Investments in subsidiaries	2,950,000	2,950,000	-	-
Investments accounted for using the equity method	5,817,405	6,639,096	5,817,405	6,639,096
Equity investment at fair value through other comprehensive income	-	2,427,217	-	2,427,217
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	47,671	47,671	47,671	47,671
Total non-current assets	64,803,318	71,530,293	69,990,765	77,185,755
Current assets				
Inventories	10,854,765	9,177,141	11,554,003	9,907,819
Biological assets	3,002,585	2,934,465	3,002,585	2,934,465
Trade and other receivables	11,442,850	10,236,900	11,666,155	10,453,007
Term deposits	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
Cash and bank balances	331,957	156,364	546,466	383,768
Total current assets	27,632,157	24,504,870	28,769,209	25,679,059
TOTAL ASSETS	92,435,475	96,035,163	98,759,974	102,864,814
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	12,000,000	12,000,000	12,000,000	12,000,000
Legal reserves	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,497,763	4,423,417
Retained earnings	19,420,036	19,459,124	23,703,726	23,079,065
Other reserve	(2,431,642)	(4,425)	(2,431,642)	(4,425)
TOTAL EQUITY	32,988,394	35,454,699	37,769,847	39,498,057
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Borrowings	35,206,161	35,815,727	35,463,637	36,359,554
Lease liabilities	933,295	1,155,064	1,503,845	1,746,906
End of service benefits	1,132,118	1,043,154	1,222,864	1,120,410
Deferred tax liabilities	228,478	158,302	453,723	373,958
Total non-current liabilities	37,500,052	38,172,247	38,644,069	39,600,828
Current liabilities				
Borrowings	14,591,368	13,882,202	14,881,224	15,005,344
Lease liabilities	221,769	299,845	244,540	366,233
Tax payable	-	-	159,268	175,648
Trade and other payables	7,133,892	8,226,170	7,061,026	8,218,704
Total current liabilities	21,947,029	22,408,217	22,346,058	23,765,929
TOTAL LIABILITIES	59,447,081	60,580,464	60,990,127	63,366,757
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	92,435,475	96,035,163	98,759,974	102,864,814
Net assets per share	0.275	0.295	0.315	0.329

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Parent Company		Group	
	2022 RO	2021 RO	2022 RO	2021 RO
Revenue from contracts with customers	56,927,441	38,418,282	56,293,026	37,844,711
Cost of sales	(44,149,174)	(30,669,340)	(42,916,478)	(29,090,734)
Gross profit	12,778,267	7,748,942	13,376,548	8,753,977
Selling and distribution expenses	(7,105,360)	(6,519,953)	(6,477,193)	(5,877,475)
Administrative and general expenses	(1,964,132)	(2,020,273)	(2,223,659)	(2,272,123)
Impairment loss on financial assets	(222,430)	-	(222,430)	-
Other income	227,332	-	230,299	10,009
Operating profit / (loss)	3,713,677	(791,284)	4,683,565	614,388
Finance income	67,287	75,427	67,287	75,427
Finance costs	(2,917,339)	(2,489,397)	(3,016,512)	(2,622,348)
Finance costs (net)	(2,850,052)	(2,413,970)	(2,949,225)	(2,546,921)
Share of net loss from associate accounted for using the equity method	(821,691)	(138,534)	(821,691)	(138,534)
Profit / (loss) before income tax	41,934	(3,343,788)	912,649	(2,071,067)
Income tax expense	(81,022)	448,541	(213,642)	254,377
Profit / (loss) for the year	(39,088)	(2,895,247)	699,007	(1,816,690)
Profit / (loss) per share:				
Basic earnings / (loss) per share	(0.0003)	(0.024)	0.006	(0.015)



WHITE HOUSE

Cancerous skin lesion removed from Biden's chest

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's doctor on Friday said that a skin lesion removed from the president's chest in February was a basal cell carcinoma, which is a type of cancer.

He stated that the cancerous tissue was successfully removed and Biden required no further treatment.

US President Joe Biden's physician Kevin C.O' Connor wrote in a letter to White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre that the lesion was removed and biopsied.

According to the letter released by the White House, the skin lesion was removed from Biden's chest on February 16, as part of his comprehensive health assessment. According to the physican, the biopsy confirmed that the small lesion was basal cell carcinoma. "On 16 February, at Walter Reed National Medical Center, the President had a skin lesion removed from his chest as part of his comprehensive health assessment. This tissue was sent for traditional biopsy," Kevin C.O' Connor wrote in a letter to Karine Jean-Pierre.

"As expected, the biopsy confirmed that the small lesion was basal cell carcinoma. All cancerous tissue was successfully removed. The area around the biopsy site was treated presumptively with electrodessication and curettage at the time of biopsy. No further treatment is required," Kevin C.O' Connor further stated.

Kevin C.O' Connor stated that the site of biopsy has nicely healed and Biden will continue dermatologic surveillance as part of the ongoing healthcare assessment.

US President Joe Biden's physician in the letter noted, "Basal cell carcinoma lesions do not tend to 'spread' or metastasize, as some more serious skin cancers such as melanoma or squamous cell carcinoma are known to do." He stressed that the lesions have the potential to increase in size, causing more significant issue and challenges for surgical removal.

In February, Kevin C.O' Connor had said that Biden remains "healthy" and "vigorous" after his physical and is "fit to successfully execute the duties of the presidency," CNN reported. As per the news report, the exams of Biden's head, ears, eyes, nose and throat were normal. — ANI

SALALAH MILLS COMPANY SAOG

Salalah-Sultanate of Oman

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR YEAR 2022

Dear Shareholders,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the Board of Directors of Salalah Mills Co. (SAOG) and present to you the Twenty Six Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements for the year ended on 31st December, 2022, along with the Report on Corporate Governance.

Financial Results
Dear shareholder, the company's total revenues reached OMR 75 Million, showing an increase of OMR 15 Million that is 25.5% compared to total revenues of OMR 60 Million made in the year 2021. The increase is attributed to the higher selling prices due to higher cost of raw materials and higher sales quantity. The export revenues represented 51% of the total revenues. The net profit made by the company was OMR 1.68 Million, showing an increase of OMR 280 Thousand compared to the previous year that was 20% increase.

Wheat Subsidy
As a result of higher international wheat prices, the government announced a subsidy for the prices of wheat for one year with effect from 1st May 2022.

Cash Dividend
Dear shareholders, based on the dividends policy approved by the Board of Directors, I am pleased to announce that the Board of Directors is proposing a cash dividend of Baiza 20 per share.

Animal Feed Line Enhancement Project
The commercial production started on January 2022. The factory products are preferred by consumers. The Management is studying doubling the production capacity in 2023. Due to the increases of raw material, the government announce a subsidy for four main input items for six month starting form 1st July 2022.

New Center for Food Industries at Khazaen Economic City
The production lines have been bought and LCs were opened. The project expected to be in production end of first quarter of 2024.

Salalah International Plastic Industries Production Expansion
The project is expected to be completed end of the first quarter 2023, which will increase the production capacity for 72 Million bags to 100 Million bags per year.

Internal Regulations
The Board of Directors have reviewed the effectiveness of the internal control systems and approved the Audit Committee's action plan and the internal audit plan for the year 2023. The Board of Directors confirms its compliance with the new disclosure regulations issued by the Capital Market Authority.

The Board also confirms that there are no substantial matters affecting the continuity of the company's activity to its knowledge for the coming years.

Social Responsibility
Based on the Board of Directors' belief in the importance of social contribution to the local community, Salalah Mills Company had spent OMR 93.5 Thousand during 2022 for programs and functions which benefit the community as a whole.

Finally, I would like to thank the Board of Directors, the Executive Management and Employees of the Company for their efforts and contribution to this success. I pray to Allah the Almighty to help us achieve more progress and success in the coming years. And on behalf of the shareholders and myself I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq for his great support to Omani Products.

Ahmed Abdullah Saeed Al Rawas
Chairman

Separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022

	Parent Company		Group	
	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets:				
Property, plant and equipment	**25,905,467**	27,371,104	**25,905,467**	27,371,104
Investment in a subsidiary	**50,000**	50,000	-	-
Right-of-use assets	**3,634,413**	2,053,485	**3,634,413**	2,053,485
Total non-current assets	**29,589,880**	29,474,589	**29,539,880**	29,424,589
Current assets:				
Inventories	**34,115,939**	24,707,868	**34,115,939**	24,707,868
Trade and other receivables	**16,943,577**	18,794,096	**16,943,577**	18,794,096
Amounts due from related parties	**1,141,413**	402,932	**1,141,413**	402,932
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	**354,578**	347,673	**354,578**	347,673
Cash and cash equivalents	**5,070,172**	5,826,821	**5,120,172**	5,876,821
Total current assets	**57,625,679**	50,079,390	**57,675,679**	50,129,390
Total assets	**87,215,559**	79,553,979	**87,215,559**	79,553,979
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity:				
Share capital	**4,996,306**	4,996,306	**4,996,306**	4,996,306
Share premium	**3,587,782**	3,587,782	**3,587,782**	3,587,782
Legal reserve	**2,089,103**	2,089,103	**2,089,103**	2,089,103
General reserve	**2,891,826**	2,891,826	**2,891,826**	2,891,826
Retained earnings	**19,862,320**	19,181,580	**19,862,320**	19,181,580
Total equity	**33,427,337**	32,746,597	**33,427,337**	32,746,597
Non-current liabilities:				
Lease liabilities	**3,405,554**	1,732,815	**3,405,554**	1,732,815
Borrowings	**6,044,396**	1,836,672	**6,044,396**	1,836,672
Employees' end of service benefits	**551,457**	534,787	**551,457**	534,787
Deferred tax liabilities	**914,846**	967,008	**914,846**	967,008
Total non-current liabilities	**10,916,253**	5,071,282	**10,916,253**	5,071,282
Current liabilities:				
Lease liabilities	**113,443**	323,048	**113,443**	323,048
Amounts due to related parties	**236,122**	19,104	**236,122**	19,104
Borrowings	**37,822,886**	38,232,140	**37,822,886**	38,232,140
Trade and other payables	**4,352,016**	2,879,796	**4,352,016**	2,879,796
Provision for income tax	**347,502**	282,012	**347,502**	282,012
Total current liabilities	**42,871,969**	41,736,100	**42,871,969**	41,736,100
Total liabilities	**53,788,222**	46,807,382	**53,788,222**	46,807,382
Total equity and liabilities	**87,215,559**	79,553,979	**87,215,559**	79,553,979
Net assets per share	**0.669**	0.655	**0.669**	0.655

Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2022

	Parent Company		Group	
	Year ended 31 December 2022 RO	Year ended 31 December 2021 RO	Year ended 31 December 2022 RO	Year ended 31 December 2021 RO
Revenue	**75,493,800**	60,144,687	**75,493,800**	60,144,687
Cost of revenue	**(68,487,547)**	(54,304,017)	**(68,487,547)**	(54,304,017)
Gross profit	**7,006,253**	5,840,670	**7,006,253**	5,840,670
Other income	**828,585**	230,653	**828,585**	230,653
Fair value changes in financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	**6,905**	43,317	**6,905**	43,317
Administrative expenses	**(4,268,999)**	(4,055,313)	**(4,268,999)**	(4,055,313)
Sales and marketing expenses	**(119,083)**	(89,885)	**(119,083)**	(89,885)
Operating profit	**3,453,661**	1,969,442	**3,453,661**	1,969,442
Finance costs	**(1,478,320)**	(491,460)	**(1,478,320)**	(491,460)
Profit before tax	**1,975,341**	1,477,982	**1,975,341**	1,477,982
Income tax expense	**(295,340)**	(78,667)	**(295,340)**	(78,667)
Profit for the year	**1,680,001**	1,399,315	**1,680,001**	1,399,315
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	**1,680,001**	1,399,315	**1,680,001**	1,399,315
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	**0.034**	0.028	**0.034**	0.028

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request at P.O. Box No. 67, Al Awqadain, P.C. 217, Sultanate of Oman.

@salalahmillsco

SPORTS

Team Charisma extend lead on top after day three of 44Cup Oman

Three different winners - Team Peninsula, Team Charisma and Team Nika - emerged in the three races

MUSCAT: A third day of breezy conditions at Al Mouj Muscat Marina gave the crews much to ponder as all three races ended with different winners, and entirely different top three finishers in two of the three races in the 44Cup.

After the winds eased, Team Charisma of Monaco had extended their lead to seven points ahead of Igor Lah's Team Ceeref powered by Hrastnik 1860 from Slovenia with Team Peninsula Racing of Great Britain a further eight points back.

Indeed, it was Team Peninsula who set the early pace by winning the first race of the day – ahead of Team Artemis Racing of Sweden - this was followed up by two eighth placed finishes which severely hindered their progress.

Team Charisma finished fourth with Team Ceeref in fifth in the opening race. The two teams remained close in the second race, but this time they were first and second when Team Charisma won and Lah's Ceeref had to settle for the runners up spot.

The third race showed the excitement and unpredictability of the 44Cup as leaders Team Charisma owned and driven by Monaco-based Dutch businessman Nico Poons, had to settle for third and Team Ceeref for fifth.

Team Nika of Monaco, owned by Vladimir Prosikhin, founder of Monaco-based telecoms company Infosecurity Services, recorded their first 44Cup Oman with Team Aqua second.

While the top two continue to stretch the fleet, a tight battle is forming for third place.

Peninsula Racing currently occupy the position on 39 points but Aleph Racing of France and Artemis Racing are lurking in close proximity tied on 41. Team Nike and Team Aqua are tied on 48 points in joint fifth.

Nasser Al Mashari, main trimmer onboard Team Oman Sail, said, "Really hard conditions again today, very windy. We have not been used to strong winds on this boat, and hope for lighter winds tomorrow on the last day. We can perform better than we have so far, and the conditions will really help. There is still a lot to learn about this boat, but with practice and training on board we feel we can improve quickly.

"There are eight members in the crew, and everyone has a job during the race.

"We are most accustomed to a five-person crew and while there is not much difference, it is natural that if you train more then you will perform better."

The 44Cup is the world's most competitive "owner-driver" multi-city yacht racing series which gives business owners the opportunity to race with and against the world's best sailors in some of the most beautiful and diverse sailing venues around the world.

The 44Cup Oman provides a unique platform for Omani businesses to network with international C-class executives, founders, entrepreneurs and investors during a weekend of spectacular offshore action. This season's 44Cup features five stages. The second event in the 44Cup season will be in Marstrand, Sweden, from 28 June-2 July, and then Cowes, UK, from 9-13 August.

The fourth event of the season will be at the Alcaidesa Marina in Spain, next to the border with Gibraltar, before heading to Calero Marinas in the Canary Islands for the season finale. The 44Cup Oman is presented by official partners Oman Sail, organisers of the event, and host venue Al Mouj Muscat, in association with Automotive partner Mercedes-EQ, and official supporters TRANSOM Catering and Tanuf Water.

Eng. Abdulaziz Al Raisi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air, said, "We're proud to serve as the official airline partner of the 44Cup Oman.

As the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, we extend our signature Omani hospitality and the highest standard of service to the sailors, coaches, and class managers, an experience that is guaranteed to leave them refreshed and ready to take on the challenge at Al Mouj Muscat Marina for the opening round of the championship. Being part of this world-class sailing event reaffirms Oman Air's dedication to positioning the country as a prime international sports and luxury travel destination."

Thomas Grieser, CEO of TRANSOM Catering, said, "TRANSOM Catering is thrilled to be the official hospitality partner of the 44Cup Oman and deliver an unforgettable experience for guests, crews, and officials. Our culinary expertise, combined with outstanding service, will provide world-class VIP catering and dining experiences for visitors to help create lasting memories throughout the event.

"We are honoured to take a leading role in delivering another exciting event in Oman and sharing the flavours of this diverse country through our unparalleled hospitality.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Klopp, Erik ten Hag call for end to 'tragedy chanting'

LONDON: Liverpool and Manchester United managers Jurgen Klopp and Erik ten Hag have called for an end to 'tragedy chanting' in a joint statement on Saturday.

The two sides meet at Anfield on Sunday (kickoff at 8.30pm, Oman time) and Ten Hag called their rivalry "one of the greatest in world football", according to BBC.

It has occasionally been marred by rival supporters chanting about the Munich air disaster and the Heysel and Hillsborough tragedies.

But Liverpool boss Klopp told fans to "keep the passion and lose the poison".

Ten Hag added: "It is unacceptable to use the loss of life - in relation to any tragedy - to score points, and it is time for it to stop."

In November, the Football Association expressed concerns over the rise of "abhorrent chants" related to the Hillsborough disaster, including by fans of Manchester City and Manchester United on their visits to Anfield last year.

Then Manchester United and Leeds United "strongly condemned" chants about historic tragedies when they met at Elland Road last month.

At the time, the Premier League said it is "treating the issue of tragedy chanting as a priority and as a matter of urgency".

Klopp 'really happy' for Rashford after 'difficult year'

Before this weekend's game at Liverpool, Ten Hag added: "We all love the passion of the fans when our teams meet, but there are lines that should not be crossed.

"Those responsible tarnish not only the reputation of our clubs but also, importantly, the reputation of themselves, the fans, and our great cities."

The Munich air disaster happened in February 1958, when a charter plane crashed, claiming the lives of 23 people, including eight Manchester United players and three officials.

In 1985, 39 fans died in a crush against a wall which collapsed before the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus at Heysel Stadium in Brussels, while 97 supporters died as a result of a terrace crush at Liverpool's FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough in 1989.

"When the rivalry becomes too intense it can go to places that are not good for anyone and we do not need this," Klopp added.

"We do want the noise, we do want the occasion to be partisan and we do want the atmosphere to be electric. What we do not want is anything that goes beyond this and this applies especially to the kind of chants that have no place in football.

"If we can keep the passion and lose the poison, it will be so much better for everyone."

BORDER GAVASKAR TROPHY

Aussie skipper Smith pleased with his team's performance in third Test

AHMEDABAD: Steve Smith who is currently acting as the stand-in skipper for Australia was in awe of his players after their performance in the third test match in Border Gavaskar Trophy.

Australia's convincing nine-wicket triumph over India in the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Indore helped them book a place at this year's ICC World Test Championship Final. They have been a dominant side in the ongoing World Test Championship cycle, having won 11 out of 18 contests. Presently placed at top of the standings with 68.52 per cent of their possible WTC points, Australia will remain at the first position regardless of the remaining results in the event.

Smith, who stood in for Australia's regular captain Pat Cummins in the third Test, applauded the side for booking a berth in the WTC final. While speaking on the ICC podcast he said: "It's incredibly rewarding to qualify for our first ICC World Test Championship Final,"

Smith said, "It has been a goal of ours for quite a while now. The players and staff deserve a lot of credit for the standard of cricket we have played over the past two years. It would be a great reward for everyone to finish as World Test Champions."

"To also be able to play the WTC final ahead of the Ashes means it will be a great opportunity for our fans to lengthen their stays to come and watch us at The Oval. We still have one Test to play here in India where we hope to maintain this momentum," he added. - ANI

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE

WWW.TIMESOFOMAN.COM
SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2023

SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS

As a nation that is committed to transitioning to a sustainable and circular economy, the Sultanate of Oman will showcase unique sustainability-driven endeavours pioneered by different organisations at the upcoming Oman Sustainability Week.

SOLAR ENERGY PROJECTS

The Authority for Public Services Regulation has granted its approval to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company to award 'Manah 1' and 'Manah 2' solar energy projects to international investors. The project will be located in the Wilayat of Manah in Al Dakhiliyah.

Muscat bourse rises by 50 points in monthly trading

The sectoral indices recorded a collective rise, led by the financial sector index, which recorded the highest rise of 121 points, the industrial sector index rose by 87 points, and the service sector index rose by 32 points

MUSCAT: The benchmark Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) index rose in February with the support of the shares of leading companies that attracted investors and increased by 50 points to close the trading session in February at 4,753 points, thus reducing the losses it suffered in January when it had declined by 154 points.

The sectoral indices recorded a collective rise, led by the financial sector index, which recorded the highest rise of 121 points, the industrial sector index rose by 87 points, and the service sector index rose by 32 points.

However, the Sharia index recorded a slight decline.

The trading value decreased in February by 13.3 percent amid investors' interest in subscribing to Abraj Energy Services Company, which offered, during the period from February 20 to March 2, about 377.4 million shares for public subscription through two categories of investors.

The trading value fell in February to OMR45.3 million, compared to about OMR52.4 million in January 2023 and MR84.5 million in December 2022.

The number of executed deals declined by 35 percent, from 9,342 deals in January to 6,045 deals in February.

Trading focused on the shares of Omantel and Bank Muscat, which accounted for 44 percent of the total trading value. Omantel shares witnessed transactions worth OMR10.4 million, representing 23 percent of the total trading value. Bank Muscat's shares witnessed transactions worth OMR9.6 million, representing 21 percent of the total trading value. The Oman Cables Industry Company was among the most heavily traded companies in terms of turnover at about OMR4.9 million, representing 10 percent of the total trading value. Galfar Engineering and Contracting witnessed transactions worth OMR3.2 million, and Ooredoo ranked next after its turnover reached OMR2.13 million, representing 4.4 percent of the total trading value.

In February, the prices of 37 securities rose, most notably among them were Al Maha Oil Products Marketing, Al Jazeera Steel Products, Omantel, Bank Muscat, Omvest, Oman United Insurance, Oman Investment and Finance, Omani Mills, Gulf Mills for Mushroom Production, SMN Power Holding, and Voltamp Energy. And other companies whose rises spread an atmosphere of optimism in the stock exchange.

The number of securities whose prices declined last month amounted to 27 securities, most notable among them included Sohar Power, Al Batinah Power, Omani Qatari Insurance, Al Suwadi Power, and Oman Arab Bank.

And during February, the listing of the Vision Insurance Company was cancelled after its merger with the Omani Qatari Insurance Company was completed, and Al-Safa Food Company announced that the company's board of directors had decided to merge the Al-Safa Logistics Company - a subsidiary of Al-Safa Food Company - into the parent company, noting that this decision It will be presented to the company's shareholders in the Extraordinary General Assembly meeting for approval. The decision is also subject to the approval of the partners and relevant stakeholders. - ONA

MSX records strongest rise in weekly trading

MUSCAT: Share prices on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded a strong rise last week with the start of the annual dividend season and the end of subscription in the shares of Abraaj Energy Services Company, which offered 49 percent of its capital for public subscription from February 20 to March 2, equivalent to about 377.4 million shares.

Last week, the prices of 40 securities rose against 8 securities whose prices fell, and 18 securities maintained their previous levels. The shares of Omantel, Bank Muscat, Omvest, Al Jazeera Steel Products, Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles, Ooredoo and Sohar International Bank supported the Muscat Stock Exchange indices and contributed to the increase in trading value on the stock exchange.

Last week, the main index of the MSX rose 170 points, or 3.6 percent, and closed at about 4,821 points, marking its best level since mid-January. The financial sector index rose 261 points and closed above the level of 7,790 points, and the industry sector index rose by more than 203 points. The service sector index rose 39 points or 2.3 percent, and the Sharia index rose to 487 points, up 9 points.

These gains came amid investors' willingness to buy with the start of the annual dividend season for public shareholding companies, whose fiscal year ended on December 31, and during the past week, 3 companies held annual ordinary general meetings during which they approved the distribution of cash dividends to shareholders, namely: Oman Packaging Sharqiya Water Desalination Company and Omani Chrome.

This week will witness the holding of the Annual Ordinary General Assembly of Musandam Power Company, which is discussing distributing cash dividends to be paid in two phases during the current year, provided that they do not exceed 27.60 baisas per share. Shell Oman Marketing Company is also discussing distributing cash dividends of 57 percent, or 57 baisas per share.

During the past week, 15 new companies joined the list of companies that intend to distribute dividends to their shareholders during the current year, most notably Oman Refreshments, which intends to distribute cash dividends of 60 percent, or 60 baisas per share, and Al Ahlia Insurance Company, which intends to distribute cash dividends of 29 percent. Oman Chlorine, intends to distribute cash dividends of 25 percent, Oman Flour Mills Company seeks to distribute cash dividends of 12.5 percent, Salalah Port Services, Oman Cement and Al Jazeera Services, intends to distribute cash dividends of 10 percent, and Oman Engineering and Investment, intends to distribute cash dividends of 5 percent and bonus shares by 7.1 percent, and Oman Investment and Finance, which intends to distribute cash dividends of 3 percent and bonus shares by 5 percent. - ONA

INVESTOPIA 2023

Global experts discuss 'Growth Opportunities in Today's Economy'

ABU DHABI: Experts and thought leaders from diverse industries recently gathered for a session titled "Growth Opportunities in Today's Economy" as part of Investopia 2023 annual conference.

The panellists, including Marc Antaki, head of Portfolio Strategy at Mubadala, Alain Papiasse, Chairman of Corporate and Institutional Banking BNP Paribas, Stéphane Monier, Chief Investment Officer at Lombard Odier, and Evan Siddall, CEO of Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMco), shared their insights on identifying growth opportunities in the fast-evolving landscape of the 'New Economy.'

Antaki emphasised the importance of identifying priorities and opportunities based on global trends, with Mubadala's vision for the next 5-10 years centring around emerging markets, new technologies, climate agendas, and demographics.

Papiasse highlighted the crucial role of central banks in combating inflation by increasing interest rates and reducing liquidity while prioritising financing secure sectors such as energy transition and the tech industry. Monier attributed inflation to accommodative monetary policies and supply chain disruptions and emphasised the need for policymakers to employ monetary policy measures and leverage automation technologies.

AIMco's CEO, Evan Siddall, discussed the firm's plans to diversify its portfolio and explore new markets in Asia, noting that the company has historically been too domestically focused on its investments. The firm is now evaluating opportunities for geographical diversification, with a particular focus on new markets in Asia.

The Investopia 2023 annual conference focuses on the theme "Envisioning Opportunities in Times of Change" and includes 35 sessions and roundtables, bringing together more than 2,000 participants. -WAM

SME DEVELOPMENT

Inma Fund offers OMR125mn financing to 1,200 SMEs

MUSCAT: Since its inception, the Inma Fund has financed 1,200 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) worth OMR125 million in the Sultanate of Oman.

Sheikh Salah bin Hilal Al-Ma'awali, CEO of the Inma Fund, further confirmed that the total amount allocated for financing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for the current year amounts to OMR20 million, to be distributed among the fund's branches across Sohar, Salalah and Muscat.

He said in a statement to Oman News Agency that the fund began receiving financing requests for the current year to take advantage of the financing products and services provided by the Inma Fund to SME entrepreneurs and owners following the previously applied mechanism to qualify for a benefit from financing services to support their commercial projects.

He pointed out that the Inma Fund financed a number of economic sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, led by the industrial sector at 20 per cent, followed by the services sector at 19 per cent, the transportation and logistics sector at 16 per cent, the infrastructure sector at 15 per cent, and the trade sector at5 10 per cent, followed by the tourism sector at 9 per cent, and the oil and gas sector at 8 per cent.

Salah Al-Maawali explained that the sectors financed by the Inma Fund in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman were able to increase their production lines and provide a number of products and services to the local market. This contributed to revitalising the economic movement and increasing cash flows.

He said, "The Inma Fund pays great attention to small and medium enterprises, as it identified in its plan for this year a group of sectors in which work and investment will be encouraged and directed owners of small and medium enterprises to focus on them, foremost of which is the tourism sector, and the service and infrastructure sectors, transportation, oil and gas, industry and trade; because of the importance of these sectors in economic growth."

He explained that last year, the fund allocated OMR18 million for financing small and medium enterprises, and at the end of the year, it was able to achieve financing results that exceeded the allocated amount, as it financed 144 small and medium projects with a total of OMR20 million, and the industrial sector topped the sectors most funded by 20 per cent.

He further stressed that the Inma Fund continues to provide its financing products, the most important of which are asset financing, project financing, and working capital financing, with a financing ceiling ranging from OMR50,000 to OMR2 million with a repayment period of up to 8 years for most of the financing products it provides, explaining that the fund had added recently Islamic finance options also. - ONA

DATA

Omani investments in Amman bourse stand at over $57 million

AMMAN: More than $57 million is the value of Omani investments in the Amman Stock Exchange by Omani nationals. This is ranked 23rd in the listing in the Amman Stock Exchange, according to data issued by the Securities Depository Centre in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The data showed that the number of securities reached about 8,562,624 at the end of 2022, while the volume of Omani investment amounted to about $57.5 million.

The banking sector topped the highest investments in the Amman Stock Exchange for the year 2022, with more than 7 million securities valued at about $53.3 million, in addition to other investments in the services, insurance and industry sectors.

Statistics issued by the Amman Stock Exchange in 2022 showed that the value of shares purchased by non-Jordanian investors amounted to about $389.7 million, accounting for 13.8 per cent of the total trading volume of the stock exchange. - ONA

FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES

India's forex reserves drop $325 million to $561 billion

MUMBAI: India's foreign exchange reserves dropped $325 million to $560.942 billion as of February 24, according to the Reserve Bank of India's latest data. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had declined $5.68 billion to $561.267 billion.

Foreign exchange reserves declined by $5.681 billion to $561.267 billion in the week ending on February 17. This is third consecutive week of decline in overall forex reserves. The reserves have been declining as the central bank deploys the reserves to defend the rupee amid pressures due to various factors, mainly global developments.

The foreign currency assets, the biggest component of the forex reserves, fell by $166 million to $495.90 billion. It had dropped $4.51 billion in the previous week.

The value of gold reserves declined by $66 million to $41.75 billion. -ANI

MARKET

OMR300mn solar energy projects to be awarded to international investors

The two stations' project will contribute to the expansion of electricity generation in the Sultanate of Oman through alternative energy sources, and the implementation of its national strategy to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050

MUSCAT: The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has granted its approval to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) to award 'Manah 1' and 'Manah 2' solar energy projects to international investors. The project will be located in the Wilayat of Manah in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

The total cost of the two projects will hit more than OMR300 million. The projects will be built on an area of 15 million square metres. It is expected that about 2.082 million solar panels will be installed in the two stations, which will be the largest solar panel project in the Sultanate of Oman.

The two stations represent the second projects to be floated by OPWP to contract the purchase of capacity generated by renewable energy. The two plants will produce 1,000 megawatts, with 500 megawatts for each.

The two stations' project will contribute to the expansion of electricity generation in the Sultanate of Oman through alternative energy sources, and the implementation of its national strategy to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The electricity generated by 'Manah 1' and 'Manah 2' projects will account for 6.6 per cent of the total electrical energy in the Sultanate of Oman by 2025, and Oman Vision 2040 aims to achieve 30 per cent by 2030.

Such projects hoped to contribute to the transfer of expertise to Omani youth, and strengthen the local market through the requirements followed in the local added value.

It is expected that the construction works of the two stations will start in the third quarter of 2023 and that the commercial operation will be completed in the middle of 2025. -ONA

NATIONAL-LEVEL EVENT

Oman Sustainability Week set to showcase key sustainable projects as part of its site visits activity

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As a nation that is committed to transitioning to a sustainable and circular economy, the Sultanate of Oman will showcase unique sustainability-driven endeavours pioneered by different organisations at the upcoming Oman Sustainability Week (OSW).

The highly anticipated series of events are scheduled to take place from March 12 to 16, with many of the events taking place at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

A national-level event, OSW will be hosted under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and will witness the presence of decision-makers, industry experts and thought leaders from various sectors. A key highlight of the event will be the OSW Site Visits programme on March 16, which is designed in collaboration with the strategic partners of OSW, ASYAD Group, be'ah, Nama Group, Petroleum Development Oman, Oman LNG, OQ and Shell. The programme will offer attendees an opportunity to explore and gain invaluable insights into active projects, learn about international best practices and techniques and better understand how these sustainable projects have been contributing to building a sustainable environment across the Sultanate.

As part of the site visits, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) will offer a tour of its MAF premises, specifically RAH and KW to provide attendees with the opportunity to see the 3D-printed building. Meanwhile, bp Oman will feature as part of the programme, its solar robot project at GUtech. be'ah Oman will take attendees through the operations of its Sohar Industrial Waste Treatment Facility (IWTF) as well as the Barka Engineered Landfill. In addition, Nama Group's site visit will include the wetland sales centre and lagoons, whereas Asyad Group will illustrate developments in the Sohar Port and Freezone in North Al Batinah, and OQ will showcase the Majis Industrial Services.

Commenting on the various site visits, Ashley Roberts, General Manager said, "OSW is an excellent networking platform that will enable visitors to connect and collaborate with others in the industry who prioritise sustainability. The OSW Site Visit Programme, while imparting a deeper understanding of how large-scale sustainability activities function, will also shine the spotlight on the companies that have integrated sustainability into every aspect of their operations, thereby further attesting to their unfaltering dedication to fostering a sustainability-centric economy.

"Their involvement goes beyond showcasing sustainability initiatives and the progress made towards achieving targets; by presenting quantifiable results as well as the impact of the initiatives, these distinguished companies seek to inspire others to convert their sustainable strategies into actionable results."

Apart from the site visits, the OSW Expo is aimed at increasing public awareness about sustainability through an active, engaging, and interactive environment. The free-to-visit exhibition will feature the latest innovations from across the world driving the regional and global transition towards achieving net zero carbon emissions.

With Oman Vision 2040 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals in mind, OSW is geared at being the crucial bridge between those seeking to embrace the latest technological developments in sustainability and market experts providing advanced sustainability-linked solutions. The various exhibitions, programmes and high-level discussions will not only highlight sustainability trends in global markets but will also help address the challenges and leverage opportunities in key priority areas like green hydrogen, water, and waste demands as well as environmental protection.

WITH KAZAKHSTAN

ACWA Power inks major renewable development deal

RIYADH: ACWA Power, a leading Saudi developer, investor, and operator of power generation, water desalination and green hydrogen plants worldwide, has announced a ground-breaking partnership agreement with the Republic of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Energy and Samruk-Kazyna, the sovereign wealth fund of Kazakhstan to lead and develop a 1GW wind energy and battery storage project within the Central Asian country.

The project marks ACWA Power's entry into Kazakhstan, and with an initial investment of $1.5 billion, aims to support national climate action, renewables integration, and sustainable development efforts through innovation and technology integration. It is intended to successfully decarbonise fossil fuel-based power generation following its scheduled completion in 2027.

ACWA Power's involvement will represent the biggest Saudi investment in Kazakhstan's power sector to date, with wind turbines and battery storage sure to unlock new value.

TESLA CEO

Elon Musk wins dispute over Gigafactory

BRUSSELS: It was a minor highlight at what was otherwise, for many, a rather disappointing investor day for electric car manufacturer Tesla on Wednesday at the company's headquarters in Austin, Texas.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk unveiled a model of a planned Gigafactory in Mexico following an announcement the previous day by Mexico's president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

During a three-and-a-half-hour presentation, Musk outlined how Tesla plans to grow in the face of increasing competition. But the event revealed little about new Tesla products. Many investors had hoped to catch a glimpse of the next generation of Tesla vehicles but were left disappointed.

"We're excited to announce that we're going to be building a new Gigafactory in Mexico," Musk said at the event about the facility that will produce the company's next-generation vehicles. Those models will likely be smaller than the current one to drive down prices.

Tesla's new Gigafactoy is to be built in the northern state of Nuevo Leon in Santa Catarina, a city with a population of just over 300,000 and only a few hundred miles from Austin, where Tesla inaugurated its latest Gigafactory last April. The company also has plants in California, Shanghai and Grünheide near Berlin. Details were sketchy on the volume of investment, but it's thought to be around $5 billion (€4.7 billion).

The site near Monterrey had emerged as the best option due to its proximity to Texas and because of the readily available infrastructure and workforce. In addition, one of the companies there is Tesla's largest aluminium supplier, which would facilitate logistics.

Water scarcity as a point of contention

Last week Mexico's president threatened to throw a spanner in the works and essentially vetoed the plant, citing the lack of water in the region. "If there is no water, the permits will not be issued. It's not feasible," he said.

It wouldn't be the first time. The current government had already cancelled permits granted by their predecessors to beverage maker Constellation Brands for a new brewery in Mexicali, northern Mexico, because of water shortages. Nuevo Leon experienced an acute water shortage last year, which led to rationing and restrictions on water-intensive industries. There had also been a dispute over water at the plant in Grünheide, Brandenburg. The head of the local water board had warned of restrictions on drinking water.

Political background noise

Lopez Obrador stressed that "it's not just about water for the plants, that's not a problem, because treated water can be used. The problem is that any big investment brings more population, more services, more water, roads, sewers, and public transportation."

The governor of Nuevo Leon, Samuel García, on the other hand, said that his state had enough water for Tesla. He said they would work "hand in hand" with Tesla "so they can clarify and prove that they do not use water for human consumption and that the water they use is treated and minimal."

Lopez Obrador's focus on water may be more politically-driven than drought-related anyway, believes Gabriela Siller, chief economist at Nuevo Leon-based Banco Base, a financial group.

The president had apparently tried to steer Tesla's investments to a state governed by his left-wing Morena party, such as Michoacan or Veracruz, she told Spanish daily *El Pais*.

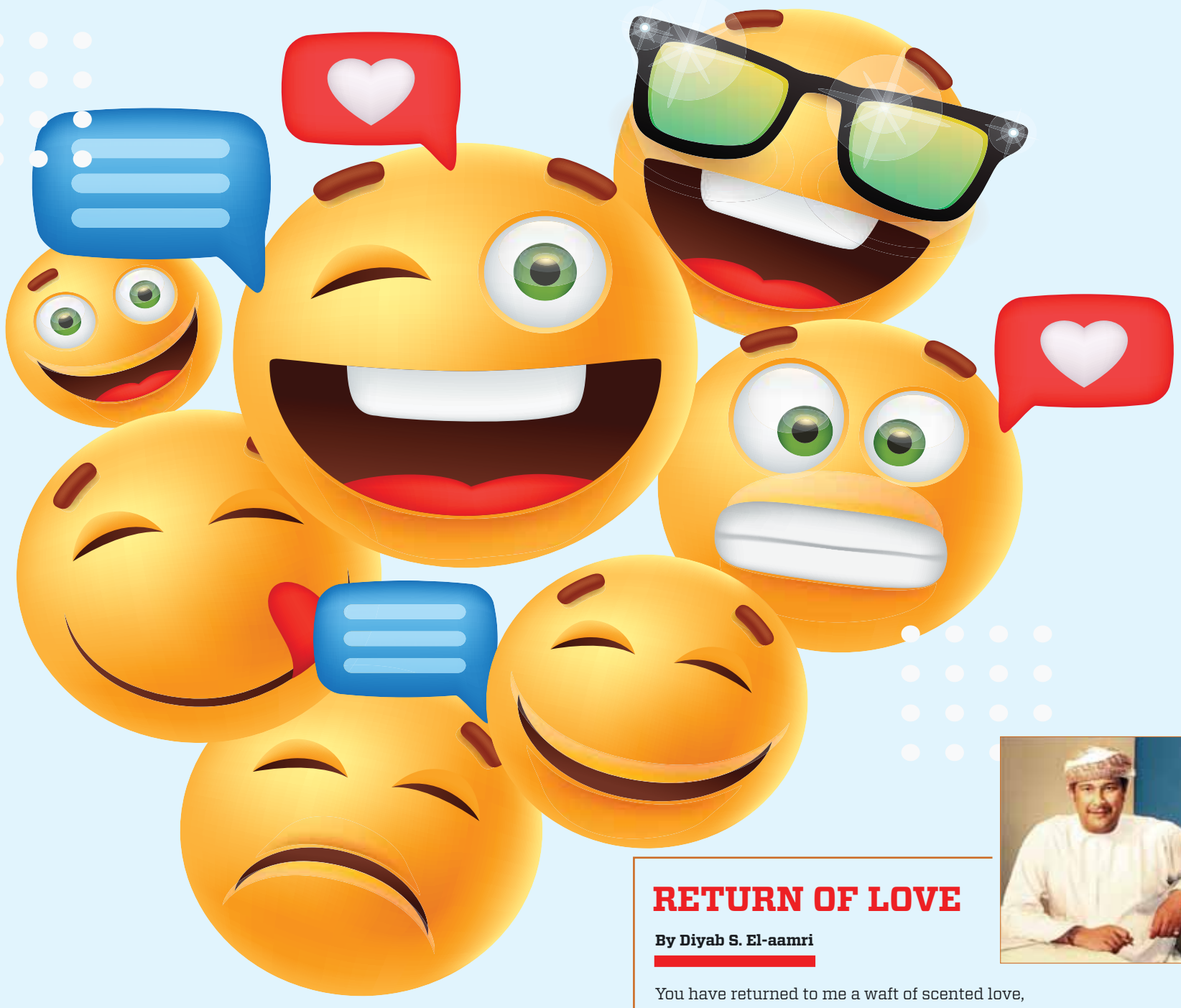
A spokesperson for Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Bloomberg news agency that the negotiations lasted 14 months and that Musk had offered various solutions to the problem of water shortages in Nuevo Leon. According to the statement, Tesla plans to use treated water to cool its towers, use a reverse osmosis system to treat water for painting vehicles where water demand is greatest, and collect rainwater among other initiatives.

Mexico: Boosting its car-friendly credentials

With that concern out of the way, Lopez Obrador can now focus on reaping the economic benefits, such as "a considerable investment" and "many, many jobs." Indeed, the new Tesla plant is expected to provide a further boost to Mexico's ambitions to establish itself as a hub for so-called near-shoring (the process of a company transferring certain segments or services to a neighbouring country — the ed.) by US and international companies. -DW

LIFESTYLE

ALL ABOUT EMOJIS, EMOTIONS AND EXPRESSIONS



Scientists studying emoji use in Japan found that the images were used to soften the impact of negative expressions as well as to express positive feelings. As more social interaction goes online, scientists are investigating how emojis are used to reflect our emotions in different contexts. Are there display rules that apply to emojis, and how do those affect people's well-being?

"As online socialising becomes more prevalent, people have become accustomed to embellishing their expressions and scrutinizing the appropriateness of their communication," said Moyu Liu of the University of Tokyo, who investigated this question in a study published in Frontiers in Psychology. "However, I realised that this may lead us to lose touch with our authentic emotions."

Liu recruited 1,289 participants, all users of the most-downloaded emoji keyboard in Japan, Simeji, to investigate how emojis were used to express or mask emotions. Previous research had established that people use emojis as functional equivalents of facial expressions, but not the relationships between emotions expressed and experienced. This is when display rules can prove problematic: if the dissonance between the emotions that you experience and the emotions that you can express is too great, emotional exhaustion can develop, although members of different cultures experience this differently.

Display rules impact more on negative emotions, which it is usually considered less appropriate to express. It is also often more acceptable to express emotions to someone who is closer to you, and it can be more acceptable for a particular gender to express particular emotions. It can also be considered more acceptable to express negative emotions in more individualist societies.

WEARING YOUR HEART ON YOUR SCREEN

The participants in Liu's study provided demographic data, answered questions about their subjective well-being, and rated how often they use emojis. They were given messages with varying social contexts, responded to them as they would normally, and rated the intensity of the expression of their emotions.

Liu found that people chose to express more emotions with emojis in private contexts or with close friends. Respondents expressed slightest emotion towards higher-status individuals. Intense expressions of emotion came with matching emojis unless people felt the need to mask their true emotions: for instance, using smiling emojis to mask negative emotions. Negative emojis were used only where negative feelings were very strongly felt. Expressing emotions with emojis was associated with higher subjective well-being compared to masking emotions.

"With online socialising becoming ever more prevalent, it is important to consider whether it is causing us to become more detached from our true emotions," said Liu, adding, "Do people require a 'shelter' to express their genuine emotions, and is it possible to break free from pretence and share our true selves in online settings?"

Liu emphasised that the study should be expanded in the future. The Simeji keyboard is extremely popular among young women, which skewed the sample towards women and Generation Z. However, this also reflected the gender imbalance in the use of emojis in general and the Simeji keyboard in particular. A broader pool of participants would provide a fuller picture of the display rules around emojis.

"First, the highly gender-imbalanced sample may have led to stronger results. Future research should explore potential gender differences in emoji display rules and examine the structural issues surrounding the formation of these emotion cultures," cautioned Liu, adding, "Second, Japanese culture's emphasis on interpersonal harmony and concealment of negative emotions may have influenced the results."

"I would welcome the opportunity to expand this study and investigate the display rules for emojis across different genders and cultures," said Liu, adding, "Collaboration with scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds would be invaluable in this endeavour, and I am open to any contact." -ANI

RETURN OF LOVE

By Diyab S. El-aamri

You have returned to me a waft of scented love,
A vision that faded long ago,
The days of harmony which I did not believe would soon be over,
Nor that the longing would pass away,
The memory of our beautiful times of love,
I remember still, how we pledged and committed.
You have returned to me the dreamy beginning of love,
The time of meeting where passion flourished,
By the bend of the valley, you were splendid
While I was like someone bewitched, resisting his sorceress!
It was there that your eyes revealed love,
Where secrets of love became unveiled,
It was there where we melted in tenderness,
In passion and feelings, we were united.
At our second meeting you were delightful,
Disclosing secrets and declaring your audible love,
Descending the sunset road in a lushness,
That turns evening courtyards fertile and verdant,
The oasis of love turns moist,
As if your steps brought spring rain to them.
An illusion of you passes every hour,
Reviving ties and connections between us,
It forbids parting, for it was a forbidder,
And it permits union, for it was a permitter,
It effuses me with pure love,
And grants me good and plentiful luck.
I had my heart locked against any invader,
So that it would not get captured by passion,
Yet I still cherish the vows of love,
And despite the years of separation, I remain patient.
I was thinking that love is like a cloud,
That descends awhile, and then it floats away!
Until your vision appears to me as a muse,
Baptizing me in love as a passionate lover and poet.
If today love has returned from you anew,
Your love was the last even from its beginning!

OMAN

Muscat's heart beats to maestro Ilaiyaraaja's musical strokes

True to his legend, the 80-year-old indefatigable Ilaiyaraaja started the evening with his masterpiece compositions that had the crowd asking literally for more after every rendition

MUSCAT: Music lovers in Muscat were treated to a magical evening woven by Indian musical Maestro Ilaiyaraaja and his brilliant troupe on Friday, March 3 at the Oman Automobile Association grounds' Muscat Arena.

Brought by Muscat Beats, the event scene in the capital city received a major fillip with this event that happened after a hiatus of almost three years.

The organisers left no stone unturned in ensuring that every aspect of a successful event was in place. Right from the well-marked extensive parking slots to shuttle services from there to the main venue, to a multitude of international eateries, and with the presence of an army of volunteers at every turn to streamline the visitor crowd, the Muscat Beats event raised the bar to a new level.

The venue was filled with over 12,000 adulating fans gathered to see the maestro, the title that was conferred on Ilaiyaraaja by UK's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra for the musical genius that he is, in action. True to his legend, the 80-year-old indefatigable Ilaiyaraaja started the evening with his masterpiece compositions that had the crowd asking literally for more after every rendition. The poignant image of the little big man, with his old harmonium by his side and eager piercing eyes scouring every musical movement, was the special gift that every guest took back with them.

Brig. Jamal bin Said Al Tai, Chairman of the Muscat Beats Organising Committee invited Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, on stage to present a special memento to the maestro. In his note, Al Tai said that although he did not understand the language the songs were sung in, he understood the universal language of music which was very uplifting to one's mood and spirit. "It is a pleasure to listen to the wonderful music of the Maestro and I am glad we brought him, on his maiden visit and performance in Oman."

Even the word indefatigable doesn't do justice when describing this person who stood for over four hours, while playing his harmonium, singing, conducting and regaling the audience with his simple stories.

The 40-member artiste crew that accompanied the musical maestro, as part of his strong musical army proved to be one better than the other in their trade. Be it the drummer, the cello-player or the percussionists or the vocalists, the rhythmic wave that meandered through the entire stage was a sight and sense to behold.

Most of the golden melodies that remain evergreen in the minds of Tamil and South Indian music lovers were rendered mellifluously by singers like Mano, SPB Charan, who is also the son of well-known Indian playback singer the late SP Balasubramaniam, Yugendran Vasudevan, son of another well-known singer of yesteryears the late Malaysia Vasudevan, iconic young singer Karthikeyan and host of young female singers like Vibhavari, Srisha Andra, Suchitra and Priya Hemesh Babu.

He also played to the gallery with his signature 'kuthu' songs that have typical folkloric drum beats and unique lyrics. The evening was also dotted with the maestro's anecdotes on his musical journey and his reminiscing of certain events and incidents related to songs and their recordings.

Rajesh Raman of the organising committee of Muscat Beats says that Oman has the potential and capabilities to host and stage international events.

He feels that the pandemic and post-pandemic scene have brought about a positive paradigm shift in the mindset of people and corporates in looking at and spending for events such as this.

The Ilaiyaraaja evening saw the venue filled to its 20,000-strong capacity and yet with proper seat arrangement and management, the event went off seamlessly.

CHALLENGING COMPETITION

Rawahi finishes creditable fourth in class at Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge

MUSCAT: Young driver Abdullah Al Rawahi accompanied with navigator Nasser Al Kawari from Qatar on Cam Am T4 finished Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge fourth in T4 group after five days of challenging competition in very high and long desert terrain and dunes.

Nizar Al Shanfari, the most experienced driver among the three Omani drivers who attended this challenge on Can Am T3, left the race after an accident with his co-driver Ali Merza from the UAE during the race after day three. He was forced to leave the race as per the instructions received from the organisers due to safety reasons although Al Shanfari was capable of continuing the race after he recorded improvement in the timing during the stages.

Abdullah Al Zubair, the third Omani champ with Navigator Faisal Al Raisi on Jeep Wrangler, faced a lot of technical issues in his car during the race, which affected his performance and by the end of day four technical problems forced him to retire from the rally.

Saudi driver Yazeed Al Rajhi won Abu Dhabi desert challenge after he pushed a lot during the last 2 days off the challenge after taking the advantage of retiring Qatari champion Nasser Al Attayh from the rally due to an accident during the race day 3.

New experience

Al Rawahi said, "Glad to finish this long challenge and also happy that I have got the honour of the fourth place trophy in T4 group in this very challenging race. This is my first time on Cam Am in desert races. It was a new experience for me and I hope that I can continue with more of these kinds of races in the future."

Al Shanfari was doing well on his T3 group Can Am and improving timing during the initial stages until he faced an unexpected surprise on day three, where a broken axle forced him to leave the rally. Neither Nizar nor Ali suffered injury but the organising committee refused the rejoining of Al Shanfari as per the regulations and safety rules.

He said, "It was good to be back behind the wheel. In fact, I was aiming to continue the race up to the end, but as you know these matters always happen in between. I will be back soon in the races."

Al Zubair stated that he was trying to reach the final day of the race, but he faced a number of issues during the race, especially electrical and technical issues in the engine also, which forced him to retire. He said, "This year was very challenging and the heat was affecting everyone, but it was overall a new experience for me."

Travelling exhibit 'Waliorejea' opens at Bait Muzna Gallery

This exclusive exhibition explores the work of documentary photographer and videographer Ania Gruca

MUSCAT: Funded by the French Embassy in Oman, the French Institute of Research in Africa and the National Center for the Arts (France) a new travelling exhibit Waliorejea premiering in Oman aims to interweave an intimate dialectic between memory and forgetting, speech and silence, presence, and absence.

Zanzibar and Oman's intertwined histories span centuries. Moving through the seas, Omanis settled in the Zanzibar archipelago, raising families, and engaging vividly with the construction of culture and society. When faced with political and economic changes in the middle of the 20th century, Zanzibaris looked for a new life and sailed off to different destinations. Many of those from Omani backgrounds settled on a journey back to their ancestries' territory hence the title of the exhibition the returnees an Oman.

This exclusive exhibition explores the work of documentary photographer and videographer Ania Gruca.

The show by Ania Gruca, Waliorejea: a documentary photography and videography exhibition, opened on February 28 at Bait Muzna Gallery under the patronage of Mohammed bin Nasser, Undersecretary for Administrative & Financial Affairs, Foreign Ministry Sultanate of Oman.

"I am pleased to initiate, through this exhibition, a cooperation with Bait Muzna Gallery, the jewel in the crown of modern art galleries in Oman, founded by Sayyida Susan Al Said," says Véronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to Oman. "The French photographer Ania Gruca has been working in Zanzibar for years. I met her in Muscat in 2022, where she had come, as part of an artist-in-residence programme supported by the French government, to meet Omanis from Zanzibar.

"The French Embassy consequently decided to support her to complete her project Waliorejea, and present it in Oman. It highlights the depth of the human links between the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar."

The photographer in this exhibition uses diverse techniques to reveal more than can be conveyed in modern storytelling. She encourages the viewer to study a body of work, to consider examining identity and belonging, and - if inspired or provoked - to engage in discussions sharing emotions and intrigue. The exhibition seeks to create a cross-cultural dialogue about the medium of documentary photography and videography and its potential as a tool for the photographer's keen interest in underreported communities and individuals.

The exhibition will be until March 21; admission is free.

Main sponsors: French Embassy, Event Partners: MHD ITC, Renaissance, JC Decaux Oman, Mijmar, Veolia, Junoon Kanga

Bait Muzna Gallery, located in the heart of Old Muscat, was established in 2000 by Sayyida Susan Al-Said. Today it is one of the most respected contemporary art galleries and art consultancies in the Sultanate of Oman and the wider GCC region.

The Gallery strives to promote emerging and established artists by holding regular solo and group exhibitions and events. Bait Muzna Gallery also collaborates with a wide range of corporate clients to place quality artwork in public and private settings. The gallery also provides a platform for international artists.

Ania Gruca is a freelance documentary photographer and videographer currently based in Paris. Her interests lie in the lives of underreported communities and individuals. May it be through current social issues, collection of memories, investigation of the past or new cultural trends as forms of expression, Ania's work relentlessly raises questions of identity and belonging.

Since 2010, she has been working on a long-term photography project exploring Zanzibar's current affairs, highlighting the Archipelago's economic, social, and political challenges and ongoing search for identity.

This project was supported by the French Institute of Research in Africa, the National Center for the Arts (France) and the French Embassy of Oman.

Throughout regular fieldwork in East Africa, Ania deepened progressively her interest in the Indian Ocean Region and the African continent where she developed numerous projects and collaborations in the past decade.

Ania is currently directing a documentary film on an internationally acclaimed young choreographer from the Comoro Islands. Aside from her work, Ania focuses on development and social issues with a strong focus on women's conditions and youth.

She regularly works with institutions and NGOs such as the United Nations Population Fund, the French Development Agency, Women's Hope International or the Forum for African Women Educationalists, or with various media. Her work has been extensively exhibited in the United States, France, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Burundi, and Nepal.

Aisha Al Kharusi owner & founder of the brand Junoon Kanga is the Curator of the "Waliorejea" Exhibition. She is known for her keen interest in the island of Zanzibar and its historical and cultural context with Oman.

Over the years, Al Kharusi has travelled extensively to the island of Zanzibar intrigued to learn more about her ancestors who moved to the archipelago during the reign of Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi, noted for having moved his capital from Oman to Zanzibar, during which time the Omani Empire reached the zenith of its power and wealth. In 2009, Aisha organized her first solo photography Exhibition – a Journey through the Ancient Theater - Zanzibar. A series of images showcasing the island's diverse and rich culture illustrating the similarities between the people of Zanzibar and Oman.

PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ZEDC participates in training fair at Sohar University

MUSCAT: Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (ZEDC) participated in the Training Fair 2023 organised by Sohar University in Al Batinah north governorate. The 3-day event witnessed the participation of 25 governmental and private institutions.

This participation comes as a part of the Centre's strategy to raise awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship in various governorates and regions of the Sultanate. The centre's participation came in a worksheet entitled" the importance of the innovation factor in creating a productive entrepreneurial environment and system.

It was presented on behalf of the centre By Rawan Saif Al-Kiyoumiya, a business analyst, and Thuraya Majed Al-Mahrouqi, a business associate. The worksheet had a positive interaction from the audience, questions and queries were asked and all the asked questions were answered.

Thuraya Al Mahrouqi said, "Zubair Enterprises Development Centre pays great interest to geographical diversity in delivering its services and this participation is a good sign."

She also added, "The centre's participation was a valuable chance to know Sohar university graduate students' ideas and instruct them about the importance of entrepreneurship and the possibility of establishing successful business projects. We would like to thank Sohar University for giving us the chance to participate in this fair and present a worksheet. In the future, we will seek to strengthen this joint work to serve entrepreneurs and students of Sohar University."

Professor Hamza Idris, Vice President for Academic Affairs of Sohar University, expressed his thanks to Zubair Enterprises Development Center for its participation in this Fair, stressing that this Fair was able to achieve its desired objectives, the most important of which is preparing graduate students to enter the labour market, in addition to exchanging experiences and knowledge in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation between the participating entities and enhancing joint work between the public and private sectors with the academic sector.

The fair was held under the auspices of Khalid bin Saif Al Meqbali, Assistant Director-General in charge of the Director-General's work in the Directorate-general North Al Batinah to present many worksheets and training workshops, in which a number of experts and academics from various institutions participated.

STATE-OF-THE-ART

Apollo Super Speciality Hospital introduces orthopaedic and spine care centre in Oman

MUSCAT: The Department of Orthopaedics, Spine, and Sports Medicine at Apollo Super Speciality Hospital offers a comprehensive range of services for patients with joint, spine, and sports-related injuries.

The department with a team of highly trained orthopaedic surgeons, sports medicine specialists, physiotherapists, and rehabilitation experts who are dedicated to delivering the best possible care to patients.

One of the key services offered by this department is arthroscopy, a minimally invasive surgical technique used to diagnose and treat joint problems. This procedure allows surgeons to view the inside of a joint and perform repairs or corrections using small instruments inserted through tiny incisions. This procedure has benefits over traditional open surgery, including less pain, less scarring, and faster recovery times.

The Department of Orthopedics, Spine, and Sports Medicine also specialises in treating sports injuries. These injuries can range from mild sprains to more severe fractures which is unfortunate but common amongst those who participate in athletic activities. The team of experts in this department understands the specific needs of athletes and offers personalised care to help patients recover quickly and safely.

Spine injuries can be debilitating and severely affects daily life; Apollo Hospitals has the most technologically advanced Spine Department driven by a highly skilled Consultant Spine Surgeon with an extremely successful track record in both surgical and non-surgical interventions/therapies. Early diagnosis and treatment are essential to ensure the best possible outcome for patients with spine injuries.

In addition to these services, the department also offers MRI arthrograms, a specialised modality of MRI used to diagnose joint problems. This imaging technology provides detailed images of the inside of the joint, which can help doctors identify and treat joint problems more effectively.

The test is recommended for patients who are experiencing pain, swelling, or limited mobility in a joint. The benefits of an MRI Arthrogram include increased accuracy in diagnosis, as well as the ability to detect small tears or injuries that might not be visible with conventional MRI techniques.

In conclusion, the Department of Orthopedics, Spine, and Sports Medicine at Apollo Super Speciality Hospital offers a wide range of services along with a team of senior consultants, consultants and specialists, who understands that every patient is unique, and they strive to provide personalised care to meet the specific needs of each patient. They work closely with patients to create a comprehensive treatment plan that includes diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation, ensuring the best possible outcome.

ROUND-UP

Renaissance Services forms pioneering Youth Shadow Board

The Youth Shadow Advisory Board forms an integral part of Renaissance 2.0, which is all about future-focused transformation

MUSCAT: Renaissance Services has constituted its Youth Shadow Advisory Board, a pioneering cross-mentoring initiative, which will see the youth contribute their perspective on building a future-focused, diversified business ecosystem while gaining from the company board's expertise.

The Youth Shadow Advisory Board forms an integral part of Renaissance 2.0, which is all about future-focused transformation.

Samir J Fancy, Chairman, Renaissance Services, said the initiative oversteps the conventional belief that only age and degrees are imperative to guide a company and opens the stage for minds well-versed in future competencies to challenge these preconceived notions. "When you journey into the metaverse, you need young guns by your side."

Constituting the shadow board are Ahlam Alkiyumi, Al Muatasim Al Said, Amani Fancy, Fatma Bahwan Al Mukhaini, Jana Eissa, Sheikh Julanda Al Hashmi, Mariam Khalid Al Subhi, Naz Tuzunalper, Riham Al Maskari and Sharif Abdulrazeq.

Aged between 18 and 29 years, these 10 members have been selected from Oman, UAE, Jordan, and the UK and have academic backgrounds ranging from engineering, medicine, business management, law and technology to psychology, strategy and sociology.

By bringing a diversity of thought and insights that connect with the future, they will contribute to Renaissance's growth ambitions in newer customer segments and markets that resonate with tomorrow's generation.

On the other hand, this two-way engagement will see them develop critical leadership skills under the mentorship of executives with decades of experience and be shaped as effective young global leaders ready to take on dynamic market environments.

Renaissance is the leading accommodation, services solutions and IFM company in Oman, listed on Muscat Stock Exchange. The company has invested over $520 million in Oman employing over 2,600+ Omani nationals contributing to local growth, building potential and creating opportunities. Renaissance is committed to safety, efficiency, green awareness, and sustaining in-country value. The company has built a strong local supply chain with 61% per cent of procurement within Oman and is passionate about building a sustainable future by investing in substantial CSR programmes every year. Renaissance owns and operates Renaissance Village Duqm, Oman's largest workforce accommodation facility, in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

HOLY MONTH

Ramadan Iftar buffet at Wyndham Garden Muscat

MUSCAT: This Ramadan, Al Andalus Restaurant at Wyndham Garden Muscat hotel welcomes guests to experience an awe-inspiring Arabian journey, providing guests with the finest Iftar experience in the city during the holy month.

The hotel's culinary team will provide guests with authentic local flavours with our rich buffet including live cooking, showcasing the diverse talents of our chefs and featuring an extensive range of Omani and international dishes including whole Ouzi, Shawarma station, Pasta station and so much more. Break your fast with your favourite Arabic juices and drinks, and end your meal with your choice of traditional Arabic desserts and exotic fruit selections.

The hotel is offering an early bird discount for booking before the 10th of March with a price of 8.5 OMR for its famous Iftar buffet, The Iftar buffet will be held in Al Andalus restaurant for 12.5 OMR per person, it was perfectly designed to create a family-friendly atmosphere, perfect for gathering and celebrating. Suhoor will be for 8.8 OMR.

In addition to the Iftar buffet, Wyndham Garden Muscat is offering an exclusive room rate of 23 OMR per night, giving guests the opportunity to stay in comfort and style. Hotel guests will also receive a 15% discount on the Iftar buffet and Suhoor.

"Celebrate with family and friends with the much-anticipated Iftar buffet enjoying the live show of Oud and Qanun. It is the perfect setting to break fasting during the month of Ramadan." said Ramy Hamdoun the Executive Assistant Manager of Wyndham Garden Muscat.

"We have created a warm and welcoming atmosphere in Al Andalus restaurant, with delicious food and a family-friendly environment, to ensure that each guest has a memorable and enjoyable experience."

NEW INNOVATIVE CHANNEL

Bank Muscat launches self service kiosks at business hubs across Oman

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision and its ongoing plan to strengthen the bank's Phygital (Physical + digital) network to better serve its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman has announced the launch of its self-service kiosks at prominent business hubs across the Sultanate.

The installation of the new kiosks is expected to greatly boost self-service by customers for a number of services in the future. The bank had earlier showcased its self-service kiosk at Comex 2022, where a large number of customers and the general public were able to try it out. Customers can now apply for new debit cards and receive replacement cards on the spot by using the self-service kiosks. The new kiosks are installed at the Bank Muscat Head Office, Mall of Oman, Salalah Grand Mall and Salalah Gardens Mall, with more kiosks to be soon launched at different locations around Oman.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir N. Al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is delighted to continue innovating and launch new products and services backed by state-of-the-art technology in close alignment with Oman Vision 2040. The new self-service kiosks enable our customers to apply for and print out new debit cards for themselves without the limitation of branch timings. Customers can thus make use of this new innovative channel to serve themselves quickly and efficiently, which is very much aligned with our customer-centric vision of serving you better, every day."

Bank Muscat offers a large number of innovative banking services and products in tune with Oman's move towards a cashless society. The bank's online and mobile banking platforms have been upgraded significantly over the recent past, resulting in a rapid increase in registered users.

The consistent rise in active customers on its e-channels reflects the growing popularity of digital banking channels. With over 1.4 million retail banking customers using various features like Zakat calculator and charity payments, real-time bill payments for utilities in Oman, local and international fund transfers and speed transfers, the bank's Internet and mobile banking offer customers a fast, comfortable and secure banking experience. Meanwhile, contactless debit, credit and prepaid cards as well as contactless wearables add to the range of e-payment options available for online shopping and PoS transactions.

BankMuscat continues to witness a remarkable rise in e-channels usage over recent years with customers able to transact quickly, securely and 24/7 via mobile banking, Internet banking, and the bank's large network of over 800 ATMs/CDMs and other devices across the country.

The state-of-the-art Contact Centre can be reached at 24795555, and it is also possible to communicate with the bank through its various social media sites.

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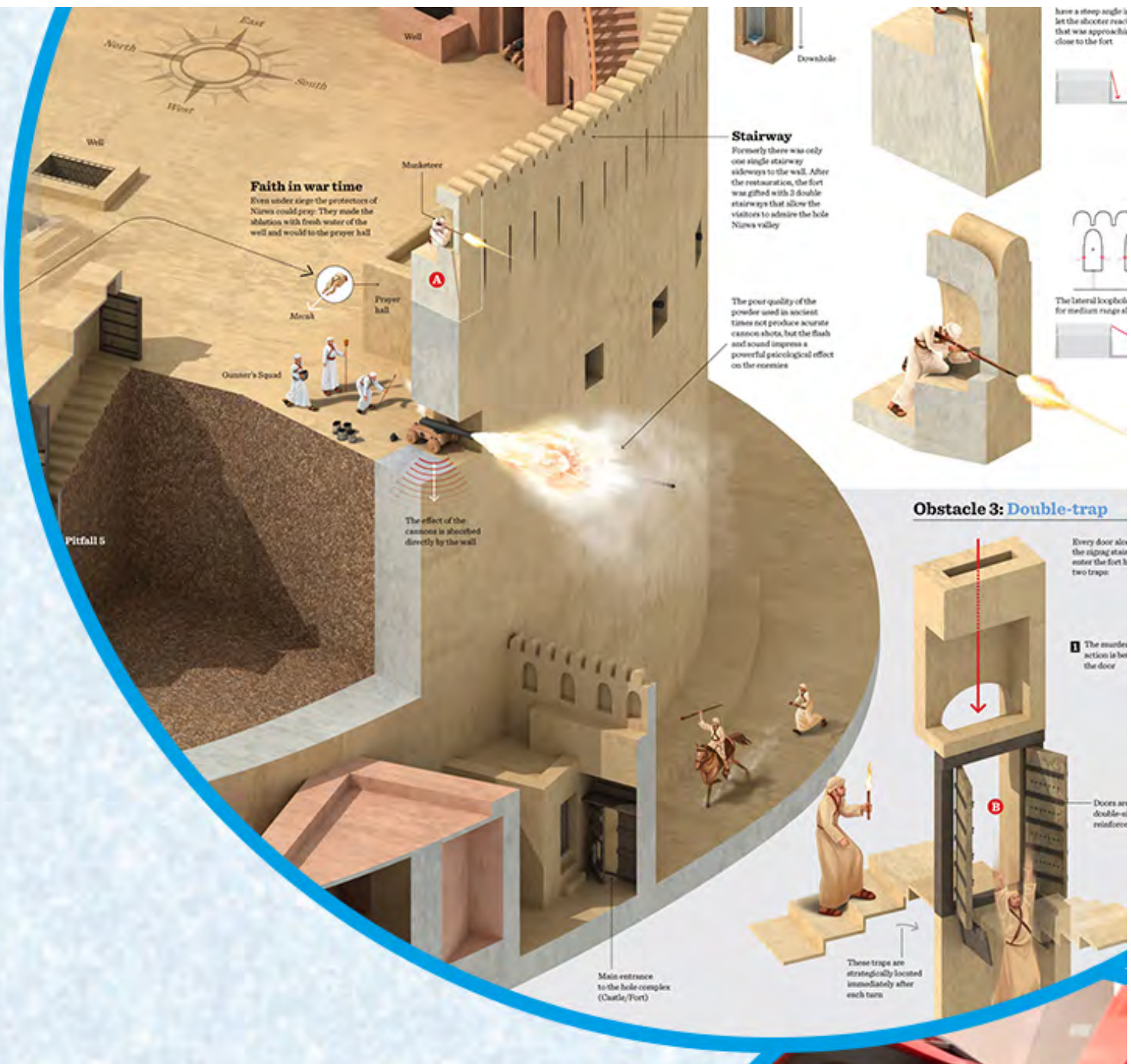

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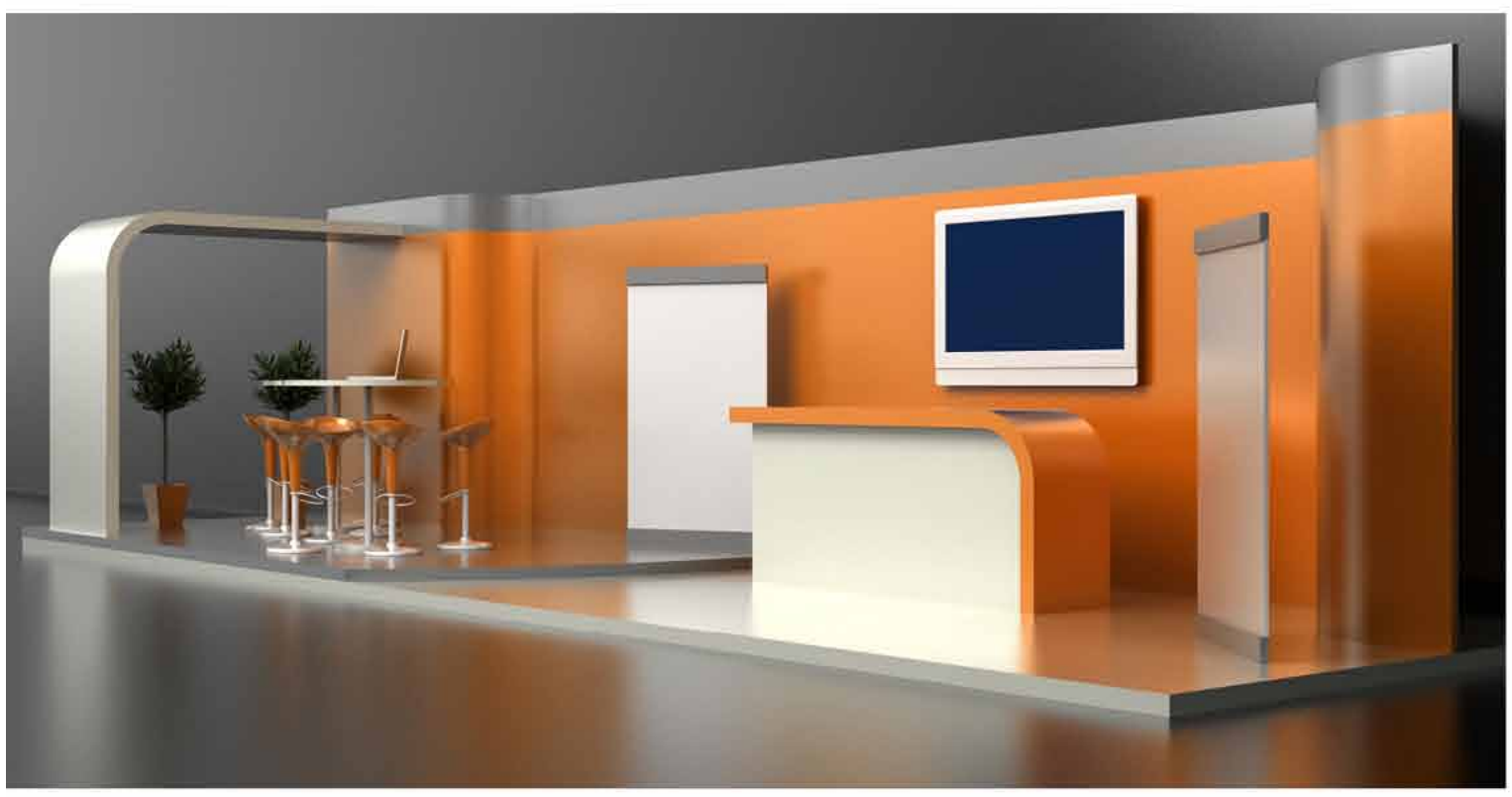

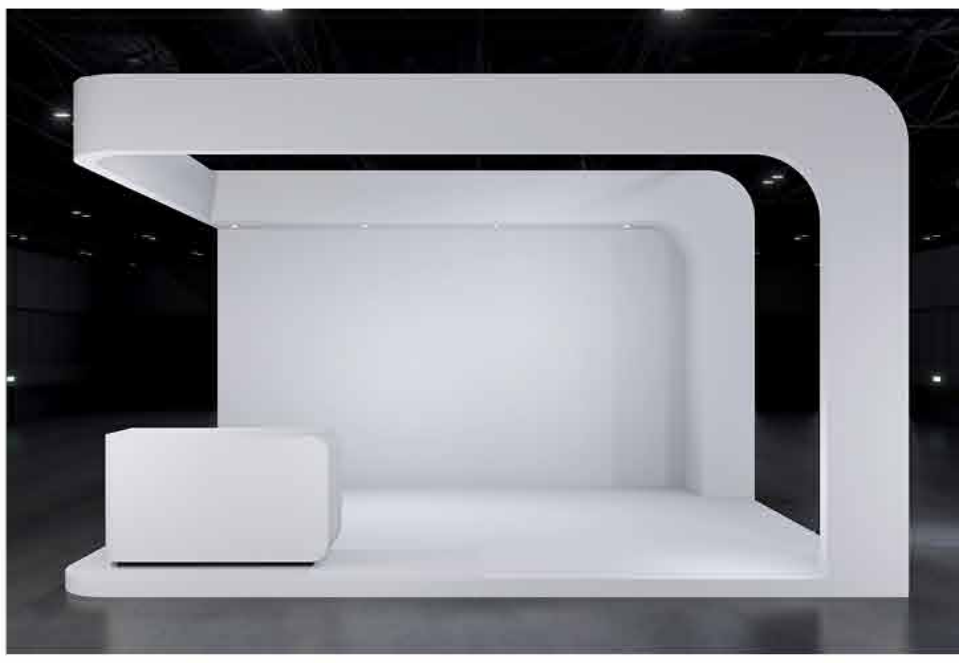

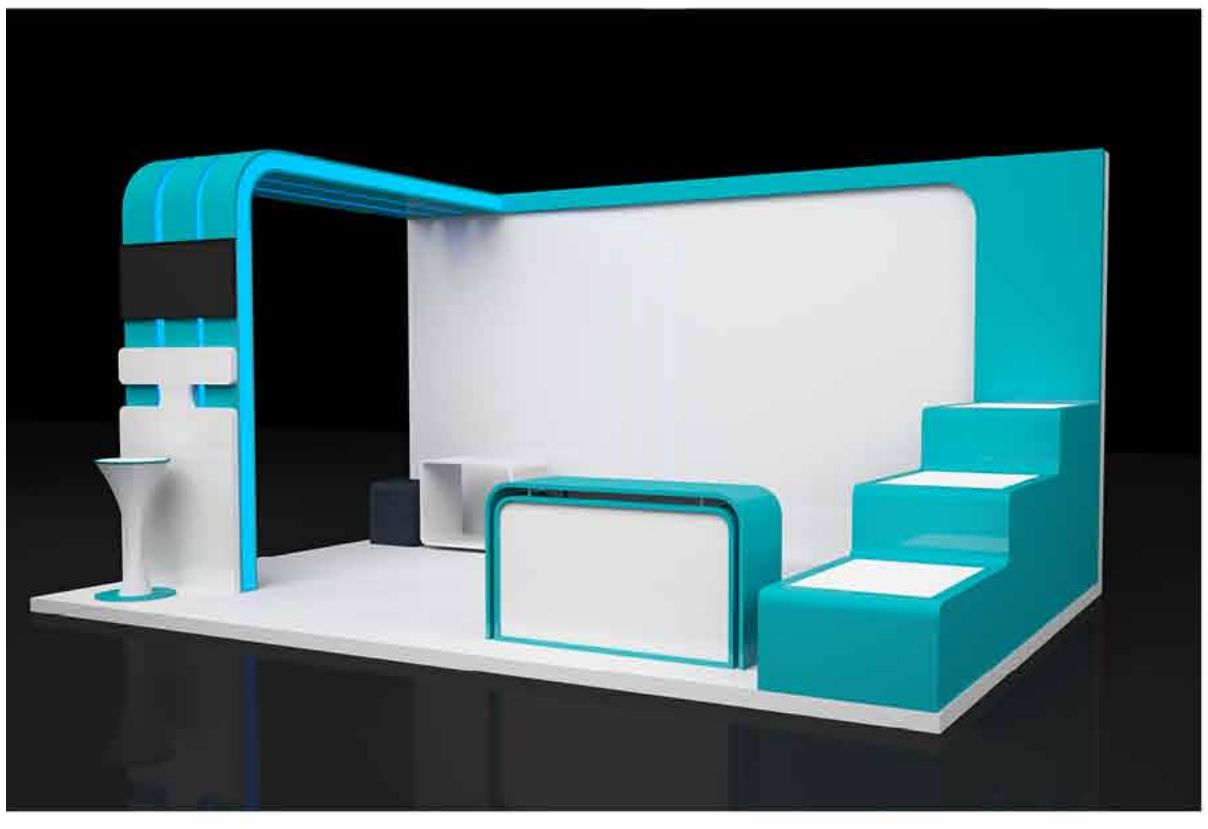

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