



HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN CONGRATULATES KING OF BAHRAIN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, on the occasion of his country's football team winning the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to King Hamad and the people of Bahrain for this triumph, wishing Bahrain further achievements in all sectors.

— ONA



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SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF THAILAND

HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received Warunee Pan-Krajang, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to the Sultanate of Oman, in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison yesterday. HH Sayyid Shihab wished the ambassador success in carrying out her duties in Oman. The meeting reviewed the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Thailand, in addition to discussing several matters of mutual interest. in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison yesterday— **ONA**

FIVE RACES

HM the Sultan to grace Royal Horse Race Festival on Tuesday

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will preside over the Royal Horse Race Festival, which will be held at Al Adiyat horse race track in the Wilayat of A'Seeb on Tuesday.

The festival will include five races allocated for pure Arabian horses while the fifth race will be the prominent one as jockeys will compete for His Majesty the Sultan's Horse Race Cup. Equestrian shows and skills, as well as Omani folklore arts and diverse musical pieces will be performed between the races. The festival will also see the participation of the Royal Camel Corps. The Royal grace of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the Royal Horse Race Festival reflects His Majesty's support for horse and equestrian sports. It also embodies His Majesty's encouragement to preserve this authentic heritage as the Sultanate of Oman enjoys a deep-rooted equestrian history. — **ONA**



Royal Oman Police marks annual day

A4

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Oman to host Arab Theatre Festival

1 Represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Sultanate of Oman will host the 15th edition of the Arab Theatre Festival from 9 to 15 January 2025. **>A2**

WORLD

Biden awards Medal of Freedom

2 Outgoing US President Joe Biden on Saturday bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom. **>A6**

SPORTS

Oman football delegation returns

3 Oman football delegation returned home from Kuwait after finishing runner-up in the Gulf Cup. **>A8**

SURVEY OF NCDS TO ENHANCE OMAN'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

The survey targets citizens and residents over the age of 15 years, and seeks accurate and comprehensive data on the prevalence of diseases

Times News Service

SALALAH/ RUSTAQ: The Directorate General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate and South Al Batinah governorates launched the 'National Survey of Non-Communicable Diseases on Sunday.

The survey on non-communicable diseases is one of the most important national projects that aim to enhance community health and develop the healthcare



system in the Sultanate of Oman on scientific foundations, said Dr. Hamoud bin Saeed Al Fazari, Director of the Primary Care Department in Dhofar Governorate.

The survey targets citizens and residents in the Sultanate of Oman over the age of 15 years, and seeks accurate and comprehensive data on the prevalence of diseases and their associated risk factors, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancer, which still represent one of

the most important challenges for health sectors nationally and globally, and have a major impact on the health of individuals and societies, through unhealthy health behaviours, he added.

He explained that the national survey programme includes two phases. The first phase includes field visits to update the maps of residential complexes and to enumerate citizens and residents in them, while the second phase includes visits to a number of residences in the governorates to take

some samples and data using an approved questionnaire and take physical measurements and some health examinations.

The survey project will depend on accurately assessing the current health situation in the country and determining health priorities, noting that the data that will be used for developing innovative health policies and programmes that aim to prevent non-communicable diseases and reduce the health and economic burdens associated with them, he added. **>A2**

BANKING INFRASTRUCTURE

Oman sees modest growth in ATM network despite digital banking surge

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman witnessed a modest growth in its ATM network in 2023, with approximately 40 new machines added nationwide compared to the previous year, raising the total number of machines in the country to 1,417.

Despite the growing adoption of digital banking channels, ATMs remain a vital component of the country's banking infrastructure, providing essential access to cash



and financial services.

According to the 2023 Central Bank of Oman (CBO) National Payments System Annual Report, Muscat continues to lead in ATM availability, boasting 565 machines, followed by North Al Batinah with 173 ATMs. Other governorates such as Al Dakhiliyah (144) and Dhofar (134) also maintain significant ATM installations, reflecting regional economic activity and population density.

While traditional banking services like ATMs remain crucial

for many, Omanis are increasingly adopting digital channels such as mobile and online banking. These options offer greater convenience and flexibility, signaling a gradual shift in consumer preferences.

The modest rise in ATMs reflects ongoing demand for accessible cash withdrawal services, especially in economically vibrant regions. However, financial institutions are keen to balance this with investments in digital infrastructure to cater to tech-savvy consumers. **>A2**

12 JANUARY

HM's Accession Day holiday announced

MUSCAT: Upon the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, it has been decided that Sunday, 12 January 2025 will be an official holiday for employees in units of the State's Administrative Apparatus (public sector), other legal entities and private sector establishments on the occasion of His Majesty the Sultan's Accession Day.

The Ministry of Labour said that employers may agree with their respective employees to continue working during the



above-mentioned day if deemed necessary, provided the workers be compensated for that. **-ONA**

15TH EDITION

500 artists to take part in Arab Theatre Festival

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Sultanate of Oman will host the 15th edition of the Arab Theatre Festival from 9 to 15 January 2025. The festival will be organized in cooperation with the Arab Theatre Institute and Oman Theatre Society.

The festival will feature 15 sensational theatrical performances from Oman and abroad.

The performances will be staged in three theatres, those of Al Bustan Palace, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (Al Irfan) and the College of Banking Studies.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan Al Busaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, Chairman of the Main Committee of the 15th



Arab Theatre Festival, said, "The festival constitutes a forum that brings together an elite group of outstanding Arab artists, theatre specialists, writers and directors, who will consider ways of enhancing the role of theatre in supporting culture and innovation in the Arab world."

Speaking at a press conference at Oman Society for Arts in Ghala on Sunday, Al Busaidi said that more than 500 Arab artists would take part in staging the 15 theatrical performances and accompanying activities.

Al Busaidi pointed out that activities of the forthcoming festival include an exhibition of Omani handicrafts, an art exhibition and 30 press conferences, in addition to a scholarly workshop that would elaborate on various aspects of

theatre, artificial intelligence (AI) and innovation.

He added that the event would see 33 book signing sessions that would highlight publications on Omani, GCC and Arab theatre arts. The sessions, which will take place at the pavilion of the Arab Theatre Institution, include the launching of 9 new books on Omani theatre.

A key event would be the message of the Arab Theatre Day, which will be presented by Palestinian artist Fat'hi Abdul-Rahman on 10 January.

Al Busaidi said that the festival reflects Arab shared values, notably member states' approaches to enhancing cultural communication, exchanging experiences, establishing partnerships and consolidating integration with

global institutions.

He explained that the main 15 theatrical performances will be presented by 13 Arab countries and that 11 of those performances would contest the "Award for the Best Arab Theatrical Performance", a prize sponsored by Sheikh Dr. Sultan Mohammad Al Qasimi. This is in addition to the contribution of participants from other Arab countries.

The festival seeks to promote Arab culture in general, with emphasis on Arab theatre. It envisages the realization of objectives of the Arab Strategy for Theatre Development. It also aims to open vistas for developing innovation in the Arab theatre, showcase Arab theatrical products and enhance research and writings addressing all segments of society. -ONA

MEETING

Sheikh Khalifa discusses Yemen issue with UN envoy

MUSCAT: Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs received here on Sunday Hans Grundberg, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Yemen.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the regional developments, as well as the situations in the Yemeni issue and the efforts made to reach a political solution.

The meeting was attended by members of the delegation accompanying the guest and officials from the Foreign Ministry. -ONA



NORTH AL BATINAH GOVERNORATE

Development works of Shinas Marine Park project

SHINAS: North Al Batinah Municipality has completed the development project of Shinas Marine Park in the Wilayat of Shinas, North Al Batinah Governorate.

This development project aims to provide a recreational environment and an outlet for citizens and visitors for tourism and entertainment.

Engineer Alia bint Salah Al Attar from the Projects Department at North Al Batinah Municipality and supervisor of the project said, "Shinas Marine Park represents an important addition to the tourism infrastructure in the Wilayat of Shinas."

"The park's area is approximately 35,250 thousand square metres,



and includes a number of public facilities, such as green spaces with an area of 4,686 square metres. This contribute to improving the environment and increasing open spaces for visitors. It also includes a site designated for games,

a number of cafes and commercial kiosks, in addition to public parking for vehicles."

She added that the project represents an opportunity for young people and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to invest in 10 designated locations in the park. This include five commercial kiosks, a café, , two electric games areas, and two marine games areas located on the beach.

It is worth noting that Shinas Marine Park is an addition to enhance tourism and entertainment diversity in the Wilayat of Shinas in particular and the Wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate in general. -ONA

WILAYAT OF MANAH

Sultan Qaboos Institute for Arabic receives 47 students

MANAH: The Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers yesterday received 47 students from the United Kingdom, Russia, Belgium, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Belarus, Uzbekistan, South Korea, El Salvador, India, Iran, Australia and Kazakhstan.

Based in the Wilayat of Manah, Governorate of A'Dakhiliyah, the institute also received 15 Arabic language teachers from some Uzbek universities (University of Oriental Studies and the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan).

Besides teaching Arabic to non-native speakers and teachers (male and female), the institute is conducting a variety of activities, including lectures, educational trips to various historical and natural places, Arabic calligraphy lessons, art courses and a programme titled "lan-



guage partner" for like-minded counterparts.

The course also includes theories of second language acquisition, methods of learning and teaching foreign languages, models on teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, teaching skills,

designing language examinations and questionnaires, dialogue sessions and other hands-on applications.

The institute is conducting a course of 8 weeks for non-native students and 4 weeks for non-native teachers. -ONA

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Project aims to collect accurate data on the prevalence of NCDs

< FROM A1 It is one of the programmes pursued by the Ministry of Health for the health and safety of citizens and residents.

The project was launched at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki Al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The survey also commenced across the South Al Batinah Governorate governorate which will last for two months.

Dr. Rashid bin Saeed Al Saadi, Acting Director General of the Directorate General of Health Services in South Al Batinah, stated



that the project aims to collect accurate and comprehensive data on the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and chronic respiratory conditions, as well as the associated risk factors and health hazards they pose to the community.

The survey will contribute to the development of strategic and

preventive plans and health programs to improve community health, prevent these diseases, reduce their risk factors, and enhance individual and community health. It will provide an overview of the health status in Oman and facilitate appropriate measures to curb the spread of NCDs and implement suitable health programmes. - ONA

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CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN



Efforts being made to promote digital banking

< FROM A1 The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and financial institutions are actively working to enhance banking services while ensuring financial inclusion across all regions.

Efforts include promoting the benefits of digital banking, advancing financial literacy, and ensuring the banking system's adaptability to meet the needs of diverse communities.

As Oman transitions toward a more digital economy, ATMs will continue to serve as a critical bridge for those who rely on traditional banking while complementing the country's growing emphasis on electronic financial solutions.

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COMMENTARY

The deadlines of our routines



SALEH AL-SHAIBANY

The first word that was in my mind when I woke up in the morning yesterday was 'deadline'. I opened my laptop about an hour later and my head began to hurt and my eyes watered. I was pushing myself to the limit. It wasn't doing my blood pressure any good. What if I collapsed suddenly? I needed to take the time off. My editors would understand. I was fighting off years of habit of making the deadlines, no matter what was the circumstance. I walked out into the sunshine. It was cool and the break took the wind off the deadline pressure. As I sat under the shade of a tree, I began to wonder of all other deadlines that I pushed into the background while giving a priority to just one. Why do deadlines push us to the edge of panic and near insanity? I have tried everything to overcome the problem but nothing really has worked so far. Even some of my own advices have never really worked that well either. "If you constantly go beyond deadlines then it's time you decide whether you lack focus or you are just careless,"



I once told my students about their projects. Disciplined and meticulous people have no problems in that area but the like of us who turn up at the airport a few minutes before departure are the most vulnerable. The wall of a deadline, therefore, attracts the spontaneous who get their drive when their backs are pinned on the wall. Mind you, there's always the fear that the wall may buckle under pressure to expose your failings. Deadlines, strictly speaking, are harmless and they are a joy to meet if no pressure is involved. We unconsciously impose many deadlines all the time and sometimes we really look forward to it when they come. Work deadlines mean anxiety and a fear of losing one's job. How do you save yourself a headache and happily meet them? I don't know but to stop worrying over something you have got to do is a good start. Perhaps, by giving a priority to what we dread most and pushing our favourite tasks behind may solve the problem. There's one clerk who used

to do the filing of papers first thing in the morning before he even made himself a cup of tea. To make it work, he needed to do the important task first and treat himself later. Perhaps deadlines are best met as early as possible when you are at your peak. Perhaps there are too many of them around and the reason they are, because we want to accomplish so many tasks in just ten or twelve hours. When I was a schoolboy, I used watched a "mooring man" at the marina holding half a dozen ropes attached to small fibre boats at the same time. He would then tie them on wooden poles to stop them from drifting. He would do that all over again in the next six-seven hours. He had to moor over a hundred boats a day before sunset. That was his deadline but he never saw it that way. It was just a job that he loved doing. Perhaps there is something to learn. He accepted what he had to do and pushed everything away. In other words, deadlines are just a series of tasks that need a little attention to get you through the day.

GOLDEN JUBILEE

ISM to celebrate 50 years with Global Alumni Reunion



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Indian School Muscat (ISM) will mark its 50th anniversary with a Global Alumni Reunion on Thursday, January 23, 2025, at ISM Campus in Darsait. This exclusive event is dedicated to ISM alumni and will bring together graduates from across the world to honour the school's legacy and achievements. Founded in 1975, ISM began as a modest institution to serve the educational needs of the growing Indian expatriate community in Oman. Over the decades, it has expanded into one of the largest and most respected schools in the region, with a reputation for academic excellence, cultural enrichment, and holistic development. Today, the school boasts over

40,000 alumni, many of whom have excelled globally as leaders, innovators, and changemakers across industries. ISM has consistently been at the forefront of academic achievement, extracurricular activities, and community service, earning accolades and recognition both locally and internationally. Its commitment to fostering intellectual growth and character development has made it a cornerstone of the expatriate community in Oman. "This reunion is an opportunity to reflect on the past, celebrate achievements, and look toward the future," said Mukund Manohar, President of the Indian School Muscat Alumni Association (ISMA). "We look forward to welcoming

alumni back to the school and reliving the bonds that made ISM a second home for so many." The event will begin at 4:00 pm with alumni being warmly welcomed back to campus. The evening will feature vibrant performances by students and alumni, offering a blend of nostalgia and celebration. Guests can look forward to ample opportunities to reconnect, network, and capture cherished moments with their schoolmates. The evening will provide a chance for alumni to reminisce about their school days while celebrating the institution's enduring impact. Registration Information: Alumni interested in attending can register online at <http://isma.ismomoman.com>

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His Majesty the Sultan confers Medals of Royal Commendation, excellent service on ROP officers



The medals were pinned by Sayyid Khalid Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court

NIZWA: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, yesterday conferred Medals of Royal Commendation, Excellent Service and Competence on some senior officers of the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

The medals were pinned by Sayyid Khalid Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court. The ceremony took place at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences.

Sayyid Khalid congratulated the officers on the Royal felicitations which, he said, reflects appreciation for the continuous efforts exerted by ROP personnel under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. The ceremony was attended by Lt.Gen. Hassan Mohsin Al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Maj.Gen Abdullah Ali Al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations, Maj.Gen Khalifa Ali Al Siyabi, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Administrative and Financial Affairs and several senior ROP officers. -ONA



MILITARY PARADE

Royal Oman Police marks annual day

NIZWA: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Sunday celebrated its annual day, which falls on 5 January every year.

On this occasion, a ceremony was held at the military parade grounds of the Sultan Qaboos Academy of Police Sciences in the Wilayat of Nizwa under the auspices of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of the Royal Court.

The ceremony saw the graduation of the 47th batch of cadet officers - holders of Diploma in Law and Police Sciences, the 11th batch of service system cadet officers, the 55th batch of university cadet officers and the 56th batch of specialized cadet officers. The batches included officers from the Internal Security Service and the Royal Guard of Oman, as well as officers from the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Republic of Djibouti.

The celebration began with a salute to the chief guest. The commandant of the parade requested Sayyid Khalid to inspect the front row of the column. After that, the graduates presented a military show before the dais. Then, the chief guest handed over awards to

top graduate officers.

This was followed by protocols of handing over the "Banner of Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences" from the 47th batch of diploma cadet officers to the 47th batch of university cadet officers.

Then, the column of the parade chanted the ROP Anthem and swore the Oath of Loyalty. They chanted thrice "Long Live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander", after which they saluted the chief guest, marking the end of the parade.

A column of ROP Cavalry paraded past the dais to the accompaniment of musical tunes by the ROP Band.

The names of winners of ROP Awards 2024 were announced during the ceremony.

The ceremony was attended by some Royal Family members, ministers and advisers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the ROP and security and military units, as well as members of the State Council and the Shura Council, directors general at government units, sheikhs and dignitaries of A'Dakhiliyah Governorate. -ONA





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COMMENTARY

Living conditions after a hundred years



SADIQ MOHAMMED SAID AL-LAWATY*

What are the biggest threats and challenges facing the world? Are the United States of America, Israel, neo-Nazis, or nuclear bombs the great threats and challenges? The answer to all of this is none of that. Nuclear war could have positive consequences for the world and its people. According to the American and European mentality, unlike Muslims, they do not mind exterminating the world's population by exposing them to weapons of mass destruction. They expect that a nuclear war is likely to kill three-quarters of the world's population and that it would be

a positive approach to alleviate the burden of uncontrolled population growth. Certainly not all peoples of the world would agree to such a cruel act. If they executed this scenario, I would call them maniacs.

In my opinion, the biggest threat is the demographic time bomb, or in other words, rapid population growth in almost every country in the world. Take Oman and India as examples. Before 1970, the Sultanate's population ranged between 600,000 and 700,000 people. Today, at the beginning of the year 2025 the population of the Sultanate has become 5 million people, which means that it has increased seven times or more in 54 years. The population of undivided India in 1947 was about 390 million, and after partition, there were 330 million people in India, 30 million in West Pakistan, and 30 million in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Today, India's population is 1.450 billion, which exceeds that of China. India is, therefore, the most populous country in the world, with a population of one-sixth of the world's population. I can't imagine what life will be like in India a hundred years from now.

Let us now look at the world population in 2024 and what it could be in 2037. On 31st December 2024, the Oman Observer magazine reported the following statistics related to the world's population:

(The world population will reach about 8.156 billion people in 2024, an increase of about 8 million people over last year (8.023 people), according to estimates by the German World Population Foundation. The United Nations expects that the world population will exceed nine billion people in 2037. While the world population is likely to rise to 10 billion people in the second half of this century). This means that the world's population increases by about a billion people every 12.5 years, but the 12.5 figure will gradually fall below that period. The number of increases in births is about 22,000 births per day, according to the magazine's statistics.

Imagine what the situation of food, the global economy, and unemployment will be like 100 years from now? In America and the West, it is believed that if a planet similar to Earth is not discovered, there will be no choice but to provoke a nuclear

war that is expected to destroy three-quarters of the world's population. There is no doubt that the option of nuclear war would not be acceptable to any country or individual in the world, yet it is possible for any country possessing such a weapon to use it without asking permission from any source. As for the distribution of the Earth's population on a discovered planet that has the same environment as Earth, if it exists, what is the means to transport humans from Earth to there? There is no doubt that this project is considered a failure. What is the alternative solution to combat global population growth?

It is time to seriously consider and plan for strict birth control measures within the limits of the number of deaths, i.e. the number of births should not exceed the number of deaths. Each country should implement this strategy separately, and complete the easy and cheap technology to convert seawater into drinking water and agricultural products, which will make more land available for agricultural products for survival and continuation of life for the next few hundred years.

I expect that many countries will have no choice but to adopt socialist policies, whether they like it or not, as is the case in Cuba today, where the state controls and all professionals, skilled and unskilled workers are employed in the public sector including barbers, taxi drivers and others who work in similar professions. Everyone receives a salary that covers only the family expenses. This is how Cuba has survived the harsh and draconian economic sanctions imposed by the United States since the 1959 revolution.

Such a situation will face the inhabitants of the Earth after a hundred years, and this is a reality whether they accept it or not, as the inhabitants of the world will have no other choice, unless there is an improvement in the cultivation of food crops and an increase in the production of fresh water.

* The author is Corporal Sultan's Armed Forces (Retired). This is a translation of the Arabic article translated by the author and published on 1.1.2025 in the Times of Oman's sister magazine Al-Shabiba.

CABLE

HM congratulates Emir of Kuwait

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on Kuwait's success in hosting the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to Sheikh Mishal and the people of Kuwait, lauding the sincere efforts made by the State of Kuwait in organising this major football event in the Gulf countries. His Majesty the Sultan wished Kuwait success to accomplish further achievements at all levels.

HM the Sultan receives thanks cable

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Dr. Mohamed Al Menfi of the Libyan Presidential Council in response to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's Independence Anniversary.

In the cable, the President of Libyan Presidential Council expressed his thanks for His Majesty's sentiments, stressing his keenness to bolster the bilateral relations in various fields to serve interests of the two countries and their peoples.

— ONA

OMAN HAJJ MISSION TO NOTIFY PILGRIMS FROM TUESDAY

The Omani Hajj Mission announced that those eligible to perform the pilgrimage this Hijri year (1446 AH) will be notified via text messages, with effect from 7 January 2024. The Mission advised the eligible "pilgrims-to-be" to join authorized Hajj companies within five days of receiving the confirmation messages, and to pay 50% of the value of their respective contracts.. — ONA



SECURE SENSITIVE DATA

UTAS holds first meeting

MUSCAT: The Academic Board of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) yesterday held its first meeting of the current academic year (2024/2025).

The meeting was chaired by Dr. Mahad bin Said Ba'Owain, Minister of Labour, Chairman of the UTAS Board.

The Board discussed a proposal on modern policies aimed to secure sensitive data and assets, besides setting guidelines and procedures to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information.

This reflects UTAS commitment to implement the best practices in information security and enhance cybersecurity.

A risk management policy endorsed by the UTAS Board at the meeting was aimed at maintaining institutional performance, upgrading the university's ability to deal with potential challenges and raising awareness of university members about security measures. — ONA



Oman Cancer Association

INVITATION TO ATTEND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING FOR THE YEAR 2025

The Oman Cancer Association (OCA) is pleased to invite honorable members to attend the annual General Assembly meeting to be held on Wednesday 26/02/2025 at 7:00p.m. at Al Harthi Hall in Al Qurum. The agenda for the meeting will include:

- The Board of Directors' report for the ended year and the draft action plan for the new year.
- The General Budget and closing account for the ended fiscal year and the draft budget for the new year.
- The Auditor' report.
- Election of Board of Director's for the year 2025-2027.
- The appointment of the financial auditor and determine incentives and without prejudice to the provisions of the State Audit Institution.
- The topics that the Board of Director's see to be presented to the General Assembly.
- Kindly note that the last day for the membership renewal or board member nomination will be Saturday, 1 February 2025.
- All the reports mentioned earlier will be available at the association's headquarters, and all members will have access to them.

If you have any inquiries, please contact us on (24498716) or email (info@oca.om).

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Investment Manager & Issue Manager


Legal Adviser

Al Bussaidy, Mansoor Jamal & Co.

Collecting Banks / Agents
   

JAPAN

Tuna ‘as fat as a cow’ sells for \$1.3 million

TOKYO: In Japan, an enormous bluefin tuna sold for around \$1.3 million (€1.26 million) in the first auction of the season at Tokyo’s famed fish market according to local media.

Michelin-starred sushi restaurants, the Onodera Group said they paid 207 million yen for the 276 kilogram (608 pound) fish.

Kyodo news agency reported that it was the second-highest amount to be achieved at auction on record.

Bluefin tuna

In 2019, a bluefin tuna fetched the equivalent of \$2.1 million – the highest price ever recorded since 1999 when records began.

“It was as fat as a cow,” Kyodo

quoted 73-year-old fisherman Masahiro Takeuchi as saying.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw new year tunas garner only a fraction of their typical selling prices amid restrictions and fewer people dining out.

The latest big sale has raised hopes Japan will continue to recover from the economic downturn. – **ow**





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Messi, Soros among recipients of Presidential Medal of Freedom

The Medal of Freedom, our nation’s highest civilian honour, was bestowed on a group of extraordinary, truly extraordinary people, who gave their sacred effort to shape the culture and the cause of America, Biden said at the ceremony



Medal of Freedom, our nation’s highest civilian honour, on a group of extraordinary, truly extraordinary people, who gave their sacred effort, their sacred effort, to shape the culture and the cause of America,” Biden said at the ceremony.

Who received a Medal of Freedom?

He awarded the medal to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Democratic billionaire phi-

lanthropist George Soros, who was represented by his son Alex Soros.

Fashion icon Anna Wintour, actors Denzel Washington and Michael J. Fox, and rock band U2’s frontman Bono were also presented with the award. As was William Nye, better known as “Bill Nye the Science Guy.”

Biden also honoured Basketball Hall of Fame member Magic Johnson, who led the Los Angeles Lakers to five championships, and

football superstar Lionel Messi, among others.

Among the remaining recipients were fashion designer Ralph Lauren, Spanish American chef and philanthropist Jose Andres and conservationist Jane Goodall.

Several posthumous medals were also given out. Robert F. Kennedy, the father of Trump ally Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and George W. Romney, father of Mitt Romney, one of Trump’s biggest conserva-



tive opponents.

President Joe Biden presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom, to Anna Wintour

Messi skips award ceremony

Argentina’s Lionel Messi, who won the Ballon d’Or – football’s most famous individual prize – eight times, is the first male football player and the first Argentine to receive the medal.

Messi did not appear at the ceremony. His representatives said in a statement that the football star was unable to attend due to prior commitments.

The Argentine World Cup winner now plays in the US for Major League Soccer’s Inter Miami, a team co-owned by former England

captain David Beckham.

Messi had been given the award as “the most decorated player in the history of professional soccer,” said a White House statement.

“He supports healthcare and education programmws for children around the world through the Leo Messi Foundation and serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador,” it added.

The medal is given to “individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavors,” according to a White House statement.

Previous recipients include Martin Luther King Jr and Mother Teresa. – **ow**

DISRUPTIONS AND CANCELLATIONS



Munich, Frankfurt flights cancelled amid winter weather

MUNICH: Snow and ice have impacted flight operations at three of Germany’s major airports, with some flights having to be cancelled.

“Due to the predicted weather conditions, flight operations are expected to be restricted and flights cancelled on Sunday, January 5, especially in the morning,” Munich Airport said on its website.

Frankfurt Airport warned of similar disruptions and cancellations during the morning hours and advised travelers to check on the status of their flights before making their way to the airport.

Various flights had to be canceled at Frankfurt, including departures to famous European destinations such as Paris, Venice and Prague.

Of the 1090 take-offs and landings planned during the course of Sunday, 120 were canceled, a spokesman for the airport operator Fraport told German news agency DPA.

Stuttgart Airport in southwestern Germany also reported several delays due to the winter weather, although the runway had been cleared and was ready for operations.

Some planes have to be de-iced

before takeoff, delaying departure times.

Reduced visibility at airports

German news agency DPA cited a spokesperson for Munich Airport as saying that reduced visibility due to snowfall had led to longer intervals between take-offs and landings, while aircraft also needed to be de-iced.

The spokesman said that one runway was being kept open while the other was being cleared.

The German weather service has issued warnings of severe weather conditions, particularly in Bavaria, where freezing rain and black ice was expected.

German rail operator Deutsche Bahn (DB), meanwhile, also earlier warned that the weather conditions were impacting some of its operations and said long distance services had been disrupted with lengthy delays and in some cases complete cancellation of train journeys.

Later in the morning, the rail operator said that train traffic had started returning to normal and reported delays of up 30 minutes as well as partial cancellation of trains in some cases. – **ow**

IN 2025

What could global turmoil mean for Africa?

PRETORIA: African nations are looking out onto an uncertain global political landscape in 2025. Russia’s grinding war in Ukraine still has no end in sight, the United States is about to swear in an unpredictable leader in Donald Trump and the European Union’s two biggest economies and perennial trading partners with African countries – France and Germany – are in political turmoil.

“We are often on the back foot whether it’s coming from the West or the East. We are often at the mercy of the ways in which other economic giants deal with us,” said Tessa Dooms, a South African sociologist and political analyst.

Some of those headwinds may well blow from a Trump-led United States. According to Dooms, the world’s biggest economy is warning that a global trade war might be on the horizon. The US has already signaled its intention to imposed trade tariffs on competitors, like China, but also allies like Mexico and Canada.

“This may impact not just the cost of goods, but also the production value chains of goods from particular regions,” said Dooms.

During his first term as president, Trump seemed to largely ignore the African continent as a trading partner, and many analysts expect more of the same from his second term. In contrast, outgoing President Joe Biden committed around \$55 billion (€53 billion) to the African continent in 2022, and visited Angola in December.

But while African nations might not be direct targets of Trump’s threatened trade tariffs or a trade war, countries like China may turn to Africa to soften the blow of difficult trading conditions.

“China has quite strong ties to the African continent and the growing BRICS grouping can definitely see this is an opportunity to strike back at the US, both in terms of where trade and production is happening,” explained Dooms. But she stopped short of saying BRICS (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and



the United Arab Emirates) can fill the void.

“There will definitely be opportunities for engagement and reimagining economic trading patterns. The US is definitely underestimating the power of the new kind of economic trading blocs. Even the European Union has options, and has Africa as part of those options,” Dooms told DW.

Big tests for new governments

Amid an uncertain outlook, new leaders will be at the helm. Major African elections in 2024 saw incumbents defeated in Senegal, Ghana and Botswana. Voters ousted the Botswana Democratic Party that had been in power for 58 years since independence from

the United Kingdom.

In neighbouring Namibia, the ruling SWAPO party extended its 34 years in power, but only by a whisker, and scored its worst ever election result. In May, South Africa’s African National Congress was forced into coalition government for the first time in the nation’s democratic history.

While the election results in those countries may present a changing of the guard away from governance dominated by liberation movements, the new leaders of Namibia, Ghana and Botswana are under pressure to deliver on elections promises.

“Generational change is an important factor in the shifting political tectonic plates we are seeing,” political scientist Nic

Cheeseman told The Associated Press. “People want jobs and dignity – you can’t eat memories.”

While the election results have worried members of the liberation establishment, many observers see the shift in power in the southern African nations as a signal that democratic processes are working. The exception to this is the disputed election in Mozambique, where post-election violence is believed to have caused the deaths of almost 300 people. Around 13,000 Mozambicans have crossed into neighboring Malawi to flee the violence in recent weeks.

“We need to take some serious stock about where our countries are, what is working, what is not and why is it not working so that we can contribute to the broader global conversation about the future of democracy,” said analyst Dooms. “We can do it from a uniquely African perspective, and ask how we build democracies that are fit for purpose and deliver for the people of Africa rather than just deliver for a few.”

Shocks at the poll may come again, as 2025 will see 11 African nations going through major elections, including Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Tanzania and Togo. – **ow**

Gaza Governorate remains under intense Israeli shelling for third day

According to medical sources, at least 184 people, including children and women, have been killed in the past 72 hours and dozens more have been injured in a barrage of 94 airstrikes and artillery shellings

GAZA: For the third consecutive day, the Gaza Governorate in the northern Gaza Strip has been plunged into days of horror as Israeli occupation forces escalate their campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the region. Since Thursday, January 2, Israeli occupation forces have



expanded the deadly attack that initially began in the North Gaza Governorate in early October 2024, with the aim of wiping out entire communities and displacing thousands of Palestinians from the region. The expansion of the offensive

has now brought the onslaught to Gaza Governorate, home to approximately 550,000 people—nearly a quarter of the total population of the Gaza Strip. This includes around 180,000 people who were forcibly displaced from North Gaza due to three months of relentless Israeli attacks.

According to medical sources, at least 184 people, including children and women, have been killed in the past 72 hours. Dozens more have been injured in a barrage of 94 airstrikes and artillery shellings carried out by Israeli forces in

the last three days. On January 4 alone, more than 45 civilians were reported killed in the latest wave of attacks targeting Gaza City and surrounding areas. The situation has grown increasingly dire as Israeli warplanes intensify their airstrikes, targeting entire residential blocks. These aerial bombardments have led to the destruction of buildings and the killing and injuries of many residents, while numerous individuals remain trapped under rubble, awaiting rescue. As the war intensifies, many Gaza residents are fearful of being forcibly relocated to the area known as Al-Mawasi – a region located in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, extending from the western outskirts of Rafah to the west of Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis. Israeli forces have been demanding people to move there, despite the fact that the area already suffers from a severe lack of basic resources such as food, water, and medical supplies. This has compounded the already dire humanitarian conditions. The journey to Al-Mawasi is a dangerous one, with limited access via sea routes and the main Salah

al-Din road, both of which are heavily impacted by the ongoing air and ground assault. Once there, displaced families are forced to confront even harsher living conditions as they struggle to find food and medical care amidst a collapsing infrastructure. With each passing day, the death toll rises, and the suffering of Gaza's residents deepens. Human rights organizations and international observers have warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe, with no end in sight to the Israeli occupation's relentless campaign against Gaza's civilian population. The Colonisation and Wall Resistance Commission announced on Sunday a record rise in violations committed by Israeli occupation forces and colonists against Palestinians and their properties in 2024. According to the Commission, a total of 16,612 violations were documented across various governorates during 2024. At a press conference held at the Commission's headquarters, the Head of the Commission, Minister Moayad Shaaban, said that Israeli forces were responsible for 13,641 of these violations, while colonists carried out 2,971 attacks. **-Wafa**

BILATERAL TIES

Maldives Foreign Minister concludes India's visit

NEW DELHI: Maldives' Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdulla Khaleel, has concluded his first official visit to India, an official press release by the Maldives' Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated. The visit included high-level discussions and the signing of key agreements to advance development cooperation, marking a significant step in strengthening the bilateral ties between the two nations. Khaleel met with India's Minister of External Affairs, S Jaishankar, where they reviewed the broad spectrum of bilateral relations. Discussions centred on exploring new areas of collaboration, particularly in development projects, infrastructure, and so-



co-economic initiatives. Khaleel expressed his appreciation for India's continued support in addressing the fiscal challenges faced by the Maldives, emphasising the importance of this partnership in promoting economic stability, the press release stated. One of the visit's key highlights

was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP). This agreement launched the third phase of project-based cooperation between India and the Maldives, aiming to bring tangible benefits to communities at the grassroots level. The projects under this phase are expected to enhance local infrastructure and improve livelihoods across the Maldives. In addition to his diplomatic engagements, Khaleel also visited the High Commission of Maldives in India, underscoring the importance of continued collaboration between the two nations. India and Maldives share deep-

rooted cultural, ethnic, and historical ties that have formed the foundation of their long-standing relationship. India was among the first nations to recognise Maldives' independence in 1965 and has remained a key partner in its development journey. Over the years, the bilateral relationship has been further solidified through high-profile visits, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attendance at President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's inauguration in 2018. Discussions during these interactions have consistently focused on addressing Maldives' developmental priorities, particularly in healthcare, human resource development, and connectivity. **-ANI**

NWS REPORT

Severe winter storm in US

WASHINGTON: Tens of millions of Americans are bracing for a huge winter storm that could bring the heaviest snowfall and coldest temperatures in over a decade. The storm, which started in the middle of the US, will move east in the next couple of days, the National Weather Service (NWS) said. A state of emergency has been declared in the states of Kentucky and Virginia, and parts of the US unaccustomed to severe cold, including Mississippi and Florida, have been warned to expect treacherous conditions, BBC news reported. **-DW**

COURTING FOR BETTER TIES



Italy's Meloni meets Trump at his Florida resort Mar-a-Lago

FLORIDA: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni met US President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, weeks before his inauguration to the Oval Office. Meloni made the trip to Florida days before a set meeting with outgoing US President Joe Biden during a visit to Rome. She is the latest in a string of leaders who are courting better ties with the future president. Argentinian President Javier Milei, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary also traveled to Florida to meet with Trump since he won the election in November. Meloni, however, is seen as a leader who can partner up with Trump well when it comes to US-EU relations, given they share a similar ideology and a security-first approach. Her close relationship with tech billionaire Elon Musk — who

will be influential in Trump's second term — also helps. **Trump calls Meloni 'fantastic'** Videos on social media show members of the Mar-a-Lago resort welcoming Meloni with applause after Trump introduced her. Italian media reported that Meloni planned on discussing the Middle East and Russia's war in Ukraine among other issues. She is also said to have discussed the arrest of Italian journalist Cecilia Sala in Iran in December — an immediate challenge for Meloni which has soured relations between Italy and Iran. Trump launched a hardline “maximum pressure campaign” against Iran during his first term in office, and will likely pursue similar policies targeting Tehran in his second term. **-DW**

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Do passports make us free?

BRUSSELS: When Britons voted to leave the European Union in 2016, UK passports no longer gave holders the right to travel freely around Europe. In short, Brexit actually changed the identity of UK citizens: They were no longer Europeans. Many Britons living in Germany, for example, decided to apply for German citizenship to obtain a German passport so they could legally remain in the EU without needing a visa. For some UK nationals, this might have only worsened their sense of displacement. But not that long ago, one could travel across borders without passports. **Passports a relatively new invention** In fact, passports as we know them today have only been around for about 100 years, according to Hermine Diebolt, who works at the United Nations Library and Archives in Geneva, Switzerland. Geneva used to be the home of the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations that was founded in 1920 to help maintain peace after the horrors of World War I. It was a time when old colonial empires were crumbling and new nation-states were being born. People were no longer subjects of their rulers, but citizens of nations. Many were also crossing borders after being displaced by the war. But most people tended to carry random local papers — if anything — to prove their identity. Already during the war, countries like Germany, France, the UK and Italy had started to insist that people from enemy countries needed official identification documents to enter their territories. “Border officials suddenly were confronted with a lot of different travel documents with different



shapes, different sizes and it was hard to know if the passport was authentic or not,” said Diebolt of the great movement of people after 1918 when the war ended. “So, they really needed to find a solution.” Finally, in 1920, the League of Nations gathered world leaders in Paris to participate in the “Conference on Passports, Custom Formalities and Through Tickets.” And so, it was official: passports everywhere should look a certain way and include the same kind of information. Measuring 15.5 by 10.5 centimetres (6 by 4 inches), passports were to be 32 pages — a format still in use today — and the front of the document must bear the country's name and the coat of arms. **‘The Passport Nuisance’** But soon there was a backlash against passports, said Diebolt. Many world leaders preferred things the way they were before, when people could move around freely without having to carry documents. The passport was also very unpopular with the public and with the press. People thought pass-

ports undermined their freedom and invaded their privacy. The document also relied on a lot of bureaucracy and red tape. In 1926, an article in The New York Times referred to the “The Passport Nuisance.” “Must passports be retained as a permanent feature of travel?” the newspaper wrote. “The system in vogue since the war is cumbersome, vexatious and a drag on free intercourse between nations.” But it was too late to go back to this freedom of movement. League of Nations members couldn't agree on what a world without border controls and passports would look like. And so, the passport was here to stay. **Modern passport reflects a global divide** Across the world, a simple travel document can make or break citizens, one's nationality dictating where they can travel and where they can stay. That is why “passport indexes” are released annually that rank passports from first to last based on how many other countries can

be visited visa-free by a passport holder. According to the Global Passport Power Rank 2025, the No. 1 spot is held by wealthy oil state the United Arab Emirates, meaning its citizens have strong freedom of global movement. At the bottom of the list are Afghanistan and Syria, war-ravaged nations with people living under isolated regimes who have very little ability to travel — although recent regime change in Syria may affect its future ranking. But what about those who have no nationality or citizenship and hence no passport? For around 10 million stateless people in the world, that's already a reality — often due to discrimination against certain ethnic groups such as Roma and Sinti people, with around 70% of their population in Germany remaining stateless, according to the US Institute of Diplomacy and Human Rights. But statelessness is nothing new. It emerged around the same time as the passport, as empires fell and nation states emerged post-WWI. **-DW**

SPORTS

With heads held high, Red Warriors return home

Oman lost to Bahrain
2-1 in the Gulf cup
final in Kuwait

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman football delegation returned home from Kuwait after finishing runner-up in the 26th Gulf Cup final on Saturday. Oman lost to Bahrain 2-1 in the summit clash in Kuwait. The Red Warriors were received at the Muscat International Airport by Basil bin Ahmed Al Rawas, Under-secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, to a warm welcome on Sunday. Oman delegation was headed by Sheikh Salem bin Saeed Al Wahabi, Oman Football Association [OFA] President and included players, head coach Rasheed Jaber, coaching staff and media members. His Excellency expressed his thanks and appreciation for the great efforts made by the national team players, the technical and administrative staff, which resulted in achieving positive results and the second place in the tournament.



OOO

Al-Kishry meets president of shooting federation

MUSCAT: Taha bin Suleiman Al-Kishry, Secretary-General of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), received Luciano Rossi, President of the International Shooting Federation, at his office on Sunday. During the meeting, the two sides discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in the sports field, in addition to reviewing the International Federation's plans to develop the sport of shooting globally and to expand the base of practitioners. The discussions also addressed future initiatives aimed at supporting athletes and providing opportunities for training and development in this sport.. Al-Kishry commended the significant role played by the International Shooting Federation in the development of shooting, highlighting the importance of establishing a sustainable partnership



between OOC and international sports federations to enhance sports performance at both local and international levels. For his part, Luciano Rossi expressed his gratitude and appre-

ciation for the warm reception. He reaffirmed the commitment of the International Shooting Federation to providing full support to national Olympic committees in the field of shooting sport.

IN PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal miss chance to narrow Liverpool's lead

LONDON: Arsenal missed the chance to narrow Liverpool's lead at the top of the Premier League to three points when it was held to a 1-1 draw away to Brighton on Saturday. Although 17-year-old winger Ethan Nwaneri put it ahead after 16 minutes after Mikel Merino's neat flick, Arsenal failed to turn possession into clear chances and paid the price when Joao Pedro netted a 61st-minute penalty after he was caught by defender William Saliba who attempted to head clear. Alexander Isak scored again as Newcastle United came from behind to win 2-1 away to Tottenham Hotspur to make it five consecutive league wins for Eddie Howe's side, while increasing the pressure on Tottenham coach



Ange Postecoglou.

Tottenham took an early lead through Dominic Solanke in the fourth minute, but its lead lasted just two minutes before Anthony Gordon scored past debutant goalkeeper Brandon Austin, with Spurs appealing for a prior

handball.

Isak then scored for the seventh consecutive match to give Newcastle all three points to move it a point behind fourth-placed Chelsea, who was pegged back with a 1-1 draw away to an improving Crystal Palace. *-Xinhua*

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UAE'S REAL ESTATE SECTOR

The UAE's real estate sector maintained its growth momentum throughout 2024, marked by an increase in real estate projects and infrastructure investments, reinforcing its position as a key pillar of the country's economic growth.

MARKET
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WWW.TIMESOFOMAN.COM
MONDAY, JANUARY 6, 2025



MSX INDEX ENDS LOWER

The MSX index closed at 4,569.70 points, down by 0.08% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.73% at 425.69 points. Dhofar Generating, up 4.62%, was the top gainer while Al Omaniya Non-convertible Bonds 2020, down 6.25%, was the top loser.

Regulations for covered short selling, SLB activities launched

These regulations are designed to enhance market efficiency and improve liquidity, providing market makers, liquidity providers, and liquidity funds with new tools that will bolster trading stability and open up new investment opportunities

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) announced the issuance of new regulations governing Bilateral Securities Lending and Borrowing (SLB) activities, as well as Covered Short Selling (CSS).

These regulations are designed to enhance market efficiency and improve liquidity, providing market makers, liquidity providers, and liquidity funds with new tools that will bolster trading stability and open up new investment opportunities.

The issuance of these regula-



tions is part of ongoing efforts to enhance and update capital market systems and legislation, keeping in pace with global developments while addressing the local market needs.

Under the new regulatory framework, CSS will be subject to the MSX regulations outlined in Decision No. 143 of 2024. Additionally, Bilateral SLB activities will be governed by Decision No. 2 of 2024, along with the procedural rules and guidelines issued by MCD.

In this regard, Haitham Al-Salmi, CEO of MSX, explained that issuance of these regulations will reshape investment strategies by providing innovative methods for market makers and liquidity funds to diversify their portfolios and effectively manage risks. This will

contribute to enhancing liquidity and provide all market participants with a more dynamic trading environment, while complying with regulatory requirements to ensure greater security. These activities will create new opportunities, enabling the implementation of hedging strategies and benefiting from market efficiencies, ultimately boosting investor confidence and supporting the sustainability of the market.

Regarding Bilateral SLB regulations, Mohammad Al-Abri, CEO of Muscat Clearing & Depository, emphasized that these regulations are a strategic step towards improving market efficiency, increasing liquidity, and enhancing flexibility. This feature is envisaged to be a key tool in supporting market

stability and providing investors with additional opportunities to maximize their returns.

"Our role at MCD is to ensure the smooth and transparent execution of lending and borrowing operations, fully adhering to the highest standards of safety and compliance with applicable regulations. Through this activity, we affirm our commitment to providing innovative solutions that meet investors' needs and enhance their trust in the Omani market.

Change of status

The importance of these new regulations lies in their potential to elevate MSX from a frontier market to an emerging market status. By issuing new financial services activities, these regula-

tions aim to increase the size and scope of financial companies' operations, enhancing their ability to offer diverse investment alternatives. This, in turn, will promote the trading of otherwise dormant securities and help boost overall trading volumes.

Both SLB, as well as CSS, will offer investors new tools to manage their investments, positioning MSX among advanced markets and attracting global institutions and investors looking for a diversified investment environment.

In terms of Bilateral SLB, the regulations allow borrowers to temporarily transfer or buy securities outside the market on a deferred payment basis, with a commitment to return or repurchase the securities at the lender's request during the agreed period. This activity is intended to increase market liquidity, improve efficiency through continuous buy and sell offers, and provide market makers with an emergency reserve of securities when their holdings are depleted.

MCD plays a central role in ensuring the smooth and transparent operation of these lending and borrowing activities. It is responsible for managing the collateral and overseeing the transfer of securities between lenders and borrowers. MCD will also publish periodic reports detailing the total amount of borrowed securities from each issuer, which will be made available on MCD's official website.

Licensed entities, such as SLB agents, will facilitate the transactions between borrowers and lenders. This process ensures transparency, governance, and compliance with applicable regulations. Furthermore, a contract must be signed between the lender

and borrower, outlining the rights and obligations of both parties.

As regards the eligibility, lending is open to state institutions, licensed financial institutions, insurance and reinsurance companies and investment funds with assets exceeding 1 million Omani Rials (1,000,000 OMR), or individuals whose personal assets, or those held jointly with their spouses and minor children, exceeding 500,000 Omani Rials (500,000 OMR) or its equivalent in foreign currencies, excluding the value of the individual's primary residence. This feature provides institutional investors with additional ways to diversify their portfolios while improving market liquidity.

And on regard CSS activity, it will allow Sophisticated investors to sell borrowed securities, with the obligation to settle the transaction by the settlement date. Regulations require these transactions to be executed at or above the last traded price, with additional restrictions if the price drops by 5% from the previous closing price. In such cases, the transaction will be suspended for two trading days.

To engage in CSS, Sophisticated investors must obtain approval from MSX and demonstrate their technical, administrative, and financial capabilities. They must also show that they have systems in place to manage and segregate orders for CSS and submit reports regarding their internal control and compliance systems.

MSX & MCD encourage all interested parties to review the detailed regulations and procedures for Bilateral Securities Lending & Borrowing and Covered Short Selling on the official websites of MSX (www.msx.om) and MCD (www.mcd.om).

INDIA STOCK OUTLOOK



Market participants will watch out for Q3 earnings, global cues and FPI activities

MUMBAI: The domestic stock markets, in the upcoming week, will focus their attention on the earnings of companies, foreign portfolio investments (FPI) data, a host of economic data, Fiscal Year GDP Growth, Index of Industrial Production (IIP), and other global cues, according to the market experts.

The market participants will also have their eyes on the outcome of the scheduled visit of U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan between January 5-6, to co-chair a review of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET).

This visit is expected to drive innovation, attract investments, and positively impact India's technology and infrastructure sectors, reinforcing the growing strategic partnership between the two countries, the expert market watchers say.

"Looking ahead to the second week of the year, several key events are likely to influence market sentiment. The earnings season begins with IT major TCS, a key trigger as any signs of improvement in Q3 numbers could reverse the ongoing trend of FII outflows.

"Additionally, a host of economic data, including HSBC Composite PMI, HSBC Services

PMI, Fiscal Year GDP Growth, and IIP, will be closely monitored for further cues," said Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

Manish Goel, Founder and Director, Equentis Wealth Advisory Services Pvt Limited, observing the investors' sentiments stated, "The release of the First Advance Estimates of Annual GDP for FY 2024-25 on January 7, 2025, is a key event to watch, as it will provide important insights into the economic outlook and could have a notable impact on market sentiment and expectations ahead of the Union Budget."

The stock markets kicked off 2025 on a positive note, with benchmark indices gaining nearly 1 per cent despite volatility.

Initially, the sentiment was subdued, showing slight improvement in subsequent sessions. However, the real momentum emerged on Thursday, enabling the indices to close higher despite a lacklustre final session.

As a result, the Nifty and Sensex ended the week at 24,004.7 and 79,223.11, respectively.

Sectoral performance was mixed, keeping market participants engaged. Auto, FMCG, and energy sectors emerged as the top gainers, while realty and banking sectors ended in the red. -ANI

NATIONAL BANK FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural credit ecosystem in India is increasingly getting formalised, says NABARD Chairman

NEW DELHI: India's rural credit ecosystem is increasingly getting formalised and borrowers across the country are preferring formal sources due to a variety of reasons, including interest subventions and subsidised credit, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Chairman Shaji KV told reporters on Sunday.

"The access of credit from informal sources is actually coming down very drastically. That means that a formalisation of rural credit is happening. (Formalisation of rural credit) in itself will leave a lot of margins at the hands of the rural people, because if you access an informal source, the rate of interest will be higher, thus margins before them will be lower," Shaji KV told a press conference at the ongoing six-day Grameen Bharat Mahotsav in Bharat Mandapam here.

Interest-subsented loans through Kisan Credit Cards, agri fund schemes, and a cap on the rate of interest on informal means put together helped formalisation of rural credit, he said.

Rural consumption in India is improving and the rate of growth in rural consumption is better than urban consumption, creating a lot of demand in the rural pockets.

Going ahead, with farmgate infrastructure being set up across the country, Shaji KV said there



now is a need to shift people out of agricultural production to value-added processing through a value chain development.

He said agri credit growth is expected to be more than 13 per cent this fiscal 2024-25. Agri credit growth has been on an average at 13 per cent over the past ten years.

"This year we will be achieving around 27 to 28 lakh crore in agriculture credit," the NABARD chairman said.

The NABARD chairman was also asked to respond about the regional imbalance in agri credit, particularly in east and northeast India. He said the lack of digitised land records was an impediment.

"...for any credit to grow there needs to be a linking of the KYC

with the activity which they are doing. So in the case of certain areas, there is still a problem of land records being made available. So that is what is preventing. To address this, the government is now going for this digitisation," he said.

A lack of data is creating that imbalance, he stressed. "So we are addressing that imbalance through making available the data and making it easier for banks to lend credit," he supplemented.

Asked whether only subsidization of fertilizer will help augment the agricultural sector, Shaji KV argued that subsidisation of fertilizer will definitely help, and in the same breath added that irrigation, better roads, high-yielding crops, credit availability at sub-

vented or subsidised rates were also key.

The ongoing six-day Grameen Bharat Mahotsav in the national capital is aimed at improving the visibility of rural Indian products to urban consumers. NABARD is India's apex development bank, established in 1982 under an Act of Parliament to promote sustainable and equitable agriculture and rural landscapes.

"We are showcasing their specialised products, especially the GI ta products, organic products, products of rural artisans, products of tribal people, products of women entrepreneurs, products of SHGs, FPOs, and such other things," the NABARD chairman said.

NABARD is also handholding rural artisans to market their produce on the internet, including the flagship digital public infrastructure ONDC.

Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) is aimed at promoting open source networks for all to exchange goods and services on the internet, and most importantly it is independent of any specific platform.

"We are working in different states with different groups for improving their productions and improving their visibility," the NABARD chairman said. -ANI

PEOPLE'S BANK OF CHINA

PBOC outlines monetary priorities for 2025

BEIJING: China's central bank has outlined its monetary and financial priorities for 2025 following a two-day meeting that ended Saturday, emphasising expanding domestic demand, stabilising expectations and stimulating vitality to ensure sustained improvement in the Chinese economy.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) said it will implement a moderately loose monetary policy

in 2025, forestall and defuse financial risks in key areas, and further deepen financial reform and high-standard opening up.

Stable economic growth

Unveiling its monetary policy for this year, the central bank explained that it will implement a moderately loose monetary policy to create a sound monetary and financial environment for stable economic growth.

It also noted leveraging a mix of monetary policy tools to reduce the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates when appropriate in light of domestic and international economic and financial conditions and the operation of financial markets.

Sufficient liquidity

The PBOC said it will maintain sufficient liquidity and steadily increase financial supply, so that

the growth in social financing and money supply will match the target for economic growth and overall price levels.

The meeting also underlined putting existing financial resources to good use and improving efficiency in the use of funds. In the meantime, the PBOC will keep the exchange rate of the yuan basically stable at an adaptive and balanced level, and forestall exchange rate overshooting risks. - Xinhua

MARKET

MSX index ends lower

Dhofar Generating, up 4.62%, was the top gainer while Al Omaniya Non-convertible Bonds 2020, down 6.25%, was the top loser



MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,569.70 points, down by 0.08% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.73% at 425.69 points. Dhofar Generating, up 4.62%, was the top gainer while Al Omaniya Non-convertible Bonds 2020, down 6.25%, was the top loser. Shares of OQBI were the most active in terms of number of shares traded while OQEP were the most active in terms of turnover.

A total number of 1391 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of RO 6.28 million, with more than 27.93 million shares changing hands. Out of 52 traded securities, 20 advanced, 15 declined, and 17 remained unchanged. At the session close, foreign investors were net sellers for RO 152K while GCC & Arab investors were net buyers for RO 77K, followed by domestic investors for RO 74K worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,798.51 points, up 0.12%. Prices of Al Madina Takaful, Bank Ni-

zwa, Oman Arab Bank, Bank Muscat were up by 1.24%, 1.02%, 0.65%, 0.40% respectively. Prices of Al Sharqia Investment, Ominvest were down by 1.37%, 1.22% respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,260.54 points, down 0.06%. Prices of Muscat Thread Mill, Gulf Mushroom Products, Al Anwar Ceramics, Voltamp Energy, Oman Cables Industry were up by 3.57%, 2.27%, 1.85%, 0.50%, 0.32% respectively. Prices of Galfar Engineering, Gulf International Chemicals, Jazeera Steel Products were down by 3.85%, 1.37%, 0.35% respectively.

Services Index was down by 0.09% before closing at 1,734.55 points. Prices of Dhofar Generating, Al Suwadi Power, National Gas, Ooredoo, Al Batinah Power were up by 4.62%, 4.48%, 2.56%, 2.17%, 1.47% respectively. Prices of Salalah Port Services, Muscat Gases, Abraj Energy, Phoenix Power, OQ Gas Networks were down by 7.14%, 2.78%, 1.82%, 1.67%, 1.48% respectively. — United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	4,579.89	4,566.13	4,569.70	4,573.30	-3.60	-0.08
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,809.81	7,788.89	7,798.51	7,789.44	9.08	0.12
Industry Index	5,260.54	5,234.08	5,260.54	5,263.87	-3.33	-0.06
Services Index	1,738.45	1,733.20	1,734.55	1,736.16	-1.61	-0.09
MSX Shariah Index	425.69	422.88	425.69	422.59	3.10	0.73
MSX TR INDEX	6,414.14	6,394.86	6,399.86	6,404.90	-5.04	-0.08
FINANCIAL TR IDX	8,872.75	8,848.97	8,859.91	8,849.60	10.31	0.12
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	6,069.42	6,038.89	6,069.42	6,073.26	-3.84	-0.06
SERVICES TR IDX	2,080.29	2,074.01	2,075.63	2,077.55	-1.92	-0.09
FIXED INCOME INDEX	1,067.21	1,067.21	1,067.21	1,067.21	0.00	0.00

Trading Summary

Volume		Turnover		Trades		Market Cap		Up		Down		Equal		Sec. Traded	
27,931,848		6,284,270		1,391		27,963,156,700		20		15		17		52	

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 5

ISIN

SECURITY NAME

VOLUME

TURNOVER

TRADES

OPEN PRICE

HIGH

LOW

CLOSE PR

PREV. CLOSE

DIFF. BD

DIFF %

LAST PR

LAST BD

LAST OFFER

PREV. VALUE

MARKET CAP

REGULAR MARKET

OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	129,336	5,896	12	0.068	0.070	0.068	0.070	0.067	0.003	4.478	0.070	0.068	0.070	0.100	50,008,444
OM0000003968	OQREDOO	15,366	9,611	7	0.235	0.235	0.235	0.235	0.230	0.005	2.174	0.235	0.228	0.235	0.100	152,971,894
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	850	94	1	0.110	0.110	0.110	0.110	0.108	0.002	1.852	0.110	0.108	0.118	0.100	24,200,000
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	36,100	2,491	3	0.069	0.069	0.069	0.069	0.068	0.001	1.471	0.069	0.068	0.069	0.100	46,567,233
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	17,000	1,394	9	0.082	0.082	0.082	0.082	0.081	0.001	1.235	0.082	0.081	0.082	0.100	14,350,000
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	221,306	56,186	19	0.254	0.254	0.253	0.254	0.253	0.001	0.385	0.254	0.254	0.257	0.100	1,906,624,854
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	8,688	3,341	3	0.384	0.385	0.384	0.384	0.383	0.001	0.261	0.385	0.385	0.390	0.100	127,653,121
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	205,850	192,432	6	0.932	0.938	0.927	0.927	0.926	0.001	0.108	0.927	0.927	0.931	0.100	695,250,000
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	48	12	1	0.259	0.259	0.259	0.259	0.259	0.000	0.000	0.259	0.259	0.000	0.100	25,900,000
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	21,206	1,252	5	0.060	0.060	0.059	0.059	0.059	0.000	0.000	0.059	0.057	0.059	0.100	21,011,511
OM0000002804	ASAFFA FOODS	910	330	1	0.408	0.408	0.408	0.408	0.408	0.000	0.000	0.408	0.400	0.420	0.100	48,960,000
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.	629,485	54,665	19	0.087	0.087	0.086	0.087	0.087	0.000	0.000	0.087	0.087	0.090	0.100	17,400,000
OM0000003388	SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	2,046,174	282,452	29	0.138	0.138	0.138	0.138	0.138	0.000	0.000	0.138	0.137	0.149	0.100	913,179,985
OM0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS	54,460	15,724	6	0.290	0.290	0.288	0.288	0.289	-0.001	-0.346	0.288	0.288	0.297	0.100	35,970,612
OM0000004735	SEMOCORP SALALAH	15,000	1,455	2	0.097	0.097	0.097	0.097	0.098	-0.001	-1.020	0.097	0.097	0.100	0.100	92,553,479
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	15,000	4,879	4	0.326	0.326	0.325	0.325	0.329	-0.004	-1.216	0.325	0.324	0.325	0.100	217,218,763
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	8,340	3,130	2	0.376	0.376	0.375	0.375	0.380	-0.005	-1.316	0.375	0.362	0.375	0.100	86,653,750
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIA INVESTMENT HO.	2,250	162	1	0.072	0.072	0.072	0.072	0.073	-0.001	-1.370	0.072	0.072	0.078	0.100	6,480,000
OM0000000972	OQ GAS NETWORKS	1,284,067	171,275	111	0.134	0.134	0.133	0.133	0.135	-0.002	-1.481	0.133	0.133	0.145	0.100	5,792,281
OM0000000894	ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	1,732,343	469,954	160	0.275	0.275	0.270	0.270	0.275	-0.005	-1.818	0.270	0.272	0.270	0.100	207,954,000
Total	20	6,443,679	1,272,737	401												

Parallel Market

OM0000007407	DHOFAR GENERATING	201	14	2	0.068	0.068	0.068	0.068	0.065	0.003	4.615	0.068	0.065	0.070	0.100	15,112,320
OM0000009759	OQ EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION	5,564,917	1,899,256	570	0.238	0.232	0.238	0.238	0.247	-0.009	-3.562	0.237	0.237	0.247	0.100	277,000,000
OM0000002036	MUSCAT THREAD MILLS	1,990	289	2	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.140	0.005	3.571	0.145	0.140	0.145	0.100	2,377,145
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	7,330	586	3	0.080	0.080	0.078	0.080	0.078	0.002	2.564	0.080	0.078	0.080	0.100	6,800,000
OM0000002287	GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS	4,428	966	1	0.225	0.225	0.225	0.225	0.220	0.005	2.273	0.225	0.224	0.242	0.100	10,297,305
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	72,792	7,133	10	0.098	0.099	0.097	0.099	0.098	0.001	1.020	0.099	0.095	0.099	0.100	221,458,350
OM0000008869	THE PEARL REIF	1,808	222	1	0.121	0.121	0.121	0.121	0.120	0.001	0.833	0.121	0.117	0.131	0.100	71,563,862
OM0000005260	OMAN ARAB BANK	8,500	1,318	2	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.154	0.001	0.649	0.155	0.155	0.161	0.100	258,758,550
OM0000000428	SMN POWER HOLDING	173,059	59,911	11	0.340	0.347	0.340	0.347	0.345	0.002	0.580	0.347	0.341	0.347	0.100	69,273,553
OM0000003661	VOLTAMP ENERGY	296	119	1	0.402	0.402	0.402	0.402	0.400	0.002	0.500	0.402	0.402	0.415	0.100	32,723,906
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	120	280	2	2.799	2.799	2.799	2.799	2.790	0.009	0.323	2.799	2.700	2.799	0.100	251,073,300
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	28,888	1,300	3	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.000	0.000	0.045	0.044	0.049	0.100	13,821,585
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	113,187	7,697	8	0.068	0.068	0.068	0.068	0.068	0.000	0.000	0.068	0.065	0.070	0.100	14,428,240
OM0000001962	AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING	110	6	1	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.000	0.000	0.050	0.046	0.049	0.100	4,250,000
OM0000002372	OMAN OIL MARKETING	1,920	1,421	1	0.740	0.740	0.740	0.740	0.740	0.000	0.000	0.740	0.740	0.750	0.100	45,343,500
OM0000000870	BARKA DESALINATION	38,000	4,673	2	0.122	0.122	0.122	0.122	0.123	0.000	0.000	0.123	0.121	0.123	0.100	9,280,206
OM0000000908	OQ BASE INDUSTRIES (SPZ)	12,096,692	1,369,214	249	0.113	0.114	0.113	0.113	0.114	-0.001	-0.877	0.113	0.113	0.121	0.100	390,922,466
OM0000002028	GULF INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS	35,800	2,603	5	0.073	0.073	0.072	0.072	0.073	-0.001	-1.370	0.072	0.072	0.075	0.100	1,512,000
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	123,273	7,368	10	0.060	0.060	0.059	0.059	0.060	-0.001	-1.667	0.060	0.059	0.060	0.100	86,293,486
OM0000000847	OMAN REIT FUND	5,187	415	9	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.082	-0.002	-2.439	0.080	0.080	0.087	0.100	40,690,554
OM0000001178	MUSCAT GASES	9,767	1,029	3	0.105	0.105	0.105	0.105	0.108	-0.003	-2.778	0.105	0.098	0.107	0.100	3,150,000
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING	1,720,679	128,487	75	0.076	0.076	0.073	0.075	0.078	-0.003	-3.846	0.075	0.073	0.075	0.100	15,222,983
OM0000002333	SALALAH PORT SERVICES	600	158	4	0.280	0.280	0.260	0.260	0.280	-0.020	-7.143	0.260	0.000	0.280	0.100	46,575,724
Total	23	19,950,454	3,494,491	975												

NEW RECORD

S. Korean carmakers' sales of eco-friendly models hit high in 2024



SEOUL: South Korean carmakers' domestic sales of eco-friendly cars hit a new record last year, driven by the popularity of hybrid models, data showed Sunday, Yonhap News Agency reported.

The country's five carmakers recorded eco-friendly car sales of 450,194 units last year, up 11.3% on-year, according to separate data

from Hyundai Motor, Kia, GM Korea, KG Mobility and Renault Korea Motors.

Of the total, hybrid models accounted for 356,058 units, up 25% from a year earlier, taking up 88% of total eco-friendly car sales.

Sales of electric vehicles, on the other hand, dropped 21.2 per cent to 91,385 units in 2024,

the data showed.

Domestic sales of hydrogen fuel cell cars also plunged 36.4% to just 2,751 units.

"Despite the sluggish sales of electric vehicles, demand for eco-friendly cars remained solid, fuelled by the soaring sales of hybrid models,"



NEW METHOD OF SCANNING SHOWS EFFECTS OF TREATMENT ON LUNG FUNCTION

Using the new scanning method, the team is able to reveal the parts of the lung that air doesn't reach properly during breathing

A novel way of scanning lungs can demonstrate the impact of treatment on lung function in real-time, allowing experts to observe the functioning of transplanted lungs. This could help doctors detect any deterioration in lung function earlier.

The scan method has enabled the team, led by researchers at Newcastle University, UK, to see how air moves in and out of the lungs as people take a breath in patients with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and patients who have received a lung transplant.

Publishing two complementary papers in Radiology and JHLT Open, the team explained how they use a special gas, called perfluoro propane, which can be seen on an MRI scanner. The gas can be safely breathed in and out by patients, and then scans are taken to look at where in the lungs the gas has reached.

The project lead, Professor Pete Thelwall is Professor of Magnetic Resonance Physics and Director of the Centre for In Vivo Imaging at Newcastle University. He said; "Our scans show where there is patchy ventilation in patients with lung disease, and

show us which parts of the lung improve with treatment. For example, when we scan a patient as they use their asthma medication, we can see how much of their lungs and which parts of their lung are better able to move air in and out with each breath."

Using the new scanning method, the team are able to reveal the parts of the lung that air doesn't reach properly during breathing. By measuring how much of the lung is well-ventilated and how much is poorly ventilated, experts can make an assessment of the effects of a patient's respiratory disease, and they can locate and visualise the lung regions with ventilation defects.

Demonstrating that the scans work in patients with asthma or COPD, the team comprising experts from across Universities and NHS Trusts in Newcastle and Sheffield published the first paper in Radiology.

The new scanning technique allows the team to quantify the degree of improvement in ventilation when patients have a treatment, in this case, a widely used inhaler, the bronchodilator, salbutamol. This shows that the imaging methods could be valuable in clinical trials of new treatments for lung disease. - ANI

Border-Gavaskar Trophy back in Australia after 10 years

Head coach Gautam Gambhir looked dejected as he saw India's growing misery on the field

SYDNEY: Australia broke the 10-year-long hiatus and successfully reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after conquering India at the Sydney Cricket Ground and thumping its authority in the fierce rivalry with a 3-1 series win.

Rohit Sharma, who decided to sit out in the final Test, saw his side with downcast eyes. Head coach Gautam Gambhir looked dejected as he saw India's growing misery on the field. The emotions of the two stalwarts summed up the SCG Test.

For India, the three days were a mix of seeing dreams and then watching them crumble right in front of their eyes. The six-wicket defeat ended India's hopes of reaching the World Test Championship final for the third successive time.

On the other hand, the triumph



in Sydney booked Australia's date with South Africa in the WTC final at the iconic Lord's. The Baggy Greens will step into the venue with the ambition of successfully defending the WTC mace.

The victory in Perth became a distant memory when India crumbled in the opening hour of Day 3. Australia captain Pat Cummins forced out an edge from Ravindra Jadeja, who tried to cover his line but failed miserably. The Australian skipper nipped one back in to clean up Washington Sundar for 12(43).

Jasprit Bumrah, who left the

field to go for scans and later returned to the dressing room on Day 2, stepped up on the crease to lead his side with the bat. He straightaway cleared his intentions by going after the bowlers. He went for a wild swing on the first ball but was eventually outdone by Scott Boland.

Before wrapping up India's innings, Boland continued to haunt the visitors with his fiery spells. He lured Mohammed Siraj to give away an outside edge to Usman Khawaja.

Just a ball later, he clicked 133.1

kph and got enough moment to see the ball crash into the top of the leg stump. Bumrah went for a wild swing but missed the line of the ball completely. His dismissal saw India bundle out on 157, setting a target of 162 runs for Australia to chase down.

Australia had a paltry 162-run target to chase down, and Sam Konstas went straight after a Bumrah-less Indian bowling attack. The stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah's involvement with the ball was a concern after he suffered from back spasms on Day 2.

There were initial hopes about the prospect of seeing him deliver with the new ball after he came out to bat. However, the hopeful eyes were soon filled with disappointment when Bumrah was nowhere to be seen on the field.

In Bumrah's absence, Mohammed Siraj spearheaded the attack and bowled in tandem with Prasidh Krishna. With a shining kookaburra in his hand, the dream start by the Indian team faded away.

The pressure played tricks on Siraj's mind and eventually got the better of him. He forgot his line and lengths and gave away 13 runs in the opening over.

It seemed as if the pressure also caught up to Prasidh Krishna, who also wavered in his consistency and gave away 13 runs in just the second over.

With Australia running high on momentum and Sam Konstas dominating the proceedings, India needed some inspiration from its established pace duo.

The motivation came from Prasidh Krishna, who reduced Australia down to three wickets at the stroke of lunch. It all started with Konstas miscuing his shot to Washington Sundar.

Marnus Labuschagne casually edged it away to Yashasvi Jaiswal, while Steven Smith fell short of entering the 10,000 Test runs club.

In front of his home crowd, Smith stood one shot away from celebrat-

ing a massive milestone in his career. However, Prasidh extracted extra bounce from the surface and forced Smith to commit to the shot.

Smith looked helpless while trying to fend off the rising delivery, eventually slicing it to Yashasvi Jaiswal, who dived from the third slip to take a stunning catch. Jaiswal broke off in a sprint to celebrate, while Prasidh punched the air in jubilation over the crucial wicket.

As the game progressed in the second session, wickets in a flurry was what India needed, but the moment never came. Siraj lured out an edge from Usman Khawaja, but it wasn't enough to push India's case for victory.

The bowlers kept at it, but Travis Head and Beau Webster held firm in their stance while taking Australia closer to a famous win at the SCG and in the context of BGT.

The body language of Indian players slowly dropped as the hosts, with beaming smiles, cruised towards glory. Debutant Webster finished it off in style by finding the boundary rope, bringing the BGT back to Australia. Head and Webster returned unbeaten with scores of 34(38) and 39(34).

Brief Scores: Brief Scores: India: 185 & 157 (Rishabh Pant 61, Yashasvi Jaiswal 22, Scott Boland 6/45) vs Australia 181 & 162/4 (Travis Head 34*, Beau Webster 39*, Prasidh Krishna 3-65). -ANI

AUSTRALIAN SKIPPER

Cummins excited to defend World Test



SYDNEY: Following his side's win over India in the fifth Test, Australian skipper Pat Cummins expressed excitement to defend the ICC World Test Championship title at Lord's against South Africa.

Australia will have the chance to defend their World Test Championship crown, claiming victory over India in the fifth and final Border-Gavaskar Test to secure their place in the Final at Lord's in June.

Speaking during the post-match presser, Cummins said, "We talk about the World Test Championship a lot, it is a trophy we are really proud to hold so we want to go back and defend it."

"I think it is a great tournament in that you have got to play well consistently and across all different conditions against different teams."

Pat Cummins has praised opener Usman Khawaja for his resilient performances during the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy series, despite not always getting the runs he would have liked.

In the post-match press conference, Cummins spoke highly of the challenges Khawaja faced, acknowledging the difficulty of opening the batting on challenging pitches against top-tier bowling attacks.

"It literally doesn't get any harder than opening the batting on these pitches against a quality bowling attack. It's the hardest job in cricket and I thought he looked really good at times. Sometimes he got some really good balls," Cummins said.

"I think, you know, he looks like he's batting as well as, you know, any other time, so probably overall didn't get the runs he would have liked, but you get innings like today where he just shows his maturity and experience is so valuable," he added.

"So, yeah, who knows? You know, I know he always says age is just a number, so took some good catches in the field as well. Still moving all right. So, yeah, no end date from our end, as long as he's still scoring some runs," he added. -ANI

BORDER-GAVASKAR TROPHY

Both of us should have been there: Sunny on being snubbed at presentation ceremony

SYDNEY: Legendary former Indian cricketer Sunil Gavaskar has expressed his disappointment after being snubbed from the presentation ceremony of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy despite his name being associated with the coveted trophy. The historic series, which saw Australia break a 10-year hiatus and reclaim the trophy with a 3-1 victory, was marked by fierce competition and memorable moments.

Gavaskar, who was left out of the presentation ceremony, shared his thoughts on the situation, saying, "I was told just before the Test

started that was going to be the situation. If India didn't win or draw the series I wouldn't be required... I'm not feeling sad, but I'm just feeling a little perplexed. It's the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, both of us should have been there," as quoted by ABC SPORT.

The snub came after Australia successfully reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at the Sydney Cricket Ground, a landmark victory that marked the end of a decade-long wait for the Australians. Despite his dismay, Gavaskar's comments reflect the deep respect he holds for the pres-

tigious rivalry between India and Australia, with both nations having played a significant role in the Trophy's history.

Australia's dominant 3-1 series win has reignited their rivalry with India, with the victory serving as a strong statement in international cricket and eliminating the visitors from the World Test Championship (WTC) race. However, Gavaskar's exclusion from the presentation ceremony left a bittersweet note for the cricketing legend, who has long been synonymous with the fierce competition between the two teams. -ANI



INJURY SETBACK

Can't fight your body: Bumrah addresses injury setback, rues chance of bowling on 'spiciest wicket'

SYDNEY: "Frustrated" after his recent injury setback, India's stand-in captain Jasprit Bumrah rued the chance to bowl on the "spiciest wicket" of Sydney in the series.

India faced a massive setback after Bumrah suffered from back spasms during Day 2 of the final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. After going for scans, Bumrah returned to the dressing room as expectations built around Bumrah's involvement on Day 3.

The stadium erupted in jubilation when Bumrah came out to bat. When India folded on 157, everyone's gaze was fixed on the SCG to see if Bumrah turned up to bowl in the second innings.

When the players formed a team huddle, Bumrah was no-



where to be found, which confirmed his absence with the ball as India failed to defend 161 and conceded a 6-wicket defeat.

Bumrah addressed his recent setback and admitted he had to

accept that his body couldn't fight back.

"A little frustrating, but sometimes you have to respect your body, and you can't fight your body. Sometimes you have to ac-

cept. Would have loved to bowl on the spiciest wicket of the series. Just had a little discomfort after the first innings," Bumrah said in the post-match presentation.

The 295-run victory in Perth in the series opener became a distant memory when India fell to a 3-1 series defeat. There were moments when India had the window of opportunity to turn the situation around, but the lack of capitalisation affected India.

"The chatter was about belief. The other bowlers stepped up in the first innings as well. This morning, the chat was also about belief. Lots of ifs and buts. The whole series was well-fought. Today also, we were there. It was a well-fought series," he said. -ANI

MASSIVE SCORE

Holder Athletic Club into Copa del Rey last-16 through penalty shootout

MADRID: Athletic Bilbao suffered a massive scare in the first game of its defence of the Copa del Rey title as it needed a penalty shootout to progress past fourth-tier side UD Logrones on Saturday.

Although Ernesto Valverde's side had nearly all of the chances in the game, it could not beat home goalkeeper Kike Royo in 90 minutes or in 30 minutes of extra time.

Logrones went into the penalty shootout full of confidence after knocking Girona out on penalties in the previous round, but Athletic goalkeeper Julen Agirrezabala, who hadn't made a save all night, was the hero when he saved Alex Gualda's spot kick, before Imanol Sarriegi also missed for Logrones.

Spain international Nico Wil-

liams fired over the bar to add extra drama to proceedings, but with no more errors it was down to Unai Gomez to book his side's place in the last-16.

FC Barcelona

FC Barcelona kicked off away to fourth-tier Barbastro after the confirmation that La Liga and the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) have again rejected the club's appeal to re-register forwards Dani Olmo and Pau Victor, but had few problems against its fourth-tier rival.

Eric Garcia put Barca ahead in the 21st minute, and Robert Lewandowski doubled the lead 10 minutes later.

The Pole's second goal of the



game early in the second half killed off any hopes of Barbastro fighting back, and Pablo Torre added a fourth with 34 minutes to play af-

ter a bad goalkeeping error.

Antoine Griezmann scored the only goal of the game in the first half as Atletico Madrid won 1-0

away to third-tier Marbella in a match played in Malaga's La Rosaleda Stadium.

Isco's 38th-minute goal was enough to see Real Betis through 1-0 away to second-division Huesca.

Osasuna is another top-flight side into the last-16 as it survived a fightback away to second-division struggler Tenerife.

Osasuna looked to be cruising after goals from Jorge Herrando and an own goal from Jose Leon put it 2-0 up after just 25 minutes, and the team from Pamplona could have been leading by four goals by halftime if it had taken its chances.

However, some poor finishing let Tenerife off the hook and after Leon pulled a goal back on the

stroke of halftime, it had Osasuna on the back foot for most of the second half, but failed to find an equalizer.

Isaac Romero gave Sevilla an early lead away to second-division leader Almeria, but the top-flight team was blasted out of the competition by four second-half goals from Almeria, with striker Luis Suarez scoring a hat-trick after Marko Milovanovic had leveled four minutes into the second half.

On Friday, fourth-tier Pontevedra stunned last season's beaten finalist Mallorca 3-0, while Getafe won 1-0 after extra time in Granada, and Rayo Vallecano had a comfortable 3-1 win away to second-division Racing Ferrol. -Xinhua

IN PICTURES



US teachers, students visit Shijiazhuang, China's Hebei
US college students pose for photos in Peking Opera costumes in Shijiazhuang, north China's Hebei Province. At the invitation of Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School, a group of US teachers and students visit Shijiazhuang recently. *Xinhua*

Wintering red-billed gulls arrive in Donghu Lake scenic spot
This picture shows red-billed gulls flying at the Donghu Lake scenic spot in Wuhan, central China's Hubei Province. A large number of wintering red-billed gulls arrived in Donghu Lake scenic spot recently, attracting lots of tourists. *Xinhua*



Ethiopian runners sweep Xiamen Marathon titles
Participants start during the Xiamen Marathon 2024 in Xiamen, southeast China's Fujian Province. *Xinhua*



Akshay Kumar, Veer Pahariya, Dinesh Vijan, Amar Kaushik and others pose during the trailer launch of film 'Sky Force'
Bollywood actors Akshay Kumar, Veer Pahariya, film producer Dinesh Vijan, filmmaker Amar Kaushik and others pose during the trailer launch of their upcoming film 'Sky Force', in Mumbai. *ANI Photo*



Clothing culture week kicks off in Xizang
This picture shows a costume show during the opening ceremony of a clothing culture week in Lhasa, southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region. The clothing culture week, first of its kind in Xizang Autonomous Region, kicked off here, with the aim of presenting the charm of Tibetan clothing culture and promoting the development of local cultural tourism industry. *Xinhua*



Modified cars exhibited during Summernats car festival in Canberra, Australia
A modified car is exhibited during the Summernats car festival at the Exhibition Park in Canberra, Australia. *Xinhua*

ROUND-UP

ARA Petroleum announces its joint sponsorship of Oman’s pavilion at Expo 2025 in Japan

Oman’s pavilion, currently in its final stages of construction, reflects Oman’s rich heritage and future aspirations

MUSCAT: ARA Petroleum (ARA) announced its joint sponsorship of Oman’s pavilion at Expo 2025, which will be held in Osaka, Japan. This collaboration and partnership underscore ARA’s commitment to supporting Oman’s cultural and economic initiatives on the global stage. Expo 2025, themed “Designing Future Society for Our Lives,” is scheduled from April 13 to October 13, 2025, on Yume Shima Island in Osaka. The event will showcase innovative and techno-

logical advancements from around the world. Oman’s pavilion, currently in its final stages of construction, reflects Oman’s rich heritage and future aspirations. Inspired by Oman’s natural and topographical diversity, the design focuses on three main elements: land, water, and people. His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik, Minister of Culture, Sports, and Youth, recently chaired the central committee meeting tasked with preparing Oman for Expo 2025 in Osaka. The meeting, held in Muscat, reviewed the latest preparations for the global forum, including the pavilion’s readiness and the start of experimental activities. ARA was honoured to participate in this meeting as one of the pavilion’s official sponsors. Our sponsorship aligns with ARA’s desire to foster international cooperation and promote sustainable development. By supporting Oman’s participation in Expo 2025, ARA aims to contribute to Oman’s sustainable development goals and encourage global collaboration.



PARTNERSHIP



Sohar Aluminium and Sohar Hospital sign American Heart Association Training Site Accreditation pact

MUSCAT: Sohar Aluminium Company and Sohar Hospital, an accredited American Heart Association (AHA) Training Center, have signed an agreement to grant accreditation to Sohar Industrial Training Institute (SITI) to conduct AHA courses in full accordance with AHA’s esteemed guidelines. This partnership allows Sohar Aluminium to become an officially recognised AHA Training Site, offering different life-saving courses, including First Aid/Heart Saver and Basic Life Support. These courses will be conducted at the Company’s Sohar Industrial Training Institute (SITI). The courses are designed to equip Sohar Aluminium’s employees and other trainees with the essential skills needed to respond effectively in emergency situations and in life-threatening conditions. As occupational health is an essential part of healthcare in industry, Sohar Aluminium has long been committed to the safety and well-being of its workforce. The company established a Medical Center on its premises and became operational in November 2008 after due inspection and accreditation/licensing by Ministry of Health with primary focus on Occupational Health. Subsequently, scope of activities was enlarged to include urgent/acute medical care and strengthen emergency medical response. Forming this partnership with Sohar Hospital serves to ensure that Sohar Aluminium’s employees have access to high-quality, internationally recognized training in life-saving skills, un-

This partnership allows Sohar Aluminium to become an officially recognised AHA Training Site, offering different life-saving courses, including First Aid/Heart Saver and Basic Life Support

derscoring our commitment to health, safety, and well-being in the workplace and beyond. By providing essential AHA-certified training, Sohar Aluminium’s Medical Centre aims to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills to act confidently in critical moments. Being a professional institute, Sohar Industrial Training Institute (SITI) primarily focuses on delivering technical vocational training while also providing safety and soft skills training. It provides various training programmes and courses with competitive international standards in the technical and professional fields and personal skills development for employees, trainees, and contractors from within and outside Sohar Aluminium.

SIGNIFICANT EXPANSION

BankDhofar enhances customer accessibility with network of 131 branches nationwide

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, one of the leading financial institutions in Oman, has significantly expanded its branch network to 131 branches nationwide, reinforcing its commitment to enhancing customer accessibility across Oman. In 2023 alone, the bank opened 43 new branches, each offering a comprehensive suite of banking services designed to meet the diverse needs of its customers. From card collections to tailored banking solutions, BankDhofar’s branches make these services easily accessible to all segments of its clientele. With this impressive expansion, BankDhofar is now the second-largest bank in Oman by branch network size. However, these branches represent more than just the bank’s physical presence—they are fully equipped and staffed to deliver a wide range of banking solutions to all segments of society, including women, youth, children, and high-income groups, particularly holders of the Al-Riyada and Al-Rifaa cards. The branches also cater to high-net-worth customers, providing specialized services with a focus on safety, confidenti-



ality, and personalized care. BankDhofar’s offerings include clear and strategic savings and investment plans, such as fixed and recurring deposit accounts and long-term deposit accounts designed to support children’s education. These products help parents save for their children’s higher education needs, while retirement planning options enable customers to grow their savings for financial security and stability in their later years. Celebrated for its exclusive banking services tailored for women, BankDhofar has introduced specialized accounts that offer unique benefits and privileges. Recently, the bank launched a special credit card for women that includes first-year fee exemptions, access to exclusive rewards programs, and additional perks like airport lounge access at Muscat and Salalah International Airports, travel and purchase protection, and global acceptance at millions of locations. In support of small and medi-

um-sized enterprises (SMEs), BankDhofar has developed dedicated banking solutions that enable business owners to efficiently manage their finances. Through smart POS devices, SMEs can easily collect payments, handle cheque deposits remotely, and streamline bulk cheque processing, offering entrepreneurs greater flexibility in their operations. As a technology-driven institution, BankDhofar continues to lead in leveraging advanced technology to enhance customer experience, safety, and convenience. A prime example of this is the recent launch of “Dhofar Pay,” “Samsang Pay” and “Apple Pay” are innovative services that allows customers to make payments by simply swiping their Android smartphones at POS terminals, further simplifying the banking experience. BankDhofar’s strategic focus and customer-centric approach are reflected in its financial performance, with net profits rising by 19.9% in the first half of 2024, reaching OMR 22.18 million compared to OMR 18.4 million during the same period in 2023.

FINANCIAL ECOSYSTEM

Taageer Finance’s CEO reflects on company’s milestones and SME impact

MUSCAT: Taageer Finance Co., one of Oman’s leading finance and leasing companies (FLC), continues to make waves in the financial ecosystem under the visionary leadership of its CEO, Shahn Mohammed Al Balushi. Recently named “Finance & Leasing CEO of the Year,” at the New Age Banking Summit, Al Balushi credits this prestigious recognition not to individual effort but to the collaborative achievements of his dedicated team. “This recognition is not about me; it’s about the team and the company. Taageer Finance has grown into a prestigious institution thanks to the unwavering commitment and teamwork of everyone involved. I am just one part of this incredible team,” said Al Balushi. During his tenure, Al Balushi has steered Taageer Finance through a period of remarkable growth and resilience. Over the last five years, the company has implemented key initiatives to enhance its financial stability and customer service, particularly in the SME and retail sectors. The company has prioritized customer satisfaction by accelerating loan approval processes, especially for SMEs, making it one of the fastest providers in the sector.



Under Al Balushi’s leadership, the company has achieved a provisioning coverage ratio of 70%, a significant improvement from 52% five years ago. Additionally, the company has consistently delivered strong dividends over the last three years. That’s not all, a groundbreaking treasury function was introduced to diversify funding sources. This move allowed Taageer to shift from reliance on bank loans to innovative instruments such as bonds. The company has successfully issued three bonds in recent years, all of which were oversubscribed, additionally a perpetual bond issuance was also concluded with full subscription earlier this year. “The creation of the treasury

function was a turning point for Taageer Finance. It has allowed us to diversify our funding portfolio and play a crucial role in driving the economy forward. This success is a testament to the trust of our stakeholders and the hard work of our treasury team,” Al Balushi highlighted. As a leading financial institution, Taageer Finance has been instrumental in supporting Oman’s SME sector, a cornerstone of the nation’s economic development. By providing fast and efficient funding solutions, the company has helped entrepreneurs and businesses thrive, reinforcing its position as a trusted partner in economic progress. “Taageer Finance’s fast approvals and tailored solutions for SMEs have positioned us as a leader in this sector. We are proud to contribute to Oman’s financial ecosystem by enabling businesses to grow and succeed,” Al Balushi remarked. Beyond financial achievements, Al Balushi emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of innovation and growth within the company. His focus on empowering a young, dynamic team has been pivotal in delivering exceptional customer service and addressing the unique needs of clients across Oman.

With a strong foundation and a clear vision, Taageer Finance is poised for continued success, further solidifying its role as a key player in Oman’s financial landscape. Taageer Finance offers a diverse range of financial and leasing solutions for businesses and individuals. Headquartered in Al Khuwair in Muscat, the company boasts an extensive nationwide network, with branches at Watayah, Sohar, Al Kamil Al Wafi, Barka, Nizwa, Salalah, and Seeb. By offering customers a cutting-edge digital platform, upholding the highest corporate governance standards, implementing resilient systems and procedures, and utilizing state-of-the-art technology, Taageer has established itself as a trusted ally for customers. This includes the integration of Point of Sale (POS) machines at all branches, a robust mobile application with payment gateway integration to facilitate a streamlined cashless payment process, as well as the efficient processing of customer requests through its mobile application. Taageer takes pride in being a responsible corporate citizen, actively supporting the community and contributing to the nation’s socio-economic development goals.

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