LET'S TALK
Times OF OMAN

OMAN, LUXEMBOURG DISCUSS ECONOMIC COOPERATION

A session of talks was held between the Sultanate of Oman and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The talks touched on means of promoting the economic relations between the two countries. >A5

HIS MAJESTY ISSUES ROYAL DECREE

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued Royal Decree No. 6/2023 ratifying the "Agreement on the System of Linking Payment Systems of Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States", endorsed in the city of Al Ula on 5 January 2021. Article (1) states that the abovementioned agreement shall be ratified in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the Ratification Document for the abovementioned agreement in line with its provisions. Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. -ONA

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WEATHER

Musandam, Buraimi witness thunderstorm

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The northern governorates in Oman will continue to see moderate to heavy rains for the next 2-3 days, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said on Tuesday.

Places like Musandam, Buraimi, North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah have been experiencing showers since Monday morning.

Heavy rain is expected in Muscat Governorate on Thursday evening and will continue until Friday. The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) calls everyone to take precautions.

For the rest of the northern governorates, the intensity of rain will be between light and medium on Wednesday, and peaking on Wednesday evening until Friday morning. Heavy rainfall may sometimes be accompanied with thunderstorms in all the governorates.

Meanwhile snow fell in Jabal Shams in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on Monday evening. Snowfall is expected to continue till early morning, an official from Oman Meteorology said.

The official confirmed to Times of Oman that Jabal Shams in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate recorded a temperature of – 2.1 degrees Celsius on Tuesday.

Photo- Saif Al Khatri

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Guide on SMEs, start-ups launched

1 The ASMED launched its first edition of "Guide for Small and Medium Enterprises and Start-ups". The step seeks to market SMEs and introduce them to different government and private establishments. >A3

WORLD

India tests locally developed new OS

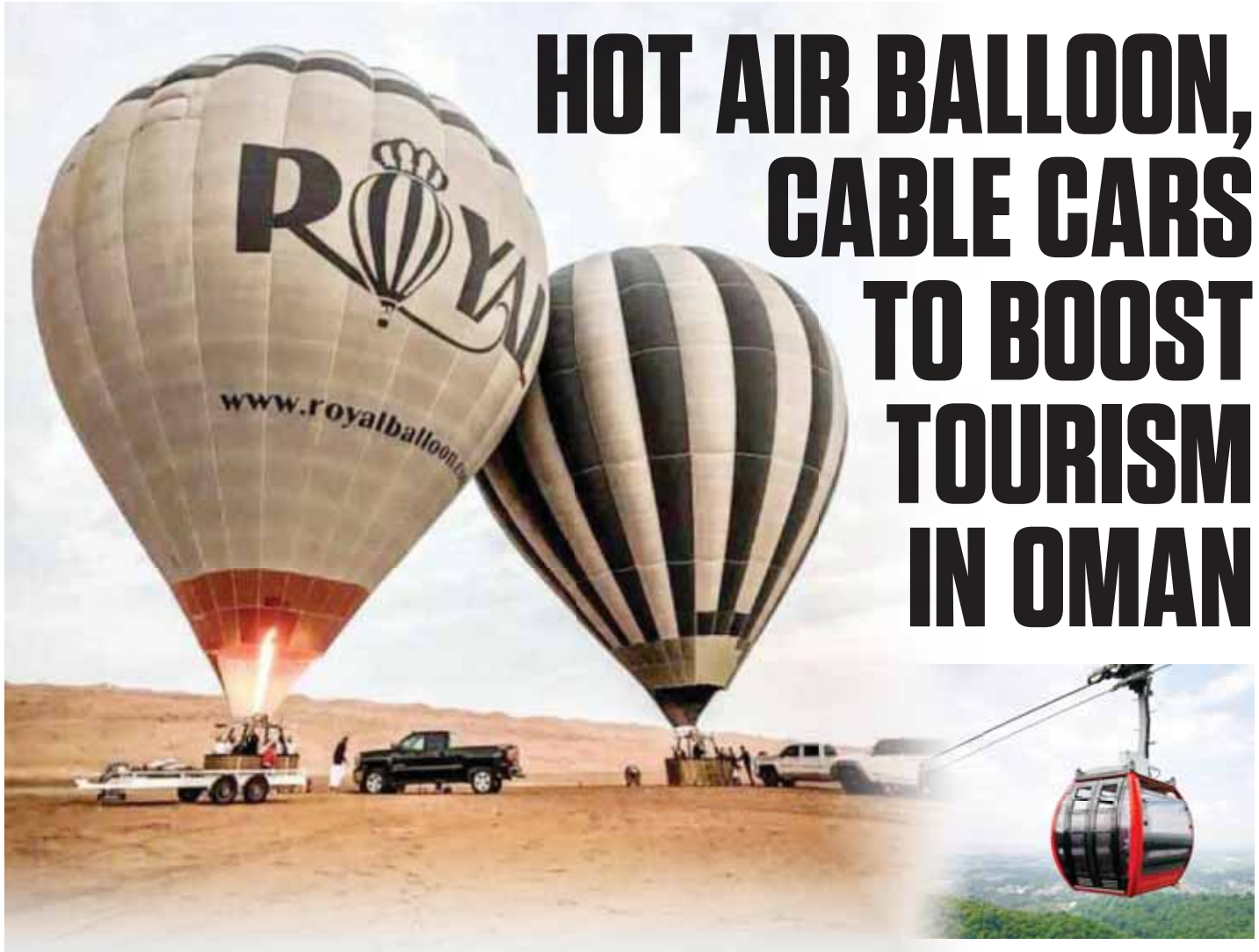
2 India on Tuesday tested 'BharOS', an indigenous operating system developed by the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. BharOS - a new mobile operating system focuses on privacy, security. >A7

SPORTS

Qurum Thunders, Darsait Titans in final

3 Darsait Titans beat Ruwi Rangers by 51 runs while Qurum Thunders thrashed Amerat Royals to claim victory by 4 wickets in the semifinals of the Oman D20 at the Oman Cricket Academy. >A8

HOT AIR BALLOON, CABLE CARS TO BOOST TOURISM IN OMAN



The Civil Aviation Authority in Oman has given the permit to the Royal Balloon Company to start its commercial operation

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Adventurers in Oman can look forward to a host of recreational activities with the introduction of cable cars and hot air balloon in the country.

With options many, it is expected that these projects will help promote local tourism and attract foreign tourists in the Sultanate of Oman. As part of this tourism campaign, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has given the permit to the Royal Balloon Company to start its commercial operation.

In a statement, the CAA said that the approval of the permit will enhance tourism in the Sultanate, and is a step towards economic diversification.

The commercial operation of the Royal Balloons Project was inaugurated on Tuesday under the auspices of Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed Al Shamsi, Governor of North Sharqiyah, in the presence of Saeed Al Obaidani, Director General of Tourism Development in the Ministry and a number of specialists in the Heritage and Tourism Department in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

Speaking about the hot air balloon, Al Faisal Mohammed Al Rashdi, one of the owners of Royal Balloons company, said that this project is a partnership between an Omani company and a Turkish company specialising in hot air balloons in four countries and Oman is the fifth country.

OMR80

The balloon ride will take place between 40 and 60 minutes during sunrise and cost OMR80 per person. It will reach a height of 600 metres above the sea level

"The company owns a fleet of at least 22 balloons in these countries," the official said.

"The balloon ride will take place between 40 and 60 minutes during sunrise and will cost OMR80 per person. It will reach a height of 600 metres above the sea level.

"But there are discounts for Omanis and residents, starting from OMR59 per person," the official added.

There are two balloons this season with a capacity of 12 people per balloon. The project will continue during the tourist season in the Sharqiyah Sands from October to April of each year. The company plans to expand in the future in other regions in the Sultanate after consultation with the concerned authorities," the official said.

In addition, cable car projects are also likely to come up in Muscat and Dhofar.

In a move to boost Dhofar's attraction as a tourist destination, a cable car project is being planned in the Darbat area of the governorate. The visitors to the Oman Botanic Garden (OBG) will be able to ride the country's first cable car once it opens its doors to the public in 2023.

Spanning 420 hectares, the OBG will be among the largest botanic gardens in the world when complete, and is located about 35km from Muscat.

SCIENTIFIC INSIGHTS

Breast cancer tops Oman's cancer list

Times News Service

MUSCAT: With 350 breast cancer cases reported in the Sultanate of Oman, this disease continues to top the list among all cancers affecting people in the country, according to the cover story of the latest issue of Scientific Insights, published by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Breast cancer is followed by thyroid and colorectal cancers in Oman.

Statistics published by the Ministry of Health in 2019 indicated that the total cancer cases among new and registered Omanis reached 2,089 and 200 cases were reported among residents.

According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 20 million people were diagnosed with cancer in 2021, which caused nearly 10 million deaths.

The cover story of the latest issue of Scientific Insights, published by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, explored the role of research in combating cancer, including discussing the current reality of treatments, the contribution of food to limiting the spread of cancer, reasons for the spread of cancer, and more.

Number of cancer cases in 2019

Cancer Type	Cases
Breast	350
Thyroid	235
Colorectal	213
Stomach	116
Prostate	113
Non-Hodgkin lymphoma	93
Leukemia	91
Trachea and lung	82
Bladder	76
Liver	68

Cancer is not a single disease

Dr. Zahid bin Abdullah Al Mandhari, Head of Radiation Oncology Department at Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre, maintained that "cancer is not a single disease as some would expect, but rather a large number of diseases characterized by the presence of abnormal cells that divide in an uncontrollable manner and have the ability to infiltrate, spread and destroy normal body tissues."

He added that although cancer is the second leading cause of death in the world, cure rates and control are improving significantly in recent years for many types of cancer due to the improvements in methods of early detection of cancer as well as methods of treatment and prevention, and all of these improvements have occurred due to scientific research.

With regard to the discovery of a new immunotherapy for cancer, Dr. Muna Al Habsi, researcher in the immunity and ageing fields and a member of Dr. Tasuku Honjo's research team who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2018, stated that cancer is a medical term that includes a variety of diseases in which defective cells have evaded the immune system and have divided uncontrollably to create a mass of cells

The cells are usually unable to perform their functions adequately and thus disrupt and prevent the organ from carrying out its role in the body. She mentioned that cancer, like many diseases, poses a challenge to humanity, and the only way to eradicate it in all its forms is through research and experimentation within a scientific and ethical approach.

Dr. Taha bin Mohsin Al Lawati, Senior Consultant Surgical Oncology and Breast Oncoplastic Surgeon at the Royal Hospital, said that cancer has been scientifically proven to be a cellular change and abnormal growth that invades the surrounding tissues, which leads to the loss of functions of the body's organs, general weakness and sometimes death. >A5

PRAYER TIMINGS

Dhuhr	12:24pm
Asr	3:31pm
Maghrib	5:53pm
Isha	7:07pm
Fajr (Tomorrow)	5:31am

Oman keen to preserve, protect and promote human rights

OHRC organises educational campaigns and training workshops to promote awareness about human rights in Oman

THE YEAR 2022 is considered an exceptional year in the march of Oman Human Rights Commission, as the Royal Decree No. (57/2022) reorganising the Commission was issued achieving full compliance with the United Nations Paris Principles on National Human Rights Commissions.

During this year, the Oman Human Rights Commission continued to monitor and receive human rights reports from various groups of society, citizens and residents alike.

Whereas the Commission contributed to finding appropriate solutions and settling those reports, in cooperation with the concerned authorities and institutions, in addition to providing legal consultations to individuals who communicated with the Commission through various means of communication.

The Commission also carried out several field visits during this year, including Sumail central prison, the detention centres of the Royal Oman Police in the governorates, a number of government institutions, civil society organisations, workplaces and places of workers, in addition to field visits based on the reports submitted by individuals, all of which aimed to learn about ensuring and fostering human rights.

Additionally, the headquarters of the Commission witnessed a prominent activity during this year, which included holding multiple meetings with the civil society organisations, as well as visits by a number of ambassadors of countries in Oman to discuss topics pertaining to human rights. The Commission also received this year the President of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and a high-level delegation from the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Moreover, the Commission organised workshops and training programmes, with the participation of representatives of government agencies and civil community organisations. It also carried out awareness-raising campaigns targeting various segments of society and continued to train and qualify its staff in the various disciplines it deals with in the field of human rights.

Regarding the international reports that addressed human rights in the Sultanate of Oman during the year 2022, the Commission monitored, followed up on, analysed, and then responded to those reports, relying on human rights principles, international conventions, national legislation, reports issued by official authorities and sources of civil society organizations. This is in addition to the reports monitored and received, the results of its field visits as well as the awareness campaigns implemented throughout the year.

Moreover, during that year, the Commission was actively present at the regional and international levels, where it participated in many international meetings and gatherings besides contributing to presenting proposals and recommendations related to the promotion of human rights through its memberships in regional and international committees and organisations.

And via this report, the Oman Human Rights Committee is pleased to highlight the most prominent steps and actions it has taken, stressing its continued determination to carry out its responsibilities and duties, supported by the appreciated cooperation of all competent state institutions and civil society organisations to achieve all that serves fostering and preserving of human rights in the Sultanate of Oman.

Legislative & Legal Developments

Royal Decree No. 57/2022 Reorganising the Oman Human Rights Commission: The Sultanate of Oman is keen to preserve, protect and promote human rights in accordance with international principles and national legislation, as stipulated in the Basic Statute of the State and the laws emanating therefrom, as well as international covenants and treaties.

This concern was crystallized in the establishment of the Oman Human Rights Commission by virtue of Royal Decree No. (124/2008), where it was granted legal personality. The Commission consists of 14 members, some of whom represent government units whose work is related to human rights issues, others represent civil society organizations, in addition to two members representing the Council of Oman. Under this formation, the representative of the Council of State is appointed as the Chairman of the Commission.

Emphasizing the importance of the Committee and its responsibilities in the field of human rights, the Royal Decree No. (57/2022) was issued on 5th of Zulhujjah 1443AH, corresponding to 4th of July 2022, reorganizing the Commission and setting a new work system that provides the Commission with full independence and autonomy. As a result, the Commission's relationship with His Majesty the Sultan became direct through what was stipulated in the decree that the Commission is to submit its annual report to His Majesty - may God protect him - and the position of Chairman and Vice Chairman are to be filled by election among members from non- representatives of governmental authorities.

The new system of the Commission also stipulated that it shall be composed of experts, those interested in human rights and representatives of a number of government agencies related to human rights. This achieves the principle of pluralism in the composition stipulated in Paris Principles, provided that the members of the Commission elect, on their first meeting, a chairman and a vice-chairman who is not a representative of government authorities.

The resolutions of the Commission shall be passed by a majority of the votes of the members present from representatives of civil society, and in the event of equal votes, the Chairman of the meeting shall have the casting vote, so as to ensure that all the resolutions of the Commission and the votes thereon are those of the representatives of civil society only to enhance the Commission's independence. The decree also stipulated that representatives of government authorities participate in the work of the Commission and attend its meetings to benefit from their expertise and to acts as a bridge between the Commission and the authorities they represent without having the right to vote.

Under this amendment, the Commission became fully independent in the exercise of its work, as the decree affirmed its role as a national mechanism for protecting and promoting human rights, which strengthened its competence of human rights issues at the domestic and international levels.

The decree, reorganizing the Commission, came in line with the aspirations of the Sultanate of Oman in its long-term development strategy (Oman 2040) on sustainable development, in order to achieve a decent level of life for all citizens and residents on the land of Oman.

The new system also included the Commission's competence to develop a national human rights strategy, monitor abuses and receive complaints and conduct field visits to investigate human rights incidents. The Commission shall also be responsible for awareness-raising and education through organizing conferences, courses and seminars related to human rights. At the international level, the Commission is to cooperate with international mechanisms pertaining to human rights, prepare reports and participate in meetings related to human rights at the regional and international levels.

All these competencies and the provisions contained in the new system are compliant with the international basic principles adopted for the establishment of national human rights institutions and thus contribute to paving the way for the Commission's attainment of classification (A) in the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Monitoring, receiving reports

The Commission assumes the responsibility of following up, receiving and monitoring human rights reports, cases and abuses. In this section, we will highlight the efforts made by the OHRC in monitoring and receiving reports for various groups of society.

This is in addition to its role in seeking to settle and resolve the same by conducting field visits to prisons, places of detention, hospitals and labour gatherings inside the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation and coordination with the relevant authorities. During 2022, the reports monitored and received by the OHRC included matters of civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, and the rights of the most favoured.

During this year, the OHRC received more than 353 issues from citizens and residents, it delivered legal and human rights advice and directed the relevant people to the concerned authorities to follow up. Furthermore, it received and monitored 79 reports on issues relating to human rights within its competence and responsibilities, as follows: Monitoring and Receiving Reports.

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National laws have ensured that individuals' rights and freedoms are protected at the pre-trial stage by providing a set of guarantees for human rights and individual and public freedoms to ensure maintaining them.

Criminal procedures are deemed as a part of the areas in which the real protection of individual freedoms appears, to achieve a balance between justice and the protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of the accused persons. In the course of this right, the Commission received a communication from the OHCHR on 11 August 2022, clarifying the availability of fair litigation requirements and legal representation for a citizen arrested by the competent authorities.

After coordination with the competent authorities on the information received, it was found that the citizen is accused of the felony of (using the media to insult the legitimacy of the authority of the Sultan), the misdemeanour of (spreading false and tendentious rumours that would undermine the prestige of the state and its economic status) and the misdemeanour of (insulting a public official).

The Commission also confirmed the availability of basic human rights guarantees for him, including the procedures and stages of litigation and the pre-trial rights.

On 7 September 2022, the Commission also followed on up the issue of a television report broadcast by an Arab television channel on the arrest of a woman residing in the Sultanate of Oman by the competent authorities, and her relatives demand to be released. The Commission communicated with the competent authorities, and it was found that she was under arrest for investigation in a criminal case.

Then, she was released after completing the preliminary investigation procedures. In addition to emphasizing the appropriate humane treatment that preserves her dignity.

International Reports

The Omani Human Rights Commission (OHRC) follows up on and reviews all published material on the human rights situation in Oman, pursuant to its competence, under Article No. (11), paragraph 3 of its reorganization decree (57/2022), which is to monitor what may be raised by the Governments of some States and some international and non-governmental organisations in the regarding human rights in the Sultanate of Oman, and to coordinate with the concerned authorities to verify and respond. In its analysis of international reports, the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) relies on several bases, the most important of which are:

- Universally agreed human rights principles.
- International instruments and conventions.
- National legislation and laws.
- Annual reports and statistics issued by the relevant authorities and civil society in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Reports on reports received and observed by the Commission.
- Reports of field visits to places of detention and arrest, etc.

Awareness-raising and educational campaigns as well as training workshops organised by the Commission to promote awareness of human rights in the Sultanate of Oman.

From this standpoint, OHRC followed up on a number of international reports during the year 2022 and worked to analyse and respond to them. OHRC is fully committed to paying close attention to all the information contained in these reports, since they reflect the international view of the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to the application of human rights standards and the follow-up of human rights issues within Oman.

Among the reports that reached OHRC and to which it responded during this year is the annual report of the US Department of State, the annual report of "Amnesty International "on the human rights situation in the Sultanate of Oman during the year 2020/2021, and the report of Human Rights Watch No. 23 of 2022. The Commission also responded to a news report by the BBC titled "Fugitive workers from Oman". It also responded to reports in the Zimbabwean "Sunday Mail "and the report by the Dutch organization "Do Bold "on domestic workers from the Republics of Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone working in Oman. The Commission also prepared the parallel report to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Guide on start-ups and SMEs launched

The Guide seeks to market SMEs and introduce them to different government and private establishments, segments of society and investors

MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (ASMED) on Tuesday launched its first edition of "Guide for Small and Medium Enterprises and Start-ups".

The step seeks to market SMEs and introduce them to different government and private establishments, segments of society and investors.

ASMED also aspires to help local SMEs and start-ups go global.

The guide, which comprises 84 such nascent enterprise in its first edition, also covers Omani trademarks specialised in industry and technology. It reflects diversity in terms of activities, products and services that the firms offer to individuals and establishments.

SMEs constitute 4.1% of the industrial sector.

By providing SMEs and start-ups exposure, the guide offers them an optimal opportunity to expand their activities within Oman and abroad. -ONA

DHOFAR GOVERNORATE

Cleaning campaign for coral reefs organised in Mirbat

MUSCAT: A cleaning campaign for coral reefs was launched in the Wilayat of Mirbat on Tuesday. The campaign has been organised by the Directorate General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, with the participation of a number of government, private and civil agencies and volunteer teams.

Head of the Marine Environment Department at the Directorate General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, said that the campaign comes as part of the efforts to preserve the marine environment by removing fishing nets and remnants attached to coral reefs as a result of wrong environmental practices.

It is worth noting that the campaign will last for five days and aims to enhance the environmental awareness among the participants and the community. It will help in spreading awareness about the dangers of waste that pollute coral reefs and affect wildlife in the marine environment.

OMANI MARKETS

Ministry keeps tab on fish stocks in local markets

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources confirmed that it is monitoring fisheries traffic markets in the governorates of Oman to ensure the availability of fish products and to investigate causes of shortage in supply, if any.

The ministry quoted rainy winter weather conditions as reasons for low supply of some types of fish in Omani markets, since high sea waves resulting from those conditions prevented the fishermen from going out to the sea over the past few weeks.

It pointed out that there is diversity in the supply of different fish, with the exception of large pelagic fish (yellowfin tuna and longtail tuna) whose fishing was affected by the climatic conditions, the method of fishing and the fact that some target display markets are far from the coastal strip.

The ministry affirms that the wholesale central market plays a role in maintaining the stability of internal markets, namely by increasing the volume of unloaded fish. The wholesale market constitutes a link between all areas of landing and buyers. It achieves a degree of integration between areas of high production and areas of demand.

Acting in coordination with fisheries companies and factories, the ministry contributes to compensating the temporary shortage of supply in the affected fish markets.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stressed that it would continue to monitor the situation in the local fish markets and take all necessary measures to ensure the stability of supply during the period of weather conditions. -ONA

BADR AL SAMAA, OFA

Prize distribution ceremony for social media contest winners held

MUSCAT: Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals in association with Oman Football Association (OFA) holds prize distribution ceremony for social media contest winners.

Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals in collaboration with Oman Football Association (OFA) had recently run a social media contest on Instagram and Facebook for the football lovers namely "Score with Badr and Win".

In the Instagram and Facebook Reels, the national football players of Oman asked a series of questions to the to the social media users to test their knowledge about the game.

Owing to the immense support and following for the game of football in Oman and also football being the national sport of Oman, the contest witnessed a lot of engagement from the users and many of them responded with the right answers. For each question winners were chose through lucky draw system and in total 29 winners were selected.

A gift handing over ceremony was held in the conference hall of Oman Football Association. The gifts to the winners were handed over by the management of OFA; Hilal Al Sinani, General Secretary, Shabib Al Hosni, Assistant General Secretary and Dr. Majid Al Wardi, Head of Medical Services and management of Badr Al Samaa; Firsath Hassan, Executive Director and Sameer PT, CEO.

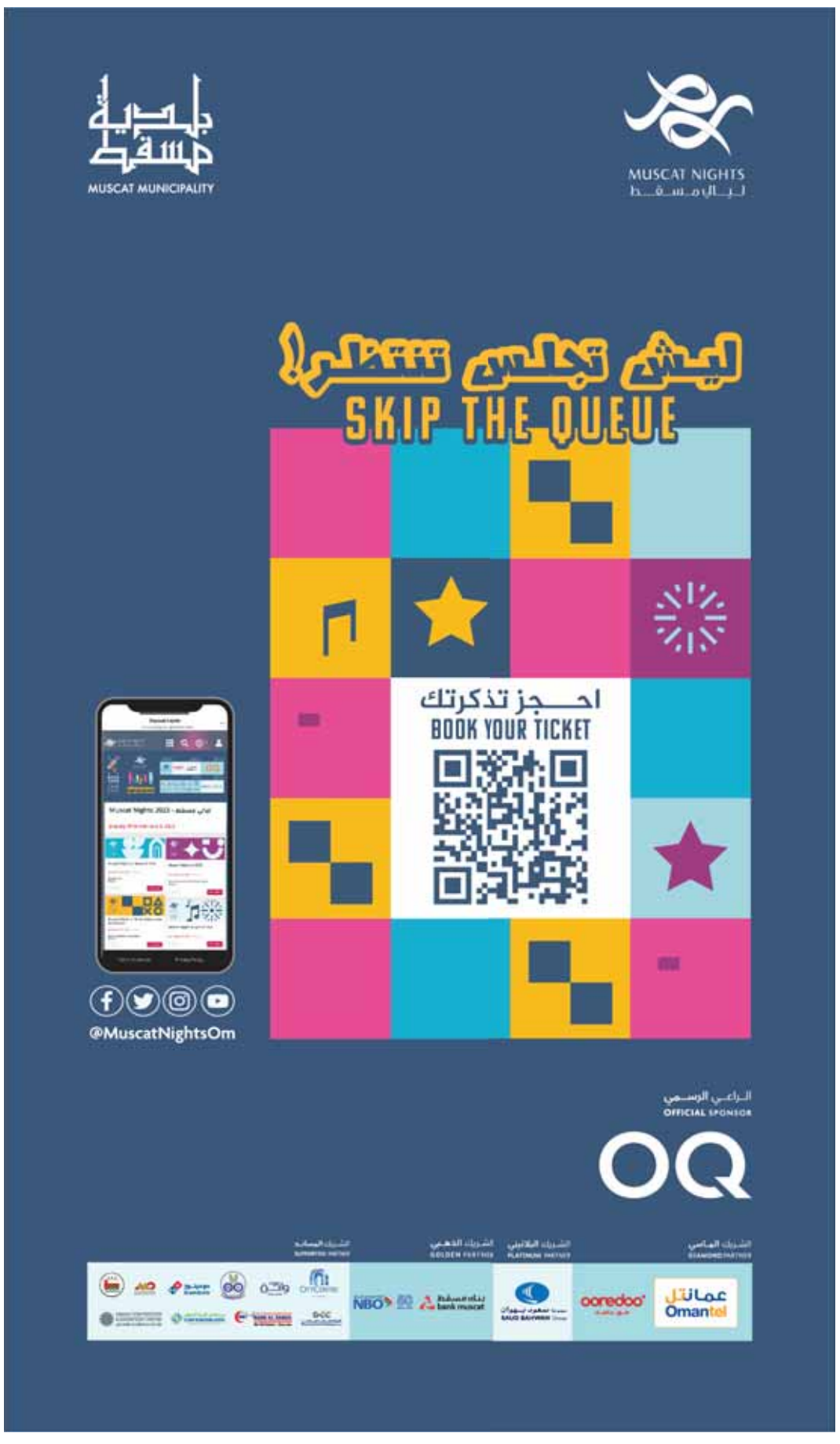
A co-branded T-Shirt, Executive Health Check-Up and a hypermarket gift voucher was given to the winners.

Speaking on this occasion, Hilal Al Sinani told that the journey with Badr Al Samaa has been incredible and he appreciated the extraordinary medical support provided by Badr Al Samaa to OFA.

Firsath Hassan assured continuous support to OFA and said that sport is the best was to send across the message of fitness and good health. He said we will continue to support all sports in Oman.

Sameer PT congratulated the winners and thanked the national football team players to associate with the campaign. He said the love for football in Oman is incredible and Badr Al Samaa will always be shoulder to shoulder with quality healthcare services for OFA.

2023 is the milestone year of Badr Al Samaa's and OFA's incredible journey as partners as it marks 10 years of association. The ceremony was anchored by Asif Shah, Head Branding and Communication, Badr Al Samaa.



Muscat Nights

OMAN AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION, A HUB FOR GAMING

AS PART of Muscat Nights, Oman Automobile Association is hosting several activities and programmes targeting the youth and electronic games lovers at well-equipped halls, thus making it a most favoured destination for youth and families.

The simulation games are the main attraction along with the screens and halls that provide the visitors an amazing experience of role play as the games enable the gamers to generate their favourite characters in virtual reality.

The quiz contests and the strategic games are favoured by the youth, which made Muscat Municipality introduce a many such games.

The activities of Muscat Nights also include several challenging competitions including drifting, E-gaming and gaming truck. New educational and adventure electronic games have also been introduced at Oman Automobile Association.

There are trucks for sale of food, antiques, garments, sports supplies, perfumes and beverages besides a pavilion that has been allocated for family businesses and SMEs for displaying their various products. It is worth mentioning that the selection of holding the youth activities at Oman Automobile Association comes with the keenness of Muscat Municipality for strengthening its ties with the establishments specialised in introducing the youth activities.

The entry fee at Oman Automobile Association is OMR 3.000 for all activities held at the site including the stage, the shows, games rooms and open yards with the food trucks and restaurants and the other shopping outlets at Oman Automobile Association.

The simulation games are the main attraction along with the screens and halls that provide the visitors an amazing experience of role play as the games enable the gamers to generate their favourite characters in virtual reality.

Omran Group opens 'Walk In' Creative Art Space expo

This art space will be a permanent platform that will be used to display the works of Omani artists

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) celebrated yesterday the opening of the unique 'Walk In' Creative Art Space at The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. This initiative falls within the framework of the 'Creatourism' programme, one of the Group's initiatives to promote Oman's rich and diverse art, culture and heritage in its various developments and hotels, as well as giving creative minds ample opportunities to showcase their talents. This art space is a permanent platform that will be used to display the works of prominent Omani artists.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HE Sayyed Said bin Sultan Al Busiadi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, and witnessed the presence of the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Omran Group's CEO, and several officials and national artists.

Speaking on occasion, Sayyed Said bin Sultan Al Busiadi said, "The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is working toward activating the cultural strategy 2021-2040 by supporting platforms and initiatives that promote Omani art and culture. In particular, those that achieve the eight values that underpin our strategy. By supporting these initiatives we delivering on the mission of our strategy. This encompasses organising and developing cultural works and creating the appropriate environment to foster creativity to strengthen the country's cultural identity".

"Supporting platforms that celebrate the creative work of Omani artists fulfil the values of the cultural strategy. This 'Walk In' Creative Art Space, and the 'Creatourism' initiative under which it falls, are exactly such platforms. They bring together creative minds from all over the country to showcase the breadth and depth of art, culture, and heritage in Oman while contributing to the growth and development of the country's tourism sector."

The art space, located at one of the main entrances of the OCEC, will serve as a permanent space that celebrates creative arts. Currently, it features more than 30 specially curated art pieces by talented Omani artists, including Alia Al Farsi, Anwar Sonya, Asila Juma, Budoor Al Riyami, Gaith Al Siyabi, Hassan Meer, Idris Al Hooti, Israa Al-Balushi, Majeda Alhinai, Marwa Al- Kaabi, Mazin Al-Harthi, Moosa Omar, Nada Al Masoudi and Ruqayia Al Balushi.

Hassan Meer, the Art & Culture Expert at Omran Group, commented on the Art Space, saying, "As part of our 'Creatourism' initiative, we aim to give local artists a platform to showcase their talent and celebrate their creative artworks. Moreover, we aim to leverage the initiative to enrich our assets with creative arts by local artists, utilising their skills and capabilities to enhance the country's tourist experiences, primarily through art and culture-related shops, exhibitions, and activities at our tourist facilities."

The Omran Group has continued to develop various programmes and activities, such as the 'Creatourism' programme, as part of its commitment to nurturing, inspiring and promoting promising local talent. Furthermore, these efforts contribute to preserving and showcasing the Sultanate's cultural heritage through the Group's numerous hotels and development projects. It also showcases the Group's commitment to its sustainability framework, which is based on four main pillars: economy, society, environment, and cultural heritage.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Breast cancer tops Oman's cancer list

Dr. Muna Al Habsi

Dr. Taha Al Lawati

Dr. Zahid Al Mandhari

< FROM A1

Dr. Zahid Al Mandhari said: "The number of new cases reported annually is about 2,000, and this number is increasing due to the increase in the average age, as the possibility of cancer has a direct relationship with the age of the person, but there are other reasons that may play a role in this noticeable increase, such as a change in lifestyle like the lack of exercise, fast food, smoking and other causes."

Dr. Taha Al Lawati stated that the latest statistics published by the Ministry of Health in 2019 indicated that the total cancer cases among new and registered Omanis reached 2089 cases and 200 cases among residents.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Oman, Luxembourg discuss ways to boost economic ties

LUXEMBOURG: A session of talks was held here on Tuesday between the Sultanate of Oman and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The talks touched on means of promoting the economic relations between the two countries and encouraging SMEs to invest in Oman. It also covered the cooperation in a set of areas including tourism, ports and green hydrogen. The Omani side was represented in the meeting by Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Salim Al Harthy, Oman's Ambassador to Luxembourg, while Luxembourg was represented by Carlo Thelen, CEO of the Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce. – ONA

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Role of AI in achieving SDG 4 highlighted

MUSCAT: A regional workshop on the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in promoting fairness and progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) began at the Governorate of Muscat on Tuesday. The two-day workshop highlights pioneering experiences and practices in this field.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr. Muna Salim Al Jardani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Vocational Training.

The event coincides with marking the International Day of Education. It is organized by the Ministry of Education, represented by Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science in cooperation with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO).

Experts from various parts of the world are taking part in the workshop. Those include experts from UNESCO, the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS) and the Regional Centre for Educational Planning (RCEP) at Sharjah, among others.

The workshop aims to shed light on the efforts of Arab and Islamic countries in promoting fairness and progress towards achieving SDG 4 through AI applications. – ONA

INVITATION TO TENDER

SOHAR ALUMINIUM

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. :	**2022-ENG-SOW-0063**
Tender Title :	Electronic EHS Permits
Scope :	Vendor shall study and design SA online Risk Assessment & EHS work permits as per the existing SA requirement and processes from design to Implementation of the product in all SA process.
Tender No. :	**2022-ENG-SOW-0059**
Tender Title :	Supply of computer – Laptop
Scope :	Vendor shall supply of new Laptops with similar or higher specifications as per Sohar Aluminium Technical Specifications. With on-site warranty support (services & spare parts) for the laptop models procured, this include repair jobs whenever required. Vendor should take care of the logistics. Preventive maintenance every quarter.
Tender No. :	**2023-ENG-SOW-0002**
Tender Title :	Cyber Security Assessment Findings Closure – SIEM
Scope :	The SIEM solution must be On-Prem.The proposed SIEM solution should include SOAR and UEBA ,the license activation and go-live of SOAR/UEBA should be after the successful completion and matureness of SIEM solution. Implementation should be carried out by certified engineer, including building use cases as per Sohar Aluminium requirements.

Start Date for Issuing Tender Documents	Last Date for Applying Tender Documents	Last Date for Tender Submission
01 February 2023	31 January 2023	15 February 2023

Kindly send your email and company profile to: **tender@sohar-aluminium.com**

For list of active tenders visit: **https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing**

WORLD

Myanmar army accused of war crimes, case filed

Complainants are seeking punishment for the crimes they allege were perpetrated by the country's army when the government was overthrown in a military coup and during a crackdown on Rohingyas in 2017

FRANKFURT: A human rights group and 16 people from Myanmar have filed a criminal complaint against Myanmar's military accusing it of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Fortify Rights is among the complainants seeking punishment for the crimes they allege were perpetrated by the country's army after 2021 when the government was overthrown in a military coup and during a crackdown on Rohingyas in 2017.

Residing in different countries, the 16 complainants belong to Myanmar's various ethnic groups including Rohingya, the dominant Burman and minority Chin communities.

What do we know about the complaint?

According to Fortify Rights a 215 pages-long complaint letter draws on more than 1,000 interviews which were conducted by the rights group since 2013 and on Myanmar army's leaked records.

In the letter, complainants have alleged that Myanmar's military "systematically killed, raped, tortured, imprisoned, disappeared, persecuted, and committed other acts that amount to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes," Fortify Rights, the campaign group which is leading the legal case, said in a statement.

The case has been lodged with Germany's Federal Public Prosecutor General under universal jurisdiction which allows the prosecution of grave crimes irrespective of where the crime was perpetrated.

"We trust in Germany to open an investigation and seek justice for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed by the military and its leaders in Myanmar," said Nickey Diamond, also a member of the board at Fortify Rights.

Investigation underway

The federal prosecutor's office in Germany has declined to comment on the complaint. Before the case can go to court, the office will have to decide on filing an indictment.

A probe concerning the actions of Myanmar generals is already underway at the International Court of Justice, while a genocide case is before the the International Criminal Court. Activists have also filed cases in national courts of Argentina and Turkey.

— DW

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FROM DETENTION CAMP

France repatriates 47 women, children from camp in Syria

PARIS: France announced on Tuesday taking home 15 women and 32 children who were held in a militant detention camp in northwestern Syria, as Western countries continue to face humanitarian pressure to repatriate their nationals from extremists prisons.

The French foreign ministry said in a statement that the repatriated adults were handed over to the "competent judicial authorities," whereas the minors were delivered to child assistance services and will undergo medical and social monitoring.

A statement by the French Ministry of Justice and anti-terrorism department added that there were arrest warrants for seven of the repatriated woman, while eight had been placed in custody. The women are aged 19 to 59.

What we know about the repatriations

The 47 repatriated nationals were all brought from the Roj prison camp in northeastern Syria, located some 15 kilometres (9 miles) away from Syria's borders with Turkey and Iraq. The camp holds tens of thousands of foreigners with suspected links to the so-called IS.

For nearly a decade, militants from across the world, including Europe and other Western countries, flocked to northern Syria and Iraq to join the militant group, which captured swathes of land within the two countries from 2014 until its fall in 2019.

Humanitarian organisations have been pressing the countries of origin for years to repatriate their nationals, to alleviate the pressure on local authorities. The conditions within the camps have been described as dire, mostly due to overcrowding and a lack of resources.

France has been particularly reluctant, with the government arguing that the return of potentially radicalised individuals poses security risks in a country which has seen many terrorist attacks in recent years.

This is the third large-scale repatriation by the French government. Last October, 15 women and 40 children were repatriated, preceded by 16 women and 35 children last July.

Tuesday's repatriation follows a statement by the UN Committee against Torture, which said France was violating UN conventions against torture for failing to repatriate its nationals from prison camps in Syria. — DW

TO BUY THE FOOTBALL TEAM

Jeff Bezos to sell 'Washington Post' to buy NFL team

NEW YORK: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is likely to sell the American newspaper Washington Post to buy the football team Washington Commanders, according to media report.

The Washington Post is believed to be up for sale by one logical suitor, who intends to submit a proposal, according to a source with firsthand knowledge of the matter. The source declined to identify the suitor. A second newspaper buyer and seller claimed to have heard rumours that the publication might be for sale. However, as per several media reports, a spokesperson for Bezos said the Washington Post is not for sale.

A spokesperson for the journal — the owner of which, News Corp, also owns the New York Post, also stated the paper is not for sale.

Notably, Bezos bought the Washington Post in 2013 for $250 million. New York Post reported that Bezos is 'looking to clear the way' to get the Commanders from embattled owner Dan Snyder. Reportedly, the Commanders, who have won three Super Bowls, lifting the Lombardi Trophy in 1983, 1988 and 1992, are seen by their potential investors as a sleeping giant franchise in a major market.

According to reports, Bezos is facing trouble because the struggling owner of the Commanders, Dan Snyder, is still angry about the illustrious newspaper's series of exposes exposing a poisonous management culture at the team, where bosses including Snyder are allegedly responsible for enabling sexual harassment.

Meanwhile, Front Office Sports, a multiplatform media brand that covers the influence of sports on business and culture reported that Bank of America, hired by Snyder to auction the Commanders, "continues to court Bezos — even if there are indications that Snyder doesn't want to sell" to the Amazon founder, media report said.

— ANI

IS EUROPE READY?

Artificial intelligence is coming to your workplace

YVERDON-LES-BAINS: Renan Rodrigues had been working as a food delivery driver at Swiss company Smood for about a year and a half when "the robot" took over. This is how the 33-year-old describes the algorithm-powered program that allocated deliveries and shifts for him and his colleagues.

Smood had used such software since he started working there in 2020, Rodrigues told DW. But at a certain point, "the robot" became entirely responsible for planning his working day, according to him, and appealing to human managers was no longer possible.

The goal of "the robot" was to organize deliveries in the most efficient way possible. From his employer's perspective, Rodrigues is sure that it worked. When he started at Smood in the small Swiss town of Yverdon-Les-Bains, it was typical to do around two deliveries an hour, he said. By the time he left, it was more like four or five.

"I quickly understood that it would be a disaster on a human level," Rodrigues told DW. He saw "the robot" pitting employees against each other. The quickest, best-performing drivers got more deliveries, he claimed. Ultimately, he said, he found himself getting less work. His zero-hour contract didn't guarantee him a minimum number of working hours or a fixed monthly wage, and he found it difficult to anticipate his income.

"For me, the worst part was to tell me that I have a stopwatch running at all times, hours and places, when I'm already being tracked by GPS systems, for my speed, etc.," he said. It created what he called "social stress." Instead of greeting a restaurateur when picking up a meal, he would bark at them to hurry up, running in and out. "It's sad on a human level."

Reckoning with robots

What Rodrigues and his colleagues dubbed "the robot" is also known as algorithmic management, when workplace decisions are made according to computer-powered calculations known as algorithms. It is closely linked to artificial intelligence (AI), which according to the European Commission "refers to systems that display intelligent behavior by analyzing their environment and taking actions — with some degree of autonomy — to achieve specific goals."

The use of algorithmic management is particularly associated with the gig economy, companies like Uber and Deliveroo, whose workers are typically freelance or on zero-hour contracts.

In fact, AI tools are quickly making inroads into various sectors of the economy.

For white-collar office jobs, they can be deployed in recruitment or to track performance. A 2022 survey of 1,000 companies by professional services consultancy PwC found that between a sixth and a quarter had used AI in recruitment or employee retention in the past 12 months. Among the companies that were most advanced in the use of AI, around 40% had used it to improve employee experience and skills acquisition, or to increase productivity.

Companies can use data about employees or candidates in a variety of ways, as a report published last year by OpenMind, a nonprofit initiative of Spanish bank BBVA, highlighted. "Human resources professionals make decisions about recruitment, that is, who to hire; in worker appraisals and promotion considerations; to identify when people are likely to leave their jobs; and to select future leaders. People analytics are also used to manage workers' performance."

Take the example of HireVue, a US company that, according to its website, has more than 800 clients, including major multinationals like Amazon, G4S and Unilever. Using video job interviews, the company claims it can massively speed up recruitment, offer candidates greater flexibility and actually make hiring fairer.

Algorithms can be trained to eliminate unconscious race and gender biases common in human hirers, so the argument goes. Citing the example of a British customer, the Co-Operative Bank, HireVue said its tools helped push down a gender bias favoring men from a 70/30 ratio to 50/50 — gender parity.

However, a number of experts and journalists have in recent years flagged the risk of reproducing racist, ableist or sexist bias in AI-enabled recruitment. A US study last year found that AI-trained robots repeatedly discriminated against women and non-white people.

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has even issued guidance on the use of workplace AI, warning that "the use of these tools may disadvantage job applicants and employees with disabilities." What if you scored poorly on a test that required high keyboard dexterity, for example?

Legal changes in the pipeline

In the European Union, two key pieces of bloc-wide legislation are on the way that should affect the way AI is deployed at work. The European Commission has stressed that, in general, AI can be beneficial for citizens and businesses, but that it also poses a risk to fundamental rights.

Under the proposed AI act, employment, management of workers and access to self-employment are specifically mentioned as high-risk uses. For makers and buyers of such AI tools, the law should provide specific obligations before products hit the market, chiefly a conformity assessment.

This test would scrutinize, among other things, the quality of data sets used to train AI systems (poorly trained systems can produce biased results), transparency provisions for buyers and levels of human oversight. AI developers would also have monitoring obligations once a product hits the market.

From a workers' perspective, what the AI legislation doesn't do is specifically regulate how it can be used by your boss, according to Aida Ponce Del Castillo of the European Trade Union Institute. "It's a missed opportunity," the researcher told DW. The obligations fall on the sellers of technology. Certain technologies are banned outright under the AI act — like the "social scoring" system associated with the Chinese government — but this doesn't have huge implications for the workplace.

The second upcoming piece of relevant legislation is the Platform Work Directive, Ponce said. It has a dedicated chapter on algorithmic management, but as the name suggests, it only covers the estimated 28 million workers in the EU platform sector. The proposed law, according to the European Commission, "increases transparency in the use of algorithms by digital labor platforms, ensures human monitoring on their respect of working conditions and gives the right to contest automated decisions."

Draft laws

These draft laws — both still working their way through the EU legislative process — should give workers the tools to challenge potentially problematic use of AI by their bosses, Ponce said, cautioning that they won't outright prohibit them. Two things she believes should be banned are emotion-reading tech (one of the most contested forms of AI; many experts doubt that emotions are simple or universal enough to measure) and the suspension of accounts for gig workers like Uber drivers.

"I don't want to say that AI is bad. I've dedicated 20 years of my life to studying technologies," Ponce said. It's always about managing the risks for people, she said.

Former delivery driver Rodrigues' feelings about "the robot" are clear enough: he believes there ought to be much more regulation on what companies can and can't do. He was ultimately fired by Smood, he admitted. But Rodrigues he explained that he doesn't mind: he has landed a training contract for his dream job, and is now set to become a train driver. — DW

WORLD

India successfully tests indigenously developed operating system 'BharOS'

The BharOS is an Indian government-funded project to develop a free and open-source operating system (OS) for use in government and public systems

NEW DELHI: India's Union Minister for Communications, Electronics and Information Technology and Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday tested 'BharOS' an indigenous operating system developed by the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT).

"Congratulations to everyone involved in developing the system. For the very first time when our Prime Minister Narendra Modiji talked about digital India 8 years ago, some of our friends mocked him, but today, technocrats, innovators, industries and policymakers, and academic institutions of the country have accepted his vision after eight years," he said. Union Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw was also present at the event. "There will be difficulties in this journey and there are many people around the world who will bring difficulties and will not want any such system to be successful," Vaishnav said.

BharOS — a new mobile operating system focused on privacy and security. A mobile operating system is a software that is the core interface on a smartphone like Android by Google and iOS by Apple.

The BharOS is an Indian government-funded project to develop a free and open-source operating system (OS) for use in government and public systems.

The project aims to reduce the dependence on foreign OS in smartphones and promote the use of locally developed technology. It is a huge leap forward to create an indigenous ecosystem and a self-reliant future.

BharOS Services are currently being provided to organisations that have stringent privacy and security requirements and whose users handle sensitive information that requires confidential communications on restricted apps on mobiles. Such users require access to private cloud services through private 5G networks.

The BharOS was developed by JandK Operations Private Limited (JandKops), which has been incubated by IIT Madras Pravartak Technologies Foundation, a Section 8 (Not for Profit) Company established by IIT Madras. The Foundation is funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, under its National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NMICPS). It aspires to put India on par with those few countries that currently possess such capabilities.

Addressing a Press Conference on January 19 to announce this Indian Mobile Operating System, Prof. V. Kamakoti, Director, of IIT Madras, said, "BharOS Service is a Mobile Operating System built on a foundation of trust, with a focus on providing users more freedom, control, and flexibility to choose and use only the apps that fit their needs. This innovative system promises to revolutionise the way users think about security and privacy on their mobile devices."

"IIT Madras looks forward to working closely with many more private industries, government agencies, strategic agencies and telecom service providers to increase the usage and adoption of BharOS in our Country," he added.

BharOS comes with No Default Apps (NDA).

This means that users are not forced to use apps that they may not be familiar with or that they may not trust.

Additionally, this approach allows users to have more control over the permissions that apps have on their device, as they can choose to only allow apps that they trust to access certain features or data on their device.

According to Karthik Ayyar, Director, JandK Operations Pvt Ltd., the start-up that developed this Mobile Operating System, said, "In addition, BharOS offers 'Native Over The Air' (NOTA) updates that can help to keep the devices secure. NOTA updates are automatically downloaded and installed on the device, without the need for the user to manually initiate the process. This ensures that the device is always running the latest operating system version, including the latest security patches and bug fixes. With NDA, PASS, and NOTA, BharOS ensures that Indian mobile phones are trustworthy."

BharOS provides access to trusted apps from organisation-specific Private App Store Services (PASS). A PASS provides access to a curated list of apps that have been thoroughly vetted and have met certain security and privacy standards of organisations. This means users can be confident that the apps they are installing are safe to use and have been checked for any potential security vulnerabilities or privacy concerns. — ANI

UNITED STATES

7 dead, 1 critically injured in California shootings; suspect nabbed

WASHINGTON: At least seven people were killed and one person critically injured after shootings were reported from two locations in the Half Moon Bay area in north California of the United States, CNN reported citing local officials who said that a 67-year-old suspect is now in custody.

According to San Mateo Board of Supervisors President Dave Pine, one shooting incident occurred at a mushroom farm and another near a trucking facility, around two miles from the farm, as per the CNN report. Meanwhile, on Monday afternoon, two students were killed in a targeted shooting at Des Moines in Iowa at a charter school, according to US-based news publication The Hill. The two victims identified as teenaged students were taken to the hospital for treatment in a very 'critical' condition where they succumbed to their injuries.

Earlier on Saturday a gunman shot dead 11 people in a popular dance studio in Southern California's Monterey Park.

Meanwhile, regarding the shootings in Half Mon Bay, San Mateo County Sheriff Christina Corpus addressing a media briefing said that deputies found had one person dead and another injured at the first location, and soon after three more people were found dead at a separate site.

The Sheriff described the shooting as "horrific" and stated that the suspect who was located in his vehicle in the parking lot of a substation in Half Moon Bay was taken into custody and and a semi-automatic handgun was found in his vehicle.

"It's a tragedy that we hear about far too often but today has hit home here in San Mateo County," CNN quoted the Sheriff.

Dave Pine in a statement released on the County of San Mateo website said, "We are sickened by today's tragedy in Half Moon Bay. The scourge of gun violence has sadly hit home. We have not even had time to grieve for those lost in the terrible shooting in Monterey Park. Gun violence must stop."— ANI

SPORTS

CLINCH SERIES 3-0

India beat NZ by 90 runs in 3rd ODI

INDORE : Centuries from openers Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill followed by three-wicket hauls from Shardul Thakur and Kuldeep Yadav help India defeat New Zealand by 90 runs in the third and final ODI of the series at the Holkar Cricket Stadium in Indore on Tuesday.

With this win, Men in Blue blanked New Zealand in the three-match ODI series 3-0. Shardul and Kuldeep both bagged three-wicket while Yuzvendra Chahal claimed two conceding 43 runs.

Devon Conway was the highest run scorer for New Zealand with a blistering knock of 138 runs off 100 balls.

Defending 386 runs, India gave New Zealand a big blow as Hardik Pandya bowled Finn Allen on the second ball of the first over.

Despite losing Allen in the very first over of the innings did not stop Devon Conway from slamming Indian bowlers all around the ground as the New Zealand opener kept scoring boundaries at regular intervals.

Henry Nicholls joined hands with Conway to keep the visitors in a hunt for steady runs chase. The duo of Nicholls and Conway took their team's total beyond 100 runs in the 15th over of second innings. The duo also stitched up the 100-run partnership, however, the stand was broken by Kuldeep Yadav who dismissed Nicholls after scoring 42 off 40 deliveries.

Conway looked in supreme touch and raced to his century in 71 balls to keep New Zealand alive in the chase in the 24th over. Captain Rohit Sharma then brought Shardul Thakur back into the attack and the pacer gave New Zealand two back-to-back blows. Shardul dismissed Daryl Mitchell for 24 then he improved his delivery and removed Tom Latham.

In the 28th over of the innings, Thakur provided India with another wicket as he sent new batter Glenn Phillips packing after scoring just 5 runs. After losing five-wicket, Conway kept hitting Indian bowlers all around the ground with batter Michael Bracewell.

A terrific inning of 138 in just 100 balls with 12 fours and 8 sixes by Devon Conway came to an end as Umran Malik dismissed him in the 32nd over of the innings. New batter Mitchell Santner then came out to bat.

In the 37th over of the innings, Kuldeep dismissed a dangerous batter Michael Bracewell for 26 runs off 22 deliveries, leaving the visitors tottering at 269/ 7. Lockie Ferguson fell prey to Kuldeep's sharp delivery in the 39th over of the game. In the next over Yuzvendra Chahal bagged his first wicket of the match, dismissing Jacob Duffy.

Earlier, centuries from openers Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill and a half-century from all-rounder Hardik Pandya guided India to a massive total of 385/9 in 50 overs. Put to bat first by New Zealand, India got off to a fantastic start.

Openers Shubman Gill and skipper Rohit Sharma showed no mercy on Kiwi bowlers and scored with attacking intent from the word go. Gill smashed pacer Lockie Ferguson for 22 runs in the eighth over which included four boundaries and a six. India crossed the 50-run mark in 7.4 overs.

At the end of the first 10 overs and the mandatory powerplay, India were 82/0, with Rohit (39*) and Gill (41*). Gill brought up his sixth ODI fifty in just 33 balls with a wristy whip to Mitchell Santner in the 12th over. Rohit also brought up his 49th ODI fifty with a huge six on Santner's delivery in the 14th over in 41 balls.

The batters continued to feast on Kiwi bowlers. India reached the 100-run mark in 12.4 overs, without losing a wicket, crossed the 150-run mark in 17.5 overs and touched 200-run mark in 24.1 overs.

Rohit looked in supreme touch and brought up his 30th ODI ton, his first since January 2020 in the 50-over format in just 83 balls. Gill also reached his fourth ODI ton in just 72 balls, hitting Blair Tickner for a four. All-rounder Michael Bracewell delivered the breakthrough for Kiwis, ending the 222-run stand between the openers. Rohit was dismissed for 101 of 85 balls, with nine fours and six sixes.

In the very next over, Tickner dismissed Gill for a well-made 112 of 78 balls, with 13 fours and five sixes. India were 230/2 at this point. Virat Kohli and Ishan Kishan were the fresh pair on the crease. Both continued with the attacking gameplay exhibited by the openers. India reached the 250-run mark in 32 overs. -ANI

OMAN D20

Qurum Thunders and Darsait Titans in final

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Darsait Titans snatched win from Ruwi Rangers by 51 runs while Qurum Thunders dominate Amerat Royals to claim victory by 4 wickets in the semifinals of the Oman D20 at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Al Amerat.

Darsait Titans thump Ruwi Rangers

Batting first, Darsait Titans got off to a steady start courtesy their top-order. The Titans' most profilic batmen Zeeshan Maqsood (73 of 42;4x4,7x6) turned up to the occasion to bolster a magnificent half century well supported by the young Sahil Shaik (37 of 19;3x4,3x6) to take them to 171 in 20 overs.

Mohd Nadeem (2/27) was the pick of the bowlers for the Rangers. In response, the Rangers started off well to chase down the total but loosing wickets in the middle overs courtesy of Md Yousuf's (4/20), Zeeshan Maqsood's (2/21) and Jan Shafiq's (2/21) bundled the defending champions to just 120. Ruwi Rangers were unbeaten in the league stage of the Oman D20, unfortunate to succumb to the semi finals.

Zeeshan Maqsood was awarded Man of the Match for his all-round display and taking the Titans through to the Finals.

Qurum Thunders put the Amerat Royals to bat first. The Royals started off well but kept losing wickets at regular intervals making Amerat's batsmen count each run in their innings. Amerat Royals could only manage 89 runs bundling down in 17 overs.

Zeeshan Maqsood - Darsait Titans.

Ayaan Khan - Qurum Thunders

Munis Ansari (3/9) was the pick of the bowlers along with Samay-Shrivastav (2/16) and Akash Mohite (2/32).

In response, Qurum Thunders easily chased down the target confirming their berth in the Finals. Ayaan Khan (26 of 20) was awarded the Man of the Match for scoring crucial runs and picking a wicket.

OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES

The price of Oman oil has increased, with prices for delivery by March 2023 reaching $85.22, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil rose by 85 cents from the price of Monday, which was at $84.37. - ONA

MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,786.21 points, up by 0.15 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.37 per cent at 483.79 points. Gulf Mushroom Products, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while, Takaful Oman, down 9.52 per cent, was the top loser.

Tethys oil production reaches 868,589 barrels

The net entitlement, Tethys Oil's share of production after government take, amounted to 467,564 barrels of oil, corresponding to 54 per cent of the total production

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Tethys Oil's share of production from Blocks 3&4 onshore in Oman during the fourth quarter (Q4) 2022, before government take, amounted to 868,589 barrels of oil, corresponding to 9,441 barrels of oil per day.

The net entitlement, Tethys Oil's share of production after government take, amounted to 467,564 barrels of oil, corresponding to 54 per cent of the total production. A total of 424,444 barrels of oil were sold in the quarter with an achieved oil price of $93.3 per barrel.

Net entitlement is the share of production available for sale by Tethys Oil and is calculated monthly in accordance with the terms of the Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) for Blocks 3&4. The net entitlement will vary depending on the level of production, oil price and recoverable costs incurred during the period.

The oil sales of 424,444 barrels in the fourth quarter of 2022 reflect the October, November and December lifting nominations. Consequently, the fourth quarter of 2022 achieved oil price reflects the Official Selling Price (OSP) of October to December 2022, the average official selling price in that same period was $92.90.

Tethys Oil's interim report for the fourth quarter and year-end report for 2022 will be published on 7 February 2023.

Tethys Oil is an oil exploration and production company with a focus on onshore areas with known oil discoveries.

The company's core area is the Sultanate of Oman, where it holds interests in Blocks 3&4, Block 49, Block 56 and Block 58. Tethys Oil has net working interest 2P reserves of 26.2 million barrels of oil and net working interest 2C Contingent Resources of 15.6 million barrels of oil and had an average oil production of 11,136 barrels per day during 2021.

EMPOWERING SMES

Agreement signed to support SMEs

MUSCAT: To empower small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and support the development of their businesses, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Sharakah and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (ASMED).

The MoU aims to support entrepreneurship, empower SMEs, and enhance the sustainability of their business.

The MoU was inked by Halima Rashid Al Zari'ee, Chairperson of ASMED and Ali Ahmed Muqaibal, CEO of Sharakah.

Halima Rashid Al Zar'ee, Chairperson of ASMED, said, "This agreement comes to enhance the existing cooperation and partnership with Sharakah, as we seek to enhance the authority's role in empowering SMEs. We are committed to consolidating the presence of SMEs in all fields to increase their contribution to the GDP and the development of the national economy."

Ali Ahmed Muqaibal, CEO of Sharakah said, "The objective of this collaboration is to expand and boost the support extended to SMEs.

"The MoU will contribute to the advancement of entrepreneurship in Oman, boost the SME sector's contribution to the economy, and make small businesses more active and robust." -ONA

CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN

Treasury bills worth OMR105mn issued

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) raised OMR105 million by way of allotting treasury bills on Tuesday.

The value of the allotted treasury bills for a maturity period of 28 days amounted to OMR40 million. The average accepted price reached OMR99.673 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.665 per OMR100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.26594 per cent and 4.27994 per cent, respectively.

Whereas, the value of the allotted treasury bills for a maturity period of 91 days amounted to OMR65 million.

The average accepted price reached OMR98.788 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at OMR98.785 per OMR100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.86101 per cent and 4.92064 per cent, respectively.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks with the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The CBO acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 5.00 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 5.50 per cent.

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. -ONA

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

NEP signs pact with Daleel Petroleum on entrepreneurship

MUSCAT: The National Employment Programme (NEP) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with Daleel Petroleum Company to upgrade the skills of Omani nationals in the field of self-employment and entrepreneurship. The aim is to enable Omani youth to make use of the self-employment initiative.

Training programmes

The MoC includes allocating several training and qualification programmes to youth to directly join the labour market. It provides for introducing technical, scientific and innovative disciplines that keep pace with the latest advances in technology, the information revolution and future systems.

It also included the importance of promoting the culture of personal enterprises and educating youth to explore this area of business. -ONA

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Gulf Mushroom Products, up 10 per cent, was the top gainer while Takaful Oman, down 9.52 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,786.21 points, up by 0.15 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.37 per cent at 483.79 points.

Gulf Mushroom Products, up 10 per cent, was the top gainer while Takaful Oman, down 9.52 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of HSBC Bank Oman were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 345 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR1.67 million, with more than 10.82 million shares changing hands. Out of 42 traded securities, 10 advanced, 16 declined, and 16 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net sellers for OMR36,000 while foreign investors were net buyers for OMR32,000, followed by GCC & Arab investors for OMR4,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,734.15 points, up 0.2 per cent. Prices of Oman Qatar Insurance, HSBC Bank Oman, United Finance, Oman & Emirates Investment, and Ominvest were up by 5.63 per cent, 2.53 per cent, 1.59 per cent, 1.37 per cent and 0.48 per cent respectively. Prices of Takaful Oman, Global Financial Investments, Oman Arab Bank, Oman United Insurance, and Al Anwar Investment were down by 10.00 per cent, 1.70 per cent, 1.52 per cent, 1.38 per cent and 1.16 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,917.04 points, down 0.69 per cent. Prices of Gulf Mushroom Products was up by 10.00 per cent. Prices of Raysut Cement, A'Saffa Foods, National Aluminium, Oman Fisheries, and Voltamp Energy were down by 5.71 per cent, 4.02 per cent, 3.08 per cent, 2.13 per cent and 1.08 per cent respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.56 per cent before closing at 1,654.09 points. Prices of Phoenix Power, Sembcorp Salalah, SMN Power Holding and National Gas were up by 6.00 per cent, 5.33 per cent, 2.00 per cent and 0.99 per cent respectively. Prices of OIFC, Renaissance Services and Oman National Engineering were down by 3.08 per cent, 1.79 per cent and 0.85 per cent respectively. — **United Securities**

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

INDECIES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev . Value	Diff	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	4,789.63	4,776.79	4,786.21	4,778.95	7.26	0.15
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,737.80	7,716.23	7,734.15	7,718.75	15.40	0.20
Industry Index	5,958.38	5,917.04	5,917.04	5,958.38	-41.34	-0.69
Services Index	1,654.09	1,642.18	1,654.09	1,644.96	9.13	0.56
MSX Shariah Index	486.74	483.79	483.79	485.60	-1.81	-0.37
MSX TR INDEX	6,047.72	6,031.51	6,043.40	6,034.23	9.17	0.15
FINANCIAL TR IDX	8,096.74	8,074.17	8,092.93	8,076.81	16.12	0.20
SERVICES TR IDX	1,754.77	1,742.14	1,754.77	1,745.08	9.69	0.56
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	6,203.41	6,160.37	6,160.37	6,203.41	-43.04	-0.69

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
10,829,250	1,671,598	345	23,636,921,208	10	16	16	42

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR TUESDAY, JANUARY 24

REGULAR MARKET

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RO)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	2,600	1,082	2	0.416	0.418	0.416	0.418	0.416	0.002	0.481	0.418	0.414	0.418	0.100	279,376,748
OM0000003000	Al MAHA PETROLEUM	200	180	1	0.900	0.900	0.900	0.900	0.900	0.000	0.000	0.900	0.900	0.900	0.100	62,100,000
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	23,978	22,731	10	0.948	0.948	0.948	0.948	0.948	0.000	0.000	0.948	0.928	0.948	0.100	711,000,000
OM0000003281	TAAGEER FINANCE	179,144	17,914	14	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.000	0.000	0.100	0.097	0.103	0.100	25,866,180
OM0000003398	SOHAR INT. BANK	430,388	43,900	7	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.000	0.000	0.102	0.102	0.105	0.100	468,186,354
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	5,243	2,307	1	0.440	0.440	0.440	0.440	0.440	0.000	0.000	0.440	0.438	0.440	0.100	24,200,000
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	1,457,374	406,796	55	0.279	0.280	0.279	0.279	0.280	-0.001	-0.357	0.279	0.279	0.279	0.100	2,094,284,780
OM0000001152	OMAN NAT. ENG.	70,052	8,196	10	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.118	-0.001	-0.847	0.117	0.117	0.118	0.100	16,380,000
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSUR.	4,000	1,144	1	0.286	0.286	0.286	0.286	0.290	-0.004	-1.379	0.286	0.280	0.300	0.100	28,600,000
OM0000003125	GLOBAL INV. H	10,130	578	2	0.057	0.058	0.057	0.058	0.059	-0.001	-1.695	0.058	0.056	0.058	0.100	11,600,000
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SER.	160,866	70,785	11	0.440	0.448	0.440	0.440	0.448	-0.008	-1.786	0.440	0.438	0.440	0.100	104,020,400
OM0000001525	OMAN INVST& FIN.	542,794	68,453	33	0.129	0.129	0.126	0.126	0.130	-0.004	-3.077	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.100	29,862,000
Total	12	2,886,769	644,066	147												

Parallel Market

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RO)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
OM0000002267	GULF MUSHROOM P	1,500	330	1	0.220	0.220	0.220	0.220	0.200	0.020	10.000	0.220	0.201	0.220	0.100	9,153,160
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	1,001,205	51,691	34	0.051	0.053	0.051	0.053	0.050	0.003	6.000	0.053	0.051	0.053	0.100	77,517,877
OM0000006979	OMAN QATAR INSUR.	5,562	916	2	0.160	0.169	0.160	0.169	0.160	0.009	5.625	0.169	0.168	0.169	0.100	16,900,000
OM0000004735	SEMBCORP SALALAH	1,010,715	78,623	40	0.076	0.079	0.076	0.079	0.075	0.004	5.333	0.079	0.078	0.079	0.100	75,411,184
OM0000001517	HSBC BANK OMAN	4,700,632	761,502	6	0.162	0.162	0.162	0.162	0.158	0.004	2.532	0.162	0.158	0.164	0.100	324,050,672
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	50,000	2,550	4	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.050	0.001	2.000	0.051	0.049	0.055	0.100	10,181,416
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	221,000	13,949	16	0.063	0.064	0.063	0.064	0.063	0.001	1.587	0.064	0.063	0.064	0.100	22,345,242
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	99,500	7,363	8	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.073	0.001	1.370	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.100	9,018,750
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	48,760	4,973	11	0.101	0.102	0.101	0.102	0.101	0.001	0.990	0.102	0.102	0.103	0.100	8,670,000
OM0000001095	DHOFAR INSURANCE	12,838	2,536	3	0.196	0.200	0.196	0.200	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.200	0.200	0.205	0.100	20,952,409
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	15,000	900	1	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.063	0.063	0.000	0.000	0.060	0.060	0.063	0.100	19,350,218
OM0000001608	OMAN PACKAGING	5,570	1,030	1	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.000	0.000	0.185	0.170	0.185	0.100	6,000,634
OM0000002366	AL BATINAH DEV.	16,282	684	1	0.042	0.042	0.042	0.042	0.042	0.000	0.000	0.042	0.042	0.000	0.100	1,260,000
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEER.	25,000	4,485	6	0.179	0.180	0.179	0.180	0.180	0.000	0.000	0.180	0.170	0.178	0.100	36,537,560
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	410,623	40,240	7	0.098	0.098	0.097	0.098	0.098	0.000	0.000	0.097	0.097	0.100	0.100	219,221,397
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	2,000	59	3	0.029	0.030	0.029	0.030	0.030	0.000	0.000	0.030	0.027	0.030	0.100	20,246,623
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	20,100	583	3	0.029	0.030	0.029	0.030	0.030	0.000	0.000	0.030	0.028	0.030	0.100	21,432,190
OM0000003661	VOLTAMP ENERGY	19,868	1,828	4	0.092	0.092	0.092	0.092	0.093	-0.001	-1.075	0.092	0.092	0.093	0.100	7,489,053
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	39,697	3,573	8	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.091	-0.001	-1.099	0.090	0.090	0.092	0.100	15,750,000
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	4,000	340	1	0.085	0.085	0.085	0.085	0.086	-0.001	-1.163	0.085	0.078	0.087	0.100	17,000,000
OM0000005260	OMAN ARAB BANK	8,500	1,111	4	0.132	0.132	0.130	0.130	0.132	-0.002	-1.515	0.130	0.131	0.132	0.100	217,023,300
OM0000001566	OMAN FISHERIES	24,000	2,210	4	0.093	0.093	0.092	0.092	0.094	-0.002	-2.128	0.092	0.091	0.092	0.100	16,751,213
OM0000001319	ALUMINIUM PROD.	5,300	339	3	0.063	0.064	0.063	0.063	0.065	-0.002	-3.077	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.100	2,115,001
OM0000002804	ASAFFA FOODS	12,500	2,698	4	0.219	0.219	0.215	0.215	0.224	-0.009	-4.018	0.215	0.211	0.215	0.100	25,800,000
OM0000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	22,026	2,960	6	0.138	0.138	0.132	0.132	0.140	-0.008	-5.714	0.132	0.129	0.136	0.100	26,400,000
OM0000004776	TAKAFUL OMAN	100,000	3,800	5	0.038	0.038	0.038	0.038	0.042	-0.004	-9.524	0.038	0.039	0.046	0.100	9,500,000
Total	26	7,882,178	991,273	186												

US TECH GIANT

Microsoft makes 'multibillion-dollar' investment in ChatGPT-creator OpenAI

WASHINGTON: Microsoft has confirmed it is making a 'multibillion-dollar' investment in OpenAI, the company behind the viral new AI chatbot tool called ChatGPT, CNN has reported.

Microsoft, an early investor in OpenAI, said it plans to expand its existing partnership with the company as part of a greater effort to add more artificial intelligence to its suite of products, according to a CNN report. In a separate blog post, OpenAI said the multi-year investment will be used to "develop AI that is increasingly safe, useful, and powerful."

"We formed our partnership with OpenAI around a shared ambition to responsibly advance cutting-edge AI research and democratise AI as a new technology platform," Satya Nadella, Microsoft's CEO, said in a statement.

The deepening partnership between the two companies has the potential to supercharge OpenAI's ambitious projects, including ChatGPT, which has captured the attention of - and sometimes sparked concerns from - academics, business leaders and tech enthusiasts with its ability to create provide lengthy and thorough responses to user prompts and questions, according to CNN report.

PARTNERSHIP EXPANSION: Microsoft, an early investor in OpenAI, said it plans to expand its existing partnership with the company as part of a greater effort to add more artificial intelligence to its suite of products. - **Photo used for illustrative purpose only**

The investment could also catapult Microsoft as an AI leader and ultimately pave the way for the company to incorporate ChatGPT into some of its hallmark applications, such as Word, PowerPoint and Outlook, CNN said.

As a result of its existing exclusive deal with OpenAI, Microsoft recently said it would soon add ChatGPT features to its cloud computing service, Azure, CNN said, adding that if ChatGPT becomes available on that service, businesses could use the tools directly within its apps and services, too.

The report said the investment comes days after Microsoft announced plans to lay off 10,000 employees as part of broader cost-cutting measures. Nadella said at the time that the company would continue to invest in "strategic areas for our future" and pointed to advances in artificial intelligence (AI) as "the next major wave" of computing.

OpenAI is also the company behind DALL-E, which generates a seemingly limitless range of images in response to prompts from users. Both DALL-E and ChatGPT are trained on vast amounts of data to generate content, according to the CNN report. -**ANI**

SAUDI PORTS AUTHORITY

New trade route to link Jubail Commercial Port to six global ports

RIYADH: The Saudi Ports Authority (Mawani) has revealed the addition of Jubail Commercial Port to the India Gulf Service 1 (IG1) shipping route by ocean carrier Hapag-Lloyd.

The newest cargo service will contribute to fulfilling the ambitions of the National Transport and Logistics Strategy (NTLS) to upscale the Kingdom's integration with global trade networks besides improving its score in the UNCTAD's Liner Shipping Connectivity Index to 80 points.

Kicking off on February 12, the weekly service will link the Kingdom to the ports of Jebel Ali, Karachi, Mundra, Sohar, Shuaiba, and Umm Qasar on board three containerships with an average carrying capacity of 2,400 TEUs.

A strategic trade gateway for the Kingdom's Eastern Region and its industrial and petrochemical complexes, the Arabian Gulf port is modernly equipped to handle all kinds of vessels and goods alongside delivering a host of world-class offerings to local importers and exporters.-**SPA**

GLOBAL AGENDAS

Fortune Global Forum 2023 to focus on 'New Era for Business'

ABU DHABI: The UAE's Capital will host the 2023 Fortune Global Forum from November 27 to 29, for the first time in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena), the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development (ADDED) announced.

Held under the theme 'A New Era for Business', the forum will address global agendas currently including market and trade dynamics, geopolitical tides, emerging technologies, talent in addition to workplace shifts, climate risk, and consumer trends.

Rashed Abdulkarim Al Blooshi, the undersecretary of ADDED, said, "Bringing the Fortune Global Forum to Abu Dhabi forms a critical part of our strategic economic progression roadmap, especially as we roll out our contribution to the international business development and ESG agendas alongside other global cities and enterprises, building synergies and improving life for all stakeholders. November's discussions and analyses by the C-suites, economists, reporters and think tanks in Abu Dhabi will serve to identify mutually beneficial economic opportunities, with sustainability and the notion of stakeholder capitalism at its core.

Al Blooshi further explained, "In an era characterised by multiple forces influencing all aspects of life, it is imperative that we keep mobilising towards a viable economic and social goal, raising ambitions, and increasing the pace of implementation. Our mandate and objectives when representing Abu Dhabi and the UAE on the global centre stage, are to collaborate closely with everyone, complementing one another and improving coherence, thus creating greater and more impactful and self-sustaining economic models."

As part of preparations and agenda development leading up to the Fortune Global Forum in Abu Dhabi 2023, Fortune will organise two events in key financial centres during the year.

Saood Abdulaziz Al Hosani, the undersecretary of the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, said, "Abu Dhabi's progressive track record in hosting global business events of this calibre is a testament to our proven capability, best-in-class infrastructure and year-round attractiveness of our destination. In these rapidly changing times for global business, we look forward to welcoming visionaries from the government, the private sector and the media to take the business dialogue to the next level while experiencing authentic Emirati hospitality in Abu Dhabi." -**WAM**

SMOOTH TRAVEL

China's outbound travel market sees recovery at Spring Festival

HANGZHOU: On the first day of the Chinese Lunar New Year, a Chinese tourist surnamed Wu landed in Bangkok, Thailand, together with her parents, at the start of a long-awaited vacation.

"I wanted to take my family to Thailand a few years ago, but it was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said Wu, who lives in Hangzhou, capital of east China's Zhejiang Province. "As soon as the restrictions on our overseas trips were lifted, I booked the plane tickets to Thailand and fulfilled my promise."

As China downgraded its management of COVID-19 and facilitated the smooth and orderly cross-border travel of Chinese and foreign nationals in early January, the outbound travel market, which had been almost dormant for the past three years, quickly recovered during the Spring Festival.

"Currently, the demand for outbound travel is very strong. For instance, our charter flight products to the Maldives on Chinese Lunar New Year's Eve were sold out within three days," said Hang Haijun, head of a travel photo service.

The embassies and tourist bureaus of many countries, including Thailand, Norway and Indonesia, have extended their welcomes to Chinese tourists in various ways. -**Xinhua**

LIFESTYLE

GETTING CHILDREN OUTSIDE CAN HELP MITIGATE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SCREEN TIME

You're probably concerned about how much time your young children spend staring at a screen, whether it's a tablet, phone, computer, or television. You're probably curious about how screen time affects your child's development and whether there's anything you can do to mitigate any negative effects.

According to new Japanese research, more screen time at age 2 is associated with poorer communication and daily living skills at age 4—however, when children also play outside, some of the negative effects of screen time are mitigated.

In the study, which will be published in March in JAMA Pediatrics, the researchers followed 885 children from 18 months to 4 years of age. They looked at the relationship between three key features: the average amount of screen time per day at age 2, the amount of outdoor play at age 2 years 8 months, and neurodevelopmental outcomes--specifically, communication, daily living skills, and socialization scores according to a standardized assessment tool called Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale-II—at age 4.

"Although both communication and daily living skills were worse in 4-year-old children who had had more screen time at aged 2, outdoor play time had very different effects on these two neurodevelopmental outcomes," said Kenji J. Tsuchiya, Professor at Osaka University and lead author of the study, adding, "We were surprised to find that outdoor play didn't really alter the negative effects of screen time on communication--but it did have an effect on daily living skills."

Specifically, almost one-fifth of the effects of screen time on daily living skills were mediated by outdoor play, meaning that increasing outdoor play time could reduce the negative effects of screen time on daily living skills by almost 20 per cent. The researchers also found that, although it was not linked to screen time, socialization was better in 4-year-olds who had spent more time playing outside at 2 years and 8 months of age.

"Taken together, our findings indicate that optimizing screen time in young children is really important for appropriate neurodevelopment," said Tomoko Nishimura, senior author of the study, adding, "We also found that screen time is not related to social outcomes and that even if screen time is relatively high, encouraging more outdoor play time might help to keep kids healthy and developing appropriately."

These results are particularly important given the recent COVID-19-related lockdowns around the world, which have generally led to more screen time and less outdoor time for children. Because the use of digital devices is difficult to avoid even in very young children, further research looking at how to balance the risks and benefits of screen time in young children is eagerly awaited. -ANI

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According to new Japanese research, **more screen time at age 2 is associated with poorer communication and daily living skills at age 4—** however, when children also play outside, some of the negative effects of screen time are mitigated.

SPORTS

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2023: DJOKOVIC, PAUL, SHELTON ADVANCE TO QUARTERFINALS

Questions were being raised over Djokovic's fitness as he was playing with a hamstring injury that made him look really uncomfortable in earlier matches

MELBOURNE: Serbian tennis superstar Novak Djokovic advanced to the quarterfinals of the ongoing Australian Open, defeating Australia's Alex de Minaur in their round of 16 match on Monday.

Djokovic eliminated the home player from the competition by a comfortable margin of 6-2, 6-1, 6-2. Questions were being raised over Djokovic's fitness as he was playing with a hamstring injury that made him look really uncomfortable in wins against Roberto Carballes Baena, Enzo Couacaud and Grigor Dimitrov previously.

But the nine-time Australian Open champion put all the doubts regarding his fitness to rest in a largely one-sided round-of-16 match.

"I really wanted to win in straight sets," Djokovic said as quoted by ATP.

"You obviously do not know what is going to happen on the court. I thought the first four, five games were close. After breaking serve in the first set, I started feeling more free and more loose to hit through the ball and be more aggressive," he added.

"I thought he was a bit more nervous towards the end of the second [set] and the beginning of the third set. I thought that was my opportunity to capitalise on those chances. Tennis is a very quick and dynamic sport. Things can change in a matter of moments, the matter of points. But I kept my focus all the way through and played the best match of the year so far," added Djokovic.

Elsewhere, Tommy Paul of America reached his first-ever quarterfinal of a Grand Slam event, defeating Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut in their round-of-16 clash.

The 25-year-old delivered a fantastic fourth-set performance to win the match 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-5.

"It was a really physical, tough match," said Paul after his hard-earned victory on Margaret Court Arena.

"Any time you play Bautista it's going to be a war. So I was prepared for that match and I thought I executed really well today. It is always fun playing on this court, I think it was my third time playing here and it's always a blast," said Paul.

He will be taking on compatriot Ben Shelton next after the 20-year-old downed J.J. Wolf in five sets, extending his dream debut in Melbourne.

He won the match by 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (4), 6-2.

Earlier, Andrey Rublev rallied back from the brink to edge out Holger Rune of Denmark in a blockbuster 5-setter clash to book a seat in the quarter-final in the ongoing Australian Open here at the Rod Laver Arena on Monday.

Rublev saved two match points before winning 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (11/9) on Rod Laver Arena.

"I never in my life was able to win matches like this. This is the first ever time that I won something like this, especially in a very special tournament, the Australian Open, to be in the quarter-finals. So it's something I will remember for sure all my life. I have no words, I am shaking and happy," ATP.com quoted Rublev as saying post-match. ANI

FEBRUARY 4

PCB chairman Najam Sethi calls for emergency meeting over Asia Cup venue

MANAMA: Asian Cricket Council (ACC) will hold an emergency meeting on February 4 in Bahrain to discuss the venue for the 2023 Asia Cup following Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Najam Sethi's request.

The PCB and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will face off in Bahrain over their disagreement surrounding the ACC calendar of events announcement made by the ACC president and Indian board secretary Jay Shah, which the PCB claims was made "unilaterally" without consulting the Pakistan board. The calendar was unveiled by ACC president Jay Shah on January 5.

"For some time there hasn't been any ACC Board meeting and there were a lot of decisions being made and one of them we have challenged. Now the good news is that we managed to convince them to have their Board meeting and I will be attending it," Sethi said as quoted by ESPNcricinfo.

During the former PCB chairman Ramiz Raja's term, tensions had been building between the two boards, particularly over the venue of the 2023 Asia Cup, which is slated to take place in Pakistan in September.

However, it was cast into doubt when shortly after a BCCI meeting in October, Shah announced that the tournament would move to a neutral location because India could not travel to Pakistan.

Sethi adopted an aggressive approach during his last term, suing the BCCI for violating a contract to play bilateral series in 2014 and 2015. The PCB argued it was inappropriate.

The ICC dispute resolution committee declared that the PCB's claim "must fail" because the agreement between the boards contained only a "moral responsibility," not a legal one. As a result, the PCB was forced to pay the BCCI a sizable settlement.

Following Raja and his Board's removal by Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to ensure that a management committee could be formed to oversee cricket-related matters, Sethi returned to the PCB office last month.

"We have to look at what we can do but we can't [fight] another case, but I can say that that case wasn't handled properly and I think we didn't give a good fight. But eventually, even judges said that if you look through the microscope this case is in favour of Pakistan but if you see this case with a telescope this is going in India's favour. So in nutshell, with all the nitty-gritty it's Pakistan's case, but then their stance was that it's the [Indian] government which isn't allowing us [to tour Pakistan]," Sethi said.

The relations between India and Pakistan have caused a decline in the two nations' cricket relations over time. Since Pakistan's limited-overs tour of India in 2012-13, India and Pakistan have not faced off in a bilateral series.

The Indian men's team hasn't played a match in Pakistan since 2008, yet Pakistan last visited India for the 2016 T20 World Cup. Their interactions have been limited to ICC and ACC events.

Following years of isolation in the wake of the 2009 attack on Sri Lanka's team bus in Lahore, Pakistan has resumed hosting international cricket matches on a regular basis over the past three years, with almost all full members (with the exception of India) travelling there for red- and white-ball contests.

Pakistan was originally scheduled to host the 2022 Asia Cup (which was postponed from 2021), but Sri Lanka instead agreed to host the competition in the United Arab Emirates.

The PCB is committed to hosting the 2023 Asia Cup, but Sethi refused to reveal the possibilities before the board.

"All expected discussions and what the possible options are, I am keeping close to my chest for now. I don't want to hint at anything about what will be my possible stance there. Whatever the stance is, it will be according to the interests of Pakistan," he concluded.

TOURISM

Oman to host Ironman 70.3 on 4 February

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Sultanate of Oman will host Ironman 70.3 Triathlon at Shatti Al Qurum (Qurum Beach) area on 4 February 2023.

The tournament will consolidate Oman's status among leading global destinations for sports events.

It includes a swim in the waters of the Sea of Oman off Qurum Beach, followed by a bike race and a run that takes the athletes through the wonderful urban areas of Muscat.

The event will highlight Oman's tourism attractions, including Muttrah waterfront, Al Alam Palace, the Royal Opera House Muscat and the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, as well as the unique mountainous terrain surrounding Muscat.

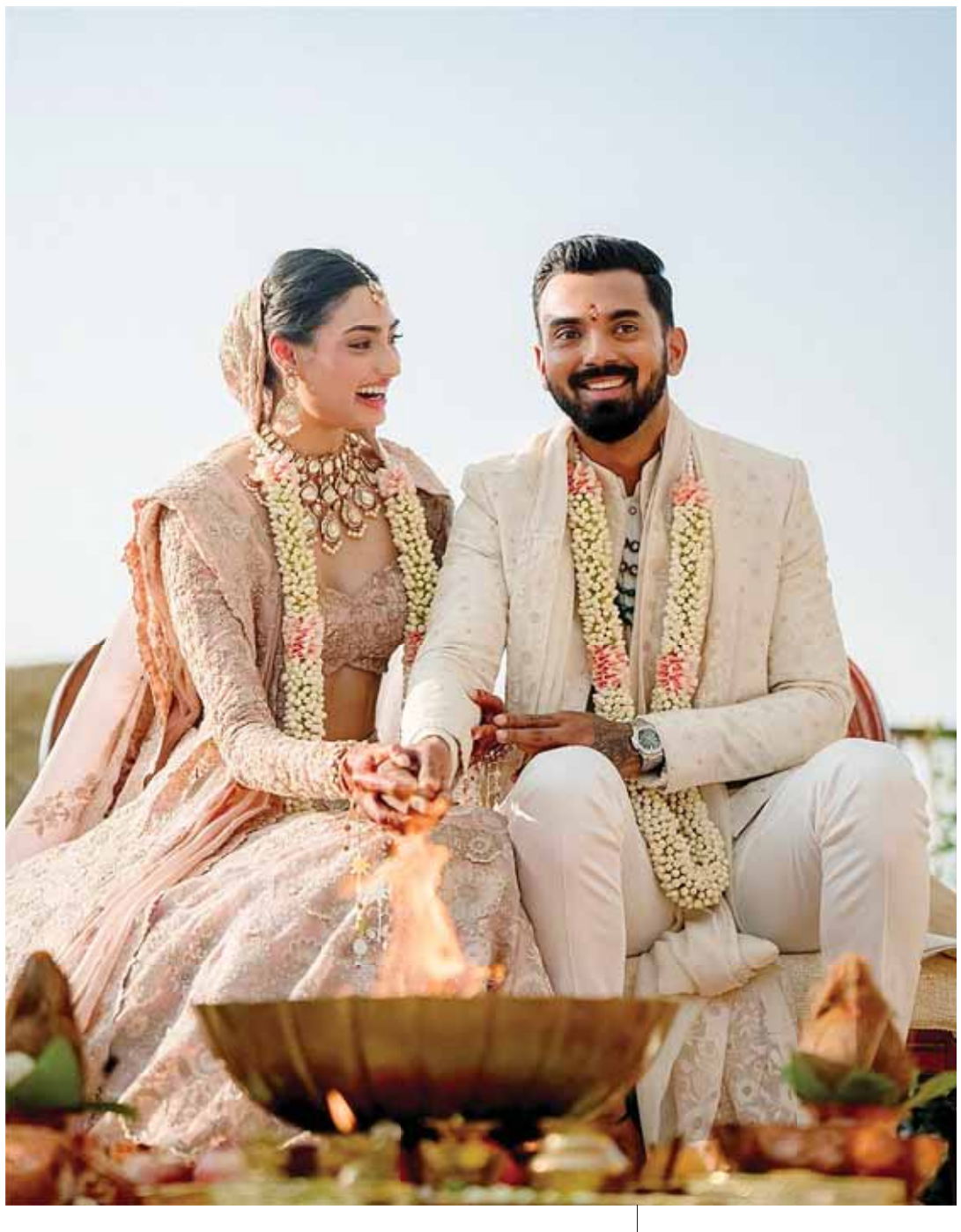
The championship's three stages are as follows: A swimming race for a distance of 1.9km (1.2 miles), a bicycle race for a distance of 90km (56 miles) and a 21.1 marathon (13.1 miles). The three races total 113km, the equivalent of 70.3 miles.

Prior to the conclusion of the tournament, a fun run called "Ironkid" will be organised on 3 February for children aged 3 to 13 years.

An Ironman races village, to be hosted between 2 and 4 February, will comprise a variety of entertainment activities and items of interest to endurance sports lovers in Oman.

IN-PICTURES

Dog show held in Islamabad, Pakistan
A girl walks a Belgian Malinois during a dog show in Islamabad, Pakistan. Xinhua



Athiya Shetty tied the knot with cricketer KL Rahul
Actress Athiya Shetty tied the knot with cricketer KL Rahul, in Mumbai. ANI Photo

Moscow Zoo prepares food and festive decorations for giant panda
Giant panda Dingding sits beside festive decorations at the Moscow Zoo in Moscow, capital of Russia. The Moscow Zoo prepared food and festive decorations for giant pandas to celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year. Xinhua

People watch gala performance to celebrate Sonam Losar and Spring Festival
Actors play musical instruments during a village gala performance to celebrate Sonam Losar and the Spring Festival in Pucun Village, Mangpu Township of Xigaze, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region.
Xinhua

High-speed railway line brings convenience to people's skiing trips
Skiers check in skiing equipment at Beijing North Railway Station in Beijing, capital of China. The Beijing-Zhangjiakou high-speed railway line brings great convenience to people's skiing trip to Chongli district of Zhangjiakou City in north China's Hebei province.
Xinhua

Flooded areas after heavy rain in Buket Linteung village, Indonesia
A man tries to fix the roof of his house damaged by flood water due to heavy rain in Lubok Pusaka village, Aceh Utara district, Aceh Province, Indonesia. Xinhua

ROUND-UP

Bank Nizwa titled 'Strongest Islamic Retail Bank in Oman' at IRBA 2022

The award demonstrates Bank Nizwa's commitment to providing consumers with tailored banking experiences that meet their changing needs through Sharia-compliant, cutting-edge financial solutions

MUSCAT: The fastest-growing Islamic bank in the Sultanate, Bank Nizwa, has been awarded 'The Strongest Islamic Retail Bank in Oman 2022' conferred by UK-based Cambridge International Financial Advisory (IFA) at the 8th Islamic Retail Banking Awards (IBRA) Ceremony 2022.

The award demonstrates Bank Nizwa's commitment to providing consumers with tailored banking experiences that meet their changing needs through Sharia-compliant, cutting-edge financial solutions. The IRBA analyses global Islamic banking efficiency performance using the most rigorous academic analysis. The prestigious awards recognise individuals and institutions that have demonstrated a solid commitment to Islamic retail banking and contributed significantly to its growth and success.

"Our pursuit of becoming the global leader in Islamic finance has been acknowledged with these wins by Bank Nizwa. Beyond growing our assets, we strive to provide Sharia-compliant products and solutions of the highest quality. The award motivates us to keep offering sustainable financial solutions to the community and provide the most exceptional customer service. With our solid footprint, as Oman's leading Islamic bank, we are well positioned to promote Islamic banking," said Arif Al Zaabi, Assistant General Manager - Retail Banking.

"Our retail banking business has made remarkable achievements over the past few years. We have also expanded our customer base significantly by responding quickly and efficiently to emerging market trends and accelerating the shift to digital banking. Taking advantage of technological evolution, we are Oman's first bank to open a digital-only branch to motivate those who still use conventional banking methods to adopt digital banking. Keeping our focus on product diversification and innovation will enable the bank to continue to pursue its strategy and create value. In particular, we will focus on delivering operational excellence and adding the greatest value for our bank and for the Islamic banking sector," he added.

The Retail Banking Division, which constitutes the majority of the company's operations, provides innovative Sharia-compliant products, such as savings, current, and investment deposit accounts, as well as home, personal and auto financing solutions to meet the financial needs of people across the country. It has worked towards continuously redefining the Islamic banking experience in Oman by providing customers with innovative products and services underpinned by responsive customer care and technologically advanced solutions, meeting today's dynamic requirements. This approach has brought about positive change in Oman's retail banking space, prompting other institutions to re-examine their product and service offerings.

Increasingly, customers expect banking platforms to be intuitive, frictionless and connected. As a result, Bank Nizwa has created FinTech solutions for the retail division through technology and innovation. Among these projects is its partnership with the Islamic Finance Initiation Network (IFIN), which offers instant Islamic 'Goods Financing' to its customers. By leveraging IFIN's cloud-based platform, Bank Nizwa can make Islamic financing processes faster, easier, and more hassle-free. In addition, Bank Nizwa became the first Islamic bank in Oman to introduce Sharia-compliant eco-friendly credit and debit cards made from Polylactic Acid (PLA) after recognizing the importance of sustainability and forming a strategy dedicated to it.

One of the bank's main objectives is to increase financial inclusion and accelerate the transition to a digital economy. In line with this, Bank Nizwa constantly improves its products and services portfolio. The bank constantly strives to improve consumer convenience by adopting tactics that meet their expectations.

Furthermore, the division conducts knowledge sessions about Islamic banking and Sharia-compliant financial services and products to empower attendees to make informed financial decisions. The Retail Banking Division strives to offer a richer customer experience by innovating its products and services. Over the next few years, the company plans to expand its network to increase its customer base.

CSR INITIATIVE

SIXT Oman reaches out with care to Omani children with special needs

MUSCAT: SIXT Oman recently organised a CSR initiative at the Al Injaz Private School in Al Ansab.

This event stems from the programme conducted by the Regine SIXT Children's Aid Foundation Drying Little Tears, which takes place annually following the occasion of Children's Day. The initiative calls for all SIXT companies across the world to take part in the Marathon Initiative, with SIXT employees organising trips for children, holding interactive activities or making generous donations to children's homes.

The main aim of the Regine SIXT Children's Aid Foundation is the improvement of human living conditions for children worldwide. The foundation is modelled after the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child and is divided into four programme areas including health, care, education and emergency aid.

Given the challenging conditions over the past year and schools moving to online platforms, SIXT Oman sought to make a difference by conducting the initiatives within the premises of the Al Injaz Private School. During the event, employees held various fun and interactive activities for the children, conducted and participated in games and distributed presents and snack boxes.

FINE IMPRESSION

Toyota's powerful and stylish Raize SUV: Great companion for relaxing getaways

MUSCAT: Toyota's popular Raize is compact, powerful and stylish. The Raize makes a fine impression with its ability to adapt to the city's driving conditions and also double up as a great companion for relaxing getaways.

Pairing outstanding fuel efficiency and maneuverability with distinctive design and ample interior space, the Raize SUV highlights Toyota's focus on catering to the needs of the brand's most discerning customers and comes equipped with a host of convenient features.

The Raize is available with a 1-liter turbocharged engine providing smooth and responsive acceleration and producing 96.5hp and 14.28Kg.m. of torque. Paired with Continuously Variable Transmission simulates a seven-speed sequential shift transmission to deliver powerful, smooth acceleration from start-off and at low speeds and quiet and efficient transmission at higher speeds. A newly developed lightweight, highly rigid body and suspension contribute to outstanding handling, stability, and ride comfort. The vehicle also boasts excellent maneuverability, with a 5.1-meter turning radius.

The Raize's interior offers comfort and convenience, with an instrument panel has been designed to ensure an outstanding field of view from the driver's seat. Steering wheel switches are also optimally positioned to give the driver intuitive control over multimedia and vehicle functions and an illuminated center console makes it easier to locate items placed in the tray.

The vehicle's spacious cabin hosts a range of practical features, including an 8-inch multimedia screen that comes integrated with USB port on the head unit that allows passengers to connect external media devices, a four-speaker sound system, a powerful air conditioning system, and 60/40 split and foldable rear seats.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the new Raize, which comes with a comprehensive array of safety features, including dual front SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control, Anti-lock Braking System, Hill-start Assist Control, Rear fog lamp, and Tire Pressure Monitoring System, among many others.

LITTLE MANILA SHOPPE OPENING

Imelda M. Panolong, Ambassador of the Philippines to the Sultanate of Oman, Vice Consul Jacqueline Joan Arquiza, Vice Consul Joanna Vi Arbado, Gregorio Abalos-Labor Attache and other officials of the Philippine Embassy Muscat attended the grand opening of Little Manila Shoppe, branch 3 near Jollibee next to Dhofar Insurance on January 19. Dr. Joseph Cuarteros, owner of Little Manila Shoppe and support staff were also present. — Supplied picture

AHLIBANK

Grow your money daily with 'Wafra Plus'

MUSCAT: In line with ahlibank's principle of offering innovative products and services to its customers, which support their saving and money management goals sustainably, the 'Wafra Plus' account is a daily return account that offers many benefits such as competitive rates, debit cards, and more.

It enables new and existing customers to better develop their financial resources daily. This comes as part of ahlibank's efforts to provide a suite of banking products and services that exceed customers' expectations.

The 'Wafra Plus' Daily Growth Account is a savings account that pays up to 1.75% interest per year on the daily balance in the account. At the end of each day, the benefit is compounded and credited to the client's accounts. Key benefits for Wafra Plus accountholders include up to 1.75% interest p.a. in competitive benefits, compounded advantages daily, unlimited transactions on the account, and benefits being credited to the account every day. As per the scheme, ahlibank will offer interest rates ranging from 1.00% (for deposits up to OMR9,999) to 1.75% (for deposits of OMR100,000 and more), depending on the deposit amounts.

Growth strategy

"The 'Wafra Plus' account comes in line with the comprehensive growth strategy of ahlibank. We at ahlibank are always keen to encourage smart and sustainable money management in all our operations, and the "Wafra Plus" account comes as a good example of that, as it supports our customers' efforts to save in a simple and effective way that meets their goals and aspirations. By enhancing our existing suite of products and services, we are always looking to develop solutions that suit the lifestyles of our customers," said Muneer Al Balushi, AGM – Head of Retail Distribution.

With Wafra Plus, customers can use 24x7 cash management via digital channels or the branch network; they are not only able to make unlimited transactions but are also able to augment their savings with competitive perks that are compounded and paid daily. As a result, advantages are available to customers as withdrawals or compounded benefits in their accounts.

"Customers' financial strength will be enhanced not only by the availability of limitless withdrawals but also by the intrinsic savings culture it fosters, as it is designed as a straightforward and easy-to-maintain service. The 'Daily' prefix on the product indicates the bank's desire to instil financial competency in its customers, who will now be able to earn more daily. We strongly encourage our current and prospective customers to take advantage of this unique opportunity to grow their finances while enjoying the peace and security that comes with it," added Muneer Al Balushi.

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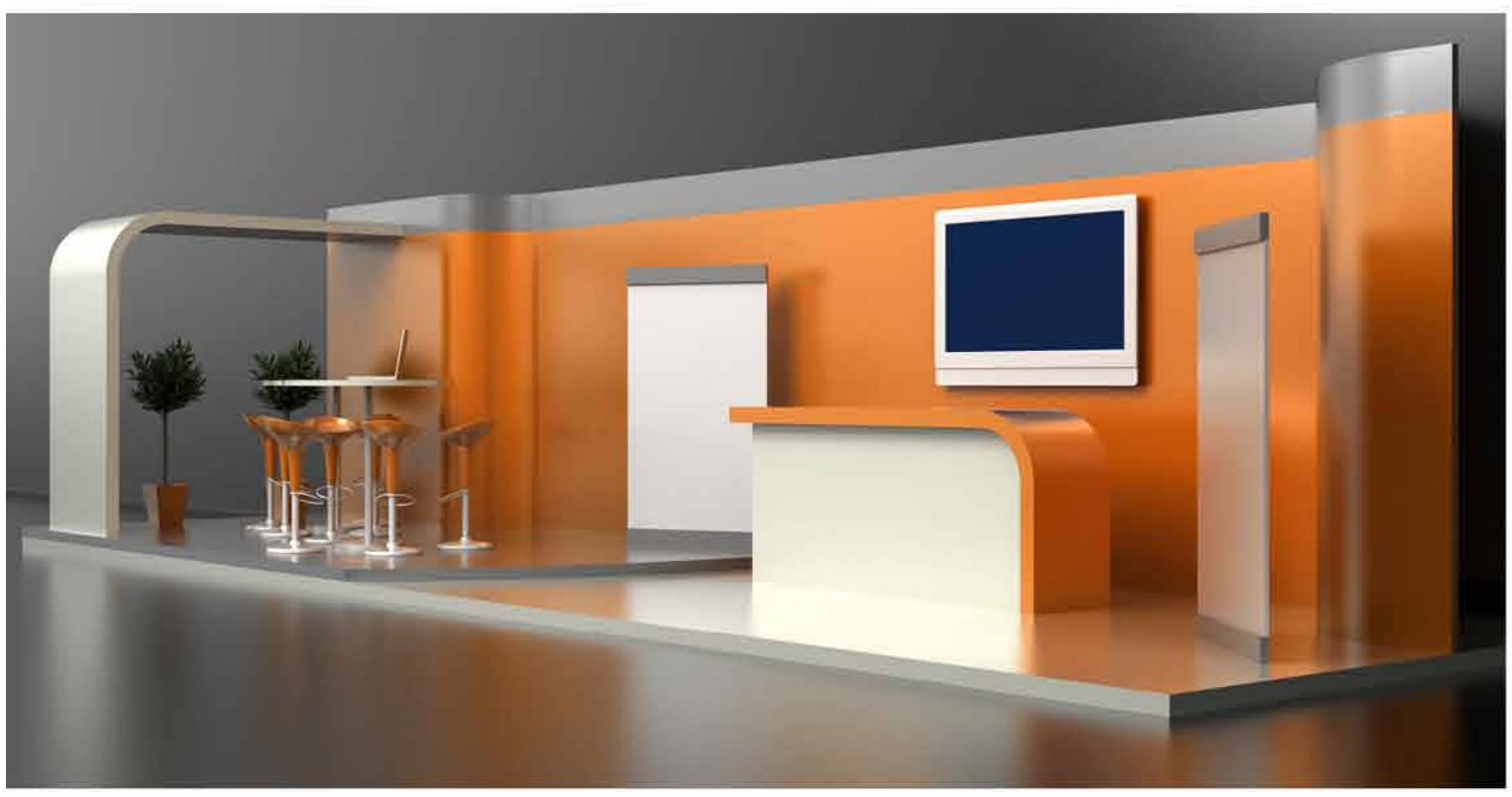

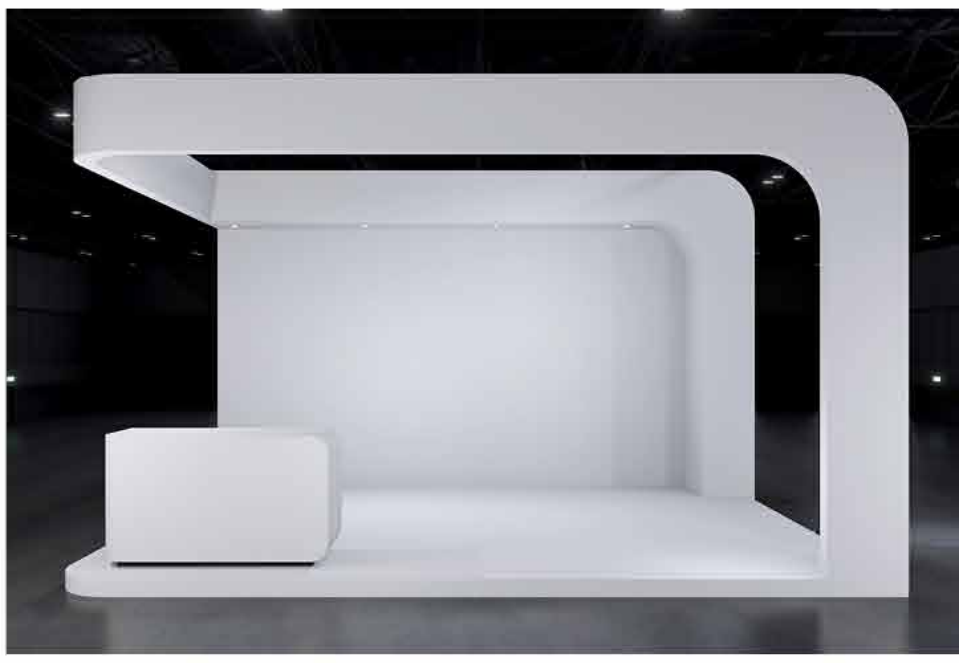

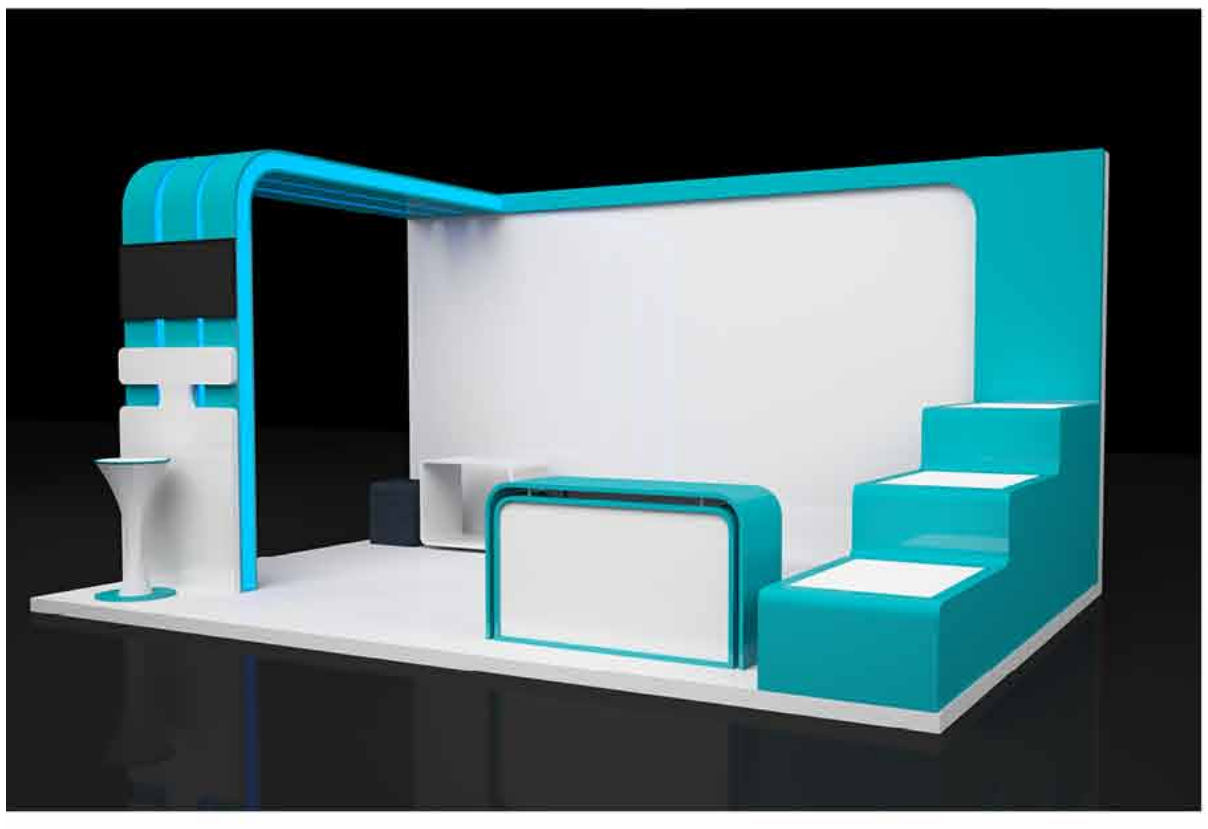

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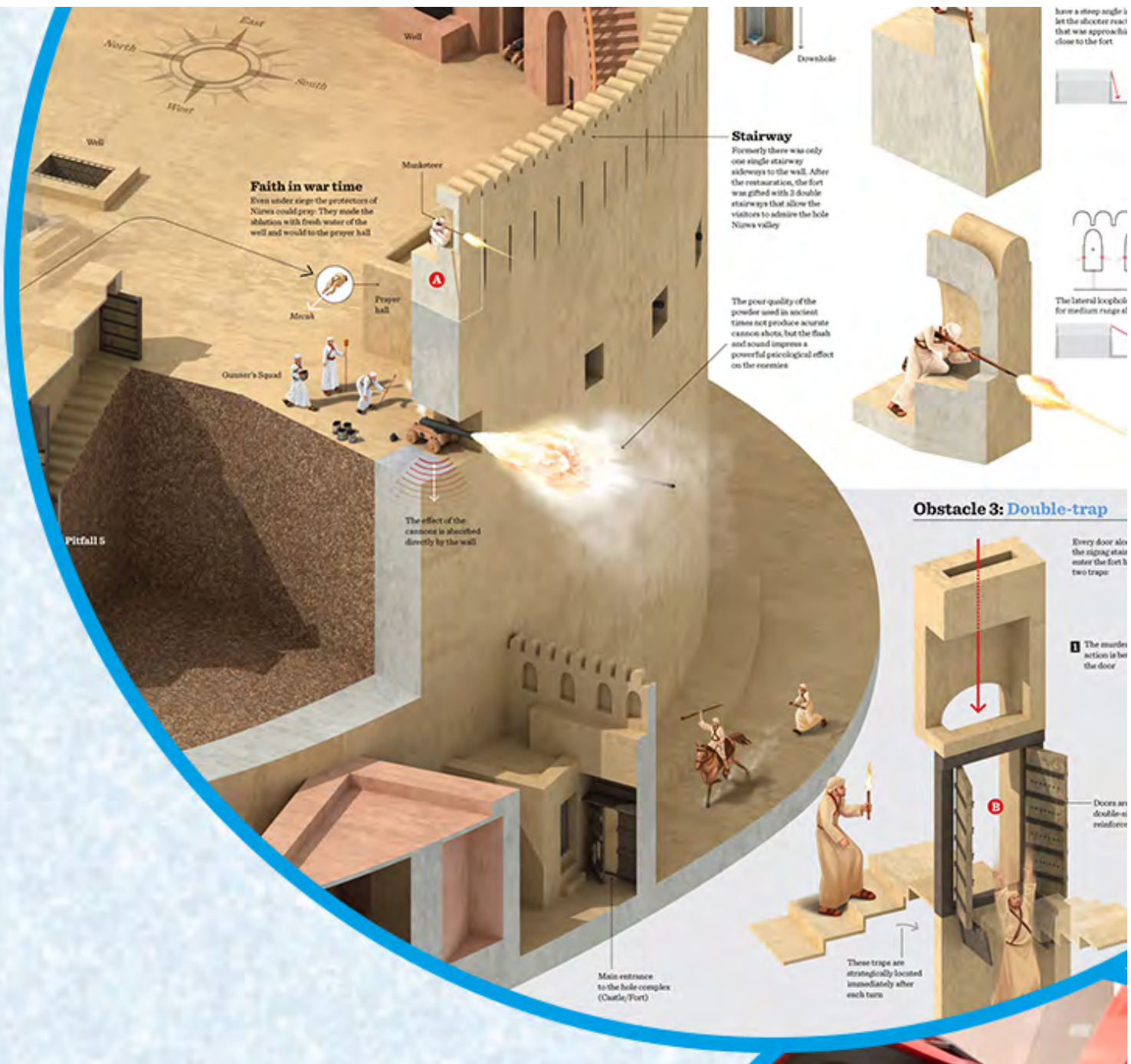

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