

**OMAN PARTICIPATES IN OIC
EXTRAORDINARY SESSION**

The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 17th extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states' Ministerial Council. **>A2**



**HM THE SULTAN RECEIVES THANKS
CABLE FROM KING OF BELGIUM**

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Philippe of the Kingdom of Belgium in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's National Day. In the cable, King Philippe expressed his utmost appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's sincere sentiments, wishing him good health and wellbeing. **>OA**



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OMAN TO CURB GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

The Sultanate aims to adopt policies centred around renewable energy

Many of the plans to harness renewable energy are already under implementation

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman intends to harvest more energy from renewable sources to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions and help mitigate the impact of climate change.

A senior official at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) exclusively told the *Times of Oman* that many of the plans to harness renewable energy are already in motion, as part of the objectives of Vision 2040.

"We will reach these targeted percentages of emissions in keeping with the vision," he said.

"The mechanisms taken by

us to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions depend on diversifying energy sources, especially renewable energy sources, pursuing an energy efficiency policy, and the use of clean technologies. We also expect more electricity to be produced from renewable sources of energy."

The CAA's plans for more focus towards clean energy answers the queries put forth at the 26th Climate Conference in Glasgow (COP26), organised under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The organisation also reviewed the updated biennial report on the current state of greenhouse gases, as well as mitigation mechanisms in Oman.

"While we have implemented many practices, we expect output from these initiatives to be gradually lifted over the coming years, so their contribution matches the requirements of Vision 2040," he said.

"However, there are challenges we face in rolling out these economic plans, the most concerning of which is the economic situation, due to

the volatility of oil prices and access to international funding sources," added the official.

"However, it is important that we press ahead with them, as they are part of the objections of Oman Vision 2040 that relate to environmental sustainability and the sustainability of natural resources."

Various government and private stakeholders are expected to play a role in the implementation of these plans to pivot to renewable sources.

"All of these plans will be implemented in accordance with the approved policies and in cooperation with all government agencies as well as the relevant private sector companies, especially those concerned with the energy and industry sectors," explained the CAA official.

"It is expected that new projects in the field of renewable energy and the trend towards a green economy will create new job opportunities, in addition to their contribution to increasing the gross domestic product and diversifying and sustaining the economy," he went on to add.

CIVIL AVIATION

Airlines to be fined for COVID violations

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Airlines flying to Oman will be fined for allowing passengers who do not follow the country's COVID-19 protocols to board their planes.

Oman's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said in a circular that all aircraft operators travelling to Oman should meet the needed requirements. "Air operators shall notify the passengers, prior to arrival, to prepare their documents for verification by the immigration and upon request by airport staff," said the CAA.

Documents that need to be presented by all passengers include proof of registration on Oman's eMushrif portal (www.covid19.emushrif.com), as well as a PCR test with a negative result, or a confirmation of reservation of a PCR test on arrival. Furthermore, fully vaccinated passengers need to show their proof of vaccination. While Omani nationals and certain arrivals who are not fully



vaccinated are exempt from institutional quarantine, all other foreign nationals need to show their institutional quarantine booking confirmation.

The CAA added that citizens of Oman and the United Arab Emirates who are travelling between the two countries must present their eMushrif registration certificate. This is to include the "upload of a COVID-19 vaccination certificate and the negative result of the COVID-19 PCR test conducted within 14 days prior to the scheduled time of arrival in the Sultanate of Oman," said the CAA. **>A2**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES



OMAN

Four arrested for trade in wildlife

1 An illegal operation involving the smuggling of five baby cheetahs and two lynx cubs has been foiled by teams from the Royal Oman Police. **>A2**

WORLD

Toll in Philippines Typhoon climbs to 144

2 The death toll from Typhoon Rai that battered the Philippines this week has climbed to at least 144, local officials said on Sunday. **>A6**

MARKET

EDO corporate vision and logo launched

3 Energy Development Oman (EDO) SAOC has launched its new brand identity by unveiling its corporate vision and logo. **>B1**



27th
MUSCAT



ALEXA SMARTER

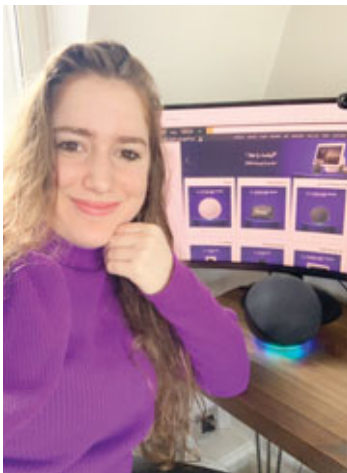
Meet the woman who helped Alexa understand Arabic

Times News Service

MUSCAT: An Omani engineer who worked on providing Amazon's Alexa virtual assistant with the ability to recognise and understand Arabic speech has spoken about the efforts taken by her team and her to make Alexa smarter by making it understand more local words and slang.

Deena Shahrabani, a knowledge engineer who works from the UK for Amazon, was one of four members tasked with helping Alexa understand Khaleeji Arabic, the version of the language spoken in the Gulf. Alexa users in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia can now issue commands in Arabic, with the service soon to be rolled out among other Arab countries as well.

Deena explained, "We do recognise the various ways customers can ask questions, so we try to be as inclusive as possible to capture the most common shapes in different dialects, so you could be understood if you use the Egyptian way of asking 'how many'. However, in terms of speech, we only speak



DEENA SHAHRABANI: Knowledge Engineer at Amazon

Modern Standard Arabic and Khaleeji.

"Context is very important in understanding all languages with Alexa, and Arabic is no exception," she added. "We have a team of data analysts and knowledge engineers who manually review any machine translated text and ensure we have

a good level of accuracy there. We constantly aim to enrich Alexa with more culturally-specific idioms and phrases and I think that is definitely an area we can work on now that we have launched in two countries."

Deena was one of four initial members tasked with improving Alexa's knowledge of Arabic: she was joined by another knowledge engineer in London, a product manager in Dubai, and a data analyst in Cambridge. That team was supported by other core units, including specialists in automatic speech recognition (ASR), natural language understanding (NLU), and text to speech (TTS).

Other engineers, who were assigned to Alexa's responses to commands regarding prayer times, smart home functions, and alarm calls, were also part of the team.

"My role involves building the question and answering capabilities of Alexa and improving her knowledge in multiple topics including prayer times, football, and Politics," said Deena. "So if you ask in Arabic, 'Alexa, when does Saudi Arabia Play?' you should hear the

answer I defined."

"I made sure that Alexa understands each component of that phrase and provides the appropriate response to ultimately provide the best customer experience," she added. "I also worked closely with the product team to ensure we target the highest-traffic utterances, as well as with our software engineering team to ensure we solve any nuances with Arabic that need code modifications, for example, in terms of the understanding of various dates."

Born and raised in Muscat after her father, Dr Rashid Shahrabani, moved from the UK in 1988 to set up the Royal Hospital's cardiology centre, Deena and her family were granted Omani citizenship in 2000, when she was just four years old. She graduated from the Sultan School, and joined Amazon in 2019, as part of their Graduate Retail Programme. Realising she wanted a more technical role, however, Deena joined the Alexa International team a year later to help launch Alexa in Arabic, which she says is one of the hardest languages to learn.

Her native connection to the language and keenness to take on the responsibility thrust upon her attracted Deena to the role, but fresh challenges came in the form of the hurdles brought up by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Late nights are not unheard of when working on hard projects that might also require working with colleagues in California," she admitted. "It is quite flexible and I really felt the autonomy to work at your own time at Amazon as long as the job is done. Flexible working is probably the best thing to come out of the pandemic - although it can go the other way."

"We started work-from-home at Amazon in the UK quite early on in March 2020, and since have not been required to work in the office," she added. "As my team is really global, I think working remotely is quite the norm with most meetings held virtually. Travel is one thing that affected us as quarterly off-sites were something unique about the role, where we'd all meet in a certain city every few months and reconnect with our colleagues." **>A2**



Dhuhr.....	12:09pm
Asr.....	3:10pm
Maghrib.....	5:30pm
Isha.....	6:45pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....	5:24am

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Oman backs OIC steps to help Afghanistan people

ISLAMABAD: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 17th extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states' Ministerial Council, held to discuss the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

The Omani delegation was headed by Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Diplomatic Affairs Undersecretary at the Foreign Ministry.

Al Harthy gave a speech in which he affirmed that the "Afghan people deserve to be supported at this delicate political juncture".

Oman is working hand-in-hand with other members of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to find the best ways to help Afghanistan and its people and back all measures undertaken by the OIC to handle the situation, said Al Harthy.

The Ministerial Council underscored its member states' solidarity with the Afghans in their endeavours to establish peace and enjoy unity, stability, sovereignty and prosperity.



MEETING: The Omani delegation was headed by Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Diplomatic Affairs Undersecretary at the Foreign Ministry. -ONA

The Council urged OIC member states and the international community to concentrate on providing quick humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.

Oman's delegation included Sheikh Mohammed Omar Al Marhoon, Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to Pakistan, and officials at the Foreign Ministry. -ONA

ARABIC

<FROM A1 Cutting-edge innovation

Deena revealed, "My job was very exciting but not easy by any means: Arabic was the first right-to-left language we launched, and there were many nuances unique to Arabic such as diacritics which increase the number of homonyms greatly. Disambiguating different words that share the same spelling was an important part of the launch."

Having now established herself at one of the world's biggest tech companies, and on the forefront

of cutting-edge innovation, Deena has some advice for other Omanis, who want to make a name for themselves.

Selling points

"Definitely focus on your unique selling points," she said. "I have always searched for Arabic-speaking roles when looking at jobs abroad as I knew it would give me an edge. The UK is not the easiest of countries to sponsor interna-

tional applicants, so I would definitely focus on nailing a few years of experience in your home country, before applying for a global transfer or an application abroad."

"Continuously learning and building your confidence through online courses is definitely a plus," she added. "I think tech roles are still the most demanded among professions, and having a good foundation will help you sail forward."

ABHS meet calls for sharpening the skills of health workers

AMMAN: The Sultanate of Oman concluded its participation in the meetings of the Arab Board for Health Specialisations (ABHS), held in Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The ABHS Supreme Council's extraordinary meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Al Saeedi, Minister of Health, President of the ABHS Supreme Council and the Head of the Executive Council.

The meeting saw the participation of Dr. Omar Awad Al Rawas, Secretary-General of the ABHS and other members of the ABHS Supreme Council.

The meeting underscored the importance of cooperation to improve the services offered by the ABHS by supporting scien-



MEETING: The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Al Saeedi, Minister of Health, President of the ABHS Supreme Council and the Head of the Executive Council. -ONA

tific development, sharpening the skills of health workers in Arab countries, representing distinguished physicians based on

international standards, as well as enhancing the participation of Arab countries in the ABHS.

-ONA

ROP

4 held for trade in wildlife

Times News Service

MUSCAT: An illegal operation involving the smuggling of five baby cheetahs and two lynx cubs has been foiled by teams from the Royal Oman Police.

"Four suspects, including citizens and others from the Gulf, were arrested, and they were in the possession of five young cheetahs and two lynxes," said the country's Environment Authority. The ROP handed over the animals to the Directorate General of Environment in the Governorate of Dhofar, where they are receiving care.

AL THAMAR ATTAYYIB



Oman-Pakistan naval drill ends

MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) concluded its participation in the naval drill (Al Thamar Attayyib), which was carried out jointly with the Pakistani naval forces from 13 to 18 December 2021.

The drill comes within the

framework of the RNO's annual training plans, aiming at exchanging expertise with friendly countries to sustain the readiness level of the RNO fleet and personnel on various marine disciplines in line with their national tasks. -ONA

FRANKINCENSE LAND

Exhibition on geological heritage extended till January 15

SALALAH: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, extended the exhibition on the Geological Heritage of Oman themed "Sustainability and Job Opportunities" until 15 January 2022.

The exhibition, held in Museum of the Frankincense Land, is organised by the ministry in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Geological Society of Oman (GSO).

Osama Mohammed Al Rowas, Director of Museum of the Frankincense Land, said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the exhibition witnesses a great turnout of visitors of all categories since its opening on 15 November 2021. The opening ceremony coin-



cided with Oman's celebrations of the 51st Glorious National Day.

He added that the exhibition targets academics, teachers, uni-



versity and school students, and those interested in the field of geology and the winter tourism season, which began last October.

The Director of Museum of the Frankincense Land noted that the exhibition on Geological Heritage of Oman sheds light on the diversity of Oman's geological heritage and raises awareness of the importance of preserving it.

It also seeks to introduce the geological heritage sector and the potential job opportunities therein as part of the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040, as well as its executive programs aiming to enhance citizenship, identity, heritage and national culture.

Statistics recorded 3,190 visitors, including more than 30 school and university visits to the exhibition from 15 November to 15 December 2021.

The exhibition constitutes 6 corners, some of which are the richness of Oman's geological heritage, the diversity of Oman's geology and its natural geological history. It also showcases unique geological heritage pieces and fossils, some of which belong to extinct animals like dinosaurs and elephants.

Training workshop

A training workshop was held on the sidelines of the exhibition from 12 to 14 December, with the participation of experts in geological heritage and specialists from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The workshop aimed to introduce job opportunities in this sec-

tor, as well as empowering those interested in this field.

50 participants

The workshop also attracted more than 50 participants from institutions and individuals, during which they had two-day lectures. On the third day, the workshop was concluded with a field visit geological sites in Dhofar Governorate.

The exhibition comes as part of the programs of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to develop and diversify the museum system in the Sultanate of Oman and to enhance the contributions of the heritage sector to economic activity.

-ONA

Trending ON SOCIAL MEDIA

📖 MOST READ ON FACEBOOK

24,176 REACH



Story on Arabic certification test to be launched

A story on Arabic certification test to be launched reached 24,176 people and had 1,994 engagements on Facebook.

📺 MOST WATCHED VIDEO ON FACEBOOK

3,200 VIEWS

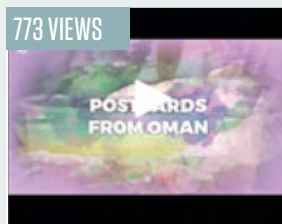


Video on Covid-19 vaccine third dose

The Page 1 story video on Covid-19 vaccine third dose had 3,200 views and reached 13,400 people

📺 MOST VIEWED VIDEO ON INSTAGRAM

773 VIEWS



Postcards from Oman series episode

The Postcards from Oman series episode had 773 views and 34 likes on Instagram.

CAA

<FROM A1 Ban on arrival from 7 African countries continues

Meanwhile, the decision to deny entry to passengers arriving from seven African countries – South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Mozambique – continues to be in effect. This includes those who have visited these countries in the 14 days prior to their arrival in Oman.

"Omani citizens, diplomats, health workers and their families are excluded from this decision, as well as citizens of the said countries who have valid residence in Oman," said the authority, with regards to the entry ban in place.

"All those who are excluded from this decision, including Omani citizens, are subject to COVID-19 PCR tests upon arrival and mandatory seven days' institutional quarantine, with COVID-19 PCR tests on the sixth day."

The decision to halt arrivals from these countries came into effect at 8am on Sunday, 28 November, 2021, and remains in place until further notice.

"The Civil Aviation Authority urges Omani citizens to avoid travelling in the coming period, except in absolute necessity," added the government body.



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TOURISM

Omani, French experts share views on ways to grow tourism

Times News Service

MUSCAT: More than 80 attendees from the industry and others listened to Omani and French panelists on how to grow a strong, safe, respectful and employment rich tourism industry in Oman at an event hosted by OFA.

'Tourism in Oman – Global Adventure' was hosted by OFA recently at Al Bustan Palace Hotel under the auspices of Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to the Sultanate of Oman.

The event started with the OFA coordinator speech explaining about the real interest of such an event on Adventure tourism discussion gathering many different actors together to have a global view on the subject. Marie Elcagaray thanked all the sponsors who were a part of the project: Oman Air, Oman Automobile Association, Al Bustan Palace, JCDecaux and Marvelous World Travel.

The French pro athletes' team presented the video they produced since they arrived on 9th December exploring the incredible sites for mountain biking in Oman. This was then followed by a panel of discussions moderated by Mohana Prabhakar.

The panel focused on how to match the potential of outdoor activities in Oman with expertise from France. The first panelist, Thomas Manfe, Project Manager of Sidekick (France), spoke about how outdoors activities can be developed as an asset for Oman tourism, connecting them with big brand and adventure industry abroad. Then Ludovic Henry, Technical Director, Velo Concept (France), who was attending the meeting online explained how activities that tourists are looking for have changed in France and what are the options that are possible to offer in France that could also be adopted in Oman.

Khaled Abdul Malak, surgeon and explorer, continued the panel showing how makes Oman's landscape unique when it comes to developing it as an adventure sports destination.

CIVIL AVIATION

Codeshare deals help boost Oman Air growth trajectory

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, will continue to strengthen strategic codeshare partnership agreements to maximize its post-pandemic growth trajectory. The airline's ongoing recovery calls for greater codeshare connectivity to offer passengers better connections and a wider choice of destinations from its hub in Muscat.

FLYING HIGH: Oman Air has built a healthy network throughout the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, as well as several cities in Europe, South Asia and Africa in recent years.

Oman Air has built a healthy network throughout the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, as well as several cities in Europe, South Asia and Africa in recent years and is focused on growing additional connectivity to North and South America and Australia through strategic codeshares with its 18 partner airlines. These include Ethiopian Airlines, Etihad Airways, Garuda Indonesia, Gulf Air, Royal Dutch Airlines KLM, Kenya Airways, Kuwait Airways, Lufthansa, Malaysia Airlines, SalamAir, Bangkok Airways, Qatar Airways, Royal Jordanian Airlines, Saudia, Thai Airways, Turkish Airlines, Sri Lankan Airlines, and Egyptair. Currently, Oman Air operates 46 codeshare sectors and markets an additional 219 codeshare sectors on six continents through its partners for a total of 265 sectors.

"Providing access to more destinations underpins our business operations and growth strategy as we gradually emerge from the global pandemic and look for new ways to offer our valued guests greater travel convenience and connectivity," said Eng. Abdulaziz Al Raisi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air.

Reciprocal connectivity "Together with our codeshare partners, we continue to grow our network reach out of Muscat while offering reciprocal connectivity for passengers flying to the Sultanate of Oman. Strategic codeshare agreements make sense at a time when airlines around the world are facing tremendous challenges, and Oman Air understands that now, more than ever, seamless connectivity is a deciding factor for passengers when it comes to booking."

INVITATION TO TENDER



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Scope	: Contractor to design, supply, install, commission the new UPS system along with Generators and cable laying inside premises.
Tender No.	: 2021-ENG-SOW-0073
Tender Title	: Site Wide Machine Guarding
Scope	: Contractor to design, fabricate, supply, and install Machine Guarding solutions as per scope.

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WORLD



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Typhoon Rai toll in the Philippines rises to 144

The number of deaths is likely to rise as local officials gather data from the field

MANILA: The death toll from Typhoon Rai that battered the Philippines this week has climbed to at least 144, local officials said on Sunday.

Bohol province in the central Philippines is the worst-hit with 72 deaths, while Negros Occidental reported 18, Cebu 16, Dinagat Islands 10, Southern Leyte six, among others.

The number of deaths is likely to rise as local officials gather data from the field.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) has yet to update its death tally after saying on Saturday night it had received reports of 31 deaths in central and southern Philippines due to Rai.

Communications are still down in typhoon-ravaged areas, making it difficult for the NDRRMC to contact its regional and provincial agencies.

Bohol Governor Arthur Yap said his province has tallied 72 deaths as reports trickle in from the field.



“Presently, communications are still down. The signal is intermittent,” Yap said, adding that the central Philippine province is still without electricity. He said it might take up to three weeks to restore power in the province.

Yap appealed to fuel suppliers to triple the deliveries of gasoline and fuel, saying the province is dependent on generator sets.

He said the residents of some hardest-hit towns are asking for food and water. More chainsaws are also needed to clear fallen trees and debris. “Many of the smaller roads are still not passable,” he added.

On Sunday, the police posted a video about rescuing 26 people, including nine minors and nine elderly, trapped on a tree for hours in Negros Occidental province.

President Rodrigo Duterte has

ordered the speedy delivery of food, water, and necessary items such as tents and tarps to the typhoon victims after visiting the affected areas by aircraft.

He also ordered the military and the Philippine Coast Guard to send boats and ships to augment the immediate delivery of needed supplies.

The military will send medical teams onboard two Navy ships to augment the health personnel in Siargao and Dinagat Islands, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said.

Typhoon Rai made landfall on the Siargao Island on Thursday afternoon. It was blowing maximum winds of 195 km per hour and with gusts of up to 240 km per hour when it slammed into the island in Surigao del Norte province.

The typhoon swelled rivers and flooded low-lying areas while cut-

ting through towns and villages in the central Philippines and the northern Mindanao in the southern part of the country.

The NDRRMC said Rai affected more than 700,000 people in nine regions, caused power outages, damaged buildings and houses in these areas. The government is still assessing the typhoon’s damage to crops and infrastructure.

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, mainly due to its location along the Pacific Ring of Fire and Pacific typhoon belt. On average, this archipelagic country experiences 20 typhoons every year, some of which are intense and destructive.

The World Bank said natural disasters have killed 33,000 Filipinos in the past 30 years, affecting 120 million people. **ANI**



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LAND DISPUTE

13 killed in land dispute in Guatemala



GUATEMALA CITY: Police in Guatemala said on Saturday that 13 people have been killed in the village of Chiquix, 96 miles east of Guatemala City, in an apparent land dispute.

The victims include women and children.

It was not immediately clear how the victims died, but police described the killings as “intolerable and incomprehensible fratricide.”

According to a police statement released on Twitter, a police officer was among those killed while two others were injured.

“From the first moment, the necessary police officers have been appointed to find those responsible for these crimes and make evaluations of new strategies to try to stop more unfortu-

nate events,” the statement read.

Historic land dispute

A dispute between two municipalities that has run for more than 100 years appears to be the cause of the attack.

Residents of Nahuala and Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan have been involved in violent confrontations in the past that have also turned deadly.

In May 2020, President Alejandro Giammattei declared a state of siege following an escalation of violence in the area.

“These differences have persisted for more than a hundred years, and throughout history have claimed the lives of many, many villagers involved in the supposed defense of their lands,” Giammattei said at the time. **BW**



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority



Zawawi Trading Company LLC

Recall Campaign for Mercedes-Benz
S-Class (223 platform), C-Class (206 platform)
Model year: 2021
Date of Campaign: 20.12.2021
Recall Segment: Mechanical
Recall Type: Safety
Product Description:

Number of vehicles	Chassis number	To	Chassis number	Sales Designation
13	WIK2231611A065707	TO	WIK2231611A077569	S 580 4MATIC
1	WIK2231761A076066			S 580 4MATIC

Description of defect:
Mercedes-Benz AG has determined that on certain S-Class (223 platform) and C-Class (206 platform) vehicles, a nozzle inside the suction jet pump in the fuel tank might not have been installed or fixed inside the pump according to specifications. If the nozzle was not fixed inside the pump according to specifications, the nozzle might detach within the suction jet pump. Subsequently, the fuel pressure necessary for driving under certain circumstances, such as reduced fuel level and full throttle operation, might not be reached. This might lead to sudden engine stalling without warning.

Procedure:
As a precautionary measure, Mercedes-Benz AG, via its Mercedes-Benz service partners, will check the fuel system on the affected vehicles and replace the fuel tank including the suction jet pump, if necessary and expected workshop visit for the check and, if necessary, replacement of the fuel tank system will take around 14 hours and will be free of charge.

For more information:
Sultanate of Oman customers affected by the recall who have not been contacted already will be telephoned by representatives of Zawawi Trading Company LLC, so that they can arrange a convenient time from 20.12.2021 to get their car inspected.

Contact details:
Toll free number: 80079777 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs with effect from 20.12.2021.



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TENDER NO. 83081/21

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Interested specialized companies with experienced in EPC works in the cement industry, may obtain the Tender Documents after paying online a tender fee of RO. 525.000 (Rial Omani Five Hundred Twenty Five Only) to Company's account, detailed below:

Account name: Oman Cement Company SAOG
Bank name: Bank Muscat SAOG
Account number: 0423 01086 3070 017
Account Type: OMR
SWIFT Code: BMUSOMRX

The above payment is a non-refundable amount.

A copy of the deposit transaction shall be e-mailed to CFOSecretary@omacement.com and copying Treasury@omacement.comstating in the Subject, the "Tender No." and "Tender Description". Accordingly, Company will email the tender documents' link.

Contact details: Office number: +968 244 37803, Mobile number: +968 97932277
The last date for purchasing of Tender Documents is on the 31st th January 2022.
Last date for submission of offers is on Monday, 28th February 2022 by 12:00 PM, accompanied by a bid bond issued by any local bank in Oman (equivalent to 1%) of the total tender value. The bid bond must be valid for 120 days from the last date of submission of offers.

Any tenders received beyond the closing date and time or without a supporting tender bond will NOT be considered. This publication is part of the tender documents.

DEADLY BLAST

Suspected gas explosion kills at least 12 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Police in Pakistan are trying to determine what caused a deadly blast near a bank in Karachi on Saturday, which killed at least 12 people.

Sabir Memon from the Karachi Trauma Center first told the AP news agency that 10 people were killed and 13 others had been injured from the explosion.

Senior police officer Sarafar Nawaz Shaikh later said two more people had died of their injuries, raising the total death toll further.

Video recorded at the scene and posted on social media showed people standing near rubble of the Habib Bank Limited (HBL) branch as sirens sounded in the background.

Police have been unable to say for certain what caused the blast and are currently investigating possibilities. **ANI**



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WORLD



Omicron cases doubling at least every three days, says WHO

The current understanding of the Omicron variant will continue to evolve as more data become available

GENEVA : Amid the unabated spread of the Omicron cases around the world, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said infection numbers of the new variant is doubling at least every 3 days.

The new variant of the coronavirus is spreading faster than the Delta strain in countries with documented community transmission, with the number of cases doubling in 1.5 to 3 days, according to the WHO. As of December 16, the Omicron variant has been identified in 89 countries across all six WHO regions. The current understanding of the Omicron variant will continue to evolve as more data becomes available.

In an update on Saturday, the United Nations' health agency said



OMICRON: The new variant of the coronavirus is spreading faster than the Delta strain in countries with documented community transmission, with the number of cases doubling in 1.5 to 3 days.

that there is consistent evidence that Omicron has a substantial growth advantage over Delta.

"It is spreading significantly faster than the Delta variant in countries with documented community transmission, with a doubling time between 1.5-3 days. Omicron is spreading rapidly in countries with high levels of population immunity and it remains uncertain to what extent the observed rapid growth rate can be attributed to immune evasion, intrinsic increased transmissibility or a combination of both," WHO said.

However, given the currently available data, it is likely that Omicron will outpace Delta where community transmission occurs.

The UN agency added that there are still limited data on the clinical severity of Omicron. More data are needed to understand the severity profile and how severity is impacted by vaccination and pre-existing immunity, it added.

According to WHO, hospitalizations in the UK and South Africa continue to rise and given rapidly increasing case counts, it is possible that many health-care systems may become quickly overwhelmed. There are still limited available data, and no peer-reviewed evidence, on vaccine efficacy or effectiveness to date for Omicron, the UN agency said.

Netherlands to go into lockdown due to 'fifth wave'

The Dutch government announced a stricter lockdown on Saturday out of fear for the rise of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the country.

"I stand here with a gloomy mind," Prime Minister Rutte said at a press conference in the Hague. "The Netherlands is going into lockdown again." "That is inevitable. Omicron is spreading even faster than we feared. That is the complicated story we have to tell tonight," he said.

The new lockdown will take effect from 5 a.m. Sunday morning and will remain in effect until January 14, 2022. According to Rutte, a hard lockdown is inevitable "because of the fifth wave that is approaching us with Omicron."

Only essential shops like supermarkets, medical contact professions and car garages remain open, but all other shops and all education, the catering industry, restaurants, museums, theaters and zoos must close.

Jaap van Dissel, the boss of the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) and member of the Outbreak Management Team (OMT), which advises the government, was present at the press conference to explain his worries, although the infection figures are in decline with 14,742 positive tests from Friday to Saturday.

He expressed the expectation that the Omicron variant of the coronavirus will be dominant in the Netherlands shortly after Christmas. On Dec. 14, Rutte had announced the extension of the current measures, an evening lockdown between 5 p.m and 5 a.m. local time for non-essential shops, while primary schools had to close one week earlier before the Christmas holidays. Only four days later he concluded that this will not be enough to stop Omicron. **ANI**

RESTRICTIONS

Germany hits UK travellers with new restrictions due to Omicron concerns

BERLIN: Germany will classify the UK as an area of variants of concern due to the rapid spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant, announced Germany's Robert Koch Institute on Saturday.

The decision is set to go into effect on Monday. The restrictions will also apply to the British territories of the Isle of Wight and Channel Islands.

The move puts the UK into the highest risk category as defined by German officials.

People entering Germany from virus-variant areas must quarantine for two weeks. This requirement applies to travelers regardless of whether they are vaccinated or have recovered from the coronavirus.

Presenting a negative coronavirus test does not reduce the quarantine period.

Why is the UK in this category?

According to Germany's Health Ministry, areas of variants of concern are areas of widespread occurrence of a virus variant that can be reasonably believed to pose a particular risk. This means either that the variant is causing more severe symptoms or that vaccination or recovery from the virus offers limited protection.



The UK is currently struggling to contain the rapid spread of the omicron coronavirus variant. On Friday, British officials reported a record number of over 93,000 new cases of coronavirus infection, and just over 90,000 new cases on Saturday.

Besides the UK, a number of southern African countries have been classified as virus-variant areas since November 28.

Travelers who enter Germany from virus-variant areas face stricter restrictions than travelers from areas that are designated simply as "high risk."

What are the high-risk areas?

Travelers entering Germany from high-risk regions need to undergo a 10-day quarantine period, which can be reduced to 5 days with a negative coronavirus test result. These restrictions apply to people who have not been fully vaccinated and cannot prove that they've already contracted the coronavirus and recovered from it.

The German government added France and Denmark to its list of high-risk areas on Sunday due to increasing numbers of coronavirus infections.

With this measure, all countries neighboring Germany except for Luxembourg will be considered high-risk areas. The label also applies to many other countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Also on the list are Norway, Lebanon and Andorra, which were added by the official Robert Koch Institute on Friday. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Albania, North Macedonia and Moldova have been removed from the list. Criteria for inclusion in the list include absolute numbers of coronavirus infections, the rate of the virus' spread and the burden it imposes on the healthcare system. **DW**

DISAGREEMENTS



UK's Brexit Minister David Frost resigns

LONDON: The United Kingdom's Brexit minister, David Frost, has resigned over disagreements with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on a number of issues, including COVID-19 measures.

In his resignation letter to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Frost said, "...we agreed earlier this month that I would move on in January and hand over the baton to others to manage our future relationship with the EU. It is disappointing that this plan has become public this evening and in the circumstances, I think it is right for me to write to step down with immediate effect." Earlier, UK media reports said that Frost handed in his letter of resignation to Johnson a week ago, however, he was persuaded to stay in his post until January.

Frost said in his resignation letter that Brexit is now secure and the challenge for the Government now is to deliver on the opportunities it gives us. "You know my concerns about the current direction of travel."

"I hope we can get back on track soon and not be tempted by the kind of coercive measures we have seen elsewhere," the Brexit minister said.

UK Prime Minister responded to Frost by saying that he was "very sorry" to receive his resignation letter and thanked him for his "unique contribution towards getting Brexit done." **ANI**

ABUNDANCE OF CAUTION

CNN closes offices to nonessential employees due to COVID concerns

WASHINGTON: CNN is sending all of its nonessential employees to work from home amid a spike in coronavirus cases, network President Jeff Zucker said in a memo.

"Given the recent, sudden surge in Covid cases around the country, and within our teams at CNN, Turner Sports & WarnerMedia Studios, as of tonight we are CLOSING our offices to all employees who do not have to be in the office to do their jobs," the Saturday memo says, as quoted by The Wall Street Journal.

Zucker said that CNN made the decision to minimize the number of employees in office spaces out of an "abundance of caution." **ANI**

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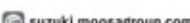


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Richardson, Starc strike, Australia six wickets away from victory

Australia declared their second innings at 230/9, setting England a target of 468

As soon as England started to gain some momentum, Jhye Richardson got the prized scalp of Burns

ADELAIDE: Travis Head, Marcus Labuschagne and Jhye Richardson were the standout performers as Australia gained full control on Day 4 of the ongoing second Ashes Test here at the Adelaide Oval on Sunday. At stumps, England's score read 82/4-- still, 386 runs away from the target. Ben Stokes (3*) is unbeaten at the crease. Resuming the final session at 20/1, Rory Burns and Dawid Malan (20) added 28 more runs to the total, before the latter was sent back

to the pavilion by Michael Neser. Skipper Joe Root then walked out to the middle and along with Rory Burns, he added 22 runs for the third wicket. As soon as England started to gain some momentum, Jhye Richardson got the prized scalp of Burns (34) in the 31st over and England was reduced to 70/3, still needing 398 runs for the win. Right before stumps, England skipper Joe Root (24) was scalped by Mitchell Starc and Australia is

now just six wickets away from going 2-0 up in the series. Earlier, Australia declared their second innings at 230/9, setting England a target of 468. Labuschagne and Head scored half-centuries for the hosts in the second innings. Brief Scores: Australia 473/9d and 230/9d; England 236 and 82/4 (Rory Burns 34, Joe Root 24; Jhye Richardson 2-17). **ANI**



ASHES: Right before stumps, England skipper Joe Root (24) was scalped by Mitchell Starc and Australia is now just six wickets away from going 2-0 up in the series.

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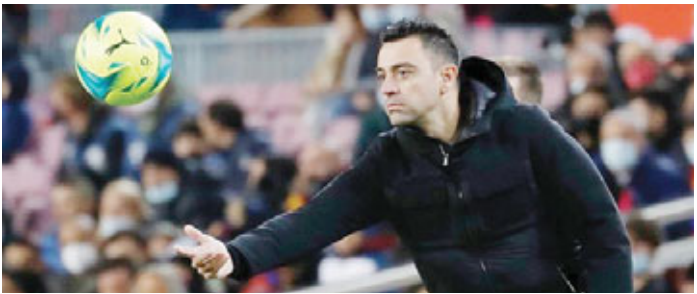
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FOOTBALL

Have to learn and be more responsible: Xavi on Barca's underperformance

BARCELONA: FC Barcelona head coach Xavi expressed his disappointment on his side's below-par performance in the La-Liga clash against Elche FC on Saturday. Despite winning the game by 3-2, Xavi believes that his side performed unconvincingly in the match. "We've lost [Barcelona's] model of play and we have to bring it back. I have not been here for six years and there are things that have surprised me tactically. I wasn't here so I don't know who's responsible for it, but it's making [the job] hard for us," Goal.com quoted Barcelona head coach as saying. "The large majority [of players] don't understand the positional play. There are mechanisms that I understood from the age of 11 and we have players here that haven't worked on them. We complicated things for ourselves. Elche sur-



vived on our errors and that cannot be the case. We have to learn and be more responsible," he added. Xavi later praised the 17-year old Gavi for his spectacular performance and called him the 'future' of the club. "You can only take your hat off for that performance from Gavi," he said. "It's spectacular how he plays. Along with Nico, Abde [Ez-zalzouli], [Ronald] Araujo, [Alejandro] Balde, they're the future of the club. I played here when I

was 18 and I was scared. These guys are bursting with personality. I'm delighted with this generation, Gavi is especially exciting," said Xavi. "What's most surprising about Gavi is his age, he's 17. Look at how he's competing. Today he made the difference with a goal and an assist. I don't want to compare him with anyone, just make sure he doesn't put the brakes on because he has no ceiling," he added. **ANI**

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PREMIER LEAGUE

Gabriel Martinelli's brace powers Arsenal to win over Leeds



LONDON: In the only Premier League match on Saturday, Arsenal eased to a 4-1 victory against Leeds United at Ellan Road. Gabriel Martinelli scored his first Premier League brace and Bukayo Saka was also on target in a mesmerising opening 45 minutes, in which Gunners mustered 11 shots on target - the most in a single first half of Premier League football since 2003/04. Leeds rallied briefly in the second half, scoring from the penalty spot. However, substitute Emile Smith Rowe latched on to Martin Odegaard's exquisite through-ball to finish and confirm Arsenal's third straight league victory six minutes from time. Arsenal stay fourth on 32 points, four ahead of West Ham United. Leeds, who had 15-year-old Archie Gray on the bench, are five points above the relegation zone in 16th. **ANI**



MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX ENDS HIGHER

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index (30) gained 12.5 points, comprising an increase of 0.31 per cent to close at 4043.11 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 4030.57 points.

EDO launches its corporate vision and logo

The new logo, which was designed by PDO Concept and Design Adviser Mohammed Al Mahrazy, also reflects its approach to energy and sustainability, as well as EDO's values of driving forward the energy transition agenda



MUSCAT: Energy Development Oman (EDO) SAOC has launched its new brand identity by unveiling its corporate vision and logo.

The company was set up in Muscat in December 2020 to take over the government's 60 per cent stake in PDO's Block 6 oil and associated gas, and 100 per cent in PDO's Block 6 non-associated gas and condensate. PDO continues to operate Block 6, and EDO, through PDO, is responsible for the bulk of Oman's hydrocarbon output.

EDO's vision – "To be a world-class partner for growth, driving a sustainable energy future" – will guide the business towards achieving its objectives of: Creating a vehicle for growth, enhancing efficiencies and governance in Oman's oil, gas and new

energies sector. Alleviating the government's Block 6 funding requirements and unlocking value through diversification and value chain integration.

EDO Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Haifa Al Khaifi said, "EDO's ambitious vision is inspired by the Oman 2040 Vision of transitioning to renewables, leveraging world-class development opportunities and maximising value for Oman."

"The new logo, which was designed by PDO Concept and Design Adviser Mohammed Al Mahrazy, also reflects our approach to energy and sustainability, as well as EDO's values of driving forward the energy transition agenda."

Following its establishment, through Royal Decree 128/2020, the transfer of the Block 6 oil concession (Royal Decree 21/2021) and the granting of a new Block 6 gas concession (Royal Decree 43/2021), EDO has made substantial progress on its journey

to become the country's energy champion and to support the Sultanate's economic diversification.

In August 2021, EDO successfully secured \$2.5 billion of financing at competitive rates to meet the funding requirements for Block 6.

New interim appointments to the EDO team have also been announced, including Saif Al Harthi as Chief Financial Officer, Aiman Al Shukailli as Chief Strategy and Commercial Officer, Kahlan Al Nabhani as Chief Corporate Planning and Services Officer and Dr Qassim Al Riyami as Chief Reserves Officer.

Al Khaifi who has over 25 years of experience in the energy sector and is the first female CEO of a Gulf Co-operation Council national energy company, commented, "These robustly qualified and experienced interim appointees will further energise EDO's progressive journey during this transitional phase." - **DNA**



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Online Auction Notice.

Auction for sale of unused & used mobile, fixed, transmission, switching & power equipment.

Oman Telecommunications Company (S.A.O.G)
P.O. Box 789, Postal Code 112, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
hereby gives notice of the auction as follows:

Reference Number	Description	Site Visit	Offers Submission Date
RFI #79	e-Auction for sale of unused & used mobile, fixed, transmission, switching & power equipment from Omantel Al-Amarat warehouse in Muscat.	19 th Dec 2021 to 23 rd Dec 2021	30 th Dec 2021

The invitation to this bid is open to all international and local contractors specialized in this field.

- Bidders who are interested to participate in this auction are requested to submit their pre-qualification details online (RFI No 79) on Omantel e-tendering system (<https://tenders.omantel.om>). Companies that are not registered on Omantel e-tendering system are requested to register themselves to qualify/participate in the e-Auction.
- The auction will be conducted online on Omantel eTendering platform at <https://tenders.omantel.om>. The date and time of e-Auction shall be informed to shortlisted bidders based on evaluation of pre-qualification submissions.
- A maximum of 2 participants will be allowed per vendor to enter the premises during the site visit.
- Shortlisted bidders will be requested to submit a bid bond or certified cheque valid for 90 days from the date of submission addressed to GM-Procurement & Contracts Omantel, prior to the date of e-Auction.
- The details of the e-Auction and the required registration/training will be provided to the shortlisted bidders before the e-Auction.
- For auction inquiries, requests for clarifications or a site visit, please do not hesitate to call us on 99444421 or Qais Al Zadjali on 98259090.

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MARKET

MSX index ends higher

The market value went up by 0.118 per cent to reach about OMR22.05 billion



MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index (30) gained 12.5 points, comprising an increase of 0.31 per cent to close at 4043.11 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 4030.57 points.

The trading value stood at OMR4,751,467, comprising a drop of 21.7 per cent, compared to the last session, which stood at OMR6,069,744.

The report released by MSX

pointed out that the market value went up by 0.118 per cent to reach about OMR22.05 billion.

The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached OMR354,000, comprising 7.44 per cent.

The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached OMR119,000, comprising 2.50 per cent. The net non-Omani investment went up by 4.94 per cent to OMR235,000. — **ONA**

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT
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INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff.	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	4,044.71	4,031.28	4,043.11	4,030.57	12.54	0.31
FINANCIAL INDEX	6,481.34	6,453.27	6,475.65	6,463.83	11.82	0.18
Industry Index	6,000.87	5,988.98	5,989.18	5,989.11	0.08	0.00
Services Index	1,577.30	1,571.84	1,577.30	1,574.77	2.53	0.16
MSX Shariah Index	531.00	529.82	530.43	530.13	0.30	0.06
MSX TR INDEX	4,867.23	4,851.07	4,865.30	4,850.21	15.09	0.31

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap.	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
24,342,859	4,751,467	347	22,045,456,925	11	9	20	40

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19

ISN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PD	LAST BD	LAST OFFER	PDA VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET																
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	155,268	54,945	15	0.348	0.360	0.348	0.354	0.348	0.006	1.724	0.358	0.360	0.360	0.100	230,434,257
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	116,200	46,248	31	0.398	0.398	0.398	0.398	0.392	0.006	1.531	0.398	0.398	0.400	0.100	87,560,000
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	1,288,386	636,972	14	0.496	0.498	0.494	0.494	0.488	0.006	1.230	0.494	0.494	0.498	0.100	1,765,790,547
OM0000003388	SOHAR INT. BANK	4,773,690	548,921	11	0.115	0.115	0.114	0.115	0.114	0.001	0.977	0.114	0.112	0.115	0.100	343,857,163
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	190	25	1	0.130	0.130	0.130	0.128	0.128	0.000	0.130	0.130	0.125	0.135	0.100	10,880,000
OM0000001525	OMAN INVST & FIN.	5,732,600	835,967	28	0.145	0.146	0.144	0.146	0.146	0.000	0.000	0.145	0.141	0.146	0.100	34,602,000
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	30,000	6,990	2	0.233	0.233	0.233	0.233	0.233	0.000	0.000	0.233	0.230	0.233	0.100	77,093,341
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	80,000	7,570	10	0.095	0.095	0.094	0.095	0.095	0.000	0.000	0.094	0.094	0.094	0.100	19,000,000
OM0000002077	AL OMANIYA FIN.	362	43	1	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.000	0.000	0.120	0.116	0.120	0.100	35,032,221
OM0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PROD.	2,000	684	1	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.348	0.348	0.000	0.000	0.342	0.344	0.354	0.100	43,464,480
OM0000003000	AI MAHA MARKTING	8,965	5,522	1	0.616	0.616	0.616	0.616	0.616	0.000	0.000	0.616	0.628	0.652	0.100	42,504,000
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	162,447	115,716	13	0.712	0.716	0.704	0.712	0.712	0.000	0.000	0.716	0.712	0.716	0.100	534,000,000
OM0000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	11,095	2,596	3	0.234	0.234	0.234	0.234	0.236	-0.002	-0.847	0.234	0.234	0.236	0.100	46,800,000
OM0000006920	VISION INSURANCE	200,000	18,400	2	0.092	0.092	0.092	0.092	0.093	-0.001	-1.075	0.092	0.090	0.093	0.100	9,200,000
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SER.	820,000	386,480	19	0.420	0.424	0.420	0.420	0.426	-0.006	-1.408	0.424	0.412	0.424	0.100	98,292,200
OM0000002200	AHLI BANK	300,364	34,693	3	0.117	0.117	0.115	0.116	0.118	-0.002	-1.695	0.116	0.115	0.129	0.100	226,160,266
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	131,976	7,127	13	0.054	0.054	0.054	0.054	0.055	-0.001	-1.818	0.054	0.053	0.060	0.100	16,585,902
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	1,009,895	484,750	21	0.480	0.480	0.480	0.480	0.490	-0.010	-2.041	0.480	0.470	0.480	0.100	26,400,000
Total	IS	14,923,447	3,193,548	189												
Parallel Market																
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEER	599,810	44,823	18	0.073	0.075	0.073	0.075	0.073	0.002	2.740	0.075	0.075	0.076	0.100	15,223,983
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	63,750	3,060	9	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.047	0.001	2.128	0.048	0.047	0.048	0.100	70,204,870
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	70,000	3,430	5	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.048	0.001	2.083	0.049	0.048	0.049	0.100	35,005,911
OM0000003125	GLOBAL INV. H.	8,425	519	2	0.061	0.062	0.061	0.062	0.061	0.001	1.639	0.062	0.059	0.062	0.100	12,400,000
OM0000001152	OMAN NAT. ENG.	175,700	15,988	2	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.090	0.001	1.111	0.091	0.090	0.093	0.100	11,830,000
OM0000004788	MADINA TAKAFUL	782,000	74,290	17	0.095	0.095	0.095	0.095	0.094	0.001	1.064	0.095	0.095	0.095	0.100	18,623,000
OM0000001517	HSBC BANK OMAN	6,528,083	629,792	58	0.095	0.100	0.094	0.096	0.095	0.001	1.053	0.100	0.097	0.104	0.100	182,030,028
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	20,330	3,761	2	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.000	0.000	0.185	0.185	0.188	0.100	300,800,076
OM0000001566	OMAN FISHERIES	4,000	240	2	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.000	0.000	0.060	0.058	0.062	0.100	7,500,000
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	59,070	3,090	5	0.052	0.053	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.000	0.000	0.053	0.052	0.053	0.100	18,155,509
OM0000003281	TADGER FINANCE	50,000	3,350	6	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.071	0.071	0.072	0.100	18,034,890
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	272,000	26,112	13	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.000	0.000	0.096	0.095	0.098	0.100	214,747,491
OM0000004735	SEMOB CORP. SALALAH	18,702	1,219	2	0.073	0.073	0.073	0.073	0.073	0.000	0.000	0.073	0.073	0.073	0.100	69,683,752
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	7,500	361	2	0.049	0.049	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.047	0.049	0.100	32,394,597
OM0000007084	MCT DESALINATE	788	71	2	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.089	0.089	0.000	0.000	0.090	0.082	0.093	0.100	13,843,988
OM0000006447	OMAN RET. FUND	1,000	83	1	0.083	0.083	0.083	0.082	0.082	0.000	0.000	0.083	0.080	0.080	0.100	53,690,233
OM0000007407	DHOFAER GENERATING	7,500	555	3	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.076	-0.002	-2.632	0.074	0.000	0.074	0.100	16,445,760
OM0000001962	AL MADINA INV.	6,000	288	1	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.053	-0.005	-9.434	0.048	0.048	0.052	0.100	3,360,000
Total	IS	6,672,658	811,232	150												

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DATA

China's service outsourcing industry sees steady growth

BEIJING: China's service outsourcing industry posted steady expansion during the first 11 months of this year, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Chinese firms inked service outsourcing contracts worth about 1.56 trillion yuan (about \$245 billion) from January to November, up 20.2 per cent year on year. The executed contract value stood at 1.1 trillion yuan during the period, a year-on-year rise of 19.4 per cent.

Outsourcing is the business practice of hiring a party outside a company to perform services and make goods traditionally under-

taken by the company's employees. Of the total, offshore service outsourcing contract value rose 14.4 per cent from a year ago to 876 billion yuan.

Service outsourcing with countries along the Belt and Road led the overall growth, with contracts valued at 169.1 billion yuan. — **Xinhua**

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FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

IP, tariffs, data protection to dominate UK-India FTA negotiations

NEW DELHI: Intellectual Property (IP) protection and enforcement, standards, tariffs on several products and data protection are among the key issues that would dominate the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) talks between India and the United Kingdom (UK), which are set to being early next year.

Strong political will

Talking to ANI, Managing Director of UK India Business Council Kevin McCole said there is a strong political will and desire from the two countries to conclude a comprehensive free trade agreement as soon as possible.

McCole said UK India Business Council has identified key areas of concern of the business community that needs to be addressed during the talks.

"During the last summer, we conducted a round table. We engaged with around 200 business leaders. A number of priority areas came up," McCole said in a virtual interview from London.

He said business leaders of both the UK and India want a defined standard of rules for trade and investment. "Having defined standards is very important." — **ANI**

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- Retrieve cold product samples from the warehouse and proceed with their inspection process at the MOH.
- Keep track of all necessary licenses/ permits both personal and company and keeping them updated as per Governmental requirements (Documentation).

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Indian 23 yrs, B.Com, fresher looking for suitable job in accounts, office assistant or sales. Contact 72872847. Email ruknuddintabish@gmail.com

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Email: bilalsaghe@gmail.com

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Indian male (23) B.Com graduated certified management accountant 2 years' experience in financial accounting & reporting. Contact 78630609 Email: jams hijamsheer2037@gmail.com

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Email: minhajalish@gmail.com

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Contact: 94326527
Email: sreekanth.kerala987@gmail.com

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Contact 93270023 rajugtem10@yahoo.com

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Mechanical Engineer 4 yrs experience in factories and car maintenance with DL seeks job. Contact 93521100.

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Email: fahadca@gmail.com

Civil Engineer, Indian, B.E Civil, having 11+ yrs Exp. Looking for a suitable position, valid GCC D/L, Currently in Oman. Contact 95085270
Email: fasee.syed@gmail.com

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Sales operations coordinator B-com with E-commerce & Various other certifications, 5 years of Dubai and 2 years of Muscat experience, with refined skill set, Looking for new challenges. Contact +968 9676 6702
E-mail: ilyas3299@gmail.com

Indian B.E Civil 3yrs experience available in Oman with NOC. Looking for Sales/Purchase job. Immediate joining GSM 72651777

Indian, 24 yrs experience in consumer electronics company in Oman, looking for a suitable position. NOC available. Can join immediately. Contact 91163640

12 years experienced person in FMCg industry, looking for a suitable placement. Holding valid Oman D/L. Contact 92428081

PURCHASE/PROCUREMENT

7 yrs of Experience in Procurement (Heavy Machineries) plus Accounting, Administration, Logistic Support, Mechanical engineering. Contact +968 93545741

Indian Female (45) - B.Ed Graduate. Primary, middle school teacher. Have 6 years exp. in CBSC School, Kerala. Looking an opportunity in Muscat Indian School. Contact Nos: 968-98378518 / 91 94954422210. Email: vkalluvilayil@hotmail.com

7 yrs exp in purchase, logistics, warehouse/inventory and 10 yrs exp in commercial operations. Having D/L, Contact 98531104

Purchase, Procurement, Logistics & Stores professional, more than 25 years experience having very good knowledge in Construction, Mechanical & Commercial materials, looking for immediate openings. NOC & DL available. Contact 99276414. Email: shettigarhulsidhar@gmail.com

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EXTENSIVE SMARTPHONE USE BY PARENTS MIGHT DAMAGE TODDLERS' DEVELOPMENT



A new study has found that interaction between mothers and their toddlers is reduced by a factor of four when the mothers use their smartphones and this might damage their toddler's development as well. The research has been published in the 'Child Development Journal'. The new study was led by Dr Katy Borodkin of the Department of Communication Disorders at the Stanley Steyer School of Health Professions, Sackler Faculty of Medicine of Tel Aviv University.

The experiment involved dozens of mothers of toddlers (aged two to three years). The mothers were ostensibly invited to participate in a study examining the link between the mother's and the child's interests, and so they were asked to perform three tasks: Browse a designated Facebook page and like videos and articles that interested them; read printed magazines and mark articles that interested them; and finally, play with the child while the smartphone and magazines were outside the room (uninterrupted free play).

"Our goal was to simulate situations in real life where the mother has to take care of her child, while at the same time devoting some of her attention to her smartphone," Dr Katy Borodkin explained.

"The mothers were unaware of the purpose of the experiment, so they behaved naturally by splitting their interest between the toddlers and the smartphone and magazines. We videotaped all the interactions between the mothers and the toddlers and later scanned the recordings frame by frame in an attempt to quantify the mother-child interaction," she added.

Researchers from Tel Aviv University have defined three components of mother-child interaction. The maternal linguistic input was examined first, which is the linguistic content that the mother conveyed to the child. According to previous research, this is an important predictor of a child's language development. It has been found in the past that reduced linguistic input leads to reduced vocabulary in a child, even as an adult.

Next, conversational turns were examined, i.e. how interactive the discourse was. This is a predictor of language and social development, as the child learned that he or she has something to contribute to the interaction as well as the basic social norms of social interactions. Finally, maternal responsiveness was ex-

amined, that is, to what extent the mother responded to child bids. This is a measure of the immediacy of the response and its contingency on the child bid's content.

For example, when the child said "look, a truck", there is no comparison between a response such as "yes, that's great" and a response such as "correct, this is a red truck, like the one we saw yesterday". This measure is the basis for almost every aspect of child development: linguistic, social, emotional, and cognitive.

"We found that the three components of mother-child interaction were reduced by a factor of two to four relative to uninterrupted free play, both when the mother was reading printed magazines and browsing on her smartphone," Dr Borodkin said.

"In other words, the mothers talked up to four times less with their children while they were on their smartphone. Moreover, they exchanged fewer conversational turns with the toddler, provided less immediate and content-tailored responses, and more often ignored explicit child bids. Even when they were able to respond while browsing Facebook, the quality of the response was reduced - the mothers kept their responsiveness to a bare minimum to avoid a complete breakdown in communication with the toddler," she added.

Equally interesting was the fact that no difference was found between browsing a smartphone and reading magazines.

"We did not find that one media distracted more than the other. However, it is clear that we use smartphones much more than any other media, so they pose a significant developmental threat. It should be noted that we currently have no research evidence suggesting an actual effect on child development related to the parental use of smartphones, as this is a relatively new phenomenon. However, our findings indicate an adverse impact on the foundation of child development. The consequences of inadequate mother-child interaction can be far-reaching," she explained.

To conclude, Dr Borodkin added, "In our current research we focused on the mothers, but we believe that our findings characterize communication interferences between fathers and their toddlers as well, since the smartphone usage patterns are similar between men and women, thus allowing us to estimate with high probability that the research findings are applicable to fathers and to mothers". -ANI



FEATURE



STEVEN SPIELBERG

Oscar-winning director at 75

From “Jaws” to “Schindler’s List” and most recently “West Side Story,” the Hollywood titan shines in all film genres. And he’s still helming ambitious projects.

“I dream for a living.” The Steven Spielberg quote appears next to a large black-and-white picture of him smiling on the website of his production company, Amblin.

Judging from the career of the 75-year-old American film director, producer and screenwriter, he appears to be living his dream too. And he’s taken generations of film fans along for the ride.

Born on December 18, 1946, in Cincinnati, Ohio, Steven Allen Spielberg moved several times while growing up, spending part of his youth in Arizona and most of his working life in the mecca of moviemaking, California.

Given his Orthodox Jewish heritage, he grew up listening to stories of how some of his ancestors had perished in the Holocaust.

Holocaust film

A victim of antisemitic bullying at school, he has admitted to having had issues with his Jewish roots. Decades later, his catharsis came in directing the harrowing Holocaust film “Schindler’s List,” which would earn him his first Academy Award for best director.

Joining the Boy Scouts aged 12, and wanting to obtain a photography merit badge, he had used his father’s 8 mm movie camera and submitted a nine-minute film titled “The Last Gunfight.”

There was no stopping the amateur filmmaker thereafter, who has cited 1962’s “Lawrence of Arabia” as “the film that set me on my journey.”

That journey began with him becoming one of the youngest television directors for Universal in the late 1960s, with his first made-for-TV film entitled “Duel” in 1971 receiving generally positive reviews.

The Sugarland Express

In 1974, Spielberg made his debut in a theatrical film, “The Sugarland Express,” based on a true story about a married couple on the run and desperate to regain custody of their baby from state-mandated foster parents.

It would also mark the start of a decades-long collaboration with prolific composer John Williams, who composed the scores for all but five of Spielberg’s films.

Still from Steven Spielberg film *Duel*, a man checking the motor of a battered car.

Spielberg’s first feature film was not for the silver screen but for television. Due to its success, “Duel” was later released in cinemas. In this cheaply produced, incredibly effective thriller, an aggressive tanker truck driver duels with a car driver in a California wasteland. Originally, Spielberg



had intended to dispense completely with dialog.

Evoking various emotions

But it would be a mechanical shark that sometimes failed to function that would seal his reputation as a filmmaker who could draw the crowds and rake the dollars — breaking box office records at the time.

1975’s “Jaws” is now considered the first-ever summer blockbuster. The sight of that dorsal fin swiftly slicing through the waters accompanied by John Williams’ ominous two-note “shark theme” signaling impending danger re-



mains spine tingling to this day.

There was no stopping Spielberg thereafter. His films — often featuring children or adults from fractured middle-class families or ordinary people doing extraordinary things — evoke a gamut of emotions.

He stoked our primal fears with “Jaws” or “War of the Worlds” (2005); brought out our inner child through “E.T.” (1982) and “The Adventures of Tintin” (2011); made us consider worlds beyond ours in “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” (1977), kept us riveted by the derring-do of his famed archaeologist Indiana

Jones in “Raiders of the Lost Ark” (1981) or rooting for journalists unearthing uncomfortable truths in “The Post” (2017). We watched agog as long-extinct predators were resurrected and roamed the earth again in “Jurassic Park” (1993), and in horror at the violence of war in “Saving Private Ryan” (1998), which earned him his second Academy Award for best director.

Bildergalerie Agenten und Spione Filme Bridge of Spies Der Unterhändler

Many parts of Steven Spielberg’s movie were shot in and around Berlin. It re-enacts the

first of a series of spy swaps that took place on Glienicke Bridge, which became known as the “Bridge of Spies,” hence the title of the film. Spielberg isn’t the first filmmaker to portray secret agents in Germany. Here are more examples.

Entering new realm

These are but a selection of the films he has directed. The mind boggles at everything else he’s produced or written, giving the impression he’s covered every genre in the filmmaking book.

Through his production house Amblin Entertainment, which

he founded in 1981, he produced hits like “Gremlins,” the “Back to the Future” trilogy, “Who framed Roger Rabbit,” the “Men in Black” series or “Flags of Our Fathers.”

And then with Dreamworks SKG, which he formed in 1994 with Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen, we were treated to groundbreaking animated films such as “Antz” (1998) and the wildly successful “Shrek” franchise. They however sold their company to Viacom in 2005 for \$1.6 billion.

Spielberg will now enter the realm of streaming services too, his company Amblin Partners having signed in June 2021 a deal with Netflix to produce multiple films a year for the streaming giant.

Besides directing, Spielberg also produced various films including the successful ‘Shrek’ franchise

A journey through genres

Having covered almost all genres from action-adventure, sci-fi fantasy, horror, historical drama, animation, and most recently musicals through “West Side Story,” he was recently asked during an interview with Yahoo if there’s any genre, he’d like to tackle next.

“I was asked that question over the last 40 years of my career, if not longer, and I always said a musical was the one thing I haven’t done,” replied the director who also once wanted to do a James Bond film.

“The thing I neglected to say, which I’ve never done, and the one genre that I haven’t really tackled yet, is the Western. So, who knows, maybe I’ll be putting on spurs someday, who knows?”

Meanwhile, a fifth “Indiana Jones” is on the cards, as well as a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age drama called “The Fabelmans.”

And dinosaur fans can rejoice: “Jurassic World: Dominion” is scheduled for release in summer 2022.

ROUND-UP

Celebrate festive season with Hormuz Grand Muscat, a Radisson Hotel

Make this festive season memorable at Hormuz Grand Muscat with endless festive fun and a variety of culinary offers, delightful entertainment and exciting activities in a luxurious setting

MUSCAT: Christmas is right around the corner and Hormuz Grand Muscat – winner of the Luxury Contemporary Hotel – Global award at the recent World Luxury Hotel Awards 2021 is all about creating memorable festive experiences and elevating guests’ enjoyment to new heights. Indulge in festive-themed surroundings, with our beautiful Christmas tree and gingerbread house scene in the lobby whilst enjoying our impeccable service and culinary delights. Relish in seasonal favourites with us from a takeaway turkey, Christmas Eve dinner, to Christmas lunch with family and friends and New Year’s events. We are here to cater to all your festive needs. Our worldwide awarded



restaurants Qureshi Bab-Al-Hind and OMNY are glitzed up for the season with the lavish fare for your NY celebrations. Christmas Celebrations officially began with our traditional

gingerbread house decorating competition and the lighting of our Christmas tree on December 6. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are also very popular at the Hormuz Grand Muscat, and this year the hotel will host a Christmas Eve celebration at OMNY offering lavish culinary selections. Enjoy a 4 course menu, specially curated by our Executive Chef and his team on December 24, from 7 pm onwards. The price starts at OMR 26 per guest; a reduced a la carte and children’s menu option is also available. On Christmas Day, the annual lunch offers an exceptional spread of traditional treats, live carving stations, grills and a decadent dessert station. Also, a special guest pays a visit to surprise

and spread cheer. Price starts at OMR 28 per guest. December 25, from 12 noon to 4pm. Usher in 2022 at our New Year’s Eve celebration at Hormuz Grand Muscat! Indulge in a special menu inspired by the season with a celebratory drink offered at OMNY. Set menu prices start from OMR35 per guest, with options of a reduced a la carte and children’s menu. Dine under the stars at Oasis terrace and try our extensive buffet featuring a selection of salads, main courses and delectable desserts. Price starts from OMR 28 per guest. Ring in the New Year with a truly Arabic experience at Zaiba Ballroom. Special performance by Ahmed Sekmani and Nahwand

Band. Price starts from OMR 35 per guest inclusive of buffet and live performance or enjoy the show with our accommodation package and live performance - starting from OMR 110 for two guests. On New Year’s Day, start 2022 off on a delicious note with the ultimate brunch at Straits along with unlimited selected drinks from 1 pm to 5 pm. Price starts from OMR25 per guest. There are also some fantastic accommodation packages to choose from. Check out our spacious guest rooms and elegant suites to bring in 2022 in style with exclusive celebration packages. All rates are subject to 5% VAT and children between 6-12 years enjoy a 50% discount and kids 5 years and below dine for free.

MANAR ALIZZ INITIATIVE

Alizz Islamic Bank organises seminar on ‘Waqf and Will’

MUSCAT: As part of Manar Alizz Initiative, Alizz Islamic Bank in collaboration with Al Rustaq Charity Team will organise a seminar under the theme ‘Waqf and Will: their Civilisational Role’ on Wednesday at Wilayat Al Rustaq in the governor’s office. This seminar comes in response to the many invitations received by Alizz Islamic Bank from across the different governorates of Oman following the successful launch of a similar seminar held at Grand Millennium Muscat during which Alizz Islamic Bank hosted a distinguished group of scholars, researchers, and specialists in this field. In their work papers, the experts underlined the fact that the ‘will’ is a religious duty commanded by Allah yet much is needed to be done to educate the public about continuous charity and the act of giving.

It is highly praised for its noble and vital purposes as it can be used to fund charitable activities in the Sultanate as a gesture of social solidarity. On the other hand, endowment (‘waqf’) is an important religious instrument since the early days of the Islamic civilisation and, practically, the Omani society has applied this concept throughout its history as a reflection of compassion and empathy between the members of society under the tenets of Islamic Sharia. To continue this shining legacy, while offering Islamic banking services; there is a need to underscore the role of waqf and provide the opportunity to invest in the ‘waqf’ properties. These will grow into sustainable sources of income to fund charitable activities and manifest the strong bond between society members.

COLLABORATION

British Airways, Qatar Airways mark next milestone in their joint business

DOHA: British Airways and Qatar Airways mark the next milestone in their joint business partnership, as they announce their intent to extend their joint business. The news follows British Airways’ relaunch of daily services to Doha, with the airline’s first flight taking off from Gatwick last week, giving customers access to Qatar Airways’ expansive global network with connections from Doha to over 100 destinations across the world. The flight was operated by a Boeing 777-200ER aircraft featuring three cabins - Club World (business class), World Traveler Plus (premium economy) and World Traveller (economy). This winter, the airlines will jointly operate up to six daily flights between London and Doha - five from London Heathrow and one from London Gatwick. Following on from this milestone



in their partnership, the two airlines announced that they intend to further expand their joint business and offer customers access to more destinations on their respective networks. The proposed expansion will give customers enhanced access from Europe to popular destinations in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Australasia, such as

Singapore, Sydney, Colombo and Nairobi. It will also improve access to destinations across Europe such as Amsterdam, Madrid or Dublin. Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, Akbar Al Baker, said: “Expanding our Joint Business with our strategic airline partner, British Airways, is an important milestone in our ambition of providing

customers access to the most extensive route network and unrivalled product.” Sean Doyle, British Airways’ Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, said: “The launch of our first flight from Gatwick to Doha was an important milestone in our existing joint business with Qatar Airways. The proposed expansion of the joint business will be great news for customers, offering them access to more destinations across the world with seamless connections. We know customers are always looking for more options to connect onto popular holiday hotspots such as the Maldives and Seychelles, and this expansion will allow them to do just that.” The airlines expect to receive news of any relevant regulatory approvals of their expanded Joint Business proposition in the first half of 2022.

IN COOPERATION WITH OMAN DATA PARK

Oman Information and Communication Technology Group launches Oracle’s Hyper-Scale Cloud Infrastructure Data Center in Oman

MUSCAT: Oman Information and Communication Technology (OICT) Group, Oman Data Park and Oracle have jointly launched Oracle’s Hyper-Scale Cloud Infrastructure Data Center in Oman, as the first oracle cloud region in the Sultanate. The new cloud region (OCI), will provide a broad range of IaaS/PaaS Cloud Services for all entities in the public and private sectors, across the Sultanate of Oman, through ODP certified Tier III Data Center. Oracle’s Cloud Infrastructure (OCI) is a dedicated region in Oman that will enable the entities in Oman to run all their Oracle systems on a multi-tenant cloud infrastructure with physical control of infrastructure and data to help them meet the most demanding regulatory, data residency, and latency requirements. Commenting on this event, Eng. Said bin Abdullah Al-Mandhari, CEO of Oman Information and Communication Technology (OICT) said, “This partnership between the group and Oman Data Park embodies the objective of setting up (OICT), which aims at becoming an investment arm for the government in partnership with the private sector in implementing the strategies of the telecommunications and information technology sector, as well as the initiatives for keeping with the Fourth Industrial.” Al-Mandhari added, “The launch of this cloud region also comes within the framework of the four specialisations of the Oman Information and Communication Technology (OICT), which include the fields of infrastructure, communications, information technology platforms, provision of services, data centres, cloud computing, services of electronic platforms, and information security survives, in addition to the efforts of the group to contribute in building the country’s digital economy, and promoting the development of small and medium Foundation” Eng. Maqbool Al Wahaibi, CEO



communications and information technology sector, as well as the initiatives for keeping with the Fourth Industrial.” Al-Mandhari added, “The launch of this cloud region also comes within the framework of the four specialisations of the Oman Information and Communication Technology (OICT), which include the fields of infrastructure, communications, information technology platforms, provision of services, data centres, cloud computing, services of electronic platforms, and information security survives, in addition to the efforts of the group to contribute in building the country’s digital economy, and promoting the development of small and medium Foundation” Eng. Maqbool Al Wahaibi, CEO

of Oman Data Park also stated: “We in ODP are pleased to be part of this distinguished cooperation with the OICT group, which resulted in launching the Oracle Cloud Region in the Sultanate.” He emphasized those capabilities of Oman Data Park to provide the best levels of cloud services, relying on the team of specialized experts at ODP, which is Sultanate’s first IT-managed and cloud services provider. Al Wahaibi added that OCI is built on agile modelling that simplifies the transformation of all verticals in the Sultanate of Oman towards a sustainable economy and 4th industrial revolution. He pointed out that the launching of this Oracle advanced cloud technology will accelerate the digital transformation vision

2040 by upfronting the latest technology in cloud services that meets market needs and data governance requirements, reduce operational costs, and modernise legacy applications. The Oracle High Performance Cloud Region will also enhance the ability of companies and organisations to ensure the security and integrity of their data within the country, will contribute to reducing data transmission times and speeding up recovery from the consequences and effects of disasters on a large scale, while it is one of the first ultra-wideband clouds from Oracle has been launched in the Sultanate. This service will also provide the operating companies and institutions in the Sultanate with access to a high-bandwidth network with high performance to operate all types of workloads with various work tasks, including complex calculations. ODP has greatly contributed to providing an all-in-one solution of computing, cloud computing services, data storage, networking, as well as web-hosting and network security services, while it has an advanced virtual data centre in the field of cyber security – Cyber Security Park, with a world-class level of quality.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES

UFC signs pact with Elevate

MUSCAT: United Finance Company (UFC), one of Oman’s leading finance companies, signed an agreement with Elevate Management Services recently, to provide ongoing training programmes to UFC employees. Elevate is one of Oman’s specialised companies focused on learning, development and management consultancy. It provides for various solutions based on an employee’s training needs as well as a company’s vision. Both UFC and Elevate strongly believe that an employee is the biggest asset of any company and it is critical to provide them appropriate training to ensure that they can grow, both professionally and personally. As part of the company’s overall development plan, the proposed learning & development solutions will comprise technical skills, soft skills and behavioural training programs for all employees. In addition, there is a unique plan in place for assessing and developing the talent of young Omanis in UFC and preparing them for a long-term career with the company. UFC and Elevate agreed that the major goal of their cooperation would be to improve the knowledge and abilities of UFC employees and that both parties would put forth their best efforts to prepare Omani youth to participate



in Oman’s development in the next few years. Without a doubt, this will lead to increased business growth and support the new UFC management’s vision. Nasser Salim Said Al Rashdi, Chief Executive Officer of United Finance Company, said, “Our vision is to be the first choice and the best finance company for our stakeholders and the community. As a result, we want to make certain that we provide our employees with the necessary skills to advance their careers and provide customer-centric financial products and solutions that support the sustainable growth of the economy leading to job creation and income growth. Ahmed Qadir Al Balushi, Chairman of Elevate said, “We are proud and excited to be chosen by UFC to be their partner in providing training to their staff.”

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ROUND-UP

Meethaq: Changing banking landscape

As the pioneer of Islamic banking services in the Sultanate, Meethaq has been continuously setting new benchmarks in the sector

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat is the most popular and largest Islamic banking services provider in Oman, offering a full suite of Sharia-compliant retail, corporate banking and wholesale banking products and services.

Since its inception 9 years ago, Meethaq Islamic Banking has been enjoying phenomenal growth and continues to set new benchmarks. It has been very encouraging to see both retail and corporate customers wholeheartedly adopting innovative Islamic banking and finance solutions, which were previously unavailable in Oman.

In line with its excellent customer-centric vision and full commitment to offering a world-class Islamic banking experience to customers in every corner of the country, Meethaq has established the largest Islamic branch network in Oman consisting of 12 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 12 branches across other governorates. In addition to its already excellent network of branches, Meethaq has a dedicated network of 41 ATMs/CDMs and also provides free access to more than 740 plus ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country for customers to conduct their banking transactions with ease. This has resulted in Meethaq enjoying the tremendous confidence of its extensive base of customers.

Meethaq demonstrated its leadership in the sultanate's Islamic banking sector yet again by growing its assets despite the strong economic headwinds brought about by the ongoing pandemic. It is noteworthy that with close to 30 per cent market share of the total Islamic assets in Oman, Meethaq Islamic banking is significantly bigger than both full-fledged Is-



Islamic banks and other Islamic windows operating in Oman.

Supporting Oman's economic development

Meethaq has been at the forefront in actively supporting Oman's economic development with its ever-growing suite of Islamic finance products and services catering to the varied and sophisticated needs of its different customer segments. In May 2017, Meethaq attained a notable milestone when it received approval from the Capital Market Authority and the Central Bank of Oman to launch the first Sukuk programme in the Sultanate of Oman allowing participation by retail investors.

The maiden Sukuk issuance was a great success with subscriptions far exceeding the initial target amount. Meethaq exercised its green shoe option to absorb the excess demand for its Sukuk and raised a total of OMR 44.6 million, which was well above the initial target of OMR 25 million. Similarly, Meethaq Sukuk Second Series launched in 2019 was a resounding success with the Islamic banking leader successfully raising an additional OMR 45.6 million. Building on these successes, Meethaq has played a pivotal role in several sovereign Sukuk issuances by the Government of Oman.

In addition to supporting the Sukuk issuances in various capacities which include being mandated as the Sole Lead Manager, Issue Manager and Book Runner, Meethaq has always been the largest Islamic Financial Institutional investor in all of the Government of Oman Sukuk issued so far. This reflects Meethaq's commitment to supporting the Sultanate's sustainable economic and development growth over the long term.

Meethaq recognises the immense investment prospects and potential offered by Oman and



continues to play an important role in the development of key sectors in the Sultanate. In support of Oman's Food Security related strategic initiatives, several local food producers such as Gulf International Poultry, Osoul Poultry Company and Al Nama Poultry have been financed by Meethaq. Meethaq has also been instrumental in the development of the country's transport and logistics infrastructure by providing financing facilities to Oman Air and Oman Shipping Company.

Hence, Meethaq promotes the Sultanate's national goals of achieving strong economic growth, sustainable development and ensuring prosperity for all by financing national initiatives which are vital for the well-being of the country's economy.

Innovation

Innovation has always been a crucial element of Meethaq's product offerings and has resulted in the launch of numerous innovative corporate and retail products. Meethaq's product suite comprises several variants of savings and current accounts customised to meet the needs of different customer segments, financing

solutions such as Home financing, car financing, personal goods financing, travel finance, personal financing, education finance, marriage finance, Ijarah Financing, Diminishing Musharaka Financing, Wakala Billstihmar Financing and Goods Murabaha Financing amongst other structured products & services.

With the aim of offering a full range of Islamic financial offerings to cater to the different customer segments, Meethaq also offers credit cards, debit cards, Motor Takaful solutions, Trade Finance solutions and Hafawa Premium Banking services. These are essentially additional products and services recently launched by Meethaq in response to the growing sophistication of its customers. It is also noteworthy that even during multiple periods of enhanced social distancing and lockdowns in the post-COVID-19 phase, Meethaq continued to innovate and launch new products or upgraded its existing products and services, which have greatly benefited its customers. These include digital onboarding of customers for opening savings accounts, domestic helper, travel and SME Takaful offerings in partnership



with Takaful Oman, the launch of Corporate Purchase Card, co-branded Lulu Credit Card and the opening of fixed deposits through mobile banking.

Digital payments

Meethaq is strongly committed to investing in state-of-the-art technology to further increase efficiency and improve customer service. With an emphasis on competitive channels and new products to cater to various customer segments, Meethaq is focused on maintaining leadership in hi-tech products and services, including electronic payment and web-based services, in tune with the banking requirements of a young, tech-savvy generation.

Several significant technology upgrades were implemented over the last 15 months, including the Meethaq Wallet, which supports storing both Meethaq and non-Meethaq credit/prepaid/debit card details or even another bank's wallet details. This allows customers with a Meethaq Bank wallet to make digital fund transfers to a third party conveniently. It also allows a registered wallet customer to send or request money from anyone just by entering their mobile number or email address, irrespective of whether the customer is a Meethaq Bank wallet user or not. Naturally, the new product has significantly boosted cashless payments in Oman.

Other recent technological upgrades involved enabling customers of other banks in Oman to use Bank Muscat and Meethaq CDMs / FFMs to transfer funds to Meethaq or Bank Muscat accounts. Allowing the usage of debit cards issued by other Omani banks at Meethaq and Bank Muscat CDMs has reduced customer visits to Meethaq branches across the Sultanate and helped improve social distancing during the pandemic phase.

Promoting savings

Meethaq has been playing an active role in promoting savings amongst its customers by launching the Hibati savings account. As part of this, Meethaq organised Hibati prize draws throughout the year, with 5 high-value prizes amounting to OMR 300,000 to be given away in the upcoming End of Year draw. In total, cash prizes worth more than OMR 1.5 million are being given away in 2021 to as many as 5,331 winners.

Based on the Sharia concept of unrestricted Mudarabah, the cash prizes offered under Hibati's 2021 prize draw scheme are 'Hiba' (gift) from Meethaq to its customers and are paid out of Mudarib's (shareholders') own sources. The cash prizes are in addition to the profit share of Investment Account Holders (IAHs) in the General Mudarabah Pool as per the declared profit rates.

World-class Islamic banking experience

Meethaq's strong commitment to supporting the strategic national development initiatives in line with Oman's Vision 2040 economic blueprint, continued investment in new technologies and infrastructure to nurture and grow existing and new customer segments, has been well recognised by the global Islamic finance community.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Shari'a compliance certification by the Sharia Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman. Meethaq's adoption of AAOFI standards (Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions) further distinguishes Meethaq Islamic banking practices in terms of standardisation of its products and services complementing its world-class Islamic banking experience.

ISLAMIC BANKING

Maisarah offers over OMR100,000 at year-end mega prize draws

MUSCAT: Maisarah Islamic Banking Services – BankDhofar's Islamic banking window – reiterated its full-on readiness for the largest prize values among all at the year-end mega draws.

As per the scheme, three lucky winners from across the Maisarah branch network will win OMR 100,000 in the Priority Banking category, OMR 10,000 in the Standard and Affluent Banking category and OMR 2,000 in the children category.

Valid through December 31, in addition to expected profit, the account – which is a personal savings account that is based on the Islamic concept of Mudaraba – allows customers to win cash prizes distributed from the shareholders' funds.

Each OMR 100 gives customers the chance to win cash prizes as per terms and conditions of the scheme, and winners are randomly selected by an automated system in line with the approved



procedures for the prize draws.

In addition to the year-end, mega-prize draws, there are also weekly prizes of OMR100 each granted to three winners from each branch, with a total number of 30 winners every week. Moreover, there are exclusive prizes for children in the monthly draws where one winner per branch is awarded OMR100, with a total

number of 10 winners.

For Standard and Affluent Banking customers, there are monthly prizes of OMR 500 each for one winner per branch, with a total number of 10 winners. Meanwhile, Priority Banking Customers have the chance to win OMR2,000 each for one customer from every branch, with a total number of 10 winners in monthly draws.

LUXURIOUS

Benefits on Lincoln Navigator

MUSCAT: The luxury Lincoln Navigator, the large and luxurious SUV is now even more attractive to own with exclusive benefits. Customers owning the Navigator can avail of service 5 years / 100,000km, 1-year registration and 3M window tint. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom.) The campaign is valid until December 30.

While on the move, the Navigator is also easy to adjust to changing conditions. With the turn of a dial, the driver can adapt the Navigator to changing roads or weather, and enjoy a smooth, confident ride. Additional available technology includes: Trailer Backup Assist, which automatically steers the vehicle to turn a trailer the desired amount – meaning less time required to perform the task; Navigator is expected to deliver more towing capability than any other premium full-size SUV; 360-degree camera and enhanced park assist, which reduce stress from parallel and perpendicular parking. The system integrates views from four cameras to create



an overhead image so the driver can see all around the vehicle; Adaptive cruise control, which automatically slows Navigator in stop-and-go traffic – resuming speed when traffic allows.

The interior layout is clean and uncluttered, with a simple, soothing ambience. At night, interior ambient lights sequentially illuminate each of the SUV's three rows. During the day, a panoramic roof fills the cabin with natural light. Inside, spaciousness comes in all three rows, including storage in each to keep the cabin clean

and organized. An available rear-seat entertainment system allows passengers to stream content wirelessly with an Android device to one of the 10-inch adjustable screens mounted on the rear of the front seats.

The Navigator is designed to be intuitive and easy to use. A 12-inch configurable instrument cluster allows drivers to choose the information they want to be displayed. An available Head-Up Display can show selected information on the windshield instead of the instrument cluster.



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KNOW MORE

Offer valid from 30th November 2021 to 29th January 2022 on all models purchased through the CHANGAN Showroom Retail Offer. #Whichever is earlier. Periodic Maintenance Service Only. Offer includes only 10,000 Kms service intervals. 2 Years / 35,000 Kms - applicable on Changan Alsvin model only. 3 Years / 55,000 Kms - applicable on Changan EADO PLUS, CS35 PLUS, CS75 PLUS, CS85 Coupe, CS95 and HUNTER Pickup only. @For 1st Year Oman and UAE only. ^For 1st Year only. ^^Through Fuel Card. OMR 50 for Alsvin and OMR 100 for all other models. *Easy Monthly Installments are calculated based on 20% down payment for 8 years loan tenure for base models of Alsvin, EADO PLUS 1.6L, CS35 Plus, CS75 Plus, CS85 Coupe & CS95. Changan Hunter 2WD Gasoline Pickup EMI is calculated for 6 years loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals from banks. Applicable on vehicles purchased for personal use. Images shown are for illustrative purpose only. Specification may vary as per the model variant. To know more, please visit the Changan Showroom.

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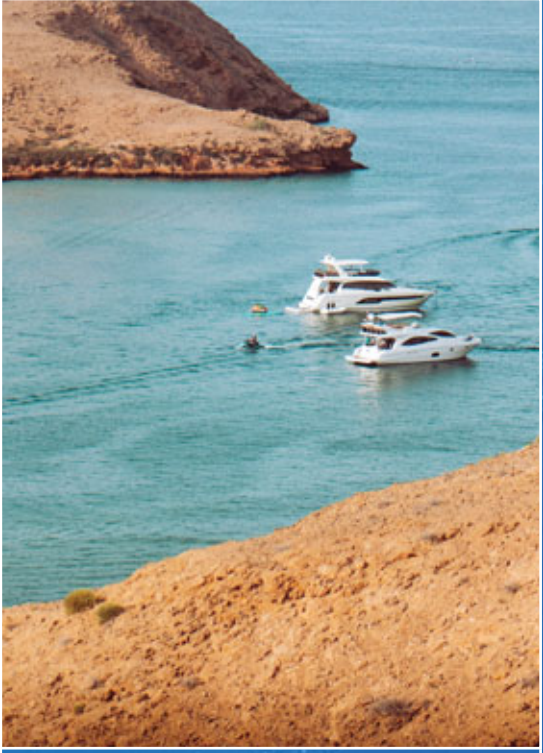
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DODGE

OMAN'S FAVOURITE DIVING SPOTS



Oman's winter season is the perfect time to experience the country's many marine tourism activities. From swimming, diving, bird and dolphin watching to watching the sunrise amidst nature, choices are plenty when it comes to winter activities.

For those who love diving, the Sultanate of Oman is one of the most famous diving destinations in the region. This is because of its awesome diversity in marine life. It has small islands and bays and caves, which offer varieties of marine life, as well as unique coral reefs. The most important diving areas around Muscat are Al Khairan, Al Fahl Island, Damaniyat islands, Khaleej Al Maqbarah in Old Muscat and Al Jis-sah beach.

Among other marine activities is dolphin watching, just a few kilometres from the Muscat coast. Many tourists on small boats come to watch these dolphins and their wonderful performances. Many companies organise multiple trips to these marine areas.

Adhering to rules and regulations at sea is necessary. Tourists have to listen to advice while relaxing on the beach, whether on a boat or while swimming. It is important to protect your life and the lives of those around you as well.

You can indulge in new adventure activities, but you have to avoid taking risks by taking along professionals when you're diving or swimming. You can also learn some water sports at specialised training centres.

When using water bikes, boats and water skis you must ensure their safety before use to avoid any problems. It is necessary to know the daily weather conditions, and through this knowledge you can decide if different water sports are possible.

TOP DIVING SITES IN OMAN

Al Fahal Island

It is located four kilometres off the coast of Muscat. It takes about 20 minutes by boat and offers an excellent diving experience in the bays and caves around its shores. When you dive, you will see a large variety of hard and soft reef species, as well as thousands of large and small fish.

Bandar Khairan

It is a diving area consisting of bays hidden by trees. It takes about half an hour to arrive by boat, where dolphins swim near the shore. There are always large swarms of tropical fish swimming in the area and there are various types of coral reefs.

Damaniyat Islands

These islands are also known as the "Jewels of the Crown". They are located northwest of Muscat, about 18 kilometres off the coast of Batinah. They are spread over an area of 240km. There are several varieties of coral reefs with their dazzling colour scheme.

