

ROHM TO START 2022 WITH TWO CONCERTS

The Royal Opera House Muscat announced that it will kick off its awaited 2022 season with two concerts on 6 and 7 January 2022 starring famous pan Arab singer, composer and violinist Saber Rebai. **>A5**



OMANI ENDOWMENT PARTNERSHIP PORTAL NAMED 'WAQF' LAUNCHED

The Imam Jabir Bin Zaid Waqf Foundation (JBZF) on Sunday launched an Omani Endowment Partnership Portal named "Waqf". The portal aims to enhance the concept of community-based endowment service and offer digitised solutions to streamline the process of humanitarian donation. **>A5**



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PANDEMIC

343 new COVID-19 infections recorded

Times News Service

MUSCAT: 343 more people in Oman were reported to be infected with COVID-19 on 2 January, according to figures released by the government.

One more person was reported to have died from the disease, bringing the total number of deaths since the pandemic came to Oman to 4,117 people.

A total of 305,832 people have so far been infected with the virus, with 300,488 of them having successfully recovered.

Hospitalisation

Three people were admitted to hospital for COVID-related issues in the 24 hours leading up to 2 January, while there are 14 people currently in hospital, with four of them in intensive care.

The single-day figures revealed on Sunday were at par with the numbers of new infections re-



ported on the previous Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

119 people tested positive on Thursday, 30 December, another 102 on Friday the 31st, and a further 122 on the first day of 2022.

"With our commitment to wearing masks and maintaining social and physical distancing, we will prevent ourselves, our families, and our community from the spread of the coronavirus," said the Ministry of Health in its advisory.

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

RH gets advanced cancer care machine

1 Royal Hospital has inaugurated the first advanced cancer tumours treatment device in Oman. **>A2**

WORLD

Fire burns in South African Parliament

2 A fire broke out at the South African Parliament building in Cape Town on Sunday. **>A6**

MARKET

62,335 SMEs were registered in Oman

3 62,335 SMEs were registered in Oman till November 2021 compared to 47,802 in November 2020. **>B1**

INFRASTRUCTURE

New bridge to make it easier to explore Dhofar region



Times News Service

MUSCAT: People looking to explore deeper into the Dhofar will be well-served by the Wadi Afoul Bridge when it comes into service.

Intended to contribute to the smooth flow of traffic between the wilayats of Salalah, Rakhyut and Dhalkut, the project is part of the works and projects issued by the Tender Board, and approved in 2021.

"The bridge will also have a role in solving the problem of inter-

ruptions to traffic to the western regions of the Dhofar Governorate when wadis are flowing," said His Excellency Sheikh Issa bin Ahmed Al Maashani, the Wali of Rakhyut, speaking to the Oman News Agency.

Multipurpose

The bridge comes under both the aspects of providing better services to motorists, as well as development efforts to improve connectivity within the country.

Adding to this, Youssef bin Salem Al Mashikhi, a Shura Council

representative for Wilayat Rakhyut, said, "The announcement related to this bridge is good news for the inhabitants of Rakhyut and Dhalkut. It is a blessing for them during the reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, may God protect him."

The bridge will also help increase connectivity towards the road that leads to the international border with Yemen.

"It is of great importance to the future development of the western region of the Dhofar," said Al Mashikhi.

NINE-POINT AGENDA FOR SULTANATE'S 2022 BUDGET



-  Maintaining prudent and sustainable levels of **public spending**.
-  Enhancing the contribution of **non-oil revenue** to total public revenue.
-  Giving priority to **establish projects** that are linked to productive sectors.
-  Redirecting **government subsidies** to targeted low-income households.
-  Maintaining the **level of spending** on basic services.
-  Giving priority to complete the programme of **digital transformation**.
-  Continue improving Oman's **credit rating** and increase investors' confidence.
-  Continue **supporting** training programmes and training linked to jobs schemes, and boost job creation.
-  Continue supporting **small and medium enterprises** (SMEs).

The 2022 budget is very clear on its economic and social development objectives

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's budget for the year 2022 has listed nine salient points that form its economic and social guidelines for this year.

"The State's General Budget

for the financial year 2022 is consistent with the objectives of the Tenth Five Year Development Plan," said the Ministry of Finance in its budget report. "The 2022 budget aims to achieve a set of economic and social development objectives."

These include maintaining prudent, sustainable levels of public spending; enhancing the contributions of non-oil revenue; prioritising projects linked to productive sectors; redirecting government subsidies to targeted low-income households; maintaining spending levels on basic services; prioritising digital transformation programmes; continued improvement of Oman's credit ratings to increase investor confidence; support training pro-

grammes and those linked to job schemes, while boosting job creation; and continued support for small and medium enterprises.

Challenges

"Over the past few years, the national economy experienced frequent fiscal challenges posed by a sharp drop in oil prices, lower oil demand, high public debt, and the implications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic," explained the budget report. "These challenges have adversely affected Oman's creditworthiness and borrowing cost."

"Moreover, Oman was hit by Tropical Cyclone Shaheen, which took a toll on the community and infrastructure of some wilayats," added the report. **>A2**



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29th MUSCAT



HERITAGE

Four new stamps launched to mark alliance between National Museum and Oman Post

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Four postage stamps celebrating the fifth anniversary of the National Museum's public opening were inaugurated by the National Museum in cooperation with Oman Post, an Asyad Group company.

The postage stamps carry illustrations of unique artefacts dedicated to various epochs throughout the glorious history of Oman, the land and its people.

Signed cover

Salim bin Mohammed Al-Mahrooqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum signed the cover of the first day of postage stamps.

The stamps include a picture of the oldest incense burner discovered in the Sultanate of Oman dating back to about two thousand years BC, one of the main findings of the Majan civilisation.



The other is a picture of the Saidi dagger belonging to Sultan Turki bin Said Al Busaidi, bearing its authenticity and made from pure silver, with a sheath that preserves the tradition and remains a noble symbol.

In addition, the throne chair, which was engraved on the top of the letter "Qaf" from the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimour, and finally the Will letter, which illuminates for a bright future to the Sultanate of Oman, under the

leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik.

Celebration

Jamal bin Hassan Al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said: "The inauguration

of the postage stamp comes to celebrate five years full of achievements that we are proud of as we make our way with young Omanis to the bright places of the renewed Renaissance of the Sultanate of Oman." **>A4**



Dhuhr.....	12:16pm
Asr.....	3:18pm
Maghrib.....	5:38pm
Isha.....	6:53pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....	5:30am

Advanced cancer care machine inaugurated at Royal Hospital

The machine, a heated chemotherapy infusion device, is the first-of-its-kind in the Sultanate

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital (RH), represented by the General Surgery Department, inaugurated the first advanced device for the treatment of cancerous tumours in the Sultanate of Oman.

The machine is a heated chemotherapy infusion device, which is one of the most important scientific discoveries that eliminate cancer cells in the abdominal cavity after tumour removal operations.

"The device is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman. It replaces the traditional method of injecting chemical drugs into the abdominal cavity after the op-



erations of removing cancerous tumours," said Dr. Rashid Mohammed Al Alawi, Head of the General Surgery Department at RH.

In a statement to Oman News Agency ONA, Dr Rashid pointed out that the device will contribute to the treatment of cancerous tumours in many parts of the body, especially colon, ovarian, and appendix tumours and that it can be used for dozens of cancer cases every month.

Meanwhile, Dr. Aamid Khamis Al Aarimi, Director of the Department of Surgery at RH, told ONA that as many as 13,821 surgeries were conducted by different departments of the Royal Hospital. The departments included gastrointestinal surgery, liver surgery, glands surgery, breast surgery, obstetrics surgery, gynaecology surgery, urology surgery, dental surgery, paediatric surgery and vascular surgery, he added.

The cases varied between critical and stable, said Dr. Aamid, noting that this achievement coincided with the exceptional period of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic outbreak and its emergent strains. The performance confirms the hospital's readiness to handle various surgical cases in a way that ensures the safety of patients in accordance with the highest approved standards, he explained.

-ONA

STATE COUNCIL



Records and Archives Law changes to be discussed

MUSCAT: The State Council will hold today its third regular session for the third annual convening of the seventh term, chaired by Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah Al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The session will discuss the draft amendment of some provisions of the Records and Archives Law, issued by Royal Decree No. 60/2007, referred from the Council of Ministers and the report of the State Council's Legal Committee on it.

The session will also discuss the Draft Law of Securities and

the report of the Economic Committee of the State Council on it.

The agenda of the meeting will also see the swearing in of Maha bint Sulaiman Barakat Al Lamki before the State Council in accordance with Article 11 of the Internal Regulation of the State Council.

The meeting will also acquaint the participants with a number of reports submitted by members of the State Council and the report of the Secretariat General on the activities of the State Council for the period between the previous session and the current session. -ONA

BUDGET 2022

FROM A1 Budget assumes \$50 per barrel oil

"However, with the efforts put in by government entities and members of society, life has returned to normal."

The budget for this year has been set at OMR12.13bn, of which OMR10.58bn will be financed through revenues. The 2022 budget is slightly lower than its 2021 counterpart in terms of both revenue (OMR10.94bn in 2021), and spending (OMR12.167bn).

"The 2022 budget deficit is estimated to be around OMR1.55bn, i.e. 15 percent of the total revenue and five percent of gross domestic product," said the MOF report. "Nearly 74 percent of this deficit will be financed through external and domestic borrowing, i.e. OMR1.15bn, while the rest of the deficit, around OMR400mn, will be covered by drawing on reserves. However, the government seeks to achieve a growth rate of 2.5 percent and constant prices in 2022."

Medium Term Fiscal Plan

"Public revenues and expenditures have been estimated after taking into account the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP), as well as a set of bases and scenarios, which all aim to ensure the continuation of basic services delivery such as education, healthcare, housing and social welfare, in addition to improving the business environment and investment climate."

The MTFP, which runs from

2020 to 2024, was developed with an overarching objective of achieving fiscal balance for Oman in the medium term to decrease debt levels brought about by borrowing, particularly from international markets, and make debt servicing costs more sustainable. The dual shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and oil market disruptions also placed an urgent spotlight on the country's fiscal situation.

The current budget assumes an oil price of \$50 a barrel, a rate referred to in the report as "precautionary", with the majority of spending going towards public expenditure.

OMR10.159bn has been allocated for public spending across four areas: defence and security (OMR2.965bn), civil ministries (OMR4.3bn), gas purchase and transport (OMR 1.6bn), and public debt servicing (OMR1.294bn).

The rest of the expenditure has been assigned for investment projects totalling OMR1.971bn. These include development (OMR900mn), electricity subsidies (OMR500mn), loan repayments (OMR200mn), and other necessary expenses (OMR371mn).

Oil revenue for this year is forecast to amount to OMR4.49bn, gas revenue is to contribute a further OMR2.75bn, and current revenues another OMR3.34bn. Oil production is expected to touch OMR1,055,000 barrels a day.



January 2022



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6,7 JAN



RIGOLETTO
20, 21, 22 JAN



VERDI
MASTERPIECES
23 JAN



CHRIS BOTTI
27, 28 JAN

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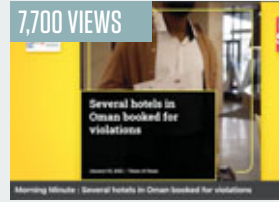
Trending ON SOCIAL MEDIA

BOOK MOST READ ON FACEBOOK



A story on UAE announces travel ban reached 26,913 people and had 1,690 engagements on Facebook.

TELEVISION MOST WATCHED VIDEO ON FACEBOOK



The Morning Minute video on hotel raids in Oman had 7,700 views and reached 26,800 people on Facebook.

INSTAGRAM MOST VIEWED VIDEO ON INSTAGRAM



The Page 1 story video on indicators pointing to a positive 2022 for Oman had 499 views and 28 likes on Instagram.

OMAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Sayyid Bel'arab opens Astronomy Exhibition 2022

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Bel'arab bin Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday presided over the opening of the Astronomical Photography Exhibition 2022.

The event was organised by Oman Astronomical Society in cooperation with the History of Science Centre (HSC) at the German University of Technology in Oman. The exhibition included 27 astronomical photos of 20 photographers.

Ammar Salim Al Rawahi, Chairman of Oman Astronomical Society, delivered the opening speech.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, HH Sayyid Bel'arab felicitated

the participants for the success of the exhibition.

The exhibition comprised 27 photographs of 20 photographers including Ibrahim Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Basil Khamis Al Masrouri, Turki Ibrahim Al Jenaibi, Sultan Nasser Al Ruqaishi, Esam Ali Al Salehi, Ali Rabia Al Kindi, Isa Salim Al Sheikh, Falah Nasser Al Ruqaishi, Majid Suwaif Al Habsi, Majid Mohammed Al Far'ai, Mahmoud Said Al Ameri, Mahmoud Mohammed Al Jabri, Muayad Ahmed Al Siyabi, Nasser Said Al Khamisi, Nada bint Salim Al Lamki, Hilal Said Al Khamisi and Yosef Said Al Khamisi. -ONA



POSTAGE STAMPS

< FROM A1 Stamps highlight beauty of Omani history, civilisation

"The inauguration of this stamp is the result of a cooperation between the National Museum and Oman Post in order to perpetuate the treasures of the Omani heritage that are stored by the postage stamps, and to convey the depth of the Omani cultural heritage to the farthest corners of the earth around the world," Al Moosawi added.

Alongside Sayyid Nasr Al Busaidi, General Manager Customer

Experience at Oman Post and Asyad Express stated "Through these commemorative stamps, we aim to highlight the beauty of Omani history and civilisation for future generations. At Oman Post, we have always been proud of our national role in documenting history in a distinctive way and immortalising national personalities and achievements by launching postage stamps celebrating these

occasions. We hope that stamp collectors and lovers of history and culture will enjoy this new set of commemorative stamps".

The stamp is part of a series of commemorative stamps in denominations of 500 and 100 baisa, with dimensions of 3 cm x 5 cm, and was printed in the offset way. Postage stamps and commemorative cards will be displayed in the "Stamps and Collectibles" shop of

Oman Post at the Opera Galleria.

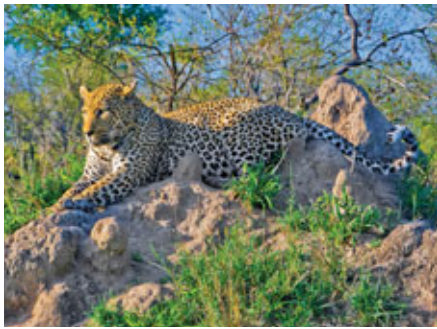
The National Museum is the Oman's flagship cultural institution, showcasing the Sultanate's cultural heritage from the earliest evidence of human settlement in the Omani Peninsula to present day through which we look forward to our promising future. The Museum was established by Royal Decree 62/2013, issued on 16 Muharram 1435 AH (corresponding

to 20 November 2013), as a legal entity with financial and administrative independence and the capacity to own, manage and dispose of tangible and intangible assets of Oman's cultural heritage, in line with internationally recognised experiences and standards in classifying ancient museums.

The Museum aims to achieve its educational, cultural and humanitarian mission by consolidating

noble Omani values, activating belonging, and raising public awareness among citizens, residents and visitors about Oman, its history, heritage and culture, and by developing their creative and intellectual abilities, especially in the areas of preserving evidence, collectibles, and highlighting the cultural dimensions of Oman, and by employing and adopting the best practices and standards in museum science.

DHOFAR'S HIGHEST MOUNTAIN IS HOME TO OMAN'S LEOPARD SANCTUARY



SAMHAN MOUNTAIN is one of the most important mountain ranges in the Governorate of Dhofar, with a maximum height of 2,100 metres. Samhan Mountain includes many plateaus punctuated by narrow and deep gorges, some of which are about 1,000 metres deep. At this elevation, only plants native to semi-arid climates can be found.

"Dhofar's highest mountain is also home to Oman's leopard sanctuary, for which special permission to visit is required," says the Ministry of Tourism. "However, visitors can explore a host of attractions ranging from the Tawi Ateer sinkhole to the round houses of the indigenous Jebbali tribe, before setting up camp on the peak's plateau - just before the sanctuary's entrance.

"Jabal Samhan has many levels that are traversed by deep and narrow mountain passes, some of which are up to a thousand feet deep. On the plain of Jabal Samhan different plant species such as acacia and frankincense trees grow.

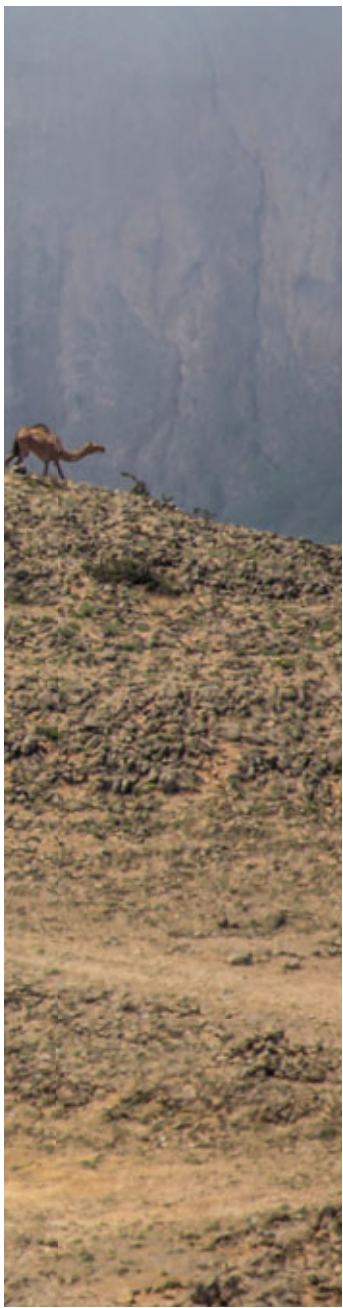
"The narrow mountain passes are poor in water, but there are numerous streams that serve as an important source of water for most of the animals living here," said the ministry. "In addition to the Arabian leopards are many other mammals native to these mountains, including the Arabian gazelle, the fox and the Nubian goat."

Various plants grow in the plain of Jabal Samhan, such as acacia and gum trees. The narrow mountain passes have little water but there are a number of streams, which are an important source of water for most animals found in the region.

Besides the Arabian leopard (considered a rare animal), these mountains are home to a number of other mammals such as the Arabian gazelle, foxes and the Nubian ibex.

Leopards are the animals that best adapt to the surrounding environment, and are often smaller and lighter in colour than their African counterparts. Arabian leopards have survived for a long time in the northern mountain range of the Arabian Peninsula.

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COVID-19

UAE announces travel ban on unvaccinated citizens

ABUDHABI: UAE has announced a travel ban on citizens unvaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines from January 10 with a requirement to obtain the booster dose for the fully vaccinated.

UAE citizens
“Ban on Travel on UAE citizens unvaccinated with #Covid19 vaccine, starting Jan 10, 2022, with a

requirement to obtain the booster dose for the fully vaccinated,” the country’s National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority (NCEMA) said in a tweet on Saturday. However, the authority has said that it would not be applicable for those medically exempted from taking the vaccine, humanitarian and treatment cases. This comes as the Omicron

variant of the COVID-19 is rallying infections in a large number of countries and has surged the hospitalisations in the US and Europe.

Virus surges
The massive spread of the virus, surges in infections and hospitalisations have also led to the cancellation of a large number of flights as fear of the Omicron spread grows. -ANI



IN CAPE TOWN



Fire breaks out in South Africa Parliament

CAPE TOWN: A fire broke out at the South African Parliament building in Cape Town in the early hours of Sunday morning.

Large flames and a column of smoke could be seen coming from the National Assembly. A statement by Jean-Pierre Smith, the City of Cape Town’s mayoral committee member for safety and security, said 36 firefighters were at the scene.

Firefighters were battling a blaze in the national Parliament buildings in Cape Town. The cause of the fire is not known as of now.

Firefighters were on hand to battle the blaze

The fire broke out around 3:00 a.m. UTC and was on the third story of the Parliament building. Reports indicated that it started in the office space and spread towards a gym. The roof had also caught fire.

The nearby area, including the cathedral where Archbishop Desmond Tutu was buried on Saturday, was cordoned off.

No casualties have been reported, and it was not immediately clear if anyone was in the building when the fire started.

Minister of Public Works Patricia de Lille told reporters the Old Assembly building had caught fire. She added that the situation was mostly under control and that while an extractor was pulling the smoke out of the National Assembly. She said the fire had been contained in other parts of the building but was still burning in the National Assembly chamber. The cause of the blaze is still unknown. De Lille said officials were reviewing CCTV footage to determine the cause of the fire.

The Houses of Parliament in Cape Town consist of three main sections. The oldest was constructed in 1884, and the newer sections were added in the 1920s and 1980s. While South Africa’s National Assembly and upper House National Council of Provinces are located in Cape Town, the government is based in Pretoria. -DW



The G7, or ‘Group of Seven,’ consists of the US, Canada, Japan, France, the UK, Italy and Germany

BERLIN: Just before Christmas, German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit unveiled the new G7 2022 logo: a white G and 7 placed so they merge into one simple shape on a dark blue backdrop. “G7 Germany 2022” is written underneath. That’s it. “This design with its focus on the essentials is intended to represent the focused work programme we have set ourselves for this presidency,” Hebestreit said.

The G7, or ‘Group of Seven,’ consists of the US, Canada, Japan, France, the UK, Italy and Germany. When these countries came together in the 1970s, they were the seven strongest industrialised nations in the world, and the economy was the dominant topic. Today, the G7 deals with major international issues that require a multilateral approach.

Germany takes over from the United Kingdom

Much of what was discussed and negotiated under the United Kingdom’s G7 presidency in 2021 will have to be continued from January



G7 SUMMIT VENUE: Elmau Castle will be the venue of the G7 summit in the summer. -DW

ary when Germany takes over. Above all, the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, which after two years shows no sign of abating, remains a major concern. The G7 health ministers last met at the end of November. At their summit in London in June, the G7 leaders agreed to distribute 2.3 billion vaccine doses to developing countries by the end of 2022. Germany is the second-largest donor in the COVAX vaccination alliance.

Climate policy is to be a central topic of the German G7 presidency. At the G7 foreign ministers’ meeting in Liverpool in December, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Green Party) stressed that the climate crisis has implications for peace and security, not only for Europe but especially for the emerging and developing countries.

“We can be under the illusion that the West is an island, but even here the water will continue to rise inexorably if we do not act now,”

Baerbock said. “That’s why we will make pulling together on the climate crisis one of the priorities of our G7 chairmanship next year.”

Engaging China

Without China, however, the G7 will not be able to put the brakes on global warming. “China is a partner for us, for the G7,” the German foreign minister said, referring to more than just climate protection. “Many global problems, we can only solve together.” How to deal with the authoritarian regime in Beijing, however, is an extremely controversial issue within the G7. And US President Joe Biden has urged a tougher stance.

China is certainly a competitor and “in many ways also a systemic rival,” said Foreign Minister Baerbock, but: “Cooperation is the top priority in diplomacy, but it must be on the basis of human rights and in compliance with international treaties.” This “foreign policy dilemma” can not be ignored, she said.

The special role of the US

“We must adapt our approach to China to the realities,” said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) in mid-December during his first speech in parliament as the head of the new government. The “critical human rights situation” and “violations of universal standards” must not be ignored. “That doesn’t change the fact that a country of China’s size and history has a central place in the international concert of nations.”

During Germany’s G7 presidency, it will become clear that the new German government wants to shape its foreign policy much more than before through “constructive dialogue.”

“I stand united with US President Joe Biden in the conviction that the world’s liberal democracies must prove that they can provide the better, the fairer, and the more equitable answers to the challenges of the 21st century,” Scholz said. He promised that the German government would always stand up for multilateral cooperation and international institutions.

As to Russia, the G7 has threatened “massive consequences” in the event of an attack on Ukraine. This refers primarily to punitive economic measures. “Any violation of territorial integrity will have a high price, and we will stand together with our European partners and our transatlantic allies and speak with one voice,” Chancellor Scholz said in parliament, repeating a statement made by his predecessor in office, Angela Merkel. -DW

Full story at timesofoman.com/world

CORONAVIRUS DIGEST

France reduces COVID-19 isolation time

PARIS: A series of COVID-19 rule changes will cut the amount of time vaccinated people spend in quarantine if infected

The French government will ease quarantine requirements for people infected with the coronavirus despite record numbers of new cases, Health Minister Olivier Veran said.

Starting Monday, fully vaccinated people who test positive for the coronavirus will only have to isolate for seven days and can leave quarantine after five days if they show a negative test, Veran told the French newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche.

Unvaccinated people would have to quarantine for 10 days and their isolation time could be shortened to seven days with a negative test, he said.

Meanwhile, fully vaccinated contacts of positive cases will no longer need to isolate provided



they test themselves every other day for six days. Unvaccinated contacts will have to isolate for seven days.

The change in regulations should allow a “benefit-risk balance aimed at ensuring the virus is controlled while maintaining

socio-economic life,” the Health Ministry said.

To be considered fully vaccinated, an individual must have received a booster dose no later than seven months after being immunized. Veran said this period will now be shortened to four months

from February 15.

The UK has so far refused to curb socializing and large events despite record infections last week, citing a less dramatic increase in hospitalizations when compared with case numbers.

“Curbs on our freedom must be an absolute last resort and the British people rightly expect us to do everything in our power to avert them,” Health Secretary Sajid Javid wrote in the Daily Mail newspaper.

“I’ve been determined that we must give ourselves the best chance of living alongside the virus,” he added, noting the “enormous health, social and economic costs of lockdowns,” he added.

In New South Wales (NSW), Australia’s most populous state, COVID-19 numbers have decreased. Newly diagnosed cases in NSW dropped to 18,278 from 22,577 the day before as the number

of tests carried out on New Year’s Day declined by a quarter, Health Department figures showed.

However, hospitalisations jumped by 18 per cent to 1,066, prompting growing concerns about potential strains on the country’s health system.

Ecuador saw COVID-19 cases triple in the last quarter of 2021, following the appearance of the Omicron variant, according to official figures.

December recorded a total of 24,287 cases, more than double the number reported in November (9,513), and more than three times the number reported in October (7,556).

Ecuador ended 2021 with a total of 551,620 confirmed cases in its last quarter, including 33,682 deaths, reflecting an increase of 61 per cent and 58 per cent over the same period in 2020, respectively. -DW

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Bollywood couples seek escape in wildlife reserves

MUMBAI: Away from the city, under the stars and closer to nature — this is how many Bollywood couples have opted to welcome their New Year.

Alia Bhatt, who rang in the New Year with her boyfriend Ranbir Kapoor, posted a picture of the sky and wrote, “hey 2022”.

Previously, she had shared a bunch of pictures from the trip, featuring glimpses from the wildlife including images of giraffes, lions and cubs in the wild.

Ananya Panday, who reportedly went to the Ranthambhore National Park with rumoured boyfriend

Ishaan Khatter, shared a carousel of pictures with stills and video of a tiger, langur and spotted deer.

“Entering 2022 with a grateful, happy heart. stay safe, be kind & make every moment count #YearOfTheTiger,” she wrote in the caption.

Ishaan also posted pictures on his Instagram handle and penned a similar caption that read, “Eye of the (tiger emoticon) and with that, we begin the year of the tiger!!!”

Rumoured couple Kiara Advani and Sidharth Malhotra also headed together to welcome the New Year in the lap of nature.

Kiara took to her Instagram handle and shared pictures of a tiger, birds, peacocks and spotted deer.

Meanwhile, Sidharth shared pictures of himself on a safari ride.

“Happy New Year! May this year be the start of a new chapter in which you write your own story! Wishing you strength & good health on this journey ahead,” he penned the caption. Ishaan Khatter took the comments section and wrote, “Stunning clicks wow who took.”

It appears from several pictures that Sidharth and Kiara rang in the New Year with Ishaan and Ananya. -ANI



4-WICKET WIN

Ghazanfar shines in thrilling victory for Ghubrah

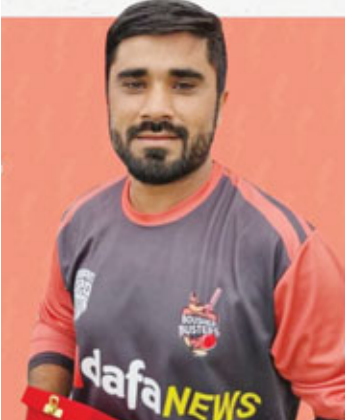
Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman veteran Ghazanfar Iqbal was at his six-hitting best when he helped Ghubrah Giants to a sensational 4-wicket win over Amerat Royals in a D20 Cricket League game at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Amerat on Saturday.

Prathik Athavale's 91 off 63 and Rafi Ullah's belligerent 26 off 8 including 3 massive sixes, were the highlights of Amerat's 180 for 6. Ghazanfar and Akshay Jathar claimed two wickets each.

Opening the innings, Ghazanfar worked up his old magic by smashing 78 off only 47 balls, including 7 fours and 5 sixes, paving the way for Ghubrah's successful chase in 19.3 overs as it reached 183 for 6. Haroon Khan chipped in with a fluent 32. Prasad Sankata bagged 3 for 30.

Brief Scores (D20): Amerat Royals 180 for 6 in 20 overs (Pratik Athavale 91 – 12x4, 1x6, Rafi Ullah 26 – 1x4, 3x6. Ghazanfar Iqbal 2-30, Akshay Jathar 2-49) lost to

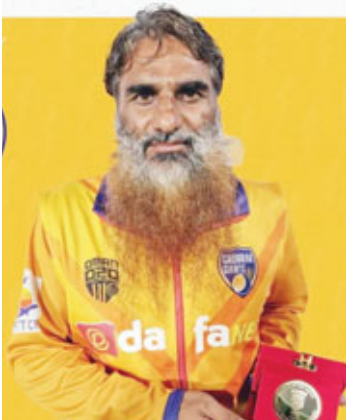


Ghubrah Giants 183 for 6 in 19.3 overs (Ghazanfar Iqbal 78 – 7x4, 5x6, Haroon Khan 32 – 2x4, 2x6. Prasad Sankata 3-30) by 4 wickets.

Gustav, Mohit help Ruwi

Earlier, in the day's second game at the same venue, Ruwi Rangers rode on Gustav Burger's fluent 44 and Mohit Patel's superb 3 for 10 to beat Darsait Titans by 48 runs.

Apart from Burger, Naseem Khushi was the other main scorer



with a whirlwind 23 off 10 including 2 fours and 2 sixes as Ruwi scored 147 all out in 19.4 overs. Ubaid Ullah and Khawar Ali picked up three and two wickets respectively.

Darsait failed to make a match of it, folding up for a dismal 99 in the final over. Nester Dhambatsop scored with 25. Sanuth Ebrahim and Imran Ali lent Mohit excellent support by taking two wickets each.



Brief Scores (D20): Ruwi Rangers 147 all out in 19.4 overs (Gustav Burger 44 – 1x4, 3x6, Naseem Khushi 23 – 2x4, 2x6. Ubaid Ullah 3-27, Khawar Ali 2-31) defeated Darsait Titans 99 all out in 19.3 overs (Nester Dhamba 25 – 3x4, Mohitdhirubhai Patel 3-10, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-21, Imran Ali 2-0) by 48 runs.

Asif stars in Bousher win

Asif Khan's all-round contribu-

tion helped Bousher Busters to a 3-wicket victory against Khuwair Warriors in Saturday's first D20 match that was reduced to 15 overs due to rain.

Amir Kaleem once again top-scored for Khuwair, scoring 50 off 30 including 4 sixes as his side limped to 102 for 8. Ajay Lalcheta and Bilal Muhammed claimed two wickets each whereas Asif took one.

Bousher surpassed the modest total off the last ball, scoring 103 for 7 for a nail-biting win. Asif led the tense chase with a vital 34. Amir Kaleem was the pick of Khuwair bowlers, taking 3 for 11 while Rubel Sattar and Arjun Suresh bagged two wickets each.

Brief Scores (D20): Khuwair Warriors 102 for 8 in 15 overs (Aamir Kaleem 50 – 1x4, 4x6, Ajay Lalcheta 2-14. Bilal Muhammed 2-9, Asif Khan 1-12) lost to Bousher Busters 103 for 7 in 15 overs (Asif Khan 34 – 1x4, 2x6, Aamir Kaleem 3-11, Rubel Sattar 2-16, Arjun Suresh 2-18) by 3 wickets.

Guru bowls Sarco to big win
Guru Kotian's magnificent 6 for 29 powered Sarco to a thumping 134-run victory against Orient Travels in a 50-over A Division League game at OC Turf 2 in Amerat on Friday.

Sarco exhibited its batting prowess by posting 251 for 8 on the board in the stipulated 46 overs. Ajay Menon (59) and Sathisha Achary (42) being its main batters. Ibrar Hussain picked up 3 for 35.

Orient Travels failed to stand up to Guru's devastating spell with the new ball and was dismissed for a lowly 117 in only 21.2 overs. Sandip Patel was the other standout bowler, taking 3 for 28.

Brief Scores (A Division): Sarco 251 for 8 in 46 overs (Ajay Menon 59 – 4x4, 2x6, Sathisha Achary 42 – 6x4, 2x6, Dileepa Srilal 33 – 3x4, Ibrar Hussain 3-35) beat Orient Travels 117 all out in 21.2 overs (Syed Mohammed 38 – 3x4, 3x6, Guru Kotian 6-29, Sandip Patel 3-28) by 134 runs.

Bangladesh hit back with bat and ball at Bay Oval

Bangladesh finished the day 175-2, still 153 runs in arrears of New Zealand's 328

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Mominul Haque's side provided a stiff challenge for the hosts on day two, claiming 5/70 in the morning session and setting a platform for a strong first innings total.

Bangladesh finished the day 175-2, still 153 runs in arrears of New Zealand's 328.

After the loss of Tom Blundell at the end of day one, Rachin Ravindra walked out with Henry Nicholls resuming on 32*. Ravindra would only spend five overs at the crease, before a tentative press forward brought the end to his stay. Reaching low and forward at third slip, Shadman Islam snapped up the chance for Shoriful Islam's third wicket.

Kyle Jamieson joined Nicholls, and the pair put on a partnership of 32, of which Nicholls contributed 24. Attempting to counter, Jamieson fell for the extra flight of Mehidy Hasan Miraz, holing out to Shadman who was a magnet in the field.

Shadman dropped a chance off No.11 Trent Boult, but made amends almost immediately, taking the catch of Nicholls for 75 to end the innings. Tim Southee and Neil Wagner provided little support for Nicholls earlier, making six and a duck respectively in a disappointing collapse of 5/70



SOLID REPLY: Bangladesh were solid in reply with the bat, seeing a tricky period off before lunch, moving to 70/1 by the tea break. -icc

over the course of the morning for the hosts.

Bangladesh were solid in reply with the bat, seeing a tricky period off before lunch, moving to 70/1 by the tea break. Shadman Islam (22) spooned a catch back to Wagner in his follow-through, though the pair of Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Najmul Hossain Shanto dug in for the tourists, putting on 104.

The pair rode their luck with shots hit at catchable height, though the ball evaded New Zealand's awaiting fielders in a frus-

trating afternoon for the hosts. Not all of New Zealand's bad fortune was out of their control however, with Neil Wagner and his side not referring an lbw decision against Mahmudul that would have been overturned if taken upstairs.

The tourists went unbeaten through the first hour of the day's final session, with Shanto bringing up his second Test half-century with a six over mid-wicket. Mahmudul joined him with a fifty (his first in Test cricket), with

the partnership only broken by a smart piece of bowling from Wagner. Working the left-hander over with short-pitched bowling, Wagner pushed his length up, drawing an edge to Will Young.

Mominul Haque entered at No.4 and prevented a late collapse with some mature batting, finishing on 8* after joining Mahmudul to see off the day.

Mahmudul will resume on day three needing 30 runs for his maiden Test century.

ROYAL CAVALRY HORSE 'FAKHR' SCORES FIRST PLACE IN DUBAI

The horse of Royal Cavalry (RC) 'Fakhr' won the first place in the second half competitions at Meydan Racecourse in Dubai. The winning horse, in the 1,400-metre race of the purebred Arabian horse category, was led by the jockey Antonio Friso and trained by coach Ibrahim Al Hadhrami. Moreover, the victory is a first-of-a-kind for the RC in Dubai's Meydan Racecourse for purebred Arabian horses. -ona



COVID-19

Silverwood tests positive

MELBOURNE: England head coach Chris Silverwood has tested positive for COVID-19 while isolating with family in Melbourne.

Silverwood was already due to miss the fourth Ashes Test in Sydney having entered quarantine when one of his family was caught up in the initial coronavirus outbreak in the touring camp. The head coach has been replaced by Assistant coach Graham Thorpe, who will now lead the English team. "England men's head coach Chris Silverwood has tested positive for Covid-19," a statement from the England and Wales Cricket Board read as reported by SkySports.

"Silverwood has been isolating in Melbourne since December 30 following a positive test from one



of his family members. He will remain in isolation until January 8. Silverwood is asymptomatic and is fully vaccinated," the statement read further.

It was further stated that Silverwood is expected to return to the England party in Hobart ahead of the fifth Ashes Test.

Australia has already retained the Ashes after gaining an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series. The fourth Test will begin on January 5. -ANI

SA VS INDIA



Team India hit training ground ahead of 2nd Test

JOHANNESBURG: Ahead of the second Test against South Africa, Team India hit the nets for an intense training session at the Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg.

Taking to Twitter, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) posted some pictures from the training ground and wrote, "Getting Test-match ready at The Wanderers." Head coach Rahul Dravid was seen supervising while skipper Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Umesh Yadav, Wriddhiman Saha were among those attending the training session.

Earlier in the first Test, visitors defeated South Africa by 113 runs on the final day of the game on Thursday. India has taken a 1-0 lead in the three-match Test series.

Mohammed Shami picked five wickets in the first innings before completing 200 scalps in the longest format of the game on Tuesday. In the second innings, Shami dismissed three South African batters to help India win the game.

Team India will be locking horns with South Africa for the second Test on January 3 in Johannesburg. -ANI

IN SELFISOLATION

Liverpool boss Jürgen Klopp to miss his side's crucial Premier League clash against Chelsea

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp will miss his side's crucial Premier League clash against Chelsea on Sunday after a suspected positive coronavirus test.

His assistant Pep Lijnders will take charge for the fixture at Stamford Bridge, the Merseyside club said on Saturday, adding that Klopp is now isolating.

Three other members of his backroom staff have also tested positive.

Klopp, coaching staff and 3 players affected

Klopp announced Friday that three unnamed players had tested positive, and this week complained that each new day was a "lottery" as he waited to discover if any others had got the virus.

Earlier in the month, Virgil van Dijk, Thiago Alcantara, Fabinho and Curtis Jones went into isolation after positive tests.

The quartet returned to training earlier this week.

If Klopp's positive test is con-



Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp.

firmed, the German will also miss the League Cup semi-final first leg at Arsenal on Thursday.

The setback comes as third-placed Liverpool try to keep pace with leaders Manchester City.

However, Liverpool are not expected to ask for the Chelsea match to be postponed.

The Premier League has been ravaged by COVID outbreaks since December.

In total, 17 English top-flight matches have been postponed due to COVID so far, including Liverpool's game against Leeds on Boxing Day. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta missed Saturday's game against Manchester City after a positive test.

Liverpool battle Blues for second place

The Reds are one point behind Chelsea with a game in hand after losing their last league match at Leicester on Tuesday.

Liverpool trail Manchester City by 12 points, with two games in hand, following the champions' 2-1 win at Arsenal.

Liverpool are third in the league standings on 41 points from 18 games, a point behind second-placed Chelsea but with a game in hand.

Klopp lost his mother to COVID last year in Germany, and could not return to his home country for the funeral due to travel restrictions. -nw



MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,146.81 points, up 0.42 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.26 per cent at 530.37 points. National Aluminum Product, was the top gainer, up by 4.48 per cent while, A'Saffa Foods down 7.37 per cent, was the top loser.

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Oman registers 30% increase in SMEs

The Governorate of Muscat topped the list by reaching 21,068 enterprises, comprising a rise of 31.5 per cent till the end of November 2021

MUSCAT: The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered in the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development till the end of November 2021 increased by 30.4 per cent to reach 62,335 compared to 47,802 in November 2020, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Among the governorates, the Governorate of Muscat topped the list by reaching 21,068 enter-



NCSI REPORT: The total number of SMEs registered by the end of November 2021 recorded an increase in the Governorate of South Al Batinah by 33.1 per cent to reach 4,742. - File picture

prises, comprising a rise of 31.5 per cent, followed by the Governorate of North Al Batinah with 9,830, comprising an increase by 30.4 per cent, the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah with 7,604, going up 25.9 per cent and the Governorate of Dhofar by 5,318, constituting a surge by 33.7 per cent compared to the same

period in 2020.

The total number of SMEs registered by the end of November 2021 recorded an increase in the Governorate of South Al Batinah by 33.1 per cent to reach 4,742, the governorate of North Al Sharqiya by 27.9 per cent to reach 4,110, the Governorate of South Al Sharqiya

by 32.2 per cent to reach 3,738, the Governorate of Al Dahirah by 24 per cent to reach 3,454, the Governorate of Al Buraimi by 28.9 per cent to reach 1,321, the Governorate of Al Wusta by 33 per cent to reach 831 and the Governorate of Musandam by 73.4 per cent to reach 319. -ONA

GOVERNORATE OF AL DAKHILIYAH



DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: The agreements, worth over OMR1.8 million were signed by Sheikh Hilal Said Al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah with a number of companies. - ONA

Pacts worth over OMR1.8mn signed to develop and improve municipal services

MUSCAT: A number of agreements were signed in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah to implement a package of municipal and developmental service projects.

The move comes as part of the efforts exerted by Al Dakhiliyah Governor's Office to develop and improve municipal services in the wilayats of the governorate.

The agreements, worth over OMR1.8 million, were signed by

Sheikh Hilal Said Al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah with a number of companies.

The agreements included a number of projects, namely the development of commercial areas in Al Madra area in the Wilayat of Samail, Al Alam area in the Wilayat of Izki, and the renovation of Birkat Al Mouz Park in the Wilayat of Nizwa, in addition to other agreements. -ONA

PARTNERSHIP



NBO offers customers 10% cashback offer with Oman Oil

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Continuing to reward customers with convenient solutions, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has partnered with Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) to offer a 10 per cent cashback on fuel transactions. From January 2-15, 2022, NBO customers can get up to OMR5 cashback per day when topping up their tanks using NBO credit cards at Omanoil filling stations across the country.

Maha Al Raisi, Head of Retail Products at NBO, said, "We are always looking at new ways to reward our customers for their loyalty and to add value to our range of products. For the next two weeks, customers can earn cashback on fuel purchases with Omanoil simply by paying conveniently and securely using any NBO chip and pin or contactless credit card and receive 10 per cent back by the next working day following an approved transaction."

NBO offers a range of credit cards to suit every requirement, each with unmatched benefits and lifestyle features loaded with exclusive discounts and offers which allow customers to save, earn nuqati loyalty points and win every time they use their NBO credit card. Every NBO credit card is equipped with cutting-edge technology and leading security features.

OMAN ENERGY FORUM

Benefits of improved water-food-energy efficiency highlighted

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The 8th Oman Energy Forum 2021 brought together a host of experts to discuss the water-energy-food (WEF) nexus in Oman under the theme 'How to find Sustainable & Holistic Solutions for Oman to Achieve Water-Food-Energy Security?'

During the virtual workshop, participants discussed how all sectors should work towards the common goal of efficiently managing the WEF nexus. The discussions

highlighted the importance of the nexus at the national and governorates levels in Oman. In addition, participants discussed the reciprocal effects between the nexus and long-term growth trends.

Key topic

Another key topic the forum explored is the need to set the right incentives for foreign direct investment and how to create an environment conducive to the formation and/or transformation of enterprises on a sustainable basis.

Speaking during the forum, Walter Simpson, Managing Director - CC Energy Development highlighted that the energy industry has a key role to play and it is right in the centre of change and what is required is real intention and ownership from all stakeholders to come together, work as one team to address challenges and leverage opportunities.

Simpson said, "The hydrocarbons sector is resourceful and brings a lot of value to the table. We need to build trust with all stake-

holders and we can achieve that by reducing our emissions and being transparent about the fact that we are working hard to do that. It's about managing water sources effectively, and that may be reusing it or ensuring that saline water doesn't contaminate areas.

"It's also about being responsible with these resources and above all, I think it's about working with the community and implementing solutions. This will ultimately help all industries across different areas of Oman."



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MARKET

MSX index ends higher

National Aluminium Product, was the top gainer, up by 4.48 per cent while, A'Saffa Foods down 7.37 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,146.81 points, up 0.42 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.26 per cent at 530.37 points. National Aluminium Product, was the top gainer, up by 4.48 per cent while, A'Saffa Foods down 7.37 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Al Anwar Investment were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded while Bank Muscat were most active in terms of turnover.

A total number of 603 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR2.15 million, with more than 10.86 million shares changing hands. Out of 35 traded securities, 16 advanced, 3 declined and 16 remained unchanged. At the session close, foreign investors were net buyers for OMR14,000 while Omani investors were net sellers for OMR11,000 followed by GCC & Arab investors for OMR4,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 6,602.20 points, up 0.37 per cent. Oman & Emirates Holding, Taageer Finance, Al Omaniya Financial Services, Al Anwar Investment and Bank Muscat were up 3.17 per cent, 2.78 per cent, 2.48 per cent, 2.15 per cent and 2.07 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 6,083.95 points, up 0.12 per cent. NAPI, Galfar Engineering, Oman Cement and Al Anwar Ceramics were up 4.48 per cent, 4.11 per cent, 0.81 per cent and 0.46 per cent respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.48 per cent before closing at 1,628.65 points. — United Securities

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

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EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff.	Diff%
MSX 30 INDEX	4,150.37	4,130.84	4,146.81	4,129.54	17.27	0.42
FINANCIAL INDEX	6,607.87	6,580.75	6,602.20	6,577.92	24.28	0.37
Industry Index	6,097.60	6,072.85	6,083.95	6,076.87	7.09	0.12
Services Index	1,628.65	1,622.97	1,628.65	1,620.87	7.78	0.48
MSX Shariah Index	533.22	529.82	530.38	531.77	-1.40	-0.26
MSX TR INDEX	4,994.37	4,970.87	4,990.08	4,969.31	20.78	0.42

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
10,867,263	2,157,348	603	22,134,045,720	16	3	16	35

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 2

RIN

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PD	LAST BD	LAST OFFER	PUR VALUE	MARKET CAP
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REGULAR MARKET

OM0000002077	AL OMANIYA FIN.S	10,000	1,240	2	0.124	0.124	0.124	0.124	0.121	0.003	2.479	0.124	0.120	0.124	0.100	36,199,961
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	4,501,192	429,238	173	0.085	0.086	0.085	0.085	0.083	0.002	2.151	0.085	0.084	0.085	0.100	19,000,000
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	1,413,060	698,216	34	0.490	0.498	0.490	0.494	0.484	0.010	2.066	0.498	0.490	0.498	0.100	1,765,790,547
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	180,799	9,473	17	0.058	0.059	0.058	0.059	0.058	0.001	1.724	0.058	0.058	0.059	0.100	18,121,833
OM0000001525	OMAN INVST& FIN.	317,250	46,499	18	0.149	0.149	0.145	0.147	0.145	0.002	1.379	0.146	0.140	0.149	0.100	34,839,000
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	52,150	20,026	5	0.384	0.384	0.384	0.384	0.380	0.004	1.053	0.384	0.384	0.388	0.100	249,962,584
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	181,250	44,950	7	0.248	0.248	0.248	0.248	0.246	0.002	0.813	0.248	0.248	0.248	0.100	82,056,432
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	98,850	43,437	30	0.440	0.440	0.430	0.440	0.438	0.002	0.457	0.440	0.420	0.440	0.100	96,800,000
OM0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PROD.	73,000	26,858	12	0.372	0.372	0.366	0.368	0.368	0.000	0.000	0.366	0.366	0.370	0.100	45,962,449
OM0000002200	AHLI BANK	60,000	6,960	4	0.116	0.116	0.116	0.116	0.116	0.000	0.000	0.116	0.114	0.120	0.100	228,160,268
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIA INV.	127,100	11,619	10	0.092	0.092	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.000	0.000	0.092	0.088	0.094	0.100	15,765,660
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	6,846	5,148	8	0.752	0.752	0.752	0.752	0.752	0.000	0.000	0.752	0.752	0.760	0.100	564,000,000
OM0000003398	SOHAR INT. BANK	339,278	39,515	5	0.117	0.117	0.113	0.116	0.116	0.000	0.000	0.113	0.112	0.117	0.100	346,847,226
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	502,140	222,739	45	0.460	0.460	0.440	0.444	0.446	-0.002	-0.448	0.442	0.440	0.490	0.100	24,420,000
OM0000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	6,000	1,453	3	0.248	0.248	0.241	0.242	0.248	-0.006	-2.419	0.241	0.241	0.248	0.100	48,400,000
Total	15	7,848,915	1,607,670	373												

Parallel Market

OM0000001319	ALUMINIUM PROD.	306,312	42,944	37	0.140	0.142	0.138	0.140	0.134	0.006	4.478	0.138	0.136	0.140	0.100	4,700,003
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEER	585,105	44,314	35	0.075	0.076	0.075	0.076	0.073	0.003	4.110	0.076	0.076	0.080	0.100	15,426,970
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	5,400	351	1	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.063	0.002	3.175	0.065	0.065	0.067	0.100	7,921,875
OM0000003281	TAGEER FINANCE	128,859	9,166	12	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.072	0.002	2.778	0.074	0.071	0.075	0.100	15,765,660
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	94,176	4,613	9	0.049	0.049	0.048	0.049	0.048	0.001	2.083	0.049	0.049	0.047	0.100	35,005,911
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	6,204	310	3	0.051	0.051	0.050	0.050	0.049	0.001	2.041	0.050	0.049	0.050	0.100	73,130,073
OM0000001152	OMAN NAT. ENG.	105,381	9,817	10	0.092	0.094	0.092	0.093	0.092	0.001	1.087	0.093	0.092	0.094	0.100	12,090,000
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	35,743	3,431	8	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.095	0.001	1.053	0.096	0.090	0.096	0.100	16,800,000
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	50,000	9,900	1	0.196	0.196	0.196	0.196	0.196	0.000	0.000	0.196	0.190	0.196	0.100	318,685,486
OM0000002333	SALALAH PORT SR.	570	314	2	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.000	0.000	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.100	107,902,440
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	141,500	8,410	2	0.060	0.060	0.059	0.059	0.059	0.000	0.000	0.059	0.057	0.064	0.100	20,599,530
OM0000003125	GLOBAL INV. H.	509,888	32,286	30	0.064	0.065	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.000	0.000	0.063	0.063	0.064	0.100	12,600,000
OM0000003711	SOHAR POWER	1,120	46	2	0.041	0.042	0.041	0.039	0.039	0.000	0.000	0.042	0.038	0.042	0.100	8,619,390
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	437,167	42,405	25	0.097	0.097	0.097	0.097	0.097	0.000	0.000	0.097	0.096	0.097	0.100	216,984,444
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	13,139	631	3	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.046	0.051	0.100	32,394,597
OM0000007084	MCT DESALINATE	12,000	1,080	4	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.000	0.000	0.090	0.085	0.093	0.100	13,999,536
OM0000007407	DHOFAAR GENERATING	102,300	6,650	13	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.000	0.000	0.065	0.063	0.065	0.100	14,445,600
OM0000008447	OMAN REIT FUND	500	45	1	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.088	0.088	0.000	0.000	0.090	0.080	0.088	0.100	57,618,787
OM0000002804	A'SAFFA FOODS	187,964	33,066	31	0.195	0.195	0.172	0.176	0.190	-0.014	-7.368	0.175	0.172	0.175	0.100	21,120,000
Total	19	2,718,348	249,678	229												

Chinese factory activity edges higher in December 2021

BEIJING: Chinese factory activity edged higher in December as supply disruptions eased and export demand weakened, a survey showed. The monthly purchasing managers' index issued by the national statistics agency and an industry group gained to 50.3 from November's 50.1 on a 100-point scale on which numbers above 50 show activity accelerating. The Associated Press (AP) reported.

Chinese manufacturing has been hampered by shortages of some components including semiconductors and disruptions in shipping.

Some areas ordered factories to shut down temporarily starting in September to meet official energy efficiency targets. A measure of new orders improved to 49.7 from November's 49.4, according to the China Federation of Logistics & Purchasing and the National Bureau of Statistics, though demand still was weak. -BNA

Apple provides insight into limitations of Bluetooth, feature set of AirPods 3

WASHINGTON: American tech giant Apple's vice president of acoustics Gary Geaves recently provided some interesting insight into the limitations of Bluetooth and the feature set of the AirPods 3.

To explain some of the design decisions Apple made with the AirPods 3, Apple's vice president of acoustics Gary Geaves appeared in an interview with an outlet and provided some interesting insight into the limitations of Bluetooth and the feature set of the AirPods 3, as per Mac Rumours.

Geaves said AirPods 3 were built entirely with custom-made components, using nothing "off the shelf." Apple is using a "complicated acoustic system," "carefully tuned bass port," and a "brand new, custom amplifier" all in the name of the best possible sound quality.

When asked if Bluetooth is holding back Apple's hardware and "stifling sound quality," Geaves declined to say too much, but he said that Apple "concentrates very hard" on getting the most out of Bluetooth, and that "it's fair to say" that Apple would "like more bandwidth." -ANI

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STORYBOOKS MIGHT BE AN EARLY SOURCE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES

Researchers have found that children by age two start to develop beliefs about gender, including stereotypes. Children’s interactions with and observations of adults have been cited as the sources of these beliefs. However, a new study published in the journal Psychological Science examines a different, potentially under-recognised source of gender stereotypes and associations, popular children’s books. Researchers found that storybooks contain many words that adults consider to be gendered and likely contribute to children’s gender knowledge. “We found that many popular children’s books often read to young children, like Curious George and Amelia Bedelia, contain rich information about gender that is presented in subtle ways,” said Molly Lewis, a researcher with the Department of Psychology at Carnegie Mellon University and lead author of the study. “In some cases, the stereotypes in these books were stronger than in books targeted at adults.” Previous research on children’s books and gender stereotypes has relied mostly on content analysis. Lewis and her team took a different approach. They collected a corpus of 247 books commonly read to children ages 5 and under and asked adults to rate on a 5-point scale how strongly the words in the books’ text were associated with masculinity and femininity. An overall gender bias score was calculated for each book.

Books with the highest feminine-bias scores included Chrysanthemum, Brave Irene, and Amelia Bedelia, according to the study. Those with the highest masculine-bias scores included Curious George, Dear Zoo, and Goodnight, Goodnight Construction Site. The Polar Express, In the Night Kitchen, and Hippos Go Berserk were rated as “neutral.” The researchers also used “word embeddings,” a machine learning method, to measure words’ gender associations beyond the adults’ ratings. This approach identified patterns in gender-related “word neighbours,” which are terms that typically appear together across large bodies of text, such as “merry” and “Christmas” in American English. The analysis showed that children’s books vary widely in the number of gender associations they contain, from strongly male to strongly female.

“We found that books that we estimated to be gender-biased based on adult judgments also tended to be biased when we used this automated method,” Lewis said. “This is important because it suggests that some of the gender associations that emerge in adulthood begin to appear in the statistics of children’s texts and could potentially be learnable from exposure to children’s books.” Machine learning was also used to examine whether gender stereotypes that social psychologists have uncovered in past behavioural experiments also appeared in children’s books. “For instance, we found that the statistical patterns of words in these books reflected the stereotype that boys are good at math, while girls are good at reading,” Lewis said. “Another unexpected result was that children tended to be exposed to books that conveyed gender stereotypes about their own gender.

Overall, there were more female biases across the corpus than male biases. However, the research also revealed that gender portrayals varied across the books studied. “One implication of this finding is that parents may be able to influence children’s development of beliefs about gender through their choice of books,” Lewis said. An encouraging finding, she said, is that not all storybooks contain gender stereotypes and some feature gender information that contradicts stereotypes. “We also found hints of historical change in how gender was depicted in children’s books,” Lewis said. “More recently published books were more likely to have female main characters and main characters without obvious gender associations.” - ANI



We found that books that we estimated to be gender-biased based on adult judgments also tended to be biased when we used this automated method

FEATURE



ROSE PARADE BLOOMS ON NEW YEAR’S DAY DESPITE COVID-19

PASADENA: Pasadena was awash with colours this Saturday, as the beloved Rose Parade, the most famous annual celebration event for New Year in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, returned in full bloom.

After its COVID-19-induced cancellation in 2021 for the first time since World War II, Pasadena’s Colorado Boulevard, the city’s main thoroughfare and a segment of the former U.S. Route 66, was again filled with the whimsical, colorful floats be-decked with flowers, petals and seeds, the lively marching bands, and spirited equestrian riders that it is so justly famous for.

Despite soaring infections fueled by the far more contagious Omicron variant, the 133rd parade went on.

Up to 20 bands, 18 equestrian units and dozens of floats took part in Saturday’s event.

However, they did attract a much smaller in-person crowd

than usual, and a quarter or more of the spectators were not wearing masks in the crowded stands and sidewalks.

The parade kicked off the new year at 8:00 a.m. local time with actor, LeVar Burton, of Star Trek’s Next Gen fame, serving as Grand Marshall.

Twitter came alive with fans singing his praises all during the procession. An original song, “Throw my Arms Around the World,” written and sung by the multi-Grammy award-winning LeAnn Rimes, set the festive, uplifting tone for the rest of the nationally televised event.

Looking sharp in his long cream-colored coat, Burton welcomed live spectators and television viewers to the Rose Parade, saying that the Parade’s theme this year of “Dream, Believe, Achieve” was “a testament to the reliance and dedication of our first responders and healthcare workers and every single one of

you watching today for what it is you do.”

Chuck Hamill, a Californian resident who has not missed the Rose Parade in the last 20 years, enjoyed it from the sidelines again this year wearing a mask.

“I’m so glad it’s back,” he told Xinhua. “It rings in the new year with hope, color, and good family fun.”

Nature lovers also had a flock of faux feathered and furred floats to enjoy, including the San Diego Zoo Alliance’s float celebrating nature and the dedication of animal rescue organisations; the Sierra Madre float “Nature’s Classroom,” with its giant, gorgeous yellow and orange-billed toucans perched in a stunning tropical forest alive with blooms.

It was interesting to note that many more health-oriented floats were featured this year, such as Donate Life’s float to raise awareness of the life-saving results of organ donation.

-Xinhua



FEATURE

GHADA SHOUAA

AN OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALLIST STRIPPED OF HER GLORY



Heptathlete Ghada Shouaa won Syria's only Olympic gold medal. She says the treatment she received after her 1996 triumph at the Atlanta Games didn't reflect her feat and this remains a deterrent for female Arab athletes.

The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics handed out 2,741 medals combined, but not every medal won at them will necessarily dovetail with a fairy tale ending.

While we now hail the merits of the people who made the podium in Tokyo, what happens next to those who trained tirelessly for years in the pursuit of Olympic glory?

Ghada Shouaa is a former Syrian heptathlete and gold medallist who talked with DW about her Olympic story and her desire for women athletes to receive more recognition in the Arab world.

From world No. 1 to injury-stricken

Shouaa's story began with a 25th-placed finish at her first Olympic Games, in Barcelona in 1992. Her crowning moment then came at Atlanta in 1996, when she won Syria's first and only Olympic gold medal to this day. Combined with her triumphs at the World Championships the year before, Shouaa was ranked as the No.1 heptathlete in the world for two consecutive years.

The joy didn't last long though, as injuries hindered her pursuit of further glory and resulted in her moving to Ger-

many to receive specialist treatment for a severe back injury.

In 1999, a return to the World Championships stage saw her claim bronze in Seville, only for injuries to again blight her journey at the Summer Games in Sydney a year later. Shouaa's battle with injury wasn't the only adversity she faced, though.

"It all started in Sydney and afterward, when I couldn't go back to Syria, I had to continue my treatment in Germany," Shouaa told DW. "Sports authorities personnel started a smear campaign, accusing me of faking all my injuries to avoid serving my government or returning to my country!"

Pressure from the Syrian athletics' authorities

To her shock, the Syrian Olympic Committee, the General Sport Federation and the Syrian Athletic Federation then agreed to cut her funding.

"They stopped paying me, and my coach and I didn't have the financial capacity to participate at our own cost. Without my sponsor in Germany, I wouldn't have been able to live."

Shouaa was forced to make a difficult call and decided against representing Syria in the future. Her decision prompted the Syrian authorities to lay siege to the world-renowned athlete's reputation. They sent her to court in 2004 and stripped her of all her financial rights.

Knowing she stood little chance, she paid bail to be able to stay out of jail and



exit the country that had failed her with what dignity she had left. "I'm not a criminal. They should have been punished and put in jail because they are corrupt," said Shouaa, who competed for local German clubs before retiring in 2004.

"I was mentally exhausted. The pressure from Syria was not easy to handle. I used to get threats by phone. My life was not easy."

A region of untapped sporting talent

The Arab world is full of young athletes who could be gold medalists if their sports received more funding or they had more role models like Ghada Shouaa. Arab countries were represented by 14 female athletes at the Olympics in Tokyo, and they left with four medals: one gold, one silver and two bronze.

"The lack of Arab women in the Olympics was a tragedy, and the reason is because the new generation is watching what happened to us," said Shouaa.

"The bullying of women has to stop, and those who intend to hurt us on purpose, especially on social media, should be punished. They say we are not women and that we won because we have men's genes. They want us to be in the kitchen and look like models. I'm an athlete, and I don't care how I look."

Shouaa believes that the medal winners in Tokyo are temporary exceptions who will disappear from memory like many have before.

"Nothing comes in one day or two; you need a plan that might take 12 to 14 years. The problem is that those in charge of sports in the Arab countries simply don't have patience."

"In my country, they don't know how important it is for athletes to compete internationally and feel the spirit of sports. From my time as an athlete to now, I hear the same stories about the abuse and bullying of women. Nothing has changed, unfortunately."

A tough and treacherous road to tread

The aspiring Olympians who don't get any moral or material support have to find a way to earn a living and start from scratch like Shouaa did in Germany. Despite having several coaching certificates, Shouaa has decided to avoid anything related to sports.

She had previously worked as an Olympics analyst on Arabic TV channels, but they paid her significantly less than her male counterparts. As a result, she decided to reject an offer for the Tokyo Olympics.

"This is discrimination, and I don't accept it. If you watch sports on Arab TV channels, you only see men commenting or analyzing. But I'm also an expert, I did something big in my career as an athlete and I could have given the Arab audience a good perspective about women's sports. But those in charge don't like strong personalities or hearing the truth," she said.

The war in Syria forced many athletes to flee their country hoping for a better life. With 90% of government ministries still in power and failing to keep their promises of a better future, Shouaa thinks the prospects for female athletes in Arab countries remain as challenging as ever despite her bid to break down barriers.

"I don't want them to honour me after I die, and that's usually the case there. History will take the right side at the end but we won't be here anymore."

ROUND-UP

Go beyond with the powerful and dependable Toyota Hilux

The Hilux is two vehicles in one: a work truck through the week and a family vehicle on weekends, thanks to added comforts and safety features

MUSCAT: The Toyota Hilux rises above expectations, to deliver some of the finest on-road and off-road experiences ever.

The Hilux is two vehicles in one: a work truck through the week and a family vehicle on weekends, thanks to added comforts and safety features. Indeed the Hilux models are stunning in design and features. Their performance and safety parameters are amongst the best and the strong frame and suspension impart toughness for any demanding task.

Apart from this, high-quality materials are used to ensure high durability. The distinctive Toyota grille renders the Hilux instantly recognisable.

A tough deck protects cargo and increase carrying capabilities, while wheels are fitted with wide tyres for a better grip.

In Oman, the Hilux is available in two versions – The rugged Hilux with J-Deck and the sporty 4.0 Litre V6 Hilux Adventure with the A Deck. The 4.0 Litre V6 Toyota Hilux Adventure is a truly exciting mean machine that’s been developed by Toyota to get your pulse racing. Check out the Hilux Adventure and unleash the power.

The Toyota Hilux Adventure packs the legendary Hilux ruggedness! Every Toyota Hilux Adventure comes with high-end features that start with the mighty 4.0 Litre V6 Engine packing a mighty punch with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m Torque. It has an Auto Disconnect Differential to keep the tempo going. Equal importance has been provided to the technical superiority and safety features of the Hilux 4x4.



The noteworthy features include a 2.7 Litre Petrol Engine that is available in 5-speed Manual Transmission and 6 Speed Automatic Transmission, outputting 164 HP.

The Hilux is not only a tough vehicle but also an advanced pick-up with stylish cues hitherto found

only on SUVs. The front of the Hilux gives a sense that the vehicle is wider than it is.

This is achieved by the horizontal bars that make up the Grille and Sleek Headlamps that wrap around the front of the Fenders. The Hilux sports a thick, chunky

Front Bumper sculpted like an SUV, Front Fog lamps, Alloy Wheels, apart from Side Stripes that adorn the vehicle.

The Hilux’s interior continues the concept of “Tough and Emotional”, and reflects the same attention to detail as the exterior

with SUV vehicle styling, accents and ornamentations. The key features that keep you comfortable are the Auto Air conditioner, Multi-Information Display (MID), 8” Navigation and many more.

The Hilux comes equipped with several active and passive safety

features like Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Brake-Force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist (BA), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Hill Assist Control (HAC), Trailer Sway Control and SRS Airbags for the Driver and Front Passenger.

BANK MUSCAT

Baituna home finance customers’ first choice for owning dream homes

MUSCAT: Every New Year comes with new plans and dreams, like owning a house that can warmly bring together family members.

Throughout all these years, Bank Muscat, the leading financial institution in the Sultanate, managed to help turn thousands of dreams into reality through Baituna home finance.

It has been steadily attracting large numbers of customers across Oman for its competitive features and offers that go in line with Bank Muscat’s customer-centric vision.

The bank has been providing financing products to a wide range of customers, both Omanis and residents, facilitated by its large network of 174 branches.

Thus, customers can easily visit any branch or apply for home finance through any of the dedicated Baituna Sales Centres at Qurum, Mabelah, Nizwa, Salalah, Barka, Sur, Saham, Sohar, Ibra, Buraimi and Ibra.

In line with the vision “To serve you better, everyday”, Bank Mus-



cat has attractive offers aligned to the customers’ unique needs. It should be noted that Bank Muscat offers very attractive interest rates



Since its launch, we have seen the demand for Baituna home finance and it became the customers’ first choice when they think of buying a house or a land. During this season and the active movement in the real estate sector, we anticipate higher demand for our home finance

Abdullah Tamman Al Maashani
General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat

and a tenor up to 25 years.

Eligibility
Omanis employees of government

and semi-government institutions, as well as Tier 1 companies, are eligible to apply for home finance products and enjoy the

banking facilities.

Baituna home finance is available for salaried government employees with a minimum salary of OMR250 and minimum service of 3 months for up to 25 years of home financing, while employees of Tier 1 private sector companies with a minimum salary of OMR500 and a minimum of 6 months service are eligible for home loans having a tenure of up to 25 years.

Loans of up to OMR500,000 are available through Baituna, subject to the applicant fulfilling the relevant criteria. Easy and convenient credit approval can be obtained at any of the dedicated Baituna Sales Centres or branches across Oman.

Speaking about Baituna, Abdullah Tamman Al Maashani, General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat, said, “Since its launch, we have seen the demand for Baituna home finance and it became the customers’ first choice when they think of buying a house or a land.

“During this season and the active movement in the real estate

sector, we anticipate higher demand for our home finance. The bank is fully prepared to receive its customers’ application for our product and we hope that they will enjoy the benefits it provides. We call upon our valued customers to utilise these benefits and fast processing procedures to finance their dream homes.”

Bank Muscat is always committed to supporting the real estate sector, which contributes substantially to the Sultanate’s economic growth. Customers can use the bank’s Baituna financing facilities to construct or purchase new homes as well as land for residential use. Bank Muscat customers can take advantage of the fast processing of applications across the bank’s extensive network of branches and dedicated Sales Centers and the excellent insurance coverage for their financing. Flexible payment options and simple documentation makes Baituna the leading home finance facility in the Sultanate.



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