



**OMANI NATIONALS AND RESIDENTS
ENCOURAGED TO VOTE TODAY**

MUSCAT: Following a widespread response to the Sultanate's Oman Nation brand visual identity voting drive, campaign organizers are now encouraging all Omani citizens and residents who haven't yet cast their vote to do so during the fourth and final day of voting, which takes place today (Sunday). **>A5**



Founded 1975 · Volume 49 No. 209 | 16 Pages · Baisas 200 · Subscription OMR63 | ISO 9001:2008 Certified Company | Chairman/Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali | Printed & Published by Muscat Media Group

[TIMESOFOMAN.COM](#) [FACEBOOK.COM/TIMESOFOMAN](#) [TWITTER.COM/TIMESOFOMAN](#) [YOUTUBE.COM/USER/TIMESOFOMANONLINE](#) [TIMESOFOMAN.COM/WHATSAPP](#) [TIMESOFOMAN.COM/RSS](#) [LINKEDIN.COM/COMPANY/TIMES-OF-OMAN](#) [INSTAGRAM.COM/TIMESOFOMAN](#)

Transfer your salary to Meethaq & get

15% cash bonus

[Know more](#) **2465 6666**

Terms and conditions apply. Valid until 31 December 2024.

© B. No. 1/14573/9



OMAN'S GDP TOPS OMR28 BN



This jump in GDP was on the back of a substantial increase of 4.2% in non-oil activities to OMR20.527 billion

MUSCAT: Oman's gross domestic product (GDP) at fixed prices registered an increase of 1.9% to reach OMR28.14 billion (at market price) by end of the third quarter of 2024 compared to OMR27.63 billion by end of third quarter of 2023.

This jump in GDP was on the back of a substantial increase of 4.2% in non-oil activities to OMR20.527 billion by end of the third quarter of 2024 compared to OMR19.706 billion registered

by the end of the corresponding quarter of 2023.

The initial data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the added value for oil activities decreased by 2.8% to reach OMR8.881 billion by end of the third quarter of the current year compared to OMR9.133 billion by end of the third quarter 2023. The contribution of oil activities amounted to 31.6%.

Crude oil activities decreased

by 4.1% to reach OMR7.479 million, while the activities of natural gas increased by 4.7% to OMR1.401 billion.

Total industrial activities amounted to OMR6.220 billion by end of the third quarter of 2024 compared to OMR5.889 billion by end of the third quarter of 2023. The agricultural, forestry and fisheries activities reached OMR735.7 million while service activities reached OMR13.571 billion. **-ONA**

SECRETARIAT GENERAL FOR NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS

Emblem of Oman's Renewed Renaissance launched

MUSCAT: As part of the Sultanate of Oman's celebration of the day His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik took the reins of power in the country—the 11th of January Anniversaries, the Secretariat General for National Celebrations on Thursday announced the launch of the emblem of "Oman's Renewed Renaissance".

The emblem depicts features denoting the "5 years" in which His Majesty the Sultan established the "5 basic pillars" of: Social development, Youth, Economy, Decentralisation and Governance.

The emblem represents overlying circles that reflect the vitality of decision-making and implementation. The top line indicates constant implementation through plans characterised by flexibility, durability in pursuit of improvement, as well as the symbolism of the harmony of all vital sectors. It also indicates the fruitful outcome of national action influenced by the Royal vision that takes centre stage among the five pillars.

The emblem features several colours, each having symbolic connotations. Dark purple symbolises nobility and Royal splendour, as well as the rich cultural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman and the country's prestigious position among nations. It embod-



ies originality, uniqueness and the spirit of authentic cultural heritage.

The greenish blue colour symbolises innovation and modernisation. It embodies the country's constant pursuit of progress, while at the same time evoking the serenity and unwavering commitment to sustainability.

The gold colour manifests excellence and achievement. It portrays a deep-rooted heritage, a bright future envisaged to bring about a solid economy and prosperity and reflects the country's sky-high aspirations.

The greyish yellow colour symbolises stability and warmth. It embodies elegance and hospitality and reflects the strong bond between man, land and biosphere, as well as (the people's) appreciation of simplicity. **-ONA**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN National Survey for NCDs from today

1 The Ministry of Health will launch the National Survey for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) on Sunday. It will be conducted across all governorates of Oman and will target citizens and residents aged 15 years and above. **>A2**



OMAN Huge crowds throng Muscat Nights

2 The much anticipated and enjoyable event in Oman, the Muscat Nights, kicked off on December 23rd and is witnessing an overwhelming increase in the number of visitors thronging the various fascinating venues. **>A4**

MARKET Oman's broad money supply rises by 12.6%

3 The broad money supply in Oman witnessed a growth of 12.6% on an annual basis to reach OMR24.8bn billion by the end of October 2024. This rise was due to the increase in narrow money by 24.8 percent. **>B1**



GROUP A TOPPER

Jaber confident as Oman face Saudi Arabia in Gulf Cup semi-finals

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman head coach Rasheed Jaber remains firm in his belief that his team can go the distance in the tournament after securing a crucial 1-1 draw against the UAE on Friday, to set up a semi-final clash against Saudi Arabia in the ongoing 26th Gulf Cup Football Championship in Kuwait.

Oman's semifinal opponent was confirmed on Saturday night after the final round of Group B matches. Bahrain, which had already secured their place in the semifinals, lost to Yemen 2-1 but still finished



on top of the group despite Saudi Arabia ousting defending champions Iraq 3-1 in the other match on Saturday. Both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain finished with six points but the latter sealed the top spot on tie-breaker rule that counted head-to-head result. Bahrain had defeated Saudi Arabia 3-2 in the group stage to finish on top.

Oman finished as Group A topper and will now meet Saudi Arabia in the first semi-final on December 31, Tuesday. Yemen, despite, the win over Bahrain finished at bottom to exit along with the holders with three points each.

Jaber said: "We have a talented and capable group of players, and I'm confident we can go all the way in this tournament," reaffirming his trust in his squad's strength and potential to challenge for the title.

The match against the UAE on Friday was a challenging one for Oman.

Jaber explained, "It was a difficult match. We took some time to settle down, and the pressure from the previous matches affected our performance. Our players felt the weight of the responsibility, but they gradually found their way back into the game." **>A2**

EMI
OMR 155*
for 6 years

1.5L Turbo Engine, 175 hp, 7-Speed DCT, 2WD
SUPER WARRANTY 6 YEARS / UNLIMITED MILEAGE*

800 50800 **9662 8909**

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC

*Terms and Conditions Apply

*Easy Monthly Installment is calculated based on 20% down payment for 6 years loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals from Banks only. Images shown are for illustrative purpose only. Specification may vary as per the model variant. To know more, please visit the CHANGAN AUTO Showroom.

Showrooms : Qurum 94641010, Mawaleh 97888180, Nizwa 96628940, Sohar 95351200, Salalah 96629050, Ibri 96628930

Sales Centers : Barka 96629010, Sur 96628920



Dhuhr.....	12:14pm
Asr.....	3:15pm
Maghrib.....	5:35pm
Isha.....	6:50pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....	5:28am

TOURISM

Mountain hiking event in Wadi Bani Khalid concludes



Times News Service

MUSCAT: A mountain hiking event, organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, concluded on Saturday in Wadi Bani Khalid, located in the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate of Oman.

Organised as part of the executive programme for Sur, the Arab Tourism Capital 2024, the two-day event drew over 150 hikers

from various governorates and regions across the country.

The event focused on the most important aspects related to security and safety in mountain walking activities, introducing participants to the important aspects followed in mountain walking and camping activities, and informing them of this unique experience that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has given to introducing

this type of activity.

The event started from the water ponds area near the village of "Maqal" in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid at an altitude of 640 metres. After that, the path continued gradually ascending until reaching the highest peak overlooking Wadi Bani Khalid for a distance of 4 to 5 kilometres, then continuing on to mountain paths with a moderate ascent until

reaching the camping point in the village of Hloot after the participants covered a distance of 20 kilometres. The height of the area is about 2050 metres above sea level.

Participants traversed a mountainous route, passing through several villages, including Al Sahf, Al Safa, Al Maysem, and Hayl Al Naqa. The next day, the participants set off from the camping area in the village of Hloot until they

reached the Niyabat of Tiwi in the Wilayat of Sur, covering a distance of 30 kilometres.

Organising this event comes within the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's interest in adventure activities and reviving the old mountain trails approved by the Ministry, ensuring the application of security and safety standards in adventure activities.

Organising the mountain trail

also contributes to enhancing the tourism experience, as the Sultanate of Oman is rich in diverse geographical nature, geological, cultural and heritage aspects, in addition to encouraging specialised tourism companies licensed by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to organise adventure trips for this type of mountain trails, as well as promoting adventure tourism in Oman.

Food Safety, Quality Centre carries out 256 field visits

Through the centre, the ministry has developed an integrated system in line with changes in the field of food production, focusing on scientific aspects and risk management

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Food Safety and Quality Centre has announced the completion of 256 field visits in the first half of 2024 as part of its strategies to enhance inspection and



oversight of food products to ensure compliance with health standards and approved specifications.

These field visits included various food, agricultural, animal, and fishery establishments, fish powder and oil factories, warehouses, fishing vessels, some trading locations, and marketing outlets to ensure these establishments adhere

to the required standards.

Dr. Hussein bin Simah Al Masrouri, Director-General of the Food Safety and Quality Centre at the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries, and Water Resources, emphasised the importance the ministry places on ensuring food safety and quality.

Through the centre, the ministry



has developed an integrated system in line with changes in the field of food production, focusing on scientific aspects and risk management.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he said that the ministry's efforts include a range of measures and regulations governing the production, import, export, trade, and consumption of food products, as

well as inspection processes, issuing necessary regulations, qualifying food establishments, and monitoring products in local markets.

He added that the centre dealt with 90 reports and warnings during the first ten months of 2024 (January - October) and issued 11 local food notices, 3 recalls, and 1 advisory.

These measures are part of the centre's commitment to a prompt and effective response to food safety issues. Furthermore, the Food Safety and Quality Centre released 26,584 imported food shipments in the first half of 2024, issued over 15,138 validity certificates, 2,319 health certificates, and 552 export certificates, contributing to enhancing foreign trade of food products.

The centre also matched 451 explanatory data cards and 1,396 test reports.

These efforts reflect the ministry's dedication to meeting food safety and quality requirements and ensuring consumer confidence in available food products.

TWO PHASES

Health ministry to launch national survey



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health will launch the National Survey for Non-Communicable Diseases on Sunday, which will be conducted across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The survey will target citizens and residents aged 15 years and above and will be carried out in two phases.

The Ministry of Health relies on the trust and cooperation of citizens and residents for the success of this national project, which will benefit everyone by enhancing the health of current and future generations.

The ministry also urges the public not to heed to rumours to the health teams conducting the survey and requested them to seek accurate information from official sources.

Game On, Oman! Let the magic of play begin

READY, SET, PLAY!

Get ready to level up your fun with thrilling arcade games and exciting rides!

f @ /MagicplanetMENA

MagicplanetMENA.com

26TH GULF CUP FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Oman topped Group A due to a better disciplinary record

< FROM A1 Despite the early struggles, Oman held firm and secured the point they needed to progress to the semifinals.

Oman finished level on five points with Kuwait but topped Group A due to a better disciplinary record. Both teams entered the last group-stage matches needing only a draw to qualify for the semifinals. While Oman and Kuwait had played out a 1-1 draw earlier in the group stage, it was Oman's fair play that saw them edge their rivals and secure first place in the group.

"We are happy with today's result, but now we turn our focus to the semifinal," Jaber said, shifting his attention to the next challenge.

However, ahead of the semifinals, Jaber faces a potential setback with the injury to key player Salah Al Yahyai, who suffered a calf strain during the match.

"Salah is an important player for us, but unfortunately, he suffered a new injury. We will assess his condition ahead of the semifinal," Jaber added.

Friday's match also witnessed a personal milestone for Oman's striker Harib Al Saadi who completed 100 international games for the country.

Despite the challenges of the group stage, Jaber's confidence in his squad is unwavering. With their semifinal spot secured,



Oman is now poised to make a strong push for the title, with the coach's belief in his team firmly intact.

Oman will play the first semifinal on December 31.

Oman play thrilling draw with the UAE

On Friday, UAE's Yahya Al Ghasani made an early impact, scoring in the 20th minute to give his

team a 1-0 lead. Oman struggled to find their rhythm in the first half, failing to equalise before the break as the UAE defence held firm.

However, Oman came out stronger in the second half and found the equaliser in the 79th minute. Abdulrahman Al Mushaifri's timely strike levelled the score, giving Oman the crucial point they needed to secure their semifinal spot.

In injury time, the UAE had a chance to snatch the win when they were awarded a goal following a foul by Oman goalkeeper Ibrahim Al Mukhaini on Tahnoon Al Zaabi in the 93rd minute.

Fabio Lima stepped up to take the penalty, but Al Mukhaini made a brilliant save, diving to his right to deny the UAE and spark jubilant celebrations from the Omani players and supporters.



MUSCAT NIGHTS FRENZY: HUGE CROWDS THROG VARIOUS VENUES



On Friday and Saturday these venues witnessed the young and the old, be it the citizens or the expats, visiting the venues of Muscat Nights in an attempt to weave together memorable moments and to further explore the beautiful and historic culture of Oman which is on display

Times News Service

The much anticipated and enjoyable event in Oman, the Muscat Nights, kicked off on December 23rd and is witnessing an overwhelming increase in the number of visitors thronging the various fascinating venues. On Friday and Saturday these venues witnessed the young and the old, be it the citizens or the expats, visiting the venues of Muscat Nights in an attempt to weave together memorable moments and to further explore the beautiful and historic culture of Oman which is on display. The crowds could be seen thoroughly enjoying the extravaganza and unforgettable experiences. Long-time resident of Oman, Madhu B Nambair said, " Muscat

Nights is back and is bigger and brighter this year. It is expected to provide a month-long extravaganza. This time for sure this event is offering numerous entertainment and tourism events for all." "While there are plenty of culture and an opportunity to savour the traditions of the country, there are also several events that have been put up by the organisers, Muscat Municipality, to make Muscat Nights a grand success," he further added. "The Muscat Nights, in many ways, is a microcosm of what makes Oman such a unique destination in the region. While there is plenty of culture and an opportunity to savour the traditions of the country, there are also several events that have been put up by the organisers to further modernise the event this time," Indian expat, Shafeer said.





HONGQI

HS5

OMR 134 PER MONTH

80080777

Azaiba





7 YEARS SERVICE WARRANTY
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

RAM takes major steps to realise national visions

The graduation ceremony took place in Kuwait during the final in-person module, held from 23 to 25 December 2024

Times News Service

KUWAIT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) has concluded the “Future of Work in Government for GCC Countries” programme, a groundbreaking initiative and the first-of-its kind, aimed at second-line government leaders from Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Implemented by the Royal Academy of Management in collaboration with the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in Bahrain, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) of Kuwait, and Said Business School at the University of Oxford, the programme reflects a strategic initiative to enhance Gulf integration in government development and realise national visions for future readiness.

The graduation ceremony for the participants took place in Kuwait during the final in-person module, held from 23 to 25 December 2024.

The event was held under the patronage of Dr. Essam Al-Rubaian, President of the Kuwait



Civil Service Commission, and attended by Dr. Ali bin Qassim Al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, along with a distinguished gathering of senior officials and experts from GCC countries.

The programme journey included several phases and key themes, comprising ten virtual modules delivered in Arabic. These executive learning modules focused on strategic and leadership topics such as public administration, project management, business analytics, and digital transformation.

The programme also addressed critical issues like change management, enhancing team leadership effectiveness, and enabling institutions to adapt and thrive in the digital economy, alongside leadership strategies and future readiness.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Ali bin Qassim Al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, underscored the importance of the programme and its focus on mid-level leadership development, describing this group as the backbone of institutions.

He highlighted their critical

role in implementing senior leadership strategies and translating them into practical outcomes that achieve organisational objectives.

He stated: “We believe that enhancing leadership capabilities is fundamental to achieving sustainable and innovative transformation in government operations across the GCC. Through this program, we have provided an integrated learning experience that blends modern theories with practical applications to equip these leaders with the skills needed to face challenges and develop innovative solutions.

“This approach aims to improve institutional performance and support the realisation of the various national visions of the GCC countries, ensuring their readiness for the future in all its dimensions.”

During the closing ceremony, he further emphasised: “The Academy remains committed to fostering Gulf cooperation by designing innovative learning solutions tailored to leaders at all levels, with a particular focus on utilising modern educational tools such as artificial intelligence and experiential learning.

OFFICIAL LOGO

Citizens, residents urged to vote for Oman Nation brand campaign



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Following a widespread response to the Sultanate’s Oman Nation brand visual identity voting drive, campaign organisers are now encouraging all Omani citizens and residents who haven’t yet cast their vote to do so during the fourth and final day of voting, which takes place on Sunday 29, December 2024.

Sunday will mark the last opportunity for the people of Oman to cast their vote for one of three Oman Nation brand visual identities – which will subsequently be used as the official logo for the Sultanate’s long-term nation branding strategy, after the winning logo is revealed to the public in early-2025.

To-date, the visual identity voting campaign has achieved a widespread, positive response, and enjoyed representation from Omani citizens and residents, country-wide.

Commenting on the positive

response to the campaign, Eng. Aisha Mohammed Al Saifi – Director of Oman’s Unified Promotional Nation Brand Project, and Vice President for the National Programme for the Development of Private Sector and Foreign Trade (Nazdaher) stated: “Today is the final day to take part in this exciting Oman Nation brand voting campaign. For Omani citizens and Oman-based residents, the process is very easy. All you have to do is visit the official voting website www.omanbrand.om –where you can cast your vote for the brand logo which you feel best represents our nation’s authentic values and aspirations, and national story.”

“A distinct, authentic, and positive Oman Nation brand shapes how we’re perceived globally as a highly attractive country for foreign investment, tourism, and trade; and as an ideal working and lifestyle location for both Omanis and foreign nationals; along with many other factors that support the growth and development of our

economy and society. Today is our last chance to vote, and I encourage everyone to do so – because this is a wonderful opportunity to play a part in bringing to life an exciting new chapter in Oman’s national story,” Eng. Al Saifi added.

The visual identity voting campaign forms part of the Sultanate’s long-term nation branding strategy, which plans to positively impact how Oman is perceived globally, and leverage this perception for the benefit of the country’s economy and society.

Each of the Oman nation brand visual identities takes the form of a branded logo that unites both traditional and contemporary Omani design elements in a visually appealing way.

The identities were developed as part of the Oman’s broad nation branding strategy, and involved an extensive and rigorous 12-month period of research, with the entire process being overseen by a Creative Committee consisting of Omani creative professionals.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialized companies to participate in the below said Tenders:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Site Visit	Last date for seeking pre bid clarification	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/TENDER/M/ 2024/011	OPERATION & MAINTENANCE OF REVERSE OSMOSIS WATER DESALINATION PLANTS AT RAKHYUT	11 Jan - 2025	14 Jan - 2025	21 Jan - 2025	28 Jan - 2025	OMR 1,575.000
DISC/TENDER/M/ 2024/012	OPERATION & MAINTENANCE OF REVERSE OSMOSIS WATER DESALINATION PLANTS AT SHWEMIA	11 Jan - 2025	16 Jan - 2025	21 Jan - 2025	28 Jan - 2025	OMR 1,575.000

- To purchase the tender document, send Email to tenders@dhofarservices.nama.om
- Contractors shall be submitted the price proposal in separate cover and technical proposal in separate cover with heading “COMMERCIAL OFFER & TECHNICAL OFFER”.
- Contractors shall be submitted the technical offer in three separate covers (ICV, HSE and Technical).
- The proposal document should be deposited in the tender box located at our main office.
- In the event of receipt of the EOI document on behalf of another company, the interested in the above EOI document should provide details of the person’s name and the company details .
- The Contractor shall be registered with NDS, meeting HSE qualification criteria.
- Valid “CEP Authorized card copy issued by NDS” Shall only consider for assessment.
- The Contractor shall be registered electrical contractor with Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) Oman (B-Grade or above). a valid “DCRP Registration Certificate” are to be attached along with the technical documents.

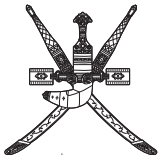
For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232558 • email: hasano@dhofarservices.nama.om



Dhofar Integrated Services Company S. A. O. C.
PO Box 2609, PC 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Phone: 23232523, Fax 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



سُلْطَانَةُ عُومَانِ
وَزَارَةُ التَّحْصِيلِ وَالرَّيَاوَاتِ



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of tender document	Last date for tender submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small & Medium Companies	Local Companies
558/2024	Rental of 9 four-wheel drive vehicles and 2 saloon vehicles for the Ministry's General Office building in airport heights.	Companies specialized in the field of renting cars, machinery and equipment and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday, 16-01-2025 02:00 PM	Wednesday 05-02-2025 10:00 AM	OMR 10/-	OMR 25/-
559/2024	Supply and installation of floor coverings for the offices of employees of the Ministry's General Office.	Companies specialized in the field of furniture supply and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent or first degree.	Thursday 16-01-2025 02:00 PM	Wednesday 05-02-2025 10:00 AM	OMR 10/-	OMR 25/-

- Specialized Companies, registered with the Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>), On Sunday 29/12/2024.
- For Inquiry , please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200)

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry”

www.mosd.gov.om

info@mosd.gov.om



mosdOman

Israeli raid puts Gaza hospital out of service

The WHO says that a raid at the last major health facility in northern Gaza has put it out of service

GAZA: The World Health Organization (WHO) on Saturday said that the last major health facility in north Gaza, the Kamal Adwan Hospital, was out of service following a raid by Israeli forces.

“Initial reports indicate that some key departments were severely burnt and destroyed during the raid,” the WHO said in a statement, adding that 60 health workers and 25 patients in critical condition reportedly remain in the hospital.

The WHO said there had been repeated attacks on or near the hospital since early October and that the raids were undoing efforts to keep the facility functional at a minimal level.

“The systematic dismantling of the health system in Gaza is a death sentence for tens of thousands of Palestinians in need of health care. This horror must end and health care must be protected.



Ceasefire!” the WHO said.

Middle East ‘not a battleground’ for big powers

The foreign ministers of China and Iran said that the Middle East should not be a battleground for the world’s superpowers.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and China’s Wang Yi agreed that “the international community should respect the sovereignty, security, stability, unity and territorial integrity of Middle East countries,” according to a readout from Beijing’s foreign ministry.

Calls for a ceasefire in Gaza were reiterated along with the proper implementation of the ceasefire in Lebanon. The foreign ministers also called for the “integrated promotion of counter-terrorism, reconciliation and humanitarian

processes in Syria”, according to the readout.

“The two sides agreed that the Middle East belongs to the people of the Middle East, and is not a battleground for the big powers, and should not be a victim of geopolitical competition and conflicts between countries from outside the region,” the ministry said.

Israel says missile fired from Yemen intercepted

The Israeli military said its air defenses had intercepted a missile fired from Yemen early on Saturday.

There were warning sirens in dozens of cities in Israel, including Jerusalem.

Houthi-affiliated channel Al Masirah TV reported that a US-British “aggression” had targeted a

park in the Ma’een district west of Sanaa. There was no confirmation from the US or Britain.

On Thursday, Israel struck several sites in Yemen including the international airport.

The Israeli military said it was targeting infrastructure used by Houthi militants in Yemen for military purposes.

Houthis have claimed solidarity with Palestinians since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in 2023 and have fired a series of missiles and drones at Israel. The war was triggered by Hamas terror attacks on Israel on October 7, killing some 1,200 people in Israel.

The Houthis have also launched attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea which has resulted in US and sometimes UK strikes. -aw



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

Founder: Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali
Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali
Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Anees bin Essa Al Zedjali
Chief Executive Officer: Ahmed Essa Al Zedjali

EDITORIAL: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24813153, E-mail: editor@timesofoman.com
ADVERTISING: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24812624, E-mail: advertising@timesofoman.com
CIRCULATION: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24818270, E-mail: circulation@timesofoman.com

H1B VISA ALLOCATIONS

Invest in our American workforce first: Nikki Haley

WASHINGTON DC : Former South Carolina Governor, Nikki Haley has entered the debate of H1B visa allocations in the US, amid discussions by billionaire Elon Musk, Republican leader Vivek Ramaswamy, along with Sriram Krishnan--President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for White House policy adviser on artificial intelligence--on expanding the visa programme.

Nikki Haley shared that during her tenure as Governor of South Carolina, the state's unemployment rate went down from 11 per cent to 4 per cent because the government recruited foreign companies to invest in South Carolina and not their workers. She told how South Carolinians were trained for the new jobs that have now resulted in the people building planes and automobiles amongst others.

She emphasised the importance of investing in the American workforce, stating, “If the tech industry needs workers, invest in our education system. Invest in our American workforce. We must invest in Americans first before looking elsewhere. Don't ever underestimate the talent of Americans or the American spirit.”



According to CNN, social media posts by Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy arguing in favour of expanding the H-1B visa programme for highly skilled workers have sparked a debate among supporters of Trump about how the programme should be fit into the incoming administration's immigration agenda.

The debate around the H1B visa controversy was sparked by Trump on Sunday when he announced he was appointing Sriram Krishnan to be a White House policy adviser on artificial intelligence. Krishnan quickly came under fire for a November post suggesting immigration changes. -ANI

SECURITY REASONS

Bangladesh imposes curbs on journalists

DHAKA: Bangladesh interim government has cancelled the accreditation card of journalists due to security reasons. As a result, the journalists will be restricted to enter the Secretariat.

Bangladesh home ministry on Friday issued an order to impose

the restrictions. The Bangladesh Secretariat is the administrative headquarters of the government of Bangladesh, and houses the majority of ministries and government agencies and bodies, located in Segunbagicha, Dhaka.

Usually, the Press Information

Department (PID) issues accreditation cards to journalists to collect news.

“Access to the Secretariate through accreditation cards issued in favor of journalists is hereby canceled until further orders”, a press released from the home

ministry said. On August 5, a student-led movement ousted Sheikh Hasina as Bangladesh Prime Minister, after weeks of protests and clashes that killed over 600 people. Hasina, 76, fled to India and an interim government led by Muhammad Yunus was formed. -ANI

CONFLICT ZONES

UNICEF says record number of children affected by wars



NEW YORK: More children than ever before are estimated to be living in conflict zones or forcibly displaced, the United Nations children's agency UNICEF said on Saturday.

UNICEF estimated that more than 473 million children worldwide — one in six — live in areas affected by conflict.

This has led to a record number of children being killed, injured or having their rights violated.

“By almost every measure, 2024 has been one of the worst years on record for children in conflict in UNICEF's history — both in terms of the number of children affected and the level of impact on their lives,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell.

“A child growing up in a conflict zone is far more likely to be out of school, malnourished, or forced from their home — too often repeatedly — compared to a child living in places of peace.”

The UN verified 32,990 grave rights violations against 22,557 children in 2023 and expects the figure to be even higher for 2024.

UNICEF said thousands of Palestinian children had been killed in Gaza this year amid Israel's continued bombardment of the enclave. Israel says it is fighting the militant group Hamas there.

In Ukraine, the UN verified more child casualties in the first nine months of 2024 than during all of 2023.

The agency also said that in Haiti, there had been a 1,000%



increase in reported incidents of sexual violence against children this year.

In Sudan, as in Gaza, a significant portion of children have missed out on more than a year of school.

Children are also missing out on vital vaccinations and are being deprived of other healthcare due to wars. UNICEF said around 40% of unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children live in countries affected by conflict, making them vulnerable to disease outbreaks like measles or polio, which was recently detected in Gaza for the first time in 25 years.

“Children in war zones face a daily struggle for survival that deprives them of a childhood,” said Russell.

“Their schools are bombed,

homes destroyed, and families torn apart. They lose not only their safety and access to basic life-sustaining necessities, but also their chance to play, to learn, and to simply be children.”

UNICEF also highlighted the high number children being killed, injured or otherwise having their rights violated by conflicts in Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar.

It reiterated a call for all parties to conflicts to end the suffering of children and ensure their rights are upheld in accordance with international humanitarian obligations.

“We cannot allow a generation of children to become collateral damage to the world's unchecked wars,” Russell said. -aw



كاسابيللا
casabella

من 30% حتى 70%
FROM UP TO

تصفية نهاية الموسم
END OF SEASON CLEARANCE

يسري العرض من تاريخ: 28 نوفمبر وحتى 15 يناير 2025
Validity from: Nov 28th to Jan 15th 2025

@casabella.oman @casabella.oman @casabella_oman

Putin says Azerbaijan plane crash was a ‘tragic incident’

The Kremlin statement, published on Saturday, says Putin offered his apologies that this incident “happened in the Russian airspace”

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin apologised to Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev for what Moscow has described as a “tragic incident” involving the Azerbaijan Airlines plane that crashed in Kazakhstan on Christmas Day.

The Embraer jet came down near Aktau airport in Kazakhstan on Wednesday, killing 38 people. Twenty-nine survived.

The Kremlin statement, published on Saturday, says Putin offered his apologies that this incident “happened in the Russian



airspace.”

Repelling these attacks

“During this time, Grozny, (the town of) Mozdok and Vladikavkaz were being attacked by Ukrainian combat drones and Russian air defense was repelling these attacks,” the Kremlin said Putin told Aliyev.

However, the statement does not explicitly say that the plane was shot down by a Russian missile. ‘External physical and technical interference’ — President Aliyev

During a telephonic conversation, Aliyev told Putin that the plane was first hit by “external physical and technical interference” over Russia “resulting in a complete loss of control,” Baku’s presidency said in a statement.

It added Aliyev “highlighted that the multiple holes in the aircraft’s fuselage, injuries sustained by passengers and crew due to foreign particles penetrating the cabin mid-flight, and testimonies from surviving flight attendants and passengers confirm evidence of external physical and technical interference.”

Previously, Azerbaijan’s Trans-



port Minister Rashad Nabiyev said survivors had heard explosive noises outside the aircraft before the plane was struck by “something,” adding that “the type of weapon” was yet to be determined.

EU foreign affairs chief calls for ‘swift, independent’ probe

The European Union’s foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas has meanwhile called for a “swift, independent” investigation into the matter.

“Reports that Russian fire could have caused the Azerbaijan Airlines plane are a stark reminder of #MH17. I call for a swift, independent international investigation,” said Kallas on social media platform X. “Our thoughts are with the families and friends of the victims. I wish for a speedy recovery to the injured,” Kallas added.

The MH17 was shot down by a BUK missile over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014 as it flew from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. All 298 people on board died.

Investigators in the Netherlands believe there are “strong indications” based on intercepted phone calls that Putin had personally approved the weapons transfers to its proxy forces in the east of Ukraine.

— DW

BID FAREWELL

State funeral held for former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh

NEW DELHI: The state funeral for former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh began on Saturday as mourners gathered in the capital bid farewell to the leader who oversaw the country’s economic liberalisation.

The 92-year-old Singh, who served as prime minister from 2004 to 2014, passed away on Thursday.

On Saturday morning, Singh’s body was brought to his Congress Party headquarters in New Delhi, where leaders and supporters paid their tributes.

Later, Singh’s body was taken to the crematorium for his final rites, amid beating of the drums by soldiers.

The Indian government had announced a seven-day state mourning period.



All cultural events have been canceled, while government buildings across India are flying the national flag at half-staff.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend the funeral. In a tribute to the former leader, Modi called Singh one of India’s

“most distinguished leaders.”

Rahul Gandhi, the current leader of the opposition Congress Party, had said that Singh “led India with immense wisdom and integrity.”

US President Joe Biden had hailed him as a “true statesman” for fostering economic progress and strengthening ties with the US.

Born in then British-ruled India in 1932 in what is now Pakistan, Singh earned degrees from Cambridge and Oxford and held key senior civil service posts, including central bank governor.

A mild-mannered technocrat, Singh is best remembered for his work as a finance minister in 1991 overseeing India’s economic liberalization, to avert a potential economic crisis.

He first became Prime Minister of India in 2004, followed by a second term in 2008.

Singh was celebrated for steering India through a period of rapid economic growth and sealing a landmark nuclear deal with the US. — DW

TENSIONS INCREASE

Taliban targets ‘several points’ in Pakistan

KABUL: Afghanistan’s Taliban forces targeted “several points” in Pakistan on Saturday, Taliban said, days after Pakistani aircraft carried out aerial bombardments inside the country, as per Al Jazeera.

The statement, which was released by Taliban did not directly specify that Pakistan was hit, but said the attacks were conducted “beyond the “hypothetical line” - an expression used by Afghan authorities to refer to a border with Pakistan which has been in dispute since long.

“Several points beyond the hypothetical line, serving as centres and hideouts for malicious elements and their supporters who organised and coordinated attacks in Afghanistan, were targeted in retaliation from the southeastern direction of the country,” Al Jazeera quoted Taliban as saying.

Asked whether the statement referred to Pakistan, Taliban spokesperson Enayatullah Khwarazmi said, “We do not consider it to be the territory of Pakistan, therefore, we cannot confirm the territory, but it was on the other side of the hypothetical line.”

Afghanistan has rejected the Durand Line, a border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which was drawn by the Britishers in the 19th century, as per Al Jazeera. The Taliban sees it as a divisive line between Pashtuns on both sides of the border.

“Clarity! Several points on the other side of the virtual line “Durand” in the south-eastern direction of the country were targeted, which were hideouts and centers for evil elements and their supporters, who were organizing attacks in Afghanistan,” Taliban said in a post on X. — ANI



MICHAEL WALTZ

Jaishankar meets Trump’s NSA pick

WASHINGTON, DC: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a meeting with the next US National Security Advisor, Michael Waltz on Friday evening during his visit to the United States.

The two leaders held discussion on bilateral partnership and current global issues, and Jaishankar said that he is looking forward to working with Waltz.

“Delighted to meet Rep. @michaelgwaltz this evening. Enjoyed a wide-ranging conversation on our bilateral partnership as well as current global issues. Look forward to working with him,” Jaishankar said in a post on X.

Michael Waltz would succeed Jake Sullivan as the US National Security Advisor after Donald Trump assumes office as 47th US

President in January. Earlier in November, Trump picked Florida Republican leader as his National Security Advisor.

Waltz also served as a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Mike served 27 years in the US Army and National

Guard. Jaishankar, who is on an official visit to US, concluded a two-day conference of the team at the Indian Embassy in the US and Consuls General. He expressed confidence in the deliberations and noted that they would plummet the India-US partnership.

On Thursday, Jaishankar met with the United States NSA Jake Sullivan, in Washington, DC. — ANI

MILITARY ALLIANCE

NATO’s 2025 challenges: Trump, Ukraine, defence spending

BRUSSELS: NATO chief Mark Rutte set the tone for the alliance’s priorities for 2025 in an ominous speech highlighting just how close war is to the military alliance’s doorstep.

“From Brussels, it takes one day to drive to Ukraine,” he said in a December speech at Carnegie Europe. “That’s how close the Russian bombs are falling. It’s how close the Iranian drones are flying. And not very much further, the North Korean soldiers are fighting.”

Rutte made a case for public support of increased government defense spending and investment not only to strengthen European security but also to aid Ukraine and deter Russia from expanding further.



an unpredictable US President Donald Trump. While all recent US presidents have called for European nations to spend more on their defense, Trump is the only one who has threatened to abandon alliance members who fail to pony up.

In a bid to win Trump over, many European states met the pledge to spend 2% of their gross domestic product on defence last year. Now, as Trump prepares to be sworn in,

there are suggestions that NATO may up the spending target to 3% or even 4%.

“We will need more time to consult amongst allies, what exactly the new level should be. But it is considerably more than 2%,” Rutte confirmed. “Let me be very frank, if you would only spend more and not spend better, you have to go to at least 4%.”

Experts said Trump would likely push for 4% and added that the European allies would be well advised to offer deals he sees as favorable.

“Europeans need to offer a good deal to the US,” Gesine Weber, a fellow with the German Marshall Fund (GMF), told DW in a written statement. “A model where the US could only be a ‘backstop’ or a ‘defender of last resort,’ while Europeans assure most of European conventional defence, could fulfill this criterion.”

European efforts to bolster NATO and where they fall short

There is consensus among NATO’s European members that they must do more for their own defense by picking up on lagging defense production and plugging logistical gaps.

In 2024, NATO held Steadfast Defender, its largest military exercise since the Cold War. In December, it decided to revise its 2015 hybrid warfare strategy as acts of suspected sabotage at Moscow’s

behest have risen over the last few years.

There is also a concerted effort to increase troop deployments on NATO’s borders. Germany, for instance, has decided to send 5,000 soldiers to Lithuania by 2027.

European NATO members face a particular disadvantage when it comes to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, such as satellites with a view of enemy territory or large transport helicopters that can carry bulky defence equipment and troops over a long distance.

Improvements over the next year are planned in this sector, but experts believe it will take more than a decade to develop the capabilities the Europeans currently depend on the US for.

“The Europeans have few satellites, and it can take up to 10 to 15 years to fill this gap,” Rafael Loss, a policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations with a focus on security and defense in

the Euro-Atlantic area, told DW. But the first challenge for European states is to shell out the cash such projects require, he added.

NATO’s benefits reach beyond the North Atlantic

NATO’s European members argue that the alliance not only ensures security and prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic but also strengthens Washington’s response to Beijing in the Indo-Pacific region.

The allies have enhanced ties with their four Asian partners — the so-called AP4 of Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan — to combat China and Russia’s “no-limits” partnership. The NATO-AP4 cooperation is expected to grow next year with more intelligence sharing.

“NATO’s European members are trying to tell Trump’s China hawks that abandoning NATO will make it much more difficult for them to confront China,” Loss said. — DW

SPORTS

1ST T20I

Duffy leads NZ to a thrilling victory against Sri Lanka



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: New Zealand pulled off a remarkable eight-run victory in the first T20I against Sri Lanka on Saturday, taking a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. It was a master-class in resilience from the hosts, who clawed their way back into the game twice to snatch a win from Sri Lanka's grasp.

The visitors appeared to be in firm control for most of the match. First, they reduced New Zealand to 65 for 5 midway through the innings, and later, they cruised to 121 for no loss in pursuit of a target of 173. But cricket is often a game of moments, and Jacob Duffy's three-wicket over in the 14th turned the tide decisively in New Zealand's favor.

Sri Lanka's openers, Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis, had laid the perfect foundation with a 121-run stand. Mendis fell for 46, but with 52 needed off 40 balls and nine wickets in hand, the visitors seemed on course. However, Duffy's strikes sent Kusal Perera and Kamindu Mendis back to the pavilion within three deliveries, and the collapse began.

Nissanka fought valiantly

for his 90, but the middle order crumbled under pressure. Matt Henry dismissed Nissanka and Bhanuka Rajapaksa in quick succession, leaving Sri Lanka needing 19 off the last eight balls. Wanindu Hasaranga, known for his finishing abilities, didn't face a single delivery as he was run out in a mix-up in the final over.

Earlier, New Zealand had rallied from a precarious position thanks to a sensational 105-run stand between Daryl Mitchell (62) and Michael Bracewell (59). Their power-hitting in the latter half of the innings saw 85 runs added in the last seven overs. Binura Fernando (2-22) and Maheesh Theekshana kept Sri Lanka in control early on, but Matheesha Pathirana's expensive spell (4-60) undid much of that work.

Duffy's 3 for 21 earned him Player of the Match honors, while Sri Lanka will rue their inability to close out a match that was theirs to lose.

Brief scores: New Zealand 172/8 (Mitchell 62, Bracewell 59, Binura 2-22) beat Sri Lanka 164/8 (Nissanka 90, Mendis 46, Duffy 3-21). - Agencies

Reddy's dramatic ton keeps India in the fight

The all-rounder shared a 127-run stand with Sundar as India fought back after being 221/7 against the Aussies

MELBOURNE: Nitish Kumar Reddy's maiden Test century, an unbeaten 105, led India's defiant comeback on the third day of the fourth Test at the MCG on Saturday to end the day at 358/9, still trailing the hosts by 116 runs.

With his father watching from the stands, Reddy's remarkable innings gave India a glimmer of hope despite Australia's looming first-innings lead.

Arriving at the crease early on the third morning after Rishabh Pant's dismissal, Reddy showcased grit and skill. Partnering with Washington Sundar, he added a crucial 127-run stand that rescued India from a perilous 221 for 7. The partnership, spanning nearly 48 overs, frustrated Australia, who had seemed poised to dominate.

Sundar contributed a resilient 50, supporting Reddy in steady-ing the innings. While Washington's knock was watchful, highlighted by a solitary boundary off his 103rd ball, Reddy played with intent. His half-century featured crisp strokes, including a six off Nathan Lyon. As Washington fell to a bouncing delivery from Lyon, Reddy, stranded on 99, faced enormous pressure with only the tail for support.

In a tense final few minutes, Jasprit Bumrah's dismissal exposed No. 11 Mohammed Siraj to Pat Cummins. Siraj held firm, negotiating three crucial balls to allow Reddy his shot at history. Facing Scott Boland, Reddy struck a glorious lofted drive to bring up his century, sparking jubilation among Indian fans.

India closed the day at 358 for 9, trailing Australia by 116 runs - a far cry from the 253-run deficit they



faced earlier. The recovery significantly reduced Australia's advantage, although the visitors remain on the back foot.

Earlier, Pant's attempt to scoop Boland ended in a leading-edge dismissal, a moment that drew criticism and shifted momentum in Australia's favor. Ravindra Jadeja contributed a cautious 25 before falling lbw to Lyon, who finally made an impact in a series

where he has been largely quiet.

Australia's bowlers worked hard, with Scott Boland (3-57) and Cummins (3-86) leading the attack. Mitchell Starc, although wicketless across 25 overs, maintained pace despite briefly clutching his back.

Mitchell Marsh bowled economically but without much threat, and Lyon finished with two key wickets, including the break-

through against Washington.

Australia, bolstered by Sam Konstas' earlier heroics in the series, will still aim for a three-figure lead but may need to contend with time constraints on a pitch showing no significant signs of deterioration.

Brief scores: India 358 for 9 (Reddy 105*, Washington 50, Boland 3-57, Cummins 3-86) trail Australia 474 by 116 runs. - Agencies

Introducing
New Sportage L
Make space for adventure



KNQ 0924



Movement that inspires

Service*
5 Years /
50,000 Kms
whichever is earlier

Insurance &
Registration®

- Curved Integrated Display 12.3" TFT LCD (Cluster) + 12.3" TFT LCD (Infotainment)
- 2.0T (233HP) & 1.5T (197HP) Engines, 8-Speed AT- Shift by Wire (SBW)
- Stylish, Functional & Spacious Interior

Discover the all-new Sportage L – an SUV that is built to be the best-in-class. It takes unmatched space and power, elevating comfort and versatility to a whole new level. Get ready for pulsating performance with robust 1.5T & 2.0T engines while the 8-speed Shift-by-Wire transmission delivers a drive that's smooth and responsive. Stay ahead with advanced Safety features. The Kia Sportage L isn't just an SUV. It is a statement of unparalleled excellence. Discover the best-in-class experience at any Kia showroom, today.

Reliable International Automotive LLC. C.R. No. 1707183, Wattayah: 24579846/47; Al Mawelah: 99473174; Barka: 93201347; Nizwa: 99874368; Sohar: 92837722; Sur: 25546190/93204360; Rustaq: 92869449; Salalah: 13211460/99884217

Saturday Showroom Timing: Muscat, Al Mawelah, Barka, Sohar & Salalah from 9.00 AM to 1.00 PM

* Service - 50,000km / 5 yrs (whichever is earlier), ®Registration and Standard offer of 1 yr. comprehensive insurance. Insurance applicable would be given to the extent of a private vehicle only, if applicable. Additional premium as per insurance norm would have to be paid by the buyer. For models where insurance is offered as a benefit, additional cash gift can be availed by customer in lieu of insurance. All the above benefits not applicable on Ministry, Bulk fleet, Corporate & RAC deals. Vehicles may also include some Dealer Installed Accessories. Pictures & Colors are indicative. For further details, please visit your nearest Kia showroom.

APPLE WATCH SERIES 10
Apple has unveiled a fresh advertisement aimed at encouraging users to stick to their 2025 fitness resolutions with the Apple Watch Series 10.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



INDIA'S ELECTRONICS SECTOR
India's electronics industry is on the brink of a transformative phase as it targets \$500 billion in manufacturing output by 2030, according to TeamLease report. Achieving this goal will require the sector to expand fivefold in the next five years, addressing a \$400 billion production gap. > **B2**

GCC-STAT DATA

Public finance of GCC countries sees significant financial surplus

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The data issued by the Statistical Centre for the Co-operation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat) indicate that the financial risks of the GCC countries will be low in the short term amid forecasts of stable or declining interest rates locally and globally. The reports issued by credit rating agencies also signalled an improvement in the sovereign bond rating of the GCC countries in 2023. It is also expected that the credit attractiveness of GCC countries will increase, which would allow for the rescheduling of their public debts at lower financial costs.

According to the estimates of the GCC-Stat, the public debt of the GCC countries is expected to stabilise at 28% of the GCC countries' GDP during the years 2024 and 2025. The financial budget reform plans, which are based on improving the efficiency of public spending and programmes to stimulate growth in non-oil sectors, would contribute to achieving a balance between maintaining the economic growth rate and the sustainability of public spending.

The data issued by the GCC-Stat also reveal that the public debt of the GCC countries has doubled over the past ten years to reach about \$628 billion in 2023, after it was \$144 billion in 2014. The volume of debt as a percentage of the GCC countries' GDP increased to reach its peak in 2020 at 40.3%, before declining in the following



years to reach about 29.8% in 2023. The total public finances in the GCC countries also recorded a significant deficit during the period from 2014-2021. The highest deficit value was registered in 2015, with an amount of about \$158 billion, which accounts for 11.1% of the total GCC countries' GDP. In 2020, a deficit of \$128 billion was recorded, which represents 8.8% of the total GDP.

The public finances of the GCC countries witnessed a significant financial surplus in 2022 estimated at \$134 billion, representing 6.1% of the gross domestic product, followed by a surplus of \$2 billion in 2023.

The total public revenues in the GCC developed significantly during the period 2021-2023 to record about \$641 billion in 2023. Oil revenues accounted for 62% of public revenues, compared to \$723 billion in 2022, of which oil revenues accounted for 67%.

Total public spending in the GCC countries reached its highest levels in 2023, recording about \$639 billion. Current spending accounted for 85% of the total public spending, compared to 15% for investment spending in the GCC countries.

Oman's broad money supply increases by 12.6% to OMR24.8bn

However, cash held by public decreased by 5.9 percent, while demand deposits increased by 33.2 percent at the end of October

MUSCAT: The broad money supply in the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a growth of 12.6 percent on an annual basis to reach OMR24.8 billion by the end of October 2024.

This increase was due to the increase in narrow money by 24.8 percent, and quasi-money by 8.4 percent, which consists of the total savings deposits and time deposits in Omani riyals plus certificates of deposit issued by banks in addition to margin accounts and all foreign currency deposits in the banking sector.

Demand deposits

Cash held by the public at the end of last October decreased by 5.9 percent, while demand deposits increased by 33.2 percent.

With regard to the interest rate structure of conventional commercial banks, the weighted av-



erage interest rate on deposits in Omani riyals increased from 2.531 percent in October 2023 to 2.709 percent in October 2024, while the weighted average interest rate on loans in Omani riyals increased from 5.452 percent to 5.628 percent during the same period.

The average interest rates in the overnight interbank lending market recorded a decrease of 4.681 percent in October 2024 compared to 5.584 percent in October 2023; as a result of the decrease in the weighted average

interest rates on repurchase operations to reach 5.500 percent compared to 6.000 percent during the same period last year, in line with the policies of the US Federal Reserve.

Islamic banking assets top OMR8bn

Meanwhile, The total assets of Islamic banks and windows combined amounted to about OMR8.3 billion, representing 18.7 percent of the total assets of the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman

by the end of October 2024, recording an increase of 16.4 percent compared to the same period in 2023.

Data issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) indicated that the total financing balance granted by units practicing Islamic banking activity increased by 13.8 percent to reach about OMR6.7 billion.

While deposits in Islamic banks and windows recorded a 24 percent increase to reach OMR6.5 billion by the end of October 2024. - **ONA**

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

MSX hits lowest level in two years

MUSCAT: The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell by 40 points in the week to close at 4,468 points, recording its lowest level in two years after losing support from leading companies. Prices of 37 securities declined compared to 18 securities whose prices rose. Local investors and institutions focused on shares of companies affiliated with OQ Group, accounting for more than 71 percent of the total trading value.

Muscat Stock Exchange has been witnessing a decline in stock prices for several weeks, with investment funds and companies focusing on a limited group of stocks, which pushed the main index and sectoral indices to decline despite the good performance in the first half of this year and the rise of the Muscat Stock Exchange index on May 30 to 4,845 points, recording its best levels during the year. However, it was unable to continue rising amid pressure on stocks after the announcement of the subscription in OQ Exploration and Production and then OQ Basic Industries. The good financial results for the third quarter of this year announced by public joint stock companies last October were unable to lead stocks to rise, with the exception of a limited group of stocks that were able to maintain their levels.

The week's trading came days before the close of the 2024 fiscal year and the preparation of public joint-stock companies listed on the stock exchange to announce their preliminary financial results, which are expected to be disclosed within the next two weeks.

The sectoral indices of the MSX recorded a collective decline last week, led by the financial sector index, which fell below 7,500 points, recording a weekly decline of 72 points. The industrial sector index declined by 50 points, the services sector index lost about 9 points, and the Sharia index recorded a decline of 7 points, closing at 406 points.

During the week, local investment institutions tended to buy, accounting for 80.1 percent of the total trading value, compared to 39.4 percent sales, while individ-



ual Omani investors tended to sell, accounting for about 51 percent of the total trading value, compared to 15.5 percent sales.

The trading value declined in the week to OMR26.8 million compared to OMR29 million in the previous week, recording a de-

cline of 7.6 percent, and the number of deals executed also declined by 30 percent from 11,223 deals to 7,799 deals.

OQ Basic Industries came in first place among the most traded companies in terms of trading value, at OMR13.3 million, repre-

senting about 49.8 percent of the total trading value. OQ Exploration and Production came in second place with trading valued at about OMR4.7 million, while OQ Gas Networks witnessed trading valued at about OMR1.2 million, bringing the total trading value of the three companies to OMR19.2 million, representing 71.7 percent of the total trading value. The three companies also accounted for 83.6 percent of the total number of securities traded last week, which amounted to 171.3 million securities.

The market capitalisation of securities listed on the MSX during the week witnessed gains of OMR2.3 million after rising at the end of Thursday's trading to OMR27.32 billion, benefiting from the rise in the market value of the closed market that is not traded inside the hall, in addi-

tion to the gains recorded by the parallel market.

Majan Glass topped the gainers, rising by 40 percent and closing at 14 baisas. Dhofar International Development and Investment rose by 10 percent and closed at 230 baisas. National Detergents Company rose to 710 baisas, recording a 5.9 percent increase. OQ Exploration and Production rose by 4.6 percent and closed at 337 baisas. Sembcorp Salalah rose by 4.2 percent and closed at 98 baisas.

On the other hand, Barka Water and Power Company led the losing stocks, declining by 11.1 percent and closing at 280 baisas. The stock of Arab Falcon Insurance Company fell by 9.6 percent and closed at 113 baisas, and the stock of Eastern Desalination Company fell by 5.1 percent and closed at 128 baisas. - **ONA**

Yellen says 'extraordinary measures' needed to avoid US debt default

NEW YORK: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said her department will need to start taking so-called "extraordinary measures" to prevent the nation from hitting the debt ceiling as early as January 14. If the US does hit the debt ceiling, the Treasury Department, responsible for ensuring financial security, will not have enough cash on hand to pay back debts.

That's because the Treasury has to take on debt to make sure it has enough money to pay its bills — which can range from paying for social safety programs to paying interest to investors who have bought government bonds.

Once the US hits the debt ceiling, the Treasury is unable to borrow more money, which could force the country to default on its debt payments. The US has never defaulted on its debt before.

What did Janet Yellen say?

"Treasury expects to hit the statutory debt ceiling between January 14 and January 23," Yellen wrote in a letter addressed to the House and Senate leadership.

The US debt limit was suspended in 2023 after a bipartisan deal between the Democrats and House Republicans.

But the suspension is scheduled to expire on January 2, 2025, forcing the Treasury to begin using so-called extraordinary measures to allow the government to keep paying its bills.

Debt is set to decline

Yellen said that on January 2 the debt is set to decline slightly so the new limit will be reached again later in the month.

"Treasury currently expects to reach the new limit between January 14 and January 23, at which time it will be necessary for Treasury to start taking extraordinary measures," she said.

"I respectfully urge Congress to act to protect the full faith and credit of the United States," she further said. - **dw**

Omani stock market ends year with weekly decline

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani stock market experienced another weekly decline of 0.90%, continuing the downward trend to close the year near where it started, losing the gains it made during the previous months, according to an industry watcher.

"The market has remained range-bound for two years, trading horizontally overall. This week was marked by broadly negative performances across regional markets and subdued activity, considering the year-end period," said Abdullah Mahfoodh Al Wahaibi, coach and analyst in global financial markets.

"With the beginning of the new year, focus will shift to fourth-quarter earnings results and the new US administration under President Trump, with particular attention to its



decisions and their potential implications on global trade and energy markets, which could significantly impact regional and global economies," he further added.

Looking ahead, the Omani stock market faces important developments in 2025, particularly regarding the Oman Investment Authority's ambitious plan to launch 30 invest-

ments through public offerings across various sectors including energy, logistics, utilities, and infrastructure between 2025-2029.

This initiative is part of a broader divestment strategy aimed at strengthening the national economy and attracting foreign direct investments, aligning with Oman's Vision 2040.

The market may find support from anticipated healthy economic growth in 2025 and potential interest rate cuts depending on the Federal Reserve's direction, which could help stimulate business activities and corporate earnings.

Sectors performance were all negative this week. In the industrial sector, performance remained under pressure with a decline of 0.97%.

Notable movements included Oman Cement, which saw its

share price decrease by 0.53%, while Gulf Mushroom Products experienced a more significant drop of 1.36%. Oman Cables Industry recorded a steeper decline, falling by 4.41%.

The financial sector demonstrated similar weakness, posting a decline of 0.96%.

Leading financial institution Bank Muscat saw its shares retreat by 0.40%, while Bank Nizwa experienced a larger decline of 1.02%. Al Anwar Investment showed more pronounced weakness, with shares falling by 3.03%.

The services sector also ended the week in the negative territory, declining by 0.51%. Within this sector, Abraj Energy Services showed relative resilience with a modest decline of 0.36%, while Renaissance Services fell by 1.58%. Barka Water and Power experienced a significant decline, with shares plummeting by 11.11%.

MARKET

NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN

NBO boosts customer convenience with new digital complaint tracker

MUSCAT: As part of its digital strategy and migration efforts, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has introduced a new feature on the NBO app that allows customers to register and track complaints digitally anytime, anywhere, without needing to visit a branch or contact the Call Centre.

This innovative feature provides a convenient and transparent way to address customer concerns by enabling the submission of essen-

tial details such as complaint type, account number, and attachments, while also offering real-time progress tracking.

Exclusive services

Commenting on the initiative, Dr. Ali Salim Al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager and Head of Digital Banking & E-Channels at NBO, said: "At NBO, we are committed to enhancing our customers' experiences by providing ex-

clusive services that cater to their needs and expectations. This digital initiative simplifies the process of registering and tracking complaints, ensuring faster and more transparent resolutions. It underscores our ongoing efforts to deliver exceptional service and foster a positive banking experience for all customers."

This new digital feature reflects NBO's alignment with the Consumer Protection Framework and

enhances the bank's complaints handling process.

It is part of National Bank of Oman's broader commitment to improving service efficiency, convenience, and customer satisfaction through digitisation.

For more details on NBO's accounts, products, and exclusive offers, visit www.nbo.om, contact the NBO Call Centre at 24770000, or explore the user-friendly NBO app.



India's electronics sector targets \$500bn in manufacturing output

RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

India's forex reserves drop to \$644.39bn

Achieving this goal will require the sector to expand fivefold in the next five years, addressing a \$400bn production gap



NEW DELHI: India's electronics industry is on the brink of a transformative phase as it targets \$500 billion in manufacturing output by 2030, according to TeamLease report.

Achieving this goal will require the sector to expand fivefold in the next five years, addressing a \$400 billion production gap. Presently, the industry's domestic production stands at \$101 billion, with mobile phones accounting for 43 per cent of this output.

Other key contributors include consumer and industrial electron-

ics (12 per cent each), electronic components (11 per cent), and emerging segments such as auto electronics (8 per cent), LED lighting (3 per cent), wearables and hearables (1 per cent), and PCBAs (1 per cent).

This extraordinary growth trajectory is projected to generate 12 million jobs by 2027, encompassing 3 million direct and 9 million indirect roles. Direct employment opportunities will span nearly 1 million engineers, 2 million ITI-certified professionals, and 200,000 specialists in high-demand fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and data science.

Meanwhile, non-technical roles will account for the bulk of indirect employment opportunities, reflecting the sector's potential to drive economic growth and create diverse career paths.

Despite its promising outlook, the electronics sector faces a significant talent gap that could impede its progress. This challenge is not just about numbers; it involves a critical shortage of skilled professionals essential for achieving the sector's ambitious manufacturing goals. Bridging this gap is crucial to strengthening India's position in the global electronics supply chain.

To address this issue, workforce

skills must be aligned with industry needs, particularly in high-demand areas such as semiconductors, electromechanical parts, and both passive and active components. The talent pool is expected to come from specialised fields such as Electronics and Electrical streams, ITI-certified professionals, and other technical domains, while general education streams can effectively support indirect roles.

AR Ramesh, CEO of TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship, highlighted the need for targeted skilling programs, stating, "Scaling apprenticeship enrollments, currently growing at a 55 per cent CAGR and projected to reach 1 million apprentices by 2027 to 2 million apprentices, will help create a robust talent pipeline to meet industry needs."

He added, "To realize this vision of becoming a global leader in electronics manufacturing, India must blend skilling with strategic investments in infrastructure, policy interventions, and innovation to propel the sector forward."

Sumit Kumar, Chief Strategy Officer at TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship, emphasized the importance of capacity build-

ing, "Employers and industries can strengthen this effort by setting up in-house training centres and collaborating with academia through Work-Integrated Learning Programs (WILP) and degree apprenticeships."

He added, "Scaling apprenticeship programs, reskilling, and upskilling initiatives for over 50 per cent of the workforce, alongside robust capacity-building measures, will empower India to bridge the skills gap and drive sustainable growth, solidifying its position as a global leader in electronics."

To realise its vision of becoming a global leader in electronics manufacturing, India must adopt a multi-pronged approach. This includes investing in skilling programs, fostering industry-academia partnerships, and enhancing infrastructure and policy support.

Efforts to increase ITI enrollment, establish in-house training centres, and expand apprenticeship opportunities will be pivotal.

Scaling reskilling and upskilling initiatives for over 50 per cent of the workforce, coupled with robust capacity-building measures, can empower the sector to overcome talent shortages and sustain its rapid growth trajectory. —ANI

NEW DELHI: India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves continue to decline. In the week that ended December 20, the foreign exchange kitty declined by \$8.478 billion to \$644.391 billion, data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) showed on Friday.

India's forex reserves have slumped eleven out of the past 12 weeks, hitting a new multi-month low.

The reserves had been falling ever since it touched an all-time high of \$704.89 billion in September.

The reserves have been declining likely due to RBI intervention aimed at aggressively preventing a sharp depreciation of the Rupee. A substantial foreign exchange reserve buffer also helps shield domestic economic activity from global shocks.

The latest RBI data showed that India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of forex reserves, stood at \$556.562 billion.

Gold reserves currently amount to USD 65.726 billion, according to RBI data.

Estimates suggest that India's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover approximately one year of projected imports. —ANI

EXEMPLARY CSR LEADERSHIP

Sohar International receives prestigious award for CSR

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman's best bank, has been awarded the prestigious 'Exemplary CSR Leadership' accolade at the recently held Oman CSR Summit and Awards 2024, reaffirming the bank's steadfast commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). This recognition underscores the bank's clear, strategic approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR), with human development at its core. The award highlights Sohar International's commitment to creating sustainable, long-term impact through initiatives that focus on empowering individuals, fostering community growth, and advancing national progress.

The award ceremony, held under the auspices of His Excellency Sheikh Salim bin Mustahail Al Mashani and graced by His Excellency Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baawain, Minister of Labour, convened senior government officials, business leaders, and non-profit organisations to celebrate leadership in CSR and sustainability. Receiving the award on behalf of the bank was Mr. Mazin Mahmood Al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer of Sohar International.

Mr. Said Mohamed Al-Aufi, Chairman of Sohar International, expressed his pride in the award, stating: "At Sohar International, we define success through a dual lens – achieving strong financial performance while delivering lasting, positive impact within the communities we serve. This recognition affirms our strategy of embedding human development as a key pillar in our CSR efforts. Our approach is rooted in empowering individuals and fostering inclusive growth across Oman. Through purposeful collaborations with government entities, businesses, and local communities, we are working towards creating opportunities that deliver sustainable and meaningful impact."

Rooted in purpose, Sohar International's CSR framework drives sustainable, long-term impact, positioning the bank as a key ena-



bler of socioeconomic growth. By aligning its initiatives with national development priorities, the bank continues to unlock inclusive opportunities, fostering positive change and shaping a more resilient and equitable future for all. Mr. Mazin Mahmood Al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer, further elaborated on the bank's strategic approach: "Our CSR strategy is grounded in creating long-term value that transcends short-term efforts. We focus on initiatives that drive social integration, economic opportunity, and empowerment, which in turn contribute to the sustainable growth of the nation. By aligning our CSR activities with national development goals, we aim to foster lasting prosperity. Our commitment to supporting entrepreneurship, empowering women, and providing for vulnerable communities positions us as a forward-thinking institution, focused on creating a resilient and inclusive future for Oman."

Aligned with Oman's long-term development goals and driven by a commitment to foster national progress, Sohar International remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing societal development through sustainability-focused corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The bank's multifaceted contributions reflect a strategic approach to community enrichment, individual empowerment, and inclusive economic growth. By enhancing maternal health-

care infrastructure through the donation of advanced ultrasound machines to the Directorate General of Health in Muscat for Al Seeb Polyclinic, and partnering with the Al Noor Association for the Blind to deliver soft-skills training for visually impaired individuals, Sohar International actively drives social integration and workforce inclusion.

Further reinforcing its role as an enabler of economic opportunity, the bank continues to foster entrepreneurship and SME growth through strategic initiatives such as Sharakahh, alongside a six-month program designed to equip 10 Omani female entrepreneurs with the digital capabilities required to expand and modernise their businesses. Sohar International's community engagement extends to addressing immediate societal needs, exemplified by its Ramadan initiative, which supported 100 underprivileged families in Muscat with essential food hampers and electronic items. Simultaneously, the bank champions local culture and the creative economy through the Safiya Art Gallery, providing a platform to promote Omani artists and preserve the nation's artistic legacy. Through these initiatives, Sohar International not only reinforces its position as a key driver of sustainable economic and social progress but also strengthens its role as a trusted partner in shaping a more inclusive and resilient future for Oman.

Elevate Your Business and Events with Us!



EVENT MANAGEMENT

- Corporate Events
- Weddings & Celebrations
- Product Launches
- and more

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

- Custom Website Design
- E-commerce Solutions
- User-Friendly Interfaces

SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLING

- Strategy & Campaign Management
- Creative Content Creation
- Analytics & Performance Insights
- 24/7 Online Presence

BRANDING

- Logo & Visual Identity Design
- Marketing Collaterals
- Brand Strategy Development
- Consistent Brand Messaging

The New 4th Dimension LLC
Po Box 86, Postal code 115
Sultanate of Oman

+968 92839679 +968 99321290





LIFESTYLE



GLOBAL AUTISM PREVALENCE



The gap is attributed to delayed or missed diagnoses in girls, whose symptoms may present differently, as well as potential genetic factors

A new study published in The Lancet Psychiatry finds that one in 127 people globally—approximately 61.8 million individuals—are on the autism spectrum, nearly doubling previous estimates. The research, conducted by Australian institutions including the University of Queensland and the University of Sydney, used 2021 data to provide updated figures. The findings highlight a significant gender disparity, with autism prevalence twice as high in men compared to women. This gap is attributed to delayed or missed diagnoses in girls, whose symptoms may present differently, as well as potential genetic factors. The study also found autism to be most common in

individuals under 20 years old. The increase in prevalence from the 2019 estimate of one in 271 people is primarily due to methodological improvements, which excluded studies that likely underestimated autism rates. Researchers emphasise the need for better global epidemiological data and stress the importance of early detection and support for autistic individuals and their caregivers. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition characterized by challenges in social communication, sensory processing, and repetitive behaviors, varying in severity. Early diagnosis and tailored support can significantly improve outcomes for those on the spectrum, the study concluded. - **ONA**

DOUBLES TO 1 IN 127

SPORTS

Bosch’s brilliance keeps SA ahead as Pakistan stumble in Centurion

South Africa added 88 for the last two wickets after Markram made 89 in the first innings of the first Test

CENTURION: Corbin Bosch enjoyed a dream Test debut, hitting an unbeaten 81—the highest score by a No. 9 batter on debut for South Africa—and steering his side to a pivotal 90-run first-innings lead on the second day of the first Test on Friday.

Despite a spirited opening partnership in their second innings, Pakistan faltered late in the day, closing on 88 for 3, trailing by two runs with the match intriguingly poised.

South Africa's innings had teetered on the brink after Aiden Markram's composed 89 was undermined by a Pakistan bowling attack led by Naseem Shah (3-92).

From 178 for 4, South Africa slid to 213 for 8, with Naseem removing David Bedingham and Kyle Verreynne in quick succession before dismissing Marco Jansen in a probing spell. Yet,



Bosch's counterattack turned the tide.

Bosch, who entered with South Africa precariously placed, displayed remarkable composure and aggression. He found valuable

support from Kagiso Rabada (15) and Dane Paterson (18), adding 88 runs for the last two wickets. Bosch reached his half-century in just 46 balls, the second-fastest fifty by a South African on debut.

His innings included a series of authoritative boundaries, including a stunning cover drive to bring up the milestone.

Pakistan's reply began promisingly. Openers Saim Ayub and

Shan Masood raced to 49 in just 11 overs, taking advantage of wayward spells from Rabada and Bosch.

However, Temba Bavuma's introduction of Paterson steadied

South Africa's attack. The pressure paid off as Rabada found his rhythm, dismissing Ayub with a peach of a delivery that clipped the top of off-stump.

Jansen then struck twice in quick succession. Masood fell to a rising delivery, edging to third slip, while Kamran Ghulam's brief stay ended with a sharp catch in the gully by Ryan Rickelton, upheld after a close review.

Saud Shakeel (14*) showed resilience, playing a couple of crisp shots before bad light halted proceedings.

South Africa's earlier batting surge, anchored by Markram and turbocharged by Bosch, will remain the standout narrative of the day. Markram looked set for his second Test century of the year before falling to Khurram Shahzad's sharp bouncer. Bosch, however, carried the innings with a mix of power and poise, ensuring South Africa capitalized on Pakistan's missed chances in the field, including a dropped catch and a no-ball reprieve.

As the pitch begins to show signs of variable bounce, Pakistan's ability to build a defendable target hinges on their remaining batters. South Africa, with momentum firmly on their side, will aim to make early inroads on Day 3.

Brief scores: Pakistan 211 and 88/3 (Babar 16*, Jansen 2-17) trail South Africa 301 (Markram 89, Bosch 81*, Shahzad 3-75, Naseem 3-92) by 2 runs. - Agencies

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal edge past Ipswich to secure vital home victory



LONDON: Arsenal maintained their unbeaten home record in the Premier League this season, edging past a determined Ipswich Town side 1-0 at the Emirates Stadium on Friday. A solitary first-half strike from Kai Havertz proved enough to lift Mikel Arteta's men to second in the table, six points adrift of leaders Liverpool.

The decisive moment came in the 23rd minute when Leandro Trossard's pinpoint delivery from the left flank found Havertz, who coolly tapped in from close range. Arsenal dominated the opening half, enjoying a staggering 83.5% possession as Kieran McKenna's Ipswich set up defensively, rarely venturing into Arsenal's half.

Declan Rice came close to doubling the lead with a curling effort from the edge of the box, while Gabriel Jesus thought he had scored after slotting the ball between Arjanet Muric's legs, only for the goal to be disallowed for offside.

Ipswich, battling at the wrong end of the table, showed more attacking intent after the break. Liam Delap worked tirelessly up front but struggled to outwit Arsenal's defensive pairing of William Saliba and Gabriel. Despite

their improved effort, the visitors failed to register a single shot on target.

Gabriel missed a golden chance to put the game beyond Ipswich's reach, heading wide from close range following a corner. Havertz also squandered an opportunity for his second, failing to connect cleanly with a Trossard header late in the game.

The victory ensured Arsenal ended the calendar year unbeaten at home, a feat unmatched by any other Premier League side. With Liverpool holding a game in hand, the Gunners remain in contention for the title race.

Meanwhile, Ipswich remain second-bottom, their defensive resilience offering little solace as they continue to struggle for points.

In other action, Brighton's winless streak extended to six matches after a 0-0 stalemate against Brentford at the Amex Stadium. Both sides had their chances, including Julio Enciso's early effort that hit the post and Yoane Wis-sa's ruled-out strike for offside. Brighton's Solly March received a warm reception after returning from a 14-month injury layoff, though his last-minute attempt sailed over the bar. - Agencies

BIG WIN OVER LEICESTER

Salah stresses humility as Liverpool strengthen Premier League lead

LONDON: "It feels different," said Mohamed Salah, reflecting on Liverpool's position at the Premier League summit. "But the most important thing is we need to stay humble. This one is very special—hopefully, we win the Premier League. It's something I dream of for this club."

Salah's words encapsulate the mindset driving Liverpool's remarkable season under new manager Arne Slot. On Thursday night, the Reds secured a commanding 3-1 victory over Leicester City at Anfield, cementing their seven-point lead at the top of the table with a game in hand. Salah, with his 19th goal of the campaign, delivered the decisive blow in the 82nd minute after Curtis Jones had earlier turned the game around.

Jones, marking his 100th Premier League appearance, scored to give Liverpool the lead, becoming the youngest player to do so for the Reds since Michael Owen in 2000. Reflecting on his milestone, the 23-year-old shared a personal moment post-match. "I saw a text



from Klopp saying, 'Congratulations on 100 games and here's to 500,'" Jones revealed. "It was him who set up the foundation for this team, and Arne Slot has carried it on."

Slot, who has guided Liverpool

to 22 wins in his first 26 matches across all competitions, remains measured despite the club's impressive form. "It's far too early to celebrate," the Dutchman said. "Two months ago, we were one point behind Manchester City.

Things can change quickly—injuries, bad luck, suspensions. So many challenges are still ahead."

Liverpool's resurgence is evident not only in the league but also in other competitions. They sit atop their Champions League group and have reached the Carabao Cup semi-finals, showcasing a depth and consistency that has eluded them in recent years.

For Salah, the dream of lifting the Premier League title remains paramount. "The most important thing is the team winning," he said. "We just take it game by game and carry on like that."

Thursday's victory, Liverpool's last home game of 2024, extended their league-best home record to 15 wins out of 19 matches. With a 10-point lead in sight if they beat West Ham on Sunday, the Reds are well-positioned to reclaim the title they last won in 2020.

As chants of "Liverpool, top of the league" echoed around Anfield, the message from both players and staff was clear: humility and focus will be key to turning a promising position into glory. - Agencies

ARSENAL STAR

Saka to miss more than two months after surgery

LONDON: Arsenal's title aspirations have been dealt a major blow, with manager Mikel Arteta confirming that star winger Bukayo Saka is set to miss "more than two months" following surgery on a hamstring injury.

Saka, 23, suffered the injury during Arsenal's commanding 5-1 Premier League victory over Crystal Palace on December 21.

The England international, who has been pivotal this season with nine goals and 13 assists in 24 appearances across all competitions,



left the stadium on crutches.

Speaking after Arsenal's 1-0 win over Ipswich, a game that lifted the Gunners to second in the table, Ar-

teta shed light on Saka's recovery timeline.

"He had a procedure, and everything went well," said Arteta. "But unfortunately, he'll be out for many, many weeks. It's hard to give an exact timeframe, but I'd say more than two months. Recovery will depend on how the healing progresses in the initial weeks."

While Saka's absence casts a shadow over Arsenal's campaign, Arteta offered a sliver of optimism regarding Raheem Sterling. The 30-year-old Chelsea loanee, ini-

tially feared to face a lengthy spell out with a knee injury, is recovering faster than expected.

"We initially thought it would take weeks, but his knee has responded well. Hopefully, he'll be available soon," Arteta added.

Arsenal, currently six points adrift of league leaders Liverpool, will need all hands on deck as they face Brentford on New Year's Day. Saka's injury presents a challenging test for the squad's depth as they aim to maintain momentum in the title race. - Agencies

A DIVISION CRICKET

Birthday boy Jangid shines with maiden A Division fifer as Ideal International triumph

MUSCAT: There are many ways to celebrate a birthday, but Ideal International skipper Manoj Jangid chose to make his 47th memorabilia on the cricket field at the Oman Cricket Academy ground recently.

Jangid delivered a stellar performance, taking a match-winning five-wicket haul to secure his team's 40-run victory over Design Group Engineering.

Although it was his maiden five-wicket haul in the A Division,

Jangid had previously achieved the feat in the B Division. This double milestone on his birthday made the occasion even more special for the veteran cricketer and his team.

After the match, teammates celebrated by carrying him on their shoulders in recognition of his outstanding spell, which helped defend their modest total of 150 in a 30-over-a-side contest.

Batting first, Ideal International rode on a blistering knock

from opener Wasim Jamadar, who smashed 44 off just 19 balls, including three sixes and four boundaries. Llewelyn Korada added a valuable 26, but the team was bowled out for 150 in 28 overs.

It was Jangid's bowling that turned the match around. Returning with dream figures of 2.4-0-10-5, he dismantled the opposition's middle order, claiming the wickets of key players Nalanka Kahatadeniya Gedara Pathum (27) and Hussain Satham (17). His efforts

ensured that Design Group Engineering were skittled out for 110 in 24.4 overs, falling short by 40 runs.

Arav Santosh Pillai provided strong support, taking 2 for 28.

Jangid's five-wicket haul on his 47th birthday underscored that age is no barrier when it comes to skill and passion on the cricket field.

With this impressive victory, Ideal International recorded their third successive win, topping the A Division league table.



ROUND-UP



A PERFECT BLEND OF PERFORMANCE, LUXURY, AND SAFETY

Bestune Oman unveils all new versatile Bestune T90 crossover



MUSCAT: Bestune Oman, represented by Gulf Great Sands (GGS) LLC, has unveiled the all new Bestune T90 crossover, a family SUV designed to meet diverse needs. The vehicle is available in three distinct variants, catering to a range of preferences and requirements.

A spokesperson for Bestune Oman said, “The new T90 exemplifies innovation, comfort, and safety, making it a standout choice for families and individuals. With its comprehensive safety features, and luxurious interiors, the T90 is a crossover that excels in every aspect. We are thrilled to bring a vehicle that seamlessly combines performance with modern luxury.”

Each T90 model offers a unique mix of specifications, features, and cutting-edge technologies, emphasising performance, comfort, and safety.

Bestune T90 Premium 1.5L Turbo
The entry-level Bestune T90

Premium 1.5L Turbo balances practicality and performance. It features a 1.5L turbocharged engine delivering 158 horsepower and 258 Nm of torque through a dual-clutch transmission. Key highlights include a panoramic sunroof, LED headlamps, and alloy wheels. Inside, 6 way power driver & manual pass seat, a leather-wrapped multifunctional steering wheel, and dual-zone automatic air conditioning. Safety features include blind-spot monitoring, S-ACC premium cruise control, dynamic park assist and multiple airbags. The infotainment system boasts an LCD display and a six-speaker audio setup.

Bestune T90 Limousine 2.0L Turbo
Building on the Premium 1.5L Turbo, the Bestune T90 Limousine 2.0L Turbo includes all its features with additional enhancements. These include a more powerful 2.0L turbocharged en-



gine delivering 240 horsepower and 380 Nm of torque. Luxury upgrades such as continuous LED headlamps integrated with full microfibre seats, head up display and power adjustable passenger seat and an interactive ambient lighting system further elevate the experience. Enhanced safety features, including rear collision warning and lane change assist, provide added assurance. An upgraded eight-speaker audio system enriches cabin entertainment.

Bestune T90 Flago 2.0L Turbo
The top-tier Bestune T90 Flago 2.0L Turbo shares the specifications of the Limousine 2.0L Turbo while adding exclusive features for a more luxurious experience. These include 19-inch alloy wheels, electric folding mirrors with memory and reverse sync, and perforated seats with eight way driver seat with memory. Inside, the AC scent

system and mood lights enhance comfort and sophistication. Safety is further bolstered with front parking radar and fully automatic parking for added convenience.

The Bestune T90 is available in a variety of colours, including phantom night black, pearl white, moon blue, red, putty grey, and bronze grey, allowing buyers to match their personal style. With its robust performance, safety focus, and luxurious interiors, the T90 is a versatile crossover suitable for families and individuals.

About Bestune Oman
Gulf Great Sands (GGS) LLC, the official dealer of Bestune Oman, has showrooms in Al Qurum and Sohar as well as sales centres in Mawaleh, Barka, Ibri, Nizwa, and Salalah to provide comprehensive services to customers. For more information, visit www.bestune-oman.com or call toll-free 80050800.

ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat strengthens partnership with Al Masarra Hospital as part of its CSR initiatives

The bank recently provided a vehicle to assist in transporting patients from and to the hospital, facilitating a seamless treatment process

MUSCAT: In line with its strong commitment to social responsibility, community service and keenness to contribute to supporting various sectors, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has strengthened its partnership with Al Masarra Hospital.

The bank recently provided a vehicle to assist in transporting patients from and to the hospital, facilitating a seamless treatment process.

The contribution was formally presented in a brief ceremony held in Al Masarra Hospital and attended by Dr. Badr Ali Al Habsi, General Director of Al Masarra Hospital and Talib Saif Al Makhmari, Head



of Community and Media Relations, Bank Muscat.

About this partnership, Dr. Badr Ali Al Habsi, General Director of Al Masarra Hospital, said: “The hospital recognises its successful collaboration with Bank Muscat, a pioneering form of partnership between health institutions and corporates. This initiative aims to improve community services, as Bank Muscat donated a vehicle

dedicated to the Community Psychological Services Department. It will improve our capacity to visit patients in their homes and provide them the necessary health and social care they require. In order to maintain treatment continuity, this support will help to enhance patients’ experience and guarantee that they receive effective and high-quality care.”

“We would like to take this opportunity to thank Bank Muscat for this initiative, which demonstrates their strong commitment to social responsibility. To fulfil our goals of offering a long-term mental health treatment, this kind of effort is of essential importance,” he added.

Talib Saif Al Makhmari, Head of Community and Media Relations, Bank Muscat, said: “We are pleased to strengthen our partnership with Al Masarra Hospital. We hope that this support will help facilitating the process of transporting patients to provide appropriate care to them. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Al Masarra Hospital for their continuous efforts and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.”

Over the past years, Bank Muscat has demonstrated its pioneering position in the field of sustain-

able development and actively encourages different segments of society to enhance their contributions and engagement.

Bank Muscat has been successfully providing support through various programmes and initiatives to various segment, aiming to leave a tangible impact and continue to support community activities by adopting clear sustainable strategies.

In its commitment to strengthening partnership between the public and private sectors, Bank Muscat has been keen to continue cooperating with various institutions to support the community and achieve common goals.

Commending its efforts in the field of social responsibility and sustainability, Bank Muscat has been awarded Best Bank in Oman for the application of environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices by Euromoney. Recently, the Bank has been honoured with the “CSR Impact on Education: Financial Literacy by Maliyat Academy Award” at the Oman CSR Summit & Awards 2024, organised by the United Media Services Group.

This recognition reflects the decisive steps taken by the Bank in promoting the concept of social responsibility among all segments of society, and adopting innovative and sustainable solutions that have a clear impact and positive long-term results.

EMPOWERING MOBILITY



Europcar Bahrain celebrates its second anniversary milestone

MUSCAT: Europcar, an icon in mobility services, was founded 75 years ago with a vision to redefine global travel experiences. Present in 134+ countries, the company boasts a vast network of 300,000 vehicles and a team of 8,800+ dedicated employees, embodying a commitment to excellence.

In Oman, the Ajit Khimji Group nurtured the Europcar franchise for over three decades, fostering a culture of quality and trust. Now, in partnership with YK Almoayyed & Sons in Bahrain, Europcar Bahrain stands as a symbol of collaboration and progress.

From humble beginnings to a thriving team today, Europcar Bahrain celebrates its 2nd anniversary, offering diverse mobility solutions—from short-term rentals to chauffeur services and international reservations. To mark the day, Sachin Shetty, the Fleet & Operations Manager flew in from Muscat to join in the festive celebrations with his dedicated team. Each interaction at Europcar Bahrain is a story of exceptional customer service and unforgettable moments, crafted by a well-trained staff and cutting-edge innovation.

Nitin Sapre, CEO of Europcar Bahrain and Oman shared, “We are immensely proud of our journey’s

strides in just two years, thanks to our incredible team. We would also like to thank you, our loyal customers, partners, and supporters for being a part of our journey—their trust and confidence in have been instrumental in our growth.”

As Europcar Bahrain raises a toast to the past and looks forward to the future, they invite you to join in celebrating a narrative of growth, partnership, and a relentless pursuit of customer delight. Let’s journey together towards new horizons of mobility excellence!

CATERING TO CUSTOMER ASPIRATIONS

Bank Nizwa offers flexible and inclusive financing bundle for Hajj and Umrah



MUSCAT: Staying true to its ethos as Oman’s leading and most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, has introduced an exclusive Hajj and Umrah Financing Bundle, a strategic initiative aimed at providing the necessary financial solution to individuals wishing to undertake these sacred journeys. Bank Nizwa enables individuals to achieve their diverse aspirations through innovative financing solutions, while also offering exclusive benefits tailored to enhance their banking experience.

Bank Nizwa offers its customers this product at a competitive profit rate on the Hajj & Umrah financing product, with repayment terms extending up to ten years. Customers are eligible for Plati-

num or Titanium credit cards, with annual fee waivers for the first year along with a complimentary travel insurance. Bank Nizwa offers fast processing, with approvals finalized on the same day of application, allowing convenience and ease for customers.

Commenting on the launch of the Hajj and Umrah financing bundle, Mohamed Al Ghassani, Chief Retail Banking officer at Bank Nizwa, said, “We continuously strive to meet the evolving and diverse needs of our community by providing innovative, Sharia-compliant financial solutions. The launch of this financing bundle reflects our unwavering commitment to meeting the growing demand for Islamic financial

products, which underscores the increasing preference for Islamic banking services. By offering tailored solutions that empower individuals to achieve their aspirations, we continue to solidify our position as leaders in Islamic financing, committed to enhancing financial inclusion and ensuring easy access to our services. In alignment with Oman Vision 2040, which promotes shared values and societal cohesion, this initiative reinforces our role as a socially responsible institution and ensures that our services reflect the values and aspirations of our customers.”

The financing bundle has been designed to combine convenience and value, offering benefits such

as premium credit cards and complementary travel insurance. Bank Nizwa remains dedicated to providing a seamless and supportive banking experience, highlighting its innovative, customer-focused approach that has earned it trust and loyalty as a leader in Islamic finance within the Sultanate.

As a forward-looking organization, Bank Nizwa continues its pursuit of shaping a prosperous future while meeting its customers’ diverse needs. Through such initiatives, the bank reaffirms its commitment to delivering financial solutions that align with its customers’ values and contribute to the advancement of Oman’s financial sector, building a thriving and sustainable future.

WINTER OFFER



White Tap Dispenser
OR Tap dispenser
OR Manual water pump
OR Cradle with tap
+ 2 Full Bottles
+ 15 Refill Coupons



Hot & Cold Dispenser
+ 2 Full Bottles
+ 30 Refill Coupons

OMR 20 ONLY

OMR 50 ONLY

Experience the purest winter with special offers from Oman Oasis

Promotion duration: 1 December 2024 to 28 February

TOLL FREE

800 71 222

09275 5522

2025

📍 OmanOasisWater

📍 OmanOasisOfficial

📍 OmanOasis

MM - 06 /002 /2024



Enroll Now

oman OASIS

BALANCED DRINKING WATER