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HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN GREET'S PRESIDENT OF CUBA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Miguel Diaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Canel and the people of Cuba. — **ONA**



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GOODBYE 2023

As the sun sets in at Qurum beach, so does the year 2023. *Times of Oman* wishes a very happy New Year to all its valued readers. — **Shabin E**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Oman ambassador presents credentials

1 Mahmoud Hamad Al Hassani, Ambassador of Oman to the Swiss Confederation, presented his credentials to Pope Francis, Chief of State of the Vatican City, as Oman's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Vatican. **>A2**

OMAN

Plan to promote adventure tourism

2 The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has partnered with Sabco Sports to increase the reach of events and promote Oman as the sports and adventure tourism destination. **>A2**

MARKET

Output of refineries, petrochemicals up



3 The Sultanate of Oman's production of refineries and petrochemicals recorded an increase by 6.6% till the end of November 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022, according to preliminary statistics released by the NCSI. **>B1**

DAVID CAMERON

Sayyid Badr receives phone call from UK



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Sunday received a phone call from David Cameron, British Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

The two ministers discussed current conditions in the Gaza Strip and navigation in the Red Sea.

Gaza ceasefire

Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi and David Cameron stressed the need for concerted international efforts to reach a comprehensive ceasefire, provide relief aid into the Gaza Strip and pave the way for peace. **-ONA**

OMAN EVENTS CENTRE TO HOST GLOBAL SPORTING TOURNAMENTS

The agreement to establish the OEC was signed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Sail Foundation

Times News Service

MUSCAT: An agreement was signed on Sunday for the creation of Oman Events Centre (OEC) that will monitor international sport events to be hosted in the Sultanate of Oman from 2024 and 2030, in coordination with private bodies operating in the sports field.

The agreement to establish the OEC was signed by the Ministry



Image is for illustrative purposes

of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Sail Foundation.

The centre is one of the outcomes of an investment lab organised by the ministry, with support from Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the National Programme for Investment and Export Development "Nazdaheer".

It will also look into proposals to host regional and international

sports tournaments and events and evaluate the benefits that can be generated sports-wise, economically and socially.

The OEC will conduct studies on regulatory requirements to secure the success of tournaments in coordination with the international sports bodies supervising sporting events.

Mohammed bin Ahmed al Amri, Director General of Sports Activi-

ties, said: "Over the past decades, sport has greatly demonstrated its ability to promote social development, economic growth, health, education, and environmental protection in societies, especially if it is part of consistent, sustainable and long-term policies."

"It is considered a long-term communication platform for peoples at both the national and international levels, which can

be used to encourage a culture of peace, and one of the most effective and versatile tools for promoting good values and principles and achieving sustainable development goals."

He added: "Hosting major sporting events and activities has become an industry for which countries compete and efforts are made to obtain the rights to organise them, as it is considered a gateway to the world, in addition to the positive returns. Diversified activities benefit the economy and society, not to mention national capabilities in the fields of organisation, management and marketing. Hosting global sporting events is an opportunity to highlight the country's tourism potential."

For his part, Assim Al Saqri, Head of the Communications Department at Oman Sail Corporation, said: "Sports has become an effective promotional tool through which it is possible to attract investment opportunities, especially with the government seeking many future projects that could be incubators for various sports tournaments." **>A3**

CAPITAL OF ARAB TOURISM

Ministry gears up to tap Sur tourism potential

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Wilayat of Sur in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate is preparing to celebrate its status as the Capital of Arab Tourism for the year 2024 on January 1.

The Office of the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah, in coordination with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, partners and relevant authorities, is gearing up to implement projects to enhance tourism, aesthetic and development potential of the wilayat.

Salim bin Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Culture, said, "The Arab Ministerial Council for Tourism at its 26th session in Doha in mid-December selected Wilayat of Sur as the capital of Arab tourism for the year 2024. It is a unique experience for this ancient wilayat to enhance its



tourist attraction, organise various events, and ensure that this occasion will be useful to highlight its tourism potential, and revitalise the region and its surroundings."

Al Mahrouqi added that the

Wilayat of Sur is rich in historic and tourism components, cultural and heritage components that make it attractive for tourists from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. He hoped that "we will be

able to add positives to strengthen the status of this wilayat, which is rich in natural elements."

"There is a plan to develop areas adjacent to the city that will be announced in the near future after the issuance of the ministerial decision designating Wadi Shab area in the Niyabat of Tiwi in the Wilayat of Sur as a tourist destination based on the approval of the Council of Ministers."

"The consultation process is ongoing to create many facilities to enhance tourist experiences in the region."

He said, "During the next two months, coinciding with the celebration of the Wilayat of Sur as the capital of Arab tourism, consulting services will be assigned to the Maritime History Museum in Sur. We hope that it will be completed within two years." **See also >A4**

WFP warns of complete collapse of basic services in Gaza

A7





MOCIIP

Commercial store raided

Times News Service

MUSCAT : A commercial establishment has been raided for practicing promotional offers without obtaining a licence from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promo-

tion (MoCIIP), in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

“A commercial establishment was raided by the department of MoCIIP for not obtaining a licence to hold promotional offers from the ministry,” the Ministry said in a statement.

CONVEYS GREETINGS

Oman envoy presents credentials to Vatican City Chief of State

THE VATICAN: Mahmoud Hamad Al Hassani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Swiss Confederation, on Sunday presented his credentials to Pope Francis, Chief of State of the Vatican City, as Oman's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Vatican.

The Ambassador conveyed His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's greetings and wishes of good health to Pope Francis, along with His Majesty the Sultan's wishes of wellbeing for the people of the Vatican.

The ambassador underlined the status accorded to coexistence, tolerance and peace in the Sultanate of Oman.

Pope Francis asked the Ambassador to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan. He wished Omani people further progress and prosperity. -ONA



Meeting held to realise digital transition goals

The strategy is scheduled to be activated with effect from January 2024

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Sunday organised the first meeting of heads of teams tasked with the management of change and digital transition in government institutions.

The meeting was a link in a series of gatherings aimed at accelerating the implementation of digital transition in the government sector, with the prime objective of realising the goals and indices of the Government Digital Transition Programme 2021-2025.

The meeting discussed the executive plan of the national strat-



egy for change management with a view to consolidating the digital transition programme in government units.

The strategy is scheduled to be activated with effect from January

2024.

The meeting stressed the need to enhance interaction among change management teams, transfer knowledge and benefit from successful experiences.

During the meeting, a “change management knowledge community” was announced. The community will help accelerate digital transition and secure its success and sustainability. -ONA

HEALTHCARE

Royal Hospital pays great attention to research culture

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital, represented by the Research Department pays great attention to the enhancement of research culture and quality is a cornerstone in development of the healthcare system in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr. Haseena bint Ahmed Al Harthi, senior specialists and head of the studies and research department at the Royal Hospital, said that the hospital offers integrated and quality healthcare and plays a key role in the field of health research in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Royal Hospital has remarkable achievements where the number of its publications amounted to 150, an increase of 30 percent compared to the past five years, she added.

She said that the year 2023 saw diverse research in the specialisation of internal medicine, surgery and paediatrics and other fields, which reflects the commitment of the Royal Hospital to of-

fering integrated and high-quality healthcare.

Building the capabilities and competency of the research personnel is a strategic priority to us, she said, adding that “we focus on practical implementation of knowledge and on enhancement of the culture of sharing knowledge”.

The fields of cooperation contribute to the research march of the hospital. The cooperation fields include enhancement of cooperation with the academic institutions and the number of publications associated with cooperation with the other academic institutions has recently increased from 3 percent to 7 percent, she said.

She reaffirmed that the Royal Hospital aspires to continue with innovation and dissemination of knowledge and efficient contribution to improvement of healthcare in the Sultanate of Oman and to start the year 2024 with ambitious plans for enhancement of research. -ONA

AL MOUJ MUSCAT MARATHON

Ministry of Tourism to promote Oman as next great sports, adventure tourism destination

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has partnered with Sabco Sports to increase the reach of the event and promote Oman's potential to become the next great sports and adventure tourism destination.

Scheduled on 26-27 of January, the event has grown to become Oman's biggest run and now aims to capture a growing global audience seeking exciting tourism experiences.

Haitham bin Mohammed Al-Ghasani, the Director General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, affirmed, “The tourism sector experienced remarkable growth in 2023, and we foresee the continuation of this positive trend. Sports tourism events constitute a fundamental strategic pillar embraced by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to enhance inbound tourist traffic to the Sultanate of Oman.

“The Al Mouj Muscat Marathon holds a prominent position in the ministry's tourism calendar for 2024, serving as a catalyst for attracting international participants, alongside the active participation of local runners from across the Sultanate.

“Our enduring objective is to showcase Oman's culture, beauty, and unique experiences, emphasising its capacity to host a diverse array of tourism events to appeal to various types of travellers. This event significantly contributes to promotional, economic, and social gains, leading to the diversification of the economy through sports tourism activities.”

“We are very proud to partner with the Ministry of Heritage of



Tourism and excited to introduce Oman to new audiences and encourage more people to visit this amazing country using the mass appeal of sport. With awe-inspiring nature, authentic charm and world class facilities, Oman con-

tinues to develop a reputation for being a vibrant destination for local and international tourists and can play a role in developing a thriving tourism sector in the coming years,” says Ali Al Ajmi, General Manager of Sabco Sports.

Organised by Sabco Sports and hosted by Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier destination and title sponsor of the event, there are five race categories to choose from ranging from 1km, 2km and 3km Kids' Runs to a half- and full marathon.



All finishers will receive a tech t-shirt and a medal to celebrate their achievement. Over 12,000 runners of all ages are expected, with registrations flowing in from across the nation and around the world to experience the unique atmosphere

of the race and spend a fun-filled weekend at Al Mouj Muscat.

Registration is currently open in all five race categories with promotional rates available for a limited time through the official website, www.muscatmarathon.om



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COMMENTARY



I will not make 2024 just another year



SALEH AL-SHAIBANY

I am planning not to do anything special this year but I am going to undo all the mistakes of the past 12 months while at the same strengthening my vows in life by trying to help people around me better than I did the year before.

In other words, I will make every day in this year count and I will leave no stone unturned on my path until I solve all the problems on the way towards the end of 2024. My family comes first and then people who seek my help.

I know I should have done better last year, but whatever blinded my vision then, I am better prepared this year than ever before. I will not stop

when the bells of selfishness start ringing or falter on my tracks when a cold sweat starts rolling down on my neck. One of the biggest excuses we all make is that time during any day is very limited.

But when we have 365 days during the year, then we can always find time to do something that is important to our families and people who need us. The twenty fours in the day is long enough to stretch a helping hand unless we let our heads clouded by unimportant routines.

Looking back, the year 2023 went very fast just like the year before that. But the question is: can we let this year whizz past uneventfully just like last year? So from now on, while the days go past, we can now avoid a lot of wastes that should be replaced with usefulness. If you want to test yourself whether you made yourself useful in 2023, then go into a rewind mode in the last 12 months.

It is not about what you have achieved financially, the business deal you clinched or the new management position, but the heart strings you pulled of people close to you during the year. Money and power come and go but

personal relationships, when nurtured properly, never lose their shine no matter what the challenges are.

A motivation to go through 'a great year' has no financial gain. How you touch people's lives is the reward that has lasting impression. So, how exactly do you do that to make every day of the year count? The little things that normally go unnoticed. When done with great care, they give others fresh hopes and purpose. For example, finding time for people who need you around is one of them.

In other words, the life changing gestures have no monetary values but a little action to reach out for somebody's feelings.

A listening ear, to some, can be life changing. Some of your friends may need their spirit lifted up and you can be there for them. Any little thing to restore the confidence of people around you is important and should be your priority this year.

If we all make that a priority in 2024, then we can change for the better our own little world around us for another year. Then the New Year will have a meaning for a real celebration.

ENDOWMENT SECTOR



Total endowment assets in 2023 stood at OMR14mn

MUSCAT: Total new endowment assets in 2023 stood at more than OMR14 million, according to the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

This was unveiled during the ministry's annual meeting during which activities and accomplishments of the waqf (endowment sector) for the year 1444-1445 AH were outlined.

A presentation to this effect showed that community support for the reconstruction of mosques stood at OMR20,750,000. This was in addition to more than OMR25 million donated to provide basic services to 12,000 mosques.

During the annual meeting, endowment investment contracts were signed to carry out four projects: the construction of Square Commercial Complex in Al Khoud in the Wilayat of ASeeb to the tune of OMR3.14 million, the establishment of a commercial building (OMR759,550), a commercial building for Bahla Mosque (OMR339,561) and a model entertainment project in the Wilayat of Nizwa (OMR335,380).

The event was held under the auspices of Sultan Salim Al Habsi, Minister of Finance. — ONA



DEC

'Objective to host tournaments'

FROM He added: "On the human level and based on experience, and as a result of the interaction of the organisational committees with the international federations coming to the Sultanate of Oman, we find widespread praise for the potential of the creative Omani human energies, which is considered an added value and quality that differs from other countries."

Basil Ahmed Al Rawas, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said: "This project is one of the outcomes of the upcoming strategy for Omani sports and the outcomes of the Investment Laboratory in the Sports Sector.

"The main objective is to search for tournaments and sporting events that can be attracted to the Sultanate of Oman according to the available capabilities, and the feasibility of these events and their objectives, whether sporting or economic, through a specialised team studying this event. This centre will have an important role in communicating between government agencies and the private sector on how to unify efforts to implement sports programmes and events that achieve the desired goals in the sports strategy in the coming period."

He explained that the centre began its work immediately after signing the agreement, and there is a plan to study a group of sporting programmes and events during the coming period that will be implemented in the Sultanate of Oman, and among these activities supervised by the centre is the World Cup for Futsal Hockey, which will start next January 24 in Al Amerat.

—With inputs from — ONA



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Development, restoration work at Qalhat site to continue: Tourism minister



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The construction of the visitor centre at the archaeological site of Qalhat, which is registered on the World Heritage List, and the development of this site will be assigned, said Salim bin Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Culture.

He said that archaeological surveys, excavations at the site and restoration work will continue, in addition to surveys related to submerged antiquities. The survey programme is also continuing at the archaeological sites in the Wilayat of Sur, including the sites of Ras al-Hadd and Ras Al-Jinz.

Dr. Yahya bin Badr Al. Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah, said, “The choice of the Wilayat of Sur as the capital of Arab tourism came from the premise that this wilayat has great tourism potentials due to its historic, cultural and social heritage, and the diverse components it abounds in, whether on the sea side or on other sides. In addition, it is currently a tourist destination, and this choice provides an opportunity for this ancient city to deepen its presence on the Arab tourism map.

“Coordination has begun with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, partners and relevant authorities to prepare a good package of events and activities that reflect the historic and cultural heritage that characterizes the Wilayat of Sur.”

Pointing out that the office of the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah will hold a press conference in the coming days during which a set of details related to the celebration of the state of Sur as the capital of Arab tourism will be discussed.

He stressed that “the selection of the Wilayat of Sur as the capital of Arab tourism came due to its potential and capabilities in accordance with the controls on the basis of which these cities are chosen. This will certainly push the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah and the relevant authorities to promote tourism projects, and improve its aesthetic aspect over the next 12 months and develop the services that tourists need. Pointing out that there is continuous coordination with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to enhance the housing aspect and beautification projects in the tourism sector.

Regarding the beautification projects in the city of Sur, He explained that the second phase of the Sur Market beautification project, which represents a combination of heritage and modernity in design from an architectural standpoint, is almost complete. There is a path in the city centre that extends for more than one kilometre, and the state central market will soon be completed. The design of the city centre's improvement project has also been completed, including the construction of parking lots, a bus station, and additional paths.



He explained that financial approval had been made for the implementation of the Maritime History Museum in the Wilayat of Sur, which was adopted by the Bilarab Bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design, and consultation has begun for the design phase. The cultural centre project has also been approved and is currently in the design stage after the financial approval. It includes a library and a youth centre.

He hoped that the project will be implemented during the year 2024, in addition to the tourism development project for the village of Mebam and the city of Qalhat, and there is a project to beautify the Tiwi district. The second package of the development of Wadi Shab will be launched, and the Sur Public Park, which has begun its implementation phases on an area of more than 150,000 square metres, will constitute a prominent landmark in the entertainment and tourism sector. A hotel, a tourist restaurant, chalets, and a water park will be established next to it, which will constitute an addition to the tourist attractions in the Wilayat of Sur.

He stated that the programme to celebrate the Wilayat of Sur as the capital of Arab tourism for the year 2024 includes many “cultural and social celebrations and events, highlighting the traditional arts for which the Wilayat of Sur is famous. There is space for civil society associations, including the Omani Society of Writers and Authors, to participate in this programme to highlight their efforts and establish cultural and artistic events in which writers, poets and others participate, and the holding of art exhibitions to enhance the tourism aspect.”



Pointing out that the office of the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah will hold a press conference in the coming days during which a set of details related to the celebration of the state of Sur as the capital of Arab tourism will be discussed.





Charthouse Residence inaugurated in Manama

The Deputy Prime Minister affirmed that the continuous growth of the tourism sector is the result of tireless efforts to strengthen the infrastructure to promote Bahrain’s status as a global tourist destination

MANAMA: Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister, opened on Sunday the Chighthouse Residence in Manama within the Bahrain Harbour District, a subsidiary of Infracorp, near the iconic Bahrain Financial Harbour and Harbour Heights. Wael bin Nasser Al Mubarak,



Minister of Municipalities Affairs and Agriculture; Fatima bint Jaafar Al Sairafi, Minister of Tourism; Abdullah bin Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry and Commerce; and Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulrahman Al Khalifa, Governor of the Capital Governorate, were present. Hisham Al Rayes, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Infracorp, and a number of the company’s employees were among the Deputy Prime Minister’s recipients. The Deputy Prime Minister affirmed that the continuous growth of the tourism sector is the result of tireless efforts to strengthen

the infrastructure to promote Bahrain’s status as a global tourist destination, to achieve the goals of the comprehensive development process led by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, with the follow-up of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister. The Minister emphasised the impressive expansion of highly rated hotel facilities, as well as the keenness of internationally known hotel brands to establish a foothold in Bahrain. Based on the quarterly economic report for this quarter, it is clear that the private sector and investors enjoy significant support

and facilities for practicing this vital activity. The rise in the number of tourists and occupancy rates in hotels contributed to this increase. Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah was briefed on the project, which is an important tributary to the national economy as well as an important non-oil contributor. It also represents an important step forward in the development of Bahrain Financial Harbour. Al Sairafi affirmed that the opening of the project represents the collective efforts of Team Bahrain from all governments, led by the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibition Authority (BTEA), aimed at enhancing investment opportunities in Bahrain, attracting leading international hospitality companies, and strengthening the private sector’s role as an economy engine. Al Rayes thanked the Deputy Prime Minister for opening the residence, commending the government’s support of the project. “We are pleased to announce the launch of another new tourism attraction in Manama, in line with the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030, as the Chart House Hotel is another landmark that contributes to the growth and development of the hotel and hospitality industry,” he added. – BNA

AL-TANFEETHI LOUNGE New lounge opens at Taif Airport

TAIF: Taif Governor Prince Saud bin Nahar bin Saud bin Abdulaziz on Sunday inaugurated the Al-Tanfeethi Lounge at the Taif International Airport in the presence of President of the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Duailj and several civil and military senior officials in the governorate. During the tour, Prince Saud reviewed the equipment of the new lounge, which is characterized by its modern design in accordance with the best international standards and simulates the unprecedented comprehensive development renaissance in the Kingdom. He also checked on the Taif Airport and the internal lounges and the progress of business and efforts provided by concerned authorities in the service of passengers. Al-Tanfeethi CEO Gelban Al-Gelban noted that the launch of the new lounge at the Taif Airport is part of a project to develop and improve Al-Tanfeethi lounges, pointing out that work in the project took 90 days of work, with a capacity of up to 800,000 passengers per year. According to the company’s new identity, modern engineer-



ing designs have been implemented as per the latest systems and equipment to meet the requirements and needs of VIP guests; he noted that the new lounge is part of several upcoming development projects to ensure that the company achieves the objectives of the National Civil Aviation Strategy. He added that Al-Tanfeethi Company operates all Al-Tanfeethi lounges in the various airports of the Kingdom. It has more than 27 guest lounges that offer guests many exclusive services to give them an exceptional travel experience. Al-Gelban said that the launch of the new Al-Tanfeethi identity is part of its ambitious plan to expand its business to achieve the goals and aspirations of beneficiaries. – SPA

SHEIKH ZAYED FESTIVAL



UAE to step into 2024 with record-breaking fireworks

ABU DHABI: Sheikh Zayed Festival, currently taking place at Al Wathba in Abu Dhabi, is preparing to welcome 2024 with exceptional fireworks displays that will light up the sky over the festival area at midnight, in an event anticipated by viewers from inside and outside the country. The festival’s annual New Year’s Eve celebration programme attracts Arab and foreign visitors from abroad, in addition to thousands of citizens and residents within the country, to enjoy the shows taking place on this occasion, which include – in addition to the fireworks display – international folklore and artistic performances, recreational events for visitors, in addition to various events and activities dedicated to children. Sheikh Zayed Festival will welcome 2024 this Sunday evening with a fireworks display that will last for more than 40 minutes, breaking four new Guinness World Records in terms of quantity, time, and shape. Visitors to the festival will also have the opportunity for the first time to see more than 5,000

drones, which will paint artistic images in the sky of Al Wathba, breaking a new Guinness World Record. Visitors will also enjoy the largest laser show ever in the region, in addition to the shows of the Emirates Fountain and the accompanying lights to the rhythm of music. On the occasion of welcoming the year 2023, the Sheikh Zayed Festival succeeded in breaking four Guinness World Records, three of which are for fireworks, and a new record for drones. The following records were recorded: Most helicopter-shaped fireworks fired in 30 seconds; Most wheel-shaped fireworks fired in 30 seconds; Most repeated fireworks in 30 seconds; and the largest formation of a quick response (QR) code performed by drones. Sheikh Zayed Festival recorded three new Guinness World Records on New Year’s Eve 2022 with the largest fireworks display, which lit up the sky over Al Wathba with various formations and colours that dazzled the audience. The Festival witnessed excep-

tional performances in which it broke the record for the largest number of fireworks in terms of quantity, time, and shape for 40 minutes, which provided its visitors with an exceptional experience to begin the new year. The huge drone show that soared over Al Wathba skies displayed the title “WELCOME 2022” using 2022 drones, which was a global first. Sheikh Zayed Festival broke two Guinness World Records within the first minutes of 2021 with huge fireworks displays that lit up the sky over Al Wathba for 35 continuous minutes and were launched from 16 towers. The first Guinness World Records to be broken was when the festival succeeded in using the Girandola technology to break the record in the number of shots by firing 300 Girandola shots in a time period of 30 seconds, which was a global first. Additionally, for the first time in the world, the Guinness World Record for the largest fireworks display with the largest number of shots in a straight line was broken on New Year’s Eve 2021. – WAM



Ministry of Defence

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Defence invites MOD registered suppliers to participate in The following tender:

Subject	Tender Number	Last Date for Inquiries	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Documnet Price per copy (RO)
THE SUPPLY AND MAINTENANCE OF LIQUID PETROLEUM GAS* FOR ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN	37/2023	22/01/2024	29/01/2024	1500 RO
SUPPLY OF BREAD (LEBNANI) FOR ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN	38/2023	29/01/2024	05/02/2024	900 RO
SUPPLY OF RATION FOR ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN	39/2023	12/02/2024	19/02/2024	1500 RO

1. Tenders documents and terms may be obtained on payment from the office of the Secretary of the Tender Committee, gate No. 14 of MAM Camp between 0900 to 1300 hrs on the working days.

2. Payment of Tender documents to be made by using of any Visa Electron Cards or “Visa credit” Cards or through Smart Card issued from all the banks are operated in Oman .



Invitation to Attend the Extraordinary General Meeting of Bank Muscat Oryx Fund

The Fund Management Board of Bank Muscat Oryx Fund (the “Fund”) has the pleasure in inviting the unit holders to the Extraordinary General Meeting (“EGM”) to be held on Wednesday, 17th of January 2024, at 3 pm, at Bank Muscat Head Office, Airport Heights, Seeb, Sultanate of Oman.

Failing quorum, the EGM shall be reconvened on Thursday, 18th of January 2024, at 3 pm, at Bank Muscat Head Office, Airport Heights, Seeb, Sultanate of Oman, to discuss and consider the following agenda:

1. To amend article (4), article (12) and article (27) of the fund’s Articles of Association.

The respected unitholder is requested to be present at the EGM venue half an hour before the meeting.

For queries please contact Ms. Wijdan Al Shalwani on (+968) 2480 1866

P.O. Box 134, Ruwi, P. C. 112, Sultanate of Oman

WORLD

AUSTRALIA CELEBRATES BIG WITH FIREWORKS

Australia's largest city, Sydney, which proclaims itself the "New Year's capital of the world," has taken its moment in the spotlight, with its traditional firework display above the Harbour Bridge. The bridge stood in relative darkness during the countdown, before giving way to a dazzling display of bright colours after the stroke of midnight. The show, involving some 8 metric tonnes of fireworks, was witnessed by tens of thousands of people gathered at vantage points along the waterfront. —DW



US shoots down 2 Houthi anti-ship ballistic missiles

The US military shot down two missiles on Sunday morning, the container ship MAERSK HANGZHOU reported that the vessel was struck by a missile while transiting the Southern Red Sea



WASHINGTON, DC: For the second time in a week, the US on Sunday shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles in response to a Houthi attack on a merchant vessel, the US Central Command stated. The US military shot down two missiles on Sunday morning, the container ship MAERSK HANGZHOU reported, adding

that the vessel was struck by a missile while transiting the Southern Red Sea. "USS GRAVELY shoots down two anti-ship ballistic missiles while responding to Houthi attack on merchant vessel. Today at approximately 8:30 p.m. (Sanaa time), the container ship MAERSK HANGZHOU reported that they were struck by a missile while transiting the Southern Red Sea," the 7US Central Command (CENTCOM) stated in a post shared on X. The USS Laboon, a guided-missile destroyer, and F-18 fighter jets from the Eisenhower carrier strike group are in the southern Red Sea as part of a US-led coalition meant to protect shipping lanes from at-

tack by the Houthis in the key Bab el-Mandeb strait, according to The Times of Israel. The report noted that this was the 23rd attack by the Houthis on international shipping since November 19. In response, the USS GRAVELY shot down the two anti-ship ballistic missiles from Yemen directed at their merchant vessels, the report stated. "While responding, the USS GRAVELY shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen toward the ships. This is the 23rd illegal attack by the Houthis on international shipping since Nov. 19," the CENTCOM posted. The US military informed that the vessel was seaworthy and no

one was injured in the shooting down incident. "The Singapore-flagged, Denmark-owned/operated container ship requested assistance, and the USS GRAVELY (DDG 107) and USS LABOON (DDG 58) responded to the ship. The vessel is reportedly seaworthy and there are no reported injuries," the CENTCOM posted. This marked the second time that the US shot down Houthi anti-ship missiles in a week, according to the report. Earlier, on Wednesday, the US shot down twelve attack drones and five missiles, which it claimed were launched by the Houthis. There was no damage to ships in the area or injuries reported, the US Central Command stated. —ANI



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IN AFGHANISTAN

Journalists' centre expresses concern over media rights violations

KABUL: The Afghanistan Journalists Centre stated that in 2023 it had documented 168 instances of journalists' rights being violated in Afghanistan, and it raised alarm about these crimes, according to media report. According to the study, there were 61 reported incidents of journalist arrests, 78 cases of threats, and one death and 19 injuries among journalists.



The Afghanistan Journalists Centre said that "in 2023, the recorded cases of violation of the rights of journalists and the media show a significant decrease compared to the 260 events recorded in 2022, but there is no change in terms of quality and structure," TOLONews reported. This occurs concurrently with an appeal from media professionals and journalists for the interim administration to move decisively to resolve the current issues that the media personnel continue to face in the country under the Taliban regime. "All of the activities belonging to the media and journalists should be pursued through the commission of media violation and this commission should be incentivized and any media and journalist who commit a violation, should be investigated through this commission," said Rasul Shahzad, a journalist. "The government should increase access to information. The economy of the media organizations should be empowered and supported," another journalist, Mustafa Sharyar said, according to TOLONews. However, refuting the claims, the Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said that no media has come under pressure and that it is "freely active". "Some of the cases that happened in 2023 were because of violations. Sometimes, the journalists have been arrested on criminal activities or legal cases

for a temporary time. The detention has not been permanent," TOLONews quoted him as saying. It has become extremely tedious for journalists and media outlets in Afghanistan to report under the Taliban due to strict regulations as journalists are restricted to cover security issues, such as explosions and suicide attacks. The Taliban when it came to power in August 2021, promised that media would be free and independent to operate across the country. New rules were, however, imposed a month later that strictly monitor and censor journalists and the media. The short-lived media freedom was gone after the initial weeks of the Taliban rule. Media freedom in Afghanistan has gone from bad to worse and journalists are suffering from low morale under the ruling regime. Many reporters have been arrested, persecuted and threatened with death for reporting sensitive issues that are not to the likes of Taliban authorities across the country, reported Khaama Press. Female Afghan journalists suffer from double pressure for being a journalist and a woman. The restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women including barring them from attending university, working with government or non-governmental aid organizations, and appearing in public places, have also affected female journalists. —ANI

DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM

After a new constitution, what's next for Chad?

N'DJAMENA: Chad's new constitution has entered into force after being approved by the country's Supreme Court, paving the way for civilian rule. The court on Thursday confirmed the results of the December 17 referendum, which saw the new constitution pass with 85.9% approval and 14.1% against. Voter turnout was 62.86%, with about 8 million people eligible to vote. Petitions by opponents seeking to overturn the referendum were rejected by the court. It ruled that although there were some irregularities, they weren't enough to affect the outcome. Fidel Amakye Owusu, an international relations expert with the Conflict Research Consortium for Africa, told DW that Chad's latest move toward civilian rule appears to set it apart from its politically unstable neighbours in the Sahel region. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are all under military rule. "The [Chadian] leaders want the world to see Chad to be a little different or to have a situation that is more unique from what is happening in the Sahel," he said. Chad's transitional president, General Mahamat Idriss Deby, seized power in 2021 after his father and long-term ruler Idriss Deby was killed while fighting insurgents. Deby signed the new constitution into force on Friday. The new Chadian constitution, however, will maintain a centrally-governed state, despite some opponents pushing for a federal state



to help speed up development. In fact, the referendum didn't even make room for people to decide on the issue as it wasn't on the ballot paper. Chad has had a centralized government since gaining independence from France in 1960. "No" campaigners for the referendum had favored a transition to a federal state, arguing that a central government has failed to develop Chad, among the world's poorest nations. A survey published in early 2023 by the Network of Chadian Journalists and Reporters showed that more than two out of three Chadians, or 71%, were in favour of moving to a

federal system. Chad's transitional president, General Mahamat Idriss Deby, seized power in 2021 after his father and long-term ruler Idriss Deby was killed while fighting insurgents. Deby signed the new constitution into force on Friday. The new Chadian constitution, however, will maintain a centrally-governed state, despite some opponents pushing for a federal state to help speed up development. In fact, the referendum didn't even make room for people to decide on the issue as it wasn't on the ballot paper. Chad has had a centralized government

since gaining independence from France in 1960. "No" campaigners for the referendum had favoured a transition to a federal state, arguing that a central government has failed to develop Chad, among the world's poorest nations. A survey published in early 2023 by the Network of Chadian Journalists and Reporters showed that more than two out of three Chadians, or 71%, were in favour of moving to a federal system. Chadian analyst and professor Gilbert Maoundonodji, of the University of N'Djamena, said concerns about the failure of the centrally-governed state were legitimate. "After 60 years of unitary state, the weaknesses are obvious. The unitary state has not contributed to achieving national unity, to creating the conditions for sustainable development and prosperity of the unity of the country," Maoundonodji told DW. "And when we see the crises, the different conflicts that the country has experienced, the fears are well-founded." Proponents of the new constitution have instead created local level governments and representatives, aiming to allow citizens to vote for their representatives in next year's elections. But Owusu said that arrangement won't be enough to address the political and developmental needs of Chad's 18.5 million citizens. "Many Chadians wanted a fed-

eral system, but it did not happen. When the system is centralized it gives the central authority more power than otherwise. So, we don't see anything changing," he said. "We are still going to see a unitary system that has not been very effective in place and so much power in N'Djamena [the capital], rather than decentralizing the system for regional government to have that kind of autonomy to take decisions," he added. Remadji Hoinathy, a senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies in Chad, told DW that despite the opposition to the centrally-governed system, it still has some advantages. "In a highly decentralised unitary state, part of the skills [get] passed to other types of entities outside the central power outside of these entities. Even if they remain dependent on the central entity, they are autonomous entities and therefore a certain amount of power [is] passed to these entities to act at the local level," he said. Presidential, legislative, senatorial and municipal elections are scheduled for 2024, and transitional leader Deby will also be allowed to run for president under the new constitution. Owusu said it was obvious that the referendum was intended to legitimise Deby. "This referendum was a way to legitimise the kind of transition that the military in Chad wants for the country, and not necessarily a reflection of the will of the people," he said. Chad's military leaders believe the new constitution is a vital step toward next year's elections, and a return to a civilian regime. Owusu expects Deby to become president when the elections are held, to continue the Deby dynasty started when his father took power in a coup 33 years ago. "Just like his father did, we would see what is like a pseudo civilian leadership going forward," he said. Many opposition groups had called for a boycott of the referendum, fearing the junta had too much control over the process. That has left many people in Chad, Africa's fifth biggest nation by area and home to some 200 ethnic groups, unsatisfied with the transition process. "The most important element required for democracy to deepen in Chad is when the people are allowed to own the democracy," said Owusu. "If you deny the people the constitution they want for themselves, then the people cannot own the democracy." Owusu warned that allowing the military to dominate the government after the general election could spell doom for the country. "In the Sahel, what is becoming common and also erroneous is the thinking that the military can do better than the civilian government when it comes to fighting extremism or ensuring stability," he said. "That has proven to be wrong." —DW

WFP warns of complete collapse of most basic services in Gaza Strip

We are racing against time to avert a complete collapse of even the most basic services and starvation for millions, the World Food Programme said, adding only a long-term ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access can end this

NEW YORK: The World Food Programme (WFP) warned of the danger of a complete collapse of the most basic services and the occurrence of a famine in the Gaza Strip, in light of the ongoing Israeli occupation aggression on the Strip since 7 October 2023.

“As we count down to a new year, there is a different kind of count-down in Gaza,” WFP wrote in X platform.

“We are racing against time to avert a complete collapse of even the most basic services and starvation for millions. Only a long-term ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access can end this,” it added.

Since 7 October, the Israeli occupation has launched an unprecedented aggression against the Gaza Strip, which has so far resulted in tens of thousands of martyrs,



missing persons and wounded, 70% of whom are children and women, in addition to the destruction of hundreds of thousands of housing units and the forced displacement of about 2 million people inside the Strip.

Risk of disease increases in ‘deadliest year’ for Gaza

Displacement in the Gaza Strip has increased the risk of disease, according to the UN’s humanitarian agency (OCHA).

The agency also said that “2023 is the deadliest year since our records began in 2005.” The Health Ministry in the Hamas-controlled territory has reported a death toll of 21,672 from Israeli strikes and fighting. The Hamas-led ministry does not distinguish between civilian and militant deaths, but its

casualty counts have been seen as reliable by the UN and NGOs working in the region.

“The spread of diseases in Gaza has reportedly intensified, particularly due to the recent mass displacements across the south of Gaza,” the agency said, adding that “some families have been forced to move multiple times.”

OCHA said around 180,000 people were suffering from upper respiratory infections in the territory, and there were 136,400 cases of diarrhea. It also noted cases of lice, scabies, chickenpox, skin rash, acute jaundice system and meningitis.

According to OCHA, the UN children’s fund (UNICEF) delivered 600,000 doses of vaccines to the Gaza Strip on Friday.

— Agencies



YONHAP NEWS AGENCY



North Korea planning to launch 3 more military spy satellites next year

PYONGYANG: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is planning to launch three additional spy satellites next year, Yonhap news agency reported, citing Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The announcement comes after the successful launch of the country’s first military reconnaissance satellite last month.

North Korean leader set forth the goal as he wrapped up five days of the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea on Saturday, as reported by KCNA.

“Based on the experience of successfully launching and operating the first spy satellite in 2023 in the space development sector, the task of launching three more spy satellites in 2024 was unveiled and all-out measures to spur the development of space science technology were discussed,” the report said.

Recently, North Korea successfully put a military spy satellite, Malligyong-1, into orbit on November 21 after two failed attempts in May and August.

However, there are suspicions that North Korea might have received technical support from Russia in return for its arms supplies for use in Moscow’s war in Ukraine, reported Yonhap news agency.

“We need to swiftly respond to a possible nuclear crisis and mobilize all physical means, including nuclear force, in a bid to accelerate preparations for the great event of putting the entire territory of South Korea under our control,” Kim said.

He further boosted the country’s nuclear arsenal as the top policy priority for next year and ordered the Navy to enhance its military capabilities, Yonhap news agency reported citing KCNA.

Kim called for developing powerful unmanned armed aerial vehicles and means for electronic warfare in a bid to accomplish its key defence projects.

Highlighting the inter-Korean ties, Kim stated that he will no longer consider South Korea a counterpart for reconciliation and unification, adding that Seoul has declared the North as a main enemy.

The Workers’ Party has also concluded that unification with South Korea is not possible, Kim was quoted as saying, Yonhap news agency reported.

Calling for a “fundamental change” in dealing with South Korea, the North’s leader said that inter-Korean relations have become those of “two hostile countries” or “countries engaged in the

state of combat.”

Reportedly, relations between South and North Korea remained sharply strained this year as the latter focused on advancing its nuclear and missile programs, including the launch of solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles.

North Korea’s leader vowed an “offensive and ultra-powerful” stance against the US in 2024, denouncing Washington’s deployment of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula and its military drills with Seoul.

“If the US and the South pursue military confrontations with us, we will not hesitate to take critical action against them with our nuclear deterrence,” Kim said.

Earlier in September, North Korea amended the constitution to enshrine the policy of strengthening its nuclear force, according to Yonhap news agency.

Moreover last year, the country enacted a new nuclear law authorizing the preemptive use of nuclear arms, calling its status as a nuclear state “irreversible.”

At last year’s party plenary meeting, Kim called South Korea an ‘undoubted enemy’ and called for an ‘exponential’ increase in the country’s nuclear arsenal and the development of tactical nuclear weapons. — ANI

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SPORTS

Nottingham Forest shock ManU; Chelsea, Man City secure wins

United has slipped down to seventh spot, suffering their ninth loss, to go with 10 wins and a draw

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE : A late winner by Morgan Gibbs-White helped Nottingham Forest secure their first win over Manchester United since 1994 in their Premier League match at The City Ground on Saturday.

After a goalless first half, Nicolas Dominguez put Nottingham in the lead in the 64th minute. Marcus Rashford responded with an equaliser in the 78th minute. However, Gibbs-White scored the winner in the 82nd minute to hand his side three points.

United has slipped down to seventh spot, suffering their ninth loss, to go with 10 wins and a draw. They have a total of 31 points, 11 short of table-toppers Liverpool.

Forest is at 15th spot with five wins, five draws and 10 losses in 20 games, with 20 points in total.

In another match, Manchester City beat Sheffield United 2-0 at Etihad Stadium.

Rodri put City at an early advantage with a strike in the 14th minute. Sheffield was left searching for a goal and the ball possession as City dominated around 82 per cent of possession. Julian Alvarez hit the winner in the 61st minute to give all



three points to City. With two successful wins, City is now at third in the table with 12



wins, four draws and three losses in the points table, which gives them 40 points, just two short of

the toppers. Chelsea was also able to control a late Luton Town fightback, beat-



ing them 3-2 in a thrilling affair at Kenilworth Road. Cole Palmer secured an early

lead by driving home a pass by Issa Kabore in the 12th minute. Before the half time, Noni Madueke doubled the lead with a strike in the 37th minute. Palmer hit a brace, scoring in the 70th minute to triple the lead. But two fighting goals from Ross Barkley (80th minute) and Elijah Adebayo (87th minute) kept Luton alive. Chelsea was able to control their fightback to end their four-match away losing streak. Chelsea is in the 10th spot with eight wins, four draws and eight losses in 20 games, which gives them 28 points. Luton is in the 18th spot with four wins, three draws and 12 losses this year, with 15 points. **-ANI**

ITALIAN SERIE A



Juventus beat Roma to close gap at Serie A

TURIN: Adrien Rabiot's second-half goal earned Juventus a 1-0 home win against Roma as they moved within two points of the Italian Serie A leaders Inter Milan.

Rabiot latched onto a flick from Dusan Vlahovic inside the box and calmly slotted home.

Juve finish the year in second place with 43 points from 18 games behind Inter, who drew 1-1

at Genoa on Friday, while Jose Mourinho's Roma are seventh, BBC sports reported.

Third-placed AC Milan beat Sassuolo 1-0 earlier in the day.

Federico Chiesa thought he had extended Juve's lead just before the final whistle, receiving a deflected ball inside the box and turning it in, but was flagged offside.

-DNA

LEGENDARY FOOTBALLER

Cristiano Ronaldo ends 2023 as world's top goal scorer, says 'will try to do it again'

NEW DELHI: Legendary footballer Cristiano Ronaldo had a stupendous 2023 as he ended the year after becoming the world's top goal-scorer. Following the landmark, the Portuguese superstar said that he will try to achieve it again next year.

In 2023, the five-time Ballon d'Or winner scored 54 goals for his country and his current club, Al Nassr. English striker Harry Kane stood in second place with 52 for his country and newly joined club Bayern Munich. PSG and French attacker Kylian Mbappe scored 52 goals. Meanwhile, City and Norwegian striker Erling Halaand placed 50 goals.

While speaking to the Saudi media outlet SSC Sports, Ronaldo said that he was very happy to achieve the milestone and help his club and country.

"I'm very happy, it was a good year for me as an individual and as a collective. I scored so many goals, I helped the team a lot at Al-Nassr and for the national team. I feel good, I feel happy and next year I will try to do it again," Ronaldo was quoted by Goal.com as saying.

Ronaldo is considered one of the best footballers in the world, and he has set a few records which are hard to be broken.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo recently joined the Saudi club Al Nassr in January 2023, and he has played 50 matches for his new team and scored 44 goals.

In the ongoing season of the



Saudi Pro League, the Portuguese has appeared in 18 matches for the Riyadh-based club and scored 20 goals. Ronaldo also made nine assists in the 2023-24 season for Al Nassr.

Earlier, the Portuguese su-

perstar returned to his boyhood club Manchester United in 2021 after leaving Juventus, however, his stint in the English club did not last very long after he lambasted the United coach Erik Ten Hag in a controversial interview

with Piers Morgan. After Ronaldo claimed that Ten Hag did not respect the Portuguese player, United terminated the 38-year-old's contract. In his second run at United, CR7 played 54 matches and scored 27 goals. **-ANI**

PREMIER DIVISION LEAGUE

Majees CC thrash VLCC, Renaissance defeat Powertech



Zeeshan Maqsood and Aamir Kaleem



(L-R) Asif Khan, Sufyan Mehmood and Hammad Mirza

MUSCAT: Majees CC thump VLCC in the Premier Division League 2023-24 at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1 on Friday.

VLCC posted a total of 206 courtesy of Sahil Dias' 90. Sajjad Khan and Sultan Ahmed managed to notch 44 and 41 respectively. Zeeshan Maqsood and Aamir Kaleem picked 2 wickets each.

In response, the pair of Zeeshan Maqsood and Aamir Kaleem stitched a 191-run partnership to whistle through the target set by VLCC. Zeeshan Maqsood scored a magnificent century ably supported by Skipper Aamir Kaleem scoring 63. Sohail Ahmed picked 2

wickets for VLCC.

Brief Scores: VLCC 206/7 in 50 overs (Sahil Dias 90(120)*; Zeeshan Maqsood 2/33) lost to Majees 210/4 in 40.4 overs (Zeeshan Maqsood 112 (124), Aamir Kaleem 63(106) ; Sohail Ahmed 2/23) by 6 wickets.

In another Premier Division match on Saturday, Renaissance beat Zawawi Powertech at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1.

Renaissance posted a par-total of 208 courtesy Hammad Mirza's 40 along with Asif Khan scoring 39 and Mohd Adeeb scoring a quick 33.

Saishiv Narayan picked 4 wickets

while Sivaraj Dheenadhayalu picked 3 wickets to bundle Renaissance. In response, Kalaiarasan Natarajan held the Powertech chase scoring 51 along with Prabhakaran Kannan scoring 35 but could not take them through the line. Skipper Sufyan Mehmood picked 3 scalps while Asif Khan and Syed Muzamil picked 2 wickets to seal the victory for Renaissance.

Brief Scores: Renaissance 208/10 in 49.5 overs (Hammad Mirza 40(67); Saishiv Narayan 4/25) beat Zawawi Powertech 195/10 in 49.1 overs (Kalaiarasan Natarajan 51(63); Sufyan Mehmood 3/37) by 13 runs.

GLOBAL OIL DIPLOMACY
In the complex landscape of global oil supplies, the Biden administration faces strategic decisions regarding potential oil-related sanctions on Russia, Iran, and Venezuela in 2024.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER
The MSX index closed at 4,514.07 points, up by 0.64 per cent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.04 per cent at 447.08 points. Salalah Mills, up 9.90 per cent, was the top gainer while Al Hassan Engineering, down 52.94 per cent, was the top loser.

Oman’s production of refineries, petrochemicals increases 6.6%

The production of regular gasoline (91) witnessed a 16.3 per cent increase by the end of November 2023, resulting in an 11 per cent increase in sales

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's production of refineries and petrochemicals recorded an increase of 6.6 per cent till the end of November 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022, according to preliminary statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The production of regular gasoline (91) witnessed a 16.3 per cent increase by the end of November



2023, resulting in an 11 per cent increase in sales. Additionally, liquefied petroleum gas, paraxylene, and benzene products recorded an increase in exports, with a growth

rate of 103.8 per cent, 214.7 per cent and 95.9 per cent, respectively. The statistics indicate that the production of regular gasoline (91) reached 14,734,000 barrels by the

end of September 2023, with sales amounting to 13,397,600 barrels. On the other hand, the production of premium gasoline (95) decreased by 20.7 per cent, reaching

10,659,100 barrels, and its sales also decreased to 11,086,900 barrels. The production of diesel fuel (gas oil) increased by 5.9 per cent, reaching 31,155,900 barrels, with

sales amounting to 13,137,500 barrels. Furthermore, the production of jet fuel increased by 32 per cent, totalling 9,292,200 barrels, with sales of 4,048,700 barrels. The production of liquefied petroleum gas increased by 20.9 per cent, reaching 7,413,800 barrels.

Regarding petrochemicals, the production of benzene increased by 78.7 per cent, reaching 133,100 metric tonnes, while the production of paraxylene reached 465,100 metric tonnes, representing 216.6 per cent. The production of polypropylene dropped by 2.1 percent, amounting to 222,900 metric tonnes.

Oman's exports of gasoline (91) reached 1,221,900 barrels, while the exports of premium gasoline (95) amounted to 580,400 barrels.

The exports of diesel fuel (gas oil) reached 17,800,900 barrels, and the exports of jet fuel reached 5,233,400 barrels. Additionally, the exports of liquefied petroleum gas reached 449,200 barrels.

The exports of paraxylene amounted to 466,800 metric tonnes, while the exports of benzene reached 139,500 metric tonnes. The exports of polypropylene increased by 7 per cent, reaching 206,900 metric tonnes. -**ONA**

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT



Zubair Corporation launches unique job rotation programme

MUSCAT: The Human Capital Centre of Excellence (HC CoE), the HR function of The Zubair Corporation recently launched the first edition of the Tadweer (Training & Development with Effective, Enhanced Rotation) programme.

This innovative three-month initiative aims to effectively develop human capital within the corporation and its subsidiaries. For the first edition, Tadweer will focus on employees from the finance sector and strategically enable employees to comprehend different finance roles, tasks, and functions within several sectors under the corporation umbrella. Tadweer reflects the corporation's commitment to enhancing employee growth and skills.

The launch saw the attendance of various members of the Leadership Team and executives from The Zubair Corporation.

During the ceremony, executives from the HR & Finance departments, along with the rotated employee discussed the scope, role and duration of the rotation while formally signing the agreement of rotation.

Speaking on the occasion, Sharifa Al Balushi, Group Head of the Human Capital Centre of Excellence stressed the importance of this initiative. She said, "Tadweer is a commitment towards enhancing employee knowledge and skills, while boosting their performance. The programme has been designed to touch upon not only the professional growth of an individual but also a way to reach personal goals. We continually stress on building a work culture that promotes continuous learning and adapting to the dynamic work environment.

The smooth implementation mechanisms of Tadweer also allow for effective communication to convey information to all relevant employees. The Zubair Corporation's HC CoE will over-

see the entire initiative ensuring compliance with regular feedback from the rotated employee and their mentor. The corporation also communicated the objective of honouring employees and mentors who stand out during the period.

Raid Al Bimani, Treasury Manager at The Zubair Corporation said, "The success of this initiative will pave the way for its continued implementation and of similar initiatives in different specialisations that will benefit employees and the corporation alike. This marks the beginning of sustainable future that enhances employee competencies while building upon a stronger business."

One of the rotated employees, Somu AlQarni noted, "I am pleased to be a part of the Tadweer programme and hope to learn new skills through my placement. As a participant in the first session, I find myself excited to gain experience in this field and challenge myself in developing my job skills. I would like to express my thanks to the HC CoE for this wonderful experience and I very much look forward to the next stages of Tadweer."

For more than five decades, Al Zubair Corporation has been working to attract new expertise and innovations from around the world to the Sultanate and other markets in which it operates. It was one of the major institutions that contributed to establishing infrastructure at the national level, in addition to its pivotal role in the culture, tourism and industry sectors in their various fields.

The Zubair Corporation includes a diverse group of distinguished companies, strategic business units and joint projects that spread alongside the Sultanate in the markets of the Middle East, India, the Far East, Europe, and the United States of America.

FOREIGN PORTFOLIO INVESTORS

Foreign investors made beeline for Indian stocks, turned net buyers in 2023

NEW DELHI: Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have trained their sight towards India, becoming net buyers in the country's stock market in the calendar year 2023.

In December, especially, they made a beeline to invest in Indian stock markets, with a cumulative accumulation of Rs 66,135 crore. To put it into context, the entire year saw an inflow of about Rs 171,107 crore, and notably, over one-third of it came in December.

In November, the FPI inflow was Rs 9,001 crore, data from the National Securities Depository (NSDL) showed.

Before November, FPI participation in Indian stocks was lukewarm, and they had turned net sellers. They sold Rs 14,768 crore and Rs 24,548 crore, in September and October, respectively. Before that, FPIs bought Indian stocks worth Rs 7,936 crore, Rs 11,631 crore, Rs 43,838 crore, Rs 47,148 crore, Rs 46,618 crore, and Rs 12,262 crore in March, April, May, June, July, and August respectively, data showed.

The strong inflow of funds from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) lately also supported the stocks to march towards all-time highs.

Firm GDP growth forecast, inflation at manageable levels, political stability at the central government level, and signs that the central banks' world over are done



with their monetary policy tightening have painted a bright picture for India - which many agencies have termed the fastest-growing major economy.

The latest inflow particularly comes at a time when India reported strong quarterly growth, maintaining its fastest-growing major economy tag.

The Indian economy grew 7.6 per cent during the July-September quarter of the current financial year 2023-24, remaining the fastest-growing major economy. India's GDP growth for the April-June quarter grew 7.8 per cent.

Harjeet Singh Arora, Managing Director of Mastertrust, a stock trading and investment broker company, recently said, "The mar-

ket in 2023 had been a roller coaster. There was a net inflow of funds from FII during the earlier part of the year from March to July which was followed by a net outflow of funds for the next three months due to the rising tension and increasing global interest rates. The foreign institutional investors then again started buying in November due to the positive sentiments around the Indian markets."

"The BJP's victories in three states fuelled optimism in the Indian markets, particularly due to its strong performance in the Hindi heartland, a key support base. The market anticipates the ruling government's return, and any outcome contrary to investors' expectations may lead to a downturn in

the stock market," Arora added.

While maintaining the status quo in key policy rates for the fifth straight occasion, the RBI has raised the growth forecast for the financial year 2023-24 by 50 basis points to 7 per cent. In its October meeting, the RBI forecast 2023-24 growth at 6.5 per cent.

IMF, in its Article IV consultation report, which reviews a country's current and medium-term economic outlook, earlier this month said that India's growth is expected to remain strong, supported by macroeconomic and financial stability."

Despite widespread global uncertainty, India is expected to grow above 6 per cent over the next five years driven by continued strong investment, still-growing private consumption, and digitalization-driven productivity gains," the IMF noted.

Coming to Indian stock markets, the past 12 months have been stellar for investors who parked their money in Indian stocks. Though there has been some turbulence, first during the Adani-Hindenburg episode and lately during the initial days of the Israel-Hamas war, the calendar year 2023 gave handsome monetary dividends to stock market investors.

In 2023, Sensex and Nifty gained 18-19 per cent, on a cumulative basis. The indices had gained a mere 3-4 per cent in 2022. -**ANI**

MILD GLOBAL DEMAND

Challenges ahead for US export and domestic thermal coal markets in 2024

NEW DELHI: The US export and domestic thermal coal markets face headwinds in 2024 due to mild global demand, according to industry sources.

According to S&P Global, while natural gas prices could potentially boost coal consumption domestically, challenges such as warmer weather forecasts, oversupply, and competitive pricing from other coal-exporting countries pose significant obstacles.

Export thermal coal prices from the US are expected to be backwardated in 2024 amid subdued global demand. The mild winter, oversupply issues, and insufficient demand are contributing factors to weakening prices, as observed by a US coal source.

Unless production aligns with demand, prices are likely to continue to soften, and a significant adjustment may not occur until



the second quarter of the year.

A coal buyer based in India highlighted the lacklustre pricing outlook for US spot coal in 2024. South African coal, offered at a discounted and competitive price, has increased competition, leading to a drop in prices in the Indian market.

Additionally, petcoke prices are declining, adding to the competi-

tive challenges faced by Northern Appalachian coal prices.

Broker indications show a downward trend in FOB Baltimore 6,900 kcal/kg NAR coal pricing, with indications sliding from USD 87/mt to \$86.25/mt for Cal 2024.

Backwardation is also observed for US Gulf Coast coal prices, with indications showing FOB New Orleans 6,000 kcal/kg coal at \$85/

mt for January loading and USD 84.25/mt for Cal 2024.

In its December US Coal Market Forecast, S&P Global Commodity Insights expects US thermal coal exports to decline from a forecast of 43.6 million mt in 2023 to 35 million mt in 2024. The decline is attributed to Pacific Basin supplies dominating demand from China and decreasing demand from the Atlantic Basin.

The sentiment for the domestic thermal coal market is mixed. High electric power sector coal stockpiles exerted downward pressure on over-the-counter (OTC) coal prices throughout 2023.

However, if natural gas prices increase in 2024, coal generation could become more competitive.

S&P Global anticipates a potential plateauing of US thermal coal demand as declines in spot and contract coal prices spill into 2025. -**ANI**

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Salalah Mills, up 9.90 per cent, was the top gainer while Al Hassan Engineering, down 52.94 per cent, was the top loser



MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,514.07 points, up by 0.64 per cent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.04 per cent at 447.08 points. Salalah Mills, up 9.90 per cent, was the top gainer while Al Hassan Engineering, down 52.94 per cent, was the top loser.

Shares of Bank Muscat were the most active in terms of number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 966 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of OMR13.59 million, with more than 51.32 million shares changing hands. Out of 53 traded securities, 21 advanced, 18 declined, and 14 remained unchanged. At the session close, GCC & Arab investors were net sellers for OMR2821,000 while domestic investors were net buyers for OMR1733,000, followed by foreign investors for OMR1089,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,392.67 points, up 1.17 per cent. Prices of Oman Arab Bank, Bank Dhofar, Muscat Finance, Ahli Bank, Al Anwar Investment were up by 9.23 per cent, 6.67 per cent, 4.00 per cent, 1.96 per cent, 1.35 per cent respectively. Prices of

National Finance, Global Financial Investments, Ominvest, United Finance, Bank Nizwa were down by 5.68 per cent, 3.39 per cent, 2.33 per cent, 1.75 per cent, 1.03 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,475.23 points, up 0.83 per cent. Prices of Salalah Mills, Dhofar Beverages, A'Saffa Foods, Oman Chlorine, Oman Flour Mills were up by 9.90 per cent, 6.93 per cent, 6.46 per cent, 4.08 per cent, 2.00 per cent respectively.

Prices of Al Hassan Engineering, Raysut Cement, Oman Cables Industry, Gulf Mushroom Products were down by 52.94 per cent, 1.60 per cent, 1.53 per cent, 0.88 per cent respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.95 per cent before closing at 1,565.55 points. Prices of Al Maha Marketing, SMN Power Holding, Oman Telecom, Phoenix Power, Renaissance Services were up by 4.81 per cent, 2.70 per cent, 1.92 per cent, 1.89 per cent, 1.79 per cent respectively. Prices of Al Batinah Power, Barka Water & Power Company, OQ Gas Networks, Sembcorp Salalah, Ooredoo were down by 4.76 per cent, 2.22 per cent, 1.29 per cent, 1.15 per cent, 0.61 per cent respectively.

— United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	4,514.21	4,470.24	4,514.07	4,485.49	28.58	0.64
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,447.24	7,302.58	7,392.67	7,306.85	85.82	1.17
Industry Index	5,475.23	5,401.38	5,475.23	5,430.25	44.98	0.83
Services Index	1,565.55	1,547.29	1,565.55	1,550.89	14.66	0.95
MSX Shariah Index	448.06	446.55	447.08	447.27	-0.19	-0.04
MSX TR INDEX	5,950.27	5,892.31	5,950.08	5,912.41	37.68	0.64
FINANCIAL TR IDX	8,126.31	7,968.45	8,066.76	7,973.12	93.65	1.17
SERVICES TR IDX	1,741.66	1,721.35	1,741.66	1,725.35	16.31	0.95
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	5,848.91	5,770.02	5,848.91	5,800.86	48.05	0.83
FIXED INCOME INDEX	991.33	991.33	991.33	991.33	0.00	0.00

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
51,325,173	13,594,634	966	23,802,238,271	21	18	14	53

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31

	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RM)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PUR VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET																
OM00000002549	BANK DHOFAR	255,864	40,928	6	0.159	0.160	0.159	0.160	0.150	0.010	6.667	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.100	479,416,230
OM00000003000	ALMAHA PETROLEUM PRODUCTS MARKETING	17,354	18,073	8	1.040	1.060	1.040	1.090	1.040	0.050	4.808	1.090	1.030	1.090	0.100	75,210,000
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	3,100	236	3	0.077	0.077	0.076	0.076	0.074	0.002	2.703	0.077	0.076	0.077	0.100	15,172,306
OM0000003036	OMAN TELECOM	78,319	80,823	33	1.040	1.060	1.030	1.060	1.040	0.020	1.923	1.060	1.060	1.060	0.100	785,000,000
OM00000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	20,050	7,810	3	0.382	0.389	0.380	0.389	0.382	0.007	1.786	0.399	0.400	0.399	0.100	94,327,500
OM0000004788	MADINA TAKAFUL	5,000	420	1	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.083	0.001	1.205	0.084	0.080	0.084	0.100	14,700,000
OM0000001152	OMAN NATIONAL ENGINEERING & INVESTMENT	10,000	1,120	1	0.112	0.112	0.112	0.112	0.111	0.001	0.901	0.112	0.110	0.112	0.100	16,800,000
OM0000002168	ALANWAR CERAMIC	48,387	8,274	16	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.170	0.001	0.588	0.171	0.171	0.179	0.100	37,620,000
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	46,900	12,663	3	0.270	0.270	0.270	0.270	0.270	0.000	0.000	0.270	0.270	0.280	0.100	27,000,000
OM0000001081	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	361	19	1	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.000	0.000	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.100	5,337,500
OM0000002226	ALAZEERA SERVICES	130,850	28,416	9	0.217	0.217	0.217	0.217	0.217	0.000	0.000	0.217	0.217	0.225	0.100	13,281,327
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	48,494	9,699	7	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.200	0.200	0.210	0.100	11,000,000
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	8,200	2,576	2	0.280	0.280	0.280	0.280	0.280	0.000	0.000	0.280	0.280	0.290	0.100	455,284,979
OM0000002786	BANK MUSCAT	207,711	5,492,546	101	0.286	0.288	0.260	0.284	0.285	-0.001	-0.377	0.284	0.285	0.284	0.100	1,981,688,824
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	133,943	43,532	25	0.325	0.328	0.325	0.325	0.327	-0.002	-0.612	0.325	0.325	0.325	0.100	211,556,875
OM0000003398	SOHAB INTERNATIONAL BANK	1,625,187	161,330	39	0.100	0.100	0.098	0.098	0.099	-0.001	-1.010	0.098	0.098	0.099	0.100	535,833,073
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	160,799	3,182	8	0.056	0.058	0.056	0.056	0.057	-0.001	-1.754	0.056	0.056	0.058	0.100	19,943,129
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	660,283	279,454	10	0.425	0.429	0.420	0.430	0.430	-0.010	-2.326	0.420	0.420	0.429	0.100	280,713,479
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.	43,000	2,451	5	0.057	0.057	0.057	0.057	0.059	-0.002	-3.390	0.057	0.057	0.058	0.100	11,400,000
Total	19	24,064,305	6,199,554	275												
Parallel Market																
OM0000001889	SALALAH MILLS	1,000	533	2	0.533	0.533	0.533	0.533	0.485	0.048	9.897	0.533	0.533	0.533	0.000	26,630,313
OM00000005280	OMAN ARAB BANK	158,730	21,531	19	0.132	0.143	0.130	0.142	0.130	0.012	8.231	0.142	0.130	0.142	0.100	237,056,220
OM00000001261	DHOFAR BEVERAGES	1,020	220	1	0.216	0.216	0.216	0.216	0.202	0.014	6.931	0.216	0.216	0.216	0.100	4,320,000
OM0000002804	ASAFA FOODS	285,000	90,143	15	0.325	0.346	0.325	0.346	0.325	0.021	6.462	0.346	0.350	0.346	0.100	41,520,000
OM0000002341	OMAN CHLORINE	9,000	4,585	4	0.500	0.510	0.500	0.510	0.480	0.030	4.082	0.510	0.510	0.510	0.100	36,469,509
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	95,800	4,800	9	0.049	0.053	0.049	0.052	0.050	0.002	4.000	0.052	0.050	0.052	0.100	15,971,609
OM0000001400	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	6,917	3,498	3	0.489	0.510	0.489	0.510	0.500	0.010	2.000	0.510	0.510	0.510	0.100	80,325,000
OM0000002200	AHLI BANK	452,000	73,396	17	0.161	0.164	0.156	0.156	0.163	0.003	1.961	0.156	0.156	0.156	0.100	366,546,565
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	19,420	1,049	6	0.053	0.054	0.053	0.054	0.053	0.001	1.887	0.054	0.053	0.055	0.100	78,980,479
OM0000003265	NATIONAL DETERGENT	1,100	779	2	0.690	0.710	0.690	0.710	0.700	0.010	1.429	0.710	0.700	0.690	0.100	14,200,000
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	60,580	1,182	7	0.073	0.075	0.072	0.075	0.074	0.001	1.351	0.075	0.074	0.075	0.100	15,450,000
OM0000007084	MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION	155,118	11,964	9	0.077	0.078	0.077	0.078	0.077	0.001	1.299	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.100	12,132,931
OM0000008934	ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	39,922	11,914	22	0.298	0.300	0.298	0.299	0.298	0.001	0.336	0.299	0.299	0.299	0.100	230,289,800
OM0000001180	OMAN GAS	24,061	2,698	4	0.084	0.085	0.084	0.085	0.084	0.000	0.000	0.085	0.084	0.085	0.100	7,225,000
OM0000002077	AL OMANIYA FINANCIAL SERVICES	125,000	20,525	6	0.164	0.165	0.164	0.165	0.165	0.000	0.000	0.165	0.165	0.165	0.100	50,767,227
OM0000002275	SHELL OIL MARKETING	20	17	1	0.830	0.830	0.830	0.830	0.830	0.000	0.000	0.830	0.800	0.830	0.100	78,850,000
OM0000002572	OMAN OIL MARKETING	278,425	242,230	2	0.870	0.870	0.870	0.870	0.870	0.000	0.000	0.870	0.000	0.850	0.100	53,309,250
OM0000003661	VOLTAM ENERGY	2,136	296	4	0.136	0.142	0.136	0.142	0.142	0.000	0.000	0.142	0.136	0.142	0.100	11,550,191
OM0000004776	TAKAFUL OMAN	500	24	1	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.044	0.048	0.100	12,000,000
OM0000004833	AL SUWADI POWER	3,608	76	4	0.022	0.022	0.021	0.021	0.021	0.000	0.000	0.021	0.021	0.022	0.100	15,002,533
OM0000008868	THE PEARL REEF	2,100	260	5	0.124	0.125	0.123	0.124	0.124	0.000	0.000	0.124	0.122	0.124	0.100	63,044,840
OM0000002267	GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS	1,487	336	1	0.226	0.226	0.226	0.226	0.228	-0.002	-0.877	0.226	0.226	0.228	0.100	10,343,070
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	804,100	77,306	22	0.097	0.097	0.096	0.096	0.097	-0.001	-1.031	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.100	214,747,491
OM0000004735	SEBICOORP SALALAH	126,650	10,928	9	0.087	0.088	0.083	0.086	0.087	-0.001	-1.149	0.086	0.084	0.086	0.100	32,058,138
OM0000009072	OQ GAS NETWORKS	1,822,841	280,122	367	0.154	0.155	0.153	0.153	0.155	-0.002	-1.290	0.153	0.153	0.153	0.100	662,585,460
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	27,059	6,117	76	2.265	2.265	2.240	2.250	2.285	-0.035	-1.532	2.250	2.057	2.250	0.100	201,825,000
OM0000001415	OMAN CEMENT	208,385	25,433	27	0.125	0.125	0.122	0.123	0.125	-0.002	-1.600	0.123	0.123	0.125	0.100	24,000,000
OM0000003141	BARKA WATER AND POWER	20,350	914	4	0.045	0.045	0.044	0.044	0.045	-0.001	-2.222	0.045	0.044	0.045	0.100	7,040,000
OM0000004825	ALBATINAH POWER	74,545	1,491	5	0.021	0.021	0.020	0.020	0.021	-0.001	-4.762	0.020	0.020	0.021	0.100	13,497,749
OM0000002646	OMAN NATIONAL FINANCE	17,243,247	2,862,534	39	0.166	0.180	0.166	0.166	0.176	-0.010	-5.582	0.180	0.180	0.180	0.100	85,234,911
Total	30	22,030,121	3,812,612	656												

SPORTS

Neesham, Santner guide NZ to series-drawing victory against Bangladesh in the third T20I



The three-match series has ended in a 1-1 draw. The 2nd T20I could not produce a result due to rain

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: A four-wicket haul by Mitchell Santner and fiery knocks by Finn Allen and James Neesham helped New Zealand secure a 17 runs win over Bangladesh in the third T20I via DLS method on Sunday. The three-match T20I series has ended in a 1-1 draw. The second T20I could not produce a re-

sult due to rain. New Zealand put Bangladesh to field first. Soumya Sarkar (4) was quickly removed by Tim Southee. Rony Talukdar and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto got a solid start but could not get going as Ben Sears trapped Talukdar lbw for just 10 while Adam Milne removed Shanto for 17 after he offered an easy catch to Finn Allen. Bangladesh was 41/3 in 5.3 overs. At the end of the powerplay in six overs, Bangladesh was 45/3. Bangladesh reached the 50-run mark in 7.2 overs. Then following this, Santner ran through the middle order, removing Afif Hossain (14), Towhid Hridoy (16), Mahedi Hasan (4) and Shamim Hossain (9) one by one, sinking Bangladesh to 81/7 in 14.5 overs. Bangladesh somehow reached the 100-run mark in 17.3 overs but were bundled out for 110 in 19.2 overs. Santner (4/16) was the pick of the bowlers for NZ. Southee, Sears and Milne took two wickets each. In the chase of 111 runs, Allen went for big shots from one end, witnessing the wickets fall from the other end. Mahendi got Tim Seifert, Daryl Mitchell, while Shoriful Islam dismissed Glenn Phillips. Mark Chapman was also run out. All these batters could score just one run each. Kiwis were 38/4 in 6.5 overs. Allen was removed by Shoriful for 38 off 31 balls, with four boundaries and two sixes. Half of the Kiwi line-up was back in the pavilion for 49 runs. James Neesham and Santner stitched a match-saving partnership. They took NZ on the brink of a win but rain god intervened and NZ got a 17-run win via DLS Method. Neesham scored 28* in 20 balls, with a four and two sixes while Santner made 18* in 20 balls, with a boundary. -ANI

T20I

We could not take game deep, admits Bangladesh skipper Shanto



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Following his side's loss to New Zealand in the third T20I, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto admitted that his team could not get some runs on the board and take the game deep. "Our bowlers did a great job but the batters did not get runs today. All the bowlers bowled really well. In T20s, the start is very important. We got started today but we could not take the game deep -

that is the mistake we made," said Shanto in a post-match presentation. Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusinghe on Sunday praised the attitude of the "young group" in the 'Bengal Tigers' squad and said that they are fearless. While speaking after the end of the 3rd T20I match between Bangladesh and New Zealand, Hathurusinghe hailed Najmul Hossain Shanto's leadership skills. -ANI

THREE-TIME GRAND SLAM CHAMPION

Would like an opportunity to play against them again: Andy Murray 'missed' playing against Nadal, Djokovic

BRISBANE: The three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray stated that he misses competing against rivals Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, but he hopes to face them in the final stages of "big tournaments" in the future. The 22-time major winner Nadal, who is making his competitive return at the Brisbane International after missing nearly a year due to injuries, has not played against Murray since 2016. Murray, who is also competing in Brisbane, has returned from repeated extended injury stints since then to reclaim his place in the world's top 50 but has only met world No. 1 Djokovic once since 2017. "Obviously I would like the opportunity to play against them again, ideally in the latter stages of big tournaments. That's something that, you know, obviously I've missed that feeling and not had that opportunity really. I can't remember the last time I played them, to be honest," Murray said in his pre-tournament press conference as quoted by Sky Sports. Murray and Nadal both tweeted a video of a combined practice session in Brisbane on Saturday, with the duo looking to enjoy sharing the court. Murray will open his Brisbane campaign against another old



Murray and Nadal both tweeted a video of a combined practice session in Brisbane on Saturday

nemesis, No. 2 seed Grigor Dimitrov, while Nadal has yet to be determined. "It'll be a good match. Grigor had a brilliant season last season. I played against him at the US Open and he won comfortably, so I'll need to play really well, certainly much better than

there if I want to get through it," the 36-year-old said. "There's a lot of interesting first-round matches. I think obviously everyone excited for Rafa and Naomi to come back and play, so that's good - a good start for the tournament I think," Murray added. -ANI

WORLD NO. 1 RANKING

Looking back at Serbian's record-breaking 2023 season as Djokovic achieves legendary status

NEW DELHI: Novak Djokovic demonstrated to the world that he is not just one of the great four in tennis but also the best in terms of pure statistics and being the ultimate beast on the court. Djokovic, playing some of his best tennis at 36, can officially declare 2023 as his year as he ended on the top of the ATP Year-End World No. 1 ranking for a record-extending eighth time and officially became the first man to win 24 Grand Slam titles. He has tied Margaret Court for the most ever of any player in any era. The record 24-time Grand Slam champion has scripted many historic records to his name. It was a record-breaking year, from the Brisbane International in January to representing Serbia in the Davis Cup in November, with a calendar grand slam apparently within grasp. While he failed to replicate Rod Laver and Don Budge's record, he did claim many other records as his own. In 2023, Djokovic surpassed Rafael Nadal by winning three Grand Slams, giving him a total of 24 Major trophies. The Serbian came close to winning a calendar slam but was stopped by Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz at Wimbledon. Only two men have ever won a calendar slam: Don Budge in 1938 and Rod Laver in 1962 and 1969. Djokovic won his 40th ATP Masters title as he bagged the Paris Mas-



ters crown. Nadal holds the second position in the list with 36 victories, while Roger Federer has 28. The Serbian also won the ATP Masters 1000 tournament in Cincinnati, defeating Carlos Alcaraz after coming back from a set down. Djokovic is also the only player to have won all nine masters titles since the tournament's start in 1990.

With six ATP Finals championships, he was tied with Roger Federer for the most. In 2023, he surpassed the Swiss legend by winning his seventh title in Turin, defeating local star Jannik Sinner. His 71st 'Big Title' - a combination of Grand Slams, ATP Masters 1000 tournaments, ATP Finals, and Olympic singles gold - was also won.

Only an Olympic gold medal remains elusive for the world number one. Serbia's finest Olympic achievement was a bronze medal in Beijing in 2008. The 36-year-old Serbian was involved in a back-and-forth battle for the title of world number one at the end of the year. Despite Alcaraz's challenge, Djokovic prevailed.

In the first round of the ATP Finals, he defeated Holger Rune to claim his eighth ATP year-end no. 1. Djokovic has the most year-end finishes at the top of the ATP rankings, with six, followed by Pete Sampras. With five, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, and Jimmy Connors are tied for third place. After winning the ATP Finals

in November, the 24-time Grand Slam champion began his 400th week as world no. 1 in the ATP Rankings, adding another feather to his crown. Earlier this year, he broke Steffi Graf's record of 377 weeks at world number one, being the only player in either gender to do it. Federer holds the record for the most consecutive weeks as world number one, with 237 weeks. Djokovic is on his way to winning his 100th title; he now has 98. Only Roger Federer (103 points) and Jimmy Connors (109 points) are ahead of him. Meanwhile, India's star player Rohan Bopanna went about his job quietly throughout 2023, becoming a sports icon and achieving World No. 3 in the doubles rankings. Bopanna, together with Australian Matthew Edben, reached heights that few Indians have attained, and this at the age of 43, when most players retire. Bopanna was rated 19th in the world at the start of the year, but has already risen 16 places. They reached the ATP Finals and advanced to the tournament's semi-finals thanks to their higher ranking. Notably, after not competing in international tennis since the Australian Open, the 22-time major champion Rafael Nadal has confirmed that he will be returning to the tennis court at Brisbane International which begins in the first week of January 2024. -ANI

A LOOK AT THE HAPPIEST NEWS STORIES OF 2023

Ugandan rainforest dwellers make a comeback

In a welcome reversal of trends, there are now more mountain gorillas, giraffes and buffalo in Uganda than there were in the 1980s, according to the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The number of elephants has quadrupled, and the almost-extinct East African black rhinos have also returned, with a population of about 30. Part of the resurgence is credited to tougher penalties for poachers.



Mangroves as flood defence

India has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by one-third over the past 14 years, according to the news agency Reuters. T.P. Murugesan, known in India as “Mangrove Man,” is just one pioneer of growing environmental consciousness. In his home state, Kerala, in southern India, he has planted about 100,000 mangrove saplings to protect against the effects of flooding.



Syrian refugee elected mayor of German village

Ryran Alshebl, who arrived as a refugee from Syria in 2015, was elected mayor of a southwestern German village in April. Alshebl garnered an impressive 53.5% of votes cast in Ostelsheim. Eight months into his term, he is doing more than just taking international media requests: Alshebl is looking for new staff for the village kindergarten.



End of COVID emergency declared

After over three years, the World Health Organization officially declared the end of the global coronavirus health emergency on May 5, 2023. COVID-19, which killed 20 million people worldwide, began to spread globally in early 2020. According to the WHO, COVID-19 is still circulating, but the world now has better tools to protect most people from a severe bout of the disease.



Children survive jungle plane crash

Forty days after a small aircraft crashed in the Colombian jungle, soldiers successfully found four missing children. The siblings, aged 4 to 13, fed themselves on wild passion fruit and mango, as well as discarded packaged foods. Their mother, the pilot and an Indigenous leader died in the accident.



Destruction of the Amazon slows

Deforestation in the Amazon rainforest slowed down in 2023. According to the Amazon conservation forest monitoring program, deforestation in Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia has decreased by 56%. Satellite data from the Brazilian Space Agency confirmed the trend. In June alone, deforestation was down by about 40% compared with the same month in 2022.



Men are living longer in Europe

In the 1990s, men were dying on average seven years younger than women. The gap is now smaller, at 5 1/2 years. Germany's Federal Institute for Population Research used data from seven European countries to arrive at the result in a study published in August. Reasons include less nicotine consumption, a healthier diet and better medical care.



Rush for German universities

Beginning in the autumn semester of 2022, more people from abroad studied at German universities than ever before. With a total of 370,000 students, Germany overtook Australia among the most popular countries to study in, the Education Ministry reported in September. Germany was in third place globally, after only the United States and the United Kingdom.



Protection for river dolphins

On International Freshwater Dolphin Day, 11 Asian and South American countries signed a declaration pledging to protect the cetaceans that live in rivers and similar bodies of water. The agreement is meant to halt the decline in South American populations of freshwater dolphins and boost their numbers in Asia. There are only six species of the aquatic mammals left.



AI can predict giant waves

Can we use artificial intelligence to combat natural disasters? Two pieces of academic research suggest the signs are promising. At the University of Copenhagen, AI was used to generate forecasting formula for the probability of giant waves. And researchers at the University of Austin in Texas developed an AI that can predict earthquakes with an accuracy rate of 70% one week in advance.



Rescued tunnel workers

It was a Himalayan miracle: A horrific underground ordeal ended happily for dozens of workers trapped near the small Indian town Uttarkashi. On November 28, all 41 were rescued from a 4.5-kilometer highway tunnel that had collapsed on November 12 after a landslide. The workers were trapped behind tons of rock. Emergency services brought them out through a pipe 90 centimeters (3 feet) wide.



Retinal screening to detect kidney disease

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh made a revolutionary discovery, by detecting kidney disease using 3D eye scans. The more severely the kidneys were damaged, the thinner the individual layers of the retina were, the researchers concluded. Retinal screening allows kidney disease to be detected earlier. According to global estimates, about 5 million people die of kidney failure every year.



Free bus rides in Brazil and India

As of December 17, bus rides are free on Sundays in the Brazilian city of Sao Paulo, a measure that is supposed to help with social cohesion. The Indian state of Karnataka introduced a similar system in September, allowing free bus rides for about 40 million women, making it easier to find work and commute.



Delivery riders to get health insurance

In its crackdown on bogus self-employment, the EU is beefing up the rights of delivery and taxi drivers who work with firms such as Uber. About 5.5 million people work for such online platforms, including cab drivers and tradespeople. Under the new rules, they will have the same rights as employees. This also includes contributions to pensions, health and unemployment insurance.

- Pictures and captions DW

ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat inaugurates new Green Sports fields in Bahla and Al Awabi

The inauguration of the field will have a positive impact as it would help the Al Etihad Sports teams from Bahla and Al Awabi to have better sport infrastructure

MUSCAT: In line with the bank's commitment to enhance its leading role in Social Corporate Responsibility (CSR), Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, remains committed to support youth sports teams through its annual Green Sports programme.

Recently, the bank handed over the Green Sports field to the Al Etihad Sports team from the Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhliyah Governorate. The event was held in the presence of the Sheikh Dr. Salim Salayum Al Junaibi, member at the State Council, Rabea Mubarak Al Khalili, Head of the Al Etihad Sports Team, Juma Khamis Al Yaqoubi, Regional Manager, Al Dakhliyah, and a number of officials and team members. Earlier, the bank also celebrated the completion of another sports field in the Wilayat of Al Awabi, South Al Batinah Governorate, which was attended by Adnan Ahmed Al Balushi, Assistant Regional Manager - South Al Batinah, Abdullah Abbas Al Kharousi, Head of the Etihad Al Awabi Sports and Cultural Team, and a number of team members.

During the ceremony, Juma



Khamis Al Yaqoubi, Regional Manager, Al Dakhliyah, Bank Muscat, congratulated Al Etihad Sports Team in Bahla for the successful completion of the project.

He said, "This is a major achievement that will contribute in enhancing the facilities and infrastructure for the team. We hope

that the new facility would help the Al Etihad team to rise to greater heights, improve community bonding and harness the talent of Omani youth. We will continue to develop local sport teams and enhance youth's talents and support sports sector in the country."

Speaking on the occasion, Rabea Mubarak Al Khalili, Head of the Al Etihad Sports Team, Bahla, said: "We thank Bank Muscat for the continuation of Green Sports programme which is a great supporter to local sports teams in the Sultanate. The inauguration of the field will have a positive impact as it would help the team to have bet-

ter sport infrastructure which will enable the team to serve all members and community."

Abdullah Abbas Al Kharousi, Head of the Etihad Al Awabi Sports and Cultural Team, Wilayat of Al Awabi, said: "The support from Bank Muscat in the lighting system project for the Etihad Al Awabi team is an important addition since it is enhancing the field's infrastructure. Local sport fields have been an essential contributor to supporting different community activities. Green Sports programme from Bank Muscat is a positive initiative, which supports youth and national sports sector."

He further expressed his happiness with the completion of the project and affirmed that the team will continue to work hard to develop the talents of its members and support the different activates organised for the whole community.

Adnan Ahmed Al Balushi, Assistant Regional Manager - South Al Batinah, Bank Muscat said that the Green Sports programme continues to achieve more successes, as a large number of fields have been completed over the past years. He extended his best wishes for the Etihad Al Awabi team and urged them to continue the hard work in supporting Omani youth talents.

CSR programme

Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme is one of the leading CSR programmes in Oman, which provides support to local sports teams as part of the bank's efforts to develop sports infrastructure and green spaces throughout the Sultanate of Oman. The support includes greening of football fields, water desalination and lighting.

It is a matter of great encouragement that the Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 183 teams with over 50,000 team members across the Sultanate of Oman.

Since its inception in 2012, the Green Sports programme reaffirms the bank's commitment to providing ample opportunities for young Omanis to develop their talents. It goes a long way in developing the sporting skills and talents of Omani youth, thereby leading to all-round development of the sport.

360-DEGREE BANKING REWARD INITIATIVE

NBO Reward Programme offers array of rewards and redemption points

MUSCAT: As a testament to its commitment to loyal customers, NBO offers a unique 360-degree Rewards Program, presenting a bouquet of rewards and redemption points for a personalised and enjoyable banking experience.

NBO Rewards Programme is Oman's best 360-degree banking reward initiative that provides its valued customers points for their everyday banking activities. The Rewards Programme points can be earned and redeemed across a wide range of products and services, offering seamless and attractive redemption options while delivering maximum value for customer from their earned points.

The loyalty programme, launched in 2014 exclusively for cardholders, has been revamped into a comprehensive 360-degree rewards plan. This program recognises and rewards customers for utilising the various services of the bank such as card transactions, deposit increments, salary transfers to NBO, NBO app transactions, and the acquisition of additional products from NBO.

Accumulated reward points can be redeemed for different services, including settling mobile phone bills, credit card payments, utility bills for electricity and water, items from the NBO reward store, and making purchases at partner stores using NBO POS machines. Additionally, these points offer the flexibility to obtain online gift vouchers.



Commenting on the product, Maha Al Raisi, Assistant General Manager Retail Products, said: "Our Rewards Program has gained immense popularity among customers, apparent from the sub-

stantial number of redemptions. It stands out as the most successful rewards program in Oman's banking sector, underscoring our commitment to delivering exceptional value and advantages to our loyal customer base. NBO Rewards Program unlocks great value for consumers through a curated set of benefits, which include accelerated rewards and redemption points. We have been continuously working on innovative products to strengthen value proposition for customers and deliver premium benefits at convenience."

Registering for our Rewards Programme is effortless and complimentary for all. To enroll, simply log in to NBO Internet Banking or NBO App, click on the Rewards Program, and become a member. As a welcome gesture, a reward of 600 free bonus points awaits upon sign-up.

The registration points remain valid for 3 months, while all accrued points enjoy a substantial 3-year validity period. Redemption can be conveniently done online or through NBO terminals equipped with the Rewards Program feature.

The NBO Rewards Programme extends valuable opportunities to its valued customers, allowing them to enjoy a range of benefits and products. This reflects NBO's steadfast commitment to continually enhance the overall banking experience for all its clientele.

GREAT COMPANION TO NAVIGATE

Go places and discover new experiences in Ford Territory SUV

MUSCAT: Ford Territory SUV enhances the joy of driving with its impressive style, confident stance and array of features and technology. The Territory is a great companion to navigate what the city or the country roads have in store.

The Ford Territory was the outcome of Ford's new 'Progressive Energy in Strength' design philosophy, which is based on the rich heritage of the brand and its iconic aesthetics. It embodies three fundamental design principles: commanding, agile, and responsive.

The Ford Territory has an eye-catching exterior design highlighted with an integrated grille and signature light - balanced with lower graphics, with full LED lighting, which drives the focal point higher and communicates purpose, stability, and capability. The headlamps show off a unique design, with daytime running LED lights incorporated with a strong horizontal grille bar, which adds to the eye-catching appearance. The form also has function, with the headlamps lowered towards the ground for expanded lighting areas that also creates a more powerful front look. The bold grille bar is manufactured with high quality materials that help to reflect Ford's global design DNA on the car.

Adding comfort and indulgence on every journey is the territory's impressive interior. The horizon-



tal coast-to-coast design evokes a connecting space in an embracing gesture, creating openness and spaciousness. Comfort and function are maximised through premium leather seats, with a 10-way adjustable ergonomic driver's seat.

Built to optimise loading capacity, Territory is also equipped with more than 20 spacious storage compartments - as well as an extendible trunk with a 448-litre volume - allowing passengers to flexibly use storage spaces throughout the car.

Powering the Territory is an EcoBoost 1.8L engine, delivering 320Nm torque using moderate fuel and impressive power up to 190 hp. The vehicle is equipped with Seven-Speed automatic transmission providing smooth,

responsive gear shifting.

The Territory SUV is equipped with four driving modes - Eco, Normal, Sport, and Mountain - to provide customers the ability to tailor their driving experience across a range of situations, whether driving in crowded urban areas or across the open highway on long-distance journeys.

The Ford Territory is equipped with a suite of driver-assist technologies that offer maximum safety and enhance customers' driving experiences. The vehicle enables customers to drive with confidence by offering an impressive array of safety features available in Ford Co-Pilot.

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LIFESTYLE

RESEARCHERS DISCOVER HOW EBOLA VIRUS INFECTS CELLS

Understanding how viruses spread once they enter the human body is crucial for developing medications and therapies that can stop viruses in their tracks

Texas Biomedical Research Institute (Texas Biomed) researchers recently published data in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* revealing that the Ebola virus develops and exploits intercellular tunnels to migrate from cell to cell and avoid therapy.

“Our findings suggest that the virus can create its hiding place, hide and then move to new cells and replicate,” said Olena Shtanko, PhD, an Assistant Professor at Texas Biomed and senior paper author.

Specifically, the virus is generating something called tunneling nanotubes -- dynamic connections between cells that allow the cells to communicate by exchanging particles over relatively long distances, up to 200 microns.

While these structures have been shown to play a prominent role in promoting neurodegenerative diseases, cancer, HIV-1 and influenza, Dr. Shtanko is the first to investigate their role in disseminating Ebola virus.

“When we launched this project a couple of years ago, we thought the general model of spread of Ebola virus infection -- where a viral particle infects a cell, replication begins, new virus particles are made and released into the body to infect neighboring cells -- was a bit too simplistic,” says Dr. Shtanko.

Using state-of-the-art technology with live scanning electron and high-resolution 3D-microscopy, Dr. Shtanko and her team showed that Ebola virus infection in cells enhanced the formation of tunneling nanotubes containing viral particles.

The tunneling nanotubes then promoted the transfer of these particles to other cells.

Notably, the full virus was not required to trigger nanotube formation, only small sections of the virus coding for individual proteins were needed.

This happened even in the presence of treatments meant to stop Ebola virus.

“Importantly, we observed that Ebola virus infection could spread in cultures treated with virus entry inhibitors or therapeutic treatments that stop viruses from entering a cell,” Dr. Shtanko explains.

How exactly Ebola virus particles are transported through tunneling nanotubes is still an open question.

Dr. Shtanko and her team plan to try to find answers using advanced technologies such as laser microdissection, mass spectrometry and low-abundance RNA sequencing.

They will also explore if related viruses, including deadly Sudan and Marburg viruses, exploit the same mechanism to spread infection. -ANI

