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648,148 TONNES OF FISH CAUGHT UNTIL NOVEMBER 2023

The total quantity of fish landed by artisanal fishing in the Sultanate of Oman till the end of November 2023 stood at 648,148 tonnes, reaching a value of OMR387,453,000, compared to the same period in 2022, when its total quantity was 591,421 tonnes, according to the preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. **>B2**



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GAZA STRIP

Oman rejects Israeli move to storm Rafah

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman voiced its categorical rejection of the Israeli occupation forces' move to storm the Palestinian City of Rafah, which is now sheltering hundreds of thousands of unarmed civilians displaced from the northern section of the Gaza Strip.

Oman noted that this chaotic situation was a direct outcome of Israel's brutal aggression that left about 30,000 dead and tens of thousands wounded or missing.

Flagrant defiance

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Sunday, Oman pointed out that Israel's action was in flagrant defiance of the international law and international human charters. It also warned against the serious fallouts of this persistent and indiscriminate aggression in the Gaza Strip. **>A2**

TOGETHER WE PROGRESS

An opportunity for citizens to air views, share concerns

MUSCAT: Activities of the 2nd edition of the forum titled 'Together We Progress' began at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Sunday.

The forum is organised by the Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The event seeks to advance communication and interaction between the government and society and consolidate public confidence and partnership.

The forum, which brings together members of public and government officials, aims to review policies, development programmes and government initiatives.

The interactive event provides citizens with an opportunity to express their opinions and views on public matters and share their concerns about common challenges.

Sheikh Al Fadhl Mohammed Al



Harchy, Secretary General of the Council of Ministers, said that the forum embodies the Royal vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik about the importance of strengthening communication between the government and society. He added that "Together We

Progress" catalyses the principle of community participation in the development process.

Al Harchy pointed out that the forum will address topics related to the sectors of education, health, social protection, labour and employment, youth, the media and

national identity.

He added that, during the days of the forum, a special exhibition will be dedicated to Oman Vision 2040, as well as programmes on government digital transition, economic diversification, employment, investment and export de-

velopment and carbon neutrality. Meanwhile, Dr. Madeeha Ahmed Al Shaibani, Minister of Education, made a visual presentation featuring various aspects of education and the prospects for developing the sector in accordance with Oman Vision 2040. **>A4**

HEAVY RAINS LASH OMAN

FINN FISHER-BLACK PEDALS TO GLORY:

Braving rains, Finn Fisher-Black of UAE Team Emirates won the second stage of Tour of Oman on Sunday.

It has been decided that Monday will be an official holiday in Oman, except for Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The northern governorates in the Sultanate of Oman experienced moderate to heavy rains on Sunday.

In the Governorate of Muscat, rains fell in Al Seeb, Bausher, Al Amerat, Quriyat, Muscat and Muttrah. As a precautionary measure, Al Amerat-Bausher Mountain road was closed to traffic.

In the Governorate of Al Dhakhliah, rains fell in the wilayats of Bidbid and Al Hamra.

In the Governorate of South Al Batinah, rains fell in the wilayats of Al Rustaq, Al Awabi, Nakhal, Wadi Al Ma'awil, Al Musanaa and Barka.

The rainfall in these governorates led to the overflow of some wadis. Aisha Juma Al Qasmi, a meteorologist at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said that heavy rains will continue leading to flash floods at many places and overflow of wadis.

"The weather condition's peak is expected on Monday," Al Qasmi said.

In view of the current climatic conditions, it has been decided that 12 February will be an official holiday for employees of the public and private sectors in Oman, with the exception of the governorates of Dhofar and Al Wusta.

Despite heavy rains, the 13th edition of Tour of Oman continued without any hiccups.

Fin Fisher-Black of UAE Team Emirates won the second stage of Tour of Oman, days after winning the Muscat Classic race.

In light of the current weather

condition, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has warned vehicle owners against deliberately crossing wadis as it could result in forfeiting insurance coverage.

The Basic Services Sector at the National Committee for Emergency Management also completed its preparations to minimise the impacts of weather conditions.

The Basic Services Sector activated its operations centre to coordinate preparations and response to the weather condition.

This sector oversees the main-

tenance of roads, electricity, communications, water and sewage, and fuel management.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDA) has called on everyone to be careful and not to risk crossing wadis, follow safety instructions, and bulletins issued by official authorities.

In light of the bad weather, the Ministry of Education announced the suspension of classes in all governorates on Monday, with the exception of the governorates of Dhofar and Al Wusta. **>A5**

TOURISM SECTOR

Al Wusta offers investment opportunities



Times News Service

HAIMA: Endowed with virgin beaches, beautiful sand dunes, hills and mountains, Al Wusta Governorate provides ample opportunities to private sector and entrepreneurs for investments in the tourism sector.

With ample tourist infrastructure in place, Al Wusta Governorate boasts of 20 hotel establishments with 751 rooms of various categories and 465 hotel units under the supervision of the Special Economic Zone Authority- Duqm.

Bakhit bin Amer bin Suhail Al Amri, Director of the Herit-

age and Tourism Department in Al Wusta Governorate, said that the governorate is rich in tourism potentials as it has all the natural ingredients like beaches extending from Ras Al Rowais to Ras Madra among others.

The governorate also possesses sites for watching stars, natural reserves and wetlands.

The reserve is considered one of the best 25 sites of international importance for migrating birds in the Middle East, he said.

The governorate is also famous for eco-tourism, which opens the door for several projects and initiatives for private sector.

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Plan to promote Oman tourism in Russia

1 Salim Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism received in his office yesterday Olga Borisovna Lyubimova, Minister of Culture in the Russian Federation. The meeting touched on aspects of joint cooperation in areas of tourism, culture and heritage. They also discussed means of holding B2B meetings. **>A2**

OMAN

Bahrain Minister meets Omani delegation

2 Abdulla Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry and Commerce of Bahrain received yesterday a delegation of Omani businesspeople. **>A5**

WORLD

Three Emirati troops, Bahraini officer killed

3 Three soldiers of the UAE and a Bahraini officer were killed in Somalia while on a mission to train Somali forces. **>A7**

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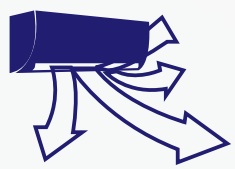
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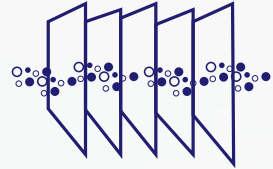
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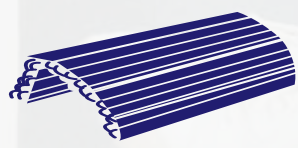
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Oman to open office in Russia to promote tourism



The two countries discussed joint cooperation in areas of tourism, culture and heritage

MUSCAT: Salim Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism received in his office on Sunday Olga Borisovna Lyubimova, Minister of Culture in the Russian Federation.

The meeting touched on aspects of the joint cooperation in areas of tourism, culture and heritage.

They also discussed means of holding B2B meetings and reviewed ways to boost cooperation in the field of museum.

The two sides further explored the possibility of expanding the tourism promotion of the Sul-



tanate of Oman in Russia by opening a tourism representation office and framing cooperation in the field of capacity building and investments.

They agreed to devise a joint executive programme through which joint meetings and events are or-

ganised in cooperation with relevant companies from the private sector to open broader areas for cooperation.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary General of the National Museum and the Russian Ambassador to Oman. -ONA

Russian violinist and Turkish pianist to perform at ROHM

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat will present its upcoming concert as part of its 2023-24 Absolute Music Series with talented Russian violinist Elvin Hoxha Ganiyev and Turkish pianist Cem Esen on Monday, 7pm at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts (free admission).

Elvin Hoxha Ganiyev is an award-winning Russian violinist who has performed with renowned conductors and orchestras in prestigious concert halls and international festivals around the world.

In this Absolute Music recital, Ganiyev will play with acclaimed Turkish pianist Cem Esen, an experienced performer in Europe, including at the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, Sofia Music Festival, and Antalya Piano Festival.

Their partnership is well established with Ganiyev performing alongside Cem Esen on his latest album, Voyages, Istanbul Chapter, released in 2021.

Together, Ganiyev and Esen will give a spectacular recital featuring Prokofiev's Violin Sonata No. 1, Claude Debussy's Violin Sonata in G minor and Carmen



Turkish pianist Cem Esen



Russian violinist Elvin Hoxha Ganiyev

Fantasia by Franz Waxman, the soundtrack for the 1946 movie Humoresque.

Absolute Music puts the spotlight on the violin, a versatile instrument which is a mainstay of classical music.

To further enrich the experience for audiences, the concert will be preceded by a book presentation of The Violin Revealed: The History, Techniques, and Secrets of Italian Violin Making from Stradivari to Today edited by Stefano Trabucchi, luthier, and journalist Roberto Messina.

The presentation took place on 11 February at 5pm at the Music Library. Attendees can explore the history of Italian violin making and delve deeper into the intricacies and secrets around this captivating instrument.

On the morning of the performance, both Esen and Ganiyev will give an exclusive masterclass to the Muscat Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, sharing their experience and technique with violin students.

Absolute Music is an evening concert series that takes place on selected Mondays throughout the season. Admission is free for both the concert and book presentation.

ISRAEL'S ARROGANCE < FROM A1 Oman calls for ceasefire

Oman reiterated its plea to the international community to take concrete measures to put to practice the global political positions to address Israel's arrogance and force it to accept a ceasefire and provide humanitarian needs for the displaced population in the Gaza Strip.

Oman urged the international community to hold Israel fully accountable for the targeting of civilians, property and facilities in the Gaza Strip. -ONA



Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG crowned Oman Insurer of the Year 2024

MUSCAT: Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG was honoured with the prestigious title of 'Oman Insurer of the Year 2024', a testament to the company's commitment to excellence and innovation in the insurance sector. The accolade was presented during a gala event hosted by MENA IR at the Shangri-La Hotel in Dubai on January 25, 2024.

This esteemed recognition comes as a result of Takaful Oman's unwavering dedication towards organizational transformation and operational efficiency. The financial results for the year 2023 showcase very strong & promising numbers, highlighting the company's outstanding customer service and forward-thinking approach to insurance solutions that cater to the evolving needs of the Omani market.

Takaful Oman Insurance (TAOD), listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, has successfully turned around its net results, reporting a net profit of OMR 647,856 (\$1.68m) for 2023. In comparison, the company posted a net loss of OMR 1,514,305 for 2022. The unaudited preliminary financial results reveal that the company's total revenues jumped by 30.3% to OMR 24.36m (OMR 63m) in 2023, compared to about OMR 18.7m (OMR 49m) in 2022.

Acknowledging the support and efforts of all stakeholders, Mr. Neelmani Bhardwaj, the Chief Executive Officer at Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG, said, "We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our shareholders, board of directors, regulator, partners, and customers, who have placed their confidence in us. Their unwavering trust and support have been the bedrock of our journey. It is their belief in our vision and investment in our values that have pro-



pelled us to the forefront of the insurance industry. We would like to thank all of our stakeholders for being an integral part of our success story."

Echoing the statement, Mr. Sulaiman Al-Harthi, the Chairman of the board, commented on the occasion, "This recognition is a collective achievement of Takaful Oman's significant contribution, unparalleled dedication, and team spirit towards excellence. Their drive continues to be of essence in providing exceptional value to our clients. Our success is a testament to the trust our customers have placed in us and the tireless efforts of our employees. The company has developed a business strategy, and has been tracking it diligently to maintain a focus on profitable growth, a critical pillar of the strategy. The improvement in financial results are testament to the effectiveness of this approach. Takaful Oman

has cemented its standing as a leading name in the insurance industry, known for its integrity, customer focus, and commitment to excellence."

About Takaful Oman Insurance (SAOG): Takaful Oman Insurance (SAOG) is one of the leading takaful insurers in Oman, established in 2014. With a customer-centric approach and a diverse distribution network, the company effectively meets Oman's changing market demands. Takaful Oman offers a comprehensive range of insurance solutions, including commercial insurance for small, mid-market, and large risks, as well as personal insurance covering motor, medical, home, travel, and personal accident needs. The company's commitment to excellence, innovation, and ethical conduct drives its success in the industry.

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COMMENTARY

Bridging the generation gap



SALEH AL-SHAIBANY

I could not help drawing a comparison between a group of elderly people and children when I was walking along a beach. There must have been half a dozen of senior citizens lying on the sand watching a group of children playing in the shallow water.

One of them then decided to get up and joined the children by kicking a ball around. A minute later, the rest joined him and soon they were all chasing the same ball on the beach. It was a spectacle of two different generations - the will-bes and the has-beens - in the same shallow water competing for the same ball. I was not alone but with a relative who was visiting from UK. He was also bemused with the scene and said to me. "It's good to see the old fogies enjoying themselves."

I smiled at his remark. There was an interesting observation there. He didn't appear to have noticed the children but only the 'old fogies'. Was this a casual remark or a cruel dismissal of a generation whose time seemed to come to an end?

I imagined the creaking sounds of the old bones with every action they were making in great contrast to the fluid movements of the youngsters. The tiny limbs of



the children were in perfect harmony with the rest of their bodies. The hands and legs of the oldies were hanging like badly fitted handles on rusty hinges and their movements were laborious if not painful. There was an age barrier between them of something over seventy years.

I remember an old neighbour years ago who always had a kind word for every child who passed him as he sat on the threshold of his house. He didn't mind the noise and the hell-raising of the children in the neighbourhood. He just sat quietly and watched us scuffle on the dusty streets or play football. When other neighbours complained, he used to say to them, "Leave them alone. I would have joined them myself if I were not old."

"Old fool" is what people of his own age used to call him because he refused to let the age barrier make him see children as a nuisance. We liked him for just being understanding of the ways of the children. Thinking back now, he knew it wouldn't be that long before the children who played before him would be in his situation.

'Enjoy your childhood,' he

seemed to tell us then, "It's not going to last forever."

When one day he failed to turn up at his doorstep, we knew what had happened because we had been expecting it. He was old, we comforted ourselves, and he was supposed to die.

Children never associate death with the young but only with the old. They see themselves growing up. Death to them is far, years away and only old people die. And that bright day out on the beach, I could a scene of joy, perhaps not in great abundance, as I watched the 'old fogies' play ball with the children on that beach. They seemed to say, "when the end comes rejoice, for the beginning was never a mistake."

We now see many teenagers complain when they are faced with minor problems instead of shrugging and move on. They waste a lot of time and let many opportunities slip away. As they do, they rub the joy away, leaving deep marks in their young lives that will only get deeper as they age. I now dare defy the phrase, "old is gold." Perhaps it rhymes well but you don't have to wait until you are long in the tooth to look for the glitter of life.

OHRC

Discussion on ending all forms of
discrimination against women

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), discussed Oman's national report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The sessions took place in the United Nations' headquarters in Geneva. Oman's delegation discussed the steps taken by OHRC to prepare the accreditation file which will be completed in May 2024. -ONA



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Annual plan for
National Museum
discussed at meet

MUSCAT: The Board of Trustees of the National Museum reviewed several topics during its 11th meeting held on Sunday at the Museum's headquarters.

Annual report

Among the highlights were the approval of the National Museum's annual report for the year 2023 and the annual plan for the Museum for the year 2024.

The meeting was chaired by Salim Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and Chairman of the Board

of Trustees of the National Museum.

During the meeting, the Board of Trustees approved the annual report for 2023 and discussed plans and programmes related to cultural diplomatic relations and international cooperation.

Bayt Greiza

Additionally, they discussed the proposed visual identity for Bayt Greiza, the houses of the al Bu-said nobility, as-Sa'idiya School Museum for Education, and the Muscat Gateway Museum. -ONA



MEETING: The meeting was chaired by Salim Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum. - ONA

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INTERACTION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

‘Idea Makers’ initiative to encourage homegrown innovative solutions

<FROM A1 Dr. Madeeha said that priorities focus on promoting high quality and community partnership, empowering human resources, establishing an integrated and independent system and grooming talents that compete locally and globally.

For her part, Dr. Rahma Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said that her ministry seeks to upgrade the quality of university education, supply the labour market with highly-qualified resources and enhance the human capital.

Dr. Rahma added that the ministry’s strategy seeks to align academic programmes with the requirements of the labour market. The strategy also aims to achieve research excellence with the prime objective of generating the desired economic and social impacts. In addition, the ministry’s strategy focuses on sustained development of vocational education and training programmes and to comply with national and international standards in this domain.

For his part, Dr. Hilal Ali Al Sabti, Minister of Health, said that the strategic approach of the health sector in Oman lays emphasis on sustainability and centralization of services, technical and medical systems, qualified human resources and the implementation of diversified and sus-



tainable funding sources.

The health sector’s programmes during the 10th Five Year Plan include comprehensive health coverage, governance and restructuring of the health sector and the establishment of a more efficient planning and financing system, said Dr. Hilal.

Meanwhile, Social Development Minister Dr. Laila Ahmed Al Najjar said that the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 include social care, family and community development, services for people with disabilities, self-employment, civil society institutions and social responsibility programmes.

Dr. Laila added that the ministry is embarked on programmes to develop the services offered to people with disabilities, with the prime aim of facilitating their integration into society.

For her part, Dr. Jokha Abdullah Al Shukaili, CEO of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and

Educational Quality Assurance, said that the Authority’s programmes focus on high quality and public partnership, as well as the continuous evaluation of school performance and educational efficiency.

Dr. Jokha pointed out that the Authority has endorsed a national system for academic programmes on accreditation, the application of standards of international bodies in the fields of external quality assurance and the assessment of basic programmes.

The forum saw the launch of an “Idea Makers” initiative, which aims to encourage citizens to develop homegrown innovative solutions that reflect the national identity and excellence in communication between the government and society.

The initiative aims at considering creative ideas of youth as measures to achieve the future aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. -ONA

RAINS FALL IN NORTHERN PARTS OF OMAN



MEETINGS

Sheikh Khalifa meets US, Russian officials



MUSCAT: Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs received at the general diwan of the ministry yesterday Daniel Benaim, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Peninsula Affairs. The meeting discussed the re-

percussions of the Israeli war on Gaza and the efforts made to cease fire. The two sides also touched on cooperation between Oman and the US in various areas and means of developing them. The meeting was attended by Ana Escroshima, Ambassador-designate of the United States of



America to the Sultanate of Oman and a number of officials from both sides. Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs held a meeting at the general diwan of the ministry with Olga Borisovna Lyubimova, Minister of Culture

in the Russian Federation. The meeting reviewed aspects of cooperation between Oman and Russia in various fields, particularly in the areas of culture and museum. The meeting was attended by a number of officials from both sides. -ONA

OMR100 MILLION

CBO issues government development bonds

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman announced a new issue of government development bonds (GDB). The size of the new issue stands at OMR100 million (can be increased) with a maturity period of 3 years and will carry a coupon rate of 4.90% annually. The issue will be open for subscription from 15 to 22 February 2024, while the auction will be held on 25 February 2024. The issue settlement date will be on 27 February, 2024. Interest on the new bonds will be paid semiannually on 27 August and 27 February, every year until the maturity date on 27 February 2027. Investors may apply for these Bonds through the competitive bidding process only and may submit bids through commercial licensed banks operating in the

Sultanate of Oman. Furthermore, investors with applications of RO 1 million and above may submit their bids directly to CBO, at their own discretion, after getting them endorsed from their banks. Prospectus and application forms can be obtained through the Central Bank of Oman official website. Notably, the Bonds are direct and unconditional obligations of the Government of Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of finance. The Bonds can be used as collateral to obtain loans from any local commercial licensed bank and can also be traded at prevailing market rates through Muscat Stock Exchange. The details of the Bonds allotted will be recorded in the register maintained by Muscat Clearing and Depositary Company. -ONA

India soon to become third-largest economy in world: Top economist



In an exclusive interview with *Times of Oman*, Sanjeev Sanyal, Principal Economic Advisor to the Government of India, shared insights on India's remarkable economic trajectory and its promising future

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sanjeev Sanyal, an internationally acclaimed economist and a key advisor to the Indian Prime Minister, forecasted a bright future for India's economy, projecting it to soon claim the position of the world's third-largest economy. Speaking exclusively to *Times of Oman* during his recent visit to the Sultanate, Sanyal remarked: "In the past two years, India has maintained a commendable 7 percent annual growth rate, surpassing all other major economies worldwide. Despite global economic stagnation, our sustained growth momentum positions us as the fastest-growing economy globally. Presently ranked fifth in GDP, we anticipate overtaking Germany within the next 18 months to become the fourth-largest economy, and subsequently surpassing Japan in the next 18 months to claim the third spot, trailing only the USA and China." Highlighting India's economic resilience, Sanyal emphasised, "Our ability to sustain robust

growth amidst global economic challenges is noteworthy. With a solid economic framework established over the past decade, we have the potential to sustain growth rates around 7-8 percent consistently. Already, in terms of purchasing power parity, India is ranked as the third-largest economy." Acknowledging India's ongoing challenge of income inequality, Sanyal conceded, "While India's economic strides are significant, we must recognise that in per capita terms, we remain a nation with vast disparities." He elaborated, "Sustained growth averaging 7-8 percent over the next 25 years is imperative to elevate the standard of living for all. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi aptly phrases it, 'Amritkaal', the next 25 years are crucial for India's development journey. Merely achieving the status of the third-largest economy is not our ultimate goal; we aspire for comprehensive socio-economic upliftment." Regarding India's expanding economic influence, Sanyal added, "India's sheer economic size con-



fers strategic advantages. By the end of this decade, our economy's scale will facilitate global competitiveness, particularly in sectors like manufacturing. Strengthened fiscal resources enable us to engage assertively in international trade and geopolitical negotiations, thus reshaping our global standing." **Combating poverty** Despite rapid economic growth, India's government has made substantial strides in poverty alleviation. Sanyal said, "India's ongoing poverty reduction initiatives represent one of the most significant endeavours in history, with tangible improvements in nutrition, longevity, and overall well-being. Sustainable growth remains the linchpin for poverty eradication and job creation."

"Going by the NitiAyog multidimensional poverty indicators, we have eliminated hundreds of millions of poor in last decade. We are a big country with big population. With growth, we can clearly say poverty is getting reduced. As our middle class is dramatically growing, we are making rapid strides in elimination. However, complete elimination of poverty is still some time away." **Driving forces of growth1** Sanyal attributed India's robust growth to fundamental strengths across various sectors. He cited, "The services sector's dynamism, coupled with unprecedented infrastructure development, including airports, roads, ports, and railways, has bolstered economic expansion. Structural reforms such as the

implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) have streamlined economic processes, enhancing institutional efficiency and financial sector resilience." He added: "In 2017, the government introduced the goods and sales tax (GST) across the country, making India an economic union. Before GST, businesses had to pay all sorts of taxes and tariffs to state governments and the national government. Exporting from one part of the country to another was arduous. We didn't have an integrated common market. Effectively, GST is like a Free Trade Agreement that India did for itself. "Another structural reform was when the government instituted the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in 2016. The goal was to clean up the banks. The IBC instituted a brand new system that turned out to be successful. As a result, banks are a lot healthier today." **Economic reform agenda** Highlighting the government's pragmatic approach to economic policy, Sanyal underscored ongoing reforms aimed at enhancing competitiveness and ease of doing business. He remarked, "Beyond structural reforms, emphasis is now on procedural enhancements and administrative streamlining. Addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies and judicial reforms are imperative to unleash India's full economic potential." Elaborating further, Sanyal said: "The government recognises that judicial reforms are necessary to unleash higher economic growth. Over 40 million cases are

pending in the courts. Processes are archaic, and enforcement of contracts is poor. The dysfunctional judicial system adds to transaction costs in the economy and slows down economic growth. Now, the country has to move from the model where the bureaucracy controls everything to one where it provides public services. Service delivery is the top priority." "Small process reforms are a very important part of improving India's competitiveness and ease of doing business," he added. On inflation issue, he responded: "The momentum in domestic inflation is well-contained. Overall CPI inflation has been in the range of 2-6 per cent. And this is not just about inflation; the overall macro stability indicators are all in good shape." **Engagement with emerging technologies** Anticipating the disruptive impact of emerging technologies, Sanyal affirmed India's commitment to harnessing advancements in AI, space technology, and drones. He asserted, "India's proficiency in these domains positions us to actively engage with technological transformations, thereby shaping the evolving global landscape." In conclusion, Sanyal stressed India's adaptability and proactive stance in navigating the complexities of the contemporary world. He remarked, "Flexibility, rather than predictive certainty, will define India's success trajectory. With a government and policy framework marked by unprecedented agility, India is poised to emerge as a global economic powerhouse, driving inclusive growth and prosperity."

WEATHER

Closure of classes due to heavy rains forecast

<FROM A1 The weather statement reads as follows: "With reference to Alert No. (1) issued by the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, and to follow-up reports of the Ministry's Central

Committee for Emergency Situations Management regarding the governorates being affected by the depression and, out of the Ministry's concern for the safety of students, it was decided to suspend classrooms in all public,

private and international schools in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with the exception of the governorates of Dhofar and Al Wusta on Monday, 12 February 2024. Classrooms will be resumed on Tuesday".

TRADE EXCHANGE

Bahrain Industry Minister meets Omani delegation



MANAMA: Abdulla Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry and Commerce of the Kingdom of Bahrain received yesterday a delegation of Omani businesspeople currently visiting Bahrain. The delegation is headed by Ridha Juma Al Saleh, Member of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Board of Directors. The meeting reviewed the economic milieu in Bahrain, as

well as the facilities provided to localise investment from the region and the world at large. It also touched on means of augmenting trade exchange between Oman and Bahrain. Moreover, the delegation visited Salman City, which includes thousands of housing units and modern services that are established based on international standards. They were also introduced to the investment opportu-

nities in the city. Further, the delegation also visited Bahrain Economic Development Board. The members of the delegation were briefed on investment opportunities in Bahrain, in addition to various investment projects in the fields of industry, logistics, real estate, foodstuff, education and technology. The meetings were attended by Dr. Juma Ahmed Al Kaabi, Ambassador of Bahrain to Oman. -ONA



SULTANATE OF OMAN
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UNITED STATES

Indian-origin man dies days after being assaulted

WASHINGTON, DC: A 41-year-old Indian-origin man has died in United States, days after suffering life-threatening injuries as a result of an assault in downtown Washington, police said.

The deceased, according to the police, was identified as Vivek Taneja of Alexandria, Virginia.

According to the police report, the incident took place on Febru-

ary 2 at approximately 2:00 a.m. (local time), following which Taneja was rushed to the hospital for treatment.

“On Friday, February 2, 2024, at approximately 2:00 a.m., Second District officers responded to the listed location for reports of an assault. Upon arrival, officers located an adult male suffering from life-threatening injuries as a result of

an assault. The victim was transported to a local hospital for treatment,” the Metropolitan Police Department’s official release said.

However, due to critical injuries, on February 7, he succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced dead.

The incident comes amid a sudden increase in attacks and deaths of Indians and Indian-Americans in the United States. — ANI





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PAKISTAN ELECTION



Imran Khan-backed independents lead in final poll count

ISLAMABAD: Independent candidates linked to former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan won the most seats in the country’s national election, a final tally by the election commission showed on Sunday.

Khan-backing independents won 101 of the 264 seats, while the party of another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, won 75 seats. The Pakistan’s People’s Party (PPP) which backed ex-Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari came third with 54 seats. Eleven other parties received a total of 34 seats in the National Assembly.

Khan — who is currently in prison — and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party were blocked from running in the election, so the supporters of Khan had to run as independents.

Both Khan’s PTI and Sharif’s party, the Muslim League (PML-N) have claimed victory. But as the PML-N becomes the single largest party in parliament, it is likely to have the best chance at forming a coalition. It has already started to seek partners.

Internet shut down over post-election clashes

The final tally was released over 60 hours after voting concluded in Thursday’s national elections, a delay that has raised questions about the process.

The vote was overshadowed by a shutdown of internet services due to several bouts of organised violence in the country as well as

allegations of manipulation.

There were initially no results from two constituencies; in one of the cases, there was no vote because of the murder of a candidate.

The former cricket star was ousted as prime minister in a no-confidence vote in 2022. He has since faced over 150 court cases he claims to be politically motivated and endorsed by his rivals in the current government. Khan has so far been sentenced to three years in jail for corruption, followed by another sentence of 10 years for charges relating to leaking state secrets, then another 14 years for corruption, and, most recently both Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced to seven years in prison each after a court decided their marriage violated the Pakistani law that states that a woman must wait three months after divorcing to marry again.

In another heavy blow to Khan’s supporters, a Pakistani court ruled that his party was not allowed to use a cricket bat as their symbol. PTI officials have pointed out that many voters in Pakistan are illiterate, and that not using the bat symbol would negatively affect their numbers. The party has accused the government of conducting a targeted clampdown against Khan and the PTI.

Ahead of the final results, Pakistan’s powerful military called on politicians to show “political maturity and unity” amid questions regarding the election.

— DW

According to the report, contracting the bubonic plague is extremely rare in the US, with an average of 5 to 15 cases occurring each year in the West

OREGON: The Oregon state of the US reported its first human case of bubonic plague in nearly a decade, the New York Post reported on Saturday, adding that the patient was likely infected by their cat.

According to the report, contracting the bubonic plague is



extremely rare in the US, with an average of 5 to 15 cases occurring each year in the West, according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

The disease is typically found in rural to semi-rural areas where wild rodents are more common.

The infected person was identified as a ‘local resident’ of Deschutes County, a rural part of central Oregon, and is believed to be the only person infected other than the symptomatic pet American-based news daily reported, quoting the health officials.

“All close contacts of the resident and their pet have been contacted and provided medication to prevent illness,” Deschutes County Health Officer Dr. Richard Fawcett said in a statement.

The person and their cat’s conditions are not yet known, but officials said the case was diagnosed and treated early, posing little risk to the community.

The bubonic plague, famous for ravaging Europe in the 14th century, is carried by squirrels, chipmunks and other wild rodents and their fleas. When an infected

rodent becomes sick and dies, its fleas can carry the infection to other animals or humans through bites.

According to the New York Post, those infected come down with a high fever, lethargy, and swollen lymph nodes called buboes. Symptoms arise between two to eight days after exposure.

While there is no vaccine, the plague is treatable with antibiotics if caught early. It can be fatal if left untreated.

The confirmed case is the first to hit the state since 2015, when a teenage girl contracted the disease from a flea bite during a hunting trip.

There have only been nine human cases of the plague in Oregon since 1995, with no reported deaths. Officials recommend people avoid any contact with wild rodents, especially sick or dead ones, and should never feed squirrels or chipmunks. People should also keep their pets away from wild rodents to avoid infection.

— ANI

AFTER CANCER DIAGNOSIS

King Charles thanks public for support

LONDON: In his first statement since being diagnosed with cancer, Britain’s King Charles III on Saturday thanked well-wishers in a note posted on the monarch’s website and the royal family’s official page on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

“I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for the many messages of support and good wishes I have received in recent days,” Charles said in a statement.

Buckingham Palace announced on Monday that 75-year-old Charles has been diagnosed with a form of cancer and that he would be postponing some engagements



to undergo treatment.

The diagnosis comes just 17 months into Charles’ reign, following the death of his 96-year-old mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September 2022.

The king also said it was heartening to hear how his diagnosis had helped to shine a light on the organizations that support cancer patients in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

“As all those who have been affected by cancer will know, such kind thoughts are the greatest comfort and encouragement,” Charles said.

News of his cancer came after Charles spent three nights in the hospital last month when he underwent a corrective procedure for a benign enlarged prostate.

Buckingham Palace has not given any details of his condition other than to say it was not prostate cancer but said the king was remaining “wholly positive” and looking forward to returning to public duty as soon as possible.

— DW

POLAND

Donald Tusk’s visit to Berlin will be a tightrope walk

WARSAW: It’s going to be a flying visit, but a very significant one nonetheless. Donald Tusk is traveling to Paris on Monday for a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, and then flying to Berlin to meet German Chancellor Olaf Scholz the same day.

For Poland’s new liberal prime minister, the visit to Berlin will be a real balancing act.

While Tusk is keen to repair his country’s battered relationship with Germany, he must guard against getting too close to Poland’s western neighbour.

The main opposition party in Poland, the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, will be watching carefully. It has labeled Tusk a “German agent” and is certain to denounce even the slightest false move in Berlin as “treason.”

Kaczynski’s party, which ruled Poland for eight years from 2015 to 2023, left a trail of destruction behind it in European politics.

While in power, it chose to focus on the close military alliance with America, preferably with Donald Trump at the helm, and wrecked its relationships with France and Germany.

When PiS was voted out of office late last year, Polish-German relations were at their lowest ebb since the collapse of communism in the late 1980s.

In the run-up to the Polish parliamentary election last October, PiS declared that Germany was the biggest threat to Poland’s sov-



ereignty and that Tusk represented foreign, German interests.

After his party’s electoral defeat, Kaczynski further ratcheted up his anti-German rhetoric, comparing Tusk’s attempts to restore the rule of law with the methods of Adolf Hitler. When the new Polish center-left coalition government finally took power in mid-December, the delight in Berlin was plain for all to see. Speaking in the German parliament, Chancellor Scholz spontaneously congratulated Tusk on his appointment and extended the hand of cooperation.

“Poland’s role in and for Europe is bigger today than ever before,” Scholz said in a government statement, expressing the hope that Germany and Poland would now move bilateral relations forward “side by side.”

Scholz also said he hoped to welcome Tusk to Berlin “in the coming weeks.”

It took almost two months for

Tusk to make his way to the German capital. His coalition’s protracted and difficult road to government, which was delayed and impeded by PiS’s all-out blocking tactics, meant that foreign policy initially had to take a back seat.

The dispute about the media and the government’s first steps toward restoring the rule of law were deemed more important than foreign policy initiatives.

But there were other reasons, too. “Tusk is being extremely cautious when it comes to Germany so as not to give the right-wing populists any pretext for criticism,” said Piotr Buras, political scientist and head of the Warsaw Office of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Buras told DW that Tusk made no mention whatsoever of Germany in his first government statement. He also said that in his view, Tusk’s chosen order for the visits — Paris first, then Berlin — was no



coincidence. “Eight years of anti-German propaganda have left a deep mark on Polish society. PiS dominates the debates about Germany,” said Buras. For this reason, Tusk isn’t expected to change tack — at least before the European elections in June. “He needs more time,” said Buras.

“Tusk is a kind of hostage to PiS’s rhetoric on Germany,” confirmed Agnieszka Lada-Konefal, deputy director of the German Poland Institute.

She stressed, however, that the German government fully understands the Polish prime minister’s predicament. “Berlin is not showing any disappointment, impatience or mistrust,” Lada-Konefal told DW. The Germans, she said, know that they should avoid forcing anything on Warsaw and that they “should not behave like the big brother who keeps telling the little brother what to do.”

Both Buras and Lada-Konefal

agreed there would be no return to the Polish-German relations of the pre-PiS era.

After the collapse of communism in 1989, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, Poland’s first non-communist foreign minister, began speaking of the “Polish-German Community of Interest,” which he later called a “community of destiny.”

Germany, the big brother, became Poland’s advocate and smoothed the path of its little brother in the East into both the EU and NATO.

“We now find ourselves in an entirely different situation,” said Lada-Konefal. Tusk’s influence as an experienced politician — he was head of the European Council for five years — has grown enormously, she said.

According to Lada-Konefal, Poland’s role in the world has also changed massively because of its swift and generous military aid

for Ukraine and the fact that it has taken in millions of Ukrainian refugees.

At the same time, she said, Germany’s wrong policy on Russia and its domestic difficulties have taken the gloss off its international reputation, adding that the balance of power has shifted toward Poland.

The process of normalising relations has begun, and the first small steps have been taken.

The Polish government has announced that the PiS government’s decision to block money for German lessons for children who are part of Poland’s German minority will be reversed. It has also announced that a Polish-German schoolbook for use in history classes will soon be approved.

But there is still much to discuss on migration policy and EU reform, especially when it comes to majority decisions on foreign policy issues, which Berlin has pushed for.

Then there is the question of reparations for Polish victims of World War II, which hangs over Polish-German relations like the sword of Damocles.

It’s unlikely that Polish-German “community of destiny” of the 1990s will be revived. Nevertheless, the new government in Warsaw is aware that faced with the crisis in the US, where Trump’s Republican Party is blocking aid for Ukraine, and Russia’s increasing aggressiveness, Poland’s best option is a close alliance with Berlin and Paris. — DW

SPORTS

Fisher-Black wins stage 2

Days after winning the Muscat Classic, the NZ rider from UAE Team Emirates sealed the uphill finish in Quriyat on a rainy day at the Tour of Oman

MUSCAT: New Zealand's Finn Fisher-Black of UAE Team Emirates seems to be enjoying the Muscat roads and the rides. Days after taking his first win of the 2024 season at the Muscat Classic, the Kiwi claimed stage 2 win of the 2024 Tour of Oman on the uphill finish in Quriyat on Sunday.

On a rainy day, Fisher-Black was the strongest in the dash to the line on the final 3km climb, beating Luke Lamperti (Soudal-Quick-Step) and Diego Ulissi (UAE Team Emirates) to the finish.

With the stage 2 victory, the Kiwi took over the race lead and the overall leader's red jersey (individual time classification) from stage 1 winner Caleb Ewan (Lotto-Dstny). Fisher-Black leads American Lamperti by six seconds and Italian Ulissi by eight heading into the stage 3 summit finish at Eastern Mountain.

Fisher-Black put up a dominating performance to win the dramatic 170.4 km stage after more than four hours (04hr:04m.04s) of racing that began at As Sifah in cloudy weather.

At the end of stage 2, Fisher-Black also received green (general points classification) and white (young rider) jerseys while Oscar Pelegri from Burgos-BH team of Spain got the golden jersey as he claimed the most aggressive rider for the second straight stage.

UAE Team Emirates had set the pace for much of the day, keeping a handle on the three-man break of the day consisting of Oscar Pelegri (Burgos-BH), Nariyuki Masuda (JCL Team Ukyo), Tegsh-Bayar Batsaikhan (Roojai Insurance).

The trio got away from the peloton



ton within the opening 25km of the hilly 170.4km stage and lasted out front for most of the day, attaining a maximum gap of five minutes before they were reeled in 6.5km from the finish.

With the break caught, the full peloton hit that ascent to Quriyat (2.7km at 6.7%), where Fisher-Black had the strongest power in the legs in the final metres to put distance between him and his competitors and take the win.

Speaking after the race, Fisher-Black said: "It is nice to have two victories in three days after my opening triumph in Muscat Classic. It was a tough race amid the

challenging weather conditions. I did not expect to see this type of weather [rains and strong winds]. I was in Saudi Arabia and UAE over the last two weeks and I thought it would be similar to the climate in Oman too. The heavy rains were in the last part of the race but the weather was good during the start of the race."

He added: "We managed as a team to overcome some climbs and hills during the stage as we implemented a good tactical and strategic plan. One of our team members crashed during the race but he managed to continue the race later. We are eyeing for more

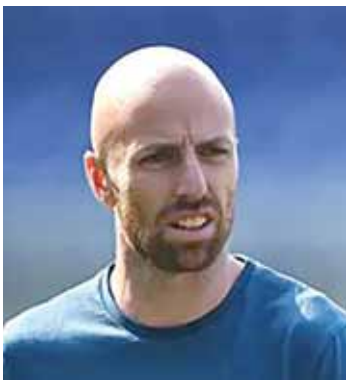
victories in the coming days of the race."

Oman's national team rider Said Al Rahbi finished the second stage race in the 67th position in a timing of four hours, six minutes and 23 seconds.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, the chief guest, handed over the awards and jerseys to the winners in presence of officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Cycling Association. On Monday, stage 3 will start from Bidbid and will end in the Eastern Mountains, a distance of 169.3 km.

INDIA VS ENGLAND

Leach ruled out of rest of Test series in India



ABU DHABI: Jack Leach has been ruled out of the rest of England's Test series against India after failing to recover from a knee injury on Sunday.

The left-arm spinner damaged his left knee fielding on the opening day of the first Test in Hyderabad, diving to stop a boundary and colliding with the ground. He then exacerbated the injury on the second morning.

The extent of the swelling of the 32-year-old's knee meant he was unable to move freely, restricting him to a maximum of four-over spells for the remainder of the Test. Leach was able to bowl 26 overs in the first innings, but could only send down 10 in the second. He was still able to dismiss Shreyas Iyer, as England sealed victory by 28 runs.

A lack of improvement in his condition meant he was subsequently ruled out of the second Test in Visakhapatnam, which India won to square the series. Initially, it was hoped the 10-day break in the series would afford Leach more time to recover, though he remained a doubt for the third Test in Rajkot.

Following further assessment in Abu Dhabi, where the England team have been based during this gap, Leach has decided to return home for further treatment and miss the last three Tests.

SIX-TEAM INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT

Fifth spot for Oman women ice hockey team in Bahrain



MUSCAT: Oman women finished fifth in a six-team international women's ice hockey tournament, which was held in Manama, Bahrain for the first time.

The two-day event termed 'Bahrain Ice Hockey Women's Gathering' saw Al Dhabi team from the UAE emerge champions, having won all the five round-robin games.

Kuwait Blue Waves finished runners-up and Bahrain Ice Hockey Club took the third spot.

Oman women side, which entered the competition as Muscat, last participated in an international event in Al Ain, UAE, in September 2023.

In Bahrain, Muscat, representing Oman Skating Sports Committee (OSSC), recorded a solitary win from two matches on the first day, and lost all three of their games on the concluding day to finish in fifth place with three points. Saudi Wings settled at the bottom of the final table after losing all five of their games.

Besides teams from hosts Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia, there was an entry from Russia - Russian Pantera.

In the round-robin games, Oman lost narrowly to hosts and the Russian team by identical 2-1 score lines, but were outplayed by Al Dhabi 10-0 in another match.

The tournament was played in the three-on-three format on a small ice rink which is roughly half the size of an international standard rink.

Muscat squad: Al Firdaus Al Kindi (captain), Khulood Ambusaidi (vice-captain), Dalal Ambusaidi (goalkeeper), Sharifa Al Aufi, Fajar Al Amri, Sara Bakhiet, Khadija Al Riyami, Nahla Abdulaal, Aysal Waheed, Jacqueline LaBonte, Laila Langrish, Ira Yada, Sabina Laderach, and Aya Al Mahrouqi. Head coach: Scott Labonte, Assistant coach: Ahmed Al Lawati, Team manager: Sharifa Al Aufi, Development manager Saud Al Aufi.

2023 AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS



SA finish third after triumph in shootout

ABIDJAN: South Africa took third place at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) after beating DR Congo 6-5 on penalties to secure their best finish at the tournament in 24 years on Saturday.

Bafana Bafana captain Ronwen Williams was the key man again, as the quarter-final hero saved two spot-kicks.

First, DR Congo captain Chancel Mbemba had the chance to win it, only for Williams to block, before Meshack Elia's penalty was also saved.

The game, which ended goalless, went straight to penalties after 90 minutes.

After losing their semi-final to Nigeria on spot-kicks, South Africa became the first team to play three straight AFCON shootouts after Williams had saved four penalties in the quarter-final win against Cape Verde.

In Abidjan's Felix Houphouet-Boigny stadium, the goalkeeper again proved the central figure after midfielder Teboho Mokoe-na, a primary factor in South Africa's superb run in Ivory Coast, hit the post with the first penalty.

Shortly after the skipper secured South Africa's success, Belgian coach Hugo Broos, 71, was given the bumps after adding a third-place 'bronze' to the 'gold' he secured with Cameroon's 2017 triumph.

After losing their semi-final to Nigeria on penalties, South Africa became the first team to play three straight AFCON shootouts after Williams had saved four penalties in the quarter-final win against Cape Verde.

"I said after the Nigeria match that I was proud of this team, and I think today people can see why I say I am proud of this team," said Broos.

"We were not fresh but when you see the mentality in that group, it is impressive," he added.

Bafana Bafana last stood on the podium in 2000, when beating Tunisia on penalties, while DR Congo were trying to equal their best tournament since 1998, which was when South Africa last contested a Nations Cup final, two years after their sole title.

"We needed to be more clinical and we lost the game because of that," said DR Congo defender Dylan Batubinsika. - Agencies

FISH CATCH IN OMAN
The total quantity of fish landed by artisanal fishing in the Sultanate of Oman till the end of November 2023 stood at 648,148 tonnes, reaching a value of OMR387,453,000, up by 9.6 per cent, compared to the same period in 2022, when its total quantity was 591,421 tonnes. **>B2**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER
The MSX index closed at 4,562.93 points, up by 0.36 per cent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.00 per cent at 440.40 points. Al Batinah Power, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while Al Madina Investments, down 8.00 per cent, was the top loser.

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund delivers remarkable performance in 2023

The fund maintained its track record of posting attractive returns during 2023 with out-performance of 23 per cent over the index

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat Oryx Fund registered industry leading gains of 29.2 per cent during 2023 as against its benchmark S&P GCC Composite index, which posted a return of 6.2 per cent. Accordingly, the fund maintained its track record of posting attractive returns during 2023 with outperformance of 23 per cent over the index. The fund achieved this stellar performance despite challenging market conditions prevailing throughout 2023 for a number of factors, including a sharp increase in interest rates and geopolitical issues. The strong performance of the fund made it the Top Performing GCC Equity



fund among the GCC equity funds in Oman for the year 2023. In addition to delivering robust capital appreciation, the Fund also rewarded investors with consistent cash dividends. During 2023, the Fund paid dividend of 68 baisas per unit which is higher than

the dividend of 66 baisas per unit paid in 2022. Bank Muscat Oryx Fund primarily invests in stock markets in the GCC region and has a consistent and proven track record of generating attractive returns for 29 years. The Fund is one of the largest

funds in the GCC region within its category and it is regulated by the Capital Market Authority as per the applicable laws and regulations in Oman. The Fund clearly stands out as an attractive investment choice for prospective investors with a medium to long term view.

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund's performance track record

Period	Bank Muscat Oryx Fund	S&P GCC Composite Index	Outperformance
2023	29.2%	6.2%	23.0%w
Past 3 Years	22.6% p.a.	9.0% p.a.	13.6% p.a.
Past 10 Years	11.1% p.a.	2.2% p.a.	8.9% p.a.

Note: Return over 1-year period is annualised
Performance as on December 31, 2023
Data source: Bloomberg and Bank Muscat

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund offers daily liquidity with no minimum holding period. Investors may choose to sell their investment anytime and receive cash funds in their bank accounts within 3 days. The Fund's Net Asset Value ("NAV") is published on a daily basis on Bank Muscat's website and on Muscat Stock Exchange's website, so that investors can track the value of their investments on a daily basis. Investors can invest and redeem their investments in Bank Muscat Oryx Fund through Bank Muscat's Mobile Banking and Internet Banking platforms. The investors can subscribe for the Fund with a minimum subscription amount of OMR50. Investors may also choose to invest

every month by subscribing to the Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) option through filling in the application form and submitting it to Bank Muscat asset management. Interested investors may contact the relevant team of the Fund through email at assetmanagement@bankmuscat.com. Please refer to the prospectus of Bank Muscat Oryx Fund available on www.bankmuscat.com to understand the Fund's details including key terms and conditions. Investors are also requested to refer to the key risk factors highlighted in the prospectus. It should be noted that the mutual fund returns are subject to market performance and past performance doesn't guarantee future performance.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING



Sohar Aluminium signs MoU with Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team to fund investment building

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sohar Aluminium Company (SA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team to finance the development of an investment building project for the team in the Wilayat of Sohar, North Al Batinah Governorate. The signing ceremony was attended by Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Busaidi, Wali of Sohar, Abdullah bin Ali Al Balushi, Shura Member of Sohar, Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Balushi, Deputy Wali of Sohar and other dignitaries. The agreement was signed by Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Kharusi, General Manager of HR and Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium, and Abdulmunim bin Mohammed Al Murshidi, CEO of Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team. The agreement stipulates financing the construction of a 4-storey residential and commercial building with a total built-up area of approximately 406 sqm based on the approved design, provided that the building is constructed within one year of signing the agreement. This project will play a significant role in boosting and ensuring the sustainability of the activities conducted by the Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team to serve the community in the Wilayat of Sohar. The revenues of this investment building will support the

team to fund its various social and charitable activities that have been managed by the Team and to achieve its objectives. The General Manager of HR and Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium confirmed that funding the construction of this project for the Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team reflects the company's social responsibility and its continuous support to give back to the communities, especially those located within its concession area. He, further, commented that this project is in line with Sohar Aluminium's direction towards developing the community and supporting sustainable projects that thrive in charitable activities, initiatives, and projects. On the other hand, the CEO of Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team stated that this investment building will stand as an asset, which will contribute to supporting the team's different activities and initiatives. He also commended the role of Sohar Aluminium, which has been a partner in funding this remarkable project, marking a testament to the company's ongoing support to the community. Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team was established in 2012 and works under the umbrella of the Social Development Committee in the Wilayat of Sohar. The team is concerned with providing a range of charitable and social services to the community of Sohar.

MEETING

Oman and Bahrain business delegation reviews available investment opportunities

MANAMA: A delegation from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), comprising several Omani businesspeople, met yesterday with Sameer Abdullah Nass, Chairman of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry. During the meeting, the two sides explored means of enhancing cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain. They also reviewed available investment opportunities in both countries. The Chairman of Bahrain's Chamber of Commerce and Industry expressed his keenness to enhance bilateral cooperation and boost trade exchange. On his turn, Eng. Ridha Juma Al Saleh, Member of the OCCI Board of Directors and head of the delegation said that the meeting reflects Omani-Bahraini relations. The meeting was attended by Dr. Juma Ahmed Al Kaabi, Ambassador of Bahrain to Oman. **-ONA**



GENERAL ARAB INSURANCE FEDERATION CONFERENCE

GAIF34 conference to focus on artificial intelligence revolution in Arab insurance industry

Times News Service

MUSCAT: His Highness, Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood Al Said, the Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, will patronise the opening ceremony of the 34th General Arab Insurance Federation (GAIF34) Conference on Monday, February 19. The conference, themed 'Sustainability and inclusivity in the Arab Insurance Industry; How Arab Insurers Leverage the Artificial Intelligence Revolution' will convene with the participation of international, regional, and local stakeholders from the insurance industry. This biennial event is a key regional gathering for insurance industry policymakers, companies, brokers, and reinsurers from the Arab world and beyond. Oman Insurance Association, in collaboration with the Capital Market Authority, currently are



finalising preparations for the launching of this significant conference. The event has garnered widespread interest from a large number of entities and companies in the insurance industry,

with over fifty local, Arab, and international companies providing diverse sponsorships. The conference is scheduled to take place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from February 18 to 21 and will address various topics in line with the theme of the event over three days by eminent panels of industry leaders and subject matter experts along with meticulously moderated plenary sessions. Oman's hosting of this regional conference comes after winning the bid in the previous edition held in Oran, Algeria. The organisation of this conference in Oman is considered an exceptional event, given its large attendance and the high-quality topics presented. The anticipated positive impact includes contributing to national goals, showcasing the country's capabilities, and continuing to host events of this magnitude in the future, enriching economic activity and tourism.

FOUNDER

Jeff Bezos sells roughly \$2 billion of Amazon shares

WASHINGTON: Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos sold around 12 million shares of the online retail and cloud services firm for roughly \$2 billion soon after laying out a plan to sell his shares over the next year. Last week, Amazon said that Bezos would sell up to 50 million shares in the firm. **Conditions** The sale plan, which is subject to certain conditions, was adopted on November 8, 2023, and would be completed by January 31, 2025, according to the company's latest annual report. Bezos, who stepped down as the company's chief executive and took over as executive chairman in 2021, founded Amazon as a bookseller in 1994. He is currently the world's second richest person with a net worth of \$200 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. **-BNA**

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Al Batinah Power, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while Al Madina Investments, down 8.00 per cent, was the top loser



MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,562.93 points, up by 0.36 per cent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.00 per cent at 440.40 points. Al Batinah Power, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while Al Madina Investments, down 8.00 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Al Suwadi Power were the most active in terms of turnover.

A total number of 648 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of OMR2.46 million, with more than 16.11 million shares changing hands. Out of 47 traded securities, 15 advanced, 13 declined, and 19 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net buyers for OMR135,000 while foreign investors were net sellers for OMR127,000, followed by GCC & Arab investors for OMR8,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,292.39 points, up 1.16 per cent. Prices of Oman Arab Bank, Ominvest, Bank Nizwa, Sohar International Bank, Bank Muscat

were up by 9.09 per cent, 2.33 per cent, 1.05 per cent, 0.91 per cent, 0.37 per cent respectively. Prices of Al Madina Investments, Global Financial Investments, Oman United Insurance were down by 8.00 per cent, 1.64 per cent, 1.10 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,424.23 points, down 0.25 per cent. Prices of Oman Packaging were up by 9.71 per cent respectively. Prices of Jazeera Steel Products, Voltamp Energy, Ray-sut Cement, Oman Flour Mills were down by 1.44 per cent, 1.33 per cent, 0.79 per cent, 0.41 per cent respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.02 per cent before closing at 1,627.95 points. Prices of Al Batinah Power, Al Suwadi Power, Muscat Desalination, Barka Water & Power Company, OIFC were up by 10.00 per cent, 8.57 per cent, 5.20 per cent, 4.35 per cent, 3.30 per cent respectively. Prices of Sembcorp Salalah, Phoenix Power, OQ Gas Networks, Al Jazeera Services, Oman Telecom were down by 1.98 per cent, 1.82 per cent, 0.68 per cent, 0.46 per cent, 0.28 per cent respectively. — United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	4,569.83	4,547.80	4,562.93	4,546.61	16.32	0.36
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,303.67	7,208.42	7,292.39	7,208.42	83.97	1.16
Industry Index	5,435.69	5,419.83	5,424.23	5,437.84	-13.61	-0.25
Services Index	1,640.57	1,627.95	1,627.95	1,627.62	0.33	0.02
MSX Shariah Index	440.87	439.89	440.40	440.41	-0.01	0.00
MSX TR INDEX	6,026.06	5,997.01	6,016.96	5,995.44	21.52	0.36
FINANCIAL TR IDX	7,969.64	7,865.71	7,957.33	7,865.71	91.63	1.16
SERVICES TR IDX	1,830.40	1,816.32	1,816.32	1,815.95	0.37	0.02
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	5,806.67	5,789.73	5,794.42	5,808.96	-14.54	-0.25
FIXED INCOME INDEX	992.89	992.89	992.89	990.84	2.05	0.21

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap.....	Up.....	Down.....	Equal.....	Sec. Traded
16,110,878.....	2,461,468.....	648.....	23,809,483,176.....	15.....	13.....	19.....	47.....

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET																
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	3,600	1,584	1	0.440	0.440	0.440	0.440	0.430	0.010	2.326	0.440	0.421	0.440	0.100	294,080,787
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	63,598	5,193	6	0.081	0.083	0.081	0.083	0.082	0.001	1.220	0.083	0.082	0.083	0.100	16,569,755
OM0000003398	SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	2,280,637	253,236	51	0.111	0.112	0.111	0.111	0.110	0.001	0.909	0.111	0.111	0.121	0.100	606,935,624
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	588,160	159,374	21	0.272	0.272	0.270	0.271	0.270	0.001	0.370	0.271	0.271	0.271	0.100	2,034,233,604
OM0000001152	OMAN NATIONAL ENGINEERING & INVESTMENT	50,000	5,750	5	0.115	0.115	0.115	0.115	0.115	0.000	0.000	0.115	0.115	0.125	0.100	17,250,000
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	723	219	2	0.303	0.303	0.303	0.303	0.303	0.000	0.000	0.303	0.302	0.315	0.100	100,254,431
OM0000002549	BANK DHOFAR	25,000	3,750	2	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.000	0.000	0.150	0.000	0.150	0.100	449,452,715
OM0000003000	ALMAHA PETROLEUM PRODUCTS MARKETING	2,320	2,459	3	1.060	1.060	1.060	1.060	1.060	0.000	0.000	1.060	1.060	1.072	0.100	73,140,000
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	11,132	4,620	2	0.415	0.415	0.415	0.415	0.415	0.000	0.000	0.415	0.414	0.415	0.100	98,110,150
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	65,635	21,750	15	0.331	0.332	0.331	0.332	0.332	0.000	0.000	0.332	0.330	0.334	0.100	216,113,484
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	102,300	9,105	3	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.000	0.000	0.089	0.087	0.093	0.100	15,575,000
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	44,574	48,205	21	1.083	1.083	1.078	1.078	1.081	-0.003	-0.278	1.077	1.077	1.084	0.100	808,500,000
OM0000002226	ALJAZEERA SERVICES	13,959	2,992	3	0.214	0.216	0.214	0.215	0.216	-0.001	-0.463	0.215	0.205	0.216	0.100	13,158,919
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	5,280	1,422	2	0.275	0.275	0.269	0.269	0.272	-0.003	-1.103	0.269	0.000	0.274	0.100	26,900,000
OM0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS	19,680	5,354	4	0.277	0.277	0.271	0.273	0.277	-0.004	-1.444	0.273	0.272	0.275	0.100	34,097,143
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO	150,000	9,000	5	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.061	-0.001	-1.639	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.100	12,000,000
Total	16	3,426,598	534,012	146												
Parallel Market																
OM0000004825	ALBATINAH POWER	91,347	3,014	7	0.033	0.033	0.033	0.033	0.030	0.003	10.000	0.033	0.033	0.033	0.100	22,271,285
OM0000001608	OMAN PACKAGING	1,000	226	1	0.226	0.226	0.226	0.226	0.206	0.020	9.709	0.226	0.206	0.226	0.100	7,330,504
OM0000005260	OMAN ARAB BANK	91,382	10,818	17	0.120	0.120	0.115	0.120	0.110	0.010	8.091	0.120	0.112	0.120	0.100	200,329,290
OM0000004833	AL SUWADI POWER	4,001,729	151,234	134	0.037	0.038	0.037	0.038	0.035	0.003	8.571	0.038	0.038	0.038	0.100	27,147,441
OM0000007084	MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION	88,931	7,179	6	0.080	0.081	0.080	0.081	0.077	0.004	5.195	0.081	0.080	0.082	0.100	12,599,582
OM0000003141	BARKA WATER AND POWER	9,864	423	3	0.046	0.048	0.042	0.048	0.046	0.002	4.348	0.048	0.043	0.050	0.100	7,680,000
OM0000008868	THE PEARL REEF	3,985	498	1	0.125	0.125	0.125	0.125	0.120	0.005	4.167	0.125	0.123	0.125	0.100	63,512,943
OM0000008447	OMAN REIT FUND	2,355	198	1	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.083	0.001	1.205	0.084	0.080	0.084	0.100	39,579,656
OM0000004430	BANK NIZWA	79,375	1,573	9	0.095	0.096	0.095	0.096	0.095	0.001	1.053	0.096	0.095	0.095	0.100	214,747,491
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	18,300	1,434	4	0.078	0.079	0.078	0.079	0.079	0.000	0.000	0.079	0.076	0.079	0.100	4,715,000
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	473,372	33,136	24	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.000	0.000	0.070	0.069	0.070	0.100	14,420,000
OM0000002036	MUSCAT THREAD MILLS	520	35	1	0.068	0.068	0.068	0.066	0.066	0.000	0.000	0.068	0.067	0.068	0.100	1,060,795
OM0000002077	AL OMANIYA FINANCIAL SERVICES	1,200	204	1	0.170	0.170	0.170	0.170	0.170	0.000	0.000	0.170	0.170	0.170	0.100	52,304,649
OM0000002200	AHLI BANK	26,473	4,209	4	0.159	0.159	0.159	0.159	0.159	0.000	0.000	0.159	0.157	0.159	0.100	373,595,537
OM0000008710	BARKA DESALINATION	45,000	5,400	4	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.000	0.000	0.120	0.118	0.120	0.100	9,062,640
OM0000008934	ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	21,123	6,660	10	0.319	0.319	0.313	0.315	0.315	0.000	0.000	0.315	0.315	0.317	0.100	342,613,000
OM0000001400	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	200	98	1	0.490	0.490	0.490	0.490	0.492	-0.002	-0.407	0.490	0.000	0.490	0.100	77,175,000
OM0000009072	OQ GAS NETWORKS	582,456	85,687	171	0.148	0.148	0.147	0.147	0.148	-0.001	-0.676	0.147	0.147	0.147	0.100	636,601,716
OM0000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	15,500	1,988	6	0.130	0.130	0.126	0.126	0.127	-0.001	-0.787	0.126	0.126	0.134	0.100	25,200,000
OM0000007910	AMAN REAL ESTATE	100	10	1	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.097	-0.001	-1.031	0.096	0.096	0.097	0.100	19,200,000
OM0000003681	VOLTAMP ENERGY	20,000	2,961	2	0.150	0.150	0.148	0.148	0.150	-0.002	-1.333	0.148	0.148	0.150	0.100	12,047,607
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	3,000	162	2	0.054	0.054	0.054	0.054	0.055	-0.001	-1.818	0.054	0.053	0.060	0.100	78,980,479
OM0000004735	SEMBCORP SALALAH	1712,255	171,949	66	0.101	0.105	0.099	0.099	0.101	-0.002	-1.980	0.099	0.098	0.099	0.100	94,502,623
OM0000001982	AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING	34,066	1,547	7	0.046	0.046	0.045	0.046	0.050	-0.004	-8.000	0.046	0.046	0.047	0.100	3,910,000
Total	24	7,323,474	496,643	483												
NCSI DATA																

Fish catch in Oman rises by 9.6% in November to reach 648,148 tonnes

MUSCAT: The total quantity of fish landed by artisanal fishing in the Sultanate of Oman till the end of November 2023 stood at 648,148 tonnes, reaching a value of OMR387,453,000, up by 9.6 per cent, compared to the same period in 2022, when its total quantity was 591,421 tons, according to the preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The statistics also showed that the quantity of fish landed at the end of November 2023 through commercial fishing reached 46,287 tonnes, while the quantity of fish landed through coastal fishing reached 5,063 tonnes.

As for the same statistics, the highest quantity of fish landed through artisanal fishing was recorded in the Governorate of Al Wusta, which reached 249,666 tonnes, followed by the Governorate of South A'Sharqiyah, which



recorded 197,926 tonnes.

The Governorate of Dhofar recorded a fish landing of 70,364 tonnes, while the Governorates of North Al Batinah North and South Al Batinah South recorded 67,110 tonnes. Fish landings in the Governorate of Musandam reached 35,214 tonnes and Muscat recorded 27,869 tonnes of landed fish.

The NCSI statistics also showed

ber 2023 decreased by 1 per cent, reaching 151,042 tonnes, compared to 152,601 tonnes at the end of November 2022.

The quantity of demersal fish landed by artisanal fishing fell by 7.9 per cent at the end of November 2023, reaching 103,000 tonnes, compared to the end of November 2022, when the quantity reached 111,816 thousand tonnes.

The number of sharks and rays landed by artisanal fishing recorded an increase of 2.9 per cent, reaching 5,786 tonnes at the end of November 2023, compared to



MUST-HAVE TECH UPGRADES FOR YOUR LIFE



Want to simplify your life, boost your productivity and work smarter? Incorporating some of the latest tech developments into your routine may be the answer. According to Authority Hacker, 77% of devices use some sort of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and 50% of consumers are becoming more optimistic about using the technology.

Check out some of the coolest technology upgrades you can make right now:

BOOST YOUR PRODUCTIVITY:

With so many distractions, it can be difficult to stay focused and productive in your personal and professional life. Cue AI to the rescue! The app RescueTime works silently on your computer or mobile device, recording how much time you spend on different programs or websites, and then creating a report providing insights into your productive time and

distractions. If you struggle with organizing your email inbox, try SaneBox. It sorts messages for you and over time, evolves to improve your productivity. Apps like IFTT (If This, Than That) allow you to create automated commands to store files and things you need.

UPGRADE YOUR SMARTPHONE:

Upgrading your smartphone will enhance security features, battery life, performance and the latest 5G network. Samsung just unveiled its latest S24 series and the new lineup is the first to leverage T-Mobile's uplink carrier aggregation. This means customers can get up to 90% faster uplink speeds than the previous Samsung lineup, making things like video uploads nearly twice as fast. The Samsung S24 series introduces Galaxy AI, with easy, real-time live language translations of voice and text, Circle to Search with Google, to help streamline your internet searches, and Generative Edit to

perfect your photos.

SMARTEN YOUR HOME:

From automatic door locks to smart plugs, thermostats and appliances, you can give your home a much-needed tech upgrade. Use smart plugs to control lighting in your home from an app, and a smart door lock with features like remote access and fingerprint ID so you can go key-free.

ENHANCE YOUR NETWORK EXPERIENCE:

The network your phone relies on to access the latest technology may need an upgrade, and now there's a way to test out another wireless provider's network before making the switch. T-Mobile's Network Pass allows you and your family to keep your current wireless provider, phones and phone numbers and try out T-Mobile's network free for three months. You'll get access to T-Mobile's largest, fastest and most awarded 5G network and the abil-

ity to compare your network performance to pick the best wireless provider for you. The best part, it all can be done online via an app, without having to go into a store.

GIVE VISUAL SEARCH A TRY:

Google, Amazon and Pinterest now allow you to use images to search for similar items or products online. You can even use this feature to translate text in different languages.

Ever feel like you're treading water? With so many apps, devices and features designed to streamline tasks and to-dos, adapting the latest tech can help you create a more productive life. -StatePoint

SPORTS

Lopez hails Qatar’s history makers

Spanish head coach was all praise for his players after the hosts retained Asian Cup crown with a 3-1 win over Jordan in the final on Saturday

DOHA: Head coach Marquez Lopez of Spain lauded his Qatar players for their composure and focus in their 3-1 victory over Jordan in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 final on Saturday. The hosts produced a dominant display from start to finish with Akram Afif netting a hat-trick of penalties to seal the victory at a packed Lusail Stadium, a victory which meant back-to-back AFC Asian Cup titles for Qatar. “I’m extremely happy and I congratulate the Qatari people and the players. We are so happy that we won the match. The tension was high. “Maybe it was not beautiful football but everyone remembers the winner and I’m proud of my players and their achievements,” said Lopez. Afif’s hat-trick took his tally to eight, with his performances landing him the Most Valuable Player (MVP) and AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Yili Top Scorer Awards, and Lopez was effusive in his praise of the striker. Qatar became only the fifth nation to win back-to-back AFC Asian Cup titles with Lopez having masterminded the triumph



despite having only taken charge in December. “I have been working in Qatar and I know the players well. It was easy to work with them and they effectively implemented our ideas on the field. “For now, I’m going to go back to work with Al Wakrah (in the Qatar Stars League). I’m not sure what will happen but we will enjoy the moment for now.”

Super Afif named MVP, wins top scorer award After being named the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Most Valuable Player (MVP) Afif said: “I would like to thank all Qataris. Congratulations to the coach and the fans. I can’t really express what



we feel but the coach worked really hard for us. Afif, who also scored from the penalty spot in the 2019 final against Japan, which Qatar won



That gave me a lot of confidence for all three penalties. I think we deserved the win tonight.” The Al Sadd SC star, who also played a prominent role in Qatar’s

triumphant campaign in 2019, opened his 2023 account by scoring twice in the 3-0 Group A win over Lebanon on Matchday One. He then struck the winner in the 1-0 victory over Tajikistan, a result which confirmed Qatar’s knockout stage spot with a match to spare. Afif was on target again in the Round of 16, scoring the winner as Qatar saw off a spirited challenge from Palestine. He was on top of his game yet again in the semi-final against Iran, scoring Qatar’s second with a thunderous effort as the hosts edged to a 3-2 victory. In emulating teammate Almoez Ali in winning both the MVP and Top Scorer awards, Afif took his involvement to 22 AFC Asian Cup goals since the beginning of the last edition (9 goals and 13 assists), constituting 67 per cent involvement in Qatar’s goals in the two tournaments.

Barsham takes Best Goalkeeper honour Qatar’s Meshaal Barsham was named the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Best Goalkeeper after playing a pivotal role in his side lifting the coveted trophy for the second successive time. The custodian, who celebrates his 26th birthday on Wednesday, started six of Qatar’s seven matches with the Maroons defeating Jordan 3-1 in a thrilling final at the Lusail Stadium on Saturday. Barsham, who plays his club football with Al Sadd SC, was rock-solid throughout Qatar’s campaign. He kept three clean sheets out of the seven matches Qatar played - having come on as substitute in the final group match against China. The custodian played a major role in Qatar joining Iran, Japan, Korea Republic and Saudi Arabia in winning back-to-back AFC Asian Cup titles. - www.the-afc.com

AFC ASIAN CUP

Jordan can walk tall despite final heartbreak: Coach

DOHA: The title eluded Jordan but head coach Hussein Ammouta only had words of praise and encouragement for his players after their defeat to Qatar in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 final on Saturday. Having gatecrashed the final with a series of scintillating performances, Jordan could produce only some of the form that had taken them within one match of winning the title as Qatar powered to their second successive title. “There is only great pride in my players as they had a great tournament. They played very well in getting us into the final,” said Ammouta. “However, our performance in the first half (of the final) was a bit of a struggle as our crosses, passes were not accurate. We improved in the second half and drew level but then conceded two penalties. “The penalties made it very difficult but the players tried their best and we have to accept that mistakes will happen in matches.” “We certainly wanted much more but it wasn’t to be but there is so much that the players can take from here. They have opened new horizons and it is crucial that the players build on this.”



Jordan will now turn their focus to the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027, with the action to resume in March. They have some work to do, having collected just a point from their opening two matches with a double header against Pakistan coming up. “We have created a new level and the key thing now is to continue improving the technical and physical aspects. “Players need to train harder, give more in matches. They need to play regularly for their clubs in order to maintain the level we have reached.” - www.the-afc.com

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool beat Burnley, return to summit

LONDON: Liverpool returned to the top of the table as they got back to winning ways against struggling Burnley (3-1) in front of a club record league crowd at Anfield on Saturday. Jurgen Klopp’s side were looking to respond after last weekend’s defeat by Arsenal, and having fallen a point behind Manchester City. They took the lead through Diogo Jota’s header from a corner which Burnley keeper James Trafford failed to claim. The Claret, who have been in the relegation zone for most of the season, levelled before half-time through Dara O’Shea’s superb header before Luis Diaz restored the lead in the 52nd minute. Burnley had several chances to equalise before Darwin Nunez’s header from Harvey Elliott’s cross sealed the points. Liverpool were without first-choice keeper Alisson because of illness but stand-in Caoimhin Kelleher made a fine save to deny David Datro Fofana an equaliser when the score was 2-1. The Reds, watched by a crowd of 59,896, had briefly been replaced at the top of the table after City’s 2-0 win over Everton in the early kick-off. But Liverpool reclaimed their two-point advantage - albeit having played one game more than their nearest rivals - while Burnley remain 19th.



Haaland double sinks Everton Erling Haaland scored his first goals since November to help

Manchester City see off a determined Everton side 2-0 on Saturday. The Norwegian has had to wait



to find the net since his return from the foot injury that sidelined him for most of December and January, but he made up for lost time here. His first goal was a brilliant first-time finish that gave his side a crucial breakthrough in the second half, and he made sure of the three points when he ran clear to slot past Jordan Pickford late on. This was their 10th successive win in all competitions, including the Fifa Club World Cup and FA Cup, and their sixth in a row in the Premier League. **Other results:** Fulham 3 Bournemouth 1, Luton 1 Sheffield United 3, Tottenham 2 Brighton 1, Wolves 0 Brentford 2, Nottingham Forest 2 Newcastle United 3. - Agencies

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Bayer Leverkusen stun Bayern Munich

MUNICH: Bayer Leverkusen struck a huge blow in the Bundesliga title race with an emphatic 3-0 victory over Bayern Munich which sent them five points clear on Saturday. Xabi Alonso’s side took the lead in the first half when Josip Stanisic finished clinically at the back post. The BayArena erupted again shortly after the break when Alex Grimaldo fired in from a tight angle. Jeremie Frimpong put the gloss on the result in injury time when goalkeeper Manuel Neuer went up for a corner. Second-placed Bayern, the defending champions having won the past 11 Bundesliga titles, managed just a solitary shot on target as they were blown away. Leverkusen’s victory means they are now unbeaten in 31 matches in all competitions this



season (won 27, drawn four). Leverkusen have never won the Bundesliga title but were runners-up in 1996-97, 1998-99, 1999-2000, 2001-02 and 2010-11. Their last major domestic trophy was 31 years ago - the 1993 German Cup - yet in such a piv-

otal encounter there was no hint that history weighed on their shoulders. **Other results:** Union Berlin 1 Wolfsburg 0, Borussia Monchengladbach 0 Darmstadt 0, Frankfurt 1 VFL Bochum 1, Augsburg 2 RB Leipzig 2, Werder Bremen 1 Heidenheim 2. - Agencies

SPANISH LA LIGA

Bellingham scores twice as Real Madrid hammer Girona 4-0

MADRID: Jude Bellingham scored twice before going off injured as leaders Real Madrid thumped title challengers Girona 4-0 to go five points clear in La Liga. A sensational long-range drive from Vinicius Jr gave Madrid an early lead at the Bernabeu. Bellingham then scored his first of the game from a sublime Vinicius pass before converting his 20th of the season after half-time. Rodrygo made it 4-0, before Joselu struck the post with a late penalty. Bellingham has now scored more La Liga goals for Real Madrid than any other midfielder in a single season this century - but the England international’s night ended on a sour note as he was forced



off with an ankle injury. He fell to the ground after colliding with Pablo Torre and was treated on the pitch for several minutes before gingerly getting to his feet. Determined to continue, the 20-year-old struck his second of the game after Paulo Gazzaniga had saved Vinicius’ initial effort,

but he was too hurt to carry on and was replaced by Brahim Diaz moments later. He was pictured on the Madrid bench with an ice pack strapped to his foot, but manager Carlo Ancelotti says the injury is nothing more than a sprained ankle and is “hopeful” Bellingham will recover in time for Tuesday’s trip to RB Leipzig in the Champions League. The victory extends Madrid’s unbeaten La Liga run to 18 matches - their longest stretch without defeat since 2021. Girona, meanwhile, remain in the top four despite slipping to just their second league defeat. **Other results:** Alaves 1 Villarreal 1, Real Sociedad 0 Osasuna 1, Las Palmas 2 Valencia 0. - Agencies

Dubai achieves its best ever annual tourism performance in 2023

Guided by its visionary leadership, Dubai further consolidates its status as one of the top three global cities for business and leisure in line with the Dubai Economic Agenda D33

DUBAI: Dubai welcomed more tourists than ever before in 2023, attracting 17.15 million international overnight visitors over the course of the year, according to the latest data published by Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET). Representing a 19.4% YoY growth over the 14.36 million tourist arrivals in 2022, last year's figure also exceeded the previous record of 16.73 million visitors registered in 2019.

The growth aligns with the goals of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 launched just over a year ago by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to further consolidate Dubai's position as one of the top three global cities for business and leisure, and the best city to visit, live and work in.

His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai Crown Prince and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai, said: "The best ever performance of Dubai's tourism sector in 2023 is a testament to the foresight of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. His Highness's commitment to fostering resilience, excellence and innovation across economic sectors and encouraging meaningful public-private partnerships that deliver value has had a transformative impact on tourism development in the emirate. Dubai's ability to constantly generate diverse and refreshingly novel travel and tourism experiences catering to a wide range of visitors has been a key factor behind this exceptional performance. With several indicators outperforming pre-pandemic levels, this year's results mark Dubai out as a vibrant focal point of growth in the global tourism landscape."

Celebrating a record-breaking year in 2023, Dubai further bolstered its ranking as the No.1 global destination for an unprecedented third successive year in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2024, the first city to achieve this unique accolade. The



milestones are testament to the emirate's vibrant and diverse offerings, supported by world-class infrastructure, exceptional service at all touchpoints, and continuous collaboration between the government and private sectors. The city caters to travellers of all budgets and preferences, and a year-round calendar of business, leisure and sporting events continues to attract international visitors.

The tourism sector's performance closely parallels the emirate's 3.3% GDP growth in the first nine months of 2023, further highlighting the symbiotic relationship between tourism and economic prosperity. Accommodation and food services activities witnessed a remarkable 11.1% growth, solidifying Dubai's position as a global tourism leader.

Dubai's international visitor performance has outshone global tourism trends, with the latest data from the UN World Tourism Organisation revealing that, overall, international tourism reached 88% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2023. The only region to overcome pre-pandemic levels with 22% visitation growth above 2019, the Middle East led global recovery in relative terms.

Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General of Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), said: "The significant rebound of Dubai's tourism sector, outstripping global recovery rates, stands as a testament to the vision and leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. This surge not only commemorates the inaugural year of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 but also highlights the efficacy of a strategy that is a decade in the making, exemplifying resilience and adaptability as central to our economic impetus."

Under the oversight of this decisive leadership and a proven public-private partnership model, Dubai has sustained robust growth, fostering confidence within local and global industries, play-

ers and enablers.

Our success stems from a diversified portfolio, with significant gains in leisure, new emerging segments, and the MICE sector as a whole, which have been further catalysed by liberal visa policies and dynamic private sector ambition. These strides reinforce Dubai's status as a premier destination for living, visiting, and conducting business.

With the Dubai Economic Agenda D33's strategy serving as our economic compass for the next ten years, we are committed to strengthening the tourism sector, enhancing our assets and infrastructure, and stimulating broader economic growth. This comprehensive approach ensures tourism thrives in tandem with our goals of talent acquisition, business acceleration and government innovation, to position Dubai as the epicentre for all those eyeing their next phase of growth and expansion."

Key regions maintain momentum

The strong tourism performance in 2023 saw Dubai maintain its position as a first-choice travel destination for visitors both from key traditional and emerging markets. From a regional perspective, the GCC and MENA delivered a combined 28% of the share, demonstrating Dubai's allure as a trusted and favoured destination for visitors from neighbouring markets. Western Europe and South Asia accounted for 19% and 18% of arrivals respectively, while CIS/Eastern Europe recorded a 13% share. The North Asia and South-East Asia region accounted for 9% of arrivals, the Americas contributed 7%, Africa 4% and Australasia 2%.

Hotels outperform pre-pandemic levels across all metrics

Dubai's hospitality sector, which is integral to the emirate's destination promise and overall growth of the tourism industry, continued to perform strongly, surpassing pre-pandemic levels across all hospitality metrics - Occupancy, Occupied Room Nights, Guests' Length

of Stay, Average Daily Rate (ADR), and Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR).

Occupancy remains among the highest in world

Average occupancy for the hotel sector in 2023 stood at 77.4%, among the world's highest, increasing from 72.9% in 2022 and exceeding the 75.3% average occupancy in 2019. The high occupancy level is an exceptional achievement, given an overall 19% increase in room supply in 2023 compared to 2019.

Milestone 150,000 room keys achieved

Dubai's hotel inventory at the end of December 2023 comprised 150,291 rooms at 821 establishments, compared to 146,496 rooms available at the end of December 2022 across 804 establishments and 126,120 rooms available at the end of December 2019 across 741 establishments. Last year's milestone achievement reflects the growth and success in the hospitality industry.

Occupied room nights surge to record high

In 2023, occupied room nights soared to a record high of 41.70 million, marking a 11% increase compared to 2022 (37.43 million). This growth also represents a substantial 30% rise from the pre-pandemic figures of 2019, which saw 32.11 million occupied room nights.

Reflecting the commitment of the city and hospitality sector to offer competitive pricing, the 2023 ADR of AED536 matched the ADR in 2022. The hotel sector's robust performance is also evident in its RevPAR growth - an increase of 6% compared to 2022 (AED415 vs. AED391) and a growth of 33% over the pre-pandemic period of 2019 (RevPAR of AED312). Guests' Length of Stay was 3.8 nights in 2023, a 10% increase from 3.4 nights in 2019.

Issam Kazim, CEO of the Dubai Corporation for Tourism and



Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), said: "As Dubai continues its exponential growth in alignment with the D33 Agenda set forth by our forward-thinking leadership, we remain committed to further elevating our standards and to advancing with innovative and distinctive world-class infrastructure, experiences and attractions."

The extensive range of offerings and Dubai's reputation as a secure, inclusive and accessible destination have been consistently recognised across multiple global indices, culminating in the city being crowned the No.1 global destination for an unprecedented third year in a row in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2024.

Our partners have played a crucial role in achieving this top ranking through their contributions to Dubai's tourism expansion and the industry's rapid resurgence, especially with their active involvement in our global campaigns and marketing endeavours. The sustained success will further enhance visitors' enduring trust, confidence and affinity for Dubai, as it accelerates towards the goal of becoming the best city to visit, live and work in, and ultimately converting visitors into long-term residents.

We are strategically harnessing the significant momentum generated during a highly successful 2023 to drive growth across all segments of tourism. As we look forward to welcoming more visitors in 2024, the unwavering support of our public and private sector partners will be pivotal in

enhancing our capacity to showcase our unparalleled offerings tailored to cater to the diverse preferences and budgets of international travellers."

Global liveability hub

In addition to securing the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards, Dubai also garnered recognition across various fronts, offering residents and visitors a unique blend of opportunities, safety, and world-class amenities in a vibrant and dynamic setting.

In a report by financial services provider Remitly, Dubai was hailed as the No.1 city in the world to relocate to in 2023, showcasing its allure as a preferred destination for individuals seeking new opportunities and a high quality of life. Furthermore, property consultancy Savills identified Dubai as the best city in the world for remote workers, emphasising its conducive environment for professionals embracing the virtual working lifestyle.

Dubai's appeal as a thriving global hub was further highlighted by Euromonitor International's Top 100 City Destinations Index 2023, which named Dubai the world's No.2 city destination, highlighting its popularity among international travellers. The city's recognition as one of the top 10 cities in the Global Power City Index, as reported by the Mori Memorial Foundation's Institute for Urban Strategies in Japan, further reinforces its stature as a key player on the global stage.

PRESTIGIOUS

ICAI Muscat Chapter wins Best Overseas Chapter award

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) Muscat Chapter (Under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS)) has bagged the prestigious 'Best Chapter Overseas Award' for the year 2023, for the 9th consecutive term. The Chapter has won second prize in Category II among 48 overseas chapters of ICAI across the globe.

The award ceremony was conducted along with the 74th Annual event of ICAI on 8 February 2024 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. CA. Jim Joseph Itty, Chairperson, ICAI Muscat Chapter and CA. Gaurav Kapoor, Vice Chairperson along with Managing Committee members, received the award from Om Birla, Hon'ble Speaker of the Lok Sabha in the presence of CA. Aniket Sunil Talati, President of ICAI and CA. Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, Vice President of ICAI.

On the occasion, CA Jim Joseph Itty, Chairperson said, "The year 2023 will be written in golden letters in the history of ICAI Muscat



chapter. We were able to complete the first batch of the Omani CFO Mentoring program in Muscat and Salalah and we are proceeding with a batch in Sohar. This initiative increased the visibility of ICAI as a brand and we were able to join hands with the local

accounting community to develop aspiring Omani CFOs. We are also delighted to support the Oman India Investment Forum conducted in association with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Embassy of India during this year. Further

ICAI has expressed their interest in supporting OCCI to develop a curriculum for Omani Chartered Accountancy students, which will strengthen the cooperation between two friendly nations."

He added, "It is a great honour to receive this prestigious recogni-

tion on behalf of the members of the Muscat Chapter and we will continue our efforts to reach newer heights in future under the sponsorship of CBFS, which is a ceaseless source of support to the chapter."

Congratulating the chapter Dr. Zahran Al Salti, Dean, CBFS said

"This is also a proud moment for CBFS. ICAI is one of the most active professional Chapters under our sponsorship. We appreciate the efforts of the chapter managing committee that enabled the chapter to win this prestigious award for the 9th year."

ROUND-UP

Liva Insurance launches ambitious rewards programme for customers

The launch event marked a significant milestone in Liva’s dedication to offering unique and high-value rewards to its customers, with the programme’s value exceeding OMR800

MUSCAT: Liva Insurance, the leader in innovative insurance solutions, announced the launch of the Liva Rewards Programme, an ambitious initiative designed to redefine the insurance customer experience.

Hosted at the Novotel Muscat, the launch event marked a significant milestone in Liva’s dedication to offering unique and high-value rewards to its customers, with the programme’s value exceeding OMR800.

Liva Insurance’s groundbreaking Rewards Programme is setting new standards in the insurance industry by significantly enhancing the role and value that insurance plays in the lives of its customers. Through strategic and exclusive partnerships with over 25 different retailers, service providers, and health-care facilities, Liva Insurance is offering its customers an unparalleled opportunity to enjoy valuable discounts and special offers that extend well beyond the traditional scope of insurance benefits.

Upon purchasing any of Liva Insurance’s wide-ranging products and services (including group medical, travel, motor, home...etc) customers will receive a digital loyalty card, which they can easily display on their smartphones or other digital devices. This digital card is their passport to accessing exclusive discounts across the network of participating partners.



“We are thrilled to introduce the Liva Rewards Programme, a testament to our commitment to being a partner in our customers’ lives, giving value beyond insurance. Through our exclusive partnerships across a wide spectrum of services and retailers, we’re proud to offer a program that enhances the quality of life for our customers, offering significant discounts and unique offers directly tied to their lifestyles.

“At Liva Insurance, we believe that insurance should do more than protect—it should propel our customers towards a richer, more

rewarding life,” Said Hanaa Al Hinai, CEO of Liva Insurance.

Bader Al Lawati, Head of Brand and Communications also commented: “The essence of the Liva Rewards Programme is to forge a deeper connection with our customers, transforming every insurance policy into a key that unlocks a spectrum of extraordinary benefits. As we continue to grow this programme, the value and the list of partners will continue to grow, giving our customers an invaluable tool to enrich their everyday lives.”

The Liva Rewards Programme is set to transform customer engagement by offering unmatched benefits, special deals, and personalised experiences. This initiative propels Liva towards its objectives of enriching the customer experience and establishing itself as a frontrunner in insurance innovation. As the region’s premier multi-line insurer, Liva continues to offer a comprehensive suite of digitally enabled, customisable solutions across all insurance lines, backed by exceptional customer service.

SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

Mark & Save officially opens its 3rd outlet at Al Khoud



MUSCAT: Expanding horizons to offer a seamless shopping experience! Mark & Save proudly unveils its 9th outlet in the GCC at Al Khoud, Muscat, Oman.

Mark & Save, the leading retail entity under Western International Group, officially opened its latest outlet, 9th in the GCC and 3rd in the Sultanate of Oman, aimed at offering the highest quality products directly from the factory to consumers at the best prices for better savings. The inaugural ceremony was graced by the esteemed presence of Basheer K.P., Chairman

of Western International Group; Muhammed bin Ahmed bin Sayeed Salmani, Divan Office; Navas K.P.; Fayis Basheer K.P.; Naufal K.P.; Haris K.P.; Hakeem K.P.; Shahnas Basheer, Directors of the group; Sayyid Khalid; Fasil; and Sahad, Ajnas, Sudheep, Nafees; and among the other guests were Ahmed Ali Al Mahroqi, Ali Salah Al Bhalashi, Said Ali Al Hakamani, and Muhammed Maskari.

At Mark & Save, we believe that everyone deserves the best, and we want to deliver our consumers the finest at prices they’ll love. The discount centre, with

products at prices, starting from 100 baisa to OMR3, is committed to bringing quality, reasonably priced products, guaranteeing excellent customer service, and catering to the needs of the community.

The brand has set its goal to open 500 value stores in the next 10 years, covering various categories including department stores, grocery stores, electronics, health, beauty, home appliances, and more. The brand is looking forward to expanding its impeccable service to meet the needs of the masses.

MAXIMUM SATISFACTION

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When it comes to your family’s safety on every journey, Ford

Ford Genuine Parts tick all the boxes as they are manufactured according to strict specifications and have undergone extensive laboratory and on-road testing

Genuine Parts tick all the boxes as they are manufactured according to strict specifications and have undergone extensive laboratory and on-road testing. Ford Genuine Parts offer immense confidence on every journey eliminating unnecessary hassles and worries.

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11 - 17 February



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- A romantic in room turn down
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From OMR 170++ per couple per night

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- Romantic dinner for two at Aangan by Rohit Ghai or Sultanah or a dining credit of OMR 60 per couple to spend in any dining venue
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