



ASYAD GROUP LAUNCHES ITS CONTAINER TERMINAL IN DUQM

Asyad Group kicked off operations at Asyad Container Terminal – Duqm that will be managed and operated by the group's ports and terminals arm, Asyad Ports. The latest addition to Asyad's asset lineup follows the Omani logistics giant's robust expansion plans that aim to offer more integrated logistics solutions, anticipate and proactively respond to new trends in global trade and handling. **>B1**



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Muscat secures top spot in Asia's Quality of Life Index mid-year 2023



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Muscat, the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman, has once again affirmed its status as one of the world's premier cities, as evidenced by the latest rankings from the prominent crowd-sourced global database, Numbeo.

In the Quality of Life Index for the 2023 mid-year, Numbeo has positioned Muscat as the best city in Asia and 17th globally out of 195 cities assessed. The Quality of Life Index is meticulously crafted, incorporating factors such as cost of living, purchasing power, housing affordability, pollution (including air and water), crime rates, health system quality, and commute times, among other statistics.

Muscat achieved an impressive score of 176.80 on the Quality of Life Index, with The Hague, Netherlands, claiming the top spot worldwide with a score of 215.7.

Abu Dhabi, UAE (173), secured the 25th position globally, standing as the second-best city in Asia, followed closely by Dubai at 26th

overall (172.7), Tokyo (166.5, 35th overall), and Doha (158.5, 72nd overall).

The rankings placed Rotterdam in the Netherlands and Luxembourg as second and third overall, with scores of 202.5 and 200.5 points, respectively. Vienna, Austria, claimed the fourth spot (197.7), and Valencia, Spain, rounded off the top-five with a score of 196.3.

Oman demonstrated strength in various indices, notably scoring 82.5 in purchasing power, 79.9

in the Safety Index, and 60.2 in the Health Care Index. The Cost of Living Index was rated at 50.4 points, while the Traffic Commute Time index stood at 20.5. The Pollution Index was measured at 35.0, and the Climate Index was rated at 67.2.

This comprehensive index is structured to offer a comparative measure, where a higher index value indicates a superior quality of life. Numbeo's survey captures the perceptions and experiences of website visitors, encompassing

various aspects of quality of life.

The Quality of Life Index, reflecting an estimation of overall quality of life, utilises an empirical formula considering factors such as Purchasing Power Index (higher is better), Safety Index (higher is better), Climate Index (higher is better), Pollution Index (lower is better), House Price to Income Ratio (lower is better), Cost of Living Index (lower is better), Health Care Index (higher is better), and Traffic Commute Time Index (lower is better).

OQ GROUP INVESTS OMR800MN IN MUSANDAM ENERGY PROJECTS

The Musandam Gas Processing Plant, located in Concession Area 8 and owned by OQ, plays a pivotal role in the region's energy infrastructure



KHASAB: OQ, the global integrated energy group, is making significant strides in Musandam Governorate with three major energy sector projects valued at approximately OMR800 million.

These projects include the Musandam Gas Plant, the management of offshore fields in Concession Area 8 and the Musandam Power Plant.

The Musandam Gas Processing Plant, located in Concession Area 8 and owned by OQ, plays a pivotal role in the region's energy infrastructure. Utilising gas for power generation, it supports the energy needs of the Governorate.

Additionally, OQ efficiently operates the offshore fields in Concession Area 8, owned by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. Since initiating the oil and gas production operations in January 2019, OQ has focused on enhancing operational efficiency, increas-

ing production and reducing operational costs. The area includes the Bukha and West Bukha fields, essential for supplying the Musandam Power Plant.

The plant provides vital electricity to the governorate with a production capacity of about 120 megawatts per hour.

Parallel to these endeavours, OQ, in collaboration with the Office of the Governor of Musandam, is executing a number of social investment projects across the governorate's wilayats. Valued at around OMR4 million, these initiatives focus on urban, environmental and tourism aspects, reflecting OQ's commitment to social responsibility and serving local communities.

The projects being implemented, in collaboration with various governmental entities, include a diverse array of significant devel-

4mn
Omani rials have been allocated for urban, environment and tourism aspects, reflecting OQ's commitment to CSR

opments. These include the Daba Archaeological Centre, developed in partnership with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism; the Daba Waterfront Project; the development of Telegraph Island; the Basah Beach project, undertaken with the Omran Group; the enhancement of Madha Park; the Bukha Waterfront development; and the establishment of the Mu-

sandam Science and Innovation Centre. This latter project is a collaborative effort involving the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and a group of oil and gas companies operating in Oman, along with Oman Sail.

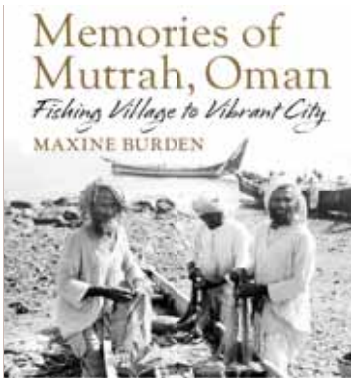
These initiatives effectively enhance the region's natural charm while bolstering the services sector and the tourism industry.

Their design focuses on harmoniously blending aesthetic improvements with practical benefits, while placing a strong emphasis on the sustainable impact of the completed and current projects. OQ Group is committed to building strong relationships with stakeholders and creating new employment opportunities for growth and partnerships. **-ONA**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN From a fishing village to a vibrant city

1 Mutrah, a melting pot where people of all nationalities and cultures blend, has been brought to life in a new book: 'Memories of Mutrah Oman, Fishing Village to Vibrant City', by Maxine Burden, an Australian citizen born in Tasmania. **>A2**



OMAN Saudi delegation to hold talks on tourism

2 The branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate will host a government and commercial delegation from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Sunday. **>A2**

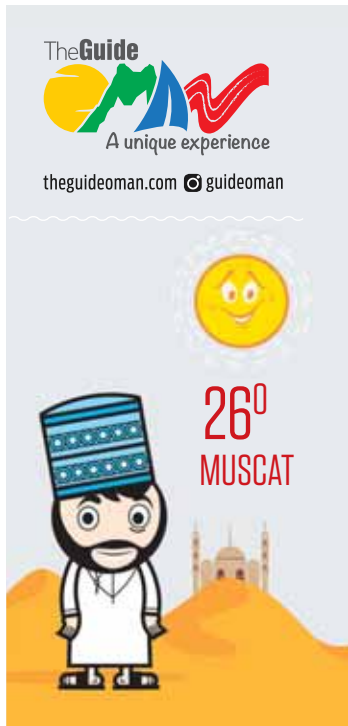
SPORTS Oman look to bounce back with victory

3 Oman's talented attacking midfielder Salaah Al Yahyai is determined to power his side to a win against Thailand when the two teams meet in Doha on Sunday. **>A8**



**Nearly 25,000
Palestinians killed
in Gaza Strip**

A7



JWRC

Oman's Al Rawahi set to break new frontiers

Times News Service

MUSCAT: It is a platform that has served as a springboard of success for rallying greats like world champions Sebastien Loeb and Sébastien Ogier and other stars like Dani Sordo, Elfyn Evans, Craig Breen and Thierry Neuville.

The FIA Junior World Rally Championship (WRC), also known as JWRC, is an international rallying competition restricted to drivers under 29 years old.

Oman will have its first-ever driver compete in the global competition as the talented Abdullah Al Rawahi and his co-driver Ata Al-Hmoud of Jordan have entered the fray for the 2024 season.



Al Rawahi made history when he became the first Omani to claim the 2023 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) title, jointly sharing with multiple MERC winner Nasser Al Attiyah of Qatar. The title was shared af-

ter both the drivers were tied for points in a dead heat for the first ever time in the MERC.

On Friday, FIA, the world motor sports governing body, revealed the line-up for the 2024 Junior WRC season.

This upcoming season will have the largest FIA Junior WRC line-up in two decades with an astonishing 19 crews registered for the 2024 season-opening Rally Sweden.

The mega entry list includes crews from across five continents representing 21 different nationalities, all of whom will pilot identical Ford Fiesta Rally3 Evos exclusively equipped with Pirelli tyres and Wolf Lubricants. Of the 19-strong field, a whopping 13 are newcomers, including Oman's Al Rawahi.

Action begins next month on the snow and ice of Sweden (February 15-18) before the Tarmac twists of the Croatia Rally (April 18-21). Gravel fixtures in Italy

(May 30-June 2), Finland (August 1-4) and Greece (September 5-8) round out the season.

In his exclusive remarks to *Times of Oman*, Al Rawahi said: "We are very excited for this new challenge. We are waiting to win the Middle East Rally Championship and then take a step up. The 2024 JWRC has the highest entries so far. So it would be very competitive."

"It will be a great experience to compete in JWRC against such a large field of experienced and rookie drivers. In MERC, it was great to compete with legend Nasser Al Attiyah. But here in JWRC, I will be up against 19 drivers, so I'm looking forward to gaining a lot of experience." **>A2**

PRAYER
TIMINGS

Dhuhr 12:23pm
Asr 3:29pm
Maghrib 5:50pm
Isha 7:04pm
Fajr (Tomorrow) 5:32am

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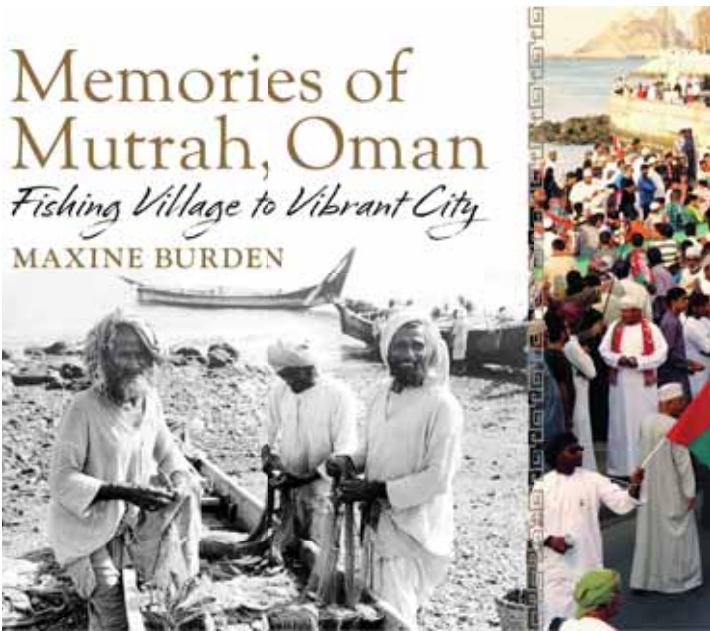
Memories of Mutrah: From a fishing village to a vibrant city

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Mutrah, a melting pot where people of all nationalities and cultures blend, has been brought to life in a new book: ‘Memories of Mutrah Oman, Fishing Village to Vibrant City.’

Maxine Burden, an Australian citizen born in Tasmania, had the opportunity to travel and spend over ten years in the Sultanate of Oman.

This new book reveals further secrets, culture and adventures of Mutrah Souq. The book, which documents the rich heritage, unique characters and cherished memories of the people of Mutrah Souq, is available in two versions. The print version is rich with photographs as well as the stories of the merchants, whilst the e-book contains only the stories of merchants and very few photographs.



Overview

‘Memories of Mutrah, Oman: Fishing Village to Vibrant City’ brings forth the fishing background of the villages of Sur on the East Coast of Oman, and Mutrah. Sur is where the trading ships from India would sail during the monsoon season before sailing onto Zanzibar on the East Coast of Africa. Fishing was always the lifeline for local inhabitants along the coast of Oman. Today fishing

is still a main export as freezer loads are driven daily from villages to Dubai to sell. A wadi forms the main alleyway of the market area known as Mutrah Souq. Dating as far back as 600 years the local inhabitants have gathered here to exchange news, reflect on the health of their families, and purchase food and living requirements from this traditional marketplace. The first shops were built in the souq around 300 years ago. They were small with shelves for displaying goods and had no roof.

The souq was a functional souq back then. Shops sold rat traps, brushes, ropes, foodstuffs, and fish along with traditional Omani fabrics from India. Today, Mutrah is a vibrant city, still catering to the local population as it has over the centuries while retaining the feel of a small fishing village. Mutrah is also a popular tourist destination offering the wonders of a traditional souq along with a new fish and vegetable market complex, featuring restaurants and cafés. The Mutrah Fort has undergone

renovations allowing visitors to walk up the many steps and take in the scenic view over the port and Mutrah city.

Description

‘Memories of Mutrah, Oman: Fishing Village to Vibrant City’ relates to the memories of the merchants of Mutrah souq, their family life, and history as passed down from generation to generation. They tell of the good and the not-so-good times.

Mutrah was a happy, lively place where the local inhabitants would gather to purchase food and living requirements from this 600-year-old traditional marketplace. Their purchases were made from large wheelbarrows with a tray, these would move around to different locations each day. The lifeline for the small villages was fishing and trading dates.

Many families from the coastal towns of Sur and Mutrah were traders, trading with the monsoons from India to Sur and onwards to Zanzibar in East Africa. Fathers would take their young sons along teaching them the maritime and navigation trade. Two of these sons became some of Oman’s top Entrepreneurs and visionaries, each heading a business empire.

Today, Mutrah is a vibrant city still providing for the people as it has over the centuries while re-

taining the feel of a small fishing village with an active fish market and a very popular souq. On the arrival of the late Sultan Qaboos in Muscat in 1970, the development plans of his father were put forward, making Muscat the capital.

He also set out plans for his ‘Muscat Capital Area’ consisting of joining Mutrah and the main port area to Muscat via a corniche, built with cement imported from India.

Souq

Port Sultan Qaboos is a tourism port, welcoming the many cruise ships that visit Oman during the main tourist season from October to March. Mutrah Souq sells original artifacts of silver jewelry, fabrics, khanjars (ceremonial swords), frankincense, perfumes, and basic kitchenware. Original Omani designs in silver and gold still exist and feature an Omani imprint, proving their authenticity.

The Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimour brought the whole country into the twenty-first century by providing healthcare, education, housing, and infrastructure for all. As a center of trade, Mutrah has always been a melting pot of nationalities and cultures, making this city unique.

citizen, born in Tasmania, who’s had the opportunity to travel and spend over ten years in the Sultanate of Oman. Travel has always been an enjoyable part of her life and working in the travel industry in Western Australia as a Master Cruise Specialist, she’s been able to fulfill a dream of traveling and guiding clients to various countries of the world. Maxine has been in print previously with Asian magazines requiring short stories about Australia.

In December 2014 her first book on Mutrah, Oman, ‘Throw Down the Anchor: The Story of Mutrah Souq,’ was released. The book was written for the Centre for Omani Dress while Maxine was a volunteer with this group in Muscat. Today Maxine resides in Tasmania on a lifestyle property.

It is here that she wrote her second book. She undertakes volunteer work with the Burnie City Council informing and assisting cruise ship visitors who visit throughout the season from October to April. As a tour guide, Maxine also guides coach tours from visiting cruise ships to various parts of the Northwest Coast of Tasmania. She also has plans to author more books about her travels throughout the world over the last twenty years.

This new book will be available through: <https://store.bookbabe.com/book/memories-of-mutrah-oman>

Saudi delegation to hold talks on desert tourism

The delegation will be headed by the First Deputy of the Board of Directors of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate will host a government and commercial delegation from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

The delegation will be headed by the First Deputy of the Board of Directors of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce.

It has 60 members including people from a number of Saudi government agencies, chairman of boards of directors and executive directors of Saudi companies representing various economic fields.

Hamad bin Ali Al-Hajri, a member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, explained that the branch has prepared a programme for the Saudi delegation that includes meeting with a number of officials from government agencies and private sector institutions to discuss strength-



in the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, through which it seeks to learn about the investment opportunities available in the governorate in various economic fields, especially in the field of desert tourism.

Hamad Al Hajri pointed out that working papers will be presented at the first Oman Desert Tourism Forum to explore investment opportunities in desert tourism, legislation and laws in desert tourism, the reality of desert tourism and its cultural and social dimensions.

For his part, Salah bin Salem Al Hajri, Chairman of the Tourism Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, said that the forum will be implemented for the first time at the level of the Sultanate of Oman to focus on investment and economic activity in the desert tourism sector in the gover-

norate, including the laws regulating this sector and the investment opportunities available to investors from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman, the cultural and social dimension of desert tourism and Gulf experiences in this aspect.

He stated that the Oman Desert Tourism Forum will work to highlight the tourism components, the cultural and historic heritage, the diversity of tourism patterns enjoyed by the desert of the Sultanate of Oman, and its importance as a tourist attraction for tourists locally and from various countries of the world.

He explained that during the forum, specific initiatives will be announced, in cooperation with other bodies, to prepare for the launch of specialised training courses in the field of tourism to develop the people of the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate region working in this field.

JWRC

< FROM A1 We will try to do well: Al Rawahi

“This sort of challenge was lacking in the MERC. We will learn a lot by taking part in different types of rallies in JWRC, from snow to tarmac to gravel. The different terrains will be demanding and we hope to do well.”

Al Rawahi added: “We will try to do well. As a driver, I always want to win but JWRC is a demanding series and needs a lot of knowledge. We will be up against drivers who have had experience. My aim is to finish on podiums and at least be ahead of the rookie drivers in the JWRC.”

Wolf Stage Wins will once again be a unique aspect of the championship with a single championship point awarded for every stage win in 2024. Double classification points will also be on offer at the season-ending EKO Acropolis Rally Greece for drivers who enter at least three Junior WRC rallies in 2024.

Up for grabs is a life-changing prize comprising an arrive and drive package to contest four European rounds of the 2025 FIA World Rally Championship in a Ford Fiesta Rally2 car, the natural progression from Junior WRC.

The champion will also have the option to compete in two additional European rounds at a subsidised rate.

Maciej Woda, FIA Junior WRC Championship manager, said: “The number of entries we received this year exceeded our expectations. This remarkable turnout not only underscores the Junior WRC’s strong appeal, but also highlights its global significance and its role as a key platform for emerging rally talent. All of this is a testament to the hard work and dedication shown by the whole Junior WRC and M-Sport Poland

team and, without them, none of this would be possible.

“The international representation and the results seen in 2023 affirm that the Fiesta Rally3 Evo is an excellent car for young drivers. Now we look forward to some more great action and exciting battles in 2024.”

Besides Al Rawahi and his navigator Al-Hmoud, the other competitors are Australia’s Taylor Gill and his co-driver Daniel Brkic, Estonia’s Romet Jürgenson and his co-driver Siim Oja, South Africa’s Max Smart and his co-driver Great Britain’s Cameron Fair, Peru’s Jose ‘Abito’ Caparó and his co-driver Spain’s Esther Gutierrez, Bolivia’s Nataniel Bruun and his co-driver Pablo Olmos of Argentina, Ireland’s Eamonn Kelly and his co-driver Conor Mohan, Paraguay’s Diego Dominguez and his co-driver Rogelio Peñaate of Spain, and Chile’s Gerardo Rosselot Valenzuela and his co-driver Marcelo Brizio of Argentina.

Also in the fray are Spain’s Raúl Hernández and his co-driver José Murado, and Roberto Blach and his navigator Mauro Barreiro, Belgium’s Tom Renonnet and his co-driver Loïc Dumont, Poland’s Jakub Matulka and his co-driver Daniel Dymurski, Kazakhstan’s Petr Borodin and his navigator Roman Cheprasov, Bolivia’s Bruno Bulacia and his co-driver Gabriel Morales of Brazil, Germany’s Fabio Schwarz and his co-driver Bernhard Ettel of Austria, Sweden’s Mille Johansson and his co-driver Johan Grönvall, Romania’s Norbert Maior and his co-driver Francesca Maior, and Peru’s André Martínez and his navigator Guillermo Sierra Ovalle.



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NATIONAL POLICY

Promoting national product by community participation

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The National Product Loyalty Programme is one of the cornerstones of promoting local content among the community.

The programme appreciates the role of society in supporting Omani products.

Bader bin Salim Al Mamari, Secretary General of the Tender

Board, reaffirmed that the National Product Loyalty Programme falls within the work of the Secretariat General of the Tender Board and is associated with the national policy of the local content.

The programme's significance stems from its support for the national policy to enhance the local content through support campaigns at the governorate level,

he said. He added that the implementation of the programme with its platform represents one of the marketing tools on which the companies rely for wooing customers by motivating them to buy through the platform and get bonuses and prizes whenever their purchases increase.

This motivation comes in the form of different methods includ-

ing getting loyalty cards or digital applications for collecting points, he added.

He said that the Secretariat General of Tender Board coordinates with companies and related parties on the procedures and announcement of the schedule for the launch of the programme, the work mechanism and the terms of joining the programme.



DRUG TRAFFICKING

Four persons arrested

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The General Administration for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, in cooperation with the Coast

Guard Police Command, arrested four infiltrators while trying to smuggle more than 100 blocks of crystal narcotics, morphine, and opium. Legal procedures are being initiated against them.

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CARNIVAL PROMOTES WADI DAYQAH AS A TOURISM HOTSPOT

Located near Muscat and about 90 kilometres from Wadi Adai, Wadi Dayqah is a tourist attraction known for its natural diversity



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Wadi Dayqah Dam tourism carnival in the Wilayat of Quriyat in the Muscat Governorate started on Friday.

The carnival is being organised by the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran), in cooperation with a number of government and private agencies. The first phase began on 19 January and concluded on 20 January, while the second phase starts from 26 January to 27 of the same month.

The carnival aims to promote Wadi Dayqah as a promising tourist destination by enhancing and enriching tourism experiences, providing opportunities for individuals and families to enjoy a range of recreational activities, in addition to involving and supporting the local community in this carnival, and highlighting Omani products.

The carnival targets visitors of all ages, as it includes various en-

tertainment activities, a corner for small and medium enterprises, a corner dedicated to children's activities with various entertaining and interactive games, and a corner dedicated to selling various types of Omani food.

The choice of Wadi Dayqah Dam to hold the event comes as it is a tourist attraction that many families visit during the holidays, especially on weekends.

It is considered as one of the largest dams in the Sultanate of Oman and also enjoys stunning views surrounded by the mountainous. It offers a number of water events and activities that attract wide interest from visitors and adventure seekers.

It is worth noting that the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) had previously organised a number of carnivals in the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, and Dhofar to enrich domestic tourism in various governorates. Located near Muscat and about 90 kilometres from Wadi



Adai, Wadi Dayqah is a tourist attraction known for its natural diversity. The wadi is an extension of similar wadis in Ash Sharqiyah Region. According to Oman's Ministry of Tourism, "About 120 wadis converge into its path, which stretches from Wilayat Dimma Wa Ta'iyeen in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate to its estuary in Wilayat Quriyat, Muscat Governorate. It is one of the year-round flowing wadis."

Designed to secure Oman's water supplies, Wadi Dayqah Dam is one of the largest on the Arabian

Peninsula and a source of irrigation and protection for the surrounding villages, as it reduces the flash floods in the area. "Set in the rugged limestone Wadi (valley) this huge construction is a real contrast of natural Omani beauty and impressive human engineering," added the ministry.

"Opened in 2012 the dam was built to collect the periodic rain fall from the high peaks above and control the volume of water flowing through the narrow torrent, 'dayqah', to the villages below.

This still maintains the ancient falaj irrigation system whilst controlling the surges of water rolling off the hillside. The dam is quite a spectacle for Oman and is by far the highest in the country. The lake is eight kilometres long and can hold 100 million cubic metres of rainwater."

"It consists of two dams: the main one is 75 metres (246 feet) high, and the secondary one is an earthen dam 48.5 metres (149 feet) high. The main dam includes a tower for water drainage."

The lake is eight kilometres long and can hold 100 million cubic metres of rainwater

Investment opportunities in Oman, India discussed

The forum discussed enhancing economic cooperation and trade and investment exchange to enhance bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and India, said the OCCI chief

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Oman-India Investment Forum discussed investment opportunities available in promising economic sectors and ways to boost the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best industrial and commercial practices.

Organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Muscat on Saturday, a number of investors and business owners from both sides and the chief financial officers of economic and commercial institutions in the two friendly countries were present in the forum. They discussed promising sectors that can be relied on for economic diversification, and the sectors include energy, mining, food security, manufacturing industries, transportation, logistics, tourism and the digital economy.



Faisal bin Abdullah Al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that the forum discussed enhancing economic cooperation and trade and investment exchange to enhance bilateral relations between

the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India. He explained that the remarkable growth in bilateral trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India is based on economic cooperation that puts responsibility on Omani and Indian private sectors for implementing this partnership, especially since the future outlook for the Omani and Indian economies is based on the private sector's leadership for growth.

He pointed out that the forum is a platform for Omani and Indian companies to explore investment opportunities in key sectors such as energy, infrastructure, technology, healthcare and tourism, with a focus on projects and initiatives that provide investment prospects and discuss commercial policies to create a conducive environment for communication and building relationships between government officials, business leaders and investors and industry experts from both the countries.

For his part, Dr. Abdullah bin Masoud Al Harithi, a member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that the forum focused on exchanging knowledge and discussing trade policies, those related to customs tariffs, and measures to facilitate cross-border trade for creating a conducive environment for further communication and building relationships, in addition to focusing on investment.

The forum witnessed the presentation of several working papers that dealt with "Oman Vision 2040", introducing its objectives and the promising investment opportunities it provides in a number of sectors, the features and incentives of investment in the Sultanate of Oman, the opportunities and facilities in economic zones and free zones, and investment opportunities in renewable energy, the digital economy, information technology, artificial intelligence, and food security, manufacturing industries and the tourism sector.

The forum also included an introduction to the investment opportunities available in the Republic of India and business opportunities for professionals and financial institutions in the first international financial centre in India. During the forum, bilateral meetings were held between business owners and specialists in the two countries to conclude partnerships and exchange experiences.

With OMA inputs

Citizens get first instalment of assistance



Times News Service

MUSCAT: On Thursday, January 18, 2024, the first payment for those entitled to social protection benefits was deposited in the beneficiaries' accounts, which includes the benefit for the elderly and children and family income support.

Social protection

In an announcement, "We would like to inform beneficiaries entitled to social protection benefits that: Beneficiaries registered before January 10 will receive the benefit starting from January 18, and beneficiaries registered later during the same month will receive the benefit starting at the end of the month."

It is to be noted that based on Article (3) of the Executive Regulations of the Social Protection Law, the disbursement shall be retroactive for a maximum period of 3 months, provided that the conditions for entitlement to the benefit are met.

COMMENTARY

Oman: A land of opportunities and life lessons



BHAVNA

Once upon a time in the enchanting Sultanate of Oman, there lived a young boy named Ali. Ali was a child with big dreams and a heart full of curiosity. He lived in a land where life, growth, patience, and perseverance were not just words; they were the very essence of the place he called home.

A Land of Breathtaking Beauty

Oman was a country of extraordinary beauty. Its landscapes were like no other—vast deserts that stretched as far as the eye could see, majestic mountains that kissed the sky, and crystal-clear waters that lapped at pristine beaches. But it wasn't just the natural beauty that made Oman special; it was the people and the lessons they imparted.

Life in the Desert

One day, Ali embarked on a journey to the heart of the Omani desert. He was guided by a wise Bedouin elder named Ibrahim. As they walked through the endless dunes, Ibrahim shared stories of his ancestors, who had thrived in this harsh environment for generations. Ali learned that life in the desert taught patience and perseverance. The desert might seem barren, but beneath the surface, there was a world of hidden treasures waiting to be discovered.

Just like in life, sometimes you have to dig deep and be patient to find the true treasures.

Growth in the Mountains

Another day, Ali ventured into Oman's rugged mountains. He met a mountain climber named Nadia, who showed him the ropes—literally! As they ascended steep cliffs and conquered challenging peaks, Ali realized that growth often comes from facing challenges head-on. Nadia told him, "Life is like climbing a mountain. It may be tough, but with determination and courage, you can reach new heights." Ali understood that in Oman, the mountains weren't just a physical challenge; they were a metaphor for life's obstacles.

Patience by the Sea

One sunny morning, Ali sat by the tranquil Omani coast, watching fishermen patiently cast their nets into the sea. He struck up a conversation with

an old fisherman named Yasser, who had been casting his net into the same sea for decades. Yasser told Ali that the sea taught him patience. Some days, the catch was bountiful, and other days, it was meager. But he never gave up. He said, "Life, like the sea, has its ups and downs. It's about riding the waves with patience and faith that better days will come."

Perseverance in the Oasis

In the heart of Oman, Ali discovered lush green oases, where palm trees swayed in the breeze, and farmers toiled under the scorching sun to cultivate their date palms. He met a farmer named Hadi, who explained the importance of perseverance. Hadi said, "In the oasis, we plant the seeds, water them, and wait for years to see the first fruits. It's a lesson in perseverance. Life often requires hard work, patience, and the belief that your efforts will bear fruit."

A Destination for Life

As Ali continued his journey through Oman, he realized that the Sultanate was more than just a place on the map—it was a destination for life.

The lessons he learned from the desert, mountains, sea, and oasis were life lessons that he would carry with him forever.

In Oman, he had seen how patience and perseverance could turn challenges into opportunities, how growth could come from facing difficulties, and how life's ups and downs were like the ebb and flow of the sea.

Ali returned home with a heart full of gratitude for the land that had taught him these valuable lessons. He knew that no matter where life took him, he could draw strength from the teachings of Oman.

And so, the young boy named Ali grew up to be a wise and resilient man, guided by the life lessons he had learned in the Sultanate of Oman. He knew

that life was an incredible journey, and he was determined to embrace it with patience, perseverance, and a heart full of gratitude.

Oman had not only been a destination for Ali; it had become a source of inspiration, a place where the values of life, growth, patience, and perseverance were etched into the very soul of the land and its people.

So, my young friends, remember that life is an incredible adventure, and the world is full of places like Oman that can inspire us to become the best versions of ourselves. Embrace the lessons of life, just like Ali did, and let them guide you on your own extraordinary journey.

Besides being a dynamic Entrepreneur and CEO of SYNERGIE Oman, Bhavna is an HR Expert, A patient Listener, A Writer, Intuitive Energy Healer, Reiki Master, Miracle Coach, Motivational Speaker.



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TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) is a private higher education institution located in Ibra, North of A'Sharqiyah Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, about 150 km from Muscat. It was established in 2009 by Ministerial Decision (78/2009) issued by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Tender details:
ASU's Tender Committee is pleased to invite experienced companies to participate in the tender for Providing Equipment for Electrical lab:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit Date	Bids Submission Deadline	Document fees
ASU/05/2024	Providing Equipment for Electrical lab at A'Sharqiyah University in Ibra	28/01/2024	31/01/2024 at 10:00 am	15 / 2 / 2024	100 OMR

- The specialized companies of the above assignment can obtain the tender document from the Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra, during the working days (Sunday to Thursday) from 9:00 am to 03:00 pm.
- Bids must be submitted in closed sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to (Tender Committee, A'Sharqiyah University - Ibra), bearing the tender subject with its reference number with no indication to the name of bidders.
- The bid submission should include the following:
 - Separate sealed envelope contains technical proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains commercial proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains tender bond.
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids.
http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.
- For more details, please don't hesitate to contact us at: yousuf.alsaadi@asu.edu.om , (+968) 25401116.

ROYAL FELICITATION

Medals of Excellent Service, Royal Merit on Personnel of Royal Court Affairs



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, on Thursday conferred medals of Excellent Service and Royal Merit on a number of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) at the Royal Court

Affairs. The medals were pinned by Nasr Hamoud Al Kindi, Secretary General of the Royal Court Affairs (RCA). The Royal felicitation was in recognition of efforts exerted by the honoured personnel during



their tenure at the RCA. **Serving the nation** The Secretary General of the RCA congratulated the officers and the NCOs, wishing them further success and urging them to keep up

their resourceful contribution in serving the nation. The ceremony was attended by Sheikh Said Hilal Al Khalili, Head of Human Resources, Finance and Support at the RCA, heads of units and senior officers at the RCA. -ONA

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



Poetry and story, competition held

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Centre for Professional Guidance and Student Counselling (Department of Educational Activities), held the second phase of the poetry, story, and novel competition in its first session last week. The two-days event was organised by the Educational Centre for the Arabic Language for the Gulf States, under the slogan: "In Arabic, we create." In this stage, 33 students participated from the various educational directorates in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The poetry, story, and novel competition came within the programs of the Arab Centre for the Arabic Language for the Gulf States for the session (2023/2024). The competition seeks to discover the potential

and linguistic abilities of gifted students according to a set of standards and indicators in the field of poetry, story, and novel, as well as students' presentation silks. Those who qualified to compete in this stage submitted their texts to an evaluation committee specialised in the fields of the competition, and at the conclusion of the evaluation, the students, and the supervisors of the two stages of the competition in the educational directorates were honored in a ceremony that included examples of students' contributions in poetry, stories, and novels. The competition aims to highlight the arts of the Arabic language, enhance loyalty and belonging to the Arabic language in the hearts of young people, encourage cultural communication between the member states and discover talented students.

JOINT STOCK COMPANY

Al Dhahirah Governorate seeks investment in oil and gas field

Times News Service

IBRI: Al Dhahirah Governorate seeks to boost investment in various fields including oil and gas sectors. The investment is being sought through the Al Dhahirah International Development and Investment which was established as a closed joint stock company in 2021 with some 2,400 shareholders from the three wilayats of Ibri, Dhank and Yanqul of the governorate. The company is planning to invest in various sectors with the focus on oil and gas, minerals, industry, tourism and agriculture. Abdulrahman bin Humaid Al Yahyaei, Chairman of Al Dhahirah International Development



and Investment Company said that the company, with over OMR2.7 million capital, is working on upgrading and boosting economic growth in Al Dhahirah Governorate and making job opportunities available to citizens in cooperation with the Office of the

Governor of Al Dhahirah. He said that the company has signed a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding with the various government departments and the private sector companies on boosting growth in Al Dhahirah

Governorate. These included a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones on establishment, development and operation of integrated terminal for truck services near the border post within the project of the integrated economic zone along with a cooperation agreement with Oman Broadband Company on investment in modern infrastructure in the governorate. He said that execution of these strategic partnerships within the company's continued efforts and ambitious vision will provide promising development opportunities in the governorate. -WITH ONA inputs

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WINTER CARNIVAL

The activities of North Al Sharqiyah winter carnival began on Saturday and will continue till February 10, 2024. The carnival will have diverse events and activities, including heritage village with its various corners, motorcycle races, and competition for wilayats. There will be a corner for children games also.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/2024/004	UNE - LOT 12C/2023	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	52.500
DISC/2024/005	Development Of Geographical Information System for Nama Dhofar Services Water Network	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	525.000
DISC/2024/006	Technical Condition Assessment for Nama Dhofar Services Water and Wastewater Assets	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	52.500
DISC/2024/007	UNE - LOT 12B/2023	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	52.500
DISC/2024/008	Replacement Of Air Blowers for "Phase 1 & Phase 2"	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	105.000
DISC/2024/009	Construction And Operation & Maintenance of Package Sewage Treatment Plant In Thumarait	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	525.000
DISC/2024/010	Replacement of Existing Assets at "Saada-1" Primary Substation	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	105.000
DISC/2023/189	Protective Lining of Tanks -Secondary, Primary Clarifier, Thickener	25/01/2024	15/02/2024	525.000

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "isupplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
 - Tel No. 23232554
 - email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om

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DHOFAR SERVICES

Dhofar Integrated Services Company s.a.o.c.
CR Number 2185229 ,PO Box 2609
PC 211 ,Salalah - Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number 23232523 ,Fax 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om

Nearly 25,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza Strip, says UN official

Ingram said that during her week in Gaza she had seen new mothers who had lost their babies, and other babies with serious injuries and illnesses

GENEVA: Almost 25,000 Palestinians have reportedly been killed in the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza since October 7 last year, the majority women and children, a United Nations (UN) official said.

Ajith Sunghay, an official with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, told a press briefing via video link from Gaza that the situation there was “a massive humanitarian crisis.”

In Rafah, the official said that



since January 15 he had witnessed people arriving from various places in and desperate situations, setting up makeshift shelters with any materials they could find.

“The communications blackout has continued since January 12, contributing to fear and confusion. Bombings of Middle Gaza and Khan Younis were audible in Rafah,” he said.

Speaking from Amman, Tess Ingram from the UN Children’s Fund told Friday’s press briefing that some 135,000 children under the age of two in Gaza are at severe risk of malnutrition. In the north of Gaza, she said, the situation is even worse.

Ingram said that during her week in Gaza she had seen new mothers who had lost their babies,

Borrell calls for two-state solution

Top European Union Diplomat Josep Borrell has accused Israel of having “created” and “financed” Hamas — which carried out unprecedented and deadly attacks on Israel on October 7 — in a bid to weaken the two-state solution.

“We believe that a two-state solution must be imposed from outside to bring peace. Although, I insist, Israel is reaffirming its refusal (of this solution), and to prevent it they have gone so far as to create Hamas themselves,” Borrell said during a speech in Spain.

“Hamas has been financed by the Israeli government to try to weaken the Palestinian Authority of Fatah,” the EU foreign policy head said.

Israel steps up attacks in south of Gaza

Israeli forces have increased attacks in the south of the Gaza Strip after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed options for a post-war future for Palestinians with US President Joe Biden.

The Israeli bombardment was focused on Khan Yunis, citing witnesses. Palestinian media also spoke of intense fire around Jabalia, which is in the north.

Isarel’s war on Hamas, which passed the 100-day mark this

week, has killed over 24,700 Palestinians so far, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza. The ministry does not distinguish between rebels and civilians in the statistics it provides on deaths.

Iran Revolutionary Guards reportedly killed in Syria

A reported Israeli strike in Syria’s capital, Damascus, has killed a number of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards and wounded others.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the strike targeted a building “where Iran-aligned leaders were meeting.” The Observatory’s director, Rami Abdel Rahman, said members of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and pro-Iran Palestinian factions were taking part in the meeting.

The death toll was not immediately clear. A security source in the regional pro-Syria alliance quoted by the Reuters news agency said four member of the Revolutionary Guards were killed in the strike, but Syria’s state news agency reported two senior Iranian military advisers were killed.

Syria’s state news agency SANA said the attack “resulting from an Israeli aggression” had targeted a residential building in the al-Mazeh neighbourhood.

-Xinhua/DW

‘MOON SNIPER’

Japan makes historic landing on moon, but robotic lander losing power rapidly

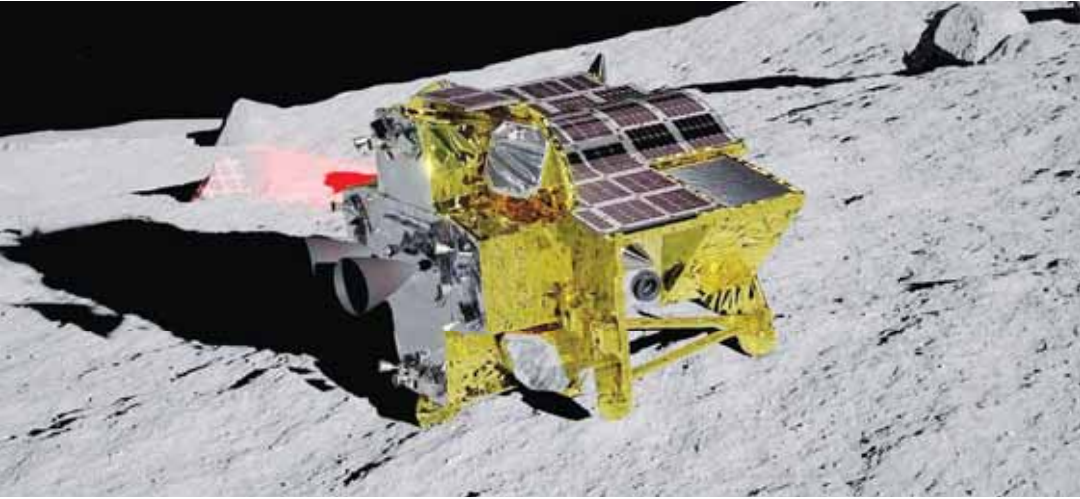
TOKYO: Japan created history by becoming only the fifth nation to successfully complete the soft landing on the moon with its ‘Moon Sniper’ robotic explorer, but fear looms that the mission may end prematurely since the spacecraft’s solar cell is not generating electricity, CNN reported, citing the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

The agency said it is currently receiving a signal from the lander, which is communicating as expected.

The uncrewed Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, mission landed just after 10:20 am ET Friday (12:20 am local time), according to telemetry data shared on JAXA’s live broadcast.

Currently, the lander is operating on limited battery power, only expected to last several hours, and the JAXA team is analyzing the data to determine the cause of the solar cell issue and the next steps for the lander. The solar cell issue may be because the spacecraft is not pointing in the intended direction, JAXA officials said.

According to CNN, there is still hope that as the solar angle changes on the moon, the solar cell may be able to charge again, but that may take some time and will depend on whether SLIM can survive the frigid lunar night, the team shared during a news conference.



The agency believes the mission has met the criteria to declare it a “minimum success,” because the spacecraft achieved a precise and soft lunar landing using optical navigation. The landing makes Japan the third country to land on the moon this century, and the fifth overall.

When asked to score the landing operation for SLIM, JAXA director general Dr. Hitoshi Kuninaka gave it a “60 out of 100,” while also mentioning that he is known for making “harsh comments.”

The team is also working to gather all of the scientific data obtained by the lander.

The lander was able to release its two lunar rovers, LEV-1 and LEV-2. The LEV-1 rover moves using a hopping mechanism and is equipped with wide-angle visible light cameras, scientific equipment and antennas that allow it to communicate with Earth, CNN reported.

The LEV-2 also outfitted with cameras, can change shape to move across the lunar surface.

Meanwhile, the team is receiving a signal from LEV-1 and will see if its cameras were able to capture any images, and they will not definitively confirm the status of LEV-2 until more data is received.

The small-scale SLIM robotic explorer, which launched in September, goes by the nickname “Moon Sniper” because it carried

new precision technology to demonstrate a “pinpoint” landing.

Previous lunar missions have been able to target and reach specific zones that spanned many kilometres, but the SLIM lander targeted a landing site that stretches just 100 meters (328 feet) across. The lander’s “smart eyes” -- an image-matching-based navigation technology -- rapidly photographed the lunar surface on approach and autonomously made adjustments as the spacecraft descended to touchdown on a sloped surface, as reported by CNN.

The JAXA team is still working to determine the accuracy of SLIM’s landing, which could take up to a month. -ANI

GENERAL ELECTIONS

Pakistan EC begins issuing postal ballots ahead of elections

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Saturday began the process of providing postal ballot papers ahead of the upcoming general elections, Geo News reported.

As per the ECP order, all eligible individuals will complete the process of casting their votes by January 22 through the postal ballot paper.

Geo News reported that the application form for the postal ballot can be downloaded from the electoral authority website.

Upon receiving the postal ballot, the voter shall then send his vote to the District Returning Officer as per the prescribed time.

General elections in Pakistan are set to take place on February 8 for which the ECP’s preparations are in full swing with the electoral body looking to ensure foolproof arrangements across the country.

To ensure strict security measures in place ahead of the polls, the ECP issued its “Code of Conduct for Security Personnel”, warning them against bias while being on election duty.

The ECP’s protocol, which excludes the Armed Forces and Civil Armed Forces, directs the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to perform their duties in accordance with the law and within the confines of the mandate assigned to the police.

Geo News reported that the security personnel, deployed for the printing and transport of ballot papers along with the polling bags, will perform their duties under Article 220 of the Constitution of Pakistan, Section 5 read with Section 193 of the Election Act, 2017.

Directing the security apparatus to cooperate with district returning officers, returning officers and presiding officers, the electoral body has stressed the need for LEAs to “remain impartial and neutral throughout the election process [...] and shall not act in favour of or against any political party or candidate in any manner whatsoever”. -ANI



NAM SUMMIT

Leaders at NAM agree to support Palestinian State

KAMPALA: Amid the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, the Indonesian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pahala Mansury said that the 19th Summit of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) agreed on several points related to the war including support on ‘Palestinian state’, Al Jazeera reported on Saturday.

It reported that the leaders at the NAM summit held in the Ugandan capital, Kampala “have decided through the NAM ministry meeting as well as the summit (our) support for the state of Palestine and also for the Palestinian people.”

The Indonesia diplomat described, “We need to ensure that there is an immediate ceasefire, not only to make sure we are actually stopping the attacks and atrocities that are happening to the people of Palestine (but) also to ensure there is a possibility to provide unhindered and sus-

tained support for humanity.”

The leaders agreed that “We have to make sure there is accountability, not only to provide support for South Africa in the ICJ court, but Indonesia right now is in the process of providing a written statement to the ICJ, which is mandated by the UNGA,” Al Jazeera reported.

The leader said, “(We discussed) how are we going to make sure that we have a sustainable two-state solution and what is the pathway to that.”

Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is leading the Indian delegation to the NAM summit being held from January 19-20.

The EAM also shared glimpses from the NAM Summit, which commenced here on Friday.

The External Affairs Minister has been holding meetings with various foreign dignitaries at the two-day summit. -ANI

95-MEMBER CONTINGENT

Marching contingent, band from France to participate in India’s Republic Day parade

NEW DELHI: A 95-member marching contingent and a 33-member band contingent from France participated in the Republic Day parade rehearsal at Vijay Chowk on Saturday as preparations continue in full swing.

According to defence officials, French Air Force Rafale fighter jets and multirole tanker transport aircraft will participate in the Republic Day parade, where President of France Emmanuel Macron is the chief guest this year.

Some Indian personnel, including Squadron Leader Sumita Yadav, who took part in France’s Bastille Day parade this year with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the chief guest there, are also taking part in the Republic Day parade here.

French President Emmanuel Macron will be the chief guest on January 26 this year at the invitation of PM Modi. It will be the 6th occasion when a French leader



will be the chief guest at Republic Day celebrations.

“My Dear Friend President Emmanuel Macron, we eagerly look forward to receiving you as the Chief Guest at the 75th Republic Day. We will also celebrate the India-France strategic partnership and shared belief in democratic values. Bientot!” PM Modi posted from his official X handle earlier inviting the French President to the main event.

In a first, the BSF all-women marching and brass band contingents will participate in this year’s Republic Day parade on Kartavya Path.

An Assistant Commandant rank woman officer and two subordinate officers will lead a total of 144 women BSF constables marching down Kartavya Path on January 26 when India will be celebrating its 75th Republic Day in the presence of Emmanuel Macron.

India and France share a high degree of convergence on a range of regional and global issues as strategic partners.

This year, India and France will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership.

Moreover, PM Modi was the Guest of Honour at the Bastille Day Parade in Paris.

He had visited France at the invitation of French President Macron. Meanwhile, French President Macron also visited India in September this year to attend the G20 Summit which was held under India’s Presidency.

President Macron and Prime Minister Modi held a bilateral meeting in Delhi on September 10, on the sidelines of the G20 summit. Following the meeting, PM Modi said they reaffirmed their commitment to take India-France relations to new heights of progress. -ANI

SPORTS

Oman look to bounce back with win

Branko Ivankovic's Red Warriors are confident of a win against Thailand in a Group F match of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 on Sunday to reignite their hopes to reach knockout stage in Doha

MUSCAT: Oman's talented attacking midfielder Salaah Al Yahya-aei is determined to power his side to a win against Thailand when the two teams meet in Group F of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha on Sunday. The match kicks off at 6.30pm, Oman time

Oman need victory to get their campaign back on track after a heartbreaking 2-1 loss to Saudi Arabia last Wednesday while Thailand - who defeated Kyrgyz Republic 2-0 in their opener - will confirm their spot in the knockout stage with another three points.

Al Yahya-aei got his ninth international goal when he scored from the penalty spot against Saudi Arabia last Wednesday, only for Oman to concede twice late in the match.

"For our game tomorrow against Thailand, we'll be facing a strong and well-organised team," said midfielder Al Yahya-aei. "We're fully ready for this game, we have no other choice but to win and to get the three points."

"The game against Saudi is in the past now. We are fully focused on the match tomorrow and we'll be going for the win. I just hope



that the Omanis will come in big numbers because their presence will give us great motivation."

Ivankovic has full faith

Satisfied with his team's spirited performance despite the defeat to Saudi Arabia in their opening match, Oman coach Branko Ivankovic is certain that his players have what it takes to bounce back and reignite their knockout stage hopes.

"When we saw the draw, we

knew that it was a difficult group. With all due respect to our next opponents, our primary objective is to win," said the Croatian on Saturday.

"We are fully prepared and want to be focused and play as good a game as we did against Saudi Arabia."

"We proved against Saudi Arabia that we are able to match any opponent we face. They are one of the top favourites and were the only team to beat the world

champions (Argentina) last year (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022). Against such a tough opponent, we lost out only in the 97th minute.

"I understand the anger and sadness of the fans but I have a lot of belief in this team. I am proud of them and am not going to make unnecessary changes."

"Thailand had a terrific opening game and while there is pressure on us to bounce back, we enjoy it because that's what football is all about - performing under pres-

OMAN VS THAILAND

Facts & Figures

Honours even

Oman and Thailand have alternated wins in their last five meetings with the West Asian side clinching a 1-0 victory in their most recent encounter (May 2021); in fact, the teams have split group stage wins across two previous meetings at the AFC Asian Cup - Oman triumphing in 2004 and Thailand winning in 2007.

Unbeaten

Thailand are unbeaten in three consecutive matches in the group stage of the AFC Asian Cup for the first time in their history (win 2, draw 1); they also have kept two clean sheets in the process, as many as their previous 18 group-stage games in the competition (win 1, draw 6, losses 11).

Losing run

Oman have lost their last two games at the Asian Cup, conceding two goals in each of those defeats; it's the first time they've conceded multiple goals in back-to-back games in the competition and they will be looking to avoid three straight losses in the tournament for the first time.

Eye on the ball

Oman made 17 interceptions in the opening round of the AFC Asian Cup 2023, four more than any other team in the competition and 11 more than Thailand (6); indeed, no player made more interceptions than Oman's Ahmed Al Khamisi (5).

(With inputs from www.the-afc.com)

sure. My responsibility is to establish a winning culture in the dressing room and motivate my boys to give their best."

'Still work to be done'

Thailand kicked off their journey with a 2-0 victory against the Kyrgyz Republic but head coach Masatada Ishii has refused to let his players get carried away.

"Starting the competition on a winning note is obviously great and it gave us a fair idea of how well-prepared we are," said Ishii, who led Kashima Antlers to the J1 League in 2016.

"But we were handed a heavy defeat by Japan (5-0 in a friendly) not so long ago. So, while I'm pleased to have collected three points, I think there is still work to be done."

"Oman have a very strong midfield and a lot of our work is to find ways to contain them. If you look at their earlier game, they got their lead and resorted to defending. It's just that a team like Saudi Arabia is good enough to break that down

and overcome the deficit and thus, we have a lot of work to do."

As for Thailand's Weerathep Pomphun, who plays for Muangthong United, the match against Oman represents another opportunity to showcase the importance of proper planning after head coach Ishii's tactics worked perfectly in the win over Kyrgyz Republic.

"From the last result, we feel really good and that has given us the motivation to perform well in the next match," said the 27-year-old midfielder.

"Oman are a good and strong team with quality players. We studied their game against Saudi, so that we can prepare. Tomorrow both want to win and it will come down to who can avoid more mistakes."

"We know Oman but we have our own strategy. We prepare the best possible way. As a defensive midfielder, it's my job to stop the opponents' attack. But everyone needs to work together to support the team."

THE ALL NEW
MG WHALE
A SPLASH OF WONDER

OMAN'S SUKUK MARKET
REACHES OMR126.5MN

The value of trading in the bond and sukuk market saw a growth of 119 percent to reach OMR126.5 million in 2023, compared to OMR57.6 million in 2022. > **B2**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



OMR8.86BN ADDED TO THE
NATIONAL ECONOMY IN Q3

The total value addition by the institutions operating in the Sultanate of Oman for the third quarter of 2023 amounted to OMR8.86 billion, according to NCSI data. > **B2**

Asyad Group launches its container terminal in Duqm

This expansion is aligned with Asyad Group's established strategy to increase the competitiveness of its services and the throughput of its ports



DUQM: Asyad Group kicked off operations at Asyad Container Terminal - Duqm that will be managed and operated by the group's ports and terminals arm, Asyad Ports.

The latest addition to Asyad's asset lineup follows the Omani logistics giant's robust expansion plans that aim to offer more integrated logistics solutions, anticipate and proactively respond to new trends in global trade and handling, and meet the requirements of the world's biggest players in the container business.

Asyad Container Terminal is also set to promote Port of Duqm and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm as a global container handling destination and a centre for integrated logistics. This expansion is aligned with Asyad's established strategy to increase the competitiveness of its services and

the throughput of its ports.

Operating and managing the state-of-the-art container terminal further highlights Asyad's advanced capabilities, know-how and competencies, being the national operator responsible for undertaking the management and operations of ports and terminals. Specifically, securing this high-profile project reflects customers' and stakeholders' confidence in Asyad Ports efficiency, expertise, and quality of service.

Since its inception, Asyad Ports has proven its proficiency in operating and managing several local ports and terminals, consistently posting profit since the first year of operations.

In terms of technical capabilities, Asyad Container Terminal is

equipped with four remotely operated 65-ton twin lift STS cranes and twelve 50-tonne RTG cranes. In addition to their 71-meter outreach and 18-meter backreach, the cranes have been fitted with a host of fifth-gen technologies, optic fiber data transfer systems for remote operation and smart driving systems.

A cutting-edge yard

Additionally, the terminal boasts a cutting-edge yard control system and an automatic landing system, all designed to improve overall handling and productivity. The terminal also consists of three berths capable of berthing and handling three ships at a time, with a quay length of over 1,000 metres, a storage capacity of 26,000 TEU

and over 600 reefer containers.

To test the terminal's readiness in the pilot stage, the loads of two very large container ships inbound from Asia and Europe were reshipped on different lines. All berthing and handling operations were completed smoothly, a testament to the terminal's readiness and technical ability to accommodate ships of all sizes and purposes and meet the growing local, regional, and global import and export demand.

Aligned with Asyad Group's strategy, operating the container terminal is yet another step to enhance integration across logistics solutions and keep pace with the rapidly evolving trade and economic landscapes in Oman, while catering for the growing maritime

traffic and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows.

This engagement also aims to support several projects related to food security, green hydrogen, oil and gas, which ultimately supports local players and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in different facets of logistics, from land transport and storage to other container-related activities.

Highlighting the role of the new terminal in Oman's drive to economic diversification, Eng. Ahmed Ali Akaak, Acting CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, stated that this venture will unlock great investment opportunities by connecting the Special Economic Zone at Duqm with global shipping lines, capitalizing on the direct access to key global markets and Duqm's strategic location at the crossroads of major international shipping lanes.

Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Al Abri, CEO of Asyad Ports, explained: "Operating Asyad Container Terminal is a significant milestone in our journey to develop and expand our portfolio and commercial operations. It clearly signals the level of efficiency of Asyad Ports' solutions as well as the strong confidence afforded to us by our global customers. Over the past two years, Asyad Ports has proven its ability to manage and operate several terminals for general cargo, bulk, and Ro-Ro."

"The state-of-the-art terminal will leverage its location at the 18-metre deep Duqm Port to accommodate vessels of all sizes and offer loading, unloading and transshipment services, container

packing and unloading, and other added value services," Al Abri added. "Inaugurating the new terminal was the result of coordinating with Asyad's strategic partners in both the public and private sectors."

Asyad Ports' CEO also underscored Asyad's endeavors to promote food security in Oman with Asyad Container Terminal acting as an enabler of the Sultanate fishing industry and meeting its demand through cold chain solutions tailored for importing and exporting fish and seafood products.

Al Abri emphasised that Asyad Ports, as the national port operator and manager, has the right expertise, technical capabilities and national competencies to operate ports and terminals at the highest level, as proven over the last years by managing numerous Omani ports and enhancing their competitiveness, profile and presence on the regional and global supply chain scene. Today, Port of Duqm is considered a key enabler of Oman's economy and an example of the Sultanate's improved competitiveness and successful integration between Omani ports. In the coming years, the port is set to become a key logistics hub catering to global shipping lines from Asia and Europe.

Port of Duqm has been instrumental in ensuring the terminal's successful pilot stage and providing critical technical and logistic support for handling and transshipment operations to ensure timely, smooth delivery and high compliance with the best health and safety standards. — **OMA**

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MARKET



OMR8.86bn added to the national economy in third quarter of 2023

MUSCAT: The total value addition by the institutions operating in the Sultanate of Oman for the third quarter of 2023 amounted to OMR8.86 billion, according to the statistics of the monthly bulletin issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Statistics indicated that the contribution of these institutions paved an important role to the gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices amounting to 80.4 percent in the third quarter of 2023 compared to 81.6 percent for the third quarter of 2022.

The NCSI data further showed that the added value of large institutions recorded OMR6.44 billion, representing 54.8 percent, a decrease of 17.5 percent compared to the same quarter in 2022, while the added value of medium enterprises amounted

to OMR742 million, representing 6.7 percent, an increase of 4.1 percent.

Small enterprises

The added value of small enterprises amounted to OMR903.90 million, an increase of 23.6 percent, and the total value added of small enterprises amounted to OMR1.17 billion, representing an increase of 37.8 percent.

The number of workers in private institutions actually operating in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 8.5 percent to 1.79 million workers during the third quarter of 2023 compared to 1.65 workers during the third quarter of 2022, while the number of institutions reached 232,632 institutions, with an increase of 10 percent in 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

- ONA

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2023 QUARTER

Reliance Industries net profits up 10.9%

MUMBAI: Reliance Industries posted a 10.9 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) during the October-December 2023 quarter at Rs 19,641 crore. In the same quarter of 2022, the profit after tax was Rs 17,706 crore.

In the three quarters so far in 2023-24 (April-December), the company's profit after tax rose from Rs 52,443 crore to Rs 57,777 crore, earnings data released on Friday showed.

Quarterly consolidated EBITDA was at Rs 44,678 crore, up 16.7 per cent year-on-year. EBITDA, or earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization, is an

alternative measure of a company's overall financial performance.

The conglomerate saw year-on-year EBITDA growth across all its business segments. The quarterly EBITDA of the oil and gas business was at Rs 5,804 crore, up 49.6 per cent year-on-year, quarterly EBITDA of Reliance Retail at Rs 6,258 crore, up 31.1 per cent year-on-year, quarterly EBITDA of Jio Platforms at Rs 13,955 crore, up 11.5 per cent year-on-year.

EBITDA growth in O2C (oil-to-chemicals) was muted because of planned maintenance and inspection shutdown, it said in its earnings report. — ANI

Sukuk trading value reaches OMR126.5mn

The sukuk market in 2023 saw a remarkable surge in the number of executed deals, which jumped to 2,035 compared to 1,029 executed in 2022

MUSCAT: The value of trading in the sukuk market saw a growth of 119 percent to reach OMR126.5 million in 2023, compared to OMR57.6 million in 2022.

The sukuk market provides additional options for investors on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), and was able to attract more investors.

The sukuk market in 2023 saw a remarkable surge in the number of executed deals, which jumped to 2,035 compared to 1,029 executed in 2022. However, the market value of the bond and sukuk market declined at the end of last December to OMR4.4 billion in 2023 compared to OMR4.8 billion at the end of 2022.

The total number of securities listed in the bond and sukuk market at the end of last December



reached 59, but trading was limited to only 29 securities.

Bank Muscat's first-class perpetual bonds topped the most traded securities in terms of trading value, with more than OMR49 million, accounting for 38.7 percent of the total trading value witnessed in the market. Ominvest's 2023 perpetual bonds came in next at OMR28.7 million while Sohar International Bank's 2019 perpetual bonds was at OMR10.3 million.

Mohammed Al Barwani Company's US dollar-denominated sukuk trading value was at OMR7.5 million while the 59th issue of Government Development Bonds (GDBs) came next with a total trading value of OMR5.9 million.

Last year also witnessed the listing of 9 securities in the bond and sukuk market with a total value of OMR394.6 million. In the GDBs sector, the 62nd issue of GDB was listed with a value of OMR67.5 million.

Other notable entries

Other notable entries in the bank bonds sector included additional permanent subordinated bonds for the National Bank of Oman OMR54 million, Oman Arab Bank OMR50 million, and Bank Dhofar with a value of OMR40 million.

In the investment and finance companies sector, permanent unsecured subordinated bonds of the Oman International Development and Investment Company

(Ominvest) were listed at a value of OMR60.1 million and the unsecured, non-transferable subordinated bonds issued by Taajeer Finance Company had a value of OMR14.9 million.

Sovereign sukuk

In the sukuk sector, the seventh issue of sovereign sukuk were listed at OMR76.3 million and Mohammed Al Barwani Company's new sukuk were listed at 30.1 million.

Oman Finance Company (OFC) contributed to the financial landscape by issuing free unsecured bonds, mandated to convert into shares after five years, in line with the decisions of the annual ordinary general assembly held in March 2023. — ONA

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

Industrial firms perform well on MSX



MUSCAT: Industrial companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded good performance in the week's trading, pushing the industrial sector index higher by 50 points at a time when other indices declined.

The industrial sector index rose last week to 5,496 points, benefiting from the rise in the shares of Al-Jazeera Steel Products, Voltamp Energy, Dhofar Food and Investment, Al-Saffa Food and Al-Khaleejia for mushroom production. In the week, industrial companies announced their preliminary financial results for the year 2023, which showed growth in profits for many of them. Al Jazeera Steel Products Company said that the group's preliminary financial results showed a growth in profits rising by 31 percent to OMR4.1 million Omani riyals in 2023 compared to OMR3.1 million in 2022. A'Saffa Foods Company said that its group recorded net profits of more than OMR3 million in 2023 compared to losses of OMR1.7 million in 2022.

The results of many other industrial companies showed a good improvement, which was reflected in the industrial sector index, which recorded the only increase among the Muscat Stock Exchange.

In the weekly trading, the prices of 41 securities declined, compared to 21 securities whose prices rose, and 12 securities that stabilised at their previous levels. The declines recorded by the stocks led to a decline in the market value of securities listed on the stock exchange at the end of the week to OMR23.92 billion, recording a weekly loss of OMR14.5 million.

The trading value on the MSX rose during the week to OMR16.37

Oman's stock market falls in weekly trading

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani stock market returned to the downside this week after two weeks of positive performances and recorded a 0.43 percent loss, according to an analyst.

"While the market started the year with a rebound, it remains on a downtrend overall and continues to see some volatility. As a result, the main index could continue to see some downward pressures and could be exposed to new price corrections," Daniel Takieddine, CEO MENA BDSwiss, said.

The stock market declined despite an increase in trading volumes. The number of shares traded on the market rose by 76 percent while the total value traded increased by 78 percent compared to the previous week. This week also saw several companies release their earnings results for last year which affected stock performances.

The market's sectors



recorded widely different performances this week. In this regard, the services sector was the worst performer, ending the week down by 1.40 percent. Ooredoo's decline affected the sector's performance. The company reported a 43 percent drop in yearly profits. OQ Gas Networks' stock performance remained stable while the company reported a 21 percent increase in net profits.

The Financial sector saw a smaller decline, losing 0.91

percent this week. The sector's stocks recorded mixed performances. Al Ahli Bank's stock decreased by 4.24 percent despite a 10 percent increase in its yearly net profits. National Bank of Oman fell by 5.59 percent, despite reporting a 20 percent increase in yearly net profits while revenue was lower than expected.

In contrast, Sohar International Bank rose 7 percent after reporting a 101 percent increase in its net profits.

The Industrial sector however was positive this week, recording a 0.93 percent increase.

Al Jazeera Steel Products witnessed strong gains and soared by 18.33 percent after it reported a 31 percent jump in yearly net profit. Voltamp Energy was another strong performer, up by 8.57 percent, following the release of its earnings results where net profits shifted to positive territory compared to the previous year's losses despite a decrease in revenue.

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LIFESTYLE



This leadership style aligns more closely

with Western gender norms that characterise women

as more empathetic and cooperative and men

FAMILY
BUSINESSES
HAVE MORE
WOMEN
LEADERS

WASHINGTON DC: Family firms account for more than 70 percent of the global GDP, and poll statistics reveal that they are significantly more accepting of female leadership: up to 55 percent have at least one woman on their board, and 70 percent are considering a woman as their next CEO. Experts attribute the outlier gender parity to a focus on long-term plans or family values.

But a new study, published in the Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, suggests that women's success as leaders in family businesses is deeply rooted in how employees interpret their leadership style.

"Family firms tend to focus on being inclusive and supportive of internal stakeholders, extending the sense of 'family' and community," says Remedios Hernandez-Linares of the Universidad de Extremadura in Spain and one of the study's authors. "This culture creates a moderating effect for women leaders — their leadership is perceived as relationship-building and values dissemination."

This leadership style aligns more closely with Western gender norms that characterise women as more empathetic and cooperative and men as more competitive and aggressive. The authors note, however, that women leaders at family businesses are not necessarily more impactful because they conform to gender norms. They thrive because their businesses' strategies emphasise areas where women are traditionally seen as competent.

"CEOs influence employees' behaviors via modeling, and leaders who are more credible and legitimate are more effective role models," says Maria Concepcion Lopez-Fernandez of Universidad de Cantabria in Spain, another of the study's authors. "Perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles can lead to prejudice and bias against female leaders."

The authors specifically dug into how CEOs foster entrepreneurship, a highly masculinised business behavior, within their business culture. They conducted regression analysis on survey

data from 322 Spanish small businesses, 198 classified as family firms and 133 as nonfamily. Women represented 20 percent of the CEOs. CEOs ranked their business's performance on five entrepreneurial traits: risk-taking, innovation, proactiveness, competitiveness, and autonomy. The survey also measured key aspects of social learning at each business, including commitment to learning, shared vision, and open-mindedness.

The analysis showed no direct effect of CEO sex on entrepreneurial orientation, and all aspects of social learning were positively related to entrepreneurship. However, there were marked differences based on CEO's gender and whether the organisation was a family business.

"It is not male or female leadership per se that predicts a firm's entrepreneurial orientation, but rather, whether the male or female CEO is leading a family or non-family business," says Kimberly A Eddleston of Northeastern, the study's third author. "Women leaders at family firms better leverage their business's commitment to learning and open-mindedness to support entrepreneurship than women leaders at nonfamily firms."

"Our study therefore suggests that while women have an advantage leading family businesses, gender biases hamper female leaders' ability to transform learning into greater entrepreneurial orientation in non-family business," added Franz Kellermanns of UNC Charlotte, the study's final author.

The study gives greater context to decades of conflicting research that demonstrates a multitude of business benefits associated with female leadership but also slower growth and lower profits. The key may lie in culture — women can create more impact at businesses that emphasize at least some more traditionally feminine values. The authors also advise that couching their leadership styles in empathy and relationship-building can also help make women business leaders more effective. -ANI

as more competitive and aggressive.

The authors note, however, that women leaders

at family businesses are not necessarily more

impactful because they conform to gender

norms. They thrive because their businesses'

strategies emphasise areas where women are

traditionally seen as competent.

SPORTS

Noskova stuns world No.1 Swiatek

The Czech teenager is making her first Australian Open main draw appearance and ended the 18-match unbeaten winning streak of the Pole

MELBOURNE: World No.1 Iga Swiatek is out of the Australian Open after being stunned by Czech 19-year-old Linda Noskova in the third round on Saturday.

The Pole, 22, had looked in control but the highly-rated Noskova fought back to win 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena.

In the decider the world No.50's power rocked Swiatek, who was hampered by forehand errors.

"I'm speechless," said Noskova, who has reached the fourth round of a major for the first time.

"I knew it was going to be an amazing match with the world number one but I didn't really think it would end up like this.

"I'm just really glad to get through this round."

Noskova is playing in the main draw in Melbourne for the first time, having lost in qualifying last year as an 18-year-old.

She fell to the floor in disbelief after converting her first match point following a tight third set.

The loss also ended Swiatek's 18-match unbeaten run, which stretched back to September.

Swiatek's exit follows second-round defeats for third seed Elena Rybakina, fifth seed Jessica Pegula and sixth seed Ons Jabeur, with only three of the top 10 seeds - defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, US Open winner Coco Gauff and Barbora Krejickova - left in the draw.



Noskova will play Ukrainian 19th seed Elina Svitolina next.

Wins over Jabeur, Azarenka and Daria Kasatkina on the WTA Tour last year drew attention to Noskova, but this is by far the biggest win of her young career.

She is the first teenager to beat a world No.1 at a Grand Slam since Petra Kvitova overcame Dinara Safina at the 2009 US Open.

For Swiatek, this is her earliest exit at a Grand Slam since 2022, although it continues her mixed fortunes in Melbourne where one semi-final appearance is her only run beyond the fourth round in six attempts.

This year she almost lost in the second round, having to mount a comeback from 4-1 behind in the third set against Danielle Collins, and after Saturday's defeat she admitted she was "more stressed" this week than in other tournaments on tour.

"I feel like I did everything I could in pre-season to improve some stuff that I wanted to," she said.

"Then I came here and I wasn't playing kind of natural any more [and] reactions a little bit slower."

Swiatek's defeat leaves 12th seed Zheng Qinwen of China as the highest ranked player in the top half of the draw.

She edged out compatriot Wang Yafan in a third-set tie-break to win 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (10-8) - 10 years after Li Na became the first Chinese winner of the women's singles title in Melbourne.

"That final I have watched more than 10 times," said Zheng, who was 11 when Li won and met her in person for the first time after the win over Wang. "I have a lot of memories.

"I was sitting there in front of the TV. I watched from beginning to the end."

Two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka is the only Grand Slam finalist remaining in the top half after she progressed with a 6-1, 7-5 victory over Latvia's 11th seed Jelena Ostapenko.

Svitolina will be seen as another contender after she brushed aside Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic 6-2, 6-3.

The 29-year-old made it to the semi-finals of Wimbledon and Roland Garros last year on her comeback after giving birth but has never reached a major final.

Zheng will play French world No.95 Oceane Dodin after she beat compatriot Clara Burel 6-2, 6-4.

Russian Anna Kalinskaya, who is ranked 75th in the world, beat American Sloane Stephens 6-7 (8-10), 6-1, 6-4 and will play Italian Jasmine Paolini.

Twenty-sixth seed Paolini reached her first Grand Slam fourth round by beating Anna Blinkova, who stunned Rybakina 7-6 (7-1) 6-4.

She will face Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska, who defeated American 27th seed Emma Navarro 6-2 2-6 6-1.

Norrie beats Ruud

British No.1 Cameron Norrie says his performance to beat 11th seed Casper Ruud and reach the Australian Open fourth round for the first time was one of his "best at a Slam".

Norrie, seeded 19th, played aggressively and smartly in a 6-4, 6-7 (7-9), 6-4, 6-3 win on Saturday.

The 28-year-old will face German sixth seed Alexander Zverev or American teenager Alex

Michelsen on Monday.

"Honestly it is so special," Norrie said about reaching the last 16.

Beating three-time Grand Slam finalist Ruud means Norrie is the first British player to reach the fourth round at Melbourne Park since Kyle Edmund in 2018.

Alcaraz advances

Meanwhile, Carlos Alcaraz comfortably reached the Australian Open fourth round for the first time after opponent Shang Juncheng of China retired with injury.

The Spanish second seed led 6-1, 6-1, 1-0 when his 18-year-old opponent, who had taken a medical timeout for treatment on his right thigh, ended the match.

It was the first time 20-year-old Alcaraz had played an opponent younger than him at tour level.

"It is not the way anybody wants to move on," Alcaraz said.

Wimbledon champion Alcaraz has now reached the fourth round of all four majors.

Alcaraz will face Miomir Kecmanovic for a place in the quarter-finals after the Serb saved two match points to beat 14th seed

Tommy Paul 6-4, 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (9-7), 6-0.

Elsewhere on Saturday, world No. 69 Nuno Borges eliminated 13th seed Grigor Dimitrov to reach the fourth round.

The 26-year-old from Portugal, who has never gone beyond the second round of a Grand Slam before, fell flat on his back as he celebrated a 6-7 (3-7), 6-4, 6-2, 7-6 (8-6) win over the Bulgarian.

Borges will face Daniil Medvedev, who progressed with a 6-3, 6-4, 6-3 win over Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime in just over two hours.

German sixth seed Alexander Zverev beat Alex Michelsen 6-2, 7-6 (7-4) 6-2 to set up a last-16 meeting with Norrie.

French wildcard Arthur Cazaux, the world No.122 who knocked out eighth seed Holger Rune in the second round, has also eliminated Dutch 30th seed Tallon Griekspoor with a dominant 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 victory.

Cazaux, 21, will take on Pole Hubert Hurkacz after the ninth seed came from a set down to win 3-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7-4), 6-3 against France's Ugo Humbert. - Agencies

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Mane scores as Senegal advance

YAMOUSSOUKRO: Defending champions Senegal booked their place in the last 16 of the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations with a 3-1 win over Cameroon in Group C in the Ivory Coast city of Yamoussoukro on Friday.

Ismaila Sarr put Senegal in front in the 16th minute and Habib Diallo made it 2-0 midway through the second half.

Jean-Charles Castelletto headed in to pull one back with seven minutes remaining to set up a nervy ending.

But, after George-Kevin Nkoudou had missed a free header to equalise, Sadio Mane sealed the win in stoppage time.

Senegal will top Group C if they avoid defeat in their final group outing against Guinea on Tuesday.

Guinea are second in the table after beating The Gambia 1-0 in the late game on Friday - a result which means Cameroon will most likely need to beat the Scorpions on Tuesday to progress to the knockout stages.

The five-time continental champions, who have one point from two games, could go through as one of four best third-placed sides if they do not overhaul Guinea on goal difference or goals scored.

Andre Onana was back in goal for Cameroon, having missed their 1-1 draw against Guinea after deciding to play for Manchester United in the Premier League 24 hours earlier.

But the 27-year-old was arguably at fault for Senegal's opener



when his clearing punch from a corner was headed back into the box by Pape Matar Sarr and forward Ismaila Sarr fired into the bottom right-hand corner.

The West Africans doubled their lead after some neat interplay in the 71st minute when Diallo ghosted in between Enzo Tchato and Castelletto to slide home Ismaila Sarr's low ball from six yards out.

Cameroon lacked a threat up front for most of the match, with striker Vincent Aboubakar - the top scorer at the 2021 finals -

absent again through injury and Karl Toko Ekambi dropped to bench.

But the Indomitable Lions sparked into life in the final 10 minutes when centre-back Castelletto powerfully headed in Olivier Ntcham's cross following a short corner.

They pressed forward in search of a draw but Nkoudou wasted the best opening when he could only divert another right-wing cross wide at the back post in the 94th minute.

Senegal went straight up

the other end to make sure of the points as former Liverpool forward Mane carefully guided Idrissa Gana Gueye's pass into the bottom left-hand corner from just inside the area.

Aliou Cisse guided the Teranga Lions to their first AFCON title two years ago, and their title defence has started perfectly as Senegal bid to become the first side to retain the trophy since 2010, when Egypt won their third in a row.

Other results: Cape Verde 3 Mozambique 0, Guinea 1 Gambia 0. - Agencies

Salah to miss Egypt's next two games with hamstring injury

CAIRO: Mohamed Salah will miss Egypt's vital Africa Cup of Nations Group B game against Cape Verde on Monday with a hamstring injury.

The Liverpool forward, 31, has also been ruled out of a last-16 tie should Egypt qualify.

Salah limped off before half-time in the 2-2 draw with Ghana on Thursday.

The result has left the record seven-time African champions needing to beat the already-qualified Cape Verde to guarantee their progression.

"Tests on Mohamed Salah, the captain of the Egypt national team, proved that he suffered a hamstring injury and will miss the next two matches of the team at the AFCON," the Egyptian Football Association said.

Salah will therefore only feature in the tournament again if Egypt advance to a quarter-final on 2 or 3 February.

Earlier on Friday Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp suggested Salah's hamstring problem was likely to be severe, given the forward had missed just 10 league games for the Reds in more than six seasons.

"He was shocked and couldn't see why he was hit by something so intense," said Klopp.

"You have these hamstring injuries in a different way. He felt it and



we know how rarely Mo goes off, or needs to go off, so it is definitely something."

Losing Salah, who is on the cusp of 100 caps for his country, comes as a major blow to Egypt, who have made a sluggish start to their campaign in the Ivory Coast, collecting two points from two matches.

Salah scored a last-gasp penalty on Sunday, after a VAR decision, to help Egypt draw 2-2 with Mozambique to avoid an embarrassing opening defeat, and they also twice had to come from behind against Ghana.

The last of Egypt's seven titles at the Cup of Nations came in 2010, a year before Salah made his international debut. - Agencies

DEAL EXTENSION



Tata Group extends IPL title sponsorship deal till 2028

MUMBAI: The Tata Group has extended its title sponsorship of the IPL for another five years, from 2024 to 2028, for US\$301 million approx., making it the "highest-ever sponsorship amount in the history of the league," a BCCI statement said on Saturday.

The group were the IPL title sponsors in 2022 and 2023, and are also the title sponsors

of the Women's Premier League (WPL).

"The collaboration with TATA Group for the title sponsorship of IPL 2024-28 is a significant milestone in IPL's journey," IPL chairman Arun Singh Dhumal said. "The record-breaking sum of INR 2500 crore (US\$301 million approx.) by TATA Group is a testament to the immense value and appeal that the IPL holds in

the world of sports.

"This unprecedented amount not only sets a new benchmark in the history of the league but also reaffirms the IPL's position as a premier sporting event with global impact. TATA Group's commitment to cricket and sports is truly commendable, and we look forward to scaling new heights together and providing fans with unparalleled cricketing

entertainment."

The Tata Group had replaced Vivo as IPL title sponsors for the last two seasons. The BCCI had temporarily severed ties with Vivo, a Chinese mobile and technology company, following political tensions between India and China in June 2020. Vivo had originally bagged the title sponsorship for 2018 to 2022 for INR 2199 crores (US \$341 million ap-

prox. at the time), but for the 2020 season, it was replaced by Dream 11, before Vivo returned for the 2021 season.

Tata's bid for the next five years is a 13.7% jump over what Vivo had paid for 2018-22.

The 2024 IPL will be played from March 22 and run till the end of May, just before the men's T20 World Cup kicks off on June 1. - Agencies



German farmers face tough road ahead

Farming has always been hard work. Machinery and technology made big improvements but come at a huge cost. Each year fewer people step into the shoes of their ancestors. Why is that?

MUNICH: This is the life of many small-scale farmers in Germany. So maybe it is no wonder that since 2020, the country has lost around 7,800 farms. That corresponds to an average of 2,600 businesses closing shop each year. During that same time, the number of people working in farming sank 7% to 876,000. Of those remaining, 45% are family members, according to the federal statistics agency Destatis

Yet, while the number of farms and employees keeps sinking, the total area farmed has remained nearly unchanged since 2010. Today 255,000 farms work 16.6 million hectares (41 million acres) of land, which simply means the remaining farms are just getting bigger.

New research by DZ Bank is even more pessimistic and sees a “retirement wave” that will help end the centuries’ old system of small family farms. After crunching the numbers, they forecast the number of working farms in 2040 to plummet to 100,000. At the same time, they calculate that the average farm will more than double in size.

But is bigger always better?

A close-up photograph of a variety of root vegetables. In the foreground, there are several large, round turnips with reddish-pink skin and some white turnips. Interspersed among them are long, tapered carrots in orange and purple varieties. The vegetables are piled together, showing their natural textures and colors.

Many family-run farms don't think so and have let their feelings be seen and heard with a weekend tractor protest across the country.

In Berlin, a huge 10-day agriculture and food industry trade show that opened January 19. With 1,400 exhibitors from 60 countries, the fair is meant to highlight regions by bringing what they do to the capital for visitors and policymakers to see.

The huge halls are filled with stands offering food and drink. Other areas are blooming with fresh soil, flowers, veggies and fruit. It smells like spring even though a dusting of snow covers

everything outside.

Figuring out what a farmer actually earns is difficult. Numerous factors like what type of farming – conventional or organic – what is grown – crops, livestock or a mix – where it's done, if family is involved, and subsidies muddy the waters.

One thing is for sure: Full-time farmers work longer hours than most other employees. The North-Rhine Westphalia Chamber of Agriculture calculated that while a regular 40-hour job comes to 2,088 hours a year, a full-time farming family member racks up 2,300 hours. For the self-em-

played there is no minimum wage. Subsidies also make up a large portion of income and are often based on size. They come from the European Union and Germany and encourage farmers to do things that may otherwise not m

Peter Tergees knows about hard work. At his winery, in Trier close to the Luxembourg border, getting up at 3 a.m. is nothing special during the fermentation phase.

A specialist for ice wine, he has been in the business for nearly 55 years but has no one willing to take over. Part of his 6 hectares is leased to someone else; what will happen later is an open question.

On call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Early mornings, long hours. No spontaneous vacations. Constant worry about weather, a lack of workers, foreign competition, succession planning and all of the living things in your care. And now a new government plan to phase out tax relief on agricultural diesel, a subsidy that has been in place for more than 70 years.

There is simply too much bureaucracy and paperwork," he told DW. "Things just have to be made easier. Farming and making wine are just not what they used to be." It is a common complaint.

Especially livestock farmers have increasingly come under scrutiny as interest in animal welfare has increased.

But these farmers don't deserve this bad reputation. In fact, they help preserve the countryside and keep idyllic country scenes beloved by tourists alive, said Nora Hammer, general manager of the German Livestock Association. They also supply "essential" fertilizer for organic farming.

At the same time, she recognizes that interest in farming is waning and not every business can make it. "Well-positioned businesses have the best chance of success," she told DW.

For her this means farms that are on a good financial ground with little debt and located in easily accessible places. Having someone on hand to take over one day is helpful, too. It is even better if they have options like biogas, solar and wind energy as add-ons.

To help support German farmers, Hammer calls for more uniform rules across the country that would allow them to quickly convert parts of their business and deal with complicated building codes or changes in consumer tastes. Currently, confusing and partly contradictory regulations slow things down or drive up costs. All this frustration makes it hard to find new, enthusiastic farmers willing to take up the reins.

In 1970, farmers contributed 3.3% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Today that is down to 1%, according to the DZ Bank study. Even though the overall economic importance of farming is decreasing, they still play a vital role: They supply the country with basic foodstuffs.

At a time when countries want to become more independent of imports from abroad, this role could become increasingly important. Now, someone just needs to convince the farmers. -dw

FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY

Nigeria: Kidnappings in Abuja spark new fears

ABUJA: Abuja, Nigeria, has been the scene of a fresh wave of kidnappings and residents of the city at the heart of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are nervous.

On January 5, a man and six of his daughters were kidnapped in a home invasion in the Bwari area of FCT. The kidnappers released the man and ordered him to pay 50 million naira (€50,400) for his children. One of the sisters, a 21-year-old university student, was killed by the kidnappers despite the payment of ransom.

Also this month, 30 people were abducted along the Abuja-Kaduna highway at Dogon Fili in northwestern Kaduna state. Mass abductions and kidnappings for ransom have been a countrywide problem for several years.

“Every responsible resident of Abuja should be concerned because this [kidnapping] is a very big challenge,” Danjuma Abdullahi, a resident of Abuja, told DW. “Security is key because security ensures welfare. If you and your family are not secure, there is definitely great cause for concern.”

In the FCT, people are limiting their movements out of fear, he said.

President Bola Tinubu has been calling for calm and meeting with his ministers and security chiefs to discuss a strategy to deal with kidnappings.

“Mr. President called us and all the service chiefs to discuss this issue, so a concerted effort is being undertaken by security agencies to really look into the situation and stop it immediately,” Defense Minister Mohammed Badaru Abubakar told DW.

Government statistics for Abuja show 40 kidnapping cases involving 236 victims between January 2021 and June 2023. Hardly any kidnappings had been reported in Abuja in the 10 months before the man and his six daughters were forced from their home.

“Kidnappings happen around the suburbs of FCT, mostly around towns or locations bordering Kaduna and Niger,” Abubakar said.



The bandits flee to nearby hide-outs and the security agencies are working very hard to push them out and block the movement and finish this thing once and for all.”

The defence minister told DW that the Nigerian public would see the results of a government intervention soon.

Abuja resident Danjuma Abdullahi is skeptical: “The call for residents not to panic is good. But we would love to see them [the authorities] master the challenge and solve the problem.”

Abdullahi believes there should be a concrete plan. “We don’t expect them to come out and tell us what strategies they have to combat kidnapping but there should at least be more explanation than just saying we shouldn’t panic,” he told DW.

In a statement this week, Amnesty International expressed concern over what it said was “an epidemic of kidnapping” and “the utter failure of the Nigerian authorities to effectively protect lives.”

“People in Nigeria are now living on the razor’s edge,” Amnesty said. “Widespread insecurity, and the chaos it causes, have been exacerbated by routine kidnappings, as armed groups tighten their

Danjuma Abdullahi agrees with Amnesty’s assessment and believes authorities have to do more to win the confidence of Abuja’s

residents. "Security has to do with intelligence, and I think intelligence has failed in this case. As an ordinary citizen, that is what I see. I don't know the strategies that the security apparatus has. I don't know what kind of synergy they have,"

According to Yahya Jarabu, a retired military officer and security expert, the fears of Abuja residents and the concerns being raised by some civil society groups are legitimate.

"The issue of insecurity is related to widespread corruption — which is everywhere. Sadly, people now do everything because of money. There is the failure of intelligence and people have their own role of providing information about the hideouts of these criminals," he told DW.

The families and friends of people who are kidnapped in Nigeria often take matters into their own hands to ensure the release of their loved ones. The crowdfunding of ransom payments has become common practice. But authorities say paying ransom simply encourages kidnapping.

"On crowdfunding, we all know that there is an existing law that prevents the payment of ransom. So it is very sad to go on the internet or radio asking for donations to pay ransom," Defense Minister Mohammed Badaru Abubakar told DW. — DW

ROUND-UP

Youth Sada and bp Oman’s fifth cycle of Reading Family Programme concludes

The programme is aimed to promote a reading culture in the Omani community by nurturing children’s skills in reading and developing local youth’s capabilities in delivering literature workshops

MUSCAT: In partnership with bp Oman, Youth Sada held a closing ceremony marking the conclusion of the fifth cycle of the Reading Family Programme, held under the patronage of HH Mona Fahad Al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and Chairperson of Children First Association.

The programme aimed to promote a reading culture in the Omani community by nurturing children’s skills in reading and developing local youth’s capabilities in delivering literature workshops.

The programme included 10 main activities targeting different governorates across Oman, which



includes the ‘Rawafid’ training programme enabling the youth in children literature, the ‘Reading ambassadors’ network’ which

aims to enhance the reading skills of 55 children, ‘My child reads’ sessions for mothers on basic skills in communication and enhancing

children’s reading skills, ‘Hakawati’ sessions for interactive storytelling, photo-storytelling competitions, the reading fam-

ily forum, interactive book reading discussion sessions, ‘Story Oasis’ children book fair with 11 libraries participating, Ad’Dhahirah reading competition and educational workshops for schools.

Fun learning model

Qais Al Magrashi, CEO of Youth Sada, said: “The Reading Family Programme is an engaging programme that fosters meaningful communication between family members and integrates reading and literature into an interactive and fun learning model. Here at Youth Sada, we always strive to be unique in our programmes to achieve a long-term positive impact on our communities. In addition, we always work as a team to develop the beneficiaries’ interpersonal and technical skills through continuous learning, working with our current technologies to overcome any challenges and I am proud of what we have achieved so far.”

Ibrahim Al Hinai, Social Investment Manager at bp Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, commented: “Our partnership with Youth Sada started in 2018 to influence a positive change within the community in Ad’Dhahirah region and the Reading Family Programme is one of the key programmes that highlights the importance of literature to children and enhances their skills. It is worth mentioning that over 1400 benefited from this initiative in 2023 including 993 children, 297 male youth, and 139 female youth across Oman.”

Last year, Youth Sada won Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed

award for Arabic Language in its sixth edition, for the Reading Family Programme’s contribution among the best initiative that enhances reading literature and develops a learning community.

Youth Sada was established in 2013, and it is an Omani foundation specialised in organizing conferences and seminars.

Youth Sada works on bringing out the youth’s talents and skills and guiding them so that they can serve and contribute to their society and nation. This is done via various activities, workshops and skill courses that work to develop the youth in all aspects including scientifically, culturally, and intellectually by cooperating with government and private institutions.

In addition, Youth Sada Centre acts like a hub, that provides creative joint working space, and works on qualifying distinguished individuals and their ambitions on a national level. This is achieved via careful selection criteria and standards, which contributes to supporting social work in our community and offers additional value to their projects and ideas submitted.

bp is the operator of Block 61. Around 90% of bp Oman employees are Omanis, including 70% of our leadership team. The company’s social investment programme aims to support the development of Omani people, economic diversification, and job creation. We’re proud to have benefitted over 170,000 people through over 100 initiatives since we launched the social investment programmes in 2014.

EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS



Toyota’s popular Corolla now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Toyota fans looking forward to owning a Corolla can now enjoy exclusive benefits. Service 5 Years/50,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and 1 Year Insurance. (Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

The Corolla is a reliable vehicle that has been constantly making a mark as a dependable and reliable partner for long. The Corolla is equipped with a perfect combination of power, fuel-efficiency, space and safety features. Allowing owners to make the most of every journey. Powering the Corolla is a 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque. For more immersive driving experiences, the engine is paired to a Direct Shift CVT transmission. Customers looking for a more fuel-efficient option can choose the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine Corolla that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque. This is paired with a CVT transmission.

The Corolla’s interior adopts a simple yet appealing style, with impressive space and integrated functional parts that combine to create a refined elegance. The er-

gonomically designed seats feature new cushion material, while the armrest and ample legroom offer superior comfort for the rear-seat passengers. Making every drive a delightful experience are a range of features, which vary based on the trim level. Occupants also benefit from AC vents for the rear seat, a moonroof, 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), 8-inch display audio, cruise control, six-speaker sound system, and 60:40 split-folding rear seats.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Corolla, which includes a comprehensive array of features to protect its occupants, such as four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others. Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories.

HOUSING FINANCING

Alizz Islamic Bank and Oman Housing Bank sign pact for ‘Iskan’ programme

MUSCAT: The CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, Ali bin Saif Al-Mani affirmed that the partnership with Oman Housing Bank, the “Iskan” programme aims to enhance the bank’s role in supporting urban development projects undertaken by the government. This collaboration involves providing supported housing financing to eligible citizens.

The programme aims to facilitate housing financing for citizens on the waiting lists of Oman Housing Bank and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, supported by various local banks operating in the Sultanate. The agreement was signed by Ali bin Saif Al Mani, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank and Moosa bin Masoud Al-Jadidi, CEO of Oman Housing Bank.

Alizz Islamic Bank actively seeks to contribute to all development initiatives benefiting the country and its citizens, whether through partnerships with Oman Housing Bank or by offering services and products aligned with Islamic Sharia principles. Ali Al Mani, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank emphasised that through this partnership, they aim to support many Omani families who meet the eligibility criteria for receiving housing financing. This humanitarian principle will contribute to extending the veins of urban development to various provinces of the Sultanate and enable many Omani families to afford homes. This reflects the belief that the prosperity of individuals leads to the prosperity of societies. Therefore, a dedicated team has been formed to process financing requests referred to



Alizz Islamic Bank, streamlining transaction processes.

Through the electronic platform Iskan (iskan.ohb.co.om), eligible citizens can access the platform’s page, complete registration procedures with easy steps, and choose Alizz Islamic Bank for housing financing. The financing is in line with Islamic Sharia principles, featuring straightforward and flexible transaction procedures. All products and services provided by the bank have been approved by the bank’s Fatwa and Sharia Supervision Authority.

After submitting the applica-

tion to Alizz Islamic Bank and completing all procedures, the bank will review the request and send a financing offer, including the financing amount, expected monthly installment, service fee percentage, expected financing duration, and any other applicable fees. The purpose of obtaining financing includes building a home, purchasing a ready-made home, purchasing an unfinished home and completing it, or purchasing residential land and building a home on it. The financing amount can reach up to OMR60,000 and OMR80,000 for citizens interest-

ed in buying housing units in complexes developed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

On the other hand, Alizz Islamic Bank employs the latest digital technologies to ensure transactions are completed with utmost ease. Therefore, Alizz Islamic Bank is the optimal choice for those seeking housing financing, especially as the bank continuously strives to secure the lives of citizens by helping them own their dream homes and Alizz Islamic bank is considered a strategic partner in the “Iskan” programme.





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