



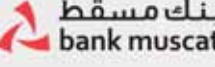
NAMA BEGINS OMR235MILLION WATER DISTRIBUTION PROJECT

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services company recently embarked on implementing a project worth OMR235 million to establish water distribution networks in the Wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank in Al Dhahirah Governorate. This was unveiled during a community meeting organised by Nama Water Services company in Al Dhahirah Governorate. **>A5**



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His Majesy issues four Royal decrees

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik yesterday issued four Royal decrees reading as follows:

Royal decree No. (63/2024) on ratifying the air services agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Chile, signed in Kuala Lumpur on 24 October, 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue.

Royal decree No. (64/2024) on ratifying an agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on eliminating double taxation for income and capital tax, as well as the prevention and avoidance of tax evasion. The agreement was signed in Luxembourg city on 16 October 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the above-mentioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and takes effect from its date of issue.

Royal decree No. (65/2024) on ratifying the air transport agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Chad, signed in Kuala Lumpur on 24 October 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue.

Royal decree No. (66/2024) on ratifying the air transport agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of Australia, signed in Kuala Lumpur on 24 October 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue. — **ONA**



Mobile laboratories to ensure quality of fuel is offered to customers

A7



HH SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES PRESIDENT OF BELARUS

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, yesterday received President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus at the Council of Ministers headquarters in Muscat. HH Sayyid Fahd welcomed the President and his accompanying delegation, hoping that relations between the two countries would continue to grow and flourish. **Story on >A3**

FITCH RATINGS REVISES OMAN'S OUTLOOK FROM STABLE TO POSITIVE

The rating agency projects Oman's budget to post a surplus of 2% of GDP in 2024

NEW YORK: Fitch Ratings on Wednesday revised the outlook of the Sultanate of Oman from stable to positive, and affirmed the credit rating of the country at 'BB+'. This is attributed to the continued reduction of government and state-owned entities (SOEs) debt, growing record of fiscal prudence and the accumulation of net sovereign foreign assets.

The agency projects Oman's budget to post a surplus of 2% of GDP in the current year (2024). It forecasts the surplus to narrow to 0.7% in 2025 and to turn to a minor deficit of 0.2% in 2026. This assumes Brent oil price of \$70 per barrel in 2025 and \$65 in 2026.



The agency estimates Oman's fiscal breakeven Brent oil price at \$67-70 per barrel.

Further, Fitch Ratings projects Oman's non-oil primary balance to continue to gradually improve with spending moderation and strengthened tax collection. It estimates the non-oil primary deficit as a share of non-oil GDP at 27% in 2024, down from 43% in 2020 and forecasts it to reach close to 24% in 2026.

Additionally, the agency projects overall GDP growth of 1.8%

in 2024, after 1.2% in 2023, supported by non-oil growth of 3.7%. Domestic consumption, robust foreign investment and tourism will maintain non-oil growth above 3% in 2025 and 2026.

Fitch Ratings projects government debt/GDP will fall to 34% of GDP at end-2024 and 33.3% by 2026 from 37.5% at end-2023 and 68% in 2020. The agency expects Oman to have reduced external debt by nearly \$2.8 billion in 2024 to \$26.6 billion (24% of GDP).

External debt repayments by

government and SOEs have assuaged liquidity risks and Oman's sovereign net foreign assets position of foreign assets + FX reserves - government debt) strengthened to close to 10% of GDP in 2024, from -9% of GDP in 2020.

The agency affirmed that the credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman could be upgraded if the country maintains a prudent fiscal stance consistent with a decline in government debt/GDP, growth of non-oil revenues as well as external buffers. — **ONA**



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MUSCAT 24⁰



CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN REPORT

Debit cards shape Oman's payment landscape in 2023

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Debit cards have emerged as the dominant force in Oman's payment landscape, accounting for a remarkable 93% of all newly issued cards in 2023.

According to the 2023 Central Bank of Oman (CBO) National Payments System Annual Report, data from Payment Service Providers (PSPs) and banks, a total of 1,328,694 cards were issued across various categories, with debit cards firmly holding the largest share.

In 2023, 1,275,475 debit cards were issued, reflecting a clear preference among consumers for the convenience and accessibility of debit payments.

These cards continue to play a central role in everyday transactions, with their widespread acceptance making them the go-to option for most Omanis.

Credit cards followed with 58,994 new cards issued, representing 4% of the total market share. While they remain less common than debit cards, credit cards continue to serve a niche market, attracting those seeking additional



financial flexibility, rewards, and benefits offered by various banks.

Prepaid cards also maintained their place in the market, with 42,148 new cards issued, making up 3% of the total. These cards are typically used for specific purposes, such as fuel purchases, online shopping, and other targeted transactions, providing a secure and convenient alternative for cashless payments.

Meanwhile, electronic wallets are gaining traction, with 11,077 new wallets issued throughout the year. This shift towards digital payments reflects growing consumer demand for more seamless and accessible financial solutions.

E-wallets are expected to continue expanding as more customers turn to them for a wide range of transactions, from online shopping to utility payments.

The overall growth in digital and card-based payments is a clear sign of changing consumer habits, with Omani citizens and residents increasingly favouring secure and easy-to-use payment methods.

As banks and PSPs continue to innovate and introduce new features, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is working to support the growth of this digital payment ecosystem, ensuring the continued evolution of the country's financial services.

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Challenges facing tech firms discussed

1 Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) represented by the Digital Economy and Artificial Intelligence Committee, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Wednesday organised the first major forum for CEOs of startups and companies in the technology and telecommunication field. **>A3**

OMAN

Asmed reviews ways to woo SME investments

2 The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Asmed) organised on Wednesday the 6th dialogue session on enhancing investments made by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the postal sector. The dialogue session focused on ways to upgrade the role of SMEs in developing the postal sector, notably by presenting innovative ideas and improving operational efficiency. **>A5**

MARKET

OIA acquires stake in Musk's AI company



3 Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced its latest investment in "xAI" company, a leading artificial intelligence American company owned by Elon Musk. The move comes as part of OIA's ongoing efforts to diversify its international portfolio and support growth across various sectors. This step reflects OIA's focus on advanced technologies as part of its broader commitment to investing in high-potential sectors. **>B1**

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HARMONIC CONVERGENCE

HH Sayyid Fahd receives President of Belarus

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, yesterday received President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus at the Council of Ministers headquarters in Muscat.

HH Sayyid Fahd welcomed the President and his accompanying delegation, hoping that relations between the two countries would continue to grow and flourish.

HH Sayyid Fahd valued the positive outcome of the President's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. He expressed his appreciation for the harmonic convergence of visions between Oman and Belarus in their drive to serve the interests of the two friendly peoples.

For his part, President Lukashenko commended the outcome of the official talks he held with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, noting that the talks consolidated relations between the two friendly countries. He expressed his admiration for the accomplishments made by Oman. He voiced his country's appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's prudent policy on domestic and foreign fronts.



HH Sayyid Fahd valued the positive outcome of the President's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman

The meeting discussed means of activating bilateral cooperation, exchanging expertise and supporting the role of the private sector in developing joint investments in the two friendly countries.

The meeting also touched on current issues and developments on the regional and international



Challenges facing startups, tech companies discussed at forum

During the forum, the CEOs Network was inaugurated in a bid to bolster strategic partnerships that support the system of digital transition



MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) represented by the Digital Economy and Artificial Intelligence Committee, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Wednesday organised the first forum for CEOs of startups and companies in the technology and telecommunication field.

The forum discussed challenges faced by these companies and the proposed solutions.

During the forum, the CEOs Network was inaugurated in a bid to bolster strategic partnerships that support the system of digital transition. The Ministry also

launched a platform for technology companies.

Faisal bin Abdullah Al-Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said: "This meeting, which represented an open dialogue, comes within the framework of implementing the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to support the partnership between the public and private sectors. It also comes from the strategic directions of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which are in line with Oman Vision 2040, to improve the business environment and support economic diversification, as



the communications and information technology sector is one of the most important sectors that enable economic diversification trends."

He explained that the Sultanate of Oman's orientations towards enhancing digital transformation are a source of many opportuni-



ties for establishing, growing and developing start-ups, communications and information technology companies, to be integrated alongside the orientation towards attracting major investments in this sector, which constitutes an opportunity for entrepreneurs and innovators.

Dr. Ali Amer Al Shidhani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications, stressed the importance of cooperation between the public and private sectors in supporting the National Digital Economy Programme, noting that this cooperation represents a fun-

damental pillar for achieving the strategic direction for the growth of the digital economy in the Sultanate of Oman.

He explained that the effective partnership between the various sectors enhances the implementation of initiatives and projects that support digital transformation, contributes to developing the digital infrastructure and creating an attractive environment for investment and innovation. He also explained that the Oman Digital Vision aims to achieve sustainable progress that enhances the Sultanate of Oman's position as a leading regional centre in the digital economy. -ONA

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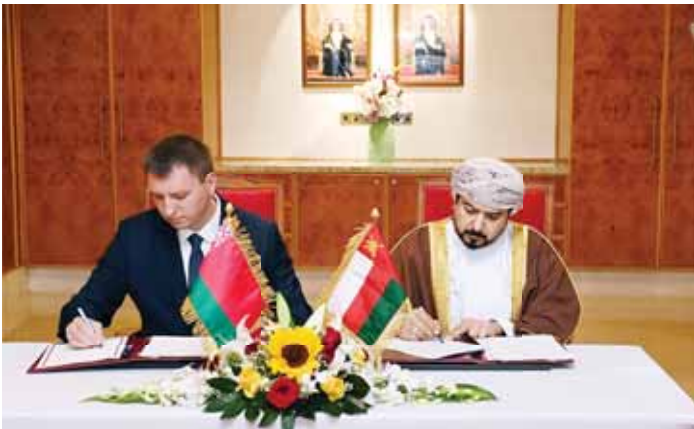


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ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

Oman, Belarus sign two MoUs

The signing of the MoUs was aimed to exchange expertise and technology, develop knowledge-based industries, support joint investments in industrial projects



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus signed today two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in industrial cooperation and in the fields of specifications, standards, conformity assessment and accreditation.

The memoranda of understanding were signed between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (on the one hand) and the Belarusian Ministry of Industry and the Committee for Standardization,

Metrology and Certification of Belarus (on the other hand).

The signing of the MoUs was aimed to exchange expertise and technology, develop knowledge-based industries, support joint investments in industrial projects and facilitate the movement of industrial goods between the two countries. It also aims to intensify joint exchange of information on national standards and technical regulations that may have a significant impact on trade between the two countries.

On behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, the memoranda of understanding were signed by Qais Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. They were signed on

the Belarusian side by Maxim Ryzhenkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, and Alexander Efimov, Minister of Industry.

The ceremony was attended by Dr. Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, Dr. Abdullah Masoud Al Harthy, Honorary Consul of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman, Hamoud Salim Al Tuwaih, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and non-resident ambassador to the Republic of Belarus, Sergei Terentiev, Non-resident Ambassador of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman, and other officials from the two countries. -ONA

AL DHAHIRAH GOVERNORATE

Nama begins OMR235mn water distribution project

IBRI: Nama Water Services company recently embarked on implementing a project worth OMR235 million to establish water distribution networks in the Wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

This was unveiled during a community meeting organised by Nama Water Services company in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The project kicked off in early December 2024, said Mohammed Harib Al Makhmari, the Project's Director, noting that the project is expected to be completed by the second quarter of 2028.

Al Makhmari explained that



the project seeks to provide safe and sustainable drinking water to all residents in the Wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate.

He pointed out that the project aims to expand the system of

water distribution networks to meet the growing population in Al Dhahirah governorate, besides enhancing the strategic storage of water in the Wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank to cater to future demand until the year 2050, based on population growth and urban expansion data. The project, designed to provide 22,000 water metre connections, will benefit more than 270,000 people in the governorate's three wilayats, said Al Makhmari, adding that the total number of water metre connections is envisaged to reach about 500,000 connections by 2050. -ONA

IN POSTAL SECTOR

ASMED reviews ways to enhance SME investment

MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) yesterday organised the 6th dialogue session on enhancing investments made by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the postal sector.

The session focused on ways to upgrade the role of SMEs in developing the postal sector, notably by presenting innovative ideas and improving operational efficiency.

ASMED seeks to encourage partnerships and cooperation between SMEs and local and international postal companies, in addition to promoting awareness about the importance of the postal sector as a vital domain in supporting the national economy.

The session covered various elements of relevance to the postal sector, including legislations,



audit procedures, standards of quality and safety, fees and licenses required in the sector, incentives, financing and investment opportunities.

The session was attended by Eng. Omar Hamdan Al Ismaili, Chairman of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), officials from the authorities concerned and owners of SMEs. - ONA



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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date
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PRE/24/073	Consultancy Services for Design of Development and Maintenance Works a long of Al Sifa Road	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/24/332	Replacing of Existing Poles Lights of DAMA SEAFRONT A'SEEB	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/24/342	Consultancy Services for Supervision for Design and Construction of Hawiyat Najm Park in Wilyate Quriyat	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/22/140 (Re-Call)	Design & Construction of Internal Roads at Ghala, LUMP SUM CONTRACT (RE Tender)	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/24/072 (Re-Call)	Design and Construction of Internal Roads in Al Mabela South Commercial Area (Lump Sum Contract)	06/01/2025	26/01/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

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- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om) .
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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:

Ref:	Description	Last date for collection of bidding document	Last date for submission of tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
2024/4611	Upgrading/replacing the switchboard and data connection panels at Ibra Health Center of the General Directorate of Health Services in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate	Before 10 am on Sunday 05/ January/2025	Before 10 am on Thursday 30/ January /2025	Specialized companies registered with the Tender Board with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades.	R.O. 25 Per set

Please note the following:

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender. (https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

Any Clarification, you may contact via:

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Mobile laboratories to ensure quality of fuel is offered to customers

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion would first start the service of mobile laboratories in the governorates of Muscat, Dhofar and North Al Batinah

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has introduced the service of Mobile laboratories for fuel pump testing as to ensure timely response and credibility in measurement of the quantity of fuel and the type of fuel offered to consumers.

The Ministry would first start the service of mobile laboratories in the governorates of Muscat, Dhofar and North Al Batinah.

Emad bin Khamis Al Shukaili, Director General of the Directorate General of Specifications and Metrology at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said the mobile laboratories service is the first service of its type in Oman and is the second at the GCC States' level.

He said that the Ministry is keen for offering this service due to the significance of periodical testing of fuel pumps and to ensure the quality of the service offered to consumers.

He said that the Ministry would enhance this service by obligating owners of fuel pumps with compliance with the local and international standards and specifications.

The mobile laboratories will be equipped with modern devices and equipment for testing the fuel, which means compliance with the type of fuel offered whether M91, M95 or M98, which would boost



the confidence of consumers and owners of fuel pump in terms of the type of fuel.

He said that the service will be activated in three units of mobile laboratories covering all stations in the governorates of Muscat, North Al Batinah and Dhofar which will be followed by other units for the remaining governorates.

There are charges against the service of periodical testing from fuel pumps which are the lowest compared to the charges applicable in the region and the other countries applying this type of services, he said pointing out to that these fees would be annual. —**ONA**



GUDAURI

Most Indian victims from Punjab in Georgia incident



TBILISI: The 11 Indian nationals who died in an Indian restaurant in Gudauri, Georgia due to carbon monoxide poisoning are mostly from the state of Punjab, the sources said the embassy is working to repatriate the mortal remains at the earliest.

"The Indian embassy in Georgia is in touch with the families and is working with local authorities to repatriate the mortal remains at the earliest," according to sources.

On Monday the embassy confirmed the deaths of 11 Indian nationals in Gudauri, Georgia, and expressed deep condolences to the bereaved families.

In a press release posted on X, the Indian Embassy in Georgia wrote, "The Embassy of India in Tbilisi is saddened to learn of the unfortunate passing of eleven Indian nationals in Gudauri, Georgia, and extends its deepest condolences to their families."

"The Embassy is working closely with local authorities to facilitate the prompt repatriation

of the mortal remains to India. We are also in contact with the bereaved families and are committed to providing all possible support," the press release added.

Earlier, Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs said that the bodies were found on the second floor of the Indian restaurant, adding that during the inspection, no signs of body injuries or signs of violence were detected.

Georgia's Internal Affairs Ministry said in a statement, "The employees of Mtskheta-Mtianeti Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in connection with the accident that took place in Gudauri, as a result of which 12 people died, started an investigation under Article 116 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which implies negligent manslaughter."

"In the resting area on the second floor of the Indian restaurant located in Gudauri, the bodies of 12 people employed in the same facility were found. At

the initial inspection, no signs of body injuries or signs of violence were detected. According to the preliminary information of the investigation, a power generator was placed in an indoor area, closed space near the bedrooms, which was turned on yesterday, probably after the power supply was turned off," the statement added.

The statement further said that out of 12 deceased individuals, 11 are citizens of foreign countries, and one is a citizen of Georgia.

"In connection with this fact, investigative actions are actively being carried out, forensic-criminalistics are working on the spot, and interviews of persons related to the case are being conducted. Appropriate examinations are appointed. A forensic medical examination has also been appointed to determine the exact cause of death," Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs said.

Notably, the incident, which occurred in an Indian restaurant in Gudauri, is under investigation. —**ANI**

NEW JERSEY

Pentagon rules out security threat amid drone sightings

WASHINGTON DC: The Pentagon on Tuesday refuted any security threats emanating from the series of drone sightings in New Jersey and said there was no threat to national security or public safety.

Pentagon Press Secretary Major General, Pat Ryder, in a press briefing, clarified that none of the drones were assets of the US Department of Defence.

"The drones in New Jersey up and down...they are not DOD assets," he said.

Notably, there has been a series of drone sightings over New Jersey in recent weeks. This has raised concerns among many regarding any security threat.

The Pentagon Press Secretary said that the cited drones are "commercial drones," or the ones being used "recreational or hobbyist." He explained that around 8500 drones are in flight in the country and though there is a possibility of their involvement in



'malign activity', it's not the case.

"There's over a million drones registered in the United States. And on any given day, approximately 8,500 drones are in flight. And so the vast majority of these drones are going to probably be recreational or hobbyist. They're going to be commercial drones, used in things like architecture, engineering, farming or they could be used for law enforcement. Is it possible that some of those drones could be up to malign activity? It's entirely possible, but the vast majority, that is not the case. In the case of drones flying near or over

US military installations, that in and of itself just given the volume of drone flights we see on a given day, is not something that's new," he said.

Stating that no drone has been identified as a presenting a national security or public safety risk, Ryder affirmed that appropriate action will be taken if the drones pose a threat.

"We'll continue to take appropriate action if and when it's deemed that any of these drones near US military installations pose a threat. But in the meantime, again, I think it's been very clear that we've not identified that any of these reported drone sightings were assessed as anomalous or that it presented a national security or public safety risk over civilian airspace in New Jersey or other states in the northeast," he said.

Ryder also said that as long as commercial drones do not enter restricted airspace, there is no harm. —**ANI**

OVERCROWDED BOAT

25 dead in DRC boat capsized

KINSHASA: An overcrowded boat capsized on a river in central Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), claiming the lives of at least 25 people, including children, with dozens still missing, according to local officials. The vessel, carrying over 100 passengers, departed from the town of Inongo, northeast of Kinshasa, but sank just a few hundred meters into its journey along the Fimi River. —**ONA**



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MEDIA REPORT

Hamas 'hopeful' of reaching ceasefire deal in Gaza Strip

DOHA: Hamas has expressed optimism about the prospects of reaching a deal about hostage and ceasefire negotiations with Israel, amid a flurry of diplomatic activity in the region, CNN reported.

In an official statement on Tuesday, Hamas said reaching an agreement was "possible." The report cited a Hamas source calling the talks "positive and optimistic."

Top US, Israeli, Qatari and Egyptian officials have all touted progress in the negotiations in recent days. While officials caution that a deal is neither sealed nor guaranteed, the upbeat language and recent diplomatic activity point to significant momentum toward reaching a deal, according to CNN.

The CIA director, Bill Burns, is expected to travel to Qatar this week to participate in further talks on a ceasefire in Gaza. Burns is expected in Doha as early as Wednesday. The report further cited an Israeli official as saying that a deal was still potentially weeks away.

"Hamas affirms that in light of the serious and positive discussions taking place in Doha, under the auspices of our Qatari and Egyptian brothers, reaching an agreement for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange is possible if the occupation stops imposing new conditions," it said in a statement.

Both Israeli and Hamas teams are in the Qatari capital for indirect negotiations. The Israeli delegation includes representatives from the Mossad and Shin Bet security services. It is the most



intensive period since talks fell apart at the end of August.

The terms of the deal are broadly the same as the proposal put forth by US President Joe Biden earlier this year.

The three-phase Biden proposal in late May paired a release of hostages held in Gaza with a "full and complete ceasefire."

The first phase would last six weeks and include the "withdrawal of Israeli forces from all populated areas of Gaza" and the "release of a number of hostages, including women, the elderly, the wounded in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners," the US president had said.

"What has changed is that Israeli forces are likely to stay in Gaza temporarily," when phase one of a deal starts, a diplomatic source said, namely in the strip of land on the Gaza-Egypt border, called the Philadelphi corridor, and in an area bisecting the strip, known as the Netzarim corridor, as reported by CNN. —**ONA**

2025 FIA MERC kicks off in Oman in January; Qatar to host round two

The event marks Oman’s return to the MERC calendar after a year’s absence, reinstating its pivotal role in the regional rally scene

MUSCAT: The 2025 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) is set to commence with the Oman International Rally, scheduled for January 23-25, 2025.

The event marks Oman’s return to the MERC calendar after a year’s absence, reinstating its pivotal role in the regional rally scene.

Organised by the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), the



rally will be based in Sohar, within the North Al Batinah Governorate. The three-day event will kick off on Thursday, January 23, from the Entertainment Centre in Sohar. Competitive stages are planned for Friday and Saturday, January 24 and 25, traversing areas in Sohar, Shinas, and Liwa provinces, notably around Al Buraimi Road. Spectators can look forward to dedicated viewing spots, including the Al Jizzi Dam and Al Uwaynah Stage, offering safe vantage points



to witness the rally action. Following the Oman International Rally, the championship will proceed to Qatar for the second round. The Qatar International Rally is slated for February 6-8, with Lusail serving as the base of operations. The event will feature 13 timed special stages covering 212.64 competitive kilometres within a total route of 627.19 kilometres. Scrutineering will take place at

the Lusail International Circuit, with media and administrative functions managed from the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) offices.

The rally will commence with a 4.36km asphalt special stage on the evening of February 6, followed by two days of desert gravel stages in the northern regions of Qatar.

The reinstatement of the Oman International Rally and the introduction of new events, such as the Saudi Arabia Rally, underscore the MERC’s commitment to expanding and diversifying rallying in the Middle East. Competitors and fans alike can anticipate a dynamic and challenging series throughout the 2025 season.

The 2025 MERC calendar, as approved by the FIA World Motor Sport Council, includes the following events: January 23-25: Oman International Rally; February 6-8: Qatar International Rally; May 1-3: Saudi Arabia Rally; May 22-24: Jordan Rally; September 7-9: Rally of Lebanon; October 4-6: Cyprus Rally.

WHITE-BALL CAPTAIN

New Zealand announce Santner as Kane Williamson’s successor

WELLINGTON: Mitchell Santner has been picked as Kane Williamson’s successor as New Zealand Cricket announced him as the white-ball captain.

Santner was officially named as the white-ball captain by NZC on Wednesday, succeeding Williamson, who stepped down from the captaincy role in the aftermath of the ICC T20 World Cup in June.

The 32-year-old all-rounder will have the opportunity to make the role his own. He has a bit of experience in leading the Blackcaps during their recent white-ball series against Sri Lanka.

With 243 international caps to his name, Santner is thrilled to begin a new chapter in his career after taking the role from stalwart Williamson.

“It’s obviously a huge honour and a privilege to be asked. When you’re a young kid, the dream was always to play for New Zealand, but to have the opportunity to officially lead my country in two formats is special,” Santner said in a statement released by the NZC.

“It’s a new challenge, and I’m excited to get stuck into the important period of white-ball cricket that we have ahead of us,” he added.

For New Zealand head coach Gary Stead, Santner was the most obvious choice for the role, and said, “Mitch is a fantastic team man and leads by example in all facets of the game. He’s an incredibly calm and collected personality, and he has a huge amount of respect in the changing room, which will serve him well.”

“He’s had plenty of experience



leading the T20 side and did a good job when he captained the ODI team last month, so he already has a good understanding of what it means to lead the team. I’m sure Mitch will also bring his own ideas and style of leadership to the role,” he added.

For Stead, the decision to hand Santner the mantle for the ODI and T20I teams was based on the needs of the wider team.

“In Tom Latham, we have an accomplished and experienced captain who has led the side admirably across all three formats. Tom’s doing a great job as full-time Test captain since taking over in October, and we’re keen to allow him to focus on that job, which requires a considerable amount of time and energy,” he remarked.

NZC CEO Scott Weenink is assured that Santner is a strong fit for the role and said, “Mitchell was a natural choice, being one of the first picked for both the ODI and T20 teams and being very popular and well-respected by his teammates.”

“He’s been one of the top-performing white-ball bowlers in world cricket for several years, and his experience will hold him in good stead as he takes over the captaincy roles. I know he will be a great leader of these teams,” he noted.

Santner’s first assignment as New Zealand’s white-ball skipper will be leading the side in the upcoming six home matches against Sri Lanka, beginning on December 23. After that, Santner will need to shift his focus to the ICC Championships Trophy next year. -ANI

3-WICKET TRIUMPH

Salman Agha’s heartwarming gesture wins hearts



PAARL : Salman Ali Agha won hearts after sharing his Player of the Match award with young Saim Ayub after Pakistan’s narrow 3-wicket triumph in the opening ODI of the three-match series against South Africa.

Young opener Ayub demonstrated his high-ceiling as a player by hammering his second ODI century in his seventh appearance for the Men in Green. After playing 50-odd balls, Ayub started to accelerate, turning the unfavourable situation around in Pakistan’s favour with his 109-run blitzkrieg.

On the other hand, Salmam was a constant threat in all parameters that South Africa had to deal with. The part-time spinner cleaned up South Africa’s batting order with his off-spin and contributed with an invaluable 82*, steering Pakistan to victory.

For his all-rounded performance, Salmam was crowned with the POTM award, but Salmam wanted to share it with Ayub. Salmam believes without the young southpaw, there wouldn’t have been a victory to celebrate for Pakistan.

“We were in a tricky position, but we took it one over at a time and built it from there. His (Ayub’s) knock set up the game. He was there with the new ball and was running out of partners. The way he played the fast bowlers and scored a hundred on this pitch was amazing,” Salmam said in the post-match presentation.

The duo formed a partnership when Pakistan appeared to be down and out at 60/4 in 19.1 overs. At that point, Salmam and Ayub united on the crease, offering Pakistan a realistic shot at changing the situation around.

They dug deep to forge a 141-run stand, during which Ayub was constantly guided by the experienced Salmam.

“Obviously, it is difficult. We were four down, and on this track, you need to keep the belief. He (Agha) is more experienced than me and was guiding me,” Ayub added.

With Pakistan 1-0 up in the series, the Mohammad Rizwan-led side will look to secure the series in the second match on Thursday in Cape Town. -ANI

REAL MADRID

Vinicius Jr wins 2024 best FIFA Men’s Player award

GENEVA: Real Madrid Brazilian forward Vinicius Jr succeeded Lionel Messi to win The Best FIFA Men’s Player 2024 award, while Spain midfielder Aitana Bonmati won The Best Women’s Player for the second consecutive year on Tuesday.

The world football governing body FIFA held The Best FIFA Football Award 2024 ceremony in Doha, Qatar, where other awards were also announced based on the votes from fans, captains and coaches of national teams and the media.

Vinicius Jr had 48 points, while Manchester City’s Spanish midfielder Rodri collected 43 points in the second. Real Madrid’s English midfielder Jude Bellingham placed third with 37 points.

Messi was ranked sixth with 25 points, as the first choice of each vote counts five points, the second counts three points and the last counts one point, according to the rule.

“The Brazil and Real Madrid star enjoyed the most spectacular season of his career in 2023-24. He regularly produced match-defining moments for Real Madrid, racking up 24 goals in 39 appearances across all competitions,”



Barcelona’s Spanish star Bonmati becomes the sixth player to win this award more than once. Bonmati helped Spain win the UEFA Women’s Nations League, and Barcelona claimed the UEFA Women’s Champions League title.

The 26-year-old collected 52 voting points ahead of Barbra Banda of Zambia (39 points) and Caroline Graham Hansen of Norway (37 points).

Real Madrid head coach Carlo Ancelotti won The Best Men’s Coach award, while Chelsea’s Emma Hayes won The Best Women’s Coach award.

The Best Men’s Goalkeeper award went to Argentine Emiliano Martinez while American Alyssa Naeyer was crowned the Best Women’s Goalkeeper.

FIFA also announced the Men’s and Women’s Best 11 as well as winners of other awards, including the Fair Play, Fan Award, etc. -Xinhua

BAN OF UP TO FOUR YEARS



Chelsea forward Mudryk suspended after positive drug test

LONDON: Chelsea forward Mykhailo Mudryk has been provisionally suspended by England’s Football Association after testing positive for a banned substance and could face a ban of up to four years.

“Chelsea Football Club can confirm the Football Association recently contacted our player Mykhailo Mudryk concerning

an adverse finding in a routine urine test.”

FA’s testing

“Both the club and Mykhailo fully support The FA’s testing programme and all our players, including Mykhailo, are regularly tested,” commented the club in a statement, which added the 23-year-old had “confirmed categorically

that he has never knowingly used any banned substances.”

“Both Mykhailo and the club will now work with the relevant authorities to establish what has caused the adverse finding. The club will not be commenting any further,” concludes the communique.

Mudryk also issued a statement in which the player said his

test result had “come as a complete shock,” and he insisted he had “never knowingly used any banned substances or broken any rules,” before saying he was “working closely with my team to investigate how this could have happened.”

“I know that I have not done anything wrong and remain hopeful that I will be back on the pitch

soon. I cannot say any more now due to the confidentiality of the process, but I will as soon as I can,” he added.

Mudryk cost Chelsea an initial 79 million U.S. dollars when he joined the club from Shakhtar Donetsk in January 2023, but has so far failed to live up to expectations, with 10 goals in 73 appearances since then. -Xinhua

OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES
Oman Crude (February delivery 2025) rose by three cents to reach \$73.57 per barrel, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). Average price of Oman Crude (December delivery) has stabilised at \$74.82 per barrel, \$1.33 per barrel higher than November delivery. - **ONA**

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS LOWER
The MSX index closed at 4,470.39 points, down by 1.39% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.26% at 412.80 points. Muscat Gases, up 9.09%, was the top gainer while, OQEP, down 2.44%, was the top loser. **> B2**

OIA announces new investment in Elon Musk’s ‘xAI’ company

The OIA Chairman emphasised that this investment supports Oman’s broader goals under Oman Vision 2040, which enables the Sultanate of Oman to adopt world-class technologies and drive future progress

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced its latest investment in “xAI” company, a leading artificial intelligence American company. The move comes as part of OIA’s ongoing efforts to diversify its international portfolio and support growth across various sectors. This step reflects OIA’s focus on advanced technologies as part of its broader commitment to invest-



ing in high-potential sectors. According to the Authority, xAI has already achieved two significant milestones since its launch by Elon Musk the establishment of a major data centre in the United States and the rollout of its enhanced platform, Grok-2. These developments are expected to further strengthen the company’s market position and boost the returns on OIA’s investment. Abdulsalam Mohammed Al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman In-

vestment Authority, emphasised that this investment supports Oman’s broader goals under Oman Vision 2040, which enables the Sultanate of Oman to adopt world-class technologies and drive future progress. On his turn, Elon Musk said, “The partnership between Oman and the Gulf countries with xAI is an excellent idea. These investments will bear fruit as we work together to build a superintelligent AI capable of solving numer-

ous problems. We are nearing the completion of training the Grok 3 model, which we believe will be the smartest AI model in the world.” xAI aims to be a pioneer in AI systems, offering the ability to process and analyze real-time data, an essential advantage over many competing AI systems. The platform provides advanced tools and detailed analytics, enabling users to optimize large AI models and manage various types of visual data, such as documents, charts,



graphs, and photographs. Oman Investment Authority’s partnership with Elon Musk extends beyond its investment in xAI. OIA is also a shareholder in SpaceX, Musk’s groundbreaking aerospace company known for its Starlink satellite communication system. This collaboration has been highly successful, with OIA achieving an internal rate of return exceeding 37% on its SpaceX investment. The strong returns are attributed to SpaceX’s rapid global expansion and the deployment of its satellite communication services in numerous countries worldwide. - **ONA**



OMAN ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION COMPANY



OETC achieves more than 52mn safe work hours since last LTI

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a commitment to achieving the highest global standards in quality, health, safety, security, and the environment, and following best practices in the field while ensuring continuous improvement and development, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has achieved a new milestone in health and safety by surpassing 52 million safe man-hours since the last lost-time injury (LTI). This achievement spans various work sites and projects across the Sultanate of Oman, as part of the company’s ongoing efforts to enhance the quality, safety, reliability, and sustainability of the electricity transmission network. This milestone was achieved due to the company’s constant commitment to raising awareness among its employees and project workers about the importance of implementing quality, health, safety, security, and environmental standards, as well as the need to follow best practices and utilize available tools to improve the safety and security of the work environment. This also included conducting regular inspection, monitoring, and follow-up campaigns by the company’s specialized team to track progress on projects, assess practices at work sites, and implement corrective actions when necessary. In this context, Mr. Fahad bin Nasser Al-Kiyumi, General Manager of Quality, Health, Safety, Security, and Environment at the company, emphasised the company’s ongoing efforts and the dedication of all specialised teams across the various fields in which the company operates. He highlighted the company’s

commitment to sharing best practices, adhering to the highest standards, and engaging with leading institutions in various fields to exchange experiences and expertise. Al-Kiyumi added: “At Oman Electricity Transmission Company, we believe in the importance of maintaining the safety, health, and security of our employees and workers through our continuous pursuit and precise application of the highest standards and best practices locally, regionally, and globally. This significant achievement, which we are proud of, is a testament to this commitment. We also strive to strengthen communication with leading institutions, and as part of this, the company recently joined the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (Opal) as part of our efforts to engage more closely with Omani institutions and exchange successful practices and experiences through a unified platform. We reaffirm our commitment to achieving further progress and monitoring performance to ensure continuous improvement.” It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across the Sultanate’s network. The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centers in the governorates. The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate, whether in the north or the south. Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

TO ENHANCE EFFICIENCIES

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Directorate General of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion in North Al Batinah Governorate, in collaboration with Credit Oman and the Logistics City, organised a workshop focused on supply chains and export assurance. The aim was to enhance understanding of international supply chain concepts and export assurance, which are critical factors for the success of institutions in global markets. The workshop commenced with a speech by Said bin Rashid Al Balushi, Director of the Investment Promotion Department at the Directorate General of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion in North Al Batinah. He stated that Oman, in its pursuit of the targets outlined in Oman Vision 2040, aims to transform into a global logistics hub and enhance its position in the global trade map. This will be achieved by leveraging its strate-



gic location, which is central to global trade movements, along with the significant growth in the maritime ports sector, land transport activities, and the expansion of new investments in various free and industrial zones. Al Balushi added, “In light of the increasing demand for rapid adaptation to market conditions and consumer needs, focusing on delivering innovations in supply chains and key technologies to enhance efficiencies in supply chain operations has become more critical than ever.”

REMARKABLE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

National Finance clinches prestigious award

MUSCAT: With a keen focus on sustainable growth, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, clinched the prestigious ‘OER Corporate Excellence Award 2024’ in the Large Cap Segment. This marks the company’s second consecutive win at this esteemed event, underscoring its remarkable financial performance in 2023 and its dedication to innovative solutions, digital transformation, and community impact. The award was graciously accepted by Bikram Singh Monga, General Manager Risk, Controls and Strategy at National Finance, on behalf of the company. The event was held under the patronage of His Excellency Faissal Al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry, and in the presence of His Excellency Shaikh Salim Bin Mustahail Al Mashani, along with a number of leading figures, experts, and change-makers, in honor of the outstanding achievements in Oman’s corporate landscape. Commenting on the win, Mr.



Tariq Sulaiman Al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, stated, “This prestigious recognition is a testament to National Finance’s relentless pursuit of excellence and its pivotal role in Oman’s financial ecosystem. It reflects not only our achievements in delivering exceptional financial performance but also our commitment to innovation in products and services, customer-centricity, and sustainable growth. For us, this honor is both a milestone and a motivation to advance our vision further—strengthening our determination to innovate, lead, and create lasting value for our stakeholders. Guided by the principles of Oman Vision 2040, we remain focused on diversifying our offerings, leveraging cut-

ting-edge digital solutions, and fostering resilience in a dynamic economic environment.” National Finance’s exceptional financial performance is a testament to its strategic execution, disciplined risk management, and adaptability in navigating dynamic economic landscapes. Supported by a robust regulatory capital of OMR143.70 million—the highest among Finance and Leasing Companies in Oman—the company has fortified its financial foundation, positioning itself as a resilient leader in the sector. Building on this strong financial base, National Finance continues to lead through transformative initiatives aligned with its strategic vision. Recognising the critical role

of SMEs in Oman’s economic landscape, the company provides innovative financing solutions to empower small and medium-sized enterprises, thereby contributing to the nation’s economic diversification. Aligned with the Sultanate’s sustainability agenda and net-zero ambitions, National Finance has championed several initiatives that address critical national priorities. By supporting the country’s first solar panel manufacturing project and becoming the first to offer financing solutions for boat engines, the company exemplifies its responsiveness to community needs. Complementing its strategic achievements, National Finance continues to make a meaningful social impact through youth empowerment programs, environmental awareness campaigns, and partnerships with non-profit organizations that support people with disabilities and underprivileged communities. These efforts embody the company’s dedication to fostering inclusivity and building a brighter future for Oman.

MARKET



MSX index ends lower

Muscat Gases, up 9.09%, was the top gainer while, OQEP, down 2.44%, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,470.39 points, down by 1.39% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.26% at 412.80 points. Muscat Gases, up 9.09%, was the top gainer while, OQEP, down 2.44%, was the top loser. Shares of OQBI were the most active in terms of number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 1277 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of OMR4.05 million, with more than 29.6 million shares changing hands. Out of 52 traded securities, 12 advanced, 20 declined, and 20 remained unchanged. At the session close, GCC & Arab investors were net sellers for OMR68,000 while foreign investors were net buyers for OMR67,000, followed by domestic investors for OMR1,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,502.47 points, down 1.27%.

Prices of United Finance, Oman & Emirates Investment were up by 3.70%, 1.54% respectively. Prices of Bank Dhofar, Al Sharqia Investment, Al Madina Takaful, Global Financial Investments, Bank Muscat were down by 9.88%, 1.41%, 1.25%, 1.22%, 1.18% respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,173.76 points, down 0.2%. Prices of Gulf International Chemicals were up by 2.94% respectively. Prices of Galfar Engineering, Oman Cement, Al Maha Ceramics were down by 1.16%, 1.06%, 0.78% respectively.

Services Index was down by 0.19% before closing at 1,721.57 points. Prices of Muscat Gases, Oman Oil Marketing, Muscat Desalination, Musandam Power, Phoenix Power were up by 9.09%, 7.59%, 3.08%, 2.96%, 1.72% respectively. Prices of Majan College, Al Suwadi Power, Dhofar Generating, SMN Power Holding, Renaissance Services were down by 1.87%, 1.56%, 1.54%, 1.16%, 0.78% respectively. — United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	4,536.85	4,470.39	4,470.39	4,533.38	-62.99	-1.39
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,600.04	7,502.47	7,502.47	7,598.65	-96.18	-1.27
Industry Index	5,214.99	5,163.17	5,173.76	5,183.98	-10.21	-0.20
Services Index	1,729.05	1,719.32	1,721.57	1,724.91	-3.34	-0.19
MSX Shariah Index	413.78	411.29	412.80	413.86	-1.06	-0.26
MSX TR INDEX	6,348.85	6,255.84	6,255.84	6,343.99	-88.15	-1.39
FINANCIAL TR IDX	8,634.42	8,523.58	8,523.58	8,632.85	-109.27	-1.27
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	6,016.86	5,957.07	5,969.29	5,981.08	-11.79	-0.20
SERVICES TR IDX	2,058.37	2,046.79	2,049.47	2,053.45	-3.98	-0.19
FIXED INCOME INDEX	1,067.21	1,067.21	1,067.21	1,067.21	0.00	0.00

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
29,600,883	4,049,442	1,277	27,254,653,521	12	20	20	52

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF	DIFF %	LAST PR.	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PREV. VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET															
OM0000002374..... UNITED FINANCE	90,378	5,061	7	0.056	0.056	0.056	0.056	0.054	0.002	3.704	0.056	0.055	0.058	0.100	19,943,129
OM0000007811..... MUSANDAM POWER	1,000	278	1	0.278	0.278	0.278	0.278	0.270	0.008	2.963	0.278	0.000	0.278	0.100	19,568,420
OM0000004825..... ALBATTINAH POWER	21,000	1,344	3	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.063	0.001	1.587	0.064	0.063	0.064	0.100	43,192,796
OM0000001681..... OMAN EMIRATES HO.	1,508	100	1	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.065	0.001	1.538	0.066	0.064	0.067	0.100	8,043,750
OM0000002168..... AL ANWAR CERAMIC	714,278	64,296	31	0.090	0.090	0.089	0.090	0.090	0.000	0.734	0.090	0.088	0.090	0.100	90,684,335
OM0000002804..... ASAFFA FOODS	790	305	2	0.386	0.390	0.386	0.390	0.390	0.000	0.000	0.390	0.389	0.390	0.100	46,800,000
OM0000003398..... SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	783,401	103,273	28	0.132	0.133	0.131	0.133	0.133	0.000	0.000	0.133	0.125	0.142	0.100	880,093,754
OM0000003988..... OOHEDOO	158,700	37,280	10	0.235	0.235	0.233	0.234	0.234	0.000	0.000	0.233	0.233	0.233	0.100	152,320,950
OM0000004735..... SEMBOORP SALALAH	123,717	11,631	7	0.094	0.095	0.094	0.095	0.095	0.000	0.000	0.095	0.094	0.095	0.100	567,311,734
OM0000003026..... OMAN TELECOM	215,545	199,394	14	0.928	0.928	0.924	0.924	0.927	-0.003	-0.324	0.924	0.922	0.924	0.100	693,000,000
OM0000001533..... OMINVEST	8,045	2,655	5	0.330	0.330	0.328	0.330	0.330	-0.002	-0.606	0.328	0.328	0.329	0.100	219,223,860
OM0000000894..... ABRAR ENERGY SERVICES	88,261	24,613	17	0.277	0.278	0.275	0.275	0.277	-0.002	-0.722	0.275	0.275	0.288	0.100	211,805,000
OM0000000972..... OQ GAS NETWORKS	834,822	109,748	88	0.133	0.133	0.130	0.131	0.132	-0.001	-0.758	0.131	0.131	0.139	0.100	567,311,734
OM0000003224..... RENAISSANCE SERVICES	202,508	76,956	6	0.381	0.381	0.380	0.380	0.383	-0.003	-0.783	0.380	0.380	0.379	0.100	89,833,800
OM0000001749..... OMAN CEMENT	15,000	5,580	5	0.372	0.372	0.372	0.372	0.376	-0.004	-1.064	0.372	0.373	0.377	0.100	123,084,000
OM0000002796..... BANK MUSCAT	325,083	82,291	23	0.254	0.254	0.251	0.251	0.254	-0.003	-1.181	0.251	0.251	0.253	0.100	1,884,105,663
OM0000003125..... GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.	133,294	10,927	12	0.082	0.082	0.081	0.081	0.082	-0.001	-1.220	0.081	0.081	0.082	0.100	16,200,000
OM0000004768..... MADINA TAKAFUL	40,530	3,242	4	0.080	0.080	0.079	0.079	0.080	-0.001	-1.250	0.079	0.080	0.088	0.100	13,825,000
OM0000002440..... AL SHARQIYA INVESTMENT HO.	5,250	368	2	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.071	-0.001	-1.408	0.070	0.067	0.070	0.100	6,300,000
OM0000000493..... AL SUWADI POWER	57,820	3,651	8	0.064	0.064	0.063	0.063	0.064	-0.001	-1.563	0.063	0.063	0.064	0.100	45,007,599
Total	20	3,821,590	745,985	274											
Parallel Market															
OM0000001178..... MUSCAT GASES	119	13	1	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.099	0.009	8.091	0.108	0.099	0.108	0.100	3,240,000
OM0000002572..... OMAN OIL MARKETING	250	195	1	0.780	0.780	0.780	0.780	0.725	0.055	7.586	0.780	0.000	0.780	0.100	4,7794,500
OM0000008447..... OMAN REIT FUND	1,760	135	3	0.079	0.079	0.075	0.078	0.075	0.003	4.000	0.078	0.070	0.078	0.100	39,673,241
OM0000007084..... MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION	21,000	1,387	4	0.066	0.067	0.066	0.067	0.065	0.002	3.077	0.067	0.066	0.067	0.100	10,421,877
OM0000002028..... GULF INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS	26,787	1,879	6	0.070	0.072	0.070	0.070	0.068	0.002	2.941	0.070	0.070	0.072	0.100	1,470,000
OM0000005963..... PHOENIX POWER	85,000	4,296	3	0.059	0.059	0.058	0.059	0.058	0.001	1.734	0.059	0.058	0.059	0.100	86,293,486
OM0000001160..... NATIONAL GAS	36,600	2,927	11	0.080	0.080	0.079	0.079	0.078	0.001	1.282	0.079	0.078	0.079	0.100	6,715,000
OM0000008868..... THE PEARL REEF	1,000	120	1	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.119	0.001	0.840	0.120	0.118	0.120	0.100	60,972,426
OM0000001797..... OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	4,250	11,519	6	2.699	2.720	2.690	2.710	2.710	0.000	0.000	2.710	2.690	2.720	0.100	243,067,000
OM0000007772..... ALANWAR INVESTMENT	143,438	19,467	11	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.000	0.000	0.066	0.065	0.066	0.100	14,003,880
OM0000003661..... VOLTAMP ENERGY	25,887	10,355	16	0.400	0.410	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.000	0.000	0.400	0.400	0.410	0.100	32,561,100
OM0000004669..... SHARQIYAH DESALINATION	1,000	135	1	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.000	0.000	0.135	0.125	0.135	0.100	13,203,292
OM0000003260..... OMAN ARAB BANK	28,000	4,032	2	0.144	0.144	0.144	0.144	0.144	0.000	0.000	0.144	0.144	0.144	0.100	240,395,040
OM0000000870..... BARKA DESALINATION	1,000	124	1	0.124	0.124	0.124	0.124	0.124	0.000	0.000	0.124	0.000	0.124	0.100	9,364,728
OM0000009569..... JABAL REIF	1,546,000	157,692	2	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.000	0.000	0.102	0.000	0.102	0.100	17,748,000
OM0000009908..... QBASE INDUSTRIES (SPZ)	21,127,240	2,343,915	637	0.111	0.112	0.110	0.111	0.111	0.000	0.000	0.111	0.111	0.111	0.100	384,003,484
OM0000003141..... BARKA WATER AND POWER	20,500	6,439	2	0.317	0.317	0.315	0.315	0.316	-0.001	-0.316	0.315	0.311	0.317	0.100	50,400,000
OM0000003005..... ALMAHA CERAMICS	99,870	12,794	11	0.128	0.129	0.128	0.128	0.129	-0.001	-0.775	0.128	0.128	0.140	0.100	7,740,000
OM0000004420..... BANK NIZWA	2,978	292	1	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.099	-0.001	-1.010	0.098	0.095	0.108	0.100	219,221,397
OM0000004248..... SMN POWER HOLDING	192,049	66,298	9	0.345	0.346	0.342	0.342	0.346	-0.004	-1.156	0.342	0.342	0.344	0.100	68,275,375
OM0000003521..... GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING	894,758	77,103	75	0.087	0.089	0.085	0.085	0.086	-0.001	-1.163	0.085	0.081	0.085	0.100	17,253,848
OM0000007407..... DHOFAR GENERATING	14,320	914	2	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.000	0.000	0.064	0.062	0.064	0.100	14,223,360
OM0000001897..... MAJAN COLLEGE	15,000	1,575	5	0.105	0.105	0.105	0.105	0.107	-0.002	-1.869	0.105	0.105	0.110	0.100	9,450,000
OM0000009759..... QO EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION	1,130,458	367,268	161	0.329	0.330	0.320	0.320	0.328	-0.008	-2.439	0.320	0.320	0.325	0.100	60,012,560,000,000
OM0000002549..... BANK DHOFAR	44,617	7,218	2	0.162	0.162	0.146	0.146	0.162	-0.016	-9.877	0.146	0.146	0.170	0.100	437,467,310
Total	25	25,463,881	3,068,743	979											

EUROSTAT DATA

Eurozone inflation

LUXEMBOURG CITY: Eurozone inflation grew at a slightly slower than initially estimated pace in November 2024, revised data published by Eurostat showed. The harmonised index of consumer prices (HICP) rose 2.2% year-on-year in November 2024, following a 2% increase in October.

— ONA

VIA API BANKING PORTAL

NBO Partners with First Exchange to enhance remittance services

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) is delighted to announce signing a pivotal agreement to partner with First Exchange, a leading financial services provider specialising in international remittances, foreign currency exchange, and payment services.

The agreement was signed by Abdullah Zahran Al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO, and Dr. Ghazi Nasser Al Alawi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of First Exchange.

Innovative solutions

The partnership facilitates easier and safer methods for customers to send money by integrating First Exchange's services with NBO's advanced API Banking Portal. This collaboration is also in line with NBO's long-term vision to build enduring partnerships and expand its digital landscape capabilities in the market, ensuring innovative solutions that meet the evolving needs of customers.

The collaboration will allow First Exchange to route all remittance transactions through NBO's Payment Hub, ensuring fast and secure money transfers across borders. NBO's API Banking Portal offers First Exchange a strong platform to expand its digital payment options with fast payment and transfer services across

its retail branches and digital channels.

Commenting on this strategic step, Dr Ali Al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager and Head of Digital & E-Channels at NBO said: "It gives us a great pleasure to join hands with First Exchange to provide enhanced financial services using innovative technology. With our API Banking Portal, we ensure customers enjoy smooth, secure, and efficient remittance services, when using digital platforms or visiting our branches. This partnership is a crucial component of NBO's digital transformation strategy, supporting our commitment to innovation while contributing to a stellar financial sector in Oman."

The platform has enhanced security features to protect customer data and ensure compliance with regulatory standards. By working together, NBO and First Exchange are committed to improving the customer experience, increasing efficiency, and reducing costs. Aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and the national push towards a more digital economy, this initiative supports the vision's goal of building a technologically advanced and diverse financial sector that fosters innovation and growth.

For more information about NBO's digital banking solutions and services, please visit www.nbo.om or contact the NBO Call Centre at 24770000.

UNIQUE PACKAGES

Juweria Boutique Hotel launches first detox programme in Hawana Salalah

MUSCAT: A pioneering initiative designed to promote health and wellness in the stunning surroundings of Hawana Salalah. This innovative programme will offer three unique packages, each tailored to meet the diverse needs of our guests.

Set against the backdrop of Oman's picturesque landscapes, the detox programme aims to provide a holistic retreat for those seeking to rejuvenate their mind, body, and spirit. Each package includes a variety of wellness activities, healthy meal options, and personalized guidance to help participants achieve their detox goals.

Detox programme highlights:
• **Three Tailored Packages:** Raw Detox Programme, Alkaline Vegan Gluten-Free Free Detox Programme and Juice Detox Program. Each package focuses on different aspects of detoxification, allowing guests to choose the experience that best suits their needs.



LIFESTYLE

SCIENTISTS
DISCOVER
PREHISTORIC

This ancient predator, resembling a dog with saber-like teeth, offers a new glimpse into the distant origins of mammal evolution



SABER-TOOTHED
PREDATOR
THAT PREDATES
DINOSAURS

Researchers have discovered the oldest gorgonopsian fossil on Mallorca, a Spanish island in the Mediterranean Sea, dating from 270-280 million years ago. This therapsid, a saber-toothed predator, offers new insights into the evolutionary lineage leading to mammals.

About 200 million years ago, the first true mammals emerged during the age of dinosaurs. However, their origins can be traced back even further to a group called therapsids. While many therapsids bore little resemblance to modern mammals, they shared key traits that would define mammalian evolution. These included openings on the sides of their skulls for jaw muscle attachment and specialised jawbones, which eventually evolved into the distinctive middle ear bones

seen in mammals today.

In a new study published on Tuesday in Nature Communications, scientists announced the discovery of what could be the oldest known therapsid fossil. This ancient predator, resembling a dog with saber-like teeth, offers a new glimpse into the distant origins of mammal evolution.

The new fossil, which doesn't have a species name yet, is a member of a group called the gorgonopsians. "Gorgonopsians are more closely related to mammals than they are to any other living animals," said Ken Angielczyk, the Field Museum's MacArthur Curator of Paleomammalogy in the Negaunee Integrative Research Center and a co-author of the paper. "They don't have any modern descendants, and while they're not our direct ancestors, they're related to species that were our direct ancestors."

Until now, the oldest known gorgonopsians lived roughly 265 million years ago. However, the new fossil is from 270-280 million years ago. "It is most likely the oldest gorgonopsian on the planet," said Josep Fortuny, senior author of the article and head of the Computational Biomechanics and Evolution of Life History group at the Institut Català de Paleontologia Miquel Crusafont (ICP) in Spain.

The fossils were found in Mallorca. But in the time of the gorgonopsians, Mallorca was part of the supercontinent of Pangea.

The fact that this gorgonopsian predates its closest relatives by tens of millions of years changes scientists' understanding of when therapsids evolved, an important milestone on the way to the emergence of mammals, and in turn it tells us something about where we come from. - **ONA**

SPORTS

India’s carrom-baller, spin wizard Ashwin bids farewell to cricket

The anticipation around Ashwin’s retirement started to build up when he was visibly emotional and was hugged by Kohli

BRISBANE : India’s decorated off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin announced his decision to retire from international cricket moments after the Brisbane Test ended in a draw.

Ashwin came into the post-match press conference with India’s captain, Rohit Sharma, to announce his decision. The anticipation around Ashwin’s retirement started to build up when he was visibly emotional and was hugged by Virat Kohli.

Moments after Ashwin announced his retirement, Rohit Sharma stood up and embraced Ashwin. The 38-year-old was brief while announcing that Wednesday marked his last day as an interna-



tional cricketer.

“I don’t want to make it about myself. This is my last day as an international cricketer. I’ve had a lot of fun. I have made a lot of memories alongside Rohit [Sharma] and

several of my team-mates, even though we’ve lost some of them [to retirements] over the last few years. We’re the last bunch of OGs, we can say that. I will be marking this as my date of having played at

this level,” Ashwin said in the post-match press conference.

“Obviously there are a lot of people to thank, but I will be failing in my duties if I didn’t thank the BCCI and fellow team-mates. I want to

name a few of them, some of the coaches [also] who have been part of the journey. Most importantly, Rohit, Virat [Kohli], Ajinkya [Rahane], [Cheteshwar] Pujara, who have taken some of the catches around the bat and given me the number of wickets I’ve managed to get over the years,” he added.

In a career that spanned over two decades, Ashwin made an everlasting impression across the three formats. He redefined the art of off-spin by working on the established variations and adding a touch of his own.

“Ashwin is a true match winner India has ever seen,” Rohit said.

He featured in 106 Tests, picked up a whopping 537 wickets, including 37 five-wicket hauls, and amassed 3,503 runs. One can even argue that his contributions to Indian cricket are far greater than just what those staggering numbers indicate.

The crafty spinner is the seventh-highest wicket-taker in Tests overall and second-highest for India behind legendary spinner Anil Kumble (619 scalps). He also has 2nd most five-wicket hauls in Tests, behind Sri Lankan spin icon Muttiah Muralitharan (67).

With Ashwin stepping down from the international stage, he is truly leaving behind a tremendous

legacy and massive boots to fill for the youngsters who will come in to make up for his presence.

Ashwin spearheaded the bowling attack and was a major face behind India’s rise to the top and eventual domination in Test cricket that lasted from 2014 to 2019.

When one turns to look at his dominance in the home conditions, he was a phenom. His expertise wasn’t just limited to the ball but also some impactful contributions with the bat.

In the white-ball format, Ashwin made 181 appearances and snatched 228 wickets. He made 116 ODI appearances and took 156 wickets at an average of 33.20, with best figures of 4/25. He also made 707 runs at an average of 16.44, with one fifty, a knock of 65 in 63 innings. He is the 13th-highest wicket-taker in ODIs for India.

In 65 T20Is, he took 72 wickets at an average of 23.22. His best figures are 4/8. He also scored 184 runs in 19 innings at an average of 26.28, with best score of 31. He is the sixth-highest wicket-taker for India in T20Is.

With 765 scalps in 287 matches, he is India’s second-highest wicket-taker across all formats, next to Kumble (953). He also won the 2011 50-Over World Cup and 2013 Champions Trophy with India. -ANI

CRICKET

WTC final hangs in balance after drawn Brisbane Test

BRISBANE: After weather forced the Brisbane Test to end in a draw, the race to the World Test Championship final further became a tricky affair, ICC Cricket reported.

On Wednesday, both teams were forced to settle for four points in the race to feature at next year’s ICC WTC final at Lord’s. The result didn’t lead to a change in the WTC standings but offered clarity on what the teams need to do to qualify for the final.

Australia remained in second place on the World Test Championship standings with a 58.89 points percentage, marginally in front of India in third with 55.88 per cent.

South Africa, with a points percentage of 63.33 per cent, remains in front of the standings and in the box seat to feature in the one-off Test in June 2025.

Australia and India remain their closest challengers ahead of the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne and the New Year Test in Sydney at the start of 2025.

To qualify for the WTC final, India need to win the remaining



two Tests to qualify for the final. Australia’s result in the Sri Lanka Tests won’t have an effect on India’s qualification.

If India wins one and draws one, then they would need Sri Lanka to play out a draw against Australia in one of the Tests.

Despite Australia captain Pat Cummins making a huge bid to push for a result after deciding to declare on 89/7 and invite India to chase down a 275-run target, the match ended at a stalemate.

Yashasvi Jaiswal and KL Ra-

hul looked in good touch, effectively negating the pace blitz of Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc. The opening pair found a couple of perfectly timed shots to keep the scoreboard ticking.

As the Test intensified, the weather came in to intervene and halt the play.

As both teams waited for some action, it eventually became clear that resuming the game would be unlikely. Both teams shook hands and decided to leave Brisbane with a draw. -ANI

THIRD TEST

Weather plays its part in keeping BGT series level

BRISBANE: The third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy (BGT) between India and Australia has ended in a draw after weather continued to make it difficult to push for a result on Wednesday in Brisbane.

The series remained level at 1-1 despite Australia captain Pat Cummins making a huge bid to push for a result after deciding to declare on 89/7 and invite India to chase down a 275-run target.

“The play has been abandoned in Brisbane and the match is drawn. After the Third Test, the series is evenly poised at 1-1.”

Yashasvi Jaiswal and KL Rahul looked in good touch, effectively negating the pace blitz of Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc. The opening pair found a couple of perfectly timed shots to keep the scoreboard driving.

Before they took the crease to chase down the target, Australia tried to fire quickly, with Usman Khawaja picking up a couple of fours to lay down their intent. The intent to play aggressively came with a risk that Australian batters



were willing to pay off.

In a space of the first 18 overs, Australia lost seven wickets and managed to put 89 runs on the board. In the first 10 overs, runs were scarce as skipper Rohit Sharma shuffled his bowlers well.

Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj bowled in tandem before the latter was taken out, and Akash Deep was thrown into the mix. The move worked magic, with Bumrah

and Akash making inroads and restricting Australia to 28/4.

Alex Carey (20*), Travis Head (17) and Cummins (22) kept their swift approach alive and tried to deal with boundaries. Wickets kept falling, but runs rose simultaneously on the board as well.

Australia managed to put 89/7 on the boards, which Cummins and the management thought should be enough to push for a result. -ANI

FIFA

2034 football World Cup in Saudi Arabia: What to expect

When will the 2034 World Cup take place?

Nothing is for sure yet, but given that the World Cup in neighboring Qatar was played in the winter, throwing the European football schedule out of whack, a repeat is likely.

In Saudi Arabia’s bid report, they detail that the weather in June and July in major cities like Riyadh and Jeddah would be between 32 and 38 degrees Celsius (89.6 and 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) — conditions that are not conducive to playing. Temperatures in the country are at their mildest between October and April, which poses a challenge to organisers.

Furthermore, tournament organisers will also have to consider Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting and prayer taking place from mid-November to mid-December in 2034.

With the global player’s union FIFPro currently going after FIFA because of an overloaded playing calendar, football’s world governing body will have to manage the complicated European playing schedule, especially with the reformed Champions League format now including games in January.

What about the stadiums?

They are likely to be some of the most unusual stadiums ever seen at a World Cup, especially if the FIFA report on the bid is to be



believed.

Some of the new stadiums will be designed by Populous, a US architecture firm that is also designing Morocco’s new stadium for the 2030 World Cup and is set to build a multi-use, climate-neutral, 20,000-capacity event arena in Munich in the coming years. The designs include a stadium built at the top of a 200-meter cliff with an exposed segment. The concept of the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Stadium is straight out of a sci-fi movie.

Organizers say there will be 15 stadiums across five cities: Riyadh, Jeddah, Abha, Al-Khobar and Neom. The latter is a city that is yet to be built and is part of the country’s 2030 vision to diversify the kingdom’s economy away from oil.

Given that 12 of the 15 stadiums are set to be in Riyadh, the capital, and Jeddah, a port city on the Red Sea, the tournament will mostly feel quite similar to Qatar, where all the stadiums were in close proximity. Those traveling around the country will likely look to fly, given that Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East and is around six times bigger than Germany.

Some venues will debut at the 2027 Asian Cup, but all eyes will be on the completion of Riyadh’s King Salman International Stadium. It is planned to have a capacity of 92,000 and will host the opening ceremony and 2034 final.

Will everyone be welcome?

As was the case in Qatar, same-sex

relations are illegal. In Saudi Arabia, being transgender is not recognized. Women’s rights are also restricted.

Speaking to the BBC in late 2023, Saudi Arabia’s sports minister, Prince Abdulaziz, said, “Everyone’s welcome in the kingdom. Like any other nation, we have rules and regulations that everyone should abide by and respect.”

Similar things were said ahead of the tournament in 2022, although tolerance had its limits. Rainbow flags and hats were taken off fans and journalists at the tournament. Manuel Neuer, among others, dropped their plan to wear “One Love” armbands after FIFA threatened to book any player wearing one. Germany’s response was to pose for their pre-match

photo with their hands over their mouths, with then-head coach Hansi Flick later confirming this was the team showing they felt FIFA was silencing teams. Recently, Germany captain Joshua Kimmich said he regretted making the gesture.

Germany’s team photo ahead of their game vs. Japan in Qatar Germany’s team photo ahead of their game vs. Japan in Qatar

What about alcohol?

Alcohol is illegal in Saudi Arabia, and drinking it can lead to fines, prison sentences or even deportation.

However, given that alcohol laws have been relaxed in the wider Gulf region in recent years and that alcohol was served at a fan zone in Doha, there is a chance regulations might be relaxed by 2034. FIFA though will not press the local government on the issue.

Stadium beer sales were banned in Qatar and that will remain the case according to a report from the Guardian citing senior sources from within world football’s governing body.

Labourers walk on a construction site in Riyadh in 2022 Labourers walk on a construction site in Riyadh in 2022

What about the cost?

There is no official or reported number for how much this tour-

nament will cost. Given that Qatar spent \$220 billion, making the 2020 edition the most expensive tournament ever, it seems likely that Saudi Arabia will spend even more. The kingdom has invested around €6 billion in sports since 2021, and the budget for a home World Cup appears limitless.

Human rights groups are concerned about stadium and infrastructure development. With 11 of the 15 stadiums yet to be built along with 10 fan zones, there is still much ambitious work to deliver on. The same applies to the required public transport improvements, with high-speed rail and a new metro in Riyadh expected.

Human rights campaigners have long said that the country’s human rights violations are a major concern and that the government is using sport to detract from its issues. The Saudi government insists that their investment in sports is opening up tourism and boosting their economy.

In FIFA’s evaluation of the Saudi bid, it awarded a 4.2 out of 5, saying that the tournament had “good potential” to “serve as a catalyst for reform.”

Amnesty International, a humanitarian organization, has said on numerous occasions that a World Cup in the country should not take place unless major human rights reforms were made. -ANI

ROUND-UP

BankDhofar wins two prestigious awards in customer experience

These accolades reinforces the bank's position as a pioneer in delivering exceptional customer experiences



MUSCAT: BankDhofar - the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of branch network - has been recognised with two prestigious global awards in the area of customer experience. These accolades reinforces the bank's position as a pioneer in delivering exceptional customer

experiences, cementing its reputation as a key driver of innovation in the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector. BankDhofar received the Qorus Reinvention Awards - MEA 2024 for "Enterprise Voice of the Customer program" Competing against nearly 700 entries from the

world's leading banks and insurers. This award highlights BankDhofar's dedication to placing the customer at the heart of its operations and showcases best practices that are transforming the financial services industry in the region. Additionally, BankDhofar was honored at the Verint EMEA in-

spire Awards 2024 with the silver award for its groundbreaking use of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence and voice of customer analytics, to streamline service delivery. This recognition celebrates BankDhfoar's innovative approach to listening to customer feedback

and translating their insights into meaningful improvements in their banking journeys. It underscores BankDhofar's commitment to staying ahead in a competitive landscape by leveraging cutting-edge solutions in delivering exceptional customer experience. BankDhofar is a leader in Oman's financial sector, recognized for its comprehensive services, customer-first approach, and commitment to innovation. To be the best bank for you, BankDhofar offers a full suite of financial solutions designed to meet the diverse needs of individuals, businesses, and corporate clients. Our commitment to quality, security, and reliability defines who we are and why so many trust us with their financial needs. As part of this commitment, BankDhofar provides a variety of financial solutions to support customers throughout life's stages and milestones. We cater to everything from current and savings

accounts to investment options, meeting both personal and business requirements. For individuals, our personal banking services offer seamless and reliable options with convenient access to banking though an ever expanding network of 129 branches spread across Sultanate of Oman. This expansive branch network ensures customer have access to a wide range of banking services, making BankDhofar a trusted partner in meeting their financial needs. For businesses, we provide specialized financial services and corporate solutions, helping local companies, including SMEs, and global enterprises, thrive in Oman's dynamic economy. Additionally customers can further manage their accounts, pay bills, and transfer money among a plethora of services though BankDhofar's advanced digital banking platforms, ensuring a seamless banking experience.

PROMOTING DIGITAL INNOVATION



Omantel Innovation Labs and Hafeet Rail Hackathon concludes

MUSCAT: Al Buraimi Governorate recently hosted the Omantel - Hafeet Rail Hackathon, a four-day event held from December 12-15, 2024. The hackathon brought together over 15 teams who presented creative ideas leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) across energy, logistics, and environmental sectors. Throughout the four days, participants gained hands-on experience in building prototypes, refining business models, preparing visual presentations, and choosing the most effective ways to showcase their solutions. The collaborative efforts of these teams, which included numerous young innovators, resulted in the creation of AI-based applications designed to address diverse challenges. These solutions included enhancing energy efficiency in telecom, developing ideas for the joint Oman-UAE railway network, creating predictive systems to reduce water loss, and designing automated systems for aquaculture. The Omantel Innovation Labs, in collaboration with Hafeet Rail, concluded the hackathon in Al Buraimi - a key initiative under Qimam, supported by the Oman Investment Authority - with a closing ceremony attended by H.E. Dr. Hamad bin Ahmed Al Busaidi, Governor of Al Buraimi. During the event, the three winning projects and ideas were showcased and honored after being evaluated by a panel of experts and specialized mentors. HH Ghada Al Said, Senior Manager of Omantel Innovation Labs, emphasized the significance of this initiative in promoting a culture of innovation, saying: "This hackathon underscores our unwavering commitment to advancing digital transformation and empowering the next generation of Omani innovators. By equipping participants with essential resources and insights, we're not only fostering pioneering solu-

tions for sustainable growth but also enhancing Oman's position as a regional leader in technology-driven sustainability." Eng. Ahmed Al Hashemi, CEO of Hafeet Rail, added: "The Al Buraimi community holds a pivotal role in our shared vision. Through our partnership with Omantel and Qimam during this hackathon, we provided an opportunity to discover and refine talents while proposing innovative solutions to key challenges. This hackathon highlights the immense potential and creative minds capable of turning our aspirations into tangible realities. At Hafeet Rail, we are inspired by the teams behind these groundbreaking ideas, and we take pride in supporting and nurturing a creative environment, reinforcing our commitment to the Al Buraimi community and its bright future." The Omantel Innovation Labs, in partnership with Hafeet Rail and Qimam, continues its efforts to promote digital innovation in Oman, supporting events that solidify Oman's role as a regional leader in AI and IoT-powered sustainable development. Omantel, through its integrated operations and extensive expertise in telecommunications and digital technologies, has established itself as the leading telecom provider in Oman and beyond. The company's innovative strategies have enabled the delivery of cutting-edge solutions across various customer segments and business sectors, while continuously striving to provide unparalleled experiences that exceed subscriber expectations. Omantel aims to contribute to Oman Vision 2040 through investments in emerging technologies, offering the latest in IT and telecom innovations such as cloud solutions, smart solutions, AI applications, cybersecurity, and more. The company also leverages its technical capabilities to foster innovation and entrepreneurship in advanced technology domains.

IN THE USA

Malabar Gold & Diamonds launches its 6th showroom in Atlanta, Georgia

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 375 showrooms across 13 countries, has launched its 6th showroom in the USA at Atlanta, Georgia. This significant addition strengthens the brand's presence in North America, offering customers in Georgia access to an extensive collection of exquisite jewellery combined with world-class service. The showroom was inaugurated by Mr. L Ramesh Babu, the Consul General of India at Atlanta in the presence of Mr. Joseph Eapen, Regional Head of North America, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Mr. Jasar R, Branch Head at Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other community leaders, management team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers, media and well-wishers. Commenting on the occasion, Malabar Group Chairman M.P Ahamed said: "The launch of our 6th showroom in the USA is a moment of immense pride for all of us at Malabar Gold & Diamonds. North America has been pivotal in driving our international growth, and our newest showroom in Atlanta is a testament to our commitment to this market. Taking forward our long-held legacy of providing an exceptional jewellery shopping experience to jewellery lovers, we shall continue with the ambitious expansion plan we have charted for North America. The launch of our Atlanta showroom marks yet another step forward on our journey to becoming the world's largest jewellery retailer. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our customers, team members, shareholders,



and stakeholders for their unwavering support in making this vision a reality". Located in Atlanta's bustling community, the showroom spans 5,400 sq. ft. and features over 30,000 jewellery designs from 20 countries. From stunning bridal jewellery to elegant daily wear, the collection includes gold, diamond, and precious gemstone pieces catering to every occasion and taste. A customized jewellery design facility is available in the showroom, enabling customers to bring their unique visions to life with expert guidance from Malabar Gold & Diamonds' skilled artisans. The showroom also has a luxurious customer lounge, facilitating a comfortable jewellery shopping experience. "Atlanta's rich cultural diversity and vibrant community made it the perfect choice for our 6th showroom in the USA. As a thriving metropolitan hub with a significant Indian-subcontinental population,

the city presents an incredible opportunity for us to bring our wide-ranging portfolio of exceptional jewellery and impeccable services to a discerning audience. Following the overwhelming success of our flagship showroom in Los Angeles, we are confident that the Atlanta showroom will uphold our track record of excellence and become a cherished destination for jewellery lovers in Georgia. We have also charted an ambitious expansion plan for North America, which will include new showrooms in cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Austin, Tampa, Virginia, Detroit, Houston, Charlotte, Phoenix, New York, and San Diego. In Canada, the brand will extend its footprint into British Columbia and Alberta.", commented Mr. Sham Lal Ahamed, MD- International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds. "We are thrilled to expand our operations into Atlanta. Upholding the ethos of 'Make in India; Market to the World', our goal is

to seamlessly blend the artistry of traditional Indian jewellery with modern, contemporary designs, ensuring that Malabar Gold & Diamonds is a universal jewellery brand that resonates with all. At Malabar Gold & Diamonds, sustainability is at the heart of everything we do. Similar to all our other showrooms, our Atlanta outlet is a testament to our vision of growing responsibly while meeting the diverse needs of our customers. Every piece of jewellery reflects our promise of quality, purity, and ethical craftsmanship, ensuring a lasting legacy for future generations", commented Mr. Abdul Salam K.P, Vice Chairman of Malabar Group. Malabar Gold & Diamonds is renowned globally for offering an unparalleled jewellery buying experience with convenience and customer-friendly policies along with the 'Malabar Promise' of incomparable quality and service assurance.

INDIAN SCHOOL DARSAIT

ISD celebrates excellence at its Annual Day

MUSCAT: Indian School Darsait (ISD) organised its 32nd Annual Day Celebrations at the Grand Hall, Al-Falaj Hotel, Ruwi, on 14 December 2024 with great verve. His Excellency, Shri Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, was the Chief Guest, while Dr. Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. The function was attended by an august gathering of distinguished dignitaries, members of the School Management Committee, principals of other Indian Schools in Oman, invited guests and a good number of parents and well-wishers. Aysha Zalka Sakkariya, the Head Girl extended a cordial welcome to everyone. In his presidential address, Mr. Shalimar Moideen, Vice President and Head of Academics Subcommittee, lauded the self-confident and competent student community, supportive parents, dedicated staff and his fellow SMC members for creating a favourable ambience for the



school to foster growth and scale greater heights. Mr. Amar Srivastava, Principal, made a digital presentation of the annual report for the year 2024-25. The comprehensive report highlighted a continued march of yet another glorious year of commendable achievements and success stories of the school. The Chief Guest congratulated Indian School Darsait on completing 32 years of its impactful role in the sphere of education to the Indian community in Muscat. His Excellency appreciated the teachers and students for the remarkable accomplishments. He said, "School is a temple of learn-

ing, where the young minds develop and blossom into wholesome, holistic, well-rounded adults of the future, ready to take on challenges that the world will throw at them". He further shared an anecdote of his meeting with Shri Balkavi Bairagi, a noted Hindi poet. The chief guest presented a panel with the poet's words to the institution. Addressing the gathering, the Guest of Honour commended Indian School Darsait's firm standing and indomitable spirit over the years as an institution imparting quality education. He stated further, "2024 is a remarkable year for the school because it has seen

many significant achievements in co-curricular activities, athletics, and academics. The outcome is the product of diligent work and collaboration among parents, instructors, and students". The evening witnessed proud moments of the felicitation of the staff. These included subject teachers of classes X and XII who helped facilitate students to achieve the CBSE National Topper Awards, staff who had completed 25 and 12 years of service with the school, staff who were applauded for their perfect attendance, teachers of Physical Education who trained students for the CBSE National Sports Meet, Ceremonial heads and co-ordinators of the Student Council were conferred with mementos and certificates. C. V. Raman House clinched trophies for Overall Championship for Cultural Activities and for Best House for the year 2024-2025. Tagore House secured the Overall Runner-up Championship trophy for Cultural Activities, and Bapu House was presented with a trophy for the Best House: Runner-up.

ROUND-UP

FOR CREATIVE EXCELLENCE



Grand Millennium Muscat triumphs at TOMI Awards

MUSCAT: The Grand Millennium Muscat, a luxurious property in the heart of Oman's capital, emerged as one of the standout winners at the inaugural TOMI Awards, a celebration of creativity in Oman's dynamic advertising and marketing landscape.

Known formally as The Oman Marketing Impact (TOMI) Awards, this maiden edition organized by Muscat Media Group (MMG) brought together luminaries from the advertising and marketing industries, making it a gala affair that honoured innovation and excellence.

Grand Millennium Muscat claimed the award in the 'Best Event Launch Video' category, impressing an independent international jury with a compelling marketing clip. The video announced the grand opening of two signature outlets, Bahriyat and Bait Al Shukolatah, with outstanding creative quality and visual storytelling.

The jury's selection followed rigorous qualification rounds, including voting by industry peers and the general public. This recognition underscores the hotel's ability to stand out in an intensely competitive space.

Welcoming the achievement, Mr. Glenn Nobbs, General Manager, said:

"It feels great to be recognized with this award in what is an intensely competitive space. Kudos to our marketing team for crafting a video clip that's not only exceptional in its creative quality but also powerfully captures the distinctive characteristics and value proposition offered by the newly launched outlets spotlighted in this clip. We will continue to harness this award-winning creative potential to strengthen Grand Millennium Muscat's positioning in the hospitality arena."

Since its reopening in October, Bahriyat has become a favorite destination for seafood enthusiasts. The menu reflects the culinary ingenuity of its Head Chef, who sources only the freshest fish and seafood from Oman's coastal waters.

Guests can indulge in a variety of offerings, from seasonal specialties to restaurant favorites, including lobster thermidor and grilled seafood platters. The outlet's striking seafood-themed ambiance and emphasis on traditional cooking styles further elevate the dining experience, making Bahriyat a standout in Oman's seafood culinary scene.

For dessert lovers, Bait Al Shukolatah is a one-of-a-kind chocolate buffet that transforms indulgence into an art form. Every Sunday and Monday evening, from 6 PM to 10 PM, the hotel's lobby becomes a haven of sweetness, offering an irresistible array of decadent chocolate creations. With live halwa-making and the enchanting melodies of Oud music in the background, this serene dessert experience is perfect for unwinding or celebrating life's sweeter moments.

These two signature concepts are among the highlights that distinguish the Grand Millennium Muscat. The property boasts 296 luxurious rooms and suites, 32 serviced apartments, and versatile public spaces, including spacious ballrooms and state-of-the-art meeting rooms.

With its courteous and professional service, the Grand Millennium Muscat continues to attract a diverse clientele—local and international, individual and corporate—offering memorable guest experiences that set a benchmark in the hospitality industry.

Alizz Islamic Bank partners with Bawshar Endowment Foundation

The bank's participation in this conference comes in line with its Corporate Social Responsibility initiative 'Alizz Cares'

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank, recently participated in the 'Oman Endowment Foundation: Innovation & Sustainability' conference, which was organised by the Bawshar Endowment Foundation, under the patronage of His Excellency Sultan bin Salem Al Habsi, the Minister of Finance.

The bank's participation in this conference comes in line with its Corporate Social Responsibility initiative 'Alizz Cares'. Alizz Islamic Bank is unwavering in its commitment to fostering sustainable social and economic development within the Sultanate of Oman. The conference promotes sustainable development by channelling Islamic finance into projects aligned with charitable and social welfare



goals, marking an advancement for Oman's financial landscape.

As part of Alizz Islamic Bank's broader strategic vision, it aims to strengthen the Islamic finance sector in Oman. The bank strategy extends beyond just banking. It's about creating sustainable synergy across various sectors in Oman, including partnerships with public and private entities enabling the bank to play a key role in building the Islamic finance ecosystem further in the Sultanate of Oman.

Touching upon the bank participation Mr. Ali Al Mani, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank said "At Alizz Islamic Bank, we embrace such conferences that highlight emerging trends and challenges. We understand the importance of sharing knowledge specifically in the field of Islamic values and principles. Aligning with partners like Bawshar Endowment Foundation demonstrates our commitment to supporting sustainable development, economic growth and dedi-

cation to impactful intatives that are the forefront of change in the landscape of Islamic finance."

Alizz Islamic Bank has embarked on many projects that have a positive impact on society and with the goal being to strive to provide a better life for the people beyond their banking needs. Accompanied by a belief that investing in sustainable initiatives is the decisive element in creating a brighter future for the country and its people.

EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

SOHAR Port and Freezone receives two awards at Oman CSR Summit 2024

MUSCAT: SOHAR Port and Freezone proudly announces its recognition at the Oman CSR Summit & Awards 2024, winning in two esteemed categories. The Maseer Programme was awarded the Empowerment through Education accolade, highlighting SOHAR's commitment to enhancing educational opportunities within the community.

This initiative has successfully enrolled over 400 students equipping them with vital skills in Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Programming and other advanced technologies.

Additionally, SOHAR received the award for Best Sustainability Initiative for its impactful contribution to the national campaign aimed at planting ten million trees. This initiative focuses on enhancing environmental sustainability in North Al Batinah by combating desertification and promoting biodiversity.

These awards reflect SOHAR's dedication to corporate social responsibility and its ongoing efforts to foster sustainable practices and empower local communities.



As a leader in sustainability initiatives, SOHAR Port and Freezone remains committed to driving positive change and supporting Oman's vision for a greener future.

For more information about SOHAR Port and Freezone, please visit soharportandfreezone.om.

As one of the world's most rapidly growing integrated industrial and logistics projects, SOHAR Port and Freezone capitalizes on its strategic location to cement its status as a crucial logistics hub in the region and globally. A unique collaboration between the Port of Rotterdam and ASYAD Group marks it as a key mega-project in Oman, offering a range of services including logistics, petrochemicals, metals, and the region's first dedicated Cargo terminal. With

over 20 years of operation, SOHAR is the main gateway for Oman's import and export, contributing 2.1% to the nation's GDP and creating almost 36,000 jobs. Committed to sustainable development and advanced technology, SOHAR is modernizing logistics infrastructure in line with the economic diversification goals of Oman's 2040 Vision.

IMPACTFUL PLATFORM

Renaissance Services supports Fifth Annual Festival for People with Disabilities

MUSCAT: Renaissance Services extended strong support to the Fifth Annual Festival for People with Disabilities, held recently at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the week-long festival, held from November 30 to December 4, 2024, saw over 1,100 participants engaging in various activities.

This initiative underscores Renaissance Services' commitment to supporting inclusion and empowerment within the community.

The festival provides a way to integrate individuals with different abilities into mainstream society, enables access to sports and cultural opportunities, and raises public awareness about the challenges they face.

A key feature of the event was the Festival Village, which showcased cultural, health and informational exhibits, including a unique display that simulated the daily challenges experienced by people with disabilities. In addition to the exhibitions, the festival included a wide variety of sports tailored to different disabilities, such as athletics, wheelchair basketball, badminton, goalball, football for the hearing impaired, boccea, bowling and traditional games.

Stephen R Thomas, CEO, Renaissance Services said, "We are

delighted to support the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in organising this impactful platform, which aims to promote a more inclusive society for all."

As the leading provider of Accommodation, Services Solutions, and Integrated Facilities Management (IFM) in the Sultanate of Oman, Renaissance Services is passionate about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and investing in sustainable programmes that create a tangible and lasting impact. By engaging with local communities, organisations, and businesses, the company strives to encourage sustainable practices and foster community engagement.



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Christmas Indulgence

Join us for a lavish Christmas buffet spread across two magical evenings,
featuring a delightful array of festive specialties.

24 & 25 December | 7pm - 10:30pm



A festive feast featuring specials like salmon gravlax, turkey terrine, and foie gras en croute. Enjoy the charcuterie bar with cold cut and cheese, along with Christmas classics such as roast turkey, rib-eye, and baked salmon. The buffet also includes international dishes, from Indian and Italian favourites to Gulf-inspired flavours and mixed grills.

OMR 38 net per person



A lavish buffet with festive selections: seafood bar on ice, turkey prepared in various styles, from terrine and foie gras to classic roast, complemented by Japanese delights. Delight at the carving station featuring marinated and perfectly grilled or roasted beef short ribs, leg of lamb, chicken, and turkey. On Christmas Eve, enjoy braised duck, beef brisket, and salmon, while Christmas Day features baked oysters and confit de canard Parmentier.

OMR 35 net per person

50% per child from 6 years and below 12 years old



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Christmas Specials

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5-course seafood set menu
OMR 45 net per person



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OMR 30 net per person



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OMR 45 net per person



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