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INMECC-Maharashtra Chapter inaugurated

MUMBAI: Maharashtra Minister for Housing Atul Save inaugurated the Maharashtra Chapter of Indo Gulf and Middle East Chamber of Commerce (INMECC) in Mumbai on Wednesday.

In his inaugural speech, Save said that Maharashtra being a front-line state more and more business organisations are coming to the state. “I welcome them and request them to contribute to the development and welfare of our state”, the minister said. He pointed out that Maharashtra stands at the top of “ease of doing business” chart and the government always provide a red carpet welcome for industries whether they are in the service sector or manufacturing. Maharashtra is one of the largest states in the country and is strong in agriculture as well as industry. A large percentage of India’s GDP is contribut-



Maharashtra Housing Minister Atul Save inaugurating the Maharashtra Chapter of INMECC by lighting the traditional lamp in Mumbai. With him other dignitaries are: VS Abdulkareem, Jagdeep Rikhy, Davis Kallookaran, James Mathew, Dr Rajendra Bharud (IAS), Sureshkumar Madhusudhanan, Shaji, JP Aprain, NM Sharafudeen and Santosh Kumar.

ed by Maharashtra. Infrastructure projects are coming up in the state in a massive way.

Projects such as Mumbai-Nagpur highway, Nagpur-Goa highway and the coastal road project as well as the proposed port on the Maharashtra-Gujarat border (which will

be six times larger than the JNPT port) will added to the infrastructure of Maharashtra, Save said. “Being the housing minister, I am planning huge housing project near the Navin Mumbai airport” he declared. He invited businessmen from the Gulf to invest in Maha-

rashtra and hoped the INMECC can help the govt in this direction.

Dr Ravinda Bharud IAS, Jt CEO MITRA and Commissioner, Tribal Research training Institute, felt the percentage of women in workforce in India is totally inadequate. “While it is 24pc

in India the corresponding figure is 50pc in Bangladesh”, he pointed out. Bharud said Maharashtra offers great opportunities to entrepreneurs.

Dr Bharud pointed out that 25pc in India’s GDP is added from Maharashtra. Maharashtra attracts 38pc of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) which amounts to Rs 65,000 crore. He revealed that Gulf, Germany etc need five lakh workers experienced in cement, concrete work and India has the workforce to fill this gap.

Others who spoke included INMECC chairman Dr NM Sharafudeen, Santhosh Kumar (ministry of corporate affairs), Dr PJ Aprain, president of Maharashtra INMECC, Dr Sureshkumar Madhusudhanan, Dr James Mathew, Davis Kallookaran, Vice-president of Maharashtra Chapter of INMECC VS Abdulkareem etc.

Saudi salaries to increase in 2024

RIYADH: A recently released report indicates that sal-

aries in Saudi Arabia are set to see an average rise of six per cent this year. This news coincides with the country’s ongoing efforts to shift its economy away from reliance on oil, leading to a growing demand for skilled workers.

According to Saudi’s Neom City Updates and insights from recruitment specialist Cooper Fitch, major projects like the \$500 billion Neom city, the Red Sea Project, and AlUla have been driving up the need for talented individuals.

“Saudi Arabia is gearing up for a significant salary boost, with an expected average increase of six per cent in 2024,” stated Neom City

Updates. The report indicates that salary increases will vary based on industry, worker performance, and company budgets. More than half of the surveyed companies have expressed intentions to raise salaries in 2024.

Local Saudi papers reported that the ministry of finance’s 2024 budget statement reveals that over the past year, the private sector has created 1.12 million jobs as part of plans to develop projects totaling more than US\$1 trillion. Saudi Arabia has introduced five new visa categories specifically aimed at skilled professionals and investors.

India’s market capitalisation to hit US\$10 trillion by 2030

NEW DELHI: India’s market cap is currently the fifth largest globally (US\$4.5 trillion) but its weight in global indices is still low at 1.6pc (10th rank), foreign brokerage, Jefferies said in a report. This should change as market free float rises and some weight anomalies get sorted out. Assuming market returns in line with the last 15-20 year history and new listings, India will become nearly a \$10 trillion market by 2030 -- impossible for large global investors to ignore, the report said.

With a consistent history of 10-12pc \$ CAGR over the last 10 and 20 years, India is now the fifth largest equity market and market cap will likely touch \$10 trillion

by 2030. Continued reforms should maintain India’s ‘fastest growing large economy’ status.

Strong trend in domestic flows have reduced market volatility and decadal low foreign ownership offers valuation cushion. RoE-focused corporate sector with 167 companies more than \$5 billion market cap leave ample choices to investors, Jefferies said. Rising entrepreneurship/vibrant start-up ecosystem is driving innovation. The 10 years of investment downcycle and risk aversion trend has now inverted with housing upcycle and corporate D/E ratio at an all-time low. India is home to 111 unicorns (market value \$350 billion) making it the

(Cont. on page-2)

FOREX RATES

As on 23rd Feb, 2024 (In rupees)

Currency	Buying	Selling
US Dollar	83.73	82.73
Euro	90.85	89.65
Australian Dollar	55.88	54.18
Japanese Yen	0.59	0.53
Canadian Dollar	62.53	61.33
Singapore Dollar	62.74	61.54
Swedish krona	9.01	7.22
UAE Dirham	23.18	22.43
Swiss Franc	95.53	93.73
British Pound	105.86	104.66
New Zealand Dollar	52.39	50.39
Thai Baht	2.42	2.21
Hong Kong Dollar	11.56	10.20
Saudi Arabian Riyal	22.83	21.88
Bahraini Dinar	226.04	212.04
Chinese Yuan	12.43	10.63
Danish Krone	12.55	11.55
Kuwaiti Dinar	275.8	259.80
Malaysian Ringgit	18.31	16.96
Omani Rial	221.42	209.42
Qatari Riyal	23.78	21.28
South African Rand	4.88	3.88



Need better welfare schemes

Even after 77 years of independence, in India, we do not have a social security scheme. Countries such as Switzerland, Germany or Sweden are known to have a social security scheme that protects the senior citizens or the jobless population. Of late, our Union government has brought out some welfare schemes, though they do not qualify to be a social security scheme.

True, the transparent National Pension Scheme (NPS) gives some sort of relief to our people to plan their post-employment phase. NPS provides people with a reliable way to plan for retirement and ensure financial security.

Governed by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), the NPS is a voluntary, long-term retirement savings scheme designed to provide a steady income stream during the old age. A main feature of the NPS is that it operates through Individual Pension Accounts (IPAs) and each subscriber is assigned a Permanent Retirement Account Number (PRAN). Subscribers can make regular contributions to their NPS account throughout their working years, ensuring a substantial fund post-retirement.

Another feature of NPS is its viability, offering subscribers two options --- Active Choice and Auto Choice. In Active Choice, individuals can decide how to distribute their funds among different asset classes like equities, corporate bonds and government securities. In Auto Choice, the asset allocation adjusts automatically based on the subscriber's age and risk preference.

At the same time, the NPS is not a free scheme. Contributions to NPS offers attractive tax benefits. Subscribers can enjoy deductions for their contributions under Section 80CCD(1), up to 10pc of their salary (basic + DA) or 20pc of gross income for self-employed individuals. Moreover, an extra deduction of up to Rs 50,000 is available under Section 80CCD(1B), providing an additional incentive for long-term savings. NPS investments are managed by Pension Fund Managers (PFMs) appointed by the PFRDA. The scheme's performance is regularly monitored, ensuring transparency and accountability.

The NPS is open to all Indian citizens, whether employed or self-employed. It caters to the needs of various segments, offering a pension solution for the organised as well as the unorganised workforce. The NPS is open to residents and non-residents, as well as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), falling within the age range of 18 to 70 years. Eligible individuals should adhere to Know Your Customer (KYC) norms outlined in the application form and possess the legal capacity to execute a contract under the Indian Contract Act. However, Overseas Citizens of India (OCI), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs) cannot subscribe to NPS. It's important to note that NPS is an individual pension account and opening it on behalf of a third person is not permissible.

But we need more innovative pension or welfare schemes. With a reasonably young population, India has ignored pension schemes.

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Ramadan spirit sweeps UAE

DUBAI: The holy month of Ramadan sees spirituality and a more relaxed pace of life prevail across the UAE. As the month of fasting draws near, greetings of "Ramadan Mubarak", translating to "blessed" or "happy" Ramadan, resonate throughout the Emirates.

The daily routines of residents are also different — from work hours to school schedules and paid parking hours, there are many aspects of life that change during the holy month. According to the Hijri calendar published by the Dubai Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department (IACAD), Ramadan will commence on Tuesday, March 12, 2024.

Reduced work hours apply to both fasting and non-fasting employees. This helps employees be part of the month's spiritual activities and cultural practices. The UAE government typically announces reduced working hours for both

the public and private sectors. While some jobs necessitate longer hours, most employees in the private sector enjoy a two-hour reduction in their workday. Government offices often close early, with working hours for public sector employees reduced to six instead of the usual eight hours.

Academic days are typically slashed down to five hours daily. However, this year, most schools will be closed during the first three weeks of the holy month. Institutions will be closed for either the spring or end-of-term break around this period.

Paid parking hours are modified during Ramadan. These will be announced closer to the holy month. Last year, Dubai applied fees from 8am to 6pm and 8pm to 12 midnight Monday to Saturday — giving residents free parking for two hours on weekdays. Sharjah applied fees from 8am to midnight Saturday to Thursday.

In Dubai, it's business as usual at most eateries. According to Visit Dubai, while there's no requirement for non-Muslims to avoid eating and drinking in public during the day, one "may choose to do so out of respect for those fasting".

Iftar holds great significance during Ramadan as it marks the meal that breaks the day's fast after the Maghrib call for prayer. Iftar is usually a time for family and friends to gather and enjoy a special meal. Many hotels and restaurants in Dubai offer feasts and special Iftar menus to cater to the occasion. Additionally, numerous restaurants provide enticing offers and discounts for Iftar meals.

Thanks to reduced and relaxed work hours, fasting Muslims are able to offer most of their five daily prayers at mosques. Places of worship are usually full, especially during the special prayers called Taraweeh that are offered after Isha.

India's market....

(Cont. from page-1)

third largest unicorn hub globally after US and China, the report said.

The government's focus on developing digital infrastructure, globally the cheapest data rates and the abundant homegrown talent pool have been the key drivers. India is now becoming a services exports hub. Services export (including remittances) now accounts for nearly \$450 billion/year.

Several large global organisations have 10-20pc of their employees based in India including companies like JP Morgan, Intel, NTT etc. Superior digital infra, young and well educated human resources should drive this segment to keep growing, the report said.

RoE-focused corporate sector is a key positive for minority investors. Listed equity market is among the most diversified emerging markets. Strong institutional framework of regulators

(SEBI, RBI), intermediaries (responsible asset managers) has helped develop a large domestic investor base. Sustainable investment habits give visibility of \$50 billion/year flow into equities from domestic investors which will likely keep the valuations on the expensive side but also reduce market volatility, the report said. India will be third largest economy by 2027. Over the last 10 years, India's GDP has grown by seven per cent CAGR in US\$ terms to \$3.6 trillion -- jumping from the eighth largest to the fifth largest economy. Over the next four years, India's GDP will likely touch \$5 trillion making it the third largest economy by 2027, overtaking Japan and Germany, being the fastest growing large economy with the tailwinds of demographics (consistent labour supply), improving institutional strength and improvement in governance.

Uniform KYC on cards

NEW DELHI: The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has decided to launch a uniform know-your-customer (KYC) norms to verify customers across financial sector to prevent illegal lending based on online applications.

"The FSDC discussed various issues related to formulation of strategy for implementing the decisions of the FSDC and the Union budget announcements. These, inter alia, included: prescribing uniform KYC norms, inter-usability of KYC records across the financial sector and simplification and digitisation of the KYC process...", the finance ministry said in its statement. The government hasn't yet disclosed the timeline for these measures.

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India on track to become \$10t economy, says WEF

GENEVA: India is on track to become a \$10 trillion economy in coming years and grab the third-largest slot soon, World Economic Forum (WEF) President Borge Brende said.

In a TV interview, Brende also said that the WEF hopes to come back to the country with the WEF India Summit in collaboration with government of India when the time is ripe. “The Indian economy is the fastest growing among all large economies of the world. We saw in Davos this year that there was a huge interest in India and I think this will only continue,” Brende said.

Geneva-based WEF, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private co-operation, holds

its annual meeting in the Swiss ski resort town Davos every year in January.

Brende said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is “always very, very welcome to Davos”.

“When you come to India, you feel some optimism which is not the case all over the world. We are facing a geopolitical recession, a very fragmented and polarised world, but still there are areas where we can collaborate and it is important to find those areas,” he said. Brende said it is necessary to underline that the economic growth is not so bad, especially in the case of India where “we are seeing seven per cent economic growth and the world’s largest economy, the US, which is also doing very well.” On India targeting to become the

third largest economy in the next three years, Brende said India is on track to become a \$ 10 trillion economy in the coming years.

“India has gone through important reforms and it is well placed vis-a-vis the two largest economies, the US and China. Also, India is seeing a good increase in foreign direct investments, a lot of manufacturing activities are now taking place in India which used to happen in other emerging economies,” he said.

He also lauded India’s digital competitiveness and said digital trade is growing much faster than traditional goods in the world today.

“India is well placed and it is just a question of time before India becomes the third

largest economy in the world after the US and China,” he said.

On India’s role in handling geopolitical conflicts, Brende said, “We will see a larger and larger Indian footprint on the global diplomatic scene in the years to come.” India’s major priority so far has been to secure economic growth, eradicate poverty, and ensure that India is flourishing when it comes to prosperity. “I think India has also stayed away from any knee-jerk reactions on geopolitical issues. It’s not an easy neighbourhood in Asia but India has dealt with situations very well and we do not see any conflicts in this region as we have seen in places like Ukraine and the Middle East,” he added.

DXB sees through 87m passengers in 2023

DUBAI: The Dubai International Airport (DXB) oversaw 87 million passengers through 2023, recording a year-on-year growth of a substantial 32pc. The numbers also point to a significant uptick in fourth quarter traffic at the airport, helped by the COP28 event and the year-end festivities. (DXB is currently connected to 262 destinations in 104 countries through 102 international carriers.)

“This exceptional performance reflects Dubai’s commitment to maintaining its lead”, said Sheikh Ahmed

Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority. In 2022, the airport had clocked in 66 million in passenger traffic. As it gave updates on quarterly numbers this year, Dubai Airport had regularly updated its own forecasts on what 2023’s eventual numbers would be.

The latest update was provided in November and then the estimate had been for 86.8 million. The final tally shows that the forecast was spot on.

Early projections show that DXB is expected to have 88.8 million guests

in 2024, putting the “hub within striking distance of the all-time high record set in 2018 at 89.1 million”.

“Dubai is setting new benchmarks in passenger experience with excellence levels and innovative technologies that constantly redefine airport services,” said Sheikh Ahmed. “Consistent with the goal of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 to consolidate Dubai’s status as one of the world’s Top 3 cities for tourism and business over the next decade, the city continues to grow rapidly as a global aviation hub and

the world’s preferred gateway for international travellers.”

Incidentally, the 2023 performance beats the 2019 passenger volumes, which was the year before Covid came about. That year, Dubai Airport had seen in 86.3 million. Over the medium-term, Dubai Airport is setting its sights well beyond that, at 100 million and more, as its domestic airlines add to their fleets, including deploying the massive Airbus A380s on high-traffic routes”2023 was an exceptional year and is a testament to our unwavering commitment to innovation,

efficiency and delivering exemplary guest experience,” said Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports. “This translated to DXB achieving its highest internal engagement scores – a reflection of our commitment to fostering a collaborative culture, where every contribution is valued and every employee is empowered to their full potential.”

With 7.8 million passengers, Dec was the busiest month during fourth quarter 2023. The Oct to end Dec phase oversaw 22.4 million guests, a year-on-year growth of 13.8pc.

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GULF FAQs

Am I entitled for maternity leave?

I have been working in a private company for two years. In the side contract that I signed with the company, it is stated that I am not entitled to maternity leave. I am about to give birth, so I applied for maternity leave, but the company allowed me leave for only a month and without any entitlements. My question is: What is the position of the law on this behaviour and on my signing of the side contract stating that I am not entitled to maternity leave? If I am entitled to maternity leave, what benefits must be paid to me and how long is the maternity leave?

The clause you signed regarding the discharge of your maternity right is considered null and void because each provision contradicting the provisions of the labour law, as per its Article 65 clause 3, even if it was existing prior to its enforcement, shall be deemed null and void, unless it is more beneficial to the worker. Each discharge, reconciliation or waiver of the rights arising for the worker hereunder shall be null and void if it violates its provisions.

You are still entitled to maternity leave of 60 days, according to Article 30 of the law and the following:

- The first 45 days with full wage; and
- The following 15 days with half wage.

The female worker may, after using the maternity leave, be absent from work without a wage for a period not exceeding continuous or intermittent 45 days. If this absence is due to her sickness or her child's sickness resulting from pregnancy or childbirth, which does not allow her to return to her work. Such sickness shall be proven by a medical certificate issued by the medical entity. This period is not included within the service term, for which the female worker is entitled to end of service benefits or the period of contribution in the retirement scheme in accordance with the legislation in force in this regard. If the female worker gives birth to a sick child or a child of determination, whose health condition requires a constant companion, according to a medical report issued by the medical entity, she has the right to a leave of 30 days with full pay starting after the end of the maternity leave and she the right to extend the leave for a period of 30 days without pay.

After returning from maternity leave and for a period of not more than 6 months from the date of delivery, the female worker shall be entitled to one or two breaks per day to breast-feed her child, provided that the two breaks do not exceed an hour. Being on a maternity leave or absent from work as mentioned in this Article shall not prejudice the female worker's right to obtain the other leaves.

Eviction from villa

A year ago, I rented a villa in Dubai. Currently I am in my second year. I did maintenance on the villa in ad-

dition to decorations, which cost me large sums of money. Currently, the landlord sent me a message asking me to vacate the villa upon the expiry of the contract for his personal use, according to what was stated in the notice. My question is, according to the rental law in Dubai, do I have the legal right to be asked to vacate for this reason? If the eviction is carried out by court ruling, do I have the right to claim compensation for the amounts I paid for maintenance and decoration work?

According to Article 25 of the law no. 33 of 2008 amending law no. 26 of 2007 Regulating the Relationship Between Landlords and Tenants in the Emirate of Dubai, the Landlord may demand eviction of tenant upon expiry of tenancy contract: If the owner of the property wishes to recover the property for use by him personally or by his next of kin of first degree provided that he proves that he does not own a suitable alternative property for that purpose. But, landlord must notify tenant with reasons for eviction at least 12 months prior to the determined date of eviction subject that such notice be sent through the Notary Public or by registered mail. If he did not notify the tenant, he will not be able to evict him.

Moreover, "If the Committee decided for the landlord to recover the property for his own use or use by his first degree next of kin pursuant to the provision of this paragraph, then landlord shall not rent the property to others for at least two years for residential properties and three years for non-residential properties from date of recovery of the property, unless the Committee decides less period for reasons considered by it, otherwise the tenant shall have the right to request the Committee to order proper compensation to him." Regarding maintenance, you have the right to claim it unless otherwise agreed by the two parties provided that the tenant may not, as per Article 19 of the law, affect any change or perform renovations or maintenance on the property unless upon a permission by the lessor. Article 16 of the same law assures that "the lessor shall be responsible during the lease term for maintenance works of the property and for repairing any malfunction or failure that affect obtaining the desired usufruct, unless otherwise agreed by the two parties."

As for decoration, the landlord is not responsible to re-pay it upon eviction taking into consideration that such works needs also a prior permission from the landlord as mentioned above. Moreover, according to Article 23 of the law, lessee may not, upon evacuating and handing over the property, remove any fixed improvements added thereby, unless otherwise agreed upon by the parties.

AAI bags 'Excellent' rating

MUMBAI: Airports Authority of India (AAI) has received an "Excellent" rating for its performance in 2022-23, the Ministry of Civil Aviation stated. The AAI announced the attainment of its rating under the MoU for the fiscal year 2022-23.

The Department of Public Enterprises has confirmed AAI's exceptional performance, awarding it a commendable score of 91.50 under the MoU, resulting in the coveted Excellent rating. The accomplishment is attributed to the leadership of Sanjeev Kumar, Chairman of AAI.

Despite the several impacts of COVID-19, AAI demonstrated remarkable financial performance by generating a revenue of Rs 11,424 crore from its operations during the fiscal year 2022-23. The recognition comes as a testament to AAI's resilience, especially considering the challenges faced by the civil aviation industry during the pandemic.

Besides, the airport authority also attained its highest-ever capital expenditure of Rs 5,175 crore during the same period. These investments were directed toward enhancing and expanding airport facilities, integrating advanced technologies, and optimising operational efficiency. Notably, a substantial chunk of the capital expenditure has contributed towards ensuring

safer, more convenient, and seamless travel experiences for passengers across AAI-operated airports.

Constituted by an Act of Parliament, the Airports Authority of India is a Mini Ratna Category - I Public Sector Enterprise, which came into existence on April 1, 1995, by merging the erstwhile National Airports Authority and the International Airports Authority of India.

At present AAI manages a total of 137 airports which include 24 international airports (3 civil enclaves), 10 custom airports (four civil enclaves) and 103 domestic airports (23 civil enclaves).

It is noteworthy that AAI provides air navigation services to over 2.8 million square nautical miles of air space. In 2019-20, the authority handled passenger movement of 159.59 million and the cargo handled 909.32 thousand MT (international 452.46 and domestic 456.85).

The key functions of AAI include the design, development, operation and maintenance of international and domestic airports and civil enclaves. Further, expansion and strengthening of operation areas --- runways, aprons and taxiways among others are also managed by AAI. The provision of communication and navigation aids which includes ILS, DVOR, DME, Radar etc also comes under the authority.

Rupee rises to 82.92 against US dollar

MUMBAI: The Indian rupee stayed firm for the fourth straight session and gained four paise to 82.92 (Dh22.59) against the US dollar in early trade on Thursday, tracking a weak American currency against major overseas rivals.

A forex trader said, however, the Indian currency was under pressure due to subdued equity market sentiment and elevated level of crude oil prices. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 82.94 and gained further to 82.92 against the greenback in initial deals, registering a gain of four paise from its previous close.



Thailand offers medical coverage up to \$14,000 for tourists

BANGKOK: Thailand has launched a scheme to offer visitors up to \$14,000 in medical coverage in the event of an accident, the tourism minister said as the kingdom seeks to lure travellers back after the pandemic. Tourists can register for the scheme through the Thailand Traveller Safety website at tts.go.th.

The government will cover expenses up to 500,000 baht (\$14,000) and pay compensation of up to one million baht in case of death under the new scheme.

Travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic hammered the king-

dom's vital tourism sector and arrivals have not bounced back as quickly as officials hoped. Tourism minister Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol told a TV channel that new Thailand Traveller Safety scheme began on Jan 1 and will run until August 31.

"The campaign aims to assure foreign tourists that Thailand is safe and everyone will be under good care," she said. The kingdom has long been popular with young backpackers from around the world seeking sun, sand, massages and fast sex plays.

But accidents are not

uncommon and there have been numerous reports in recent months of young Europeans finding themselves facing big medical bills with inadequate insurance. The Thai government stresses that the scheme will not cover accidents caused by "negligence, intent, illegal acts" or risky behaviour.

Some 28 million people visited Thailand in 2023, up from 11 million the year before, but still well down from the 40 million who came in 2019, the last year before the pandemic. Officials are hoping to hit 35 million visitors in 2024, with a target of \$55 billion in revenue.

Hotel industry doing well in Oman

MUSCAT: In a remarkable surge, the revenues of three and five star hotels in Oman experienced a substantial 23.4pc growth, reaching RO 229.2 million by the end of 2023.

This substantial increase, as reported by the National Center for Statistics and Information, showcases a significant uptick compared with the RO 185.7 million recorded at the end of 2022. Accompanying this surge in revenue was a commendable rise in the occupancy rates of these upscale hotels, reaching an impressive 48.9pc. This surpasses the 44.9pc occupancy rate observed during the corresponding period in 2022, reflecting a robust

performance in Oman's hospitality sector.

The statistics further reveal that the number of guests also experienced a notable upswing, surging to 2.07 million by the close of 2023. This marked an impressive 27.1pc increase compared with the 1.62 million guests recorded at the end of 2022. Noteworthy among these guests were Omani citizens, who comprised the largest group with lakhs of visitors. December 2023 witnessed a specific uptick in hotel revenues, soaring to RO 26.7 million compared to RO 25.3 million in October 2023. However, the number of guests in December witnessed a slight decrease.

Scindia to improve efficiency of airports

NEW DELHI: In a bid to enhance the efficiency and convenience of international travel, Union Minister of Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya Scindia spearheaded an advisory committee meeting focused on reimagining airport design and integrating cutting-edge technologies to streamline immigration and security procedures.

Held in collaboration with airport operators, CISF, and Bureau of Immigration officials, this initiative marks a pivotal stride towards establishing international avia-

tion hubs in India. Drawing inspiration from



global benchmarks such as Singapore and Canada, the discussions centered on innovative solutions aimed at expediting passenger processing.

Among the key high-

lights were proposals for the cross-utilisation of XBIS machines between domestic and international terminals at Delhi airport, aiming to optimise machine availability and minimise wait times.

Additionally, proof of concept trials for e-gates and e-biometrics for immigration are already underway, promising to revolutionise the efficiency and security standards of air travel. This forward-looking approach aligns with the government's vision to position India as a global leader in aviation.

Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of manpower requirements for CISF and Immigration officers was conducted, considering the anticipated expansion of airports across the country, including upcoming projects in Jewar and Navi Mumbai. This underscores the commitment to ensure seamless operations at both existing and future aviation facilities.

Scindia emphasised the government's dedication to embracing innovation and leveraging technology to redefine India's civil aviation landscape.

With stakeholders from various ministries and agencies actively participating in the discussions, the meeting symbolises a collective effort towards realising the shared goal of establishing multiple aviation hubs across the nation. As India continues to emerge as a prominent player in the global aviation sector, these strategic initiatives underscore a commitment to enhancing passenger experience, fostering economic growth and solidifying India's position as a hub for international travel and commerce.

AI selects Thales' in-flight entertainment system

MUMBAI: Tata group owned Air India has selected Thales' in-flight entertainment solution. According to Thales, it will upgrade and retrofit Air India's current fleet of 40 Boeing 777s and 787s with its AVANTUp system, starting in 2024 and continuing through 2025.

Additionally, Thales will install the in-flight

entertainment system on Air India's 11 new Airbus and Boeing aircraft with deliveries to commence in 2025. According to Thales, its in-flight entertainment system offers possibilities for integrating a wide range of services and applications, such as an interactive 3D map and immersive route-based programming.

Thales' Select User Interface (UI) enhances pas-

senger engagement enabling guests to enjoy the most intuitive user experience to navigate across the rich catalog of entertainment. "At Thales, we are very proud to deepen our long standing partnership with Air India," said Yannick Assouad, Executive Vice-President Avionics. This latest in-flight entertainment technology will allow us to stay at the forefront of

aviation technology and will help us provide our passengers with a unique onboard entertainment system, Rajesh Dogra, Chief Customer Experience Officer, Air India said.

Thales is a global leader in advanced technologies within three domains — Defence and Security, Aeronautics and Space, and Digital Identity and Security.

India to add four million green jobs

CHENNAI: Green industry in India provides 18.5 million jobs and is expected to add four million more by FY25. "In India, green industry employs 18.5 million individuals, and there is an anticipation that we would be growing and adding around four million more jobs by FY25," said Nidhi Pant, a 2023 winner of the UK's Earthshot Prize and co-founder of S4S Technologies in an interview to the World Bank.