

852

GET COVID-19,
THREE DIE

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Sultanate reported 852 new COVID-19 on Friday including 368 Omanis and 484 residents, which brought the total number of positive cases in the Sultanate to 27,670. Three patients died taking

the total toll to 125. According to Ministry of Health, 3,317 people were tested in the last 24 hours. The MoH also reported that 710 patients recovered from coronavirus infection, taking the total recoveries from the disease to 13,794 in Oman. A total of 55 people were

admitted to the hospital today, taking the number of people in hospitals to 389, including 102 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Due to the efforts of the medical staff at the Royal Hospital, an 85-year-old man and his 79-year-old wife recovered from COVID-19 infection.

LITTERING EPIDEMIC

USED MASKS, GLOVES POSE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT HAZARDS

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Masks and gloves are being chucked on the streets in the Sultanate, raising concerns that this could be an infection hazard in addition to being an environmental hazard. Littering can be challenging to eradicate in the best of times – and these clearly aren't the best of times.

“It damages our environment in addition to spreading the coronavirus contagion. This is infectious waste and should not be littered around”, said an official at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs.

He said that many items of Personal Protection Equipment contain

plastics which are not recyclable or biodegradable, and they need to be treated as they pose risks to both humans and the wildlife.

“While PPE helps us fight a public health challenge, they should not become a threat to the sanitary workers who come in contact with them and also should not harm the environment”, he said.

Studies have shown that plastic does not biodegrade; instead, it breaks down into tiny pieces over time and eventually enters water bodies as microplastic.

In a recent statement, the ministry warned that throwing the masks in public places like roads or beaches could become a health and

environmental concern.

“The PPE waste should be disposed of properly to preserve the health of our society and to adhere to the guidelines of the Basel Convention on environmentally-sound waste management”, the statement said.

With most offices reopened after the lockdown, there is rising concern about the safe disposal at their premises for lack of enough bins except for those used for throwing stationery or other general waste.

“All offices both in the public and private sector should commit to provide separate trash bins for depositing PPE waste”, suggested an official at Muscat Municipality.

J&J drops
skin- whitening
creams in
Middle East

LONDON: Johnson & Johnson has decided to stop selling skin-whitening creams popular in Asia and the Middle East, it said on Friday, after such products have come under renewed social pressure in recent weeks amid a global debate about racial inequality.

Johnson & Johnson will stop selling its Clean & Clear Fairness line of products, sold in India, a spokeswoman told Reuters.

It was reported earlier this month that it would drop its Neutrogena Fine Fairness line, available in Asia and the Middle East.

“Conversations over the past few weeks highlighted that some product names or claims on our dark spot reducer products represent fairness or white as better than your own unique skin tone”, Johnson & Johnson said. “This was never our intention - healthy skin is beautiful skin”.

— Reuters

KERALA EXEMPTS COVID-19 TEST FOR TRAVELLERS TILL JUNE 25

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: The Kerala government exempted overseas travellers from COVID-19 test until June 25 as fourteen flights carrying hundreds of thousands of expats took off from Muscat and Salalah to mostly Kerala, India on Friday. The state chief minister told the media his government is in talks to provide testing kits for expats in Gulf countries. Some flights were part of official repatriation while the majority of them were chartered by NGOs and overseas arms of political parties to air lift countless Indians stuck in the Sultanate. The Kerala government had on Wednesday said passengers boarding flights to Kerala from any overseas country must do a PCR / Trunet COVID/ Antibody test to identify the



FOURTEEN FLIGHTS TAKE EXPATS TO INDIAN STATE IN THE LAST 24 HOURS

COVID positive cases and “to bring in only those who are tested COVID negative”. The mandatory COVID-19 test, which cost RO 55-75, came as a sharp blow to labourers, jobless and people who needed urgent medical attention.

“Spending over RO 60 for a test is really a burden for me as I’m going home after my company lost some contracts and we have been staying in the labour camp for nearly 3 months with no salary”, a construction worker told the Observer. However, those who travel as part of the Vande Bharat repatriation programme need not produce such a certificate, according to the Indian Embassy in Muscat. “We have not received any

information mandating COVID-19 certificates for passengers bound to Kerala till Friday”, Munu Mahawer, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate, said. “We have already aided nearly 2,500 Indians get home back on 11 flights by the Central Committee plus 2 charter flights by Ruwi KMCC”, said Rayees Ahmed, president of the organisation which operated the largest number of repatriation flights. The Indian Cultural Foundation (ICF), which organised nearly half a dozen flights, operated three flights on Friday carrying nearly 600 people who required urgent medical care and pregnant women who were selected from the priority list drawn up by the Indian Embassy, according to Mohammed Raziq, General Secretary.

TEACHING CHILDREN SELF-CONTROL



I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies, for the hardest victory is over self: Aristotle. An essential strength of character is the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself and setting and working towards achieving personal and academic goals. Children who have better self-control show

decreased dropout rates, school and classroom behaviour issues, drug use, mental health problems and criminal behaviour. Self-control and self-regulation is a strength that can be taught to children. It is teaching children what is best in the long run despite short-term temptations. Self-control powerfully predicts academic and professional achievement, physical and emotional well-being, positive social relationships and financial security. **How do we encourage self-control in children?** Any character strength can be taught to children by modelling it. Parents can begin by practising self-control strategies themselves, and the children will undoubtedly follow those. Parents can resolve to accomplish a goal of

personal significance, then talk about the problems and the plans to overcome them. Discuss with children strategies that you have found, that work exceptionally well in practising self-control. Encourage children to get to work right away, rather than procrastinating. Instead of getting distracted while working, teach them to stay focused. Planning will help children understand how to be prepared for what needs to be done. Teach children to think before doing anything that they would later regret. Praise children for waiting patiently. Notice when they plan: “Great job getting all your stuff organised!” Appreciate ingenuity in navigating self-control dilemmas: “Keeping your cell phone in a different room is such a clever

idea!” Establish family rules, like no cell phones at mealtimes. Create quiet, distraction-free areas for study and work. Keep fruit on the kitchen counter and hide junk food on a high shelf. Practise self-regulation in emotional moments example controlling your anger or restraining yourself in an impulsively moment, and children will learn to do the same. Delay gratification. When children ask for something, do not always give it immediately, instead ask them to work hard to earn it or wait for a time when it is right for them to receive it. “The most important scientific discovery about self-control is that it can be taught.” — Walter Mischel *The author is an educational psychologist. Email: massrat@ahlameducation.com*

SURVIVING LOCKDOWN

LIJU CHERIAN

THREE physical trainers shared their experiences with the Observer on surviving lockdown and the lessons learnt.

Thanks to mobile apps they continued to impart their skills through online classes.

While one is a personal trainer-cum-hand stander the others being Zumba fitness instructor and a yoga teacher.

Wellness activist **Fahad al Abri** utilised the time to be with his clients online daily.

“When the lockdown began I had to find ways to deal with the situation and the only way out was to look more of what abilities we have.”

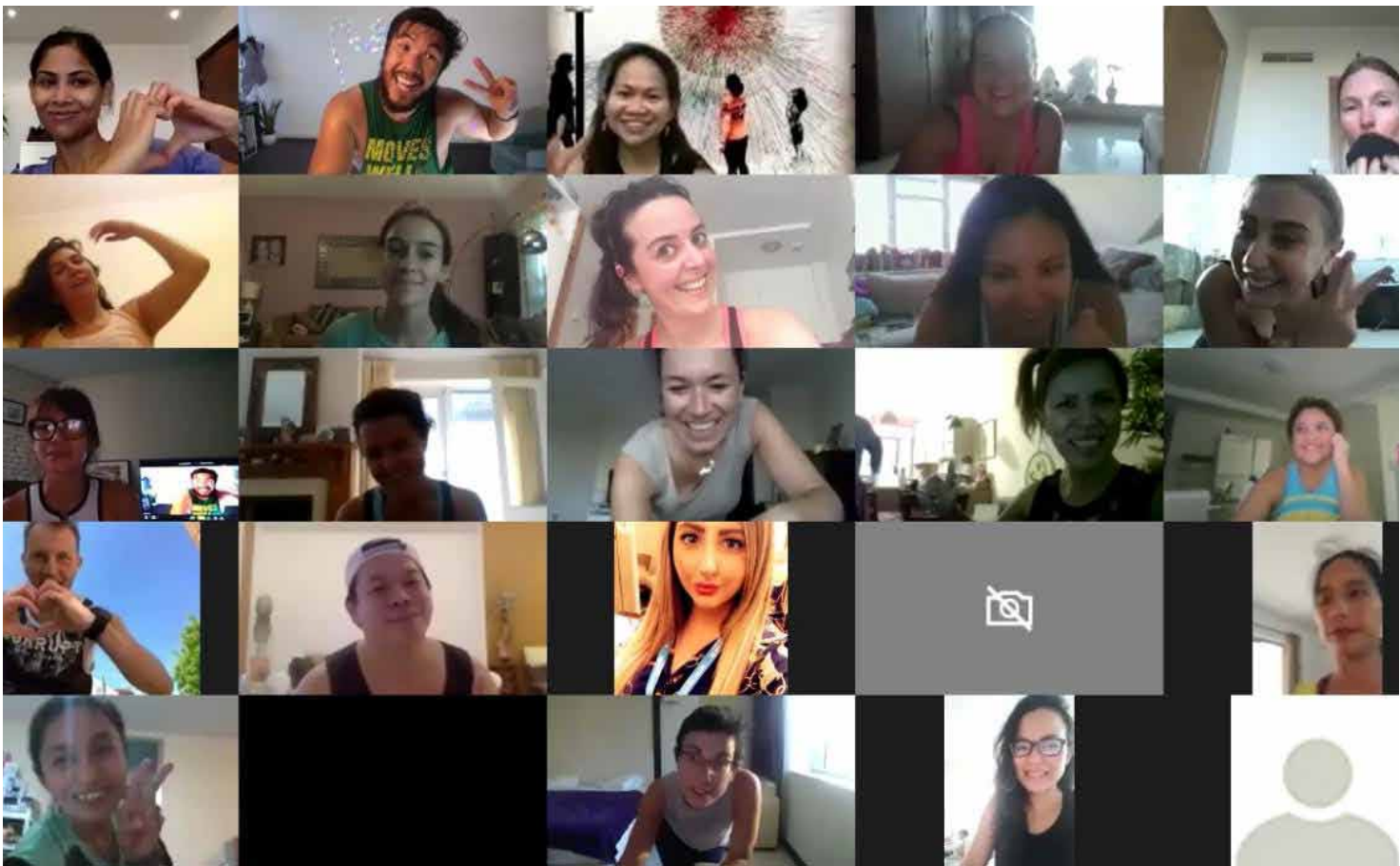
The training sessions at home provided an opportunity to share his skills through various social media platforms.

“I also kept myself busy playing my Ukulele and sharing it bringing some hope and smile to anyone watching me on my social media platforms,” says this TEDx speaker.

Zumba fitness instructor **Marissa M Pontila** from the Philippines, led her classes through Zin Studio livestream.

She was also able to attend other classes from around the world.

Marissa, who teaches at International Karate Academy in Al Khuwair, says, “It



Fahad Al Abri plays the Ukulele using Kummah as mask



Prema Arun, yoga entrepreneur

“Lockdown taught us to live a simple life and realise you do not need more than what you have and only health matters.

MARISSA M PONTILA,
ZUMBA FITNESS INSTRUCTOR

was a different experience as they were able to witness everyday through Zoom and other Apps which we were not familiar with before.”

A die-hard fan of Jed Latabe, an international fitness presenter, Marissa follows his fitness workouts and Zumba classes via Zoom every Friday.

“Lockdown taught us to live a simple life and realise you do not need more than what you have and only health matters. Because of technology we explored the other side of life keeping us busy while at home which enabled us to express our feelings, towards things that we like, and trying to like the things that we don’t like,” reveals this certified

fitness instructor. **Prema Arun**, an entrepreneur, and yoga teacher, the

period drove her to seek new horizons. Through online classes she reached out to more people and in different time zones catering to each and every individual's needs.

As co-founder of Yoga City, Qurum, her virtual teaching aspects tackled yoga as a holistic approach for the mind and body.

“I started online classes and soon realised it could reach out to more people and in different time zones. Since the online classes are interactive I could cater to each and every individual's needs,” she admits.

“The crisis taught us to be self-reliant, look inwards for creativity and motivation,” says Prema.

She is part of Prana, a public group of yoga enthusiasts, which is planning to celebrate International Day of Yoga virtually on Sunday.



مستوطنة للمقاصة والإيداع
Muscat Clearing & Depository

MUSCAT CLEARING & DEPOSITORY (S.A.O.G) MCD
POST BOX 952, CODE 112, RUWI, MUSCAT, SULTANATE OF OMAN
hereby gives Notice of following Tender:

Tender No	Description	Eligibility	Participation Charges	Sale of Documents	Bid Submission Date
IT/2020/1001	Supply & Installation, Configuration of Servers, Network Devices & Software	Local Gold Partners specialized in this field	R.O 50/=	21-06-2020 to 02-07-2020	16-07-2020

Tender Documents shall be obtained from Administration & Finance Department, Muscat Clearing & Depository, First Floor, MBD, RUWI, Sultanate of Oman (Tel.: +968-24822207) during office hours after paying the non-refundable amount mentioned above for the Tender Documents.

All Companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (2%) of the tender value on behalf of MUSCAT CLEARING & DEPOSITORY.

MCD 's Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract Agreement shall be applicable.

Tenderers are requested to submit their Tender in **Electronic copies with Password Protection** addressed to the 'Administration & Finance Manager', MCD and shall be emailed to 'Yahya Al Salmi' alsalmi@mcd.gov.om with Administration & Finance Department on or before Tender submission date.

MCD is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Tender.

HEALTH

INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY TOMORROW



Soul Healer

“Yoga does not transform the way we see things; it transforms the person who sees,” are the golden words of B K S Iyengar, one of the foremost yoga teachers in the world. With no definite cure so far for the ongoing global pandemic, the levels of anxiety and stress are increasing due to uncertainty, fear and ambiguity. Strong immunity and sound mental health are important in fighting against the coronavirus. What body can achieve through movement the mind can achieve through stillness. Through Yoga, one can achieve both.

“Yoga is not a work-out; it is a work-in. And this is the point of spiritual practice, to make us teachable, to open up our hearts, and focus our awareness so that we can know what we already know and be who we already are,”



DR PRITI SWARUP

says Rolf Gates, US-based Yoga teacher, and author. Yoga is known to help in increasing production and release of serotonin, the happiness hormone. It helps the body in flushing out the toxins and improves the oxygenation of organs. When you are happy, you naturally feel beautiful, youthful and energetic.

YogaCity (Muscat) Master Trainer Prema Arun says, “Breath, the life force prana, is the key to master our mind. Yoga trains the mind to transform it through the tools to purify the body and mind. It is a holistic approach that improves the sense of balance, body awareness and concentra-



tion. It is a meditation in motion when you do it mindfully that helps build our resilience.”

Yoga is a lifestyle manual 1-2 hours on the mat, and 22-23 hours off the mat. It makes me healthy physically, emotionally, and enables me to be more human. It is a journey of self, to self, through self.

GAJESH DHARIWAL

“As a person who has practised and instructed yoga for the last 15 years, I can vouch for a fact that daily practice of yoga strengthens, heals and makes the body and mind flexible and sharp. Every breath is life. Yoga is life,” says

Aarthi Sreekumar, an ardent yoga follower. Looking at the rising sun and stretching the whole body while performing sun salutation or the ultimate Asana acts as a reminder that everyday we can rise and shine from the darkness. Restorative yoga, like sitting quietly for a few minutes or taking a slow walk bare-foot on the grass, helps in resetting the nervous system.

“Yoga is a lifestyle manual 1-2 hours on the mat, and 22-23 hours off the mat. It makes me healthy physically, emotionally, and enables me to be more human. It is a journey of self, to self, through self,” says Gajesh Dhariwal.

And as Cyndi Lee, the first Western woman yoga master trainer says, “I think it's interesting that the opposite of being active in yoga is not being passive. It's being receptive.”

Try it to receive it. Bend it so that you don't break it. Let's yoga!

NOT EVERY CAT SHARES RAYHANA'S LUCKY STREAK

Last week wasn't Rayhana's week at all. It started with her having to visit the vet for a dental check. I took an appointment for her the following week to remove a few of her rotten teeth.

After taking her back home, I left the house to do some grocery shopping. When I came back, I gave the keys to the helper to get the grocery out of the car. It was a hot day of 40 degrees, and while the helper got busy getting the bags out, Rayhana decided to slip into the cool car without being seen. In the afternoon while feeding the cats, I didn't notice Rayhana's disappearance.

At six o'clock in the morning of the next day, I got an insistent knock on my door. It was the helper telling me that she had found Rayhana inside my car. I jumped out of the bed – heart beating fast – and ran down the stairs. Luckily enough, Rayhana wasn't dead despite being locked in for almost 15 hours straight with no food or water. Once I opened the door and took her out, Rayhana staggered and headed straight away to the water tub where she sat for almost ten minutes drinking water. I took her in as she was suffering from shock: shaking badly and clearly disorientated. I left her in my room – drinking more water – and went back to check the state of my car.

Rayhana had urinated all over the carpets and the leather seats.



RASHA AL RAISI

It took me an hour to wash the car thoroughly. To be on the safe side, I decided to take her to the vet again. Rayhana was lucky to be alive as the car was in the shade and the windows were tinted that made the car cool.

The vet suggested she have an IV drip to help her rehydrate and get rid of the jitters she was suffering from. By the evening, Rayhana was doing well but was still walking funny. The next day, Rayhana wasn't moving at all and had developed flu-like symptoms – runny nose and no voice – and had to go back to the vet! I shared her story with the other vet who noticed her funny gait. There was no coordination between her front and back legs. When suddenly stopping, it would take a few seconds for her back legs to halt. This was the neurological effects of heat stroke, the vet declared.

For now, the flu had to be treated and Rayhana was to be observed to see if she develops any other symptoms related to heatstroke. For the first two days, I had to carry her in to eat. But by the third day, she recuperated and started moving around in her new clumsy manner. After a week of the antibiotics, Rayhana had to go back for her

teeth extraction. She wasn't really happy being in and out of the vet for so many days. Now she's back to her old happy self. Nowadays I check my car before locking it, especially on hot days. Not every cat shares Rayhana's lucky streak!

The author is a certified skills trainer and the author of: *The World According to Bahja*. rashabooks@yahoo.com

OCTAL

AGENDA OF EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF OCTAL Holding S.A.O.C

جدول أعمال إجتماع الجمعية العامة غير العادية لشركة أوكتال القابضة ش.م.ع.م

The Board of Directors of OCTAL Holding S.A.O.C invites all Shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), which will be held on **Wednesday, 1st of July 2020 at 4.00 PM**, through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository Company ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum for the first EGM is not met, Tuesday, 7th July 2020, will be the date of the second meeting through the aforesaid electronic platform to consider the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the proposal to amend the Company's Articles of Association to comply with the provisions of the new Commercial Companies Law issued by Sultani Decree No. 18 of 2019 as per Annexure '1'.

Pursuant to the Company's articles of association and General Meeting regulations, through modern technology means issued by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

A juristic person, exclusively, has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.

Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date set for the Meeting until the end of the voting process on the day of the Meeting, and in the event that the shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be invalid, and he must re-vote again on the day of the Meeting.

For further information, please contact Ms. Zareen Austin on telephone: +986 22030722

Chairman

يسر مجلس إدارة شركة أوكتال القابضة ش.م.ع.م دعوة المساهمين الكرام لحضور إجتماع الجمعية العامة غير العادية للشركة والمقرر عقدها في تمام الساعة ٤.٠٠ من مساء يوم الأربعاء الموافق ١ يوليو ٢٠٢٠ م، وذلك عبر المنصة الإلكترونية لانعقاد الجمعيات العامة والتي يمكنكم الدخول اليها عبر موقع شركة مسقط للمقاصة والابداع (www.mcd.gov.om). ويكون يوم الثلاثاء الموافق ٧ يوليو ٢٠٢٠ م في تمام الساعة ٤.٠٠ مساءً، موعد الجمعية الثانية في حال عدم إكتمال نصاب الأولى، عبر المنصة الإلكترونية المذكورة أعلاه، لمناقشة جدول الأعمال التالي:

١. دراسة مقترح تعديل النظام الأساسي للشركة ليتوافق مع أحكام قانون الشركات التجارية الصادر بالمرسوم السلطاني رقم ١٨ لسنة ٢٠١٩م ووفق لما هو مبين في المرفق رقم (١) والموافقة عليه.

ووفقاً للنظام الأساسي للشركة وضوابط انعقاد الجمعيات العامة باستخدام وسائل التقنية الحديثة الصادرة من وزارة التجارة والصناعة، نود ان تلفت عنايتكم الى الآتي:

يحق للشخص الاعتباري دون غيره تفويض شخص طبيعي لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة والتصويت نيابة عنه من خلال وسائل التقنية على ان يكون لهذا الشخص الطبيعي رقم مسننمتر بشركة مسقط للمقاصة والابداع.

يبدأ التصويت على أي من البنود المطروحة على جدول الأعمال قبل تاريخ انعقاد الجمعية بمدة لا تزيد على ثلاثة أيام وحتى انتهاء عملية التصويت في يوم الاجتماع، وفي حالة تغيير رصيد المساهم بالزيادة والنقصان فسيتم إلغاء عملية التصويت، ويتعين عليه إعادة التصويت مرة أخرى في يوم اجتماع الجمعية.

لمزيد من المعلومات يرجى الاتصال بالفاصلة/ زرين أوستن على الهاتف رقم: ٩٦٨+ ٢٢٠٣٠٧٢٢

نائب مجلس الإدارة

OCTAL

AGENDA OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF OCTAL Holding S.A.O.C

جدول أعمال إجتماع الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية لشركة أوكتال القابضة ش.م.ع.م

The Board of Directors of OCTAL Holding S.A.O.C invites all Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM), which will be held on **Wednesday, 1st of July 2020 at 4.00 pm**, through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository Company ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum for the first AGM is not met, Tuesday, 7th July 2020, will be the date of the second meeting, through the aforesaid electronic platform to consider the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December 2019. (as per the Annexure 1)

2. To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the financial statements (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss Account) in respect of the Company for the financial year ended 31st December 2019. (as per the Annexure 2)

3. To consider and approve the distribution of cash dividend to the shareholders on the date of meeting at 7 % on the paid-up share capital equivalent to 40 baiza for each share, provided the dividend to be paid in instalments and at such times so as to ensure ongoing compliance with the Banking covenants in existence at the time of distribution;

4. To consider the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2019. (as per the Annexure 3)

5. To consider and approve transactions that the Company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31st December 2020. (as per Annexure 4)

6. To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors and sub-committees of the Company during the year ended 31 December 2019 and determine the sitting fees for the next financial year. (As per Annexures 5 & 6).

7. To appoint External Auditors for the financial year ended 31 December 2020 and fix their remuneration.

Pursuant to the Company's articles of association and General Meeting regulations, through modern technology means issued by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

A juristic person, exclusively, has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.

Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date set for the Meeting until the end of the voting process on the day of the Meeting, and in the event that the shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be invalid, and he must re-vote again on the day of the Meeting.

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١. دراسة تقرير مجلس الإدارة عن السنة المالية المنتهية في ٣١ ديسمبر ٢٠١٩م والموافقة عليه (حسب المرفق ١).

٢. دراسة تقرير مراقب الحسابات والموافقة على الميزانية العمومية (حساب الأرباح والخسائر) عن السنة المالية المنتهية في ٣١ ديسمبر ٢٠١٩م (حسب المرفق ٢).

٣. دراسة مقترح توزيع أرباح نقدية على المساهمين بتاريخ الجمعية وذلك بنسبة (٧%) من رأسمال الشركة المدفوع وذلك بمعدل ٤٠ بيسة لكل سهم، شريطة ان يتم سداد الأرباح بالتقسيط لضمان على مراحل التوزيع- الالتزام بالتعهدات البنكية السارية وقت التوزيع:

٤. إحاطة الجمعية بالتعاملات التي أجرتها الشركة مع الأطراف ذات العلاقة خلال السنة المالية المنتهية في ٣١ ديسمبر ٢٠١٩م (حسب المرفق ٣).

٥. دراسة التعاملات التي ستجريها الشركة مع الأطراف ذات العلاقة خلال السنة المالية التي ستنتهي في ٣١ ديسمبر ٢٠٢٠م والموافقة عليها (حسب المرفق ٤).

٦. التصديق على بزل حضور أعضاء مجلس الإدارة واللجان المنبثقة خلال السنة المالية المنتهية في ٣١ ديسمبر ٢٠١٩م وتحديد مقدار البذل للسنة المالية القادمة (حسب المرفق ٥ و ٦).

٧. تعيين مراقبي حسابات للسنة المالية التي ستنتهي في ٣١ ديسمبر ٢٠٢٠م وتحديد أتعابهم.

ووفقاً للنظام الأساسي للشركة وضوابط انعقاد الجمعيات العامة باستخدام وسائل التقنية الحديثة الصادرة من وزارة التجارة والصناعة، نود ان تلفت عنايتكم الى الآتي:

يحق للشخص الاعتباري دون غيره تفويض شخص طبيعي لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة والتصويت نيابة عنه من خلال وسائل التقنية على ان يكون لهذا الشخص الطبيعي رقم مسننمتر بشركة مسقط للمقاصة والابداع.

يبدأ التصويت على أي من البنود المطروحة على جدول الاعمال قبل تاريخ انعقاد الجمعية بمدة لا تزيد على ثلاثة أيام وحتى انتهاء عملية التصويت في يوم الاجتماع، وفي حالة تغيير رصيد المساهم بالزيادة والنقصان فسيتم إلغاء عملية التصويت، ويتعين عليه إعادة التصويت مرة أخرى في يوم اجتماع الجمعية.

لمزيد من المعلومات يرجى الاتصال بالفاصلة/ زرين أوستن على الهاتف رقم: ٩٦٨+ ٢٢٠٣٠٧٢٢

نائب رئيس مجلس الإدارة

ENVIRONMENT

IN MIDST OF PANDEMIC, E AFRICA BRACES FOR ANOTHER LOCUST INVASION

MARION DOUET

East Africa is bracing for a third outbreak of desert locusts, with billions of the destructive insects about to hatch and threaten food supplies in a region already reeling from damaging rains and the coronavirus pandemic.

Spurred by favourable weather conditions, the migratory pests have descended on East Africa in record numbers since late 2019 and another wave is about to take to the skies despite the concerted use of pesticides.

"Tens of thousands of hectares of cropland and pasture have already been damaged across the Horn and East Africa," the International Rescue Committee said in a report this month, noting even a small swarm could devour the same amount of food in a day as approximately 35,000 people.

In Ethiopia between January and April, locusts destroyed 1.3 million hectares of grazing land and nearly 200,000 hectares of crops, resulting in the loss of 350,000 tonnes of cereals, IGAD, the East Africa regional organisation, said in a June report.

But these initial estimates - corresponding to the first and second locust waves - do not fully capture the extent of damage as field sur-

veys have been hindered by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Until we get extended figures, I would just say Ethiopia was definitely the most affected in terms of croplands, then Somalia," says Kenneth Kemucie Mwangi from ICPAC, the climate monitoring programme of IGAD.

Somalia, which like Kenya experienced heavy rains and flooding in recent months that left scores dead, had already declared a "national emergency" against the locust scourge in February.

So far East African neighbours Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi have been spared the insects, which travel in huge swarms billions of insects strong, and can migrate 150 kilometres in a single day.

400 BILLION KILLED

The World Bank in May approved a \$500-million programme to help countries vulnerable to hunger in East Africa fight the pests eating their way across the region.

Pesticide spraying operations have been underway since

February, helping wipe out staggering numbers of the insects capable of multiplying their numbers 20-fold every three months.

"About 400,000 hectares were controlled in the region between January and mid May. We estimate that 400 billion locusts have been exterminated," says Cyril Ferrand, a Nairobi-based expert with the FAO.

"We can't estimate the total population because we don't have access to certain areas, especially in Somalia. But we know that it's been seriously reduced."

In Kenya, where swarms blotted out the sky for miles in recent months, locusts have retreated to just three semi-arid counties in the country's far north. — **AFP**



WORLD

EU LEADERS DISAGREE ON RECOVERY PLAN

BRUSSELS: EU leaders agreed on Friday that urgent action was needed to haul their coronavirus-hit economies from the deepest recession since World War II, but made no progress on a massive stimulus plan that has divided them bitterly for weeks. The 27 avoided a bruising bust-up during a summit by video-conference of around four hours, and agreed to meet in person in mid-July to haggle and get across the line a long-term budget and economic rescue package worth 1.85 trillion euros.

“Leaders unanimously agreed that the severity of this crisis justifies an ambitious common response,” Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, told reporters.

Earlier, European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde warned the leaders that the European Union’s economy was in a “dramatic fall” due to the coronavirus crisis and that the full impact on unemployment rates was yet to come.

Under discussion is the EU’s 2021-27 budget of about 1.1 trillion euros, and a proposal by the Commission, the bloc’s executive, to borrow 750 billion euros from the market



European Council President Charles Michel attends a European summit in video conference format, in Brussels, on Friday. – Reuters

for a new recovery fund that would help revive economies hardest hit by coronavirus, notably Italy and Spain. With more than 100,000 deaths from COVID-19, the EU is keen to demonstrate solidarity after months of bickering that has dented public confidence and put the bloc’s global standing at risk after its buffeting from Brexit.

‘NOT PARTICULARLY USEFUL’
Spanish Prime Minister

LEADERS EYE DEAL BY END OF JULY, MORE MEETINGS LIKELY

FRUGAL, WEALTHY NORTH WANTS CONDITIONAL LOANS

AILING SOUTH WANTS GRANTS, EAST SAYS IT MUST NOT BE IGNORED

Pedro Sanchez voiced impatience with a negotiation process that officials say could drag into August, calling for an early agreement.

“The more time we waste, the deeper will be the recession,” he said on Twitter. But Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said member states remained “fairly far from each other” and while everyone wanted to do a deal over the summer he was not sure it was possible. — Reuters

CHINA CHARGES CANADIANS WITH SPYING

BEIJING: China has formally charged two Canadians with spying, officials said on Friday, more than 18 months after they were arrested in a spat between Beijing and Ottawa. The pair were detained shortly after Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou was arrested in Canada on a US warrant, in what is widely believed to have been a retaliatory move from China.

The Supreme People’s Procuratorate said on Friday it has begun the prosecution of ex-diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor, who were “suspected of foreign espionage” and “providing state secrets”.

The move comes just weeks after a key ruling in the Meng case where a Canadian judge ruled that proceedings to extradite her

to the United States will go ahead.

The United States wants Meng extradited to face trial on charges related to the Chinese telecom equipment maker’s alleged violations of US sanctions against Iran.

Diplomatic relations between Canada and China have hit rock bottom over the arrests, damaging trade between the countries.

China’s Embassy in Ottawa accused the United States of trying “to bring down Huawei”.

China has also blocked billions of dollars’ worth of Canadian agricultural exports.

The arrests of Kovrig and Spavor nine days after Meng was taken into custody have been widely decried as retribution.

While the eldest daughter of Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei has been out on bail

and living in a mansion in Vancouver, the two Canadians remain in China’s opaque penal system.

Monthly consular visits for Kovrig and Spavor had been suspended since the coronavirus outbreak started in China, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in April, amid concerns over their well-being.

China’s foreign ministry has insisted the pair are in good health and that their detention facility is “in a region that is not particularly affected by COVID-19”.

However, people familiar with the matter have said the two have endured hours of interrogation and in the first six months of detention were forced to sleep with the lights on. — AFP

WORLD

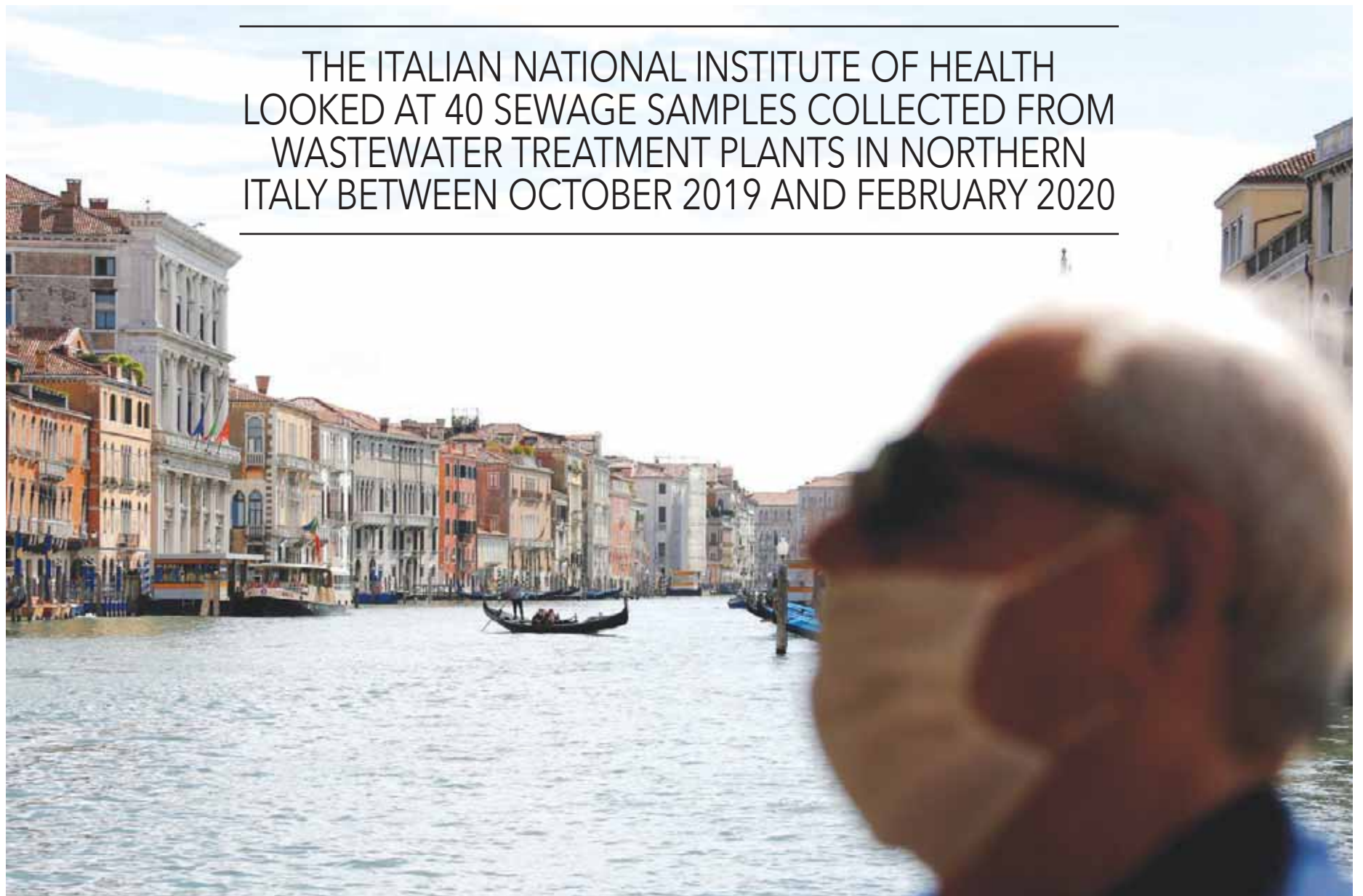
Coronavirus was in Italy by Dec 2019: Sewage study

LONDON: Scientists in Italy have found traces of the new coronavirus in wastewater collected from Milan and Turin in December 2019 — suggesting COVID-19 was already circulating in northern Italy before China reported the first cases.

The Italian National Institute of Health looked at 40 sewage samples collected from wastewater treatment plants in northern Italy between October 2019 and February 2020. An analysis released late on Thursday said samples taken in Milan and Turin on December 18 showed the presence of the SARS-Cov-2 virus.

"This research may help us understand the beginning of virus circulation in Italy," said Giuseppina La Rosa, an expert in environmental wastewater at the Italian National Institute of Health who co-led the research.

Small studies conducted by scientific teams in the Netherlands, France, Australia and elsewhere have found signs that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be detected in sewage, and many countries are beginning to use wastewater sampling to track the



THE ITALIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH LOOKED AT 40 SEWAGE SAMPLES COLLECTED FROM WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANTS IN NORTHERN ITALY BETWEEN OCTOBER 2019 AND FEBRUARY 2020

A man wears a face mask on board a vaporetto at Grand Canal, amid the coronavirus outbreak, in Venice, Italy. — Reuters

spread of the disease.

Scientists said the detection of traces of the virus before the end of 2019 was consistent with evidence emerging in other countries that COVID-19 may have been circulating before China reported the first cases of a new disease on December 31.

"That COVID-19 could have been circulating in Italy is possible," said Rowland Kao,

a veterinary epidemiology and data science professor at Scotland's Edinburgh University.

"(This finding) does not on its own, however, tell us if that early detection was the source of the very large epidemic in Italy, or if that was due to a later introduction into the country."

A study in May by French scientists found that a man was infected with COVID-19

as early as December 27, nearly a month before France confirmed its first cases.

La Rosa said the presence of the virus in the Italian waste samples did not "automatically imply that the main transmission chains that led to the development of the epidemic in our country originated from these very first cases".

— Reuters

English COVID-19 R number falls

LONDON: The COVID-19 reproduction number for England fell to 0.7-0.9, bringing it into line with the rest of the UK, the government said on Friday, as it also published details of how quickly the disease was shrinking for the first time.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday he hoped the time of national lockdowns was over after the United Kingdom's chief medical officers agreed that the COVID-19 threat

level should be lowered.

The Government Office for Science said that the growth rate, which captures the size and speed of change, was -4 per cent to -2 per cent in the UK as a whole, and -4 per cent to -1 per cent in England alone. Those figures indicate the disease is shrinking across the country.

The R number, which gives only information about the direction of change, fell in England to between 0.7 and 0.9, from 0.8-1 last week.

The R number for the UK as a whole remained steady at 0.7-0.9.

The R number represents the average number of people that one infected person will pass the virus on to. An R number above 1 can lead very rapidly to exponential growth.

The only English region where the estimated growth rate included the possibility it could be growing was London, where the growth rate was estimated at between -5 per cent and 1

per cent and the R number was 0.7-1.

Government scientists said the likely estimates were to the middle of the range, and so the disease was likely to be shrinking in all English regions for which data was published.

They also cautioned that as the number of cases decreases, the metrics would become less helpful, and measures of incidence and prevalence of the disease would need to be considered. — Reuters



US President Donald Trump meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at the demilitarised zone separating the two Koreas, in Panmunjom, South Korea, on June 30, 2019. — Reuters file photo

N Korea’s Kim stokes tensions with eye on distracted Trump

KANEEZ FATIMA

North Korea has been ramping up tensions with South Korea in recent weeks, but the campaign seems aimed at making a renewed push for sanctions relief by recapturing the attention of a US administration that is distracted by domestic issues.

North Korea blew up a joint liaison office on its side of the border last week, declared an end to dialogue with South Korea and threatened military action.

After three historic meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un failed to lead to a denuclearisation deal, US President Donald Trump's attention is fixed elsewhere, including the coronavirus epidemic, anti-racism protests and the November presidential election.

Kim, however, is facing real-world consequences for the failed talks, with North Korea's sanctions-hit economy further

strained by a border lockdown imposed to prevent a coronavirus outbreak, potentially threatening his support base among the elites and military.

Analysts say one of Kim's goals in lashing out at US ally South Korea is to remind Washington of the unresolved issues with North Korea, potentially forcing it to intervene.

"Trump could feel the need to talk to the North to manage the situation for now, and publicly claim that he had warded off the possible military provocations that Kim has threatened," said Chang Ho-jin, a former South Korean presidential foreign policy secretary.

"By raising inter-Korean tensions, North Korea could also be hoping South Korea will push harder to get sanctions exemptions for joint economic projects that have so far been elusive."

A diplomatic source in Seoul said US officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun who had led negotiations with North Korea, are willing to make "last-ditch efforts" before the US election. — Reuters

California city set to ban predictive policing

AVI ASHER-SCHAPIRO

As pressure mounts to address police brutality and racism, California's Santa Cruz is poised to become the first US city to ban predictive policing — despite headquartering the firm that pioneered the technology.

Used by police forces across the United States for almost a decade, PredPol Inc — short for predictive policing — relies on an algorithm to analyse police records and identify crime-ridden areas to determine when and where officers patrol.

But critics say it reinforces racist patterns of policing — low-income, ethnic minority neighbourhoods have historically been over-policed so the data shows them as crime hotspots, leading to the deployment of more police to those areas.

"We have technology that could target people of colour in our community — it's technology that we don't need," Justin Cummings, the seaside city's first African-American male mayor, who proposed the ban last year, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"This is something that targets people who are like me," said Cummings, who made head-

USED BY POLICE FORCES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES FOR ALMOST A DECADE, PREDPOL INC — SHORT FOR PREDICTIVE POLICING — RELIES ON AN ALGORITHM TO ANALYSE POLICE RECORDS AND IDENTIFY CRIME-RIDDEN AREAS

lines this month for kneeling beside Santa Cruz police chief Andy Mills to protest the death of George Floyd in police custody, which sparked global outrage.

PredPol did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

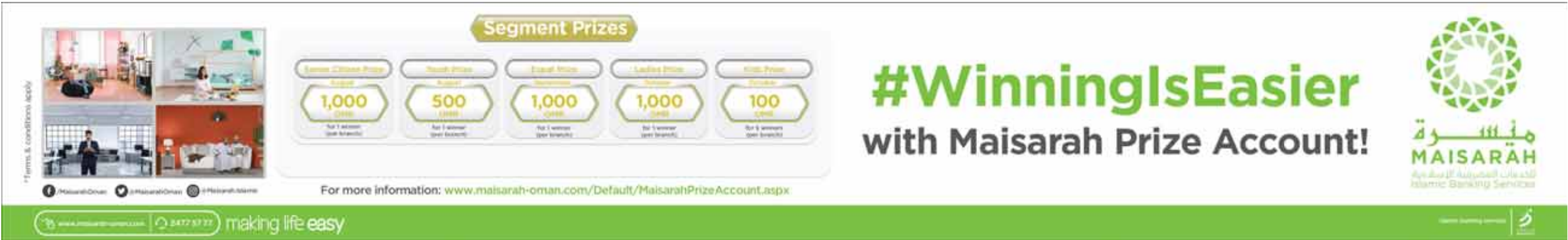
On its website, PredPol said that its technology helps police fight crime and that Santa Cruz police reported a 19 per cent reduction in burglaries since implementing its programme while Los Angeles Police saw a 25 per cent fall.

"PredPol's software technology does not pose any personal privacy or profiling concerns," the company said on its website.

"PredPol does not collect, upload, analyse or in any way involve any information about individuals or populations and their characteristics." — Thomson Reuters Foundation

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BUSINESS



Segment Prizes

Segment	Prize	Requirement
1st Segment	1,000 OMR	Net 1 winner (per branch)
2nd Segment	500 OMR	Net 1 winner (per branch)
3rd Segment	1,000 OMR	Net 1 winner (per branch)
4th Segment	1,000 OMR	Net 1 winner (per branch)
5th Segment	100 OMR	Net 1 winner (per branch)

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Plan to boost Oman’s air cargo volumes to 700,000 tonnes

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT:An array of Omani agencies spanning the aviation, shipping, logistics, customs and regulatory sectors are working in concert to achieving a trebling of the Sultanate’s airfreight volumes to around 700,000 tonnes per annum by 2030.

The ambitious goal, initiated in recent years preceding the current pandemic that has severely impacted aviation around the world, including Oman, is part of a strategic bid to position the Sultanate as a regional gateway for air cargo services.

The strategy calls for building a comprehensive ecosystem for air cargo services in the Sultanate, encompassing among other components, a freighter business, developing and upgrading temperature-controlled warehousing at key airports, boosting sea-air connectivity, introducing the concept of Airport Cities and Free Zones, and developing the air cargo capacities of domestic airports.

Stakeholders involved in the delivery of this strategic national goal include: Oman Aviation Group, Oman Airports, Oman Air, Oman Air SATS Cargo, Royal Oman Police Customs and a number of local and international freight forwarders.

Enabling the fast-track delivery of this landmark initiative is the Implementation Support & Follow-up Unit (ISFU) of the Diwan of Royal Court, which has tasked with facilitating speedy, high-level approvals for projects that aid



Oman’s economic diversification.

The underlying objective of the initiative is to take Oman’s fledgling air cargo industry global, says ISFU. “In order to optimally globalise Omani air cargo, a system is required that holistically integrates all of the key entities involved in the sector. These include the information maintenance centre, safety and security, customer management, online booking, supplier management, e-shipping, product management, revenue management, flight management and revenue accounting. Primary goals of this initiative are also to build demand in order to support the air freighter sector; and design and construct the cold capacity extension”, the task force explained in its 2019 Annual Report pub-

AMBITIOUS GOAL:
The strategy calls for building a comprehensive ecosystem for air cargo services in the Sultanate, encompassing a freighter business, adding new temperature-controlled warehousing at key airports, boosting sea-air connectivity, introducing the concept of Airport Cities and Free Zones, and developing the air cargo capacities of domestic airports

lished last week.

As part of several performance milestones iden-

tified for the delivery of this initiative, a study was commissioned to examine the introduction of freighter business model for boosting air cargo volumes in the Sultanate. The case study envisioned the possibility of ramping up national carrier Oman Air’s freighter capabilities to handle greater volumes of fishery, pharmaceutical and ecommerce volumes.

The strategy also moots a significant increase in the capacity of the Air Cargo Terminal at Muscat International Airport, currently estimated at 350,000 tonnes. Investments in 150,000 tonnes of new temperature-controlled storage capacity, catering to fisheries, pharmaceuticals, vegetables and other perishables, are proposed to be made in this regard.

Wirecard CEO quits as search for missing billions hits dead end

FRANKFURT/MANILA: The chief executive of Wirecard resigned on Friday after the search for \$2.1 billion of cash missing from the embattled electronic payments firm hit a dead end in the Philippines.

Markus Braun, who built the German company into one of the hottest investments in Europe, leaves Wirecard facing a looming cash crunch amid allegations of fraud over the missing money.

In a statement, the company said James Freis, a former compliance officer at Germany's stock exchange, had been appointed as interim CEO.

Wirecard is holding emergency talks with banks to secure a financial lifeline, three people with knowledge of the matter said, after its auditor, EY, refused to sign off on its accounts.

The company warned on Thursday that loans of roughly 2 billion euros (\$2.24 billion) could be terminated if its annual report is not published on Friday. It has until this evening to strike a deal with banks, the people said.

The company's shares tanked again after two Philippine banks said the German payments company was not a client of theirs and alleged that documents had been falsified.



Braun, who has aggressively defended the company against accusations of accounting fraud, had earlier said that the firm could itself have been the victim of fraud.

Braun had not identified those he suspected of fraud, while BPI and BDO, the two Philippine banks, both issued statements denying any relationship with Wirecard.

"Wirecard is not a client of the bank. The document claiming the existence of a Wirecard account with BDO is a falsified document and carries forged signatures

of bank officers", BDO said.

"The matter has already been reported to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas", BDO added in a statement, referring to the Philippines' central bank. BPI also said Wirecard was not a client.

"Their external auditor presented to us a document that claimed that they are a client. We have determined that the document is spurious. We continue to investigate this matter", BPI said in a statement.

EY had regularly approved Wirecard's accounts in recent years, and its refusal to sign off for 2019 con-

firms failings found in an external probe by KPMG in April.

Wirecard was a welcome technology success story in Germany, which made its name in heavy industry. But its fortunes unravelled after a whistleblower alleged that it owed its success in part to a web of sham transactions.

Braun faced calls to resign but he and the company dismissed the claims and its failure to win a clean bill of health this week from auditors for its accounts shattered investor confidence. — **Reuters**

Deutsche Telekom targets US top spot

BERLIN: Deutsche Telekom boss Tim Hoettges has his sights on becoming market leader in the United States, setting a high bar for US unit T-Mobile after its \$23 billion takeover of Sprint.

"We will become No1 in the United States", Hoettges said in a bullish speech to Deutsche Telekom's annual general meeting on Friday, held online this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hoettges also pledged that Deutsche Telekom would become the No1 fibre-optic company in Germany and Europe as well as the leader in next-generation 5G networks.

The US merger completed in April



has cemented T-Mobile's position as the country's No 3 wireless provider behind AT&T and Verizon.

Hoettges also confirmed Deutsche Telekom's guidance for this year, emphasising the group's resilience in the face of the pandemic. He added that its outlook would be updated during the second quarter to account for the US deal. "We want to continue growing", he said. "In terms of revenue. In terms of earnings from operations. And in terms of free cash flow".

Deutsche Telekom has forecast core profit this year of 25.5 billion euros (\$28.6 billion) and proposed a 2019 dividend of 0.60 euros. — **Reuters**

BUSINESS



A shopper reaches for a box of tea in a supermarket in London. — Reuters

UK RETAIL SALES REBOUNDED AFTER RECORD SLUMP

LONDON: UK retail sales rebounded 12 per cent in May as some shops reopened, having slumped a record 18 per cent in April after the country entered coronavirus lockdown, official data showed on Friday.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also revealed that total government debt rose to more than Britain's entire economic output for the first time since 1963, as the Treasury sought to keep millions of workers in their jobs.

Friday's figures come a day after the Bank of England said it would provide further cash stimulus worth £100 billion (\$126 billion or 112 billion euros) to prop up Britain's coronavirus-hit economy — on top of the £200 billion already announced. "Retail sales volumes partly rebounded in May... but sales were still down by 13.1 per cent on February before the impact of the coronavirus", the ONS said on Friday.

THE NATION'S
DEBT MOUNTAIN
MEANWHILE
GREW LAST
MONTH TO £1.95
TRILLION, OR
100.9 PER CENT
OF BRITAIN'S
GROSS
DOMESTIC
PRODUCT

"Non-food stores provided the largest positive contribution to the monthly growth in May", led by a 42 per cent surge in sales across household goods shops.

Britain went into lockdown on March 23, but this week the government allowed non-essential shops, such as clothing stores, to reopen.

A surge in online shopping during the lockdown also helped retailers to recover in May, but the sector and overall economy remains

shattered by the fallout from COVID-19.

"Naturally, spending on goods will recover faster than on services, which usually require human contact and remain largely unavailable", noted Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

The nation's debt mountain meanwhile grew last month to £1.95 trillion, or 100.9 per cent of Britain's gross domestic product.

That compared with 97.7 per cent in April, with multi-billion pound government help to pay the wages of 9.1 million people tipping the level above 100 per cent.

Furloughing, which backs up 80 per cent of salaries but is set to end in October, is expected to cost about £60 billion, according to government estimates.

The ONS on Friday added that the government deficit for the current financial year hit a record £55.2 billion in May. — AFP

Trump renews threat to cut trade ties with China



Chinese and US flags flutter near The Bund, in Shanghai, China, in this file photo. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Thursday renewed his threat to cut ties with China, a day after his top diplomats held talks with Beijing and his trade representative said he did not consider decoupling the US and Chinese economies a viable option.

The top US diplomat for East Asia described US-China relations as "tense" after their first high-level face-to-face diplomatic talks in months, although he said Beijing did recommit to the first part of a trade deal reached this year and that coming weeks would show if there had been progress.

Trump has made rebalancing the massive US trade deficit with China a top priority, but relations have worsened steadily as his campaign for re-election in November heats up.

"It was not Ambassador Lighthizer's fault (yesterday in Committee) in that perhaps I didn't make myself clear", Trump said in a tweet referring to his trade representative, Robert Lighthizer.

"But the US certainly does maintain a policy option, under various conditions, of a complete decoupling from China".

Lighthizer told a House of Representatives committee on Wednesday he did not see that as viable.

"Do I think that you can sit down and decouple the United States economy from the Chinese economy?" he said. "No, I think that was a policy option years ago. I don't think it's a... reasonable policy option at this point". — Reuters



Containers and trucks are seen at a terminal of the Qingdao port in Shandong province, China. — Reuters

BUILD A BETTER, GREENER WORLD ECONOMY AFTER PANDEMIC

PARIS: Business as usual is not an option once the world emerges from the coronavirus pandemic, according to Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz, who wants new climate-laced metrics to measure growth beyond the blunt instrument of GDP.

Stiglitz said the debilitating effects of COVID-19 worldwide offered governments a chance to forge a green recovery with a new emphasis on fairness.

“And it shouldn’t be just going back to where we were”, he said.

“GDP does not take into account the inequalities, the lack of resilience or the lack of sustainability. What we want to do now is to lead the economy in a direction that reflects all these concerns.”

Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel prize for economics in 2001 who served as a top adviser at the World Bank and in Bill Clinton’s White House, has long argued that gross domestic product is far too broad a measure.

A decade ago, he co-chaired a commission convened by the French government that recommended a new approach encompassing



GDP does not take into account the inequalities, the lack of resilience or the lack of sustainability. What we want to do now is to lead the economy in a direction that reflects all these concerns

JOSEPH STIGLITZ,
NOBEL LAUREATE ECONOMIST



metrics for sustainability and a “green GDP”.

“We argued for a dashboard”, he said, “We pointed out that if we had had better measures, we would have had a better sense of the damage that the 2008 crisis was doing”.

Today, “the most important indicator is the impact of greenhouse gas emissions”, Stiglitz said.

“What we’ve been learning more about is the multiple manifestations of climate change, in terms of for instance how it will affect extreme weather events. What we have learned is the complexity in climate change itself”.

Stiglitz is not alone in

demanding a break with the past as the world strives to overcome a pandemic that has so far killed more than 450,000 people and infected at least eight million, according to an AFP tally.

Shutdowns sparked by the outbreak have led to dizzying declines in growth rates and mammoth government bailouts in a number of countries, especially in Europe and the United States.

Some of the rescue packages have come attached with strings demanding companies refocus their investment plans on strategies to fight climate change. An

overarching plan was unveiled on Thursday by the International Energy Agency and International Monetary Fund.

The project aims to boost GDP growth by 1.1 percentage points, “save or create” nine million jobs, and slash CO2 emissions by 1.5 billion tonnes in each of the next three years.

IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said world leaders have a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to reboot their economies and tackle global warming at the same time.

But those goals continue to pull against each other, Birol acknowledged, pointing to lessons learned from the global recession triggered by the 2008 collapse of the US housing market. Stiglitz, who has extensively criticised the laissez-faire policies that led up to 2008, said the current crisis had again exposed short-sighted thinking.

“We created an economy without spare tyres, without extra hospital beds, we didn’t do pandemic preparedness, we didn’t do a lot of the things that would have enabled us to respond to the pandemic”, he said. — AFP

SPORTS

LEARNING WHILE NOT EARNING: BELLIS HAILS WTA UNIVERSITY



MUMBAI: The online educational platform launched by the Women's Tennis Association in March has been a boon for American Catherine 'CiCi' Bellis, who feels the resources have been "extremely" helpful for the players during the tour's COVID-19 shutdown.

The tennis season screeched to a halt in early March, leaving those solely dependent on tournament winnings in financial crisis.

While the governing bodies built a players relief package, the WTA and its long-time technology partner SAP also expedited the rollout of the WTA University to help the athletes gain new skills and knowledge. The platform is tailor-made for professional players and

includes financial coaching by certified specialists, guided fitness classes and leadership inspiration from Billie Jean King among others.

"The WTA University is incredible and has been such an amazing resource during this time," Bellis, 21, said in an email interview.

"It has been extremely helpful for the players during this time to learn about things off the court for real-world situations. There are a ton of mental health courses that can help players deal with mental challenges."

Bellis, a former junior number one, was 15 when she earned a wild card into the main draw of the 2014 US Open and made a splash with a victory over 12th seed Dominika Cibulkova.

Her career started building momentum and she was named the WTA's Newcomer of the Year in 2017, during which she also reached a career-high ranking of 35.

— Reuters

Djokovic puts positive spin on US Open

NEW YORK: World number one Novak Djokovic says he is excited by the prospect of playing at the US Open but says it would only be fair if every player eligible is able to compete.

The United States Tennis Association (USTA) announced this week that the US Open would go ahead at the end of August without fans and with strict health protocols in place.

However, with the COVID-19 pandemic still peaking in some regions of the world, Djokovic is concerned that many players will not be able to travel even if they wanted to.



"Hopefully every single player who is participating, chosen by ranking and who deserves their

place at the US Open, will have an equal opportunity to travel there and compete as everybody else,"

Djokovic told Eurosport's Tennis Legends podcast.

"This is very important because this is the foundation of the ATP and the foundation of international tennis."

Several leading players have voiced their concerns about the US Open taking place, especially as the US has the most deaths from COVID-19 in the world.

Defending champion Rafael Nadal said he would be unlikely to travel there in the current circumstances while women's world number two Simona Halep has also indicated she will not go. — Reuters

SPORTS



POULTER, HUBBARD SET EARLY PACE AT RBC HERITAGE

WASHINGTON: Britain's Ian Poulter capped an error-free opening round with a birdie-birdie finish to grab a share of the early lead with American Mark



Hubbard at the RBC Heritage in Hilton Head, South Carolina on Thursday. With the PGA Tour staging just its second event following a three-month hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **Poulter** showed no signs of rust with a rock-solid seven-under 64 in ideal scoring conditions at the Harbor Town Golf Links. Hubbard, chasing his first



PGA Tour title, was equally sharp in an error-free round highlighted by an eagle-three on the par-five second. "It's very important being bogey free," said Poulter. "Any time that happens on this golf course, you've obviously played pretty well. It's a fiddly, testy, tricky golf course."

The pair were being chased by American Michael Thompson, Colombia's Sebastian Munoz and Norway's Viktor Hovland, who holed out from 27 yards for an eagle-two on his last hole to join the group one shot back.

Americans Webb Simpson, Brice Garnett, Ryan Palmer and South African Dylan Frittelli were also one back of the leaders after posting 65s later in the day. Jordan Spieth had a rollercoaster opening round, beginning with a triple bogey seven on his third hole before scoring eight birdies to lead a group two back at five-under.

His 29 coming home equalled the lowest nine-hole score of the three-times major winner's career. Also in the clubhouse at five-under 66 were Tony Finau, Matthew NeSmith, Britain's Matthew Fitzpatrick, South African Erik van Rooyen and Canadian Mackenzie Hughes. — **Reuters**

RBC Heritage first-round scores (USA unless noted, par-71):

- 64 - Ian Poulter (ENG), Mark Hubbard
- 65 - Sebastian Munoz (COL), Viktor Hovland (NOR), Michael Thompson, Webb Simpson, Dylan Frittelli (RSA), Brice Garnett, Ryan Palmer
- 66 - Matthew NeSmith, Jordan Spieth, Tony Finau, Matthew Fitzpatrick (ENG), Erik van Rooyen (RSA), Mackenzie Hughes (CAN)
- 67 - Harris English, Patrick Rodgers, Vaughn Taylor, Daniel Berger, Brooks Koepka, Rickie Fowler, Ernie Els (RSA), JT Poston, Sepp Straka (AUT), Christiaan Bezuidenhout (RSA), Bryson DeChambeau, Max Homa

SPORTS



MADRID THUMP
VALENCIA TO STAY
IN TOUCH OF
LEADERS BARCA

BENZEMA SHOWS REAL CLASS

MADRID: Real Madrid's Karim Benzema scored one of the goals of the season as they beat Valencia 3-0 at home on Thursday to stay in touch with La Liga leaders Barcelona, but the visitors were left fuming after having a goal ruled out following a VAR review.

The win took second-placed Real to 62 points after 29 games, two behind champions Barca who beat Leganes 2-0 on Tuesday.

Benzema fired into the bottom corner to give Real the lead on the hour mark after inspired play by Eden Hazard, who fashioned a one-two with Luka Modric before sliding to the ground to nudge the ball into the path of the French striker.

Marco Asensio scored with his first touch since injuring his knee 11 months ago to double Real's lead in the 74th minute. Benzema rounded off the win with a jaw-dropping vol-

LA LIGA RESULTS ON THURSDAY:	
ALAVES 2 (SAINZ 56, AGUIRREGABIRIA 90+6)	REAL SOCIEDAD 0
REAL MADRID 3 (BENZEMA 61, 86, MARCO ASENSIO 74)	VALENCIA 0

ley which he set up by receiving the ball in the air, flicking it from his right foot to his left and sending it flying into the top corner. Valencia looked to have taken the lead when Rodrigo Moreno netted in the 20th minute but long after the players had celebrated the goal it was chalked off for offside against Maxi Gomez, even though the striker had not touched the ball.

The visitors faded in the second half after causing Real problems in the first and their frustrations

deepened after the third goal when teenage midfielder Kang-In Lee was shown a straight red card for hacking at Sergio Ramos.

Rodrigo had struck the post before his disallowed goal while Geoffrey Kondogbia was denied by Real keeper Thibaut Courtois at the end of a frantic first half. Valencia's Jasper Cillessen made two smart saves with his legs to thwart Hazard and Dani Carvajal before the break but the second half belonged to Zinedine Zidane's side.

"We started well but after that Valencia grew into the game and we knew we had to change something and push higher up the pitch, that's what we did and we won the game," said Asensio, who had a dream return after expecting to miss the whole season before the campaign was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. — Reuters