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AL FAISAL SATISFIED WITH BARCELONA WINTER TEST



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LAUNCHING 'BREATH CAMPAIGN' IN OMAN TO HELP PEOPLE FACE CHALLENGES



P20

BRITAIN INFLATION EDGES UP AS COVID PRICE HIT BEGINS TO EASE



MUSCAT

SULTANATE THANKED BY JAPAN FOR SUPPORT

HH Sayyid Shihab bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received a written message from Nobuo Kishi, Defence Minister of Japan, expressing thanks for the facilities provided to the Japanese side in the Sultanate. The message was handed over to HH Sayyid Shihab by Toshinori Kobayashi, Ambassador of Japan to Oman, when HH Sayyid received the ambassador at his office in Al Muaskar Al Murtafaa in Muscat on Wednesday. During the meeting, HH Sayyid Shihab affirmed that the Sultanate will spare no effort in providing the facilities for the sisterly and friendly countries. SEE ALSO P2

AMMAN

SYRIA'S ASSAD TO RUN FOR RE-ELECTION

Syrian President Bashar al Assad on Wednesday submitted documents to run for a fourth term in an election scheduled for May 26, parliament's speaker said on state media. Parliament announced the election on Sunday. Assad's family and his Baath party have ruled Syria for five decades. This year is the 10th anniversary of a crackdown on protesters which triggered a civil war that has left much of Syria in ruins. The multi-sided conflict has sucked in world powers, killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions more, but is now nearing its end with Assad, supported by Russian and other allies, back in control of most of the country.

DETAILS ON P6



INSIDE



CUT TO OXYGEN SUPPLY KILLS 22 COVID PATIENTS IN INDIA

P7



CHAUVIN CONVICTED OF MURDERING GEORGE FLOYD

P8

BAN ON ARRIVALS FROM INDIA, PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing session, the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic held a meeting on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, to follow up updates, measures of protection against the disease and means of curbing its spread.

The Supreme Committee studied the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate and the rest of the world, as well as the outcome of local reports on polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests required to be taken in advance by passengers coming to Oman due to the impacts of the global pandemic on public health in the Sultanate particularly amid confirmations that the mutated variants are linked to travel, thus the numbers of such infections have increased in the Sultanate causing adverse impact on the health system and health workers.

To protect society from more propagation of this disease, the Supreme Committee took the following decisions.

Expanding the ban on entry to

the Sultanate to cover travellers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and passengers arriving from any other country if they have passed through any of the three countries over the past 14 days.

The three countries are thereby added to the list of countries from which travellers were earlier banned from entering Oman.

The ban begins at 6 pm on Saturday (April 24, 2021), and continues till further notice. This is with the exception of arriving passengers who are Omani citizens, diplomats or health workers and their families.

The exempted groups will undergo the prescribed entry procedures when they reach the Sultanate.

The Committee also decided not to allow children below 12 years to enter commercial complexes and other trade outlets.

In this context, the Committee instructs commercial complexes, commercial outlets, restaurants and cafeterias to comply and limit the entry therein of customers to 50 per cent of the outlets' capacity. Legal action will be taken against any party that fails to abide by the decisions.

TURN TO P3

The ban begins at 6 pm on April 24 and continues till further notice. Exception for Omani citizens, diplomats or health workers and their families



Ban on arrivals from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh



Children under 12 not allowed into malls and stores

50% capacity at commercial establishments



Distance education for all grades in public, private schools

Sultanate reports 17 deaths in a day

The Sultanate continues to report an alarmingly high number of Covid-related deaths, including 17 on Wednesday which brought the total death toll to 1,926.

Dhofar Governorate accounted for seven of the 17 deaths recorded during the past 24 hours, apart from 185 cases.

The Ministry of Health reported 1,077 new cases, bringing the total number of cases to 183,770.

“One hundred and fifteen (115) people were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 812, including 264 in intensive care units (ICUs). The total recovery cases reached 163,750, which is 89.1 per cent of the total cases reported.”

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, visited the field hospital to monitor the services provided by the hospital to infected patients.

So far, 46,258 people have taken the second dose of Covid vaccine, including over 12,000 in Muscat, even as the vaccination campaign continues at the Sports Complex in Bausher and Seeb. The ministry has confirmed that the new target groups for vaccination will be announced soon.

Sultanate ranks 5th in Arab world at ETI

DAVOS: The Sultanate has been ranked 5th in the Arab world, according to the World Economic Forum's Energy Transition Index, 2021 (ETI).

The Sultanate secured 55 points and was ranked 74th at the ETI report which ranked 115 countries on their energy performance, including the resilience and efficiency of generation and transmission, and progress to cleaner forms of energy.

Sweden leads the global rankings, followed by Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. The top 10 countries account for around 2 per cent of the global population and approximately 3 per cent of energy-related CO2 emissions.

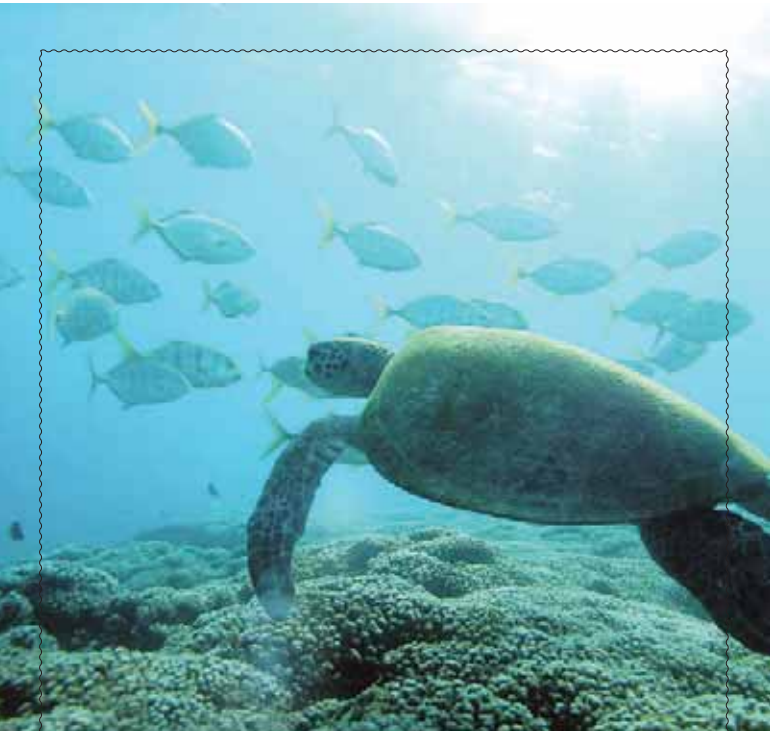
The WEF noted that as countries continue to make

headway in their transition to cleaner energy, it becomes imperative to embed a transition in the economic, political and social practices to ensure sustainable progress.

The report said that despite the outbreak of Covid-19, global investments in energy transition surpassed \$500 billion in 2020 for the first time in history.

The number of inhabitants deprived from electricity supplies dropped to less than 800 million against 1.2 billion ten years ago.

The increasing capacity of renewable energy helped energy-importing countries in particular to achieve notable progress in both environmental sustainability and energy security. — ONA



SULTANATE TO MARK EARTH DAY TODAY

The Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority, today joins the world countries to mark the Earth Day which is celebrated on April 22 every year. The celebration marks the anniversary of the modern environmental movement when millions of environmental advocates held rallies worldwide to demand a clean, safe and sustainable environment.

DETAILS ON P2

New logistics plants to come up in Khazaen

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Khazaen has signed agreements with local companies Al Rasam Al Shamilah, an Omani firm operating in the import, export and wholesale of foodstuff, and QAF International, a company established in 2015 and active in direct import of foodstuff. The agreements will see these companies set up factories and logistics units at Khazaen.

Salem Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO, Khazaen, said, “We are delighted to welcome the new investors to Khazaen Economic City. These agreements reflect the trust that Khazaen is gaining from several investors due to its attractive location, swift access to various logistics gateways across the country.”

DETAILS ON P17



HH Sayyid Shihab receives Hamish Cowell, Ambassador the UK, and (R) Toshinori Kobayashi, Ambassador of Japan. – ONA



Sayyid Shihab receives UK ambassador

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Hamish Cowell, Ambassador of the United Kingdom, to the Sultanate.

The meeting reviewed the bilateral relations between the

two friendly countries. The two sides exchanged views on matters of common interest.

MESSAGE FROM JAPAN MINISTER

HH Sayyid Shihab also received a written message from Nobuo Kishi, Defence Minister of

Japan, expressing thanks for the facilities provided to the Japanese side in the Sultanate.

The message was handed over to HH Sayyid Shihab by Toshinori Kobayashi, Ambassador of Japan to Oman, when HH received the ambassador in his office in Al Murtafaa Camp on Wednesday.

During the meeting, HH Sayyid Shihab affirmed that the Sultanate will spare no effort in providing the facilities for the sisterly and friendly countries.

The meeting reviewed the relations between the two friendly countries and exchanged views on matters of common concern. — ONA

Sultanate and Libya discuss bilateral ties

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Wednesday Sania Abu al Qasim Ghoma, Ambassador of Libya to the Sultanate.

The meeting

reviewed the march of the bilateral relations binding the Sultanate and Libya to achieve the joint interests, as well as touched on several topics of common concern.

— ONA



Sultanate celebrates Earth Day today



UNFPA launches 'My body is my own' study report

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The UNFPA conducted a study report focusing the personal body autonomy. The report was launched by the Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) in partnership with the UN Women Arab States Regional Office. The UN Development Coordination Arab States Regional Office a virtual meeting on Wednesday.

The study, UNFPA's 2021 Flagship State of World Population report, finds that nearly half of women in 57 developing countries are denied the right to seek health care services, including reproductive health and family planning services.

In the same context, the report suggests that these women have the power and agency to make choices about their own bodies, without fear of violence or having someone else decide for them.

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority, tomorrow joins the world countries to mark the Earth Day which is celebrated on April 22 each year. The celebration marks the anniversary of the modern environmental movement when millions of environmental advocates held rallies worldwide to demand a clean, safe and sustainable environment.

The Sultanate, like many other countries, has long been paying special attention to environmental issues by establishing the Office of the Environmental Protection Adviser in 1974 which has since then undertaken multiple tasks related to environment conservation.

The Public Authority for Environmental Protection and Pollution Control was established in 1979 and the Law on Conservation of the

Environment and Prevention of Pollution was enacted in 1982. This was followed by the establishment of the Council for Conservation of Environment and Prevention of Pollution in 1984 and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs in 2007 and finally, the Environment Authority was established last year.

The environmental dimension of the Oman Vision 2040 underscores the realization of balanced planning for sustainable and renewed development that meets the present needs without sacrificing future needs. Environment protection and conservation of natural resources is among the major pillars of the Oman Vision 2040 as the government seeks to realize the sustainable development goals and protect humans from harmful environment effects.

More incentives for investors soon

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has said that it is working on many initiatives, which will be launched soon to create a conducive investment environment.

The initiatives will include drafting a national strategy for intellectual property, e-commerce activities, regulations regarding fees for displaying Omani products in commercial complexes, MoCIIP said.

"To facilitate and simplify the procedures for obtaining

all approvals, permits, and necessary licenses for his commercial project, the most important aspect of the national programme to attract investments is the automatic approval service for licenses for more than 1,500 activities."

In an interview, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that the ministry is currently working on changing the industrial law, and 100 industrial opportunities will be announced in two stages, and an industrial strategy is being prepared that is in line with "Oman Vision 2040.

The Foreign Capital

Investment Law contributes to attracting foreign investments, enhancing the Sultanate's position as an investment destination capable of attracting foreign capital, and raising the Sultanate's ranking in global indicators of business ease and economic diversification, as well as limiting trade.

The law guarantees a number of incentives to encourage foreign investment, including allowing the foreign investor to have 100 per cent ownership, and the absence of a minimum level for foreign capital, and the Omani investor can enter into a partnership with the foreign investor without a specific percentage, MoCIIP said.



TENDER NOTICE

Haya Water hereby announces the following Tenders:

TENDER NO:	DESCRIPTION	ELIGIBILITY	TENDER FEE	LAST DATE OF DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE
T/2428429/2021	Design, Supply, Construction, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of Sewage Treatment Plant at AL Jazir with Capacity of 600 m3/day	Local Companies Registered with Government Tender Board and Specialized in Similar Works	RO 180/- Plus %5 VAT (Non-refundable)	06/05/2021	31/05/2021
T/2429450/2021	Design, Supply, Construction, Installation, Testing and Commissioning to Complete Mahout Existing Sewage Treatment Plant by Reedbed Technology with Capacity of 600 m3/day	Local Companies Registered with Government Tender Board and Specialized in Similar Works	RO 180/- Plus %5 VAT (Non-refundable)	06/05/2021	31/05/2021
T/2410394/2021	Legal Services for Haya Water	Local Companies Registered with Government Tender Board and Specialized in Similar Works	RO 125/- Plus %5 VAT (Non-refundable)	06/05/2021	17/05/2021

Tender documents can be purchased through Haya Water e-tendering page [Supplier Login] from the date of publication of this announcement until 06/05/2021. Applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through Supplier Login.

Applicants who are not registered with Haya Water shall register from: <https://haya.om/en/Pages/VendorRegistration.aspx> to have the login credentials of Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Haya Water e-tendering page [Supplier Login].

All participating companies shall submit a bid bond of %1 of bid value in a sealed envelope to Haya Water not later than 10.00 am on the bid submission date. Bid bond must be obtained from a bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of Haya Water.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Haya Water e-tendering page not later than 10.00 am on the date specified above.

For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.haya.om or Email to: tender@haya.om



80077111 | www.haya.om | [hayawater](https://www.facebook.com/hayawater)
[haya_water](https://www.instagram.com/haya_water) | [hayawateroman](https://www.youtube.com/hayawateroman)



Abundance of locally-grown watermelons in market

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources has confirmed that the locally grown watermelons are available at reasonable prices.

The ministry said that it monitors the supply of watermelons at the Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits and its availability on a daily basis, which is about 300 tonnes per day, at a wholesale price of between 120-160 baisas per kg. Most of these product comes from Dhofar Governorate.

The ministry indicated that random samples of watermelons



and various products will continue to be taken and analysed in accredited laboratories to verify that they are free of pesticide residues exceeding the internationally permitted limits, and for its part, the ministry encourages farmers to use

modern farming techniques and expand the cultivation areas.

It is worth noting that the area of land cultivated by the watermelon crop in the Sultanate, according to the ministry's statistics for the year 2019, amounted to 4,162 acres, with a total production of 56,616 tonnes compared to the year 2018, which amounted to 5,6047 tonnes, with an area estimated at 4,120 feddans.

The watermelon crop in the Sultanate is one of the main summer agricultural crops and of high quality and productivity, due to the fertility of the soil and the purity of the water, as freshwater is a key factor.

■ FROM PAGE 1

Ban on arrivals from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

The Supreme Committee decided that the educational process will continue to be online for all classes in all government and private schools and all higher education institutions, except for Class 12 students and students required to be present for application parts of their specialisations, such as students of colleges of medicine, health sciences or vocational training. The situation will be assessed in accordance with epidemiological

developments.

The Supreme Committee advises all the parties concerned to seek the help of volunteers in all wilayats of the Sultanate to ensure adherence to the Supreme Committee's decisions, particularly in commercial centres and complexes, trade outlets, souqs or marketplaces or cafeterias. The parties should coordinate with their respective wali's offices.

— ONA

Call for resumption of expos, conferences

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The committee for exhibitions and conferences at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry held its second meeting for the current year to discuss the challenges in light of the ongoing crisis. The committee requested the Supreme Committee to allow the opening of this sector with precautionary controls as it has been directly affected, which may lead to the declaration of bankruptcy by some companies, while others continue to suffer huge losses.

The members also stressed the importance of finding a mechanism and solutions to help companies operating in this sector to face the economic effects caused by the pandemic. They said the sector plays an important role in supporting the national

economy and economic diversification.

They called for reopening the sector by following the appropriate controls put in place by the Supreme Committee to find solutions. "Some have opened this sector and efforts should be made to benefit from their experiences regarding the mechanisms and precautionary measures."

The meeting discussed the response of the Supreme Committee to a number of recommendations that will contribute to starting the activity of exhibitions and conferences by following the highest standards of safety and health.

The OCCI committee hopes to reconsider these requirements by putting in place appropriate controls that will reduce the burdens on the owners of the institutions of this important sector.

Meet the Omani doctor in Forbes 30 Under 30 Europe list

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

An App that came into existence out of sheer necessity is today a winner and Oman's Dr Ahmed al Shahrabani who is currently working in UK as a respiratory doctor in the Covid wards over the weekends and as Co-Founder and CEO of Locum's Nest during the working week is a winner at Forbes 30 Under 30 Science and Health Care Europe Honouree. He is also an NHS Innovation Accelerator Fellow, selected as one of twelve candidates across the UK to deploy nationwide innovation in healthcare in an ethical and impactful manner.

Dr Ahmed explained to the *Observer* how it all started. "In 2016, Dr Nicholas Andreou, a colleague, and I founded Locum's Nest and our mission was to improve the lives of doctors, nurses and allied healthcare professionals in their NHS work. The idea was to improve patient care and save the NHS billions of pounds. Today, we are working with over 40,000 healthcare workers across hundreds of hospitals and have the pleasure of working with a team of 30 inspiring and hard-working colleagues at Locum's Nest."

STORY OF LOCUM'S NEST

The idea did not work out overnight. The story of Locum's Nest was born in Epsom St Helier, a hospital in south London, at the hospital where the co-founders and a few friends worked on the same ward.

"Every Friday, the rota manager would come to the ward and ask one of us to cover the afternoon shift on the following Sunday. If the consensus answer was 'no', then what followed would be a barrage of texts, emails, phone calls and bleeps to find cover as ultimately it is clinical safety affected. If no one was found through the full-time employees' spreadsheet or the flexible worker volunteers, the rota manager would resort back to phone calls, emails, texts etc to a bunch of local recruitment agencies. Basically, it was a process that costs a lot of time and a lot of money; we didn't like it as the clinicians, the core HR team was spending too many hours with very little luck in finding a doctor."

So they thought there must be a better way of doing this, and as with other industries, the idea was born to cut out the middleman with technology.

"We spent all year working



with the hospital. Asked to each other, 'what should the solution look like?'

They built a free-to-use mobile application for doctors, which had features such as a built-in digital passport to allow doctors to cross hospital borders — they could add their specifications such as their specialty, credibility etc, and link it to various calendars and rosters. They would receive notifications of shifts that matched their requirements to a hundred per cent. What made the difference was that rather than being bombarded with all jobs available, the application

Anybody can learn a textbook inside out, but it's how you deliver what you know to your patients that makes a good doctor. The art of communication always trumps science, and it was this that drew me to the profession

DR AHMED AL SHAHRABANI

filtered jobs that were only applicable to their skill set.

If this is how the app began five years ago the scenario has changed much. The platform now works with doctors and nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and all other allied healthcare professionals.

"We have also expanded and are now working across borders and not just in England", pointed out Dr Ahmed.

Dr Ahmed followed his father late Dr Rasheed al Shahrabani, who had moved to Oman from the UK in 1990.

Dr Rasheed and a few of his colleagues were instrumental

in forming Oman's first Cardiology unit, which is still running today as the nation's leading centre for heart disease.

Dr Ahmed is a student of British School Muscat. He received a Medical degree at Sheffield University in 2014. Since then, he has completed his foundation medical training between London and Surrey, where he is working today in the Covid-19 units.

"I chose to become a doctor as a result of my father. Seeing how he spoke to people with dignity and compassion and seeing how others spoke to him with respect and appreciation. I was always into the Sciences at school and loved understanding not just why things worked the way they did but crucially, how. It was the combination of the pathophysiology of diseases in conjunction with the importance of communicating with patients as humans that drew me to it. I firmly believe the art of medicine is 90 per cent communication and empathy, with the remaining 10 per cent being science."

"Anybody can learn a textbook inside out, but it's how you deliver what you know to your patients that makes a good doctor. The art of communication always

trumps science, and it was this that drew me to the profession. I've always liked engaging with people, learning about them, what's important, what do they fear or dislike and striking that balance of what to say and when", Dr Ahmed explained.

ABOUT OMAN

"About Oman, I feel it has the potential to be a world leader in healthcare provision. The resources are there, and there are many highly motivated junior doctors and nurses. I would love to work with the Ministry of Health and discuss healthcare policy at a high level, what could be improved and where our strengths currently lie. It's very important to me that we also look at healthcare delivery outside of Muscat, I was recently in discussions with the medical team on the island of Masirah and would love to complete a secondment on the island, working with the local population and resident doctors and nurses to improve patient outcomes on the beautiful island."

His formula for success is the same as his core principles at Locum's Nest. He calls for tenacity, "simplify and re-simplify" be bold and quirky to be successful.



A SMALL GESTURE CAN GO A LONG WAY

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Even small initiatives bring changes to the surroundings that result in something substantial during testing times.

A commoner has taken up the task of feeding the needy in his own limited way during the holy month.

He brings food packets in his car in downtown Ruwi and distributes them among the cab drivers who are found waiting for passengers near the taxi point.

This is Najeeb Rahiman, an expatriate who made Oman his second home since three decades and now he's mostly seen doing some charity or other.

"This act is a kind of giving back to the society which looked after me for more than three decades. I find it's giving real satisfaction than doing business as the holy month of Ramadhan is a month of reaping divine blessings," said Najeeb.

Earlier, Rahiman has donated several cartons of sports goods to the charity associations across the country aiming at supporting destitute children enjoy their favourite sports.

He donated the whole stock of his sports shop in the Oman Commercial Centre through Bait al

Rahma, a charity and humanitarian NGO which would be helping him achieve his dream for the National Day.

"Oman is the country that has been giving me a livelihood for the last nearly thirty years and the kind gesture of supporting the local youth is nothing but giving back to the country," Najeeb said.

Najeeb is doing this for the second time in a row. The year before, he donated the stock of goods in his shop just prior to the National Day celebration and was appreciated by the authorities for his genuine gesture.

"My experience in this country and the love given by the people of this beautiful country hold me here for such a long period. It has been my dream to return back something for the benefit of this nation, for some time."

He says marking every special day, be it the National Day of his foster mother country or the holy month of Ramadhan, has been a habit and would continue to do so in the days to come.

"The message of Ramadhan is giving and sharing and finding satisfaction in doing so. Happy to note that small deeds like this fetch joy and contentment in the eyes of someone else," adds Rahiman.



Putin warns West of harsh response if it crosses Russia's 'red lines'

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin warned the West on Wednesday not to cross Russia's "red lines", saying Moscow would respond swiftly and harshly to any provocations and those responsible would regret it.

At a time of acute crisis in ties with the United States and Europe, with Russian troops massed near Ukraine and opposition leader Alexei Navalny on hunger strike in jail, the Kremlin leader used his state of the nation speech to project a message of Russian strength and defiance in the face of outside threats.

"We want good relations... and really don't want to burn bridges," Putin told both houses of parliament.

"But if someone mistakes our good intentions for indifference or weakness and intends to burn down or even blow up these bridges, they should know that Russia's response will be asymmetrical, swift and harsh."

Russia would determine where its red line lay in each specific case, he said, comparing the country to a tiger surrounded by hyenas.

His comments came at the climax of a 78-minute speech dominated by Russia's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic hardship.

"In some countries, they have developed a highly unseemly



President Vladimir Putin delivers his annual address to the Federal Assembly in Moscow, on Wednesday. — Reuters

habit of picking on Russia for any reason, and most often for no reason at all - a kind of sport," said Putin, standing alone on a vast stage flanked by white, blue and red national flags and a backdrop of a giant double-headed eagle.

"Organisers of any provocations that threaten our core security interests will regret what they have done like they've never regretted anything for a long time."

Putin, who is 68 and has dominated Russia for two decades, made no mention of Navalny. The opposition leader is ill in prison after starving

himself for three weeks to demand access to his own doctors.

The rouble firmed after Putin's speech, with markets interpreting it as not escalating tensions with the West.

Recent weeks have seen an intensification of confrontation between Russia and Western countries, which are alarmed by Navalny's worsening condition and by what they say is the massing of tens of thousands of Russian troops near Ukraine and in Russian-annexed Crimea.

— Reuters

10 US diplomats ordered to leave Russia

MOSCOW: Moscow on Wednesday ordered 10 US diplomats to leave Russia by May 21, setting the date for its promise to respond in kind to the expulsion of its diplomats from Washington.

Last week the United States announced sanctions against Moscow and the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats in retaliation for what Washington said was the Kremlin's US election interference, a massive cyber attack and other hostile activity.

Russia said in the immediate aftermath it would respond in kind, and formalised the decision Wednesday announcing that 10 US diplomats in Russia were declared "persona non grata".

"These persons were ordered to leave the territory of our country by the end of the day on May 21," the foreign ministry said in a statement. Russia Wednesday warned Western rivals against crossing the Kremlin's "red line" and lashed out at foreign countries for blaming their woes on Moscow.

— AFP



A demonstrator gestures near a barricade during a protest against the military coup in Mandalay, Myanmar recently. — Reuters file photo

New US sanctions on 2 Myanmar enterprises

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday imposed fresh Myanmar-related sanctions, targeting two state-owned enterprises in the latest in a series of punitive actions following the country's military coup and the killing of protesters since the takeover.

The US Treasury Department in a statement said it blacklisted Myanmar Timber Enterprise and Myanmar Pearl Enterprise, adding that the pearl and timber industries are economic resources for the Myanmar military.

"Today's action demonstrates the United States' commitment to targeting this specific funding channel and promoting accountability for those responsible for the coup and ongoing violence," Andrea Gacki, director of Treasury's

Office of Foreign Assets Control, said in the statement.

The Southeast Asian country has been in crisis since the February coup when the military seized power from Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, with almost daily protests and a crackdown by the junta in which hundreds of people have been killed.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), an activist group, says 738 people have been killed by Myanmar's security forces since the coup and 3,300 people are in detention. Another 20 people have been sentenced to death and are in hiding.

Washington has responded by targeting the revenue of the military through several rounds of sanctions.

— Reuters



Young activists take part in a demonstration during a global day of action on climate change in Khayelitsha township near Cape Town, South Africa, on September 25, 2020. — Reuters file photo

EU clinches deal on climate law, tougher 2030 emissions goal

BRUSSELS: The European Union clinched a deal in the early hours of Wednesday on a landmark law to make its climate-change goals legally binding, including a target to slash its net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% this decade.

The deal arrives just in time for a summit of world leaders hosted by the US government on Thursday and Friday, where the EU and other global powers will promote their pledges to protect the planet.

The European climate law sets the framework that will guide EU climate-related regulations in the coming decades, steering it towards reaching zero net emissions by 2050 - a pathway

which, if adopted globally, would limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels and avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

More than a year after the European Commission proposed the bill, negotiators representing the European Parliament and the 27 EU governments finally finished its contents on Wednesday, after all-night talks.

The target to cut EU-wide net emissions by at least 55% by 2030, from 1990 levels, replaces a previous goal for a 40% cut. By 2019, EU emissions were already 24% lower than in 1990.

EU lawmakers had wanted to go further to 60% by 2030. Environmental campaigners had

said the cut should be 65%.

Negotiators agreed to limit the amount of emissions removals that can be counted towards the 2030 target, to 225 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent.

That aims to ensure the goal is met by cutting emissions from polluting sectors, rather than relying on removing CO2 from the atmosphere through carbon-absorbing forests and wetlands.

"This is a landmark moment for the EU. We have reached an ambitious agreement to write our climate neutrality target into binding legislation, as a guide to our policies for the next 30 years," Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans said in a statement. — Reuters

Queen touched by tributes to husband as she marks 95th birthday

LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth said she had been deeply touched by the tributes paid to her husband Prince Philip, in her first public remarks since his death earlier this month and as she marks her first birthday without him in 73 years.

Prince Philip, whom Elizabeth married in 1947, died on April 9 aged 99 and the royals paid their final respects to the family's patriarch at a funeral on Saturday at Windsor Castle.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the queen sat alone during the sombre service for Philip, whom she had previously described as

her "strength and stay" during her long reign.

"While as a family we are in a period of great sadness, it has been a comfort to us all to see and to hear the tributes paid to my husband, from those within the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and around the world," Elizabeth, the world's oldest monarch who has turned 95, said in a statement.

"My family and I would like to thank you all for the support and kindness shown to us in recent days. We have been deeply touched, and continue to be reminded that Philip had

such an extraordinary impact on countless people throughout his life.

The queen, who is also the world's longest-reigning monarch, will be at Windsor Castle for her birthday, which traditionally passes off with little or no ceremony.

As the royals are marking two weeks of mourning, it will be even more low key, with no gun salutes at the Tower of London or the capital's Hyde Park. The queen has an official birthday which is usually celebrated with greater pomp on the second Saturday in June. — Reuters



Syria stripped of rights at chemical weapons watchdog

THE HAGUE: The global chemical weapons watchdog agreed on Wednesday to strip Syria of its voting rights in an unprecedented punishment after a probe blamed Damascus for poison gas attacks.

Syria will also be banned from holding any offices at The Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) over its repeated use of toxic arms against civilians.

A two-thirds majority of the OPCW's member states voted in favour of the sanctions, the first time they have been meted out to any country in the agency's quarter-century history.

The measures are in response to an OPCW investigation last year that found the Syrian air force had used the nerve agent sarin and chlorine gas in three attacks on the village of Lataminah in 2017.

"The member states of the OPCW have sent a strong message: Repeated use of chemical weapons by Syria is unacceptable for the international community", the French delegation to the watchdog said.



Exterior view of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) headquarters in The Hague. — Reuters

Britain said it was a "vital step to maintain the credibility of the Chemical Weapons Convention".

Syria and its ally Russia have consistently denied that Damascus has used chemical weapons during the 10-year civil war, arguing that the watchdog has become politicised by the West.

'RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES'
France introduced a motion

on behalf of 46 countries also including Britain and the United States to deprive Syria of "rights and privileges" over the 2017 attacks and its failure to declare its chemical weapons.

Eighty-seven countries voted in favour of the motion, 15 including Syria, Russia, China and Iran voted against, and 34 abstained, OPCW officials said.

"In light of this result the draft resolution is adopted", said Jose Antonio Zabalgoitia Trejo, the chairman of the meeting of the OPCW's member states.

Syria's rights will remain suspended until member states decide that Damascus has fully declared all of its chemical weapons and weapons-making facilities, the motion says.

These include the right to vote in either the annual conference of all member states or the OPCW's executive council, to stand for election in the executive council, or to hold any office in the agency, it said.

The OPCW was created to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention and says it has helped destroy 97 per cent of the world's chemical weapons stocks. It won

Assad to run for re-election in May

AMMAN: Syrian President Bashar al Assad on Wednesday submitted documents to run for a fourth term in an election scheduled for May 26, parliament's speaker said on state media.

Parliament announced the election on Sunday. Washington and the Syrian opposition have denounced it as a farce designed to cement Assad's rule.

Assad's family and his Baath party have ruled Syria for five decades, where his Alawite minority dominate.

This year is the 10th anniversary of a crackdown on pro-democracy protesters which triggered a civil war that has left much of Syria in ruins.

The multi-sided conflict has sucked in world powers,



A poster depicting President Bashar al Assad superimposed upon the national flag with text in Arabic reading "Syria's workers are with you" is seen on a window in an upper floor of the historic Hamidiyah souq in the old city of Syria's capital Damascus on Wednesday. — AFP

killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions more, but is now nearing its end with Assad, supported by allies, back in control of most

of the country. Candidates must have lived in Syria for the last 10 years, which prevents opposition figures in exile from standing. — Reuters

the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013. The government of Syrian President Bashar al Assad agreed in 2013 to join the OPCW and

give up all chemical weapons, following a suspected sarin nerve gas attack that killed 1,400 people in the Damascus suburb

of Ghouta. But it has been repeatedly accused of chemical weapons attacks since then. — AFP

Erdogan replaces trade minister, forms two new ministries

ISTANBUL: President Tayyip Erdogan appointed a prominent member of Turkey's ruling AK Party, Mehmet Mus, as trade minister on Wednesday and split the Family, Labour and Social Policies Ministry into two ministries.

In a presidential decree Ruhsar Pekcan was replaced as trade minister by Mus, who has been a lawmaker for Erdogan's AK Party since 2011 and served as the party's deputy chairman in charge of the economy.

The decree, published in the Official Gazette, gave no reason for the change, but it comes after opposition politicians accused Pekcan's ministry of buying supplies from her family-owned company and called on her to resign.

The Trade Ministry confirmed that the purchase of sanitisers had been made, but said in a statement on Tuesday the choice was based on price alone and not due to "the name of the company making the sale".

It said that the sale, worth some 500,000 lira (\$62,000), had been carried out in line with relevant



Turkish President and leader of Justice and Development (AK) Party Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks during his ruling AK Party's group meeting at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT), in Ankara, on Wednesday. — AFP

regulations.

Erdogan's overnight changes come amid speculation over a wider cabinet reshuffle, after he changed the country's top economic management in November, including the central bank governor.

The president established two new ministries by splitting

the Family, Labour and Social Policies Ministry into two separate ministries, according to the decree.

He appointed Derya Yanik as Family and Social Policies Minister and Vedat Bilgin as the Labour and Social Security Minister, replacing Zehra Zumrut Selcuk. — Reuters

Much more work needed in Iran N-talks despite progress, says EU

VIENNA: Iran and world powers have made headway in talks to save the 2015 nuclear accord, although much more work is needed, a senior European Union official said on Tuesday, with meetings to resume next week after consultations in their respective capitals.

"Progress made over the last two weeks", European External Action Service Deputy Secretary General Enrique Mora said on Twitter. "But much more hard work needed. Third expert group was created to address sequencing issues."

The talks, aimed at bringing Iran and the United States back into compliance with the nuclear deal will pick up again next week based on progress achieved so far, Russian and Chinese officials said earlier on Tuesday.

Iran and world powers have been meeting in Vienna since early April to hammer out steps that must be taken, touching on US sanctions and Tehran's breaches of the deal's limits on its uranium enrichment capacity.

"Today the Joint Commission of #JCPOA took note with satisfaction of the progress made in negotiations to restore



Police officers stand outside a hotel, where a meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission was held in Vienna, Austria. — Reuters

the nuclear deal", said Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's Ambassador to the UN nuclear watchdog (IAEA), referring to the nuclear deal.

"In view of the progress made ... so far the Joint Commission of #JCPOA decided to establish the third working group to deal with possible sequencing of practical steps leading to full restoration of the Iranian nuclear deal."

US President Joe Biden's administration, which took office in January seeking to rejoin

the accord, has said it is ready to remove "all sanctions that are inconsistent" with the deal, although not spelling out which measures it means.

In Washington, the State Department described the talks in positive terms but said there was a long way to go.

"We probably have more road ahead of us than we do behind us at this stage", US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters at a regular briefing. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

TEL AVIV

Israel mulls including children in 2nd round

Israel is planning a second round of Covid-19 vaccination in six months, by which point it expects children to be approved by health regulators to receive jabs, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday.

Around 81 per cent of Israeli citizens or residents over 16 — the age group eligible for the Pfizer vaccine in Israel — have received both doses in one of the world's fastest rollouts. Israel has said it plans to administer vaccines to 12- to 15-year-olds upon



approval by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Pfizer and its partner BioNTech requested emergency FDA authorisation earlier this month for use in that age group. — Reuters

TRIPOLI

Egypt PM visits Tripoli as relations warm

Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli met his counterpart Abdulhamid Dbeibah in the Libyan capital on Tuesday, in a new sign of warming ties between Tripoli and Cairo. Officials from the two countries signed memorandums of understanding on electricity and telecommunications, the Libyan government said, and planned for a resumption of air links operated by the North African neighbours' national carriers.

The country had been divided



between two rival administrations: The UN-recognised Government of National Accord based in Tripoli, and its rival in the east, loyal to military strongman Khalifa Haftar. — AFP

BAB AL HAWA

Idlib receives first batch of Covid vaccines

A first batch of Covid-19 vaccines arrived on Wednesday in war-torn northwestern Syria, where millions live in dire humanitarian conditions. The 53,800 AstraZeneca doses were dispatched to the rebel-dominated region as part of the Covax programme, which aims to ensure equitable access to Covid vaccinations.

Around noon, a truck carrying the vaccines crossed the Bab al Hawa border crossing between Turkey and Idlib, a correspondent said.



"Today, we received the first batch of Covid-19 vaccines", said Abdul Hamid al Hussein of the Physicians Across Continents group which accompanied the shipment into Syria. — AFP

In brief

■ KATHMANDU



NEPAL'S EX-ROYALS TEST POSITIVE AFTER INDIA FESTIVAL

Nepal's former king and queen have tested positive for Covid-19 on their return from an Indian religious festival attended by millions of pilgrims. Former king Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah, 73, and his queen Komal Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah, 70, returned to Kathmandu on Sunday after a week-long visit to India to celebrate Kumbh Mela.

Shah's press secretary Phani Raj Pathak confirmed the couple had tested positive. "They are in self-isolation at Nirmal Niwas," he said in a statement Tuesday evening, referring to their residence. Kumbh Mela attracts enormous crowds of Hindu devotees to take a ritual dip in the Ganges River. — AFP

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES SAYS BOOSTING MARITIME PRESENCE

The Philippines is beefing up its presence in the South China Sea and deploying more ships and aircraft to protect its maritime territory and resources, a government task force said on Wednesday.

"We are exhausting all means possible to protect our territory and EEZ," the Philippines' South China Sea task force said in a statement.

President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered authorities to continue "sovereignty patrols", and intensify operations against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in its territorial waters, the task force said.

— Reuters

■ SEOUL



S KOREA COURT DISMISSES 'COMFORT WOMEN' CASE AGAINST JAPAN

A South Korean court on Wednesday dismissed a case brought by a handful of World War II sex slaves and their families against the Japanese government, saying Tokyo enjoyed "sovereign immunity" over the issue.

The ruling comes after the same court in January ordered Tokyo to compensate a dozen women forced to serve Japanese troops — euphemistically labelled "comfort women" — marking the first civilian legal victory against Tokyo in South Korea.

One plaintiff pledged to fight Wednesday's different verdict. — AFP

22 patients die at Indian hospital from lack of oxygen

JAPAN PM CANCELS TRIP TO INDIA, PHILIPPINES AMID RISING COVID-19 CASES

MUMBAI: At least 22 patients died at a public hospital in India's western Maharashtra state when their oxygen supply ran out after a leak in the tank on Wednesday, a government official said.

"The oxygen tank had a leak while refilling, and that caused deaths of 22 patients," Suraj Mandhare, an official in the Nashik district of Maharashtra, said, adding that the hospital was treating Covid-19 patients.

In Delhi, authorities scrambled to shore up supplies of medical oxygen to hospitals as a fast-spreading second wave of coronavirus stretched medical infrastructure to breaking point, officials and doctors said.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga meanwhile cancelled plans to visit India and the Philippines during his country's extended holiday starting in late April amid a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases, a senior government spokesman said on Wednesday.

Asked about media reports that Suga's trip to the two countries has been cancelled, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said: "In order to take all possible coronavirus countermeasures, it has been decided Prime Minister Suga won't take any overseas trips during the Golden Week."



Ashok Kurmi, a pharmaceutical company employee, dressed as comic character Spiderman sprays disinfectant outside the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj terminus railway station in Mumbai. — AFP

India, the world's second-most populous country, is reporting the world's highest number of new daily cases and approaching a peak of about 297,000 cases in one day that the United States hit in January.

The latest data released by the health ministry showed there had been 295,041 new infections nationwide overnight and 2,023 deaths, India's highest

in the pandemic.

Delhi's government hospitals reported they only had enough oxygen to last another eight to 24 hours while some private ones had enough for just four or five hours.

"We are facing huge problems in oxygen supply but somehow we are managing. Yesterday, it was very critical. We had only four to five hours oxygen in the

evening," said Ronit Kumar, head of Biomedical Engineering at Fortis Escorts Heart Institute.

Replenishment came before dawn on Wednesday, with enough to last through the day, he said, adding they were pushing their suppliers. "Since they are also facing huge requirements, so I don't know. I have not got confirmation," he said. — Reuters

Hong Kong woman, 90, loses \$32 million in phone scam

HONG KONG: A 90-year-old Hong Kong woman has been conned out of US \$32million by fraudsters posing as Chinese officials, police said, in the city's biggest recorded phone scam.

Hong Kong's elderly are plagued by phone scammers who seek out vulnerable and wealthy victims willing to transfer money or make bogus investments.

Police on Tuesday said scammers targeted an elderly woman living in a mansion on The Peak, Hong Kong's ritziest neighbourhood.

Last summer criminals contacted the unnamed woman pretending to be Chinese public security officials. They claimed her identity had been used in a serious criminal case in mainland China.

She was told she needed to transfer money from her bank account into ones held by the investigation team for safekeeping and scrutiny, the South China Morning Post reported, citing police sources.

Police said several days later a person arrived at her house with a dedicated mobile phone and SIM card to communicate with the fake security agents who persuaded her to make a total of 11 bank transfers.

Over five months the elderly lady gave a total of HK\$250 million (\$32 million) to the scammers, the largest sum



Hong Kong's elderly are plagued by phone scammers who seek out vulnerable and wealthy victims willing to transfer money or make bogus investments

recorded yet by a phone con.

Police said the scam was only spotted because the elderly lady's domestic helper thought something suspicious was happening and contacted her employer's daughter who then alerted officers.

After an investigation a 19-year-old was arrested for fraud and has been released on bail, police said.

The South China Morning Post reported that the arrested person is believed to have been the fraudster who turned up at

the lady's house with the phone.

Wealthy Hong Kong is one of the most unequal places on earth.

It boasts one of the highest concentrations of billionaires, many of whom live in palatial homes overlooking densely packed districts where poor families might squeeze into an apartment the size of an American car parking space.

With such a high concentration of wealthy elderly residents, the city makes a ripe target for phone scammers, many of whom operate across the border in mainland China.

Police say such scams are on the rise.

Reports of phone scams rose 18 per cent in the first quarter of 2021 with fraudsters pocketing some HK\$350 million over the period.

In 2020, police said they handled 1,193 phone scam cases where a total of HK\$574 million was stolen. — AFP

China's Xi to attend online Biden climate summit



BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping will attend US President Joe Biden's virtual climate summit this week, Beijing said on Wednesday, as the world's top polluting nations seek rare common ground despite wider political tensions.

Biden has invited 40 world leaders including Xi and Russia's Vladimir Putin to the meet starting on Earth Day, meant to mark Washington's return to the front lines of the fight against climate change after former president Donald Trump disengaged from the process.

The virtual summit will be the first meeting between the two leaders since Biden became president.

Xi will give an "important speech" at the meeting, said the Chinese foreign ministry, days after a trip to Shanghai by US climate envoy John Kerry — the first official from Biden's administration to visit China.

Kerry and Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua had said they were "committed to cooperating" on tackling the climate crisis, even as sky-high tensions remain on multiple other fronts. — AFP

Suga sends offering to controversial shrine honouring war dead

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga sent a ritual offering on Wednesday to the controversial Yasukuni shrine that honours war dead, including perpetrators of the country's World War II atrocities on its neighbours.

South Korea expressed "deep disappointment" at Suga's offering to the shrine to mark a spring festival, while China also protested the move.

The Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo honours some 2.5 million war dead, mostly Japanese, who perished in the country's wars since the late 19th century.

But it also honours senior military and political figures convicted of war crimes and has frequently been a

source of sour relations with countries that suffered from Japan's military atrocities — particularly China and South Korea.

Suga's predecessor Shinzo Abe, who stepped down last year for health reasons, visited the shrine in person on Wednesday.

The prime minister sent a sacred tree but was not expected to visit the shrine.

South Korea's foreign ministry expressed "deep disappointment and regret" over Suga's tribute and urged Japan's leaders to "face history squarely and humbly and truly reflect on the past".

"Japan should keep in mind that is the basis of a future-oriented Korea-Japan relationship," — AFP



Priests walk during the annual spring rites at the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on Wednesday. — AFP

Chauvin convicted of murdering George Floyd in landmark case

MINNEAPOLIS: Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted on Tuesday of murdering George Floyd, a milestone in the fraught racial history of the United States and a rebuke of law enforcement's treatment of Black Americans.

A 12-member jury found Chauvin, 45, guilty of all three charges of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter after considering three weeks of testimony from 45 witnesses, including bystanders, police officials and medical experts. Deliberations began on Monday and lasted just over 10 hours.

In a confrontation captured on video, Chauvin, a white veteran of the police force, pushed his knee into the neck of Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man in handcuffs, for more than nine minutes on May 25, 2020. Chauvin and three fellow officers were attempting to arrest Floyd, accused of using a fake \$20 bill to buy cigarettes at a grocery store.

The jurors remained still and quiet as the verdict was read. Chauvin, wearing a gray suit with a blue tie as well as a light-blue face mask, nodded and stood quickly when the judge ruled that his bail was revoked.

He was taken out of the courtroom in handcuffs and placed in the custody of the Hennepin County sheriff.

The conviction triggered a wave of relief and reflection not only across the United States but in countries around the world.

"It was a murder in the full light of day and it ripped the blinders off for the whole world to see the



People celebrate as the verdict is announced in the trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin outside the Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Tuesday. — AFP

The trial over George Floyd's death

WHAT HAPPENED?

GEORGE FLOYD, 46, a Black man, died after a white police officer pressed his knee to his neck for nearly 9 minutes during an arrest May 25, 2020, Minneapolis, Minnesota. His death was captured on video.

THE TRIAL

March 9 Start of trial, jury selection

March 29 Opening arguments

April 19 Closing arguments

April 20 Jury finds Chauvin guilty on all 3 charges

THE ACCUSED

DEREK CHAUVIN, 45, white, Minneapolis officer

- Charged with:
 - second-degree murder (max. sentence: 40 years)
 - third-degree murder (max. sentence: 25 years)
 - manslaughter
- 19-year veteran, fired by Minneapolis Police department after incident

OTHER ACCUSED

ALEXANDER THOMAS KUENG LANE TON THAO

- Charged as accomplices
- Will stand trial separately from August
- Also fired by Minneapolis Police department

THE PROTESTS

Floyd's death sparked protests across US and the world that continue under the banner of "Black Lives Matter"

I CAN'T BREATHE

#Justice4GeorgeFloyd #Justice4AllStolenLives

Protesters outside the Hennepin County Government Center, Minneapolis, Mar 28

AFP photos/Henric Yucel

systemic racism," President Joe Biden said in televised remarks. "This can be a giant step forward in the march toward justice in

America." Outside the courthouse, a crowd of several hundred people erupted in cheers when the

verdict was announced — a scene that unfolded in cities across the country. Car horns honked, demonstrators blocked traffic and chanted: "George Floyd" and "All three counts."

At George Floyd Square in Minneapolis, the intersection where Floyd was killed and which was later named in his honour, people screamed, applauded and some threw dollar bills in the air in celebration.

While celebrating the verdict, protesters called for justice in the case of Daunte Wright, a Black man who was fatally shot by a police officer after a routine traffic stop on April 11, just a few miles from where Chauvin stood trial. Kimberly Potter, who has turned in her badge, has been charged with manslaughter in that case. — Reuters

US police kill Black teenage girl

OHIO: Police in Columbus, Ohio, on Tuesday fatally shot a Black teenage girl they confronted as she lunged at two people with a knife, as seen in police video footage of the encounter, authorities said.

The incident, sparking street protests in Ohio's largest city, came as the nation was focused on the guilty verdict a Minneapolis jury returned against a white former Minneapolis police officer charged with murdering George Floyd last year by kneeling on his neck.

Releasing police body-camera video of Tuesday's shooting hours later, the interim Columbus police chief, Michael Woods, said officers involved there were responding to an emergency-911 call from someone who reported an attempted stabbing at a home on the city's southeast side.

Arriving police encountered a chaotic scene of several people on the front lawn where the teenager in question, brandishing a knife, charged toward one female who falls backwards, then lunged at a second female, the video showed.

A slow-motion replay of the video shows the second victim stumbling backward against a car parked in the driveway as the knife-wielding youth raises the weapon as if about to stab her, and an officer opens fire.

The teenager immediately collapses against the parked car and onto the ground, and the weapon, which appears to be a kitchen-style knife, is seen lying on the pavement near her as an officer crouches at her side to render medical aid.

Authorities described the youth who was fatally shot as



Crowds react as investigators work at the scene where 15-year-old Makiyah Bryant was fatally shot by a police officer in Columbus, Ohio, on Tuesday. — Reuters

a 15-year-old girl. But family members have identified her as Makiyah Bryant, aged 16.

The police chief said the video, which he said shows the slain teenager trying to stab both females, was released to the public within hours of the incident in the interest of "transparency."

The officer who opened fire was not identified but appears from the video to be white. The chief said he "would be taken off the street" pending an investigation.

Around the time the video was made public, live television news coverage showed a growing crowd of protesters on city streets after dark, confronting a small line of police officers on bicycles.

The demonstration appeared from media coverage to be peaceful, with protesters repeatedly chanting the girl's name.

The Columbus Dispatch reported that demonstrators had gathered near the scene of the shooting earlier in the day. — Reuters

German police clash with anti-lockdown protesters

BERLIN: Police clashed with protesters in Berlin on Wednesday as they tried to disperse a rally against the coronavirus lockdown while parliament debated a law to give the national government more powers to fight a third wave of the pandemic.

Chancellor Angela Merkel drew up the law after some of Germany's 16 federal states refused to impose tough measures despite a surge in cases. Her government has come under fire for its chaotic handling of lockdowns and slow vaccination campaign.

Police said on Twitter they would break up the protest because many in the crowds of demonstrators

were not wearing face masks or keeping a distance from one another. Up to 2,200 officers were on duty in Berlin to manage the protests.

Seven people were detained after they attacked officers, while police had to use pepper spray against other demonstrators who threw bottles and tried to climb over barriers.

"Peace, freedom, no dictatorship!" some protestors chanted, many waving German flags and banners which said the coronavirus lockdown undermines values enshrined in the constitution. Germans are sensitive to any measures which



A woman shouts in front of a police member during a protest against the government measures to curb the spread of Covid-19, in Berlin on Wednesday. — Reuters

threaten their freedom due to the country's Nazi and Communist past, and demonstrations against

the legislation have been staged in the last few weeks in towns across the country.

KADUNA

Nigerian university students abducted

Kidnappers killed one person and took an unknown number of students from a university in northwest Nigeria's restive Kaduna state, police said on Wednesday, in the latest in a series of abductions at educational institutes.

Armed groups have repeatedly struck northern Nigerian schools and universities since December, abducting more than 700 students for ransom.

The government and secu-



rity forces have largely been unable to stop the attacks as they struggle to contain worsening violence and criminality across the West African country. — Reuters

JAKARTA

Submarine missing with 53 on board

Indonesia's navy is searching for a submarine with 53 people on board that lost contact on Wednesday and is seeking help from neighbouring Australia and Singapore in the hunt, the Indonesian military chief said.

The 43-year-old submarine, KRI Nanggala-402, was conducting a torpedo drill in waters north of the island of Bali but failed to relay the results as expected, a navy spokesman said.

The military chief confirmed that assistance in the search for



the submarine and missing crew members had been sought from Australia and Singapore.

He said that contact with the vessel was lost at 4:30 am on Wednesday. — Reuters

LONDON

London Bridge station reopens after probe

London Bridge station in central London reopened on Wednesday afternoon after it was evacuated while police investigated reports of a suspicious item on board a train, an eyewitness said.

Police were called to the busy commuter hub at 11.33 GMT following reports of a suspicious item on board a train, a British Transport Police spokeswoman said.

The station was closed as a



precaution while specialist officers assessed the item.

Train operators Southern and Southeastern said on Twitter that trains were not stopping at the station. — Reuters

Your licence is ready...!

There are certain crucial steps taken by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion to make business easy and simple. This include automatic licensing, or ‘Your Licence is Ready’ initiative. It has reduced efforts and procedures taken by businessmen to practice any type of economic activity. This does not involve any prior inspection from any party. They can start business and move to broader horizons.

There are also certain economic stimulus plans implemented in the Sultanate of Oman for diversification of sources of income, increase non-oil revenues and upgrade the national economy to levels which are consistent with the major developments taking place in the world. The most satisfying thing is that these steps make everyone feel responsible, while carrying out his or her economic activity without a licence. Instead, the licensing authorities directly come to the place where these activities are done to complete the procedure of giving licences.

There is no doubt that commercial licensing work has seen many changes since the launch of ‘Invest Easy’ portal where the procedure for licensing is completed in few minutes. This has certainly helped in carrying out businesses easy. As a result of the latest initiative, the Sultanate will make progress to advanced positions in ease



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THIS INITIATIVE
BY OMAN WILL
CREATE AN
ENVIRONMENT
SUITABLE FOR
INVESTMENT,
BUSINESS AND
ECONOMIC
GROWTH

of doing business indicators released by the World Bank annually and which has recently placed the Sultanate in top position in the Gulf.

Today, we see a new paradigm shift which is not only limited to ending of licences by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion. But it is also seen on the ground where economic activity is allowed without any licences. The authorities concerned themselves are approaching with ready licences or approvals required for such activities. This is being widely seen as a distinct service offered in the Sultanate through ‘Invest Easy’ platform. It allows any investors and business owners to start their activity automatically as soon as it is registered within less than a minute. This technological achievement creates huge confidence among investors who want to start commercial activities according to their own ideas and visions.

More than 1,500 commercial activities covering all areas which can be practised without prior inspection are 88 per cent of the total economic activities in the country. It is a major quality leap which will create an environment suitable for investment, business, and economic growth.

These steps make business owners act responsibility while starting their economic activities without any obstacles, inconveniences, or

requirement of any prior approval from the authorities concerned. It reduces lot of financial burden caused while waiting for approvals and licensing. Earlier, business owners kept on paying rents, spent money on equipment and incurred other such expenses. It is so a huge financial burden that sometimes caused a business to close even before they are formally started.

Following the launch of this initiative, the annual meeting which the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion wants to hold with media professionals virtually will be an ample opportunity to learn about more on this and how it matches with the objectives of Oman’s Vision 2040.

Those who get licences electronically should abide by the terms and conditions as their responsibilities in public interests. They should contact the authorities concerned to tell them about their activities and the level which they match with the health, environment, safety and security related terms and conditions. This is required to make the national efforts a success while trying to improve the work related to business and take it further to higher levels.

We hope that ‘Your Licence is Ready’ initiative will prove to be a good gesture for the financial and business community in Oman. It will make everything easy for local and foreign investors and open wider horizons for it.

SECURITY CROSSROADS

Uncertain future for Chad as slain leader’s son takes power

ALI ABA KAYA AND DJIMET WICHE

Chad woke up to an uncertain future on Wednesday as the son of slain president Idriss Deby Itno took charge following the death of his father, who had ruled the country with an iron fist for three decades.

The presidency moved swiftly to put the reins of power in the hands of General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno and tear up Chad’s constitution, establishing a “Transition Charter” that lays out a new basic law for the desert country of 16 million people.

The new charter issued on Wednesday proclaimed that Mahamat 37, a career soldier like his father, will “occupy the functions of the president of the republic” and also serve as head of the armed forces.

Mahamat had already been named the head of a military council on Tuesday soon after the announcement of Deby’s death in combat, a move that sidelined other political institutions in Chad and has been branded a coup d’etat by opposition groups.

Deby, 68, died only a day after provisional results declared him the winner of an April 11 election giving him a sixth term in office.

The outcome was never in serious doubt, with a divided opposition, boycott calls, and a campaign in which demonstrations were banned or dispersed. The military council has already dissolved parliament and the government, and been tasked with leading an 18-month transition period ahead of new “free and democratic” elections. A nervous Western powers including Chad’s former colonial master France have called for a peaceful transition that paves the way for a civilian government.

Chad is at a critical security crossroads for the whole of the African continent and for many years now has been not just a staunch Western ally but an effective security partner

CAMERON HUDSON
An Africa expert

BEGGING FOR HELP

Bureaucratic barriers leave Covid-19 patients begging for beds

SAURABH SHARMA

As Sushil Kumar Srivastava’s breathlessness worsened, his family bundled the 70-year-old into a car and drove him to a hospital in the capital of India’s northern Uttar Pradesh state, where he tested positive for the coronavirus.

After the private hospital turned the retired government official away because it didn’t have any vacant beds, his son Ashish brought two oxygen cylinders and drove his father on a hunt for a hospital that could admit him. “All the hospitals asked for a referral letter from the chief medical officer’s (CMO) office”, Ashish said, referring to the top healthcare official of the city of some 3.5 million people.

At the office, Ashish said nobody helped him. “I was shooed away by the police”, he said, when he tried to meet the CMO.

Three days later, Ashish said someone from the government called him offering a bed for his father — a day after Srivastava had passed away at a private clinic.

The family’s ordeal reflects the worsening Covid-19 crisis in Uttar Pradesh, where people are battling bureaucracy along with the disease.

To get a Covid-19 bed in Lucknow, families say they need to show the result of an RT-PCR test, which are already in short supply.

Next, patients are required to register with the CMO’s office, which then forwards the request to the Integrated Command Control Centre for Covid management that makes the final bed allocation, a government



Relatives wearing personal protective equipment mourn a man, who died from the coronavirus disease, at a crematorium in New Delhi on Wednesday. — Reuters

TO GET A COVID-19
BED IN LUCKNOW,
FAMILIES SAY THEY
NEED TO SHOW
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SHORT SUPPLY

official said.

A state government spokesman on Wednesday said that authorities were planning to end the CMO referral system this week, and instead appoint officials at every Covid-19 hospital to assess whether a patient needed to be admitted.

The cumbersome process has come under criticism, including from the state’s Human Rights Commission that has asked the government to ditch the referral rule.

“There are expert doctors in hospitals who can decide if the patient needs to be admitted or not”, the

commission said on Tuesday. “This referral letter system is not required.”

Having already become the country currently being hit hardest by the pandemic, India has recorded more than 200,000 new Covid-19 cases daily for the last seven days, marking the world’s steepest rise this month, and there is no sign yet that the second wave of infections is going to peak soon.

In Uttar Pradesh, home to 200 million people, infections are rising by more than 22,000 cases daily, severely straining its creaky healthcare system.

— Reuters

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sport



while, during the third of the five sessions held. A total of eight sessions took place with three on the first day.

Speaking after two days of testing, Al Faisal said, “I am very happy and satisfied with my stint in new the GT3 R car. This is the first time I have raced in this car and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

“I and Andy were very happy with the car and our team was also satisfied with our timings. Overall, it was a fruitful outing and I now look forward to Paul Ricard opener next month.”

The two-time former Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East champion added, “We improved with each session and our times were very competitive. We were in the top bracket with our timings and this gives us confidence that we can achieve good results in the season ahead.

“I was comfortable pushing the car and at the end of two days of testing, I feel positive and believe that we have a good package to provide a stiff challenge to other teams during the season ahead.”

Al Faisal said that his ‘experience in racing in Porsche Cup Challenge cars’ did help him with the new GT3 R car as he was able to get a better grip and balance of the car during the testing session.

“This car has a lot of power and aero and is a lot better on brakes. I felt at ease with the car and having posted competitive times over two days, the confidence and morale are good in our team,” added Al Faisal.

On the first day of intense testing, Beretta-Schandorff (VSR Lambo) posted the best time (1.45.475) after topping sessions one and three on the slightly modified Catalan track after the changes to turn ten. Only 31 thousandths behind was the AKM Mercedes of Spinelli-Moiseev, fastest in session two, which preceded the Lambo of Cipriani (-0.440), the Lechner Racing Porsche of Al Faisal-Soucek (-0.787) and the new Audi of Balfe-Carroll (-0.829).

Al Faisal and Soucek were placed fourth in combined timings after day one and on day two, they even managed a top-two (fourth session) and a top-three (third session) in the five sessions held. AKM Mercedes of Spinelli-Moiseev were also on top on the second day.

The 16th edition of the International GT Open will begin with a race at the Paul Ricard circuit in France on May 16. The seven-leg series concludes in Barcelona on October 24.

Al Faisal, who is fully backed by Oman-based Al Manar Financial Investments, will be competing in the Pro class at the GT Open.

BARCELONA, Spain:

A new car, a new partner, and a new challenge. Notwithstanding all these, what was most important for Oman’s Al Faisal al Zubair was to have an enjoyable and fruitful outing.

And the Lechner Racing driver, just 22, did have as he finished his maiden stint in Porsche GT3 R car with his Spanish teammate, Andu Soucek, at the joint International GT Open and GT Cup Open Europe Barcelona Winter Test, on a happy note on Tuesday.

Ahead of the GT Open Series, which begins at Paul Ricard circuit in France next month, the two-day Winter Test held at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, witnessed 17 teams try out their cars in ideal weather conditions.

Al Faisal, who is making his debut in the GT Open Championship, and Soucek, were impressive on both days of testing as they posted competitive timings.

On Monday, the teams were welcomed by sunny skies while on the second day, skies were overcast and some rain appeared, for a

AL FAISAL SATISFIED WITH BARCELONA WINTER TEST



2021 CALENDAR

May 16: Paul Ricard, France

June 20: Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium

July 11: Hungaroring, Hungary

July 25: Imola, Italy

September 12: Red Bull Ring, Austria

September 26: Monza, Italy

October 24: Barcelona, Spain



Oman among Asian sides at Beach Soccer World Cup

KUALA LUMPUR: The AFC Executive Committee has agreed to the criteria of establishing the AFC's representatives for the FIFA Futsal World Cup Lithuania 2021, following the cancellation of the AFC Futsal Championship Kuwait 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The AFC Executive Committee decided to combine two sets of criteria – the first takes reference from the top five teams of the most recent edition (the AFC

Futsal Championship Chinese Taipei 2018), and the second applies a point system which calculates the top five teams from the overall ranking of the last three editions of the AFC Futsal Championship (i.e., 2014, 2016 and 2018 editions).

Based on the results of Criteria 1 and 2, the top three recurring teams – Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan and Uzbekistan – will be nominated as the AFC's representatives for the global futsal

showpiece, which is scheduled to take place from September 12 to October 3.

Additionally, playoff matches will be organised for the remaining teams – Iraq, Lebanon, Thailand and Vietnam – to determine the final two slots for Asia, with the draw to be held next week at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

In determining the AFC's representatives for the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Russia 2021, the

AFC Executive Committee agreed to the AFC Futsal and Beach Soccer Committee's recommendation of utilising the point system, which ranks the performances of the Continent's top eight teams in the last three editions of the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup.

Based on the ranking of the point system, Japan, Oman and United Arab Emirates will represent the AFC in the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Russia 2021, which is scheduled for August 19 – 29.

OOC AGM to discuss new strategies

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

The Annual General Assembly of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will take place on Thursday at the Oman Olympic Academy. The meeting, which will be chaired by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed al Busaidy, Chairman of OOC, will discuss various subjects including full review on the annual report of OOC activities for the previous year and the existing activities in 2021.

Also on agenda are the financial report for 2020 and appointment of the new auditor which is to be approved by the members of OOA. The AGM will discuss the proposed financial budget for 2021. The agenda of the meeting will feature delivering a presentation by the chairman of OOC on the current and future plans of OOC. The sixth item of



the agenda's list is opened for all the general assembly members to raise their inquiries and initiatives if any to the board directors of the OOC for further discussions and taking the proper recommendations towards development of Oman's sports.

TT, cycling representatives to join

Two more members will be added in the AGM as a representative from Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) and Oman Cycling Association (OCA) will attend the meeting. Both OTTA and OCA memberships were approved by the general assembly members in the last meeting which was held in

December last year. The previous AGM members had agreed to postpone the elections for OOC Board of Directors to be held after the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games.

In last December, Oman had hosted the 39th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) on successful note. The event was organised by the OOC in cooperation with the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). Top personnel from different Asian Olympic Committees appreciated the efforts taken by the OOC and OCA. The General Assembly of OCA was attended by chairmen and representatives of National Olympic Committees from all Asian countries and multiple influential sports figures from across the continent. Muscat city was the venue to announce Doha city as the winner bid for 2030 Asian Games while Riyadh city will host the 2034 edition.



Super League shelved as more clubs withdraw



MANCHESTER: The European Super League can no longer proceed, Juventus boss Andrea Agnelli confirmed on Wednesday, as Spain's Atletico Madrid, Italy's Inter Milan, and six English teams abandoned the breakaway competition after intense criticism.

Twelve of Europe's leading soccer clubs from England, Italy and Spain announced a breakaway league on Sunday but after 48 hours of massive pressure from fans, politicians and even British royals the six English clubs backed out on Tuesday. Agnelli said he still believed in the merits of the Super League despite the overwhelming criticism and had no regrets about how the breakaway had been conducted.

"I remain convinced of the beauty of that project," Agnelli told Reuters, saying it would have been the best competition in the world. "But admittedly ... I mean, I don't think that project is now still up and running."

Atletico Madrid joined Inter Milan on Wednesday in pulling out of the project.

A source close to Inter Milan had earlier confirmed to Reuters they were no longer interested in the project "in light of the latest developments".

The founding members of the league were English clubs Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur, Italy's Juventus, Inter and AC Milan, and Spain's

Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico.

Agnelli's Juventus, AC Milan, Barcelona and Real Madrid are the four clubs yet to announce their withdrawal but that position is expected to change within hours.

Liverpool's principal owner John Henry apologised in a video on the club's website and social media on Wednesday.

"It goes without saying but should be said that the project put forward was never going to stand without the support of the fans," he said. "I alone am responsible for the unnecessary negativity brought forward over the past couple of days. It's something I won't forget. And shows the power the fans have today and will rightly continue to have."

Having triggered an enormous backlash from players, fans and football authorities, the Super League had said late on Tuesday it would reconsider and look to "reshape" the project, while stopping short of throwing in the towel.

BEAUTIFUL DAY

The Super League had argued that it would increase revenue for the top clubs and allow them to distribute more money to the rest of the game.

However, the sport's governing bodies, other teams and fan organisations said the breakaway would only boost the power and wealth of the elite clubs, and that the partially closed structure went against European football's long-standing model. — Reuters



BRIGHTON HOLD CHELSEA AMID SUPER LEAGUE DRAMA

LONDON: Chelsea laboured to a 0-0 draw at home against Brighton & Hove Albion in the Premier League on Tuesday, a match overshadowed by reports that the Blues had ditched their plan to join the breakaway European Super League.

In a setback for Chelsea's push to qualify for next season's Champions League — the competition they had controversially planned to snub — the hosts failed to find a way through the well marshalled defence of relegation-threatened Brighton.

Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel was left to voice his frustration loudly in his native German as his expensively assembled team saw every attack easily mopped up by the visitors' back line led by captain Lewis Dunk.

Tuchel said his team had been distracted by the outpouring of anger at the breakaway plan.

"I was affected so I think the players were affected. We talk of nothing else but Super League before the match", he told the BBC. "Nobody asked about the match before. It is like this. You have to accept the distraction.

"We made big mistakes, looked tired, mentally tired", Tuchel said. "We did not deserve to win which is maybe for the first time since I come here."

Brighton substitute Adam Lallana wasted a glorious chance when he pounced on an error by



Chelsea centre back Kurt Zouma but fired wide in the 77th minute.

Danny Welbeck struck a post two minutes later with a shot from outside the box as Brighton pushed for a shock win.

Brighton defender Ben White was sent off for a second yellow card in the 92nd minute.

"We had a couple of chances at the end", Lallana told Sky Sports. "I should have buried mine. That is what football is about — the underdogs coming here tonight. We were outstanding and should have taken three points."

The draw pushed Chelsea up into fourth place and into the

Champions League qualification spots but only on goal difference above West Ham United who they are due to visit on Saturday.

Chelsea are also still in contention to lift the FA Cup and Champions League trophies.

It was the 15th clean sheet in 20 games for the Blues since Tuchel

took over from Frank Lampard in January.

Brighton remained in 16th place, seven points ahead of Fulham who occupy the highest of the relegation spots.

The game lacked the drama seen outside Stamford Bridge before the match where hundreds of

angry Chelsea fans demonstrated against the club's plan to join the ESL.

The protests turned to celebrations as media reported that Chelsea had begun the process of withdrawing from the breakaway league with fans singing: "We've got our club back." — Reuters

Virus surge to delay Olympics fan decision till June

TOKYO: Tokyo Olympics organisers may put off an announcement on how many fans can attend until June, media reported on Wednesday, as surging coronavirus infections play havoc with preparations.

Organisers have already barred overseas fans from the pandemic-delayed Games, and were expected to announce an upper limit on domestic spectators sometime in April.

But Japanese reports said the decision was now likely in June, possibly just a month before the Games open on July 23. The move would further delay ticket sales, which were put on hold when the Olympics were postponed last year.

The organising committee said the timing of the decision needed to stay "flexible" as the coronavirus situation develops.

"We remain in discussions with the IOC and IPC (International Olympic Committee and International Paralympic Committee) and intend to reach a consensus on the direction to take", a Tokyo 2020 statement added.

Athletes may also face daily virus testing, rather than once every four days as originally planned, separate reports said.

Japan's sharp rise in cases is causing further disruption for the postponed Games, with a number of test events delayed, cancelled or moved abroad.

In the latest upheaval, an artistic swimming qualifying competition has been moved from Japan,



organisers said, and spectators will reportedly be barred from an athletics event at the main Olympic stadium.

The artistic swimming qualifier was originally set to take place in Tokyo in March before being rescheduled to May 1-4, but will now be held in June at "a location to be defined, outside Japan", organisers said late on Tuesday.

World swimming governing

body FINA said in a statement that "challenges related to the international calendar and the necessary adaptation of the venue to the Olympic Games operations" were behind the decision.

FINA has already rescheduled a Diving World Cup event in Tokyo and moved a marathon swimming Olympic qualifier from Japan to Portugal, amid reported dissatisfaction over virus

countermeasures.

Japanese media said Wednesday that an athletics test event — which will double as a World Athletics Continental Tour Gold meet and feature athletes from overseas — will be held without spectators.

Organisers were set to allow 20,000 fans into the May 9 meet, according to Kyodo news agency, but tougher restrictions imposed by the Tokyo city government this

month have forced a rethink.

Virus restrictions are expected to be tightened further this week, with Tokyo and several other regions seeking a state of emergency to tackle rising cases.

Despite the situation, Olympic organisers and local officials insist the Games can be held safely. They will unveil updated virus rulebooks later this month.

— AFP

Holdovers Brazil face Germany in Olympics football group stage

ZURICH: Reigning champions Brazil were on Wednesday drawn with 2016 runners-up Germany, the Ivory Coast and Saudi Arabia in the Tokyo Olympics men's football group stages.

Hosts Japan, who have never won a medal in the men's event, will play France, South Africa and Mexico in Group A.

Group C includes Egypt, Spain, Argentina and Australia while Group B has South Korea, New Zealand, Romania and Honduras.

The tournament starts on July 22, a day before the opening ceremony of the Games that were postponed last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the women's draw record four-time champions the USA will feature against Sweden, Australia and New Zealand.

Home side Japan will play Great Britain, Canada and Chile. — AFP



ramadhan

OMAN OBSERVER

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Launching 'Breath Campaign' in Oman to help people face challenges

Ahmed Sulaiman al Alawi, founder of Science Traveller Company and currently, a community motivator has launched the "Breath Campaign" with three main goals: to help people to get rid of anxiety and tension, for them to be more connected to their spiritual side, and for them to connect with nature. Check out how it works... **P14**



QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

DO THEY NOT SEE THE BIRDS CONTROLLED IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE SKY? NONE HOLDS THEM UP EXCEPT ALLAH. INDEED IN THAT ARE SIGNS FOR A PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE.

QURAN (16:79)

9 RAMADHAN
THURSDAY, APRIL 22

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FATWA QUESTION & ANSWER



HIS EMINENCE
SHAIKH AHMED BIN
HAMAD AL KHALILI
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN

QUESTION
Will taking Covid-19 vaccine nullify fasting?

ANSWER
Vaccination won't break the fast as it is therapeutic, and taking it against a pandemic does not nullify Ramadhan rituals.

9 RAMADHAN
THURSDAY, APRIL 22

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HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

TAMIM AL-DARI REPORTED:
THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH SAID:
VERILY, THE RELIGION IS
SINCERITY.

9 RAMADHAN
THURSDAY, APRIL 22

www.omanobserver.om



Launching 'Breath Campaign' in Oman to help people face challenges

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI
Instagram: @mazoun_alghailani

The first step to facing any of life's problem is to breathe.

Such is the philosophy of Ahmed bin Sulaiman al Alawi, founder of Science Traveller Company and currently, a community motivator who launched the "Breath Campaign."

Ahmed posited that while we get to enjoy a lot of the amazing things the modern world brought along, it has also created a stressful, often challenging environment.

"I chose 'breathing' because it is an ideal method to face life's challenges with calm and wisdom," he said.

He added, "Everyone knows how to breathe. Everyone does it anywhere, anytime and without costing money. But not a lot of people know how to utilise proper breathing. Not a lot of people know how to work with their respiratory system and dwell inward so that they can arrange their thoughts and feelings," he explained.

He added, "Breathing is an ideal method to face life's challenges. When one faces issues with calm and wisdom, with meditation, that demeanour is also reflected in an individual's behaviour," he said.

Ahmed's Breath Campaign has three main goals. First, help people to get rid of anxiety and tension. Second, to be more connected to their spiritual side. And third, connect with nature.

"When one has learned how to breathe properly, meditate, regardless of the difficult circumstances surrounding them, they will be able to refer to the spirit of life and will find joy and happiness inside them," he said.

"People are going through challenges in their lives, and they have to recognize these challenges. They also have to think that for every problem there is a solution. Breathing is considered as a powerful tool that takes you to the spirit of life, no matter what the conditions are," he shared.

"The connecting with nature part, one does not necessarily have to isolate in nature. The point is just to be in it, interacting with it. It can either be planting a tree or taking a short walk by the beach," he said.

For Ahmed, Ramadhan is actually a great opportunity to launch the breathing campaign and encourage everyone



Ahmed al Alawi

to adopt the habit.

With the spiritual atmosphere of Ramadhan really high, he said people will be able to feel the positive impact of the exercise.

"The idea came to me after watching an awareness video of a spiritual teacher named Eckhart Tolle. Also, an author, Tolle in the video, talked about the world that is designed to challenge you. He said that after one problem, another usually rise that human life has become a pot of challenges and pressures. This video inspired me to think about launching a campaign to help people face life's challenges and how to deal with it," he said.

It is for this reason that Ahmed tapped his company the Science Traveller Company to develop the idea and launch it into a full bloom campaign.

Manal al Khaifi is one of the specialists who has been involved in breath campaigns. She is a self-awareness trainer and advanced practitioner of meditative breathing.

"What drove me to participate in breathe campaign is that for the first time, the Sultanate held a campaign about breathing and I really appreciate the level of development and professionalism by this organisation. I participated in this campaign by presenting workshops on breathing techniques," Al Khaifi said.

"I have presented a group of breath-



Manal al Khaifi

ing exercises in a correct manner that restores cells and increases their activity as well as contributes to the balance of the body. The workshops also included awareness of the wrong breathing forms as the body doesn't get enough oxygen which causes fatigue and the inability to perform during the day," she added.

Among many the most important benefits of correct breathing techniques are the balance of the body and the nervous system, strengthening the respiratory and immune systems, and raising the body's energy. Through breathing, a person can express his feelings and thoughts because he moves to a state of mental clarity without impulsion or emotion to the surroundings. As well as expanding awareness of feelings, thoughts and pressures, and how to deal with them with flexibility.

Breathe campaign began on March 24 and will continue throughout the holy month of Ramadhan, and will run even after the holy month is over. The campaign's programs are conducted online on the Science Traveller Company website. Online courses are presented by specialists in the field of meditative breathing. These materials can also be found on the company's various social media platforms.

To learn more about the Breathing Campaign, you can follow them on Instagram @science.traveller.a

Food Talk

Five Iftar Must- Haves This Ramadhan

With Adela Eileen



IF THERE'S something we all love about Ramadhan universally, it's surely got to be the 'iftar'(pre-dawn meal). Today, we are bringing you five (5) must-have iftar food from around the world that we are sure would make an appearance on everyone's table at least maybe half a dozen times in every family's table.



SOUP (SHORBAH)

Soups in all forms, lentils, stews, bisque, or broth. From France to Palestine Muslim all over the world consume soups on daily basis, especially in Ramadhan.

Every country has their own way of making a healthy and hearty soup.

(Adas lentil soup) popular all over the middle east, but may vary from region to region. Egypt, Palestine, Syria Lebanon or UAE, this lentil soup is a home comfort for everyone.

SAMBOSA

Sambousek, sambusaj, or samosa — let say, they are all children from the same mother. The history states sambosa originated from the middle east and quickly gained its popularity in Central Asia, Africa, south-east Asia and elsewhere. While every country has its own variation, some may serve it with sweet and spicy chutneys, others would prefer them with a dash of lime. It goes perfect with a karak chai or just any tea. Samosa is an important part of our top 5 iftars must-have list.

FRUITS

Fruits are not only known for their nutritional values, they are energy boosters especially after long hours of fasting. Fruits like apple, pears, watermelon, oranges and avocado are a great way to add to your suhoor meals too. Whether it's dried or fresh, fruits in all forms will be on our dining tables everyday.

BREAD

Bread is definitely a must-not-miss during Ramadhan. From a simple fatayer cheese and zaatar to shawarma rolls, bread in all their different forms are consumed worldwide. The Qubz of the Middle East, simit of Turkey, challah of Israel, sangak of Iran, karavai of Russia, roti of Malaysia, baguette of France, lavash of Armenia, bagels of Canada, ciabatta of Italy, and paratha of both India and Pakistan, we could go on and on to name some of the world's memorable bread.

In Ramadhan, bakery's all over the Muslim populated areas gets busier.

These bread are the ultimate comfort food served with hot soups, tea or stews.

BIRYANI (RICE)

If biryani does not bring memories nothing will. The aroma and the flavours' evoke lots of memories for different people in Oman. Biryani originated from Iran and hence, has won hearts worldwide. A simple aromatic rice dish, it satisfies your hunger. But what we truly believe in is, "every biryani has a story to tell". Ramadhan weekends would not be complete without biryani /pulao in most households. Russia, Malaysia, India, the Philippines, the Middle East, China — every country has their favourite rice dish made religiously on Fridays hence, it definitely completes our top 5 must-have iftar food series.



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TRAVEL TALES

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Veni, vidi, bici: Is Rome ready for a cycling 'revolution'?

With its historic seven hills, crazy traffic, cobbles and notoriously crumbling roads, Rome has never been the ideal city for cyclists — but with the coronavirus pandemic, things are changing.

As elsewhere, streets emptied by Covid-19 restrictions have given cyclists room to breathe, but a new network of bike lanes and generous government subsidies to buy bicycles have also helped fuel the boom.

One of the converts is Valeria Picchi, a 36-year-old mother-of-two who sold her scooter last year and bought an e-bike with a kids' trailer.

"I feel like a rare bird", she told AFP. "People look at us, my kids are thrilled... I'm becoming a bit of a celebrity in the neighbourhood."

Many in Rome still balk at the idea of setting off on a bicycle into the throng of buzzing Vespas, dented old Fiats and other kings of the Roman traffic jungle.

Cyclists in the eternal city also have to brave streets so badly potholed that Honda, Piaggio and other motorbike manufacturers reportedly use them to test the limits of the suspension of their new models.

Picchi was persuaded by the fact that she can do much of her commute and the school run on a proper bike lane, protected from traffic — a privilege denied to most Romans, at least for the moment.

She also took up a government scheme offering up to 500 euros (\$600) to people buying a new or second-hand bike or electric scooter, which received 119,000 applications last year.

"A revolution is under way and I am part of it" she exclaimed, wheeling her bike around the Villa Leopardi park in the northern Nomentano district on a sunny but chilly spring morning.

"We're not Denmark, we also need a revolution in our way of thinking, but we will slowly, slowly get there."

PAINTING OVER COBBLES

Some think the progress is too slow. "Five years ago you hardly saw any

bicycles in Rome. Nobody used them except for a ride in the park on Sundays", said Roberto Scacchi, Regional Head of pro-environment lobby Legambiente.

But speaking to AFP from a main road near the Termini train station, where a bike lane was recently added, he said: "I don't see any revolution... It's still one bicycle for every 100 cars."

According to the European Cyclists' Federation, which has collated data about European capitals from different years, only 0.6 per cent of Romans cycle regularly, against 49 per cent of Copenhagen residents.

Mayor Virginia Raggi last year announced 150 kilometres (90 miles) of new bike lanes, adding to an existing network of around 250 kilometres, and getting the city closer to its own ideal target of 500 kilometres.

But Legambiente complains that just some 15 kilometres have been completed so far, and most of them are "temporary", meaning a line of paint on the side of the road, with no barriers to protect cyclists from cars.

One major cycle lane in the north of the city abruptly turns into cobbles at points — rather than being replaced with tarmac, they have simply been painted over.

'BUBBLE COULD BURST'

Giulio Maselli, a bike shop owner in central Rome, reported a jump in sales of at least 50 per cent last year, but said Rome urgently needs to upgrade its cycling infrastructure to keep up with demand.

"Otherwise this bubble is destined to burst", he said.

Local authorities insist they are on it. Stefano Brinchi, head of municipal transport agency Roma Mobilita, said the city was working to foster an "irreversible" shift towards greener mobility.

"We need to dispel the myth that Rome should be considered a bike-unfriendly city", he said, pointing to, among other things, the grand plan of a 45 kilometre cycling ring road around the city.

The so-called GRAB (Great Bicycle Ring Road) would join the Colosseum, the Vatican area and the hip Trastevere district to lesser known districts in the east of Rome, like Tor Pignattara, and big parks in the north, like the Aniene natural reserve.

According to campaigners, the project is fully funded, officially endorsed by the city of Rome, and could be ready by the end of 2022.

"It's going to be the most beautiful cycle path in the world", Legambiente's Scacchi said. "Today, unfortunately, it's the most beautiful cycle path, but in the virtual world." — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Michael Kors pays tribute to Broadway in 40th anniversary show



American designer Michael Kors paid tribute to Broadway in his 40th anniversary show on Tuesday, with a collection that celebrated a night out in the New York theatre district.

Kors' presentation began with the designer greeting fashionistas from Times Square, where as an avid theatre fan he spoke about the hit Broadway has taken during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a short film, Broadway stars raised awareness of the Actors Fund, a charity supporting performers and behind-the-scenes workers, and introduced a pre-recorded runway show in which models including Naomi Campbell, Helena Christensen and Bella Hadid strutted down a street in Times Squares at night.

The autumn/winter collection mixed sleek work looks as well as sparkling evening wear. Kors said he had reissued a selection of his brand's "most iconic looks", with each piece including a QR code revealing its story.

"This past year, I got time to actually think about the 40-year career, the journey that it has been, the people I've met, the places I've gone, all of the collections, it's a lot to process", Kors told Reuters in an interview.

"But I'm happy — it was

one of the rare good things about lockdown that we all, I think, really got a greater sense of appreciation about so many things."

Kors opened his runway presentation with a white coat over a black shirt and trousers, before presenting buttoned, checked skirt suits, animal print designs and all-red outfits.

Rollneck jumpers were worn with furry coats, dresses had cuts at the waist and A-line skirts were slit at the front. Outerwear included wool and sparkly coats, shiny rain macs and puffer jackets.

For the evening, models wore shimmering dresses and sleek high heels.

"I wanted to talk about, hopefully if we are optimistic but realistic, that when this collection arrives in the stores starting September, October, November, December, we're all going to crave going out and getting dressed and kind of strutting our stuff", Kors said.

"Theatre will reopen and we won't go to the theatre in just a hoodie. We're going to get dressed up. When we can get back into our offices and we have a meeting we're going to want to get dressed up. When New Year's Eve rolls around next year we're getting dressed up. So, it's very much a celebration of big city life, hitting the streets, the theatre." — Reuters



Mouth-watering snacks bring joy to Yemen during Ramadhan



At the thought of breaking his Ramadhan fast with a snack of sambusa, a deep-fried savoury pastry triangle popular in Yemen, Issa al-Shabi's face lights up with joy.

On a street in the capital Sanaa, bustling with shoppers stocking up on tasty treats for iftar, the meal observant Muslims have after sunset during the Islamic month of fasting, Shabi grins and his eyes shine in anticipation.

"The sambusa is a beautiful food, and tastes delicious," he says, jabbing the air with his hand for emphasis. "Especially so during this blessed month."

Ramadan brings out a zeal among Muslims everywhere for particular memory-laden foods.

Sambusa stuffed with vegetables or meat are found across the Middle East and are a cousin of the South Asian samosa. In Yemen, they are a much-loved tradition and a business opportunity for those who know how to make the best ones.

"People compete to get the best sambusa," Shabi says, adding that shops known for their cleanliness, the skill of their staff and the quality of their ingredients fill with jostling customers.

Yemen has endured six years of war that has left millions hungry and some parts of the coun-

try facing famine-like conditions. The country does have food supplies, but a deep economic crisis has sent prices skyrocketing out of the reach of many.

For Yemenis able to spend, the joy of a crispy sambusa, spongy rawani or syrupy baklava is at the heart of the Ramadan experience.

These traditional treats, enjoyed at iftar, keep people going through the night until they resume their fast at dawn, refraining from eating or drinking throughout the day.

"You can consider them as one of the main meals. People crave them after fasting, after the fatigue, exhaustion and thirst," says Fuad al-Kebsi, a popular singer, sitting down with family and friends to share sweets for iftar.

For those with a sweet tooth, Ali Abd whisks a bowl of eggs into a cloud before adding flour and vanilla. Tins of his yellow rawani cake are baked in a wood-fired furnace before being cut and drenched in aromatic syrup.

The draw of sweets from one particular shop he rates highly brought Muhammad al-Bina from his house on the edge of town into central Sanaa.

"The sweets are awesome. Trust me!" he says, beaming. — **Reuters**



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Vale completes 10 years of operations in Oman

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS:
Brazilian mining giant continues to meet and surpass its operations and business targets, says CEO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Vale, one of the world's largest mining companies, is celebrating this month, its tenth year in operation in Oman. Vale launched the initial stages of its industrial complex at the Port of Sohar in April 2011, marking a high point in an era of big-ticket industrial investments. The project highlighted the Sultanate's strategic geopolitical location in the Middle East and Suhar's distinctive advantages as a logistics hub and maritime gateway.

Suhar, a unique deep-water port in Oman, is one of the very few ports in the Middle East capable of receiving even Vale's Largest 'Valemax' Vessels, which have a 400,000-tonne transportation



capacity. In addition to making a sizable contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product, the venture has also delivered significant benefits in jobs, value addition opportunities, in-country value initiatives, and community development projects.

Vale's investment in Oman is a paradigm of the successful convergence of Vale's strategic goals, the Omani government (represented by OQ Company), and the Sohar Industrial Port Company (SIPC).

Adriano Mansk, Vale Oman CEO, stated: "Vale's operations in Oman are a result of a dynamic

partnership with OQ and SIPC. Thanks to these key partners, Vale is meeting and surpassing its operations and business targets. The Omani government is a strategic partner that has contributed to its success by facilitating a smooth transition into the country and allowing Vale to develop its business operations seamlessly. Besides that, SIPC has acted as an efficient and logistical partner helping to connect our maritime terminals in Brazil to customers in the region."

Saleh al Musalhi, Vale Oman Deputy CEO, said: "Vale is a transformational company, one that transforms the environment

where it operates. Vale is dedicated to sustainable development regardless of where it operates, identifying the countless opportunities for growth that are available while also recognising the planet's physical limits. The company is committed to practicing and promoting these resources' efficient use, investing in clean energy, and acting to mitigate the impact of its operations on climate change. The same is true for the Sultanate, where Vale has invested heavily in employing advanced technologies in its pelletising and port operations to adhere to the environmental requirement

according to the Environment Authority's Environmental Regulations." The environmental controls that Vale has in place establish it as one of the leading companies regarding compliance with local and global environmental standards. That is in alignment with the company's plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. ISO 14001 Certificate was awarded to Vale in Oman in 2016, and it was renewed in 2019, reflecting the company's commitment to environmental protection and controls. Vale in Oman has developed environmental requirements over



The Omani government is a strategic partner that has contributed to its success by facilitating a smooth transition into the country and allowing Vale to develop its business operations seamlessly

ADRIANO MANSK

Vale Oman CEO

a period of ten years, including Dust Monitoring Systems and Emissions Controls. In addition to the Green Belt surrounding the plant, a wind Fence surrounds the stockyard with high dust retention efficiency. The company has also implemented the Dry Dust Cruster (DBD), and a unique Spraying System used to cover the Iron Ore Stockpiles to create a thick and long-lasting crust.

Packaging and foodstuff logistics plants to come up in Khazaen

NEW INVESTMENTS: Agreements signed with Al Rasam Al Shamilah and QAF International

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Khazaen has signed agreements with local companies Al Rasam Al Shamilah, an Omani firm operating in the import, export and wholesale of foodstuff, and QAF International, a company established in 2015 and active in direct import of foodstuff. The agreements will see these companies set up factories and logistics units at Khazaen.

Eng Salem Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO, Khazaen said, "We are delighted to welcome the new investors to Khazaen Economic City. These agreements reflect the trust that Khazaen is gaining from several investors due to its attractive location, swift access to various logistics gateways across the country."

The year 2021 too has begun on a highly positive demand, notwithstanding challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and witnessed the signing of several agreements that will contribute towards the government initiatives for the In-country value and knowledge transfer efforts.

An ideal location for local, regional and international corporate offices, banks, legal and finance firms, IT Parks and more, Khazaen Economic City has been seeing a steady increase in the number of investors.

Government support and free zones are only some of the USPs of Khazaen, as the City has topped these facilities with a commercial package for its early tenants.

Walid bin Mohammed al Mahthouri, CEO, Al-Rasam Al Shamilah, said, "Khazaen has the



An ideal location for local, regional and international corporate offices, banks, legal and finance firms, IT Parks and more, Khazaen Economic City has been seeing a steady increase in the number of investors

capability and capacity to host major projects, thanks to its incentives, strategic location and world-class infrastructure and facilities.

Al Rasam Al Shamilah is active in the import, wholesale and retail sectors through its Fen Al Tazieen Food catering Services brand. The project will spread over 7,500 m2 to meet local and overseas market demand."

Bader Saud al Maharbi, CEO, QAF International, stated, "Our decision to invest in Khazaen was linked to our operational growth. Our expansion plans necessitated a unit to package grains, spices, legumes and snacks, and Khazaen offered everything we were looking for. We are impressed by advantages and incentives Khazaen provides to investors, including exemption from administrative fees and reduced rents value for the first year of operation, which will undoubtedly enable us to save some operational costs upon project initiation and will contribute towards maximising returns on investment in a shorter period. Moreover, Khazaen's high-quality infrastructure is ready to serve needs of every investor."

Escrow accounts to benefit real-estate sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

After becoming the first bank in Oman to launch the specialised service in the country, Bank Muscat escrow account services are all set to boost the Omani real-estate sector.

Through this service, Bank Muscat acts as an escrow agent, which accepts all funds and then releases these funds in accordance with the progress of a real-estate project and as per the terms of the escrow agreement in line with Royal Decree 30/2018, Ministerial Decision 72/2019 issued by the Ministry of Housing and other regulatory norms.

The new service ensures that developers are paid on a timely basis without delay from the buyers' side and the buyers too enjoy the assurance of knowing that their payments are being used for the timely completion of the project.

With real-estate transactions becoming more sophisticated and complex than ever in modern times, the Sultanate made it compulsory for real-estate developers to route all funds pertaining to real-estate projects with off-plan sales into an escrow account. An escrow services

provider typically serves as a trusted middleman for payments between buyers and sellers. Funds will be released to a developer by the escrow services provider only as per the progress of the project and the terms of the agreement.

Ali bin Said bin Ali (pictured), Deputy General Manager - Agency & Custody Services, said: "The bank's escrow services are based on local regulations and international best practices. Real estate buyers can rest assured that their funds are being used for the purpose of development and not for any unauthorised purposes when paying into an escrow account. Developers will at the same time get access to payments based on completion of project milestones as per the agreement. As a trusted neutral party that is aligned to the best interests of both buyers and sellers, the bank will verify the completion of different milestones and process transactions accordingly. Sellers can rest assured that the system will encourage buyers to make payments without any delay and they will be able to access the funds in a timely manner so as to complete the project on schedule."



Corporates should step up with pandemic funding support

Without doubt, the current pandemic situation necessitates intensive efforts to contain spiralling infections and deaths amid a shortage of vaccines. These efforts must be backed by concrete actions and initiatives and.

A case in point is the example of Bank Muscat, which recently announced a financial contribution of RO 1 million towards the efforts of the Ministry of Health in limiting the spread of the coronavirus.

Financial banking institutions and other companies must follow suit as well in light of the sharp increase in hospitalisations and mortalities linked to

the second wave of the pandemic.

Such support is necessary as the concerned agencies of the government make efforts to obtain vaccines from the manufacturers around the world.

Omani banks are among businesses and organisations that generate millions of Omani rials in annual profits. Any monetary support from these organisations to the covid cause will pay dividends in the form of goodwill for their gestures. Given the challenges conditions that we find ourselves in, big private sector organisations should come forward and help fund the acquisition of vaccines to help control the pandemic.

Today, Oman is at the bottom of the list of countries in the region in vaccinating their citizens. The Minister of Health has



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GIVEN THE GRAVITY OF THE PANDEMIC-RELATED CHALLENGES WE ARE FACING TODAY, OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS NEED ALL OF THE SUPPORT THEY CAN GET TO CONFRONT THIS EPIDEMIC

acknowledged that setbacks in obtaining enough vaccines in a timely manner have led to an increase in the number of infections and deaths.

Bank Muscat has described its financial support as representing its social responsibility and national duty. Indeed, such institutions have a financial budget for corporate social responsibility commitments. Given the gravity of the pandemic-related challenges we are facing today, official institutions need all of the support they can get to confront this epidemic.

This support encompasses not only assistance that covid patients require, but also economic and social assistance to the affected sections of the community. We must use our diplomatic

and commercial relations with the international community to speed up the acquisition of vaccines. For our part, the general population should continue to adhere to pandemic protocols prescribed by the authorities, such as wearing masks in public, staying away from gatherings, and practising quarantine procedures if covid-positive, and so on.

At the same time, we should keep in mind the economically weaker sections of our society who may be in need of financial and material assistance during these difficult times.

They are also entitled to a measure of healthy living, happiness and prosperity. We must endeavour to rise to the occasion and reach out to our affected brethren.

Stay ahead of the game with the powerful Lexus IS

MUSCAT: The powerful Lexus IS does more than just draw attention where ever it goes. It packs a punch on every drive offering some of the most exciting moments on the road. The bold exterior styling and athletic silhouette of the IS signifies the agile changes that have taken place below the surface. The new IS evokes lower, wider proportions with muscular fenders, reflecting the vehicle's high performance. The sleek lines are also complemented with aggressive sharpness carved into the side and shoulder character lines.

The IS' distinct personality is completed by its exquisite interior, which invites drivers and passengers to enjoy a range



of advanced features for a refined cabin experience. These include a new 10.3-inch touchscreen multimedia system featuring Apple CarPlay® and Android Auto™ compatibility, a 4.2-inch colour multi-information display (MID), and a dual-zone automatic climate control

system with touch-sensitive controls. The vehicle also offers SmartAccess with push-button start, a 17-speaker Mark Levinson sound system, a power moonroof, power adjustable and ventilated front seats, as well as ample luggage space thanks to the 60:40 split-folding rear seats.

For those seeking to experience the ultimate in thrilling responsiveness, the IS, is also available in an F Sport version. Engineered for exhilaration, the F brand DNA has trickled down from the legendary LFA, which represents the pinnacle of refined performance. The IS F Sport model boasts exclusive interior and exterior features, including a distinctive 'F' mesh pattern, a grille-bottom air intake, rear spoiler, and 19-inch alloy wheels.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or subscribe to YouTube channel "Lexus Oman", or like Lexus Oman on Facebook or Follow Oman. Lexus on Instagram.

Thawani, BankDhofar team up to offer innovative fintech products



MUSCAT: Thawani Technologies has signed a strategic partnership with BankDhofar to introduce trending and innovative solutions to the market. This first-of-its-kind partnership in Oman comes after Thawani Technologies acquired its payment solutions provider licence from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), and will see the company bring its smart and innovative solutions to the table, while BankDhofar will provide its extensive infrastructure and vast expertise towards accelerating Oman's digital transformation and the trending remote payments.

Eng Majid al Amri, Founder and CEO of Thawani Technologies Company said, "BankDhofar is one of the

fastest growing institutions in the Sultanate and has long been a trend-setter in digital payment services.

This underscores the confidence of the private sector, as well as the small and medium enterprise community in Omani entrepreneurs recognizing their pivotal role in streamlining digital transformation in the Sultanate."

Dr Tariq Taha, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar said, "We are pleased to start this long-term partnership with Thawani Technologies, in order to provide the market with robust electronic payment solutions ensuring ease and flexibility. By joining forces, we can deliver excellent customer experience in this fast-moving landscape."

Good turnout for first 'Know Your VAT' webinar

MUSCAT: Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC), in partnership with the Omani International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), has successfully completed the first of five webinars of their recently launched 'Know



Your VAT' initiative executed by Moore.

The initiative, which is considered the first of its kind from the private sector to cover new VAT laws and procedures, was launched earlier in the month with the aim of helping SMEs

prepare themselves and ensure their businesses comply with the upcoming VAT requirements. It includes a series of five webinars, five short animated videos, a digital downloadable booklet, and one-to-one sessions where required.

Digitalisation and sustainability are two sides of the same coin

Sustainability has quickly risen to the top of the corporate agenda in the wake of the pandemic. Events of the last year have elevated the significance of environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards as companies look beyond short-term profits towards building back better.

The trend has been gathering steam for several years now, as environmental and social performance has migrated closer to the core of business operations.

Over the past decade, companies have been increasingly feeling a responsibility to demonstrate that they care about the environment, and that concern is reflected in the interests of our communities, investors and regulators.

In some ways, the pandemic has accelerated that trend. The majority of businesses around the world — including across the industrial sector — have embraced sustainability reporting



As more companies worldwide embed sustainability into their reporting standards, businesses will be able to leverage the benefits of Industry 4.0 to improve engineering, operations and performance outcomes with diverse environmental benefits for customers

LISA WEE

Director of Sustainability at AVEVA



standards. Approximately 80 per cent of companies in 52 countries now report on sustainability, an increase of 5 per cent over 2017, according to a recent KPMG Impact survey. Published in December 2020, the review analysed a one-year period ending June 2020.

While North America has the highest reporting rate on this key metric, at 90 per cent, there has been a surge in integrated reporting around the world, including as far afield as France,

Malaysia, India and Japan.

Sustainability reporting is just the start.

In the coming decade, that sustainability will become essential to industrial business models across the value chain — from sourcing and supply chain matters through to the production line and end-of-asset lifecycles.

The future belongs to companies that make the most of deeper intelligence to drive win-win outcomes for business and the environment and empower future

workforce generations, while supporting efficient, connected and sustainable working models.

Indeed, with their symbiotic relationship, digitalisation and sustainability can be seen as two sides of the same coin.

The result is improved engineering, operations and performance outcomes that can also bring diverse environmental and social benefits for customers.

Embedding sustainability into your business takes time and is best approached as a journey. Aligning on priorities and auditing current capabilities are important first steps.

Evaluating your technology capabilities in particular has become an increasingly important part of this process.

For industrial businesses looking to make their operations more sustainable, digitalisation lays the foundation for a deeper understanding of opportunities, enables real-time monitoring and can accelerate overall progress.

As such, it is generally a natural

next step for many companies but as each business progresses along its sustainability journey, the process will continue to reveal new ways it can harness the power of digital technology to reduce the business' environmental footprint and contribute to society.

Smart industrial software already does a great deal to enable greater sustainability, including by helping businesses to reduce their emissions, moving towards being more circular and making advances on traceability and product quality.

As the push towards Industry 4.0 gathers steam, the next step will be for consumers and companies to find new ways to collaborate and use the wealth of data now available to them to accelerate progress on achieving key sustainability targets, like the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals and limiting global warming to 1.5°C. Only then will we really know if we are on track to realize a more sustainable future.

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- Role & Responsibilities:** Single point responsible and accountable for the management and execution of all aspects of the services.

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- Location:** Site
- Qualification:** Bachelor Degree in Civil engineering or equivalent.
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Britain inflation edges up as Covid price hit begins to ease

LONDON: British inflation picked up in March as global oil prices rose and retailers scaled back their Covid-driven discounts, and it is expected to keep climbing as the economy reopens from lockdown.

Consumer price inflation rose to 0.7 per cent in March after dipping to just 0.4 per cent in February, slightly below the average forecast of 0.8 per cent, according to official figures published on Wednesday.

"The rate of inflation increased with petrol prices rising and clothes recovering from the falls seen in February", Office for National Statistics official Jonathan Athow said.

British inflation is forecast to rise in the coming months, due to an increase in regulated household energy bills in April, higher global oil prices and comparisons with prices a year ago when Covid lockdowns caused demand to slump.

Fuel prices in March showed their biggest annual increase since January 2020. Clothing and footwear prices rose by 1.6 per cent on the month after store closures caused by lockdown rules had caused discounting in February, the biggest increase since 2017 for the time of year. Clothing and footwear prices were still 3.9 per cent lower than a year before, and food prices were 1.4 per cent down.

The Bank of England forecast in February that inflation would reach 1.9 per cent by the end of 2021 but many economists now expect it will exceed its 2 per cent



Customers wear face masks as they shop at a local market in London. — AFP

The Bank of England forecast in February that inflation would reach 1.9 per cent by the end of 2021 but many economists now expect it will exceed its 2 per cent target before then

target before then.

In the medium-term, the BoE sees less upward pressure on inflation because of weakness in the job market, which it expects to persist even after the economy returns to its pre-pandemic size which it has forecast will happen early next year.

"Unlike the US, where we expect inflation to be relatively sticky above 2 per cent, we think the UK story is likely to be less exciting. Partly this is because we think the pent-up demand story may be less pronounced than in the States", James Smith, an

economist with ING, said.

Financial markets see about a 50 per cent chance of a quarter-point increase in interest rates by the Bank of England by the end of next year, but many economists think it could take longer for the BoE to move.

"We believe the Bank of England is most likely to hold off from acting throughout 2021 but there is clearly a growing possibility that the bank could tighten monetary policy in 2022 — although at the moment, early-2023 seems more likely", Howard Archer, an economist with EY Item Club, said.

Paul Dales at Capital Economics, said 2025 was his bet for a first rate hike.

BoE Chief Economist Andy Haldane in February likened inflation to a "tiger" that could be roused easily. But his view is not widely shared by other members of the Monetary Policy Committee, from which he will step down in June. — Reuters

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