

India imposes new Covid curbs

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state Gujarat became the latest to tighten coronavirus curbs on Wednesday as India's infections surged to a record of almost 116,000 new cases in 24 hours. Experts blame the country's fresh wave on people ignoring guidelines and attending huge religious and political events, as well as weddings and cricket matches in recent months. India has now recorded 12.8 million cases, the third-highest behind the United States and Brazil, although those nations have much smaller populations. **DETAILS ON P7**



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SINGAPORE BECOMES A GLOBAL CRUISE LEADER



MUSCAT

ANOTHER HONOUR FOR MUSCAT AIRPORT

Oman Airports Learning and Development Centre continued its focus on broadening the circle of international accreditations from major international aviation training institutions. After the successful conclusion of multiple accreditation agreements with the international organisations, Oman Airports Learning and Development Centre signed a new accreditation agreement acknowledging Muscat International Airport as an authorised international training centre accredited by American Heart Association to provide AHA first aid and cardiopulmonary recovery training courses.

DETAILS ON P5

WASHINGTON

US TO RESTORE AID TO PALESTINIANS

The Biden administration plans to unveil a package of about \$150 million in US aid to the Palestinians, restoring part of the assistance that was cut off by former President Donald Trump, people familiar with the matter said on Wednesday. The aid, mostly to be provided through the UNWRA, is expected to be announced by the State Department as soon as Wednesday as part of an effort to repair US ties with the Palestinians that all but collapsed during Trump's tenure.

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IRAN'S ROUHANI SAYS VIENNA TALKS OPEN 'NEW CHAPTER'

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AS US CITIES EMBRACE TECH, CYBERATTACKS POSE RISKS

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Decree establishes Social Security Fund

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued a Royal Decree No 33/2021 on systems of retirement and social security.

Article (1) establishes a fund to be named "Social Security Fund", to have a legal identity, enjoy financial and administrative independence and report to the Council of Ministers. Its system (bylaw) shall be issued under a Royal Decree.

Article (2) establishes a fund to be named "Military And Security Services Retirement Fund", to have a legal identity, enjoy financial and administrative independence and report to the Council of Ministers. Its system (bylaw) shall be issued under Royal Decree.

Article (3) states that a committee to be formed under a decision by the Council of Ministers shall undertake the supervision of drafting necessary regulations and finalising all procedures related



to transferring to the two funds stated in Articles (1) and (2) of this Decree all the missions, specialisations/prerogatives, origins, rights, obligations, assets and financial commitments of the following bodies: the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund, the Public Authority of Social Insurance, the Royal Guard of Oman's Retirement Fund, the Royal Office Retirement Fund, the Internal Security Service Retirement Fund, the Sultan's Special Force's Retirement

Fund, the Diwan of Royal Court Employee's Retirement Fund, the Royal Oman Police Retirement Fund, the Defence Ministry's Retirement Fund, the Central Bank of Oman's Employees Retirement Fund and Petroleum Development Oman's Employees Retirement Fund, each in accordance with its circumstances.

The above-mentioned Committee shall undertake devising the regulations and procedures of restructuring systems of retirement and social security and drafting the two funds' systems stated in Articles (1) and (2) of this Decree, in addition to devising a draft law for social security that incorporates retirement systems necessary to be applied to all employees and workers, as well as provisions related to the social security scheme, within 12 months from the date of issuance of this Decree.

TURN TO P4

'Prevention Project' set to boost primary healthcare

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the GCC Health Council, launched the health promotion strategy codenamed "Prevention Project".

The inauguration, held via video-conferencing on Wednesday, was held in the presence of Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosani, Under-Secretary of the Health Ministry for Health Affairs, with the participation of Sulaiman al Dakheel, Director Manager of the GCC Health Council.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Al Saeedi said that the strategy is launched according to the GCC

Health Vision, the common integration principles and cooperation among the GCC countries.

The prevention strategy is also adopted within Oman Health Vision 2050 and the Five-Year Health Plan (2020-2025). It aims at promoting primary healthcare.

He also pointed out that the current trend of health projects' implementation is carried out by research and surveys as health problems are examined in pure systematic approaches.

The minister also outlined that the concept of health promotion includes all aspects of individual, family and community health.

TURN TO P4



20-KM STRETCH OF ADAM-THAMRAIT ROAD TO OPEN

An additional 20 km stretch of the Adam-Thamrait dualisation project will be opened for traffic this month, as the remaining 17 km of the entire project will be ready by June 30. The project is nearing completion and earlier the road was opened to traffic in three parts - 280 km out of 317 km. **SEE P5**

Transit allowed while visit is banned

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has said only those who hold resident visas can enter the Sultanate. The entry ban to Visit and Express visa holders takes effect from Thursday (April 8) as part of the preventive measures against the spread of the Covid-19 variant.

The ROP has stopped issuing visas and only Omani citizens and residents are allowed to enter the country. However, transfer passengers will not face any issues. The airlines by which they are travelling will take care as they have to remain inside the aircraft.

"Starting from April 8, holders of Visit and Express visas will not be allowed to enter the Sultanate as part of the Covid-19 precautions. The Directorate-General of Passports and Residences has stopped issuing visas of all types since Wednesday. However, those who use Omani ports as transit points will not be affected as they remain inside the aircraft and airlines will make sure they don't step out as a matter of safety," a senior official told *the Observer*.

Since many GCC countries including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait closed their borders to flights from other countries except Oman,

TURN TO P4

Blood clots 'very rare' side effect of AstraZeneca

THE HAGUE: The EU's drug regulator said on Wednesday that blood clots should be listed as a "very rare" side effect of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine but that the jab's benefits continue to outweigh the risks.

No specific risk factors, including age, have been identified for thrombosis with the AstraZeneca shot, which could stem from an immune response, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said.

"EMA's safety committee has



concluded today that unusual blood clots with low blood platelets should be listed as very rare side effects" of the AstraZeneca jab, the Amsterdam-based watchdog said.

But it stressed that it believed people should continue to take the vaccine as part of the battle against the disease.

"The safety committee has confirmed that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing Covid-19 overall outweigh the risk of side effects," EMA chief Emer Cooke said.

— AFP

From 8th to 12th April 2021

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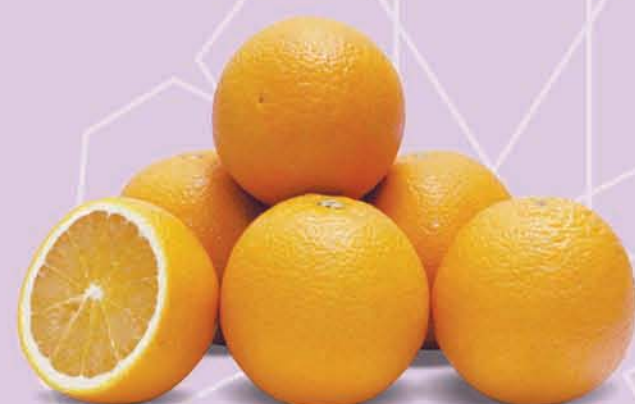
RIAL 0.125

Watermelon (Oman)
per kg



RIAL 0.690

Avocado (Kenya) per kg



RIAL 0.190

Orange Valencia (Egypt)
per kg



RIAL 1.390

Banana Robusta Box



RIAL 2.000

Grapes White Family Pack



RIAL 2.000

Nectarine Family Pack



RIAL 0.890

Mango Badami (India)
per kg



RIAL 0.390

Onion Big Bag (Approx 4 kgs)



RIAL 0.150

Potato (Egypt) per kg



RIAL 0.490

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(Brazil) per kg



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4 x 1 Ltr



RIAL 0.990 Al Fajr French Fries
2.5 kgs



RIAL 1.375 A'Saffa Chicken Samosa
2 x 240 gms



RIAL 1.990 Arctic Gold Chicken Breast
2 x 1 kg



RIAL 2.490 Lulu Tender Chicken Breast
2 x 1 kg



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Rumours and fake news pose additional challenge to society

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information, represented by the Government Communication Centre and the Media Training Centre, organised a training workshop about cross-checking news and verifying sources and digital media.

The workshop, held via videoconferencing, saw the participation Dr Abdullah of bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

In a speech during the opening ceremony, Dr Abdullah said that rumours and wrong information pose an additional challenge to society, which is gathering its strength to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

He added that such negative reports, based on unfounded and unscientific concepts, undermine the government's efforts to spread awareness about the risks of the virus.

The minister pointed out that, over the past period, misinformation fed by such rumours on alleged harms of Covid-19 control vaccines became



so intriguing to the extent that some individuals, particularly the old-aged, hesitated in taking the highly-needed vaccines.

“This compromises their lives and the lives of their families and society and exposes all to immense

threats that might lead to death,” said Dr Abdullah.

Besides spreading public awareness, the workshop illustrates the nature of false news, the way they spread and the means to avoid falling prey to them amid

Negative reports, based on unfounded and unscientific concepts, undermine the government's efforts to spread awareness about the risks of the virus

the abundance and easy access to use advanced digital tools.

The workshop studies the history of false news, methods of their dissemination and means of scrutinising them, irrespective of their format — be it in images, video clips or otherwise.

The workshop looks into verification strategies and instruments of probing fake sites, accounts, platforms, applications and social networks.

Over the past year (March 2020 to March 2021), the Government Communication Centre, through its account “Oman Confronts Coronavirus”, nullified more than 70 rumours in the same context.

— ONA

FROM PAGE 1

Royal Decree establishes Social Security Fund

Article (4) requires the boards of directors of retirement funds and the above-mentioned Public Authority for Social Insurance and its executive management to practise their missions in accordance with regulations and procedures to be endorsed by the committee stated in Article (3) of this Decree.

Article (5) states that the minimum number of years of service required for claiming optional retirement stated in all enforced laws, systems and regulations shall be 30 years of service. This provision does not apply to those who already completed 20 years of service as of the date of issuance of the Social Security Law.

Article (6) stipulates that employees transferred under Royal Decrees pertaining to the restructuring of the State's Administrative Apparatus from among those who completed two thirds of period

of subscription necessary for entitlement to pension as of the date of enforcement of those Decrees” shall be treated in accordance with provisions of retirement laws, systems and regulations applied to them prior to their transfer. Their subscriptions shall be settled and their rights adjusted (equated) in accordance with the same provisions, but without prejudice to the provision of Article (5) of this Decree.

Article (7) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (8) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the date of its issuance, except Article (6), which will be enforced with effect from the date of issuance of Royal Decrees related to restructuring of the State's Administrative Apparatus.

— ONA

Omani doctor finds fertility booster for horses

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

A veterinarian working with Royal Oman Police (ROP) has found a fertility booster for Arabian horses.

In joint research with Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Major (Dr) Khalid al Khaldi, Head of Veterinary Department at the Mounted Police Division of the ROP, found this interesting result through studies on a product from birds.

According to the research, a solution based on a natural product of swiftlet birds called Edible Bird's Nest (EBN) can boost mares' fertility.

Dr Khalid al Khaldi experimented as part of his PhD project with his lead researcher, Associate Professor Dr Nurhusien Yimer from the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). The current study on mares has proven to improve fertility among them.

The EBN is well-known in the SEA countries (Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar, Malaysia,



Laos, Cambodia, Brunei and Timor Leste). Humans have consumed it for centuries for a wide range of traditionally believed health benefits.

The innovation titled 'Fertility booster in mares (FBM)' has been tested and shown to prevent unwanted reactions in the uterus following breeding, improve uterine health, create a favourable environment for conception, and

ultimately enhancing pregnancy success rate.

The researchers believe that this technology is safe to use a natural product. It has potential benefit for the valuable horse breeding industry, as it will help cut down pregnancy wastages and associated financial losses. This innovation has been evaluated and is currently protected by UPM's Intellectual Property Office, Putra



Science Park (PSP).

Arabian horses are considered one of the most beautiful horse breeds globally for their metabolic efficiency, ability to withstand harsh desert climatic conditions, and unwavering loyalty. The purebred Arabian horses were a part of the survival of Bedouins and their culture in the Arabian Peninsula. Oman's Arabian horses are of world fame, and they make the largest mounted army in the world, the 'Royal Cavalry'.

Transit allowed, visit banned

...travellers to these countries are using Oman as their temporary stay-home for their mandatory 2-week quarantine. They will not be able to do so from today, but those who are already in the country will not be affected.

Most of the country's hotels, worst affected during the pandemic, were cashing on the transit passengers heading to countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Omani residents were to undergo seven days of institutional quarantine. With the recently mandated Sahala platform, the hotels got back some customers.

“While the pandemic

has severely impacted the hospitality sector, the institutional quarantine (IQ) has increased hotel occupancy and revenue across all categories of hotels,” said Samir Messaoudi, General Manager, Sheraton Oman Hotel.

Hotels remained packed because the people on institutional quarantine and guests were sent to other hotels in other governorates. From today, these hotels will only be welcoming the residents who are arriving from abroad. Only Oman Air, Air India, and Salam Air are operating between major Indian destinations.

‘Prevention Project’ launched

It further strengthens the community partnership and integration among all sectors to cooperate in solving all health problems.

Health Affairs under-secretary said: “We aim at reducing incorrect and risky health behaviours and habits, limiting the onset of diseases and following the right health choices in everyday life, as well raising individuals' awareness on the importance of promoting health and maintaining the proper practices, which will consequently reduce everyone's medical expenses”.

The Director Manager of the GCC Health Council hailed the Health Council's efforts at the GCC level to ensure the provision of the highest levels of health services to citizens with the highest health standards at the international organisations level. — ONA

Al Sarh tree: A natural habitat for honey bees, birds

TEXT & PHOTOS BY YAHYA ALSALMANI

Al Sarh trees can be found scattered in small numbers throughout the Sultanate especially in wadies and plains as well as in the valleys.

The scientific name of Al Sarh is 'Maerua Crassifolia' and it is descended from the 'Capparaceae' family. It is about 3 to 9 metres tall. Its small branches have short, stiff thorns, to protect itself from grazing animals.

Al Sarh tree withstands high temperatures. It is slow-growing and lives for years. Despite the heat of Oman's weather, it remains an evergreen tree throughout the year. Its flowering season begins in



March and ends in April.

Livestock feed on its fruits and leaves which are locally used as natural remedies for several diseases such as chest, abdomen and gum pain to cancers and malignant swelling.

Besides, the Al Sarh tree is an important habitat for bees that collect nectar from their flowers. And the honey produced from this tree is locally called “Abu Twaiq”. “The price of a bottle consisting of a litre and a half reaches up to RO 180. Despite the high price, it has obtained a respectable reputation among the local segments,” an Omani honey seller told *the Observer*.

“Therefore, the flowering seasons of this tree provide us

with a resource, as in the months of March and April we can harvest the Omani honey products. Omani honey is very popular in the local markets,” he added.

The majority of consumers of this type of honey use it as one of the essential ingredients in traditional medicine. Natural honey is an essential source of energy. It is antibacterial and microbial, protects against coughing diseases, and contributes to treating many diseases, like flatulence and cancers. Honey also aids reduce the period of diarrhoea and has many benefits in treating wounds, burns and skin infections, locals explained.

This tree is also considered a safe habitat for many residents and

migratory birds such as; sparrow, bulbul, bee-eater and swallow. Most of these birds hover around this tree during the flowering period. This natural beauty attracts the attention of those who frequent the plain and mountain areas around this time of the year.

Al Sarh trees can be seen in various regions of the Sultanate, as they are spread in the north, central and south parts of the Sultanate. However, nowadays “many people do not hesitate to cut its stems and exploit its seeds and flowers,” an Omani environmentalist warned.

The locals are keen and seek assistance to plant this incomparable tree because of its distinctive health, environmental and economic importance.



Muscat Airport becomes first in ME to deliver first aid, CPR training

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 7

Oman Airports Learning and Development Centre continued its focus on broadening the circle of international accreditations received from major international aviation training institutions.

After the successful conclusion of multiple accreditation agreements with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the Airports Council International (ACI) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Oman Airports Learning and Development Centre on Wednesday signed a new accreditation agreement acknowledging Muscat International Airport as an authorised international training centre accredited by American Heart Association (AHA) to provide AHA first aid and cardiopulmonary recovery (CPR) training courses. This agreement comes as part of Oman Airports' integrated strategy to provide world-class healthcare services to travellers across its airports.

The agreement was signed remotely by Abdullah bin Saleh al Yafei — Oman Airports Vice-President of Support Services, and Michael Holly — AHA International Vice-President, in an online virtual ceremony.

Oman Airports, represented by its Learning and Development Centre, has recently developed an integrated first aid and CPR training programme in collaboration with the American Heart Association, which targeted a number of Muscat International Airport employees to promote awareness of the importance of



CPR as a life-saving tool and to provide guidance on health and safety at works to participants through a range of training packages.

The programme aimed also at enhancing the skills and knowledge of participants and familiarising them with the latest principles and practices of first aid to enable rapid response to medical emergencies and facilitate crucial lifesaving of travellers and airport employees by emergency medical services (EMS) staff. Furthermore, the programme is designed for airport personnel who wish to become AHA instructors certified to deliver first aid and CPR programme courses to employees at all the Sultanate's airports.

"We are honoured by the recognition that Oman Airports Learning and Development Centre continues to receive from the world's leading and reputable institutions for the level of professionalism and high-

quality standards demonstrated by the Centre, which earned us international recognition and accreditation for our pioneering work", said Abdullah bin Saleh al Yafei, Vice-President of Support Services. "The signing of this agreement with the American Heart Society is a confirmation of our employees' qualification and elevated responsibilities to offer and sustain the highest standards of training programmes."

Al Yafei added, "With this agreement, Muscat International Airport becomes the first airport in the MENA region to be accredited by the American Heart Association to provide AHA first aid and CPR training courses. This achievement reflects the hard work and commitment of Oman Airports to develop emergency medical services (EMS) at all the Sultanate's airports during this period of serious public health concerns that the airport industry is facing around the

world, by implementing health best practises and preventive measures to ensure health safety of all travellers."

Oman Airports had achieved the provision and equipping of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in the terminals of Muscat International Airport, in an initiative that sought to achieve the highest level of timely medical and first aid emergency responses at the airport, thereby ensuring the provision of immediate life-saving care for both travellers and airport employees in the event of a health emergency. As part of this initiative, a total of 64 AED units were placed in different locations in the airport for use by first aiders in a timely and efficient manner in case of emergency. It is worth noting that with simple audio and visual commands, the AEDs provided by Oman Airport is simple and efficient to use, and can be safely used on both adults and children.



Oman, Canada hold virtual talks session

MUSCAT: The Sultanate and Canada held bilateral talks session via video conferencing on Tuesday.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, headed the Omani side while the Canadian side was led by Sandra McCardell, Assistant Deputy Minister for

Europe, Arctic, Middle East and Maghreb.

The two sides discussed bilateral relationships and ways of bolstering them to serve the joint interests of the two friendly countries and exchanged points of view on international affairs as well as the regional issues and the efforts to resolve them by peaceful means. — ONA

Workshop on food and brain health

MUSCAT: The seventh International Workshop on Food and Brain Health and how to write books and articles by Springer Nature kicked off at Sultan Qaboos University on Wednesday.

The main aim of the event to create an awareness on the impact of food, nutrition on brain health, through whole life and updates on Neuroethics and how to write books and articles.

The event will cover brain diseases and the impact of food or diet on these diseases.

Around 32 international

speakers from the USA, Oman, Europe, Morocco, Egypt, Japan, Malaysia, Australia, Qatar and India shared their research experiences. More than 200 participants have registered for the virtual event.

The two-day event is organised by Sultan Qaboos University, under the auspices of the Food Science and Nutrition (FSN) Department at the College of Agricultural & Marine Sciences (CAMS) at SQU, in association with the Ageing & Dementia Research Group (ADRG) at SQU.

Additional 20-km stretch of Adam-Thamrait road to open this month

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 7

An additional 20-km of the Adam-Thamrait dualisation project will be opened for traffic this month, with the remaining 17-km to be ready by June 30.

Salim bin Hamad al Junaibi, Director of the Roads Department in the Al Wusta Governorate, said the project is nearing completion.

Al Junaibi added that the road includes the construction of a road with two asphalt lanes with a width of 3.55 metres per lane, an outer shoulder width of three metres, an inner shoulder width of 1.5 metres, and a middle divider of 20-24 metres, separating the two directions with a width ranging between 20-24 metres.

The project includes the construction of U-turns, service roads, rest areas, weigh stations, lay bays, emergency median openings, ROP parking, reinforced concrete box culverts for cross drainage, drainage and embankment protection.



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EXIT OFFER TO THE MINORITY SHAREHOLDERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SELL THEIR SHARES

United Power Company SAOG (the "Company") with its registered office situated at Jawaharat Al Shatti, P. O. Box 147, Postal Code 134, Muscat Governorate announces that the Company's board of directors at a meeting held on 27 October 2020 unanimously resolved to convert the Company from a public joint stock company to a closed joint stock company ("Conversion from SAOG to SAOC") in accordance with CMA Circular E/8/2017 Issuing the Rules on Conversion of Public Joint Stock Companies and the Executive Regulations of the Commercial Companies Law for Public Joint Stock Companies issued by CMA Decision 27/2021.

In accordance with the said CMA Circular and CMA Decision, the Conversion from SAOG to SAOC remains subject to the shareholders' approval at an extraordinary general meeting. Following the Board's approval, the Company filed an application with the Capital Market Authority (the "CMA") on 24 November 2020 and was pleased to receive the CMA's initial approval on 28 March 2021 to the Company's Conversion from SAOG to SAOC. A disclosure in this regard was also uploaded on the Muscat Securities Market on 29 March 2021.

In accordance with the requirements of CMA Circular E/8/2017 and CMA Decision 27/2021, the Company has obtained written confirmation from Khaled Juffali Co. (holding 55% shares of the Company) ("Khaled Juffali"), Ministry of Defence Pension Fund (holding 5% shares of the Company) ("MODPF"), Civil Service Employee Pension Fund (holding 6.45% shares of the Company), Royal Oman Police Pension Fund (holding 3% shares of the Company), Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) (holding 3.15% shares of the Company) and Sogex Oman Co. LLC (holding 4% shares of the Company) (together the "Majority Shareholders") that collectively hold 76.60% of the Company's share capital, that the Majority Shareholders support the Company's Conversion from SAOG to SAOC.

In addition to the above, Khaled Juffali and the MODPF undertakes to purchase all of the shares held by the minority shareholders in the Company at a purchase price of RO 1.015 per share through an Omani Subsidiary i.e. Power Development Company LLC, fully owned by Khaled Juffali and the MODPF, if the minority shareholders wish to sell their shares prior to the Company's Conversion from SAOG to SAOC.

In accordance with the requirements of CMA Decision 27/2021, Khaled Juffali and MODPF will undertake an exit offer in order to provide the Company's minority shareholders an opportunity to sell their shares to them in accordance with the said Decision and CMA Circular E/8/2017.

The Company has appointed Ubhar Capital SAOC P.O. Box: 1137, Postal Code: 111 Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968-24949051, +968-99267286, +968-24949009 and +968-99315839. Email: Talal@u-capital.net and O.ginna@u-capital.net as a broker for the Majority Shareholders of the Company to complete the purchase of shares offered for sale by the minority shareholders with respect to the Conversion from SAOG to SAOC.

The purchase offer period shall commence from 21 April 2021 and shall expire on 12 May 2021.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Masaken Al Waha LLC would like to invite Specialized Companies to Participate in the following Tender:

Tender No	Description	Last date for Collection	Submission Date	Tender Fees (R.O)
MWAHA/0004/2021	Integrated Facilities Management Services For Masaken Al Waha Village - Sohar	11 April 2021	11 May 2021	100/-

Tender Fee:

Prior to collection of the Tender Document, interested Bidder is required to deposit a non-refundable 'Tender Fee' into the Masaken Al Waha LLC's Bank Account as per the below details and Email the payment receipt issued by the bank along with Bidder Name to info@masakenalwaha.net before the deadline for Tender Document Collection.

Account Name: Masaken Al Waha LLC

Bank Name: Bank Sohar, Qurum Branch

Account Number: 005020036315

Amount: OMR 100/-

Tender Collection:

Tender Documents will be sent to the bidder's Email upon receipt of Bank Payment Receipt, Company CR & Company Profile.

Tender Clarification:

Bidder shall submit any inquires or clarification regarding the Tender electronically to a dedicated email address info@masakenalwaha.net as per the Tender Schedule.

Tender Submission:

Bids shall be submitted electronically to a dedicated email address info@masakenalwaha.net no later than 03:00 PM on 11th May 2021.

Please Notes:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- The Tender Committee is not bound to accept the lowest offer or any other bid.
- The Bid shall be valid for Ninety (90) days from the last date of submission of the Tender.

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Rouhani says Vienna talks open ‘new chapter’

TEHRAN/VIENNA: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that talks in Vienna on rescuing a troubled 2015 nuclear deal had opened a “new chapter”.

An Iranian delegation met on Tuesday with representatives of the remaining parties to the agreement to discuss how to bring Washington back into it and end crippling US sanctions and Iranian countermeasures.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to reverse the decision of his predecessor Donald Trump to withdraw from the agreement and reimpose unilateral sanctions.

But differences remain over the mechanics of the move as Tehran has since responded by suspending compliance with some of its own obligations under the deal.

The United States was not present at Tuesday’s discussions because Iran has refused to meet the US delegation so long as its sanctions remain in place.

Instead, the European Union

“If (Washington) shows it is honest and sincere, that’s all we ask... I think we’ll be able to negotiate in a short time

HASSAN ROUHANI
Iranian President

acted as an intermediary, but all sides gave a positive assessment of the opening talks.

“A new chapter has just been opened yesterday,” Rouhani told a cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

“If (Washington) shows it is honest and sincere, that’s all we ask... I think we’ll be able to negotiate in a short time, if necessary, with the (other parties to the deal).”

The talks are to resume in



European External Action Service (EEAS) Deputy Secretary-General Enrique Mora and Iranian Deputy at Ministry of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi wait for the start of a meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission in Vienna, on Tuesday. – Reuters

Vienna on Friday, a diplomat familiar with the discussions said.

The US delegation is to gather in a different hotel, with EU negotiators acting as go-betweens.

At the same time, two groups of experts — on lifting sanctions and nuclear issues — are working “to identify concrete measures to be taken by Washington and Tehran” to restore the deal, Russian envoy Mikhail Ulyanov said.

Washington gave an upbeat assessment of the opening session.

“We do see this as a constructive and certainly welcome step,” State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

While the United States and Iran say they do not expect any quick breakthroughs, and Tehran rejects face-to-face talks, for now, both governments and the EU described the early exchanges in positive terms.

Tuesday’s talks included a meeting of the remaining parties to the original deal: Iran, Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia in a group called the Joint Commission that is chaired by the European Union.

“Constructive Joint Commission meeting. There are unity and ambition for a joint diplomatic process with two expert groups on nuclear implementation and sanctions

lifting,” EU chief coordinator Enrique Mora said on Twitter.

A source familiar with the matter said diplomats briefed the US delegation after their talks with Iran and the wider group.

The two expert-level groups have been given the task of marrying lists of sanctions that the United States could lift with nuclear obligations Iran should meet, and reporting back on Friday when the Joint Commission will meet again.

“The talks in Vienna were constructive,” Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi told Iranian state television.

And US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters in Washington: “It is a welcome step, it is a constructive step, it is a potentially useful step,” even as he repeated the US expectation that the indirect talks would be “difficult.”

A resolution of the nuclear issue could help ease tensions in the Middle East. — AFP/Reuters

Sudan abolishes Israel boycott law: Cabinet

KHARTOUM: Sudan’s cabinet approved a bill on Tuesday abolishing a 1958 law on boycotting Israel, six months after Khartoum and the Jewish state struck a deal to normalise ties.

“The council of ministers approved a bill repealing the 1958 boycott of Israel law,” it said in a statement.

At the same time, it reiterated “Sudan’s firm position on the establishment of a Palestinian state within the framework of a two-state solution”.

The 1958 law was in line with the policies of Arab nations at the time towards Israel.

Penalties for those who violated its stipulations, such as trading with Israelis, included up to 10 years in jail and a hefty fine.

But the political landscape has changed as Sudan, along with the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco, have struck normalisation deals with Israel mediated by ex-US president Donald Trump’s administration.

Sudan agreed to normalise ties with Israel last October, in a quid pro quo for Washington removing the country from its “state sponsors of terrorism” blacklist. — AFP

Yemen gravediggers, bulldozer join forces against Covid



A Yemeni worker helps as a digger (background) digs graves at a specific plot for Covid-19 victims, at a cemetery in Taez. – AFP

TAEZ, Yemen: Between the mountain ranges of Taez, dozens of fresh graves are being hastily dug in Yemen’s third city to deal with a spike in deaths from Covid-linked complications.

Groups of men, most of them wearing neither masks nor gloves, carry caskets to Al Saeed cemetery and its row upon row of new graves.

At the same time, a truck arrives, carrying mourners — along with more bodies.

People are struggling to bury their dead in the southwestern city amid a surge in cases of

coronavirus that the war-torn country is badly equipped to combat.

Besieged for years by Ansar Allah fighters and their snipers, the gravediggers of Taez are under constant threat and cannot work fast enough. Health measures, such as wearing surgical rubber gloves to bury Covid-19 victims, are not a priority here.

“We are receiving nine or 10 bodies a day,” Shaban Qaed, a cemetery official, said.

“We brought in people from the marketplace to dig with us but still haven’t been able to keep up

with demand for new graves, and we’ve had to hire a bulldozer.”

Men in traditional costume gathered around the last freshly-dug graves on Saturday for a funeral procession, with the rumble of a bulldozer at work in the background.

In other parts of the cemetery, women in black sat near the graves, reading from the Quran holy book.

The United Nations says the number of new Covid-19 infections in the impoverished country has more than doubled in past weeks. — AFP

Gaza Strip’s daily virus cases reach all-time high

GAZA CITY: The Gaza Strip has registered its highest daily number of coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

In the past 24 hours, 1,916 new cases were recorded in the Palestinian territory, which is one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

A total of 4,982 tests were said to have been carried out on Tuesday, of which more than a third were positive.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, a total of 642 people have died in the coastal strip after being infected, according to the

ministry.

Authorities say more than 27,600 residents have received an initial vaccination so far, and more than 8,000 have been fully vaccinated with a second dose.

The United Arab Emirates has donated tens of thousands of doses of the Russian vaccine Sputnik V.

In the Gaza Strip, about 2 million people live in cramped quarters, in sometimes deplorable conditions and with poor medical care. On May 22, the Palestinian territories are scheduled to conduct their first parliamentary elections in 15 years. — dpa



A girl reacts as a health worker collects her nasal swab sample at a local clinic for Covid-19 testing in Gaza City on Wednesday. – AFP

ISTANBUL

Turkey sentences 38 former soldiers to life

A court in Ankara on Wednesday sentenced 38 former senior soldiers to life in prison in a major trial over the failed 2016 coup by a military faction. Six of the defendants received aggravated life sentences for “violating the constitution,” according to state news agency Anadolu.

Aggravated life sentences are the most severe prison terms possible in Turkey since the abolishing of the death penalty in 2002. There is no chance for parole. The court handed 106



defendants jail sentences of up to more than 16 years for violating the constitution, Anadolu said.

Other charges included the attempted assassination of the president. — dpa

CAIRO

‘All options open’ in Nile dam row: Sisi

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al Sisi on Wednesday said “all options are open” in his country’s long-standing dispute with Ethiopia over a Nile dam, which Cairo fears will reduce its supply of water.

Ethiopia began building the 4.8-billion-dollar hydroelectric dam on the Blue Nile, one of the Nile’s major tributaries, in 2011, raising concerns in the two downstream countries, Egypt and Sudan.

“I tell the Ethiopian broth-



ers that we should not reach the point where they touch a drop of water from Egypt because all options are open,” he said in televised remarks at a Cairo ceremony. — dpa

TEHRAN

Iran’s daily virus cases soar to nearly 21,000

Iran passed its daily record of coronavirus infection on Wednesday as cases reached 20,954 - up by more than 3,500 from the previous day, the Iranian health ministry said.

Authorities have blamed the surge above all on millions of Iranians ignoring guidelines and travelling or holding family gatherings during the Nowruz holiday that began on March 20.

Iran, the pandemic’s epicentre in the Middle East, has reported a total of 1,984,348 cases. Health



Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari told state TV that 193 people had died from the coronavirus since Tuesday, bringing the total of fatalities to 63,699. — Reuters

In brief

■ BANGKOK



THAI RESCUE UNIT FREES BUDDHIST MONK TRAPPED IN CAVE

Thai rescue workers said on Wednesday they had freed a Buddhist monk trapped inside a flooded cave in Thailand's Phitsanulok province, after he went inside days ago to meditate.

The monk, identified by a local rescue unit as 46-year-old Phra Ajarn Manas, was on a pilgrimage from another province and had gone into the Phra Sai Ngam cave in Phitsanulok on Saturday.

An unseasonal rainstorm that struck on Sunday and continued through Tuesday flooded parts of the cave while he was inside, the local rescue unit said on its Facebook page.

— Reuters

■ ISLAMABAD



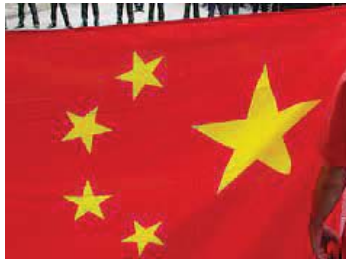
PAKISTAN PASSES 15,000 DEATHS, OVER 700,000 CORONAVIRUS CASES

Pakistan on Wednesday passed the grim milestone of 15,000 Covid-19-related deaths as the country struggles to contain the spread of the virus amid a third wave of the pandemic.

The death toll now stands at 15,026, with 102 deaths reported during the last 24 hours, according to the health ministry. The total number of cases reached 700,188 with the addition of 4,004 new infections.

Authorities have put virus hotspots under lockdown, arrested dozens of people for not wearing face masks, and sealed restaurants and shops for violating restrictions. Schools will remain closed for another three weeks. — dpa

■ BEIJING



CHINA SENTENCES UYGHUR EX-GOVT OFFICIALS TO DEATH

Two Uyghur former government officials in China's Xinjiang have been handed death sentences for carrying out "separatist activities", a court said.

Shirzat Bawudun, a former head of the Xinjiang department of justice has been sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve on the charge of "splitting the country", according to a statement on the Xinjiang government website on Tuesday. Bawudun had conspired with a terrorist organisation, taken bribes and carried out separatist activities, Wang Langtao, Vice President of the Xinjiang Higher People's Court, said at a press conference. — AFP

Myanmar security forces kill 13 protesters

YANGON: Myanmar troops fired at anti-coup protesters on Wednesday, killing at least 13 people and wounding several, media said, as a series of small blasts hit the commercial capital Yangon and a Chinese-owned factory was set on fire.

The country's military ruler said the civil disobedience movement was "destroying" Myanmar.

More than 580 people have been killed, according to an activist group, in the turmoil in Myanmar since a February 1 coup that ended a brief period of civilian-led democracy. Nationwide protests and strikes have persisted since then despite the military's use of lethal force to quell the opposition.

Security forces opened fire on Wednesday on protesters in the northwestern town of Kale as they demanded the restoration of Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government, domestic media said.

A resident of the area and the Myanmar Now news outlet said 11 people were killed and several



A policeman keeps watch near the premises of the Yangon Regional Parliament in Yangon on Wednesday. — AFP

wounded.

Reuters could not independently verify the toll.

Two protesters were killed in the town of Bago near Yangon, Myanmar Now said.

At least seven small explosions were heard in Yangon, including at government buildings, a military hospital and a shopping mall, residents said. There were

no casualties and no claims of responsibility.

The US Embassy in Yangon said it had received reports of "handmade 'sound bombs', or fireworks meant to create noise and cause minimal damage".

A fire broke out in the Chinese-owned JOC Garment Factory in Yangon on Wednesday, the Fire Department said. There were no

Security forces opened fire on Wednesday on protesters in the northwestern town of Kale as they demanded the restoration of Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government

reports of casualties and no details on the extent of damage.

In another Yangon neighbourhood, activists set fire to the Chinese flag, according to pictures posted on Facebook.

China is viewed as being supportive of the military junta and last month arson attacks were made on 32 Chinese-invested factories in Yangon.

Details of the blasts and the fire were difficult to obtain because of the junta's curbs on broadband internet and mobile data services.

A spokesman for the junta could not be reached for comment.

increase immunity among its population of 1.35 billion people.

The mostly youth-led anti-coup movement's ability to organise campaigns and share information via social media and instant messaging has been severely hamstrung by curbs on broadband wireless internet and mobile data services.

Fixed-line services, which few in Myanmar have access to, are available.

"Myanmar has been subject to a stepwise collapse into the information abyss since February", Alp Toker, founder of Internet blockage observatory NetBlocks said.

"Communications are now severely limited and available only to the few".

With print media also halted, protesters have sought workarounds to get their message across, producing their own A4-sized daily news pamphlets that are shared digitally and printed for distribution among the public. — Reuters

Lavrov in Pakistan to discuss Afghan peace

ISLAMABAD: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrived in Islamabad on Tuesday in the first visit to Pakistan by a Moscow diplomat in nearly a decade as the cold-war rivals warm up to each other about the peace process in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Lavrov was set to discuss "prospects of transition in Afghanistan aimed at giving the Taliban insurgents a chance to join the country's political mainstream", an official said.

The Russian diplomat would hold talks with Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, military and intelligence leaders and his counterpart, a Foreign



Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi pose for a picture during a meeting in Islamabad, on Wednesday. — Reuters

Ministry statement said. Bilateral cooperation including in security and defence, counter-terrorism

and the Afghan peace process would be on the agenda, the statement added. — dpa

‘Suddenly we heard the scream: Flood!’



A woman cries over her relative who was found dead after heavy rain brought flash floods in East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia on Tuesday. — Reuters

ADONARA, Indonesia: Homeless, injured, and with his daughter dead, Sugeng stares blankly as he comes to grips with the devastation left by floods and landslides on Indonesia's Adonara island.

The 60-year-old was asleep with his family on Sunday night as torrential rain battered the community at the eastern end of the vast archipelago nation.

In seconds, their lives changed forever.

"Suddenly we heard people scream 'flood!'" said Sugeng, who

like many Indonesians goes by one name.

He and his wife fled their home, but their 20-year-old daughter Indri did not make it out alive and her body was later found on a beach. "She was trying to hold on to a cupboard but the current was so strong that she lost her grip", Sugeng said.

"We buried my daughter yesterday... I'm devastated."

Adonara island, home to about 125,000 people, was among the areas hardest hit by the floods and landslides that killed more

than 150 in Indonesia and neighbouring East Timor.

The disaster was triggered by heavy rain and wind from one of the region's most destructive cyclones in years, which ripped across a cluster of islands in the neighbouring Southeast Asian nations.

Far-flung Adonara, dotted with beaches and a volcano, is accessible only by boat. It has no local hospital. More than 50 residents were killed and a dozen were still missing on Wednesday. — AFP

Biden announces all adults eligible for Covid vaccine by April 19

WASHINGTON: All adults across America will be eligible for Covid-19 vaccines within two weeks, President Joe Biden announced on Tuesday, as economic powerhouse California set a June 15 target to fully reopen businesses.

The positive news from the United States — which has reported the most coronavirus deaths of any country but is now a leader in vaccine distribution — contrasted with a record daily toll in Brazil and Europe’s troubled rollout of the AstraZeneca shot.

Biden announced in a White House speech that he is moving up the deadline for all over 18 to be eligible for vaccines to April 19. The previous target had been May 1.

“Our vaccine programme is in overdrive. We’re making it easier to get a vaccination shot,” Biden told the nation. “We’re the first country to administer 150 million shots and the first country to fully vaccinate over 62 million people.”

Biden’s April 19 deadline means ending restrictions by age, health issues or other categories for people wanting to get vaccinated.

It would not necessarily mean that anyone could get a shot immediately, as distribution remains a work in progress.



President Joe Biden delivers remarks on a vaccination update from the State Dining Room at The White House, on Tuesday in Washington, DC. — AFP

Our vaccine programme is in overdrive. We’re making it easier to get a vaccination shot

JOE BIDEN
US President

Visiting a vaccination site in Virginia earlier, Biden said that while the worst of the pandemic is “not over yet,” vaccines mean it soon could be.

CALIFORNIA TO REOPEN
The news comes as California Governor Gavin Newsom said the state will fully reopen by

June 15 if the current rate of vaccinations continues, lifting all Covid-related restrictions on businesses and gatherings.

“We’ll be getting rid of the blueprint, as you know it today. That’s on June 15 if we continue the good work,” said Newsom, adding that mask-wearing requirements would remain.

Some 556,000 Americans have died from Covid-19, by far the highest toll reported in any country.

The International Monetary Fund meanwhile said accelerated vaccines and a flood of government stimulus spending, especially in the United States, meant it now predicts global economic growth this year of 6 per cent, up from a forecast of 5.5 per cent in January. — AFP

Left-wing party wins Greenland polls

COPENHAGEN: Greenland’s left-wing Inuit Ataqatigiit party pledged its opposition to a large rare earth mining project on Wednesday after winning a parliamentary election with more than a third of the votes.

The result of Tuesday’s election casts doubt on the mining complex at Kvanefeldt in the south of the Arctic island and sends a strong signal to international mining companies wanting to exploit Greenland’s vast untapped mineral resources.

Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) won 37 per cent of votes, compared to 26 per cent in the last election, overtaking the ruling social democratic Siumut party which secured 29 per cent of votes, according to official results.



Members of the Siumut party wave party flags as they celebrate following the exit polls results of the legislative election in Nuuk, on Tuesday. — AFP

The pro-mining Siumut party has been in power most of the time since 1979. Though not opposed outright to mining, IA has a strong environmental focus. It has campaigned to halt

the Kvanefeldt project, which aside from rare earths including neodymium — which is used in wind turbines, electric vehicles and combat aircraft — also contains uranium. — Reuters

UK begins rollout of Moderna vaccine

LONDON: Britain begins using Moderna’s Covid-19 vaccine on Wednesday in Wales just as its rollout of other shots has fallen to its lowest level this year due to a supply crunch caused by manufacturing problems at AstraZeneca.

Britain has surged ahead of the rest of Europe in the race to vaccinate its population, with almost half of its citizens receiving a first dose, but supply issues from its main Oxford-AstraZeneca shot have slowed progress in recent days.

Britain distributed almost 96,000 shots on Sunday and just over 105,000 on Monday, the lowest figures since the government started publishing daily numbers in January.



Pharmacists transport a cooler containing the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine at the Glangwili General Hospital in Carmarthen, Wales, Britain, on Wednesday. — Reuters

British ministers had warned the rollout would slow in April due to AstraZeneca’s manufacturing issues, including at a site in India. “The Moderna vaccine rollout begins today, starting with

Carmarthen in Wales,” Prime Minister Boris Johnson said. “We have ordered 17 million doses that will be going into arms across the UK in the coming weeks.” — Reuters

Polar bears forced to forage eggs as warming shrinks hunting area

PARIS: Hungry polar bears are increasingly foraging on seabird eggs as climate change shrinks their Arctic hunting grounds, but research published on Wednesday on the phenomenon highlights the struggle these apex predators have to adapt to their rapidly changing environment.

The climate change threat to polar bears is well known, driven by the extraordinary pace of change in the Arctic, which is warming twice as fast as the planet as a whole.

This is already leading to dwindling sea ice, cutting short the time they have to hunt seals, their preferred prey.

With a growing imperative to find alternative sustenance, polar bears have been pushed further

afeld in search of food, including scavenging in areas populated by humans.

Some bears are also coming ashore at the same time seabirds are nesting and are snacking on their eggs.

To measure how efficient these top-of-the-food-chain predators were at this foraging — and therefore how useful the eggs are to provide energy in their diets — researchers in Canada used drones to monitor them feeding from common eider duck nests on Mitivik Island, in Nunavut.

INEFFICIENT HUNTING
The study, published in the journal *Royal Society Open Science*, tracked how the bears approached the nesting site over a period of 11 days, as the number

The polar bear: apex predator of the Arctic

Classified as a marine mammal as its range is on sea ice

Ursus maritimus

▶ Length 1.8-2.7 metres (6-9 feet)	▶ Weight 360-590 kg (800-1,300 pounds)	▶ Habitat range Mostly on the sea ice of the Arctic Ocean. Depends on sea ice to hunt its main prey - seals	▶ Conservation status Threatened with extinction as sea ice declines due to climate change	▶ Population 22,000-31,000 ▶ Lifespan 25-30 years
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Sources: IUCN, WWF, CITES, NWF

AFP Photo/KT MILLER

AFP

of eggs were depleted.

“We found that later-arriving bears increasingly visited more empty nests and did not travel in an energy-minimising way, but became less picky in the clutches they consumed,” said lead author Patrick Jagielski, of the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research at the University of Windsor. Bears also did not consistently realise that the sudden appearance of a fleeing eider hen meant eggs were nearby.

“This study demonstrates that, while species are able to incorporate ‘less preferred’ resources into their diet when their primary prey becomes more difficult to obtain, they may not be able to do so efficiently,” the authors said. — AFP

RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil passes 4,000 new daily Covid deaths

Brazil has passed the grim milestone of 4,000 Covid-19 related deaths in 24 hours, the Health Ministry in Brasilia said on Tuesday, just over two weeks after the country recorded over 3,000 new daily Covid-19 related deaths for the first time.

Ministry data on Tuesday showed that 4,195 people died over the previous day, bringing the total death toll to 336,947, with more than 13.1 million cases of coronavirus confirmed.

Only the United States has



recorded higher figures. The health system in Brazil — a country of 210 million people — has collapsed or is on the verge of collapse in many areas. — dpa

BERLIN

Merkel backs ‘short national lockdown’

Chancellor Angela Merkel is in favour of tightening virus restrictions in Germany for a short period to stem rising case numbers, her spokeswoman said on Wednesday. Merkel backs calls for a “short national lockdown”, Ulrike Demmer said, noting that the country’s health system was under growing pressure.

Germany has been in some form of shutdown since November, but has struggled to bring case numbers under control in recent weeks with a surge in



the British variant of the virus. At their last meeting in March, Merkel and the leaders of Germany’s 16 states agreed national rules including strict shutdowns and possible curfews. — AFP

MEXICO

Candidate launches poll drive from coffin

A Mexican congressional candidate launched his election campaign in a coffin on Tuesday to highlight the country’s many thousands of deaths from the coronavirus pandemic and cartel-related violence.

Carlos Mayorga, a lower house candidate for the Encuentro Solidario party in the northern state of Chihuahua, said he was sending a message to politicians that people were dying “because of their indifference.”

Mayorga arrived inside a gold-



coloured casket at a campaign rally on a bridge between the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juarez and El Paso, Texas. He was accompanied by aides dressed in personal protective equipment. — AFP

A man who pioneered CSR initiatives...

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Medal of Honour on Raoul Restucci, Managing Director of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). This is in appreciation of his work which he did in the management of the company over the years. Also, this is an acknowledgement of the exemplary services he offered while adopting many value-added initiatives and activities meant for the service of the society.

Raoul Restucci is known for bringing corporate social responsibility to the forefront of the efforts being made for national building as well as strengthening the internal structure of the organisation. He has been protecting and defending the rights of the employees, building bridges between the management and the workers for direct internal contact. Such qualities and virtues of such personalities must be lauded. This was also required to motivate others to follow the path.

There is no doubt that this honour which has come directly from His Majesty the Sultan will leave a clear imprint in the fields of national work. It will also help in the elevation of the status of the country in this area of work. For such honour, usually, there are clear and precise criteria. Such leaders deserve to be appreciated as they tirelessly work more than, anyone else for progress and advancement



Ali Al Matani
ali.matani2@gmail.com

RAOUL RESTUCCI
IS KNOWN
FOR BRINGING
CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY TO
THE FOREFRONT
OF THE EFFORTS
BEING MADE
FOR NATIONAL
BUILDING AS WELL
AS STRENGTHENING
THE INTERNAL
STRUCTURE OF THE
ORGANISATION

wherever they are. They deserve to be duly honoured and acknowledged.

Though I knew very little about him, yet it would be unfair if I did not write few words about the virtues he possessed and those were in my knowledge. A friend of all, Raoul Restucci, is seen as a very important asset for the company as well as those individuals who were associated with him. He is known for his personal traits and character, particularly his modesty, politeness and big heart. His soft talking was always appreciated by everybody.

Under his 10 years of leadership, the company has made extraordinary achievements which were more than those done in the previous five decades. During his tenure at the helm, the company has left its mark in corporate social responsibility. It seemed as if he stood to strengthen all the efforts being made in public good. There are no government or non-government organisations in any governorates of the Sultanate which have not benefited from the corporate social investments by the PDO. He utilised all capacities and capabilities of its skilled cadre in offering services to the government while bringing any changes or up-gradation or the modernisation programmes.

Raoul Restucci has adopted a lean method in his style of management. This is because he realised that the job

always requires changes, adaptation and improvement for the development of the company. Perhaps the reason behind his style of management of the company was to develop the skills of the new generation of Omanis to be able to face all sorts of changes and challenges in all areas of their work. He remained committed to Omanisation.

The need and importance of environmental conservation were never overlooked by him. He took and supported all practical works and initiatives for the purpose. He is of the firm view that natural resources must be protected. Therefore, he brought a lot of rules, terms and conditions to serve this objective which is dear to his heart so that natural balance is maintained.

During the tenure of Raoul Restucci, there was a surge in local investments in oil concession areas. It has enabled companies to take responsibilities for support services in the oil and gas sector. It helped in setting up five major local investment companies in the concession areas. The company provided funds and strengthened them with tenders worth millions to establish local companies and absorb people of these areas. It is not easy to mention or describe, in few words, all the virtues of the personality called Raoul Restucci. It is for us to see if we could give him the due honour or the respect he deserved.

WRITE FOR US

Oman Daily Observer welcomes original contributions for publication in its opinion page. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or edit the article accordingly. The article's length must not exceed 550 words. Please send the articles to opinion@omanobserver.om

WIDENING INEQUALITY

Rich world's 'near-monopoly' on Covid vaccines

MARTINE PAUWELS

Richer countries are failing a “rudimentary” test of global solidarity by hoarding Covid vaccines, Amnesty International said on Wednesday as it accused some countries of exploiting the pandemic to undermine human rights.

In its annual report, the campaigning rights organisation said the health crisis had exposed “broken” policies and that cooperation was the only way forward.

“The pandemic has cast a harsh light on the world's inability to cooperate effectively and equitably,” said Agnes Callamard, who was appointed Amnesty's secretary-general last month.

The richest countries have effected a near-monopoly of the world's supply of vaccines, leaving countries with the fewest resources to face the worst health and human rights outcomes

AGNES CALLAMARD
Amnesty International

“The richest countries have effected a near-monopoly of the world's supply of vaccines, leaving countries with the fewest resources to face the worst health and human rights outcomes.”
Amnesty strongly criticised the decision by former US President Donald Trump to withdraw

Washington from the World Health Organization (WHO) in the midst of the pandemic — a step now reversed by Trump's successor Joe Biden. Callamard called for an immediate acceleration of the global vaccine rollout, calling the inoculation campaign “a most fundamental, even rudimentary, test of the world's capacity for cooperation”.

Since the coronavirus emerged in China in late 2019, the pandemic has claimed more than 2.8 million lives globally and infected at least 130 million people. Despite regular calls for global solidarity from international organisations, figures show widening inequality in access to vaccines.

According to an AFP count, more than half the 680 million-plus doses administered worldwide have been in high-income countries, such as the United States, Britain and Israel, while the poorest have received only 0.1 per cent of the doses. At the end of March, the WHO warned of an increasingly unbalanced distribution of vaccines.

Amnesty International has supported initiatives such as the WHO's vaccine exchange platform C-TAP to share know-how, intellectual property and data.

The under-used initiative could be used to build production capacity and additional vaccine production sites, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America, according to the WHO.

Amnesty dismissed as “paltry half-measures” decisions like those of the G20 group of nations to suspend debt repayments for 77 nations.

— AFP

VULNERABILITIES

As American cities embrace tech, cyberattacks pose real-world risks

JACK GRAHAM

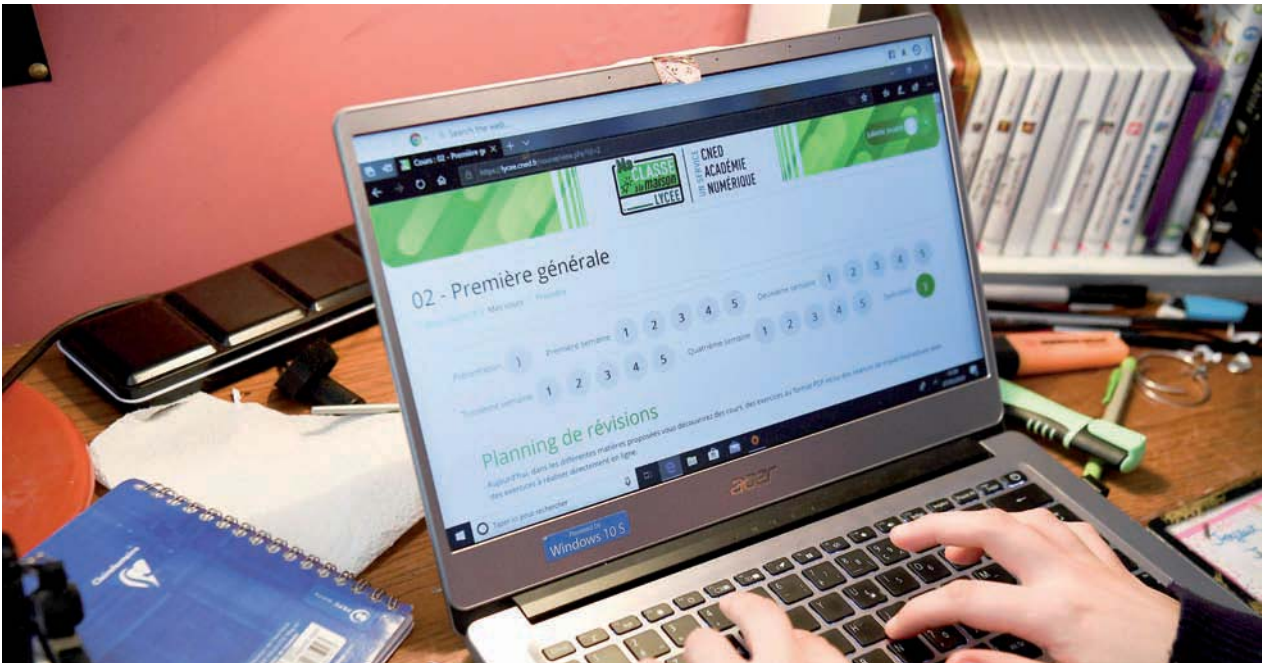
The word “cyberattack” usually brings to mind hackers breaking into a company or government agency, wreaking havoc and stealing valuable data. But for an employee at a Florida water treatment facility, an even scarier event took place in February.

On his shift at the plant, which treats water for about 15,000 people in Oldsmar, a town near Tampa, he noticed that the levels of a chemical additive in the water were increasing.

Hackers had remotely gained access to the plant's computer system and were adding more sodium hydroxide to the water supply. Typically used in small amounts to control acidity, at higher levels it can become dangerous to drink. The employee alerted his boss, the command was reversed and the crisis was averted.

But for cybersecurity experts in North America, the Oldsmar attack is a warning of how the shift towards smart technologies like remote access during Covid-19 is making cities and their critical infrastructure more vulnerable to attacks.

“Digital transformation has a soft underbelly, which is a digital risk,” said Grant Geyer, chief product officer of Claroty, an industrial cybersecurity firm headquartered in New York. “The same connections that enabled new emerging technologies to help the world also provide the perfect venue for cybercriminals and nation-state-sponsored actors to conduct malfeasance, not just in the cyber



Digital transformation has a soft underbelly, which is digital risk. — AFP

THE OLDSMAR
ATTACK IS A
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TOWARDS SMART
TECHNOLOGIES IS
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MORE VULNERABLE
TO ATTACKS

world but (also) in the physical world,” he said in a phone interview.

That means it is not only private digital information that could be at stake, but also the water people drink, the energy they use and even their lives. Last September, German prosecutors opened a homicide case after a woman died when her ambulance had to be diverted because the first hospital it arrived at in Duesseldorf was unable to admit her due to a cyberattack.

If prosecuted, it would be the first case of someone dying as the direct consequence of a cyberattack.

Several major US cities, including Los Angeles and New York,

have poured resources into their cybersecurity efforts. However, many small- and mid-sized cities lack the funding and expertise to bulk up their cyber defences, said Scott Shackelford, chair of the cybersecurity programme at Indiana University Bloomington, who runs a free cybersecurity clinic.

Mostly catering to local governments, the clinic advises on things like managing data and dealing with ransomware — a type of malicious programme hackers use to take control of computer files so they can demand hefty payments to recover them.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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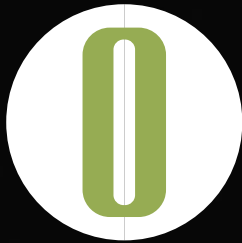
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R E A L M A D R I D' S VINICIUS AT DOUBLE TO RATTLE LIVERPOOL

MADRID: Real Madrid forward Vinicius Jr. came of age to score twice as his side punished a sloppy Liverpool to win 3-1 at home in Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final first leg.

The 20-year-old Brazilian fired the 13-times European champions into the lead in the 27th minute at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium after controlling a long diagonal pass from Toni Kroos from his own half which flummoxed the Liverpool defence.

Marco Asensio put the hosts further at ease by scoring in the 35th after a Kroos pass again caused havoc among the visiting backline but Liverpool looked more settled after the interval and a scrappy Mohamed Salah strike pulled them back into contention early in the second half.

But they failed to build on their momentum and Vinicius, who has a reputation for thrilling play but a lack of composure in front of goal, struck again in the 63rd minute, blasting past Liverpool keeper Alisson after clever combination play between Karim Benzema and Luka



Modric. Asensio missed a clear chance to grab Madrid's fourth goal, while Liverpool threatened late on.

Yet the visitors were unable to find a second away goal to take back with them to Anfield next Wednesday and the game ended with the same scoreline as in the 2018 Champions League final.

Vinicius, who kissed the Real badge after scoring his first goal was pleased to finally deliver on the biggest stage of all and silence the doubters who claimed he lacked the bottle to succeed at

Real. "The people on the outside can keep talking but I kept on working, that gave me the strength to rise to an important occasion and get the goals we needed," he told reporters.

Real coach Zinedine Zidane added: "That felt great, we played superbly but then had problems in the second half but recovered and produced a great performance, I'm so proud of the players. But there's still the second leg to come."

Real were dealt a huge setback on the morning of the game with the news that Raphael Varane



had tested positive for Covid-19, leaving Zidane's side without their two top centre backs as captain Sergio Ramos watched on injured.

But it was the heart of Liverpool's defence, depleted for the majority of the season and composed in Madrid of the inexperienced Nathaniel Phillips and Ozan Kabak, that suffered the most pain.

Kroos's incisive ball from deep caught out Phillips as Vinicius controlled it with his shoulder before confidently slotting past Alisson.

Liverpool were soon caught out again by a Kroos pass, a panicked Trent Alexander-Arnold heading the ball to the feet of Asensio, who chipped Alisson then followed his shot into the net.

'NOT SHARP ENOUGH'

"Two moments of not concentrating enough and they scored. We weren't sharp enough," said midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum.

"We hoped for a better result." Visiting coach Juergen Klopp brought on Spain midfielder

Thiago Alcantara for Naby Keita before halftime and his side looked more settled after the interval, with Salah deservedly pulling them back into contention.

But they again made things too easy for Madrid, who live for Champions League knockout matches and looked as at ease here at their tiny empty training ground as they do on these occasions at a bursting Santiago Bernabeu, currently under reconstruction.

"If you want to go to the semi-final, you have to earn the right to do so. We didn't do that tonight, especially in the first half," said Klopp.

"The only good thing I can say, apart from the goal, is it's only the first half of the tie."

Liverpool will take solace from the fact they managed to overturn a 3-0 deficit against Barcelona in the semi-finals in 2019 but in the second leg, they will be unable to count on the scorching atmosphere at Anfield, where they have lost their last six league games. — Reuters



AL FAISAL AND SOUCEK TO BID FOR GT OPEN TITLE

MUSCAT: Ahead of the International GT Open Winter Test at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya in Spain, due to be held on April 19-20, Lechner Racing's CEO, Walter Lechner Jr, has expressed confidence in his team of Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and Spain's Andy Soucek, as the team returns to the International GT Open 2021 campaign.

With a mix of youth and experience in Al Faisal and Soucek, the team has entered in the Pro category in Porsche latest GT3 model – the 911 GT3 R – and Lechner Jr is delighted to be back in the highly-competitive campaign over seven races.

In his remarks to the official website of the GT Open series, Lechner Jr said, "We had planned to return to the championship already last year, but due to the difficult circumstances we postponed the commitment by a year.

"We have never had so much time to prepare for the season — from the race car to the truck, we rebuilt everything and are now even better prepared.

"After the big family loss [demise of founder Walter Lechner in December 2020], we're sticking together even more and we're sure we'll have a spotter looking down from above."

Walter Lechner was the man behind the successful Porsche Sprint Challenge Middle East, which has been running for more than ten years and his team was the most victorious in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup.

For Al Faisal, who is just 22, Porsche Sprint Challenge Middle East has been the shining example of his fledgling career, having won the event two times in a row (2018-19) and the Omani racer credits the Late Walter Lechner for supporting and guiding him.

Having had a fruitful partnership with Lechner Racing since 2018, Al Faisal has extended that partnership to a new stage in endurance racing.

The Omani driver is teaming up with 2009 Formula 2 champion and an experienced GT star in Soucek.

Al Faisal said, "After so many years of working with Lechner Racing in the Porsche Sprint Challenge Middle East, I am looking forward to taking the next step on the international stage with the same team. My thoughts will often be with Walter Lechner Jr, from whom I learned everything at the beginning of my career and to whom I owe a lot."

For Soucek, it was a dream to drive for

an Austrian team. He said, "By joining Lechner Racing, the dream of driving for an Austrian team can finally come true. I believe we have a strong package, and I will try to use all my GT3 experience and know-how to be a valuable asset to the team.

"It's also a pleasure to return to GT Sport events, an environment I know since my times in the Spanish Formula 3 championship which I won in 2005."

Backed fully by Al Manar Financial Investments, Al Faisal is eager to be behind the wheels of his new car at the Winter Test before the series begins at the famed Paul Ricard circuit in France on May 16.

"The car is ready and I am eager to test it in Barcelona. This is my debut endurance series and I am all ready for the challenge along with Andy [Soucek].

"He brings in lot of experience and we are confident of making an impact in the series and achieve success."

The series has been affected by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic with the organisers cancelling the opening round in Algarve, Portugal, on April 25. The race has been replaced by a race at Imola, Italy, in July.

Fifa suspends Pakistan, Chad football federations

LOZAN: Fifa has suspended the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) due to third-party interference and also the Chadian Football Association (FTFA) with immediate effect due to government interference, soccer's global governing body said on Wednesday.

A group of football officials led by Ashfaq Hussain, which was elected by the Supreme Court in 2018 to run the PFF but was not recognised by Fifa, took over the headquarters recently and seized control from the Fifa Normalisation Committee headed by Haroon Malik, local media reported.

Fifa said in Wednesday's statement that its decision to suspend the PFF was prompted by the "hostile takeover" which constituted a serious violation of its statutes.

"Fifa issued a letter warning that, should the illegitimate occupation of the PFF

headquarters not be lifted and the office bearers recognised by Fifa not be permitted free access to the building to carry out their mandate, the matter would be immediately submitted to the Bureau of the Council for decision," Fifa said.

"As the situation remains unchanged, the Bureau of the Council has decided to suspend the PFF."

Pakistan was also suspended by Fifa for third party interference in 2017

The Chadian Ministry of Youth and Sports had stripped the country's FA of its powers on March 10 following concerns over the way it was being run and a breakdown in communication.

Last month, the country was disqualified from the Africa Cup of Nations by the Confederation of African Football due to the interference.

— Reuters

Sailors battle the elements at Musannah Open

MUSANNAH: Unpredictable winds on the fourth day of competition at the Musannah Open Championships posed a new challenge to competitors across all classes with many struggling in the conditions. The day started well with clear skies and light winds but as the day progressed, the winds dropped completely before changing direction throwing many off course.

In the 49er class, the Indian pair of KC Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar retain top spot with Benjamin Talbot and Alex Burger of South Africa and the Chinese pairing of Hong Wei and Chao Xiang switching places from yesterday, ending the day with the Chinese team in second and the South African duo in third. Thai pairing Don and Dylan Whitcraft are fourth and the Omani team of Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi in fifth. Just a single point separates third to fifth leaving all to play for in tomorrow's races.



The top two in the 49er FX class switched places yesterday and switched back today. After today's races, China's Ye Jin and Chen Shasha return to the top with the team of Molly Highfield and Sandy Wing Chi Choi from Hong Kong in second. Thailand's Kamonchanok Klahan and Nichapa Waiwai stay in third place.

In the Laser class, Ryan Lo Jun Han took top spot with a second place and first place, repeating his form from yesterday. India's Vishnu Saravanan gained a place

from yesterday to finish the day in second while Keerati Bualong of Thailand is in third place.

Singapore's Ryan Lo Jun Han, leader in the Laser standard Class, said, "It was a very nice day for sailing today with light winds to begin with but difficult later on as we tried to find the wind from the sea breeze. It was also mentally a very tough day, but it is important to stay consistent and not have any major faults. I was excited to finish with a second and a first place, and I

hope that by the event of the competition I will be able to represent my country at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games."

Nethra Kumaman of India retained her position at the top of the leaderboard today, as she and her team-mates once more hold three of the top four places. Dutch sailor Emma Savelon is second, Harshita Tomar is third and Ramya Saravanan is fourth. Stephanie Norton from Hong Kong is currently fifth, level on points with fourth place, and Kim Jia of South Korea is sixth with just four points separating third place and sixth place.

Nethra Kumaman, current leader in the Laser Radial class, said, "My aim is to be consistent and keep the points low so that I have an advantage going into the final days. Today was difficult because the wind suddenly died then came back during the race and I made some mistakes, but there are still two days to go so we'll see what happens."

MAN CITY EDGE DORTMUND WITH LAST-GASP FODEN WINNER

MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Phil Foden grabbed a last-minute winner as they beat Borussia Dortmund 2-1 in their Champions League quarterfinal first leg on Tuesday after Marco Reus netted a late equaliser for the Germans at The Etihad.

While the visitors will be bitterly disappointed to have conceded a second goal so late, Dortmund will take heart from the away goal and their overall performance and believe they have a real chance in next Wednesday's return game.

City lacked their usual sharpness in the final third, with Pep Guardiola's false-nine tactic not delivering benefits on this occasion, but Foden's 90th minute goal gives them the edge.

Much of the focus before the game was on Dortmund's prolific 20-year-old Norwegian forward Erling Haaland and while he was relatively quiet he did force a fine save out of Ederson before creating Dortmund's equaliser.

City had taken a 19th minute lead with a classic counter-attacking move finished off by playmaker Kevin De Bruyne after Dortmund's former Liverpool midfielder Emre Can had given the ball away to Riyad Mahrez on the halfway line.

Mahrez started the break, finding De Bruyne who burst forward and fed Foden on the left, the Englishman's cross to the back post was over hit but Mahrez recovered to pick out De Bruyne in the middle and the Belgian slotted home.

Guardiola's side then had a penalty awarded but correctly overturned by VAR after a challenge by Can on Rodri.

Romanian referee Ovidiu Hategan believed Can's foot had struck Rodri in the face but replays showed it merely brushed his leg despite Rodri falling to the ground holding his face.



HARSH DECISION

The referee was at the centre of attention again when Ederson hesitated and Dortmund's Jude Bellingham nipped in and slotted the ball into the net but the 17-year-old was harshly ruled to have fouled the Brazilian.

Television replays showed Bellingham had played the ball and in fact it was Ederson who had made contact with the English youngster but VAR did not send the referee to the monitor.

Fuelled by that injustice but also given some belief that City's defence, which had not conceded a goal in the competition since the opening game of the group stage in October, could be breached, Dortmund were positive after the break.

Ederson came to City's rescue early in the second half, saving from Haaland with an outstretched foot as the German side pushed forward positively.

City had several chances to extend their lead though and paid the price for their uncharacteristic lack of precision in front of goal when Dortmund struck six minutes before the end.

Haaland's clever pass on the half-turn found Reus, who had timed his run perfectly and beat Ederson with a composed finish.

But then Foden, who had been the main culprit in wasting chances, made amends with a clinical finish from close range after being set up by Ilkay Gundogan following a deep ball from De Bruyne.

City would have had hoped for a more convincing victory but, after a night when they did not really hit their usual heights, they will take a 27th win in 28 games in all competitions and a slim advantage into the second leg. — Reuters

Al Suwaiq end contract with Shaker after league cancellation



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

HM Cup finalists Al Suwaiq club's board of directors ended the contract of team head coach Hakeem Shaker on Wednesday inline to the recent decision to cancel Omantel League and rest of 2020-21 season footballing competitions.

The club announced the decision on its official Twitter account thanking Iraqi coach Hakeem Shaker for his efforts with the team during the past period.

The Iraqi coach was the head of technical staff of Al Suwaiq for the last two months and he led the team in the final of the 2020-21 HM Cup Championship. The Northern Batinah-based team had suffered a 5-1 loss against Dhofar in the final clash on March 7.

Hakeem had replaced coach Salim Sultan who left the team in

February. Prior to the cancellation of Omantel League by the Oman Football Association due the rise in Covid-19 cases, the experienced Iraqi coach had guided Al Suwaiq to the fifth position in the league table with 17 points.

Shaker had led the team to many accomplishments including the team's triumph in the 2016-2017 HM Cup tournament against Dhofar.

The three-time HM Cup winners had signed contracts with four players before the end of March and ahead of the season termination decision.

Hakeem had equipped the team with four professional players from France, Germany, Moldova and Burkina Faso. The team's plan was to compete and obtain one of the top positions in league order. It is expected that the board of the clubs may revise the existing contracts for the next season.



features



Tapping into local knowledge to bring a seamless rose village tour experience

Planning to experience the rose harvest season in Jabal Akhdhar? Seeing the gardens is just one part of the experience. To meet mountain guru like Maher al Riyami, entrepreneur and local products advocate like Hamdan al Saqri and rose farmer and distiller like Baba Abdullah Salim will give you a 360-degree appreciation for what this season truly means... **P16**

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PHOTOGRAPHY



PSO ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF “COFFEE” PHOTO TILT, LAUNCHES APRIL THEME

The Photography Society of Oman (PSO) under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth announced the results of the monthly competition for last March, which focused on the arts and rituals of coffee... **Story on P14**

CHANGING WORLD



OMANI STUDENT-LED COMPANY INTRODUCES FIRE EXTINGUISHER THAT PUTS OUT FIRE FROM THE SOURCE

The Omani youth have become more creative in the field of scientific innovations, and as of today, has greatly contributed to the creation of products that benefit human society... **Story on P14**

READ



THE GIVING TREE

BY SHEL SILVERSTEIN

On its face, the story is about a tree's sacrificial love for a boy. the tree gives the boy her apples to sell, her branches to build a house, and her trunk to make a boat.

ENTERTAINMENT



KIM KARDASHIAN IS A BILLIONAIRE, SAYS FORBES

Reality television star, influencer and business owner Kim Kardashian West is officially a billionaire, according to an estimate from *Forbes*, making her debut on the exclusive global list only one year after her younger sister Kylie Jenner fell off of it... **Story on P15**

FASHION



PANDEMIC LENDS MODERN TWIST TO FRENCH VINTAGE FASHION SALES

In Artcurial's auction house overlooking the shuttered boutiques of the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris, vintage fashion expert Clara Vivien is overseeing the sale of hundreds of Chanel jackets, shoes and jewelled accessories – all online... **Story on P15**



Omani student-led company introduces fire extinguisher that puts out fire from the source

BY STAFF REPORTER

The Omani youth have become more creative in the field of scientific innovations, and as of today, have greatly contributed to the creation of products that benefit human society.

In the same line, the Aman Student Company from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Suhar came up with the ambitious idea of enhancing fire extinguishing products and developing them into what the students would call the FBS or Fire Bomp Socket.

Talking about the inspiration for the said product, Faisal al Bahri shared, "Electrical fires are a big problem all over the world. We realised that there are not a lot of products that address this problem. We also did not find products that fight the fire from its source. As a result, we embarked on a journey to create a product capable of combating fire problems with the least possible damage."

"All fire extinguishers work to extinguish the fire after its outbreak and need human intervention later. From here, we sought to find a self-working and safe product that helps to extinguish the electrical fire from the place of the plug," he added.

The vision of "Aman Student Company" is to be the first com-

pany locally and internationally in providing the best innovative and self-working products that fight electrical fires.

Wanting the product to be of high quality with the best effect and safety, Al Bahri said that they've set their eyes on more ambitious goals of making it globally competitive but at a friendlier price.

Aman Student Company is one of the modern companies in its field which started its work on research at the end of 2020. By the beginning of 2021, they released their products hoping to push them to the market this year.

About FBS, Khalsa al Toobi shared, "FBS is the first product of the company and the company seeks to manufacture it in commercial quantities and distribute it in the local market, as this product targets every institution, building and house to maintain its safety and the integrity of its properties and individuals."

After confirming the effectiveness of the product, a limited number was manufactured as an experimental product and distributed to some establishments and specialists in the field of electrical fires.

FBS is almost the largest development of Aman after a long series of primary and secondary research and experiments, some of which failed and some were successful. The team members sought to make the product more effective, so it

was re-manufactured with other equipment and other models until we reached the final form of the product, which we almost believe is the best for fighting electrical fires with minimal damage and without any human intervention.

She indicated that "the company's utmost ambition is to transform from a student company to a small or medium company. Like any company, we have plans for the short and long terms, where the near-term plan is to issue the product in the local market. As for the long-term plan, we are thinking of forming our own company and manufacturing fire-fighting products that were not previously found in the global market, with new ideas and high-quality standards."

The current product is a frame that can be easily installed on the electrical socket and when any electrical fire occurs, as soon as it catches



the spark of fire in the fuse connected to the plug, the powder material that extinguishes the fire is released before it extends to the outside of the plug. This kind of fires happens in high-voltage appliances such as air conditioners, water heaters and other electrical appliances.

PHOTOGRAPHY

PSO announces winners of "Coffee" photo tilt, launches April theme



THE PHOTOGRAPHY SOCIETY of Oman (PSO) under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth announced the results of the monthly competition for last March, which focused on the arts and rituals of coffee.

The Society received about 297 pictures showcasing the theme submitted for consideration by 190 amateur and professional photographers.



The gold medal went to the photographer Abdul Hamid al Balushi, photographer Iman al Hosni won the silver medal, while the bronze medal went to the FIAP photographer Said al Shuaili.

During the event, the Society announced the topic for this month entitled Welcome Ramadhan. The new theme revolves around the soul and body related preparations for the holy month. The last day of accepting submissions will be on April 27.



The competition requires that the photos submitted are taken by the participant himself using his phone or a professional camera. Four photos need to be submitted with the photos shared on the participant's personal accounts on Instagram tagging the competition name and then PSO.

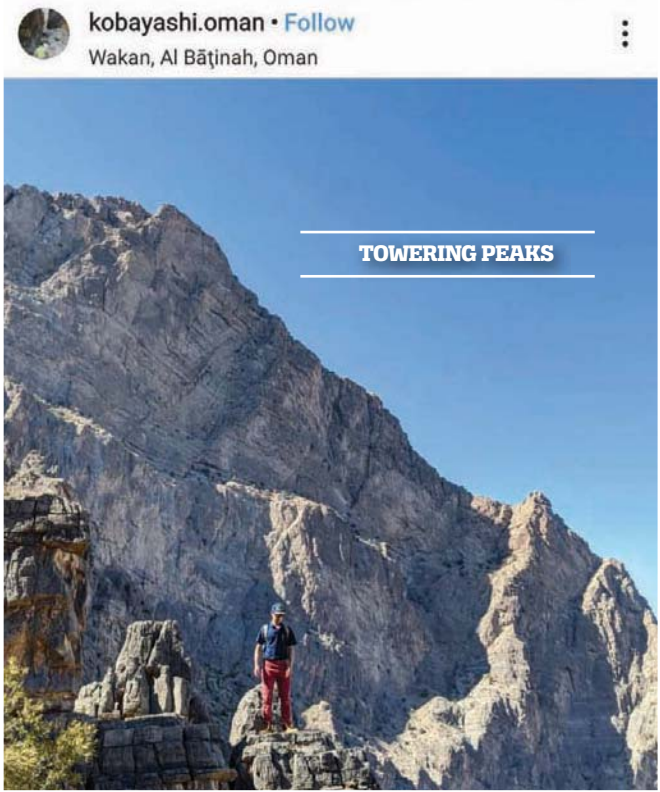
The photos will be judged by PSO heads and the three winners will be announced in the Society's official Instagram account at the end of the month.

The competition has been launched to keep the members active despite the ongoing restrictions implemented against the spread of Covid-19.



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AROUND THE WORLD

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California's
Carlsbad
Flower Fields
welcome
visitors with
full blooms

People took pictures amid waist-high blossoms in every imaginable hue of orange, pink, yellow and purple at California's famous Flower Fields in Carlsbad as it opened to the public.

The attraction was closed for most of 2020, due to pandemic-related restrictions, but plummeting coronavirus cases and California's move to the orange tier of lockdown restrictions means the fields can once again welcome a limited number of visitors.



"I am so happy we're open again," said general manager Fred Clarke. "Last year we were nine months in and we had to mow the crop down."

The fields, 34 miles (55 km) north of San Diego, showcase more than 70 million flowers, creating an annual spectacle when they bloom.

"It does feel like things are easing a little bit. It's just great to see the beauty and just get out and enjoy a day with my wife," said Artie Creighton, 53, from Corona, California.

"This is one of the first times that we've been out in a long time."

The Flower Fields, which are open to the public until May 9, are also a working farm that sells flowers, which end up at florists and supermarkets, Clarke said, explaining how they breed their own variety of ranunculus.

"We're hybridizing ranunculus and every year trying to improve the quality, the size of the flower, the brightness of the colour, the uniformity of the crop," he added.

"So every year we believe it's getting better and better." — **Reuters**

Pandemic lends
modern twist to
French vintage
fashion sales



In Artcurial's auction house overlooking the shuttered boutiques of the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris, vintage fashion expert Clara Vivien is overseeing the sale of hundreds of Chanel jackets, shoes and jewelled accessories — all online.

Paris may be the world's fashion capital, but a third Covid-19 lockdown is once again sending lovers of luxury who have time to spare and money to spend on to their screens in search of a the next vintage Chanel dress or Hermes handbag.

compared with pre-pandemic levels to 6.2 million euros, according to the online auction house aggregator Interencheres.

Antoine Saulnier, an auctioneer at Gros & Delettrez, said vintage fashion sales that before the pandemic might have attracted 100 online buyers were now drawing five or ten times that number.

"Prices are rising on some items as a result," said Saulnier as he prepared for the sale of nearly 600 Vuitton artefacts this week.

One collector who should know is



Vintage was already enjoying a revival, Vivien said, driven by a growing discomfort with "fast fashion" among consumers and increasing environmental awareness. But the pandemic shifted more of it online.

"Vintage is exploding on the second-hand market," Vivien said. "People can't walk into boutiques and so shop at online auctions."

Handbags sell particularly well. "People who bought a Chanel or a Hermes bag today delight in the knowledge that their investment doesn't stop growing, and with the pandemic increases with no end in sight."

Fashion and online vintage clothing sales more than quadrupled at online auction in France in 2020

Olivier Chatenet, a flamboyant 60-year-old stylist who spent his young adult life scouring the French capital's flea-markets and auction houses in the Drouot neighbourhood with his father.

His private collection is a treasure trove of Ungaro dresses, Chloe blouses and Sonia Rykiel overcoats. Several years ago he sold his entire Yves Saint Laurent collection — all 4,000 items.

"I try to be careful and buy at the right price," Chatenet said. But he admits he is not always successful.

"That moment the auction begins, when you have the item before you and you're overtaken by a frenzied desire to own it, you end up buying for more than you meant." — **Reuters**



Kim Kardashian
is a billionaire,
says *Forbes*

REALITY TELEVISION star, influencer and business owner Kim Kardashian West is officially a billionaire, according to an estimate from *Forbes*, making her debut on the exclusive global list only one year after her younger sister Kylie Jenner fell off of it.

Kardashian West's money comes from TV income and endorsement deals, according to the magazine, as well as her two lifestyle brands.

The star saw her wealth jump more than \$200 million just since October, *Forbes* estimated, from a worth of \$780 million last fall to \$1 billion this spring, only five years after the magazine first reported she had made her first \$51 million.

KKW Beauty was launched in 2017, often releasing cosmetic products in partnership with her four famous sisters that were heavily promoted through social media — Kardashian West alone has 69.7 million Twitter followers and 213 million Instagram followers.

By 2018, the company was making about \$100 million in revenue, according to *Forbes*, which has listed 2,775 billionaires in this year's rankings.

The 40-year-old's most recent project, Skims, launched in 2019 to offer underwear and loungewear in the founder's signature minimalist style, a move that proved lucrative during the work-from-home era.

Though the company — of which Kardashian owns a majority stake — has not disclosed revenue figures, *Forbes* has estimated its worth at more than \$500 million.

Jenner, the youngest member of the Kardashian family empire, fell out of the *Forbes* rankings in 2020 after the magazine claimed the 23-year-old had been inflating the size of her own cosmetic business. She had been named the world's youngest self-made billionaire in 2019 at age 21.

The family's hit reality show "Keeping Up With the Kardashians" is set to end this year after a 20-season run, as news also emerged earlier this year that Kardashian West had filed for divorce from rapper Kanye West. — **AFP**



Tapping into local knowledge to bring a seamless rose village tour experience

BY YERU EBUEN

Over the last few days and the three weeks that will follow, Jabal Akhdhar's gardens are seeing a massive amount of activity. The days between March and April are considered one of the most beautiful seasons for the Green Mountain with not only the rose coming into full bloom but also because it's the start of the flowering season of fruit trees like olives, walnuts, figs and pomegranates.

Jabal Akhdhar has become an impressive array of colours – the stark caramel landscape with its pockets of greens are now made even more beautiful by the overwhelming appearance of pink and

red blossoms. If there is a perfect time to go, it's this period when the temperature is several degrees lower than the rest of the country, getting chiller in the evening, and there are so many local activities happening in the morning.

As Maher al Riyami, a proud son of Jabal Akhdhar and now working nearly six years as a guest experience officer and guide for Anantara, there is no better time to come but when the flowers bloom.

"I've shown guests what Jabal Akhdhar can offer from a local's point of view. While I learn a lot through these interactions and gain a better perspective about the places our guests come from, I am also in a unique position to sell Oman as a destination", he said.

Maher's job is to become a focal person in the 'Rose Water of Jabal

Akhdhar' tour. It's a job that he does in tandem with another Jabal Akhdhar native. Showing the guests around in air-conditioned vehicles, he ushers them where to go and introduces them to rose farmers, local rose water manufacturers, and other key people in the community that make Jabal Akhdhar a truly exciting place to visit.

"Guests are impressed when they see where these roses are planted. When we show them the whole rose water distillation process and they meet hospitable distillers and farm owners like Abdullah Salim, our go-to person for this experience, they come out with better knowledge and a lasting impression of what makes Jabal Akhdhar and the rose season different", Maher said.

FROM THE GARDENS TO THE ROSE WATER BOTTLE

Hotels in Jabal Akhdhar are making the rose harvest season front and centre of their current package offerings. Because of the night lockdown, the best way to enjoy the rose harvest season is by grabbing these packages but ensuring that the stays have added entertainment and activities.

Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar is one of the prominent hotels that champions tapping into local knowledge to bring a seamless rose village tour experience to guests.

Mountain gurus like Maher takes the guests on a 90-minute guided tour of the famed damask rose farms. From the farms, guests would learn of how the flowers are cared for, the styles and techniques of harvesting and how these are delivered to distilleries. He also introduced them to some of their collaborative partners.

Hamdan al Saqri, also a Jabal Akhdhar native collaborates with different institutions to bring a different taste to the mountain experience. An entrepreneur who co-owns Fawah that specialises in aromatics and creating scents and food additives from local ingredients, Hamdan rents some of the best rose farms with a view and adds to the experience by sharing some scientific tidbits

While visits to Jabal Akhdhar are permitted, a word of caution needs to be communicated. When you do go for a visit especially during village walks, always make sure to wear masks. This is not only to protect yourself but particularly the vulnerable and ageing villagers

deeper understanding and appreciation for the culture and heritage.

ROSE SEASON IS ONLY FOR A MONTH

"The rose season is between March and April. In the next three weeks, the season will be over. After this week, there will still be rose flowers to harvest but they will be not as many as when the season started", Maher shared.

Out of the nearly 60 villages in Jabal Akhdhar, Maher said that nearly half of all the villages have Rose Gardens with some bigger than the others.

"Some of the villages are located very far down or remote that the conditions are not ideal for growing roses. For those farms, they grow date palms instead. The rose harvest season can be considered the best season in Jabal Akhdhar because of all the blossoms", Maher said.

Like Hamdan, locals and hotel operators are also finding a different way to tap the season for different experiences.

"The rose water spray that our company produces can be very refreshing if sprayed on the face during the hot day. The rose oil can also be used to cure headaches", Hamdan said.

From a luxury experience, Anantara's signature 90-minute 'Rose Rescue Ritual' utilises the soothing, balancing and hydrating qualities of the luxurious Damask roses for a session that pampers from head to toe. They have rose-themed welcome drinks and even use milk and rose petal foot rituals.

The rose season of Jabal Akhdhar has helped spur many economic activities. From being an important food additive, the essence and oil are also now used for spa treatments and massages.

While visits to Jabal Akhdhar are permitted, a word of caution needs to be communicated. When you do go for a visit especially during village walks, always make sure to wear masks. This is not only to protect yourself but particularly the vulnerable and ageing villagers.

business

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Listed firm challenges compensation award to former CEO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

The publicly traded Oman & Emirates Investment Holding Company (SAOG) says it has appealed against a ruling by a local court in the Sultanate awarding over RO 418k in compensation to the company's former CEO on grounds of "unfair dismissal".

In a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Tuesday, the Oman-UAE JV said that the ex-CEO had resigned from the company in August 2019.

"After submitting his resignation, the former CEO filed a lawsuit against the company demanding compensation for his unfair dismissal," it stated.

A copy of the judgement received earlier this week put the compensation at RO 417,874, the company noted in its filing, adding that the verdict has now being challenged in a higher court.

Oman has robust laws to combat money laundering, terror financing: CBO

DETERRENT LAWS: The Sultanate is a 'pioneer' in the region in the development of suitable legislation and regulations necessary to combat money laundering and terror financing: Executive President

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Sultanate continues to modernise its laws and strengthen its capabilities in the fight against money laundering and terror financing, Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), stressed on Wednesday.

Speaking at the opening of a webinar on 'Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT)', organised by well-known accounting and advisory services firm Crowe Oman, the official dubbed money laundering and terror financing as the twin evils of the present era.

"The Sultanate has continued steadily to strengthen its capabilities by taking proactive measures and practical steps to enhance the efficiency of its systems and expand the scope of activation of its legal statutes, the capabilities of its concerned agencies and through



The Sultanate has continued steadily to strengthen its capabilities by taking proactive measures and practical steps to enhance the efficiency of its systems

TAHIR BIN SALIM AL AMRI
Executive President, CBO

its preparation to keep pace with developments and advances on the local, regional and international arenas in combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism," Al Amri stated.

In a series of presentations, a panel of experts from Crowe Oman urged financial institutions and regulated entities, as well as non-financial organisations covered by the provisions of the AML / CFT law, to adopt steps to tackle potential risks of exposure to AML / CFT phenomena.

Earlier, the Executive President, who also chairs the National Committee on Anti-Money Laundering & Combating Financing of Terrorism (AML-CFT), described the Sultanate as a "pioneer" in the region in the development of suitable legislation and regulations necessary to combat money laundering and terror financing.

Oman's legal procedures and statutes, he said, comply with the "highest applicable international standards".

These encompass the original Forty Recommendations drawn up by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), as well as the decisions and recommendations of FATF in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA-FATF), various UN Security Council resolutions, operational agreements, and UN treaties ratified by the Sultanate.

"Furthermore, Oman believes in adopting best international practices applied in effectively combating money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism, with the aim of warding off these transboundary crimes away from Oman's promising and solid financial and economic systems and preserving and safeguarding its current and

future gains and achievements," Al Amri remarked.

Oman's efforts to tackle money laundering and terror financing can be traced back to the 1990s when the first of a series of deterrent legislative actions were adopted, said the Executive President.

Notable is Royal Decree 17/1999 promulgating the law on combating narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Chapter 8 of the Royal Decree criminalises money laundering resulting from illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, he said.

This was followed by the Law on Combating Money Laundering, promulgated by Royal Decree 34 / 2002 in response to the legislative needs of that period.

Seeking to align these domestic statutes with international strategies and conventions targeting these global menaces, the full-fledged Law on Combating Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism was promulgated by Royal Decree 79 / 2010, strengthened further by Royal Decree 30 / 2016.

For its part, the Central Bank of Oman has issued its own directives to all banks, exchange companies and finance and leasing companies operating in the Sultanate about AML / CFT related risks. On a similar note, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued its own directives to securities and insurance companies operating in the Sultanate, he added.

CMA places limits on overseas investments by insurance firms

SAFETY CURBS: The decision obliged the companies to limit the investment of their assets outside the Sultanate to the countries, financial institutions and instruments with a credit rating not less than - BBB in accordance with Standard & Poor's (S&P) rating or an equivalent

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued an administrative decision specifying the credit rating for the investment of the assets of insurance and Takaful companies outside the Sultanate.



The decision obliged the companies to limit the investment of their assets outside the Sultanate to the countries, financial institutions and instruments with a credit rating not less than - BBB in accordance with Standard & Poor's (S&P) rating or an equivalent.

The move comes to enhance the investments of the insurance

sector and to deal with the economic changes and the ability of the companies to face the investment challenges in addition to the economic value of the local market and the role of insurers and their saving schemes.

The decision is based on Article 5 of the Rules for Investment of the Assets of Insurance and Takaful Companies which confer on the

CMA the power to specify the minimum limit of credit rating for investment instruments as well as the countries and financial institutions.

The decision excluded the international bonds issued by the Omani Government to encourage the companies to invest in government bonds besides the unrated shares listed in the stock markets and investment funds and gave the companies the discretion to determine their risk appetite when investing in such instruments.

Insurance sector investments totalled RO 669.009 million at the end of 2020 (RO 634.793 million in 2019). Of this total, RO 414.38 million came from national insurance companies (RO 399.19 million in 2019), while RO 254.63 million was contributed by foreign insurance companies (RO 235.60 million in 2019).

'Green hydrogen' to cost less than natural gas

PARIS: 'Green hydrogen' produced using renewable energy will soon plunge in cost, becoming cheaper than natural gas in many areas, according to a study released by the research group BloombergNEF (BNEF).

Hydrogen is considered a leader in the race to develop sustainable energy sources and slash carbon emissions.

But it is expensive to produce and the electricity needed generates a lot of carbon dioxide emissions or other pollutants.

Green hydrogen is produced via electrolysis — an electrical current passing through water — with wind, solar or hydroelectric power providing the electricity.

BNEF researchers forecast its cost will fall steadily in the future, in large part due to lower prices for solar photovoltaic power (PV).



A new hydrogen fuel cell truck is pictured in Luzern, Switzerland. — Reuters

"We now think that PV electricity will be 40 per cent cheaper in 2050 than what we had thought just two years ago," BNEF specialists said.

"The costs of producing 'green' hydrogen from renewable electricity should fall by up to 85 per cent from today to 2050," they concluded.

In the majority of 28 markets covered by the study, green hydrogen production could cost less than one US dollar per kilogramme by 2050. — AFP

Key takeaways from MoCIIP media briefing

Several issues were raised by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), at the first media meeting held recently in the presence of representatives of various media outlets. The Ministry, after reviewing all of its strategies for the year, emphasised its commitment to attracting investments to expand the industrial and services sectors in the country.

The Ministry vowed to work in a harmonised manner, thus signalling to local and foreign investors that they will receive a clear-cut and coherent response to their applications and queries. There have been instances in the past of investors abandoning plans to invest in response to dithering, bureaucracy, and the

plurality of agencies dealing with their applications.

The Ministry also reaffirmed its commitment to promoting Omani exports to various countries around the world, by capitalising on Oman's seaports and airports to enhance non-oil exports.

It will strive to end the hegemony of some merchants who have monopolised as much as 50 per cent of goods and services. At the same time, it is working to protect merchants from unfair foreign competition via terms dumping, imports of cheap and inferior merchandise, and other uncompetitive practices.

This will protect national products and support the growth of high-spec and high-standard exports. It will also spread awareness among citizens and institutions of the importance



HAIDER ALLAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

THE MINISTRY VOWED TO WORK IN A HARMONISED MANNER, THUS SIGNALLING TO LOCAL AND FOREIGN INVESTORS THAT THEY WILL RECEIVE A CLEAR-CUT AND COHERENT RESPONSE TO THEIR APPLICATIONS AND QUERIES

of buying national products, especially through government procurement.

In addition to supporting national industries, promoting exports and attracting investments, the Ministry is preparing to launch 50 industrial investment opportunities after evaluating their feasibility — a move that will pull in around RO 200 million into the national economy, as well as promote import substitution and limit foreign exchange outflows.

It is also working to address the problem of multiple commercial registrations, which constitute a hurdle for investment and increase the risks posed by the hidden trade.

The hidden trade in particular relies on expatriate workers who, when made redundant at some point, then flood the local market.

At the same time, the Ministry is embracing modern paperless processes to help create a competitive work environment aimed at reducing time, effort and bureaucracy in its dealings with investors.

Also, as we prepare for the implementation of value-added tax, there will inevitably be an increase in the prices of some goods, products and services, potentially adding to the pandemic-induced woes of many owners of small and medium enterprises.

Everyone is eager today for an improvement in the pandemic situation, so the task of promoting investments can be pursued vigorously. After all, foreign direct investment and economic diversification are key to driving job creation for citizens as set out in Oman Vision 2040.

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OABC hosts Al Yousuf in Virtual Majlis



MUSCAT: The Oman American Business Center (OABC) hosted a Virtual Majlis with Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The session presented a unique opportunity for members of the OABC to engage and ask specific questions to better understand the vision and future plans of MoCIIP. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf discussed incentives for foreign investors and other key information about

how the plan will impact the future and Oman Vision 2040. The session also addressed business continuity and steps to mitigate the challenges faced by companies due to the pandemic.

OABC President and Chairman Ali Daud opened the session and thanked the official guest of honour: US Ambassador to Oman, Leslie Tsou, before introducing the Minister and the session's moderator, OABC Board Member and Treasurer, William Crew of Inspired Solutions.

PRESS RELEASE

BANKDHOFAR HOLDS AGM

The Board of Directors of BankDhofar has conducted its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Wednesday, March 31, 2021. The meeting, held online through the electronic platform for holding general meetings, was chaired by Eng Abdul Hafidh bin Salim al Aujaili, Chairman of the Board, and attended by the board members, senior management of the Bank and shareholders.

The AGM approved the Report of the Board of Directors of the Bank on the business and financial position of the Bank for the financial year ended on December 31, 2020.

The meeting approved the cash dividend, which will be distributed to the shareholders, at the rate of 4 baisas per share (4 per cent). The meeting brought to the attention of shareholders the transactions in which the Bank entered with related parties during the financial year ended on December 31, 2020. The sitting fees, being availed by the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board sub-committees along with the members of the Sharia Supervisory Board for the financial year ended on December 31, 2020, were ratified and the sitting fees for the next financial year were specified.



OAB HOLDS WORKSHOP ON PANDEMIC UPDATES FOR STAFF

In light of the current rise of Covid-19 pandemic cases and with the aim of generating awareness among staff on the developments of the pandemic

and methods of dealing to deal with it, the Human Resources Division at OAB organised a virtual workshop on Tuesday, April 6. Conducted in collaboration with the Royal Hospital, the workshop highlighted the new Covid-19 variants, which has led to the spread of the new wave during the last few weeks. These developments have brought about the need to be prepared to deal with the new strain, while simultaneously continuing to adhere to preventive measures to reduce the spread and risk of infections.

Adil al Rahbi, Head of Human Resources Division at OAB, said, "With the upcoming developments taking place, it has now become vital for people to think proactively. Therefore, we decided to conduct this workshop, which is also a part of the Wiqaya programme, launched by the Human Resources Division since the onset of the pandemic, which includes several preventive measures that have been taken to reduce the risk internally within the Bank"



VAT non-compliance attracts stringent fines and penalties



**DAVIS
KALLUKARAN**

Oman Vat regime is aligned to the GCC VAT framework. The UAE and Saudi governments had gone ahead with the implementation of VAT in 2018 followed by Bahrain in 2019. This gives great advantage to Oman to learn the issues, challenges and the solutions to problems faced by those countries in the implementation of VAT.

The VAT Law will be applicable in Oman from April 16, 2021. The law consists of 13 chapters and talks about a standard rate of 5 per cent for goods and services with limited number of zero ratings and highest number of exemptions compared to other countries in the region.

This is significantly lower than the OECD average rate of 19 per

cent. The expected annual revenue from VAT is about RO 400 million. The executive regulations issued subsequently consists of 13 chapters consisting of 211 articles.

Exempt and zero-rated categories

The law has exempted or zero-rated most of the food items, medical, educational, travel expenses, renting and sale of residential properties and many more subject to certain conditions.

The VAT registration has already started from February 1, 2021 and is taken up in stages. The threshold limit for mandatory registration is RO 38,500 and those above RO 19,250 can also voluntarily register especially to get the refund of VAT paid on procurement.

Right from the registration to the administration of the VAT regime, strict fines and penalties have been enacted in the law for non-compliance. Taxable persons including business corporates need to be aware of the provisions of the VAT Law that can invite administrative fines and penalties for non-compliance.



Administrative penalties are additional amounts payable by a person and may also attract imprisonment for breaching the provisions of the VAT Law.

According to Article 100 of the VAT Law, the following non-compliances may lead to a fine ranging from RO 1,000 to RO 10,000 and/or an imprisonment from two months to one year:

- Failure to identify the responsible person or appoint another person in his/her absence
- Intentional failure to notify any changes in the registration details
- Intentional failure to maintain tax invoice or records

- Failure to submit a VAT return or filing an incorrect return or failure for timely submission of records
- Failure to issue VAT invoice or issues an incorrect VAT invoice

- Committing any act to prevent the authority from carrying out their duties.

As per Article 101 of the VAT Law, the following breaches may lead to a fine ranging from RO 5,000 to RO 20,000 and/or imprisonment from one year to three years:

- Deliberate failure to register
- Deliberate failure to

report correct taxable value and tax payable on VAT return

- Submitting forged returns and documents to evade tax payment
- Deliberately destroying, concealing or disposing of documents and records and

- Intentionally instigating or assisting taxable person in submitting incorrect returns or documents.

Further Article 202 of the Executive Regulations also talks about disciplinary penalties in the event of certain failures which may lead to a fine of RO 500 to RO 5,000. This may arise in the following situations:

- Failure to submit tax returns on the legally prescribed dates for submission
- Failure of the taxable person to display the Registration Certificate in a visible place according to Article 123 of these regulations
- Failure of the taxable person whose registration has been cancelled fails to keep accounting records and books, and documents

Moreover, certain non-compliances as per Article 203 of the Executive Regulation may lead to a fine of RO 1,000 to RO 10,000 in the following cases:

- Refund of the Tax based on incorrect documents or details
- Failure of the taxable person to apply to cancel the registration from the Tax in the compulsory cases specified in the VAT Law

- Failure of the person who incorrectly received a Tax refund to repay the amount due as soon as person becomes aware of the error
- Failure to present prices of Goods and Services inclusive of Tax

Under the VAT regime, it is advisable for the taxpayer to be aware of the consequences of non-compliance to the VAT Law and should seriously look-forward for timely registrations and VAT impact assessment in their organisations.

[Davis Kallukaran is the Founder and Managing Partner of leading audit and tax advisory firm, Crowe Oman]

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Observer

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

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Nokia, Lenovo settle patent fight

Finland's Nokia has settled a multi-year patent fight with China's Lenovo Group, resolving all pending litigation across all jurisdictions, the companies said. — Reuters



US dollar at two-week low

The dollar index hit a two-week low against a basket of currencies of 92.246, slipping further from a five-month high of 93.439 set on March 31, and last stood at 92.343. — Reuters



Indonesia's forex reserves down

Indonesia's foreign exchange reserves fell by \$1.7 billion in March as the central bank defended the rupiah currency amid capital outflows triggered by rising US Treasury yields. — Reuters

G20 finance leaders to meet on pandemic measures, US global minimum tax plan

WASHINGTON: Finance officials from the Group of 20 major economies are poised to back a \$650 billion boost in the IMF's emergency reserves on Wednesday and extend a freeze on debt payments as part of an effort to help developing countries still struggling to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

The G20 gathering, taking place virtually on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, will also give US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen a chance to press for a global minimum tax on corporate profits.

The IMF on Tuesday raised its 2021 global growth forecast to 6 per cent, reflecting a rapidly brightening outlook for the US, but it warned that emerging market economies were lagging advanced economies. Pointing to a dramatic divergence between the outlook for the United States and much of the rest of the world, it said the pandemic threatened to reverse years of progress in reducing poverty.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told an event with Yellen and World Bank President David Malpass that richer countries should ensure low-income countries received coronavirus vaccinations for the sake of everyone. "We have no way to get through (this) without pulling together", she said.

Expanding the IMF's reserves, or Special Drawing Rights, would boost liquidity for all members, without adding to the debt burden of the 30-some countries already in or facing debt distress, finance officials and economists said.

Extending the current freeze on debt service payments by the



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva speaks at a press briefing in Washington, DC. — Reuters

IMF raises its growth forecast for UK economy

LONDON: The International Monetary Fund raised its forecast for British economic growth which is set to outpace the eurozone this year after its slump in 2020 but is unlikely to regain its pre-pandemic size until some time in 2022.

The IMF said Britain's economy would grow by 5.3 per cent in 2021, up from a previous forecast of 4.5 per cent it made in January, helped by the country's fast Covid-19 vaccination programme and a latest round of stimulus by the government.

Britain has suffered Europe's highest Covid-19 death toll and its economy shrank by



People pass by closed shops in central London. — Reuters

almost 10 per cent last year, the worst performance among the region's big economies except for Spain.

But it has moved more quickly than almost all other countries with its coronavirus vaccination programme. Almost half the total population of the United Kingdom has had

a first jab compared with less than 15 per cent in Germany and France.

The International Monetary Fund forecasts published on Tuesday predicted growth of 4.4 per cent for the eurozone in 2021 and 3.6 per cent for Germany, while France was expected to show a 5.8 per cent expansion.

However, the IMF forecasts do not take into account new lockdown measures announced by France and other countries in continental Europe in recent weeks.

Britain is in the process of easing its third lockdown which began in January. — Reuters

More than 250 faith groups and non-profit organisations urged G20 leaders, the White House and the IMF to go

beyond the moratorium on debt payments and expected SDR allocation to actually cancel debt and expand debt relief for

Oil prices rise on stronger economic outlook, US stockpile draw



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed stock graph and Opec logo in this illustration picture. — Reuters

SINGAPORE: Oil prices edged higher on Wednesday on the prospects for stronger global economic growth amid increased Covid-19 vaccinations and a report that crude inventories in the United States, the world's biggest fuel consumer, fell.

But optimism about talks between the United States and Iran over Iran's nuclear programme and an impending increase in supply by major oil producers capped gains.

Brent crude futures for June rose by 16 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$62.90 a barrel by 0657 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude for May was up 14 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$59.47.

"Optimism on the global economic outlook boosted sentiment in the crude oil market", analysts from ANZ bank wrote in a note on Wednesday.

Prices were buoyed as data on Tuesday showed US job openings rose to a two-year high in February while hiring picked up. This followed earlier data showing improvement in the services sectors in the US and China.

The International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday unprecedented public spending to fight Covid-19 would push global growth to 6 per cent this year, a rate unseen since the 1970s. — Reuters

Toshiba weighs buyout offer from UK fund

TOKYO: Toshiba is considering a buyout offer from a British private equity fund, it said on Wednesday, with reports suggesting the deal could be worth about \$20 billion.

Trading of Toshiba shares was halted on Tokyo's stock exchange at the open, after the Japanese firm confirmed the offer in a statement.

Toshiba said it "received an initial proposal yesterday" by CVC Capital Partners for a buyout.

"We will request detailed information and carefully discuss" the offer, the firm added.

The Nikkei newspaper said CVC was considering a 30 per cent premium over the



A man raises his hand for a question during a Toshiba news conference at the company headquarters in Tokyo. — AFP

Japanese industrial group's current share price, valuing the deal at nearly 2.3 trillion yen (\$20.8 billion) based on Tuesday's close.

The financial daily said CVC would consider recruiting other investors to participate in the buyout. CVC declined to comment on the matter. — AFP

Singapore becomes a global cruise leader

SINGAPORE: Singapore currently accounts for a third of the world's cruises its tourism body said on Wednesday, owing to the roaring success of its "cruises to nowhere" at a time of crisis in the industry globally.

Cruises have yet to restart in many parts of the world after taking a beating from the coronavirus pandemic, with some of the earliest big outbreaks found on cruise ships.

The city-state launched what it called "round trips" on luxury liners in November, which have no port of call and last only a few days. Singapore has seen relatively few domestic Covid-19 cases since last year.

The Singapore cruises are open only to its 5.7 million residents, who have been unable to leave the tiny country for leisure and have settled instead for activities



A view of the media event at the Dream Cruises' 'World Dream' cruise ship, during its launch in Singapore, in this file photo. — Reuters

like staycations and even indoor camping.

The cruises recorded about 120,000 passengers, according to the Singapore Tourism Board, and run at lower capacity, with stringent health protocols. STB did not cite a source for its

industry data.

Some cruises from the Caribbean are expected to resume from June while the US Centers for Disease has retained tight curbs on resuming cruises from the United States.

Some cruises have operated

in parts of Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, according to the Cruise Lines International Association.

Royal Caribbean said this month that it was extending the season in Singapore for its Quantum of the Seas ship due to "overwhelming demand" through October. Genting Cruise Lines and Royal Caribbean launched their pilot cruises late last year.

STB Chief Executive Keith Tan said Singapore did not expect to be leading in cruises for long.

"Over the next few months, I certainly believe there will be more resumption of cruise business in the Caribbean, and in the Mediterranean as well", Tan said. Singapore's tourism industry has been hit hard by the pandemic, with visitors dropping nearly 86 per cent to 2.7 million last year. — Reuters