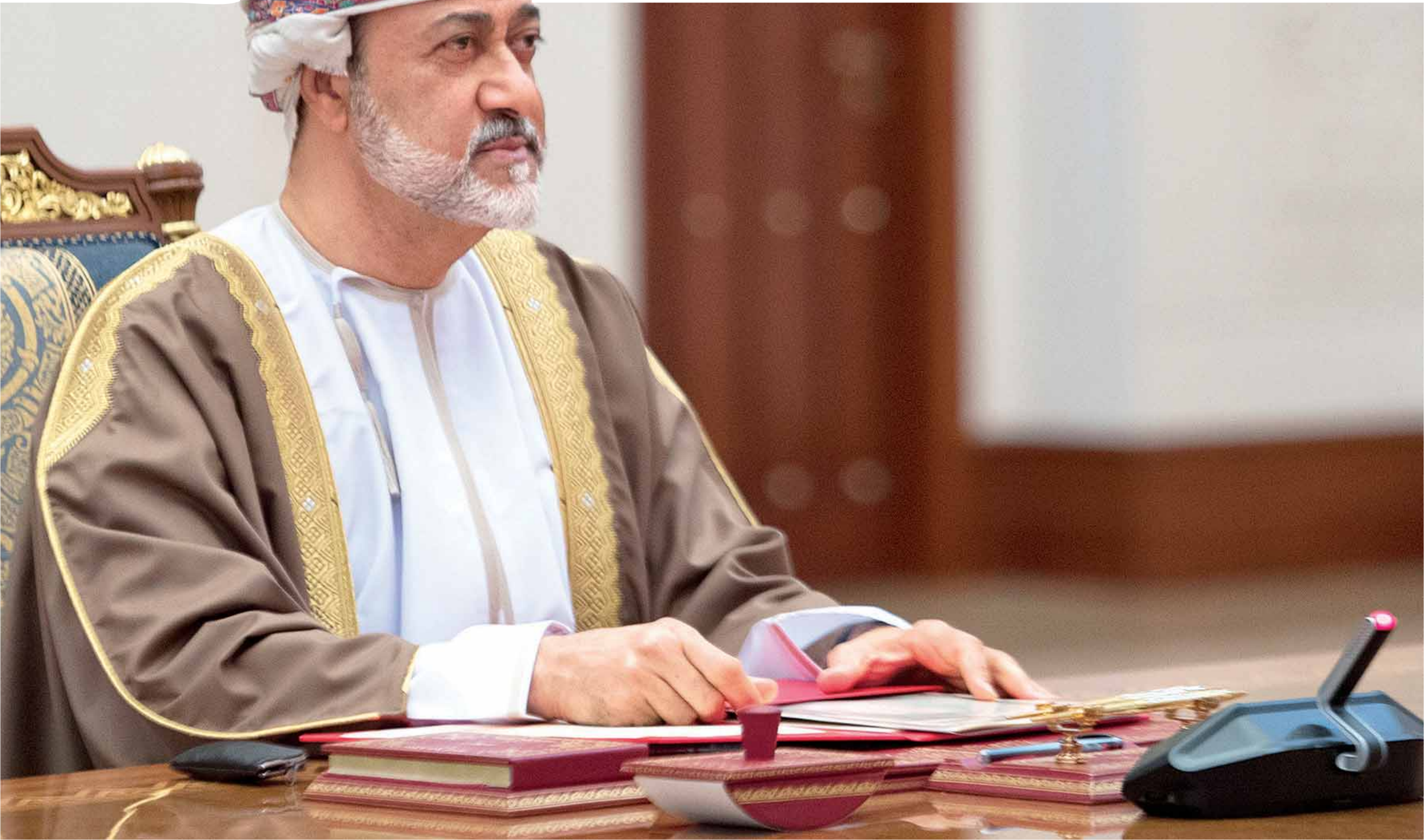


Decree ratifies Lanka pact

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 24/ 2021 on ratification of agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic, special, service and official passports, signed in Muscat on February 17, 2021. Article 1 ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this Decree. Article 2 says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. – ONA



ECONOMIC STIMULUS PLAN TO SPUR GROWTH

HIS MAJESTY PRESIDES OVER CABINET MEETING

MANAH: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Hisn Al Shumoukh Palace.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the bounties and riches He has bestowed on Oman and its noble people. He prayed to the Almighty to eternalise these bounties on Oman, wishing that security and stability shall prevail in the Sultanate and the world at large.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed the position of the national economy and the challenges posed to it due to a slump in oil prices and the ensuing rise in fiscal deficit and general debt, coupled with the impact of measures that had to be undertaken due to the prevalence of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in early 2020, when the Sultanate

took quick action through a set of precautionary and preventive measures that overshadowed economic growth in general.

STIMULUS PLAN

His Majesty the Sultan pointed out that, as part of steps undertaken by government departments, an Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP) aimed to achieve high growth rates, as per Oman Vision 2040, has been endorsed.

His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed that the ESP covers a variety of incentives and initiatives, such as cutting down taxes and fees imposed on companies that are actively engaged during 2021 in Economic Diversification Sectors of industry, tourism, logistics, agricultural and fisheries resources and mining.

The incentives also include cutting down of income tax for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during 2020 and 2021, in

FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT

His Majesty reviews the position of the national economy

Economic Stimulus Plan covers a variety of incentives and initiatives

Reviews developments on Covid-19 and efforts to provide vaccines

Urban development to have balance between growth and environment

HM commends Omani women's accomplishments in various fields

addition to the reduction of the lease value of lands in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm and industrial estates till 2022. Other measures related to the ESP include incentives to spruce up business and investment through the facilitation of entrepreneurship, offering prolonged residency for a number of foreign investors in line with terms and conditions to be announced later by the Council of Ministers, as well as incentives related to the labour market to generate employment opportunities for Omani job-seekers.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In particular, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his keenness on the steps undertaken by the departments concerned to address labour market developments. His Majesty the Sultan also stated that the Council of Ministers has endorsed the

National Urban Development Strategy (NUDS). He pointed out that NUDS is a prime enabler towards the realisation of Oman Vision 2040.

It is the first long-term strategy that orients urban development in a manner that strikes a balance between socioeconomic development and the environment over the next 20 years, said His Majesty the Sultan, adding that the NUDS is the product of wide-scale institutional and societal partnership.

It is worth noting that NUDS is sufficiently flexible to accommodate new developments and future challenges.

It charts out a general framework of urban development policies, both at a countrywide level and at the level of each governorate. It also introduces investment programmes and development projects across different sectors.

INCENTIVES TO BOOST ECONOMY AND INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP) endorsed by the Council of Ministers on Tuesday is based on five main pillars, including incentives pertaining to taxes and fees; incentives to improve business and investment environment; incentives to boost small and medium enterprises; incentives for the labour market and employment; and banking incentives aimed to enhance efforts to alleviate the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on the national economy through a set of measures to support efforts of enhancing economic recovery, economic activities and attracting foreign investments. This plan comes within the framework of procedures of the Fiscal Sustainability Plan (2020-2024), which aims at improving the financial position of the Sultanate, cut down the country's general debt and ameliorate its global credit rating.

The Economic Stimulus Plan targets the diversification of the national economy during the 10th Five-Year Plan. In particular, it lays emphasis on the sectors of converting industries, agriculture and fisheries resources, mining and mineral products, in addition to service, cultural, logistics and educational activities and their supportive and complementary sectors.

DETAILS ON P3

HIS MAJESTY CHAIRS CABINET MEETING



FROM PAGE 1

COVID EFFORTS

During the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan touched on the latest developments on Covid-19 and the concerted efforts taken by the government to provide vaccines and make them available to different segments in society. His Majesty the Sultan commended those efforts and underscored the need to accelerate the pace of providing vaccines for the largest percentage of citizens and residents.

He also laid emphasis on maintaining the ongoing public awareness drive and applying precautionary and preventive measures against the spread of the pandemic.

GREETINGS TO WOMEN

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, His

Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings "to women in Oman and in all parts of the world".

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan commended Omani women's accomplishments as they attend to their respective families and upbringing the offspring while at the same time performing the tasks entrusted to them in public life.

His Majesty the Sultan reiterated the great attention accorded to women by enabling them to shoulder responsibilities in the nation-building process. He noted that women in Oman proved their mettle in this regard. Speaking about regional and international relations of the Sultanate, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed Oman's continuous cooperation and its support for all efforts made to establish security and stability for all countries and nations of the world. — ONA





Economic Stimulus Plan based on five pillars

The Sultanate's Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP) endorsed by the Council of Ministers on Tuesday is based on five main axes, namely:

(A) Incentives pertaining to taxes and fees;

(B) Incentives to improve business and investment environment;

(C) Incentives to boost small and medium enterprises;

(D) Incentives for the labour market and employment; and

(E) Banking Incentives aimed to enhance efforts to alleviate the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on the national economy through a set of measures to support efforts of enhancing economic recovery, economic activities and attracting foreign investments.

This plan comes within the framework of procedures of the Fiscal Sustainability Plan (2020-2024), which aims at improving the financial position of the Sultanate, cut down the country's general debt and ameliorate its global credit rating.

The Economic Stimulus Plan (EPS) targets the diversification of the national economy during the 10th Five-Year Plan. In particular, it lays emphasis on the sectors of converting industries, agriculture and fisheries resources, mining and mineral products, in addition to service, cultural, logistics and educational activities and their supportive and complementary sectors.

(A) Incentives pertaining to taxes and fees are stated in the Plan as follows:

TAXES

1. Exemption from the Income Tax shall be granted to all firms that undertake their business activities within the Economic Diversification Sectors for five years, right from 1 January 2021 till the end of 2022, in accordance with the terms and conditions to be announced by the Tax Authority (with effect from the date of the firms' registration in the Commercial Register).

2. Exemption of hotel establishments from the Income Tax due for the two tax years of 2020 and 2021.

3. Permission for the settlement of the due income tax and waiving of the additional income tax (for 2021) ensuing from the segmentation of taxpaying (paying by instalments).

4. Deduction of 1% of the value of the due tax, to a maximum of RO 10,000 from the announced

tax based on tax declaration for the next year. This applies to all those who adhere to the presentation of tax declaration and process due tax payments within the deadlines stated in the law.

5. Continued suspension of the application of the Withholding Tax related to the distribution of dividends on shares and interests for five years with effect from 2020.

6. Deferring of the loss incurred by firms and establishments, as of the year 2020, to the next year and deducting the same from taxable income in the year 2021 and the subsequent years till such a time that the loss is zeroed, without commitment to the period of five years stated in Article No. 71 of the Income Tax Law.

7. Exemption from the Tourism Tax and the Municipality Tax payable by tourism establishments till the end of 2021.

8. Postponement of settlement of the Tourism Tax and the Municipality Tax payable by tourism establishments till end of December 2021.

FEES

1. Discounting by 50% of environmental permit fees that are renewed in 2021, throughout the period of validity of the permits/licenses.

2. Exemption from fines arising from expired environmental permits provided these are renewed within three months. These permits cover commercial and industrial activities that require environmental clearance from the Environment Authority.

3. Discounting by 25% of the land lease value in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm and in industrial estates affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). The discount applies for the period from January 2020 to the end of 2022.

4. Implementation of the option of "Fixed Tariff" on loads for top-consumption subscribers (consuming 100,000 kilowatt/hour or more) who are subject to the Cost-Reflexive Tariff.

(B) Incentives for the improvement of business and investment environment are stated in the Plan as follows:

1. Permission to practice business and investment activities after a business person or investor obtains a preliminary license to engage in business—without having to wait for the final license—after presenting an undertaking to stick to the prescribed terms and

Plan targets the diversification of the national economy during the 10th Five-Year Plan

criteria governing the selected type of business. The departments concerned will conduct the regular inspection and verification at any later date. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion will devise terms for the activity within one month of its date.

2. Companies registered as per the Foreign Capital Investment Law will be treated in the same way as Omani-owned companies where it pertains to Commercial Register fees. This applies to the firms' engagement in business in the Economic Diversification Sectors specified in 10th Five-Year Plan and its enabling sectors.

3. Offering foreign investment companies—as soon as they are founded and automatically—three licenses for the recruitment of expatriate manpower as per the terms set when issuing the Commercial Register.

4. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion will sign a service agreement for/with all strategic investment projects valued at more than RO 1 million. The agreement states the rights and duties of the parties (including fees and required Omanisation percentages) during the period of investment.

5. Allowing companies to own land plots of 5,000 square metres or more and properties for practicing the licensed activities in accordance with enforced laws, as per endowment fees. Companies will be given three months to adjust their conditions. Exempted from this are the lands not allowed for investment by non-Omanis, stated below:

1. That the ownership of the lands and properties has to be within land areas suitable for the actual requirements for the licensed commercial activities.

2. That the companies' ownership of land plots and properties is limited to purchase in residential-cum-commercial, and commercial, industrial and tourism uses.

3. That the companies utilise 50% of the purchased real estates for practicing the activities registered in the Commercial Register. It is allowed to lease or sell the balance of lands, with the exception of real estates purchased for tourism purposes and integrated commercial complexes.

4. Oman Development Bank's approval for the preparation of a financing programme to enhance export products and Omani services in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Oman Export Credit Guarantee Agency (Credit Oman).

5. That the departments concerned shall, within one month from its date, re-schedule municipal fees related to commercial activities licenses through mergers in a manner that streamlines procedures and expedite their finalisation.

(C) Incentives for supporting small and medium enterprises are stated in the Plan as follows:

1. Cutting down by 15%-12% the rate of income tax in accordance with the classification set by the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and their counterparts from among establishments not registered at the Authority and those registered at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion—through the two tax years of 2020 and 2021.

2. Continuation of postponement of premiums of loans of small and medium enterprises that are payable to Al Raffid

Fund till the end of December 2021.

3. The awarding of government procurement tenders shall be limited to a ceiling of RO 10,000 for small and medium enterprises whose owners are holders of Riyada Card. Exemptions can be offered by the Head of Unit if convincing reasons are furnished.

(D) Incentives for the labour market and employment promotion are stated as follows:

1. The allocation of RO 20 million in the 2021 Budget for training job-seekers and qualifying them to join the labour market.

2. Reduction of fees for expatriate manpower recruitment, renewal of licenses for them to practice professions as stated in the Second Article of the Ministerial Decision No. 12/2021 issued by the Minister of Labour. This applies to higher and medium strata jobs, technical jobs and specialised jobs specified in Clauses 1, 2 and 3 of the paragraph titled "First" and Section (3) of the paragraph titled "Second" about "specialist of information systems security and protection, specialist of geographic and electronic computer network information and commercial agent" as follows: 50% for establishments and companies achieving the required Omanisation percentage and 25% for the establishments and companies which employ non-Omani manpower.

(E) Banking incentives are stated as follows:

1. Sustained enforcement of procedures on suspending laid-out citizens till further notice, as well as citizens whose salaries are slashed by their employers/companies till the end of September 2021.

2. Instructing all banks to continue to respond to applications for the postponement of premiums and interest fees by all crippled borrowers affected by the current circumstances. The postponement shall continue for a period of six months more till the end of September 2021, without prejudice to the credit rating.

3. Credit incentive packages shall continue to be offered, including the lending ceilings, the facilitation of borrowing for affected and productive sectors, cutting down percentages of protective capital and other, to help banks, financing and finance leasing companies to shoulder their responsibilities in supporting economic recovery in the country and improving liquidity.

4. The Central Bank of Oman shall work with commercial banks, financing and lease financing companies to re-schedule the loans to fit with new fiscal flows from borrowers to secure their ability of repaying and meeting their contractual obligations with financing establishments, in accordance with emerging economic developments, without imposing re-scheduling fees.

— ONA

HM receives cable of thanks from Saudi King

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on the successful surgery undergone by Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Saudi

Arabia. In the cable, King Salman expressed his thanks for His Majesty's noble feelings and sincere prayers, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant His Majesty good health and well-being. — ONA



Tender Announcement

Supply of Food Parcels for the "Ramadan Iftar Program" for the Year 1442 AH / 2021 AD for Al Mahrah Governorate and Surrounding Areas in the Republic of Yemen

Tender No. 1/2021

Oman Charitable Organization (O.C.O.) announces a tender for the supply of 25,900 (twenty-five thousand and nine hundred) food parcels for the "Ramadan Iftar Program" for the year 1442 AH / 2021 AD, and distributing them to all the districts of Al Mahrah Governorate and the surrounding areas according to the attached list of locations (16 locations).

Specialized merchants and suppliers wishing to submit their bids for this tender can obtain the terms and conditions from the Financial Department of Oman Charitable Organization against payment of nominal fees, during the period from Sunday 7 March 2021 AD to Thursday 11 March 2021. The last date for bid submission and acceptance shall be Tuesday 16 March 2021.

Bids shall be deposited in the tender box at the Financial Department, O.C.O. Headquarters at the Wilayat of Baushar, Muscat Governorate, Al Khuwair 33, Southern Street No. 47, near Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque.

Bids shall be placed in closed envelopes sealed with red wax and addressed to H.E. the Chairman of the Projects and Tenders Committee of O.C.O. before the specified date.

"O.C.O. is not obligated to award the tender in whole or in part or to consider the lowest price."

Take time for yourself

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

With women's increasing involvement in education and employment, there is a paradigm shift in their role in society. They have been seen switching roles between home and work that puts lots of psychological pressure on them.

Mental health experts, however, find this challenge a situation that works as a healthy disconnect for them.

Resilience is seen in women with the ability to adapt to challenges that each day brings in, but what is important is not to take emotional and stress baggage from home to work and from work to home. In other words, leave the baggage at the door.

"We wear different masks and this actually is healthy because we get to break the routine. You have to be a role model for this change.

"This is called resilience — being able to adapt to accept the challenges we are facing. For example, if you are frustrated and stressed out at work, then convey this vibe to home, it is not going to be a healthy environment. You will lose connectivity with the family members. So it is important for any woman to take care of herself as well as boost her energy with

food thoughts and having friends with a positive attitude," Dr Amira Raidan, Head of Mental Health, Non-Communicable Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health, said.

She points out that boosting energy does not just happen by thoughts alone. Eating healthy food would not just brighten up your thoughts as well as the skin and boost your energy filling your body and soul with positivity.

Exercise at least twice a week does all this, especially for your respiratory system which is especially needed now as we fight the pandemic.

BETTER UNDERSTANDING

Group activities or hobbies have their benefits — they bring people together enhancing a better understanding of the feelings of the family members.

"All of this comes under positive thinking. The quality of your self-care will reflect on others," she explained.

Are working women better at self-care or are the homemakers better at self-care?

"Actually, the homemakers are better off because I work and I have taken a break because I need time for myself just to recharge and reset my goals and priorities as well as complete pending tasks. I think

Boosting energy does not just happen by thoughts alone. Eating healthy food would not just brighten up your thoughts as well as the skin and boost your energy filling your body and soul with positivity



the woman at home can do much more than the working women because we are overwhelmed with work and depending on the personality of the ladies they could be worrying about the work at home and the cycle never ends," noted Dr Amira.

She added she feels the homemakers can be better off at setting up goals with effective time and also have a relaxed zone to think and reflect.

SENSITIVE ISSUE

However, stress or depression has taken a toll on few women who gave into substance addiction. A sensitive issue because women are closely interlinked with families.

"This is why the advice is to stay away from peers and friends who are influencing you negatively. Women do overcome and they go back to society and resume their careers but they mustn't go back to previous friends who got them to this stage in the first place. That is the only way to avoid a relapse.

"This is what I have to say. Seek help because there are so many ways to get to live and no one will judge them. It is part of the life cycle. We all have our share of success and failures. Do not stay in the zone of desperateness and hopelessness.

Ask for help, we are all here to do just that," reassured Dr Amira.

According to her, the starting point is acceptance. "We need to accept ourselves and accept our surroundings so that it will minimise your rejections from all the negative vibes that will come to you. You will be immune to all the criticisms that you might come across. So acceptance of yourself is very important," she stressed.

Talking with your inner self from time to time is healthy, suggested Dr Amira. "Just spare at least five to ten minutes a day or twice a week just to find out where you are standing — Am I in the same path of acceptance or do I have some sense of rejection that blames me from doing things?

"If I am constantly rejecting everything I would be stressed all the time. So it is very important to be in the zone of well-being with resilience starting with acceptance. Just like with Corona at first, we rejected it and asked ourselves, 'why us'? But now we are slightly in the comfort zone but with precaution. And we have accepted all the precautions of the face mask, hand sanitisers, washing hands regularly and avoiding gatherings," she said.

At the top of all the suggestions, she suggests practicing meditation every day.

Stimulus plan supports economic recovery

MUSCAT: Dr Said bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, affirmed that the Royal blessing of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the economic stimulus plan reflects His Majesty's keenness and interest in supporting the efforts made to ensure economic recovery and tackle the economic effects resulting from Covid-19 pandemic by setting up appropriate mechanisms and procedures to ensure fast restoration of economic activities to normality and ensure



News Agency (ONA), Dr Said reaffirmed that the Royal blessing paves the way for another economic springboard in line with the trends of the 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025), which focuses on priority objectives that target stimulating economic activity and developing the

continued economic growth rates.

In a statement to Oman

macroeconomic environment.

The Minister of Economy also pointed out that His Majesty the Sultan also gave his blessings to the proposed measures at the long-term, which seek to stimulate the national economy. The proposed measures include initiatives, projects and programmes for economic stimulation by increasing both aggregate demand and aggregate supply, and determining expansionary fiscal policies aimed at reducing taxes and encouraging spending, and monetary policies aimed at

reducing both taxes and interest rates, as well as reviewing some fees and exemptions that facilitate the flow of investment, assist small and medium enterprises, reduce the burden of the economic situation on them, revive the business market, and create an investor-friendly environment in terms of ease of doing business and obtaining licenses.

Dr Said valued His Majesty the Sultan's support for all efforts made during the past months to establish a suitable framework for these measures. — ONA

'Sahala' to provide quarantine info

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development and eMushrif company on Tuesday signed an agreement to launch "Sahala" platform.

The platform aims to achieve the highest level of safety to limit infection, verify information to prevent fraud and inform arrival passengers in the Sultanate of quarantine procedures.

The platform also provides passengers with instructions issued by the Ministry of Health.

The agreement was signed by Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Social Development Under-Secretary, Head of Shelter and Relief Sector and Adnan bin Ahmed al Shueili, CEO of eMushrif. — ONA



إعلان مناقصة Tender Announcement

SINYAR is the new integrated commercial identity for Oman National Transport Company SAOC and National Ferries Company LLC leading land and Maritime public transport operator and the first mass transport operator in the Sultanate. SINYAR has more than 1,600 employees and operates more than 500 buses and 7 ferries across the country.

SINYAR announce the following tender, to companies specialized in the related services.

Tender Number	T-02-2021
Tender Name	توفير خدمات الدعم الفني لنظام اوراكل (ORACLE EBS R12) Provision of Comprehensive Support for Oracle EBS R12 Modules (Financial, SCM & eAM)
Project Summary	Within the framework of this tender, Sinyar would like to have a competent and qualified Service Provider to provide comprehensive support for Oracle EBS R12 Modules, backend Database & Customized Reports for a period of 12 Months.
Tender Fee	R.O 50/-
Grade & Speciality	Oracle Certified Partners

Start date for tender document distribution
 Wednesday, 10th March, 2021

Last date for tender document distribution
 Thursday, 18th March, 2021

Last date for submission
 Wednesday, 31st March, 2021

Oman National Transport Company S.A.O.C. "SINYAR"
 Head Quarter, Ghala
 P.O.Box: 620, P.C: 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

National Ferries Company L.L.C. "SINYAR"
 Head Quarter, Ghala
 P.O. Box: 911, P.C: 133, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

For more information, please send to:
 tenders@sinyar.om
 Tel: +968 24121520
 +968 24121568

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Incentives to encourage businesses: OCCI Chairman

MUSCAT: Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), has valued the Royal blessings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the economic stimulus plan (ESP) that targets supporting the efforts to alleviate impacts of Covid-19 on the national economy.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Ridha affirmed that ESP included many incentives and initiatives to achieve interest of the private sector, enhance economy and encourage foreign investment. He also praised the ESP incentives pertaining to reducing both taxes and fees, improving business and investment environment, supporting small and medium enterprises, activating labour market and employment, as well as monetary and banking procedures. — ONA



Oman reiterates conviction in rule of law

MUSCAT: The Sultanate has reaffirmed its deep conviction in criminal justice and rule of law which constitute an inevitable necessity for the realization of sustainable development.

The Basic Law of the State asserts that justice is the basis of rule and it underscores the independence of the judiciary.

The Omani Penal Law incriminates all forms of violence and promotion of anything that triggers tribal or ethnic hatred or intrigue or discrimination.

This was stated in the Sultanate's speech before the UN 14th Conference on the prevention of crime and the implementation of criminal justice. The speech was delivered by Attorney General Nasr bin Khamis al Sawai when he addressed the international conference run from the city of Kyoto, Japan via video-conferencing. The conference continues till March 12. — ONA

INVITATION FOR THE ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Ahli Bank SAOG (the "Bank") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held at 3:00 pm on Thursday, 25th March 2021 via the electronic platform for general meetings through Muscat Clearing and Depository's website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum is not complete for the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to convene, the second general meeting will be held at 3:00 pm on Wednesday, 31st March 2021 to discuss and consider the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider the auditor's report and approve the financial statement (balance sheet and the profit and loss account) for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To brief the general assembly on the Sharia Compliance Report of Ahli Islamic for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends to the shareholders at the date of General Meeting of an amount of 5 Baizas per share.
- To ratify the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors and Board Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2020 and to determine their sitting fees for the financial year ending on 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute remuneration fees of an amount of RO 147,800 to the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To ratify the remuneration and sitting fees of the Sharia Supervisory Board for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To approve the appointment of the Sharia Supervisory Board and to determine their remuneration and sitting fees.
- To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Bank during the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To brief the general assembly of the contributions made to support community services during the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the proposal to allocate RO 150,000 to support community services for the financial year ending on 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Board's Performance Report for the financial year ended on 31 December 2020.
- To approve the criteria for the Performance Appraisal of the Board of Directors of the Bank.
- To appoint a third party for appraising the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending 31 December 2021 and determine their fees.
- To appoint Auditors and External Sharia Auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2021 and determine their fees.

Pursuant to the Bank Articles of Association and the Rules for Convening General Meetings of Public Joint Stock Companies via Electronic Means issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

In case of any enquiries, please contact Mr. Habib Al Hamaid on telephone number 24577200.

OMAN AIR S.A.O.C.

Muscat International Airport, P.O. Box 58, P.C. 111, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF THE SHAREHOLDERS OMAN AIR SAOC

The Board of Directors of Oman Air SAOC ("Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to the Annual General Meeting and the Extraordinary General Meeting to be held at **11:00 AM on Monday 29th March 2021** at Oman Air SAOC's office. If the legal quorum of the meeting is not complete, a second General Meeting will be held at **11:00 AM on Tuesday 30th March 2021** at same place to look into the following agenda items:

AGM:

- To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the year ended 31st December 2020.
 - To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the year ended 31st December 2020.
 - To consider the External Auditors' Report and approve the Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Accounts as at 31st December 2020.
 - To approve the sitting fees for the Board and Ad-hoc Committees meetings for the year ended 31st December 2020 and decide sitting fees for 2021.
 - To notify the shareholders of the transactions which the Company had entered into with related parties in the course of the Company's normal and ongoing business during the year ended 31st December 2020 and approve them.
 - Electing a board member to fill the vacant seat
- Those who wish to run for membership in the Board of Directors are kindly requested to fill out the nomination form and deliver the same to the company at least two working days before the Annual General Meeting and no later than the close of business on Thursday 3/25/2021. No form submitted after that will be accepted.
- To appoint the External Auditors for the year ending 31st December 2021 and approve their fees.

EGM:

- Amending the Articles of Association as attached.**

NB: According to the Company's Articles of Association, any shareholder can appoint a proxy in writing to attend and vote on his behalf. The shareholders are requested to attend at least 30 minutes before the meeting.

For more information or enquiry, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Adil A. Al Hashmi, Company Secretary, on: 24259031

Chairman

Libya PM urges parliament to back his government

SIRTE: Libya's prime minister-designate urged lawmakers on Tuesday to back his new government to help end a grinding civil war, denouncing a campaign he claimed sought to "destroy" the fragmented North African nation.

Libya descended into chaos after ruler Muammar Gaddafi was toppled and killed in a 2011 Nato-backed uprising, resulting in multiple forces vying for power.

"We have no choice but to come to an agreement, for the future of our children," interim premier Abdul Hamid Dbeibah said, to the applause of parliament, which is sitting in the central seaside city of Sirte.

A UN-supervised process aims to unite the country after an October ceasefire between forces loyal to two rival administrations, each backed by foreign powers, in the east and west of the country.

Dbeibah, who submitted his proposed government to parliament for approval last week, denounced a "fierce campaign" and a "plot" carried out by "those who want to destroy our country, who want to occupy it".

He did not elaborate, but the process has been marred by allegations of vote-buying.

Dbeibah was selected in February at UN-sponsored talks, attended by a cross section of Libyans, to steer the country towards December 24 polls.

'FOR ALL LIBYANS'

The interim premier defended the composition of his proposed government.

"My first objective was to choose people with whom I would



Libya's prime minister-designate Abdul Hamid Dbeibah addresses lawmakers during the first reunited parliamentary session, in the coastal city of Sirte, on Tuesday. — AFP

be able to work, no matter where they come from," Dbeibah said.

The members of his government "must be able to work for all Libyans in all of Libya, not just for their region or their city", he insisted.

Over 130 of a total 188 lawmakers began meeting on Monday in Sirte, Kadhafi's hometown, to debate the proposed cabinet.

The Mediterranean port city lies halfway between Tripoli, where the UN-recognised government is based, and the east, where parliament has sat in recent years and which is home to a rival administration.

The UN mission in Libya

Dbeibah, who submitted his proposed government to parliament for approval last week, denounced a "fierce campaign" and a "plot" carried out by "those who want to destroy our country, who want to occupy it"

called the meeting "historic" and praised the convening of a "reunited session after many years of divisions and paralysis".

Dbeibah, 61, a billionaire

businessman from the western town of Misrata, was selected alongside an interim three-member presidency council to head the new unity administration.

If approved, it would replace the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, and the parallel eastern-based administration backed by strongman Khalifa Haftar.

The interim government will face the daunting challenge of addressing the many grievances of Libyans, from a dire economic crisis and soaring unemployment to crippling inflation and wretched public services. — AFP

Lebanon protesters block roads over worsening poverty

BEIRUT: Lebanese protesters set up new roadblocks on Tuesday to vent anger over political inaction in the face of deepening poverty, but security forces managed to reopen some to traffic.

The country has been mired in economic crisis, which has brought surging unemployment and spiralling prices while the currency has plunged to a new low to the dollar on the black market.

Yet the deeply divided political class has failed to agree on a new cabinet since a massive explosion in Beirut port last August that killed more than 200 people and led to the government's resignation.

Roadblocks have become a near daily occurrence in the eastern Mediterranean country and lasted all day on Monday, including in and out of Beirut.

Demonstrators on Tuesday again cut off some roads in the

northern city of Tripoli and the eastern Bekaa Valley region, the state-run National News Agency reported.

Highways leading to central Beirut were also closed, though most later re-opened. Others blinked open and closed throughout the morning.

Some protesters have called for a revival of the nationwide street movement of late 2019 that demanded the removal of Lebanon's entire political class, widely seen as incompetent and corrupt.

More than half of the population is living below the poverty line, and prices have soared as the Lebanese pound has lost more than 80 per cent of its value.

With foreign currency reserves dwindling fast, the authorities have warned they will soon have to lift subsidies on fuel and mostly imported food. — AFP



Vehicles are stuck in a traffic jam caused by demonstrators blocking a highway during a protest against the fall in Lebanese pound currency and mounting economic hardships, in Jal el-Dib, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Children can't see future in Syria after 10 years of war: Charity

BEIRUT: Many Syrian children, both inside and outside the country, cannot imagine a future in their homeland as the conflict there enters its 11th year, a charity said on Tuesday. "This 10-year war has cost Syria's young people their childhoods," Save the Children's regional director Jeremy Stoner said.

"Protracted conflict has led to fear and pessimism about children's ability to build their lives in a country scarred by war," he said in a statement.

Syria's war has killed more than 387,000 people and displaced millions since starting in 2011

with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

Between November and December 2020, Save the Children interviewed 1,900 displaced children and their caregivers inside Syria and across Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and the Netherlands.

On average, 86 per cent of surveyed Syrian refugee children said they would not want to return to their country of origin, the British charity said, citing a report it published marking the anniversary.

"I don't want to go back there. I don't want to go back and live



A Syrian woman walks with her children while in a commercial district in Syria's northeastern city of Qamishli on Tuesday. — AFP

in Syria again. I don't want to stay in Lebanon either," Nada, a 17-year-old Syrian refugee living in northern Lebanon, was quoted as saying. "No matter where I go, if we go to school, they bully us and tell us they don't want us."

Inside Syria, one in three displaced children surveyed said they would rather live in another country, the non-governmental organisation reported.

They include Lara, a seven-year-old who lives in a displacement camp in northwestern Syria.

"After 10 years, our future became all about war," she was quoted as saying.

"I wish to live in any country other than Syria, where it's safe and there are schools and toys."

More than 8.5 million Syrian children are dependent on assistance inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, says the United Nations child agency UNICEF. Up to 60 per cent of children are unable to consistently access or afford adequate food inside Syria, and more than half are missing out on school, the UN says. Of almost 5.6 million registered Syrian refugees outside the country, more than one million children have been born in exile, it says. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TUNIS

39 migrants drown off Tunisia as boats capsize

At least 39 migrants drowned off Tunisia when two boats capsized on Tuesday, the defence ministry said, as numbers risking the dangerous crossing to Europe continue to rise. Rescuers pulled 165 survivors from the floundering boats out of the sea to safety.

It was not immediately clear what caused both boats to capsize, but vessels leaving the North African coast for Europe are often heavily overloaded makeshift crafts, departing at



night even in rough weather to avoid detection from the coastguard.

Tunisian National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli said the "search is still on for survivors and bodies". — AFP

DUBAI

UAE licenses second unit of Barakah N-plant

The nuclear regulator in United Arab Emirates has issued an operating licence for the second unit of the Barakah nuclear power plant, an official from the regulator said on Tuesday. The plant in the Al Dhafrah region of Abu Dhabi is the first nuclear power station in the Arab world.

Barakah's Unit 1 was connected to the national power grid in August and in December reached 100 per cent of reactor power capacity during testing. Unit 1's commercial operations



are expected to start this year, Hamad Al Kaabi, deputy chairman of Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation (FANR) and the UAE's representative at the IAEA told journalists. — Reuters

KHARTOUM

Sudan begins vaccination for medical staff

Sudan on Tuesday launched a coronavirus vaccination roll-out, giving priority to medical workers, state news agency SUNA said. Health care workers at Jabra isolation hospital in the capital Khartoum started to get their first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine, the agency said, adding that the first phase of the roll-out will be expanded from March 15 to May 15 to include people aged 45 or older with chronic conditions. The first phase will cover 3.5 per cent of the country's



population. Sudan became the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to benefit from COVAX facility vaccines when it received 828,000 doses of the AstraZeneca shot on March 3. — Reuters

In brief

■ BEIJING

CHINA LAUNCHES
COVID-19 VACCINATION
CERTIFICATES

China has launched a digital Covid-19 vaccination certificate for its citizens planning cross-border travels, joining other countries issuing similar documents as they seek ways to reopen their economies. As vaccines are globally being rolled out, a few countries including Bahrain have already introduced certificates identifying vaccinated people, and the European Union agreed to develop vaccine passports under pressure from tourism-dependent southern countries.

The certificate issued by China will have details about the holder's Covid-19 vaccination information and coronavirus test results. — **Reuters**

■ VIENNA

'NO ADVERSE HEALTH
EFFECTS' FROM
FUKUSHIMA DISASTER

Japan's 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster has not harmed the health of local residents 10 years on, according to a report published on Tuesday by UN researchers.

Since the last report in 2013 "no adverse health effects among Fukushima residents have been documented that could be directly attributed to radiation exposure from the accident," said Gillian Hirth, Chairwoman of the UN's Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. The latest report had firmed up the 2013 research on the effects of radiation from the accident. — **AFP**

■ DUBAI

UN ENVOY IN DOHA
TO PUSH ON AFGHAN
PEACE PROCESS

The United Nations envoy for Afghanistan was due to arrive in Qatar on Tuesday to meet with Afghan government and Taliban representatives this week in a fresh push on the fractious Afghan peace process, two sources familiar with the talks said.

The visit comes as the United States is seeking to shake up the stalled Qatari-hosted talks between the warring sides, including proposals for an interim government.

UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons was also expected to meet with US special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad and Qatari officials during the visit, the sources said. — **Reuters**

Myanmar activists escape security siege

YANGON: Myanmar security forces quickly snuffed out sporadic anti-junta protests on Tuesday after hundreds of young activists who had been trapped overnight in a district of its biggest city Yangon were able to get out.

Western powers and the United Nations had called on Myanmar's military rulers to allow the youngsters to leave after fears for their safety as troops moved in.

The army takeover and arrest of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1 has brought the Southeast Asian nation to a near-standstill. Daily protests are being staged across the country, and security forces are cracking down harshly.



A poster featuring military chief General Min Aung Hlaing is seen as protesters erect makeshift barricades to obstruct security forces during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon on Tuesday. — **AFP**

More than 60 protesters have been killed and over 1,800 detained, an advocacy group said.

Scattered protests were held in Yangon and other towns across Myanmar on Tuesday but were quickly broken up by security forces using tear gas and stun grenades. At least two people were wounded, one by a gunshot, in the town of Mohnyin in the north, local media said.

Thousands of people defied a night time curfew on Monday to take to the streets of Yangon in support of the youths in the Sanchaung district, where they had been holding a daily protest against the coup.

Police firing guns and using

stun grenades announced on Monday they would check houses for anyone from outside the district and said they would punish anyone caught hiding them.

Youth activist Shar Ya Mone said she had been in a building with about 15 to 20 others, but had now been able to go home.

"There were many free car rides and people welcoming the protesters," Shar Ya Mone said by telephone. She said she would keep demonstrating "until the dictatorship ends."

Another protester posted on social media that they had been able to leave the area at around 5 am after security forces pulled out.

— **Reuters**

Malala signs deal
with Apple TV

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize as a teenager after surviving a Taliban assassination attempt, has signed a deal with Apple TV+ that will see her produce dramas and documentaries that focus on women and children.

The multi-year partnership would "draw on her ability to inspire people around the world," the company said in a statement, adding that content would also include animation and children's series.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to support women, young people, writers and artists in reflecting the world as they see it," the 23-year-old was quoted as

saying.

Yousafzai earned the wrath of the Taliban as a 10-year-old in rural northwest Pakistan when she began campaigning for education rights for girls.

At the time, the Pakistani Taliban had gained a significant foothold in the Swat Valley, imposing a fundamentalist version of religion on areas they controlled — banning education for girls and employment for women.

Yousafzai drew international attention with a series of blogs and articles she wrote about everyday life and hopes for a better future, but her fame incensed the Taliban, whose leadership ordered her murder. — **AFP**

India, world's top vaccine maker,
denies shortage at home

NEW DELHI: India's federal government on Tuesday denied any shortage of coronavirus vaccine doses in a big northwestern state and said it was sending supplies around the country based on demand and consumption patterns.

The world's biggest vaccine maker has so far given 23 million doses to some 17 million people, with the pace picking up significantly since last week after more people were made eligible.

And as demand has risen in India after a slow start and initial hesitation among people, Rajasthan this week became the first state to publicly seek urgent replenishment of its stock.

The federal health ministry, however, said there was no shortage in Rajasthan or anywhere in the country. It said Rajasthan, a state of about 70 million people, still had 1.4 million doses left as of Monday night.

"The factual position is that there is no shortage of Covid-19 vaccine with the state at present," the ministry said in a statement.

"The central government is regularly monitoring availability of vaccine supply in all states and (federal territories), and providing the doses as per their



A health worker collects a swab sample from a man to test for the Covid-19 coronavirus in Mumbai on Tuesday. — **AFP**

requirement and consumption pattern."

India, which wants to inoculate 300 million of its 1.35 billion people by August, began its campaign in mid-January with the AstraZeneca shot and another developed at home by Bharat Biotech and a state institute.

It is donating or selling

vaccines to more than three dozen countries, drawing some criticism for not expanding its own immunisation campaign further.

After the United States, India has reported the world's most coronavirus infections, which jumped by 15,388 on Tuesday to 11.24 million. — **Reuters**

Talks start to protect Indian
Ocean's depleting tuna

Representatives of 30 nations met on Tuesday to seek ways to save fast-depleting tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean as demand in Asia and the West soars for sushi and tinned fish.

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), which groups coastal countries from Australia to Kenya plus major fishing region the European Union, was convening virtually over five days to debate yellowfin tuna quotas.

Environmentalists say the warm water species is at risk of depletion as over-fishing compounds other threats from climate change and pollution. There is corporate concern too: British supermarkets Tesco and Co-op and Belgian retailer Colruyt pledged last year to stop buying Indian Ocean yellowfin unless the



A fisherman carries a tuna fish from his catch at a harbour in Lampuuk on the outskirts of Banda Aceh, Indonesia. — **Reuters**

UN-mandated commission adopts a plan to rebuild stocks.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature has for nearly a decade had the species on its "Red List".

Yet the total global catch has risen by about a third, to nearly 450,000 metric tonnes annually, according to the London-based Blue Marine Foundation advocacy group.

— **Reuters**

ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of **Global Omani Development & Investment Co. SAOC** (Company) is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend annual ordinary general meeting of the company, which are scheduled to be held at 11:00 am on Tuesday, 30/03/2021, at the company's headquarters Maktibbi building, Al Wattayah, 5th floor, Business Center, if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at 11:00 am on Monday 05/04/2021 via the mentioned electronic platform to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors report for the financial year ended 31/12/2020.
2. To consider the auditors' report and to approve the balance sheet and profit & loss account for the financial year ended 31st December 2020.
3. To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the fiscal year ended 31st December 2020. (as per Attachment)
4. To consider and approve the transactions which the Company will enter into with related parties during the fiscal year ending 31st December 2021. (as per Attachment)
5. To approve the sitting fees payable to the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board's sub-committees for the financial year ended 31st December 2020 and to specify the sitting fees for the next financial year ending on 31st December 2021. (as per attachment)
6. To appoint the Company auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2021 and to determine their fees.

Each shareholder can view and check reports, documents and data related to the agenda items of the annual ordinary general meeting during the official working hours at the company's main business center, shareholder has the right to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and vote on his behalf on the meeting's decisions.

Please arrive to the venue of the meeting at least half an hour before the appointed time.

For further information, please contact to
Mr. Jamal bin Ramadan Al-Maimani at Telephone Number 97056443.

Vice Chairman

Auditor

Legal Advisor

George Floyd murder trial

WHAT HAPPENED?

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

His death was captured on video

THE TRIAL

March 8
Start of trial, jury selection

March 29
Opening arguments

End April
Verdict expected

THE ACCUSED

DEREK CHAUVIN, 44, white Minneapolis officer

- Facing charges of:
 - second-degree murder** (max. sentence: 40 years)
 - manslaughter**
- Prosecutors wait for judge ruling on reinstating third-degree murder charge (max. sentence: 25 years)
- 19-year veteran, fired by Minneapolis Police department after incident

OTHER ACCUSED

ALEXANDER KUENG **THOMAS LANE** **TOU THAO**

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

THE PROTESTS

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

Protesters in front of the Hennepin County Government Center, Minneapolis, Mar 7

AFP photos/Handout/Hennepin County Jail

Minneapolis judge hopes to start jury selection

MINNEAPOLIS: A Minneapolis judge planned to begin screening jurors on Tuesday in the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former policeman facing criminal charges for his role in the death of George Floyd during an arrest that caused an outcry around the world.

The trial is seen as a landmark case on police violence against Black people in the United States, a country where police officers are rarely found to be criminally responsible for killing civilians.

The trial on charges of second-degree murder and manslaughter had been scheduled to begin on Monday. But Judge Peter Cahill of the Hennepin County district court was stymied by an 11th-hour ruling by the Minnesota Court of Appeals on Friday that ordered him to reconsider the request by prosecutors to reinstate a third charge of third-degree murder.

Chauvin's lawyers are asking the state Supreme Court to

prevent the additional charge being applied.

Prosecutors in the Minnesota attorney general's office told the court they do not think the trial can start until the appeal issues have been cleared up, and said they would seek an order from a higher court delaying it. "Unless the Court of Appeals tells me otherwise, we're going to keep going", the judge said on Monday.

Chauvin, 44, would face up to 40 years in prison if convicted on the most serious charge.

Chauvin, who is white, and three other police officers were fired the day after the deadly arrest on May 25 on suspicion that Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, used a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes at the Cup Foods grocery store.

Chauvin was released from jail on a \$1 million bond last October and will be tried in a courtroom in the Hennepin County Government Center — **Reuters**

EU Parliament strips Catalan separatists of immunity

BRUSSELS: The European Parliament on Tuesday lifted the immunity of former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont and two allies wanted by Spain following Catalonia's attempt to gain independence in 2017.

The MEPs, who have been in self-imposed exile, now risk being sent back to Spain to face trial and potentially imprisonment over the organisation of a banned separatist referendum in 2017.

The trio — Puigdemont and former Catalan health and education ministers Clara Ponsati and Toni Comin — immediately blamed the move on "political persecution" by Spain, which wants to try them for sedition.

The immunity of Puigdemont, the former regional president of Catalonia, was lifted by 400 votes to 248, while those of Comin and Ponsati were removed by 404 votes to 247, the parliament said.

Judicial authorities will now be able to consider extradition requests by Spain's supreme court, though in the meantime the trio can continue to perform their duties as MEPs.

Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya said the vote proved that "the European Parliament cannot be used to shield parliamentarians from appearing in front of national courts" for a breach of national law.

The vote also showed "respect for the Spanish justice system" and ensured that disputes in Catalonia are solved in Spain and not at the EU level.

The three MEPs have already announced that they will take the



Exiled former Catalan leader and members of European Parliament (From L) Antoni Comin, Carles Puigdemont and Clara Ponsati give a press conference at the EU Parliament in Brussels on Tuesday, after the European Parliament lifted their immunity. — AFP

case to the EU's highest court, the European Court of Justice.

Puigdemont, who has been living in Belgium to escape a Spanish arrest warrant, called the vote "a sad day for the European Parliament", saying it was "a clear case of political persecution".

"We have lost our immunity but the European Parliament has lost something more: European democracy", he added.

'SPANISH ARMADA'

Comin is also in Belgium and subject to a European arrest warrant, while Ponsati worked as a university lecturer in Scotland and faces an

The MEPs, who have been in self-imposed exile, now risk being sent back to Spain to face trial and potentially imprisonment over the organisation of a banned separatist referendum in 2017

extradition claim there.

In the Brussels press conference alongside Puigdemont and Comin, Ponsati said the vote was carried by an "Armada"

of Spanish MEPs.

"But we will see in the future how strong they are", she said.

All three were elected as MEPs in 2019, meaning they enjoyed immunity from prosecution.

Last year, Madrid asked the parliament to strip them of that privilege, but a vote was delayed by the coronavirus crisis.

Fighting the extradition became a cause celebre among European politicians with similar regional claims, including in Scotland and Flanders in Belgium.

Spain accuses Puigdemont and Comin of sedition and embezzlement, and Ponsati of sedition. — **AFP**

Royals silent amid crisis over Meghan's claim of racist remark

LONDON: Britain's monarchy maintained its silence on Tuesday, after Meghan and Prince Harry accused a family member of making a racist remark about their son and said she had been alienated to the point of contemplating suicide.

Oprah Winfrey's tell-all TV interview with the couple has dragged the royals into the biggest crisis since the death of Harry's mother Diana in 1997, when the family, led by Queen Elizabeth, was widely criticised for being too slow to respond.

In the two-hour show, originally aired on CBS on Sunday

evening, Harry also said that his father, heir-to-the-throne Prince Charles, had let him down.

"Worst Royal Crisis in 85 Years", read the front page of the *Daily Mirror* newspaper, while the *Daily Mail's* cover asked "What Have They Done?". *The Sun* columnist Trevor Kavanagh questioned if the interview meant the end for the royals.

"It could hardly be more damaging to the royal family, not least because there is little it can do to defend itself", *The Times* said in a lead article under the title "Royal Attack".

"The key to the monarchy's



An arrangement of UK daily newspapers on Tuesday shows front page headlines reporting on the story of the interview given by Meghan, wife of Prince Harry, to Oprah Winfrey, which aired on UK broadcaster ITV. — AFP

survival over the centuries has been its ability to adapt to the needs of the times. It needs to adapt again", *The Times* said.

Elizabeth, who is 94 and has been on the throne for 69 years, wanted to take some time before the palace issued a response, a royal source said.

Nearly three years since her star-studded wedding in Windsor Castle, Meghan gained sympathy in the United States by casting some unidentified members of the British royal family as uncaring, mendacious or guilty of racist remarks. She and Harry have also had a torrid relationship with the

British press, and in particular tabloids who have been critical of the couple.

For the monarchy, which traces its history through 1,000 years of British and English history to William the Conqueror, Meghan's bombshell has been compared to the crises over the death of Diana and the 1936 abdication of Edward VIII.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson avoided questions about the crisis, though he serves, in theory, as a servant of the crown and Elizabeth II is head of the British state as well as 15 other realms. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

MELUN, FRANCE

No lockdown planned for Paris as cases soar

France is not planning to put the Paris region into lockdown even though the number of people with Covid-19 in intensive care is at its highest since November, Public Health Director Jerome Salomon said on Tuesday.

Medical authorities in the Paris region ordered hospitals on Monday to cancel 40pc of their regular activities to make space for critical Covid-19 patients.

But Salomon told RTL radio: "A lockdown in the greater Paris region is not on the



agenda." "Lockdown is a last resort measure that would be submitted to the government and the president if we were under the impression the hospital system could not cope", he said. — **Reuters**

MOSCOW

Russia, China sign deal on lunar research station

Russia and China signed a memorandum of understanding on Tuesday to set up an international lunar research station, Russia's Roscosmos space agency said. Moscow and Beijing will draw up a roadmap to establish the station and cooperate closely on planning, designing and implementing the project as well as presenting it to the world space community, it said. "An international lunar science station is a complex of experimental and



research facilities created on the surface and/or in orbit of the moon, designed to conduct multidisciplinary and multipurpose research work", it said. — **Reuters**

LONDON

Caution urged on easing Covid-19 lockdown

Britain is not "out of the woods" on Covid-19 and it won't be possible to eliminate coronavirus infections and deaths, the government's top medical and scientific advisers said on Tuesday, stressing the need for a gradual exit from lockdown.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has announced what he has called a cautious but irreversible roadmap out of England's third national lockdown.

His Chief Scientific Adviser Patrick Vallance said that, while



deaths were decreasing and the vaccine rollout was going well, the situation could quickly deteriorate. "It's all pointing in the right direction, but I think nobody can say with certainty that this is... finished", he said. — **Reuters**

Migrants face ‘invisible wall’

ANASTASIA MOLONEY

From Australia to Egypt, migrants and refugees have been especially hard hit by job losses and economic pain during the coronavirus pandemic, with many struggling to access healthcare and state aid, a survey showed on Tuesday.

The survey, published in a report by the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Global Migration Lab, included 3,250 interviews with migrants in eight countries — Australia, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Sudan, Sweden and Britain.

Migrant workers are over-represented in hard-hit sectors such as food production and hospitality, meaning they have been disproportionately affected by layoffs and wage losses linked to Covid-19, the report said.

Migrants also make up a significant share of key workers in healthcare, scientific research, food supply chains, and those making personal protective equipment (PPE).

Yet the pandemic has led to the “intentional exclusion of migrants

MIGRANT
WORKERS
ARE OVER-
REPRESENTED
IN HARD-
HIT SECTORS
SUCH AS FOOD
PRODUCTION
AND
HOSPITALITY

from Covid-19 prevention and support programmes’, such as government cash transfers, the report said.

In Australia, nearly 90 per cent of migrants surveyed online said they were financially worse off because of the pandemic, while in Egypt, nearly 80 per cent said their income had fallen by between 70 per cent and 100 per cent due to Covid-19 restrictions.

In Africa’s Sahel region, some migrants without work prior to the pandemic have resorted to begging and most were not able to make enough money to cover their basic needs, the survey found.

“Our research reveals what we are calling an ‘invisible wall’ that has blocked migrants - particularly those undocumented or in an irregular situation — from accessing basic services,” Jagan Chapagain, secretary-general of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, (IFRC) said in a statement.

Some nations, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Britain, have introduced measures to ensure migrants — regardless of their immigration status — have free access to Covid-19 testing and screening, the report noted.

But elsewhere, migrants have been unable to access Covid-19 care because they do not have a national identity or social security number. This barrier is likely to also affect access to vaccinations even if migrants are eligible by law to receive coronavirus jabs, the report warned.

“The inclusion of migrants into national Covid-19 policies does not necessarily translate into inclusive and effective access in practice,” Chapagain said.

In some countries, migrants need to register online to get Covid-19 vaccinations, which can exclude some due to their limited Internet access and language barriers, the report said.

It also said migrants reported being hesitant to consult a doctor, seek treatment, and register for the Covid-19 vaccine due to fears of disclosing information that may be shared with immigration authorities to arrest, detain or deport them.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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

A YEAR OF ISOLATION

Vaccinated older Americans start to reclaim their lives

JOSEPH AX

Precisely two weeks after receiving her second Covid-19 vaccine shot, Sylvia Baer spent the day getting an eye exam, enjoying a manicure and buying groceries at Whole Foods - a schedule that 12 months ago would have been utterly unremarkable.

Yet the 71-year-old college professor found herself on the verge of tears at, of all places, the eye doctor’s office - the first time in nearly a year she had stepped inside a building that was not her own home for more than a moment.

“I was so happy,” she said, recalling how exciting it was to walk into her grocery store again in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. “I left with five different desserts and three different kinds of olives.”

Across the United States, Covid-19 vaccinations are changing seniors’ daily lives in ways large and small a year after the

pandemic drove many in the high-risk group into forced isolation. Older Americans are again visiting family members, eating at their favourite restaurants and shopping in stores without fear of death or hospitalisation.

The emergence of new, potentially more virulent variants of the coronavirus is causing some inoculated seniors to return to their routines with caution, however.

And the weight of so many deaths among their peers, plus the psychological burden that accompanied months of quarantine, will not dissipate overnight.

This week, Linda Dobrusin, 80, will welcome three friends - all of whom have also been vaccinated - into her home in Southfield, Michigan, to restart a weekly card game of canasta on hold since last spring.

The occasion is bittersweet for Dobrusin, who lost a lifelong friend to Covid-19 last year. The pandemic made a proper funeral impossible, so she watched the small graveside service via video.

“It’s hard to believe it’s been a year, and yet it feels like forever,” Dobrusin said.

For many seniors, the vaccine’s biggest boon is allowing them to see relatives again, after missing out on weddings, births, graduations and holidays. Older Americans in particular, who often face health risks apart from the pandemic, have felt the loss of a full calendar year deeply.

Sharon Halper, 76, is scheduled to receive the second of two shots in mid-March. Two weeks after that - when researchers say the full effect of the vaccine is reached - she plans to cook a big meal and invite her grandsons for dinner at her home in Warwick, New York, including one who recently got engaged. — Reuters

AN IMPLOSION

Lebanon’s collapse piles strain on army, security forces

ELLEN FRANCIS & ISSAM ABDALLAH

Discontent is brewing in the ranks of Lebanon’s security forces over a currency crash wiping out most of the value of their salaries as unrest and crime surge.

In unusually outspoken comments, army chief General Joseph Aoun said his warnings that the pressure on soldiers’ earnings and morale could lead to an “implosion” had fallen on deaf ears.

Lebanon’s pound has crashed 85 per cent since late 2019 in a financial meltdown that poses the biggest threat to stability since the 1975-1990 civil war.

“Soldiers are going hungry like the people,” he said on Monday, berating politicians without naming names.

“Do they want the army or not? Do you want the army to stay on its feet or not? ... They don’t care.”

The basic monthly salary of a soldier or policeman, which used to amount to around \$800, is worth under \$120 today. Budget cuts pushed the military to cut meat from its meals last year.

In what was seen as a sign of the times, the French embassy donated food parcels last month to the Lebanese army, which has long been backed by Western nations.

Some officials caution that security forces will struggle to contain unrest.

More than half the population is now poor, with wages slashed across the board, prices soaring and no state rescue plan in sight. That was even before the currency hit a record low last week after months of political paralysis. The military, its commander and the caretaker interior minister have denied recent local media reports that economic hardship spurred a rise in



A soldier stands guard as smoke rises from tires set on fire by demonstrators, during a protest in Sidon, Lebanon. — Reuters

LEBANON’S POUND
HAS CRASHED 85 PER
CENT SINCE LATE
2019 IN A FINANCIAL
MELTDOWN THAT
POSES THE
BIGGEST THREAT
TO STABILITY
SINCE THE 1975-1990
CIVIL WAR

forces abandoning duty.

Still, three security sources said a buildup of pressure on lower-ranking servicemen has fueled concerns of desertions. One member of the security forces, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he wanted to leave after many years because it had become hard to pay rent. He said he knew three others who had deserted, which is punishable by law, and worried commanders would reject his request for a discharge.

“If nothing works, I’ll have to resort to fleeing,” he said, adding he used to be able to buy his children whatever they wanted but now could barely afford a few groceries.

A second security source said army

desertions were still within the usual pre-crisis figures, though there were plans to boost aid to avoid a rise.

“We’re feeling the choke but we’re enduring,” He said a sense of national duty and bleak job prospects across Lebanon helped keep forces from wavering, but warned they should not “be pushed too far.”

FEAR OF CRIME

With Lebanon on edge, unrest is expected to grow. Protesters have burned tyres and shut main roads since the Lebanese pound hit its new low.

While the president urged forces to stop the roadblocks on Monday, General Aoun warned in a separate meeting against pulling the army into political wrangles. — Reuters

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Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
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24699437
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Al OMANEYA for Distribution &
Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100,
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24649351/24649360
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LOEW WILL LEAVE WITH A YEAR LEFT

ON HIS CONTRACT HAVING SIGNED UP UNTIL THE 2022

WORLD CUP FINALS IN QATAR

JOACHIM LOEW TO

STEP DOWN



Germany's World Cup-winning head coach Joachim Loew will step down after the European championships this July, the German football association said on Tuesday. Loew, 61, will leave with a year left on his contract having signed up until the 2022 World Cup finals in Qatar. In a statement, Loew said he was "full of pride and enormous gratitude" after nearly 15 years as national coach and that he was "motivated" for his swansong at the rearranged European championships from June 11-July 11. Fritz Keller, the president of the German football association (DFB), said Loew's decision "gives us the necessary time to name his successor calmly". Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp on Tuesday ruled himself out of the running to replace Loew. "Am I available for the job after the summer? No," Klopp said in Liverpool.

"Someone else will do the job and with the number of good German managers I am sure the German FA will find a good solution. "I have three years left at Liverpool. You sign a contract and you stick to it." Loew has vowed to go out on a high at the European championships but Germany face a tough task in the same group as world champions France and holders Portugal. "I still feel the will, great energy and ambition," Loew insisted. "I will do my best to make our fans happy and be successful at this tournament."

GREAT TRIUMPHS, PAINFUL DEFEATS
Loew, nicknamed 'Jogi', has been in charge of Germany since 2006. The 2014 triumph in Brazil, where his side beat Lionel Messi's Argentina in the final thanks to Mario Goetze's extra-time winner, was the highpoint of his reign.

AFTER EUROS

But Loew has faced three years of criticism since holders Germany crashed out of the 2018 World Cup in Russia at the group stage. The calls for him to resign grew louder after Germany were hammered 6-0 by Spain in the Nations League last November. Until the 2018 debacle, the Germans had reached at least the semifinals of every tournament under Loew. "I have worked with the best footballers in the country and supported them in their development," Loew said on Tuesday. "I have had great triumphs with them and painful defeats, but above all many wonderful and magical moments - not just winning the 2014 World Cup in Brazil." The fallout from the debacle in Russia tainted his legacy as he struggled to rebuild the team. His decision in March 2019 to end the international careers of veterans Thomas Mueller, Jerome Boateng and

Mats Hummels soon backfired. The assured performances of Mueller and Boateng in 2019/20 helped Bayern Munich win the Champions League title and led to Loew constantly having to defend his decision to sideline them from the national setup. Recently, Loew has hinted that he may recall the exiled trio for Germany's World Cup qualifiers at the end of March. His record as coach is an impressive 120 wins in 189 games with Germany with 38 draws and 31 defeats. "I have great respect for Joachim Loew's decision," Keller said. "The DFB knows what it has in 'Jogi', he is one of the greatest coaches in world football. Bastian Schweinsteiger, one of the heroes of Germany's 2014 World Cup triumph, said he had "a lot to thank" Loew for. "My respect goes to Joachim Loew. I wish him and the team a European Championship title at the end," said the 36-year-old Schweinsteiger. — AFP

 I have worked with the best footballers in the country and supported them in their development

JOACHIM LOEW
Germany head coach

In brief

■ NEW DELHI



WORLD TEST FINAL MOVED TO SOUTHAMPTON

The World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand in June has been moved from Lord's to Southampton because of the pandemic, Indian cricket chief Sourav Ganguly said. The inaugural championship's final had long been planned for Lord's, known as the 'home of cricket', in London. But Ganguly told Indian media that Southampton's Ageas Bowl was preferred because the venue has a built-in hotel. The date of the final has not yet been announced. "I'm looking forward to attending the World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand in Southampton," Ganguly said.

■ WELLINGTON



WILLIAMSON OUT OF BANGLADESH ODIS WITH ELBOW INJURY

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson will miss this month's one-day international series against Bangladesh because of an elbow injury, the Black Caps said on Tuesday. The team's medical manager Dayle Shackel said Williamson had a small tear in his left elbow that had been irritating him for months. He said Williamson had attempted to manage the injury while still playing without success, forcing him to sit out the three-match Bangladesh ODI series, which begins on March 20.

"He now needs a period of rest and rehabilitation to get the injury right," Shackel said.

■ LONDON



'DOCK MONEY' IF PLAYERS PUT IPL OVER ENGLAND

The English cricket board must stop treating its players in a "namby-pamby way" and dock money if they put the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL) above national duty, former test batsman Geoffrey Boycott said. Head coach Chris Silverwood has said England players would be allowed to miss the start of the test series against New Zealand in June if their IPL teams make the final of the Twenty20 competition.

"England messed up with a rotation policy in India and must stop treating players in a namby-pamby way," Boycott wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*.

"Players seem to forget the IPL would not come calling for them if they had not performed for England first."

Oman to head for Dubai camp tomorrow

IVANKOVIC SATISFIED WITH PLAYERS BACK TO TRAINING

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Oman national football team will head off to Dubai city on Thursday to begin the first overseas camp in 2021 which is significant part of team's gearing up to the joint 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers. The 'Red Warriors' started the internal camp on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in presence of all the selected players for the camp.

According to the schedule of training plan, the fourth and fifth training sessions will take place on Wednesday morning and evening after three sessions which occurred on Monday and Tuesday. The warm-up programme will be continued the same day of team's arrival in Dubai as the evening training session will begin at 8 pm on Thursday.

Head coach Branko Ivankovic, accompanied by the assistant coaching staff supervised the training sessions in Bausher. The coaching staff began with fitness and stretching trainings as initial warm up. The tactical and technical sessions took place in the evening period. The players trained in very narrow spaces to raise the technical coordination among them. Besides, the players also trained shooting for long



distances and creating the scoring chances.

Ivankovic expressed his satisfaction with team returning to the training ground and said the first days of the camp went smoothly and players delivered good level during the sessions. "Dhofar and Al Suwaiq players did some recovery trainings and we followed up with the players who were under medical supervision," he added.

JUMA REPLACES KHALID

On the other hand, the coaching staff replaced injured Khalid al Buraiki with Seeb's Juma al Habsi in the team list.

Shaikh Salim bin Said al Wahaibi, Chairman of Oman Football Association (OFA) met

the coaching, administration staff and the players on Monday.

The OFA chief discussed with the players on the top team assignment at the joint qualifiers and raising the technical preparations level for this significant event. "I hope all the



team players achieve the desired objectives in the forthcoming external camp in the UAE which will start on Thursday. The camp is part of the team's preparation also for the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup Championship, "he ended.

The Red Warriors will have the

first international match against Jordan on March 20 in Dubai while the next preparatory fixture is scheduled against India on March 25.

OMAN PROBABLES

Goalkeepers: Fayez al Rushaidi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini; **Defenders:** Mohammed al Musallami, Ahmad al Khamisi, Ali al Nahar, Fahmi Durbin, Juma al Habsi, Abdulaziz al Ghilani, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmad al Kaabi and Abbas al Hashimi; **Midfielders:** Abdullah Fawaz, Harib al Saadi, Yazid al Mashani, Amjad al Harthi, Zahir al Aghbari, Salah al Yahyai, Omar al Fazari, Mohsin Jawhar and Yaseen al Shiyadi; **Forwards:** Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Mohammad al Ghafri, Khalid al Hajri, Mohsin al Ghassani and Omar al Malki.

Oman Cricket marks Women's Day during league game



MUSCAT: Reiterating its commitment to promotion of women's cricket in the country, Oman Cricket (OC) celebrated the International Women's Day on March 8 by holding a ceremony during a Women's League game at OC Turf 1 in Amerat.

Recognising the importance of female participation in cricket, senior OC officials presented purple colour ribbons to all the players and match officials before the start of the game between Indian Social Club and Wadi Kabir Women teams.

Apart from having Oman Women's Cricket Academy with world class facilities where players are trained by qualified coaches, Oman Cricket has a dedicated league for its female players, providing them a platform to showcase their talent and skills.

"Women's Day is a very special occasion for us and our female players. We are glad to see that various schools and

social clubs are coming forward and supporting the development of women's cricket in Oman. During the last ICC World Cup final in Australia, 86,000 supporters were present in the stadium to support their teams which itself proves that cricket is growing at world stage. Oman Cricket will leave no stone unturned for the development of women's cricket in the country," said Madhu Jesrani, Secretary, Oman Cricket.

Paul Sheridan, Advisor Oman Cricket, said: "Women's cricket is one of the fastest growing sports in the world. In Oman, cricket is growing and thriving. We are fortunate to have such world class facilities available for all the budding cricketers. Oman Cricket is regularly organising international tours and matches for Oman women's team. We are also proud to have a women's cricket team sponsor TM! Done. Their support is helping us in developing women's cricket."

Speaking on the occasion,

Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer at Oman Cricket and national team coach, said; "I am proud to say that OC has always endorsed the development of women cricket. ICC is also supporting all the nations to achieve this goal. We have provided our facilities to all our women cricketers for their development and growth."

Vaishali Jesrani, Lady Coordinator, Oman Cricket, was pleased to see the Women's Day celebration.

"Women are in the forefront of all major activities including business, career or sports."

"Women in Oman are now coming forward and participating in all sports such as cricket, taekwondo, badminton and boxing, which were earlier known only as men's sports. It is heartening to see that Oman Cricket is committed to offering regular cricket to all our female players and provides them quality coaching to become competitive cricketers," she added.

'Fiery' Gauff sees off Vondrousova in Dubai

DUBAI: American teen sensation Coco Gauff fought "fire with fire" to come through a tension-fuelled second round against Marketa Vondrousova in Dubai on Tuesday, to join seeds Karolina Pliskova and Aryna Sabalenka in the last-16 stage.

Contesting a seventh consecutive three-set match, Gauff needed two hours to dismiss the Czech No. 12 seed 3-6, 6-0, 6-4 and set up a third-round meeting with qualifier Tereza Martincova.

The contest took on an edge when 16-year-old Gauff complained to the umpire about how Vondrousova was catching her ball toss with her racquet instead of letting it bounce or capturing it with her hand, which she believed to be against the rules.

The incident sparked some tension between the pair as the match unfolded.

At one point Gauff aimed directly at Vondrousova's body on a drive volley at the net and did not apologise. The Czech also forewent the courtesy apology

“My personality, I fight fire with fire. I lost those two points that game, and she had wild screams, and I like to scream, so I screamed back.”

COCO GAUFF,
US player

when she claimed a point via a lucky net cord.

"My personality, I fight fire with fire," Gauff later said of the incident.

"I lost those two points that game, and she had wild screams, and I like to scream, so I screamed back."

Gauff, who hit a career-high ranking of 38 last week, is hoping to continue her impressive rise with the goal of being seeded at the next grand slam.

The popular youngster turns 17 on Saturday. — AFP



Chelsea cruise, West Ham win as top-4 race hots up

LONDON: Chelsea strengthened their hold on fourth place in the Premier League as Kai Havertz inspired a vital 2-0 win over Everton, while West Ham boosted their surprise top four challenge with a 2-0 victory against Leeds on Monday.

Havertz has endured a disappointing first season following his £70 million (\$96 million) move from Bayer Leverkusen last year.

But the Germany forward was given a rare start by Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel and he responded by playing the key role in both goals at Stamford Bridge.

Havertz's shot was deflected into the Everton net for a Ben Godfrey own goal in the first half.

The 21-year-old has not scored in the league since October, but Tuchel entrusted him with an important role as Chelsea's false nine and Havertz's intelligent movement put him in position to earn the second-half penalty that Jorginho converted.

"I'm very happy with his performance, no doubt about his quality, his talent and also his character", Tuchel said.

"He needs to adapt to the Premier League, he needs to be at a club where you play to win every game, where the highest standards are normal.

"That's a normal process for him to adapt to this mentality."

Chelsea are unbeaten in 11 games in all competitions — winning eight times — since Tuchel replaced the sacked Frank Lampard in January. They are two points ahead of fifth placed West Ham, who have a game in hand in a tense race to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish.

The Blues have kept nine clean-sheets under Tuchel and only their former Italian boss Maurizio Sarri, who went 12 games unbeaten, has enjoyed a better start with the west London club.

"If you share special moments and good results, this is the thing that lifts you up to the special performances you need", Tuchel said. "I can feel a strong bond between the players in the dressing room. I feel positive energy from everyone around the team. We need this to have a run like this."

LINGARD SHINES

Sixth placed Everton are four points behind Chelsea after their first away defeat since November.

"They played better than us", Everton Manager Carlo Ancelotti said. "Once they scored it was more difficult. We are

Chelsea are unbeaten in 11 games in all competitions — winning eight times — since Tuchel replaced the sacked Frank Lampard in January

disappointed, but not too much."

West Ham's unexpected bid to finish in the top four gathered pace with a confident dismantling of Leeds at the London Stadium.

Leeds boss Marcelo Bielsa might have known it wasn't going to be his night when his side had two early goals disallowed.

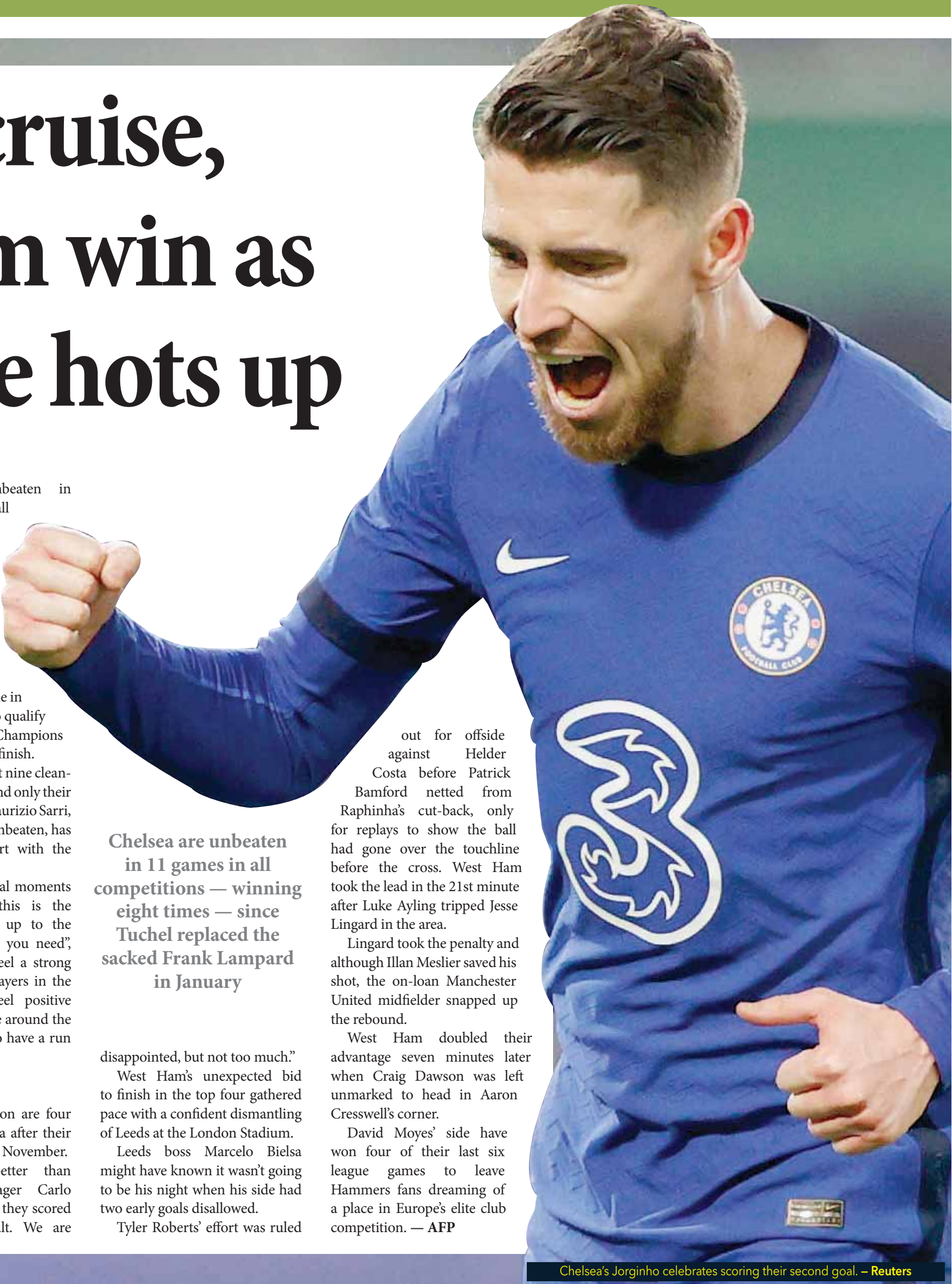
Tyler Roberts' effort was ruled

out for offside against Helder Costa before Patrick Bamford netted from Raphinha's cut-back, only for replays to show the ball had gone over the touchline before the cross. West Ham took the lead in the 21st minute after Luke Ayling tripped Jesse Lingard in the area.

Lingard took the penalty and although Illan Meslier saved his shot, the on-loan Manchester United midfielder snapped up the rebound.

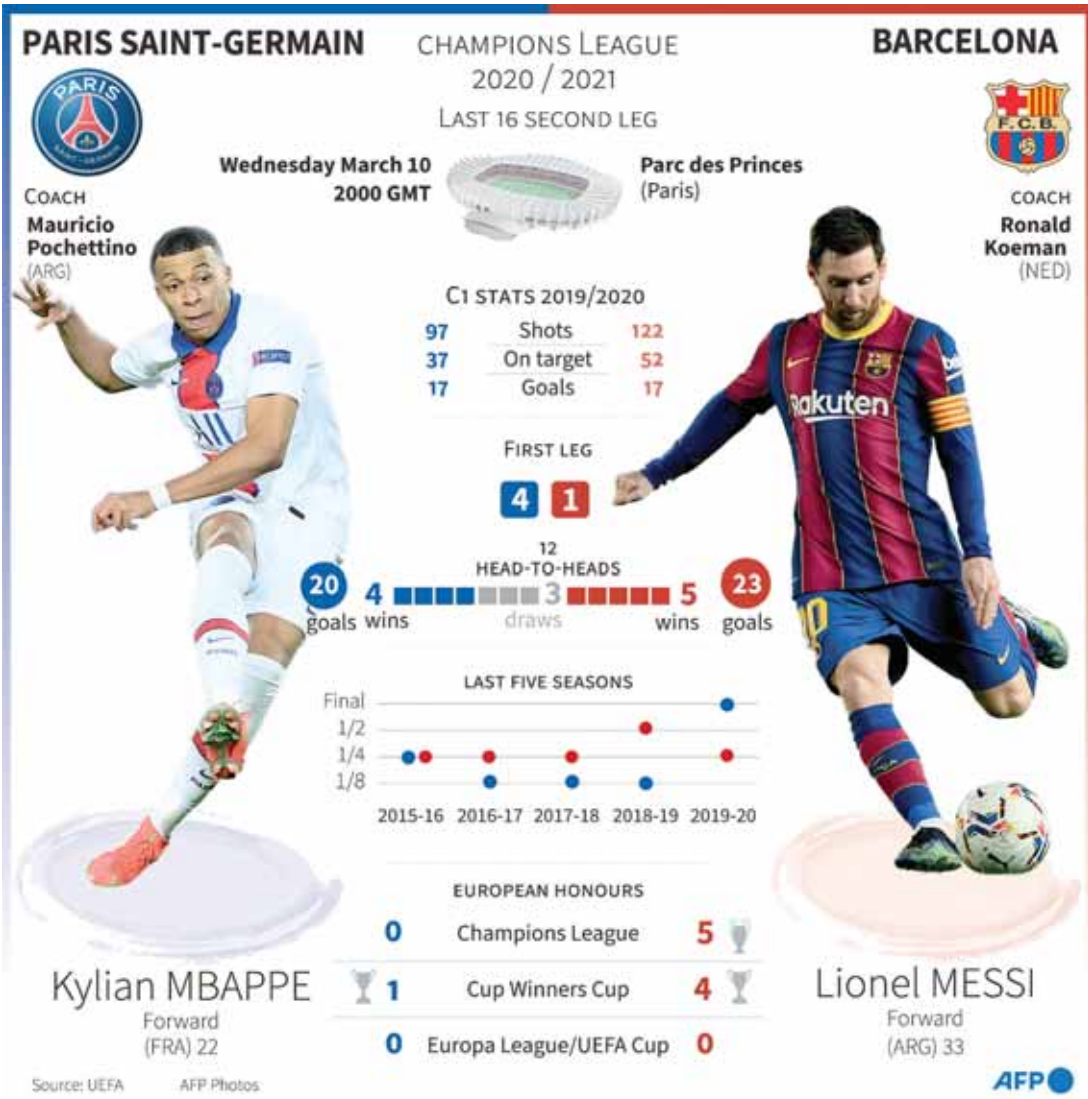
West Ham doubled their advantage seven minutes later when Craig Dawson was left unmarked to head in Aaron Cresswell's corner.

David Moyes' side have won four of their last six league games to leave Hammers fans dreaming of a place in Europe's elite club competition. — AFP



Chelsea's Jorginho celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

Messi to Paris: Barca nightmare and PSG's unattainable dream?



PARIS: As Lionel Messi comes to Paris this week with Barcelona in the Champions League, the inevitable temptation is to think ahead to next season and wonder if the Argentine might be a regular fixture in the French capital.

That remains the nightmare scenario for Barcelona fans, even if their new president Joan Laporta announced following his election victory on Sunday that he was "convinced he wants to stay".

Barcelona, like Real Madrid, fear the threat to their status at the top of the European game posed by Qatar-owned PSG and Abu Dhabi-owned Manchester City. On the evidence of the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie, PSG have bypassed Barca. Their 4-1 win at the Camp Nou means it would take a stunning turnaround in Wednesday's return to stop them reaching the quarterfinals.

A move to one of Spain's giants was long seen as the pinnacle for any player, but times have changed, as proven by Neymar's transfer to Paris for a world record 222 million euros (\$264m at the time) in 2017. PSG and City are probably the only likely destinations for Messi should he leave. But could a switch to Paris really happen?

'RESERVED A SEAT JUST IN CASE'

"Great players like Messi will always be on PSG's list", insisted the French champions' sporting director Leonardo in a January interview with *France Football* magazine.

"We are sat at the big table with all those who are keeping a close eye on it. Well, we are not sat down yet, but we have reserved a seat just in case."

Neymar would be delighted to team up with the Argentine again. "It's what I most want", he told ESPN in December. PSG would not need to pay a transfer fee, and Messi — who turns 34 in June — would be joining a club surely better placed in the short-term to win the Champions League.

He would also be teaming up with a coach in Mauricio Pochettino who is a fellow Argentine. Indeed, Pochettino was born in Murphy in the province of Santa Fe, just 150 kilometres from Messi's home city, Rosario. Both started playing at Newell's Old Boys.

"I have to be careful not to talk about players who are at other clubs", Pochettino said of Messi last week.

"In any case it is an easy answer. Great players can play for any team."

Yet Messi does not represent the future. Kylian Mbappe, scorer of a hat-trick in the first leg, does. He is 22, the

age Messi was when he won his first Ballon d'Or.

NEW CONTRACTS FOR MBAPPE AND NEYMAR?

PSG's energy and finances need to be focused on the future of Mbappe and the 29-year-old Neymar.

Both are out of contract at the end of next season. Leonardo recently said a new deal for the Brazilian was "on the right track".

Meanwhile, Mbappe has admitted he is still mulling over what to do next.

"I am very happy here. I have always been very happy", he declared recently. "But I want to think about what I want to do in the coming years, where I want to be."

According to documents released in 2018 by Football Leaks, Neymar's existing after-tax salary is 30 million euros (\$35.8m) a year while Mbappe's was due to rise to 11 million euros this year. It is safe to assume neither will be taking a wage reduction to stay.

Meanwhile, in January *El Mundo* published details of Messi's current contract, which it said is worth up to 555 million euros over four years.

Money may have once proven no obstacle for PSG, but the current climate means signing Messi could be beyond even them. — AFP

business

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Maha Energy to invest \$20m in Oman’s Block 70

KEY COMMITMENTS:
During the initial exploration period of three years, Maha Energy's contractual obligations include interpretation and reprocessing of 3D seismic and drilling of 10 shallow wells

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Swedish upstream Oil & Gas firm Maha Energy says it plans to invest around \$20 million during the initial phase of a six-year pact covering the exploration of the hydrocarbon potential of

the onshore Block 70 in central Oman.

The announcement comes in the wake of the signing of an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) with the Omani government, represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, last October.

The relatively small 639 sq km concession, previously held by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) as part of its extensive Block 6 licence, includes the promising shallow, undeveloped Mafrag heavy oil field.

“With the acquisition of the Block 70 in Oman, the Company will undertake minimum work obligations during the initial exploration period of three years which include interpretation and reprocessing of 3D seismic and drilling 10 shallow wells. Costs



for these activities are estimated at \$20 million”, the Stockholm-headquartered international upstream firm, which also has interests in Brazil and the United States, said in its latest quarterly financial report.

According to Maha Energy, the Mafrag reservoir, located at a depth of around 430 metres, is estimated to contain between 185 – 280 million barrels of original oil in place (OOIP)

acquired in the United States, the Omani acreage represented “high quality — low risk — assets” that have added to the company’s 2P (proved plus probable) and contingent resources, he noted.

“2021 has already started out on several positive notes; the oil price is up over 50 per cent since the lows of Q4 production has been across all key assets and the Company has laid the foundation for serious production growth in

all the core areas of Brazil, Oman and the USA”, Lindvall stated.

Following the ratification of the EPSA pact by Royal Decree late last year, Maha Energy became the operator of Block 70 with a 100 per cent working interest.

In the event of a commercial discovery of oil or gas, the six-year agreement can be upgraded into a 15-year production license extendable for a further five years.

The EPSA sets out, among other things, the respective entitlements of the company and the government to produced oil, natural gas and condensate.

According to Maha Energy, the Mafrag reservoir, located at a depth of around 430 metres, is estimated to contain between 185-280 million barrels of original oil in place (OOIP).

OPWP to launch sustainability awareness campaign ‘Daymah’

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) is set to launch a virtual campaign named ‘Daymah’ next Sunday in line with its vision to become the regional leader in sustainable procurement of power and water.

To this end, OPWP is collaborating with the Ministry

of Education in launching the CSR initiative which aims at raising awareness on sustainable and renewable energy resources among the youths in Oman.

The programme is planned to be executed next week for four days. The sustainability campaign invites children of grades 5 and 6 to take part in a series of interactive lessons educating them on renewable energy

resources and the generation of electricity.

The programme is targeting to involve 100 students in its first phase in an engaging and fun experience for children, incorporating various zones with different activities and experiments to enjoy. This virtual event will also feature a series of cartoon episodes representing the characters of ‘Shams’ means ‘Sun’ and ‘Najam’ means ‘Star’ and their mother who are presenting different electricity and renewables educational topics in a very attractive way.

“With the depleting traditional energy resources available in the world it is becoming critically important to incorporate sustainable resources in our day to day lives, any planned future change should be deployed until it become a culture”, OPWP’s Communication Officer and the manager in charge of Daymah Campaign, Marwa bint Yahya al Mughairiyah stated.

“We believe our children of today hold the future of tomorrow, where such campaigns are a valuable step towards building a better, brighter future for the world and Oman, and an important step forward in our global efforts towards protecting the well-being of our planet”, she added.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) FOR PROVISION OF VULNERABILITIES ASSESSMENT AND PENETRATION TESTING SERVICES FOR OMAN ELECTRICITY MARKET MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatisation of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 2004/78 as amended and the OPWP licence.

Tender Description	OPWP intends to implement a wholesale electricity spot market for the electricity sector in Oman known as the Oman Electricity Market. To operate the Oman Electricity Market, OPWP is developing an IT system called Market Management System (MMS). OPWP seeks a proposal from interested Bidders to provide vulnerabilities assessment and penetration testing services for the MMS. Please visit OPWP's website for additional information at www.omanpwp.om .
Tender Number	3/2021
Tender Purchase Period	10 March 2021 to 24 March 2021
Tender Fee	OMR 150
Submission date	21 April 2021 Before 11:30 AM (Gulf Standard Time).
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents will be provided in electronic format upon evidence of payment. The payment can be processed by local/international bank transfer and evidence of the bank transfer submitted by email to the procurement officer through procurement.officer@omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A bank guarantee of not less than 1% of the tender value, and valid for 120 days from the submission deadline date, shall be enclosed as part of the tender. OPWP is not obligated to take the lowest tender offer.

Bank account details:
Local Bank account details:
Account Name: Oman Power & Water Procurement Company SAOC
Beneficiary Bank: Bank Muscat
Branch: Corporate Branch
Account number: 0423011072740015
Swift code: BMUSOMRXXXX

International Bank details:
Correspondent Bank: JP Morgan Chase Bank, New York
Address: 4 New York Plaza, Floor 15, New York
ABA No: 000021 021
Chips No: CP0002
SWIFT Code: BMUSOMRXXXX
Beneficiary Bank: Bank Muscat
Beneficiary Name: Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC
Beneficiary Bank Account No: 0423011072740015

Oman Power And Water Procurement Co. S.A.O.C.
5th Floor, Building 5, Muscat Grand Mall, Tilal Complex (Office)
P.O. Box 1388, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Ruwi.
Tel.: 8400 2450 968+ | Fax: 9946 2439 968+ | www.omanpwp.om

Invitation from Bank Muscat (S.A.O.G)
For an Extraordinary General Meeting and an Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Shareholders of the Bank

Bank Muscat “SAOG” takes pleasure in inviting all its shareholders to an Extraordinary General Meeting and an Annual Ordinary General Meeting at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 23rd March, 2021, through the electronic platform to hold the general meetings, which you can access via the Muscat Clearing and Depository’s website (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum is not met to hold this meeting, a second meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, 25th March, 2021 through the above mentioned electronic platform, to consider and decide on the following Agenda:

First: The Agenda for the Extraordinary General Meeting:

To consider and approve the proposed increase of the authorized share capital of the Bank from RO. 350,000,000/- to RO. 450,000,000/- and amend the Articles of Association accordingly.

Second: The Agenda for the Annual Ordinary General Meeting:

1. To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020.	increase of the issued share capital of the Bank from (3,249,522,539) shares to (3,574,474,792) shares of a nominal value of (100) Baiza each.
2. To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020.	7. To consider and ratify the sitting fees for the Board of Directors and its committees’ meetings for the financial year ended 31 st December-2020, and fix sitting fees for the current financial year.
3. To consider the Auditor’s Report and approval of the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Accounts for the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020.	8. To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ remuneration of RO. 150,000/- for the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020.
4. To consider the report of the Shari’a Supervisory Board of Meethaq, the Islamic Banking window, for the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020.	9. To consider the Related Party Transactions for transactions concluded during the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020.
5. To consider and approve the recommendation to distribute cash dividend at the rate of (25%) of the issued share capital of the Bank (being 25 Baiza cash dividend for each share of a nominal value of 100 Baiza) for the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020.	10. To consider and approve the Related Party Transactions that will be concluded during the financial year ending 31 st December, 2021.
6. To consider and approve the recommendation to distribute stock dividend at the rate of (10%) per share of the issued share capital of the Bank (being 10 bonus shares for each 100 shares) for the financial year ended 31 st December, 2020. The approval of the distribution of the bonus shares will result in the	11. To appoint the statutory auditors for the Bank and the external independent Sharia auditors for Meethaq, the Islamic banking window of the Bank, for the financial year ending 31 st December, 2021 and fixing their fees, subject to the applicable regulatory approvals.

In accordance with the regulations for holding general meetings using modern technology issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- A Juristic person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the general meetings and vote on its behalf through the electronic platform, provided that this natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the meetings until the end of the voting process during the meeting. In the event that the shareholder’s shareholding balance is changed by increase or decrease, the voting process will be canceled, and he will have to vote again on the day of the meetings.

For any clarifications in respect of the agenda of the above meetings, please contact Ms. Fatma Maiallah Mohamed Al Lawati, at the Secretariat to the Board of Directors, Tel. No. (24768345), Fax No. (24780062), E-mail (fmallalah@bankmuscat.com).

Khalid bin Mustahail Al Mashani
Chairman of the Board of Directors

Ernst & Young
Statutory Auditors of the Bank and External Independent Sharia Auditors for Meethaq, the Islamic banking window

Legal Advisor

Eurosceptic politicians form new City lobby group

A group of pro-Brexit figures in the financial district of London (known as the 'City') and politicians have created a new UK financial services lobby group in a bid to trumpet the sector's success post-Brexit.

The recently launched body, is called the City United project and it aims to "combat and negate the European Union's actions" by "promoting bold new initiatives to exploit the UK's expertise in financial services".

The City lobby group is being chaired by ex-chief executive of the London International Financial Futures and Options Exchange professor Daniel Hodson, with former finance minister Lord Norman Lamont and former Member of European Parliament, Lord Daniel Hannan

on its board. It comes as Amsterdam surpassed London as the largest share trading centre in January in the wake of the UK's exit from the EU's single market and customs union. The City also lost its previous EU-wide access to European financial markets on 31 December.

"New opportunities are opening up to secure the City's global leadership in regulation and product development," Hodson said. He added: "We see a massive chance to strengthen and enhance the UK's existing position in global regulatory leadership, working in partnership with other major financial centres across the world, in contrast to the increasingly protectionist financial markets of the EU."

Brussels believes the UK is destined to diverge from its



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

THE RECENTLY LAUNCHED BODY, IS CALLED THE CITYUNITED PROJECT AND IT AIMS TO "COMBAT AND NEGATE THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ACTIONS" BY "PROMOTING BOLD NEW INITIATIVES TO EXPLOIT THE UK'S EXPERTISE IN FINANCIAL SERVICES".

financial services regulations and has withheld the equivalence status.

The Treasury has been holding Memorandum of Understanding talks with the EU to ensure future regulatory cooperation around financial services. The talks aim to put in place an agreement so that financial services regulators in the UK and EU share information and have open dialogue when making new regulatory decisions. Foreign minister Dominic Raab said that the City of London's largest competitors now, post-Brexit, will be in Asia and the US, not the EU.

Barclays chief executive Jes Staley also commented that the City needs "to be focused on New York and Singapore" post-Brexit and not the EU.

"The crucial question for the EU, while it may be able, if you

like, to nick a bit of business here or there from the City, but the problem is the measures they will take to achieve this will undermine their own competitiveness", Raab said.

He added: "The challenge to London as a global financial centre around the world will come from Tokyo, New York and other areas rather than those European hubs. Particularly if they start to erect barriers to trade and investment."

The post-Brexit trade deal did not include provisions for any kind of services, financial or otherwise. This is despite services making up a massive 80 per cent of the UK's economy.

This means that the City of London which lost its EU-wide access to European markets, now has to rely on a patchwork of regulations from individual countries.

Major banks had been prepared for this scenario, leading to an estimated £1 trillion in assets and thousands of jobs moving from London to EU financial capitals since the 2016 Brexit referendum.

The only way London's financial district can regain its pre-Brexit access is if the EU grants the UK regulatory equivalence in about 40 different areas. This is only granted if Brussels believes the UK's financial services sector will remain in the regulatory orbit of the EU in each area – now considered an unlikely prospect.

The EU did grant equivalence for London's clearinghouses to continue operating throughout the bloc on a temporary basis, which was considered crucial to maintaining financial stability.

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Own a Toyota Camry and save now



MUSCAT: One of the world's most popular sedan the Toyota Camry has remained a best-seller among automotive enthusiasts. The Camry is spacious, technologically advanced, dependable and makes for the perfect choice for those in search of memorable driving experiences.

Customers looking forward to owning a Camry can avail exclusive benefits including cash gift from RO 2100 to RO 3200, service 2 years / 20,000 kms (whichever is earlier), and comprehensive 1-year

insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance from RO 250 up to RO 300.

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Please visit the nearest Toyota showroom for exact details).

The Camry is available in two engine options. The 2.5L engine delivers 178 HP & 23.6 Kg-m torque & 3.5L engine delivers 298 HP & 36.3 Kg-m torque.

Bank Muscat continues anti-fraud campaign

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to social responsibility, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, is continuing its anti-fraud campaign to raise awareness amongst the general public against instances of electronic fraud.

With digital payments building momentum over the past, especially in the aftermath of Covid-19, fraudsters from across the globe have increased efforts to defraud the general public. Continuing its yearlong activities from last year, the bank has released its latest anti-fraud educational video in 2021 to help its customers and the general public easily recognise fraudulent practices.

This campaign advises people to always verify who it is they are dealing with before conducting a transaction and also follow 'best practices' for their digital safety. The bank's special educational



campaign is being carried out using various methods including Oman TV, radio, print and online media, and various social media channels.

The message provides examples of how fraudsters are perpetrating fraud and its consequences of blindly trusting people, especially when making purchases through the Internet without being sure of the seller's credentials.

The bank has reminded the public that they can contact the Royal Oman Police at 800777444 for advice and queries regarding electronic fraud.

Bank Muscat has also reminded its customers that times of global emergencies are almost always exploited by fraudsters.

PRESS RELEASE

NBO AWARDS GOOGLE HASH CODE WINNERS



National Bank of Oman recognised four students for their recent success in Google's global programming competition, Hash Code. Ahmed al Alawi, Ammar al Hidaifi, Khalfan al Busaidy and Loay al Habsi, software engineering students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, came in first among Arab countries and 22nd globally for their project, Rakizah.

Abdullah Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of National Bank Oman, said, "As a bank, it's something that is strongly aligned with our strategic focus on innovation. This reward is about investing in Oman's future, and recognising the amazing contribution these students are making to their country, and the example they are setting to their peer"

STAY CONNECTED FOR LONGER WITH OOREDOO'S SHABABIAH PLANS

Adding value to customers' digital lives, Ooredoo's prepaid Shababiah users can enjoy an enhanced plan that includes unlimited minutes to Ooredoo and free bonus data all rolled into one.

Valid until March 22, 2021, both new and existing users can sign up to get 4GB and 50 local minutes for RO 5, or 6GB, unlimited on-net minutes and 100 local minutes for RO 7.

Making it even more exciting, customers can get a whopping 15GB browsing data, unlimited on-net minutes and 150 local minutes for RO 10 or, even better, 32GB, unlimited on-net minutes and 250 local minutes for RO 15. Now, Shababiah prepaid users can get more out of their packages at a great range of prices, depending on their digital needs and stay connected around the clock.



Megaprojects can shape the future of the Middle East

Socioeconomic impacts: Strategy& outlines three guiding principles for the sustainable development of megaprojects

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Mega-developments, the largest construction and development projects in the Middle East, must begin with a robust, customer-focused and adaptable concept to succeed and deliver on their promise of broad socioeconomic impact, according to a new report entitled, 'Mega-developments in the Middle East: Defining successful concepts that stand the test of time' by Strategy& Middle East, part of the PwC network.

Around the world and in the Middle East, mega-developments – which include mixed-use development projects spread

across hundreds of thousands of square meters – have been used to pursue numerous socioeconomic goals and achieve national-level ambitions.

Among the most important are:

- Introducing a new, improved urban offering with the goal of enhancing the quality of life

- Regenerating an underutilised or previously neglected area
- Promoting the development of specific economic sectors, such as financial services, tourism, or manufacturing

- Showcasing a country's cultural richness to enhance its international status

"Megaprojects such as those we've seen in Dubai, or even Canary Wharf in London, can have a lasting impact when they succeed," said Karim Abdallah, partner and leader of the real estate platform at Strategy& Middle East.



"Success, however, is never assured. With these developments requiring large amounts of capital and generally more than a decade to execute, it is imperative that they begin with a concept that sets the project up for future success and adapts in the face of unexpected events, such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic," he added.

To ensure sustainable success, the Strategy& report identified three distinct guiding principles.

1. Be rooted in the context

The first principle is to be rooted in context. In practice, this means starting with a clear and complete understanding of a project's external context, including its constraints. This, in turn, will allow various stakeholders to properly identify all opportunities to capture demand and enhance the concept.

Ramy Sfeir, partner and leader of the Family Business, Multi-

sector Investments, Real Estate and Consumer Markets practices at Strategy& Middle East, said: "A vital part of beginning with a principle rooted in context is understanding the interests, needs and preferences of all the main stakeholders, including the end-users who determine demand, the partners who invest in, develop and operate assets, regulators, employees and the wider community".

2. Be clear, customer-centric, and coherent

The second principle that can ensure success is to have a concept with a clear focus and well-defined priorities, which stands in stark contrast to the often used "everything for everyone approach", which in many cases leads to a badly defined concept and offerings that are neither attractive nor different.

A customer-centric approach to a megaproject must ask itself a number of important questions.

Who is the project targeting? What elements does it need? What will need to be built and offered?

Sami Khawaja, a principal with Strategy& Middle East, said: "Around the world, the most successful megaprojects are those that ensure that the vision, target segments, value propositions and project elements are coherent among themselves and aligned to the context. This also ensures that these projects are delivered in the most effective and efficient manner."

3. Be flexible

The third and final principle is to be flexible, particularly in the face of inevitable market changes and changes to customer preferences. To be flexible, developers can ensure that their particular megaproject can include stable and large recurring revenue streams that can cover operating expenses and provide a source of funding for later phases in the event that funding dries up.



Three ships carrying US ethanol head to China

NEW YORK: Three ships carrying ethanol were heading to China from the US Gulf Coast, three trade sources said on Monday, in a sign that exports of the fuel were sharply increasing from the United States to the country.

The shipments may surpass the total amount of US ethanol that China imported last year, a positive development for the US ethanol industry, which has seen decreased demand because of the coronavirus pandemic and the US-China trade war.

The ships each have a capacity of around 30,000 tonnes, or about 240,000 barrels of ethanol, the sources said, though the exact amount of the renewable fuel onboard was not immediately clear.

It was also unclear when the cargoes would arrive in China, which buys US ethanol for fuel to blend with gasoline. One source said at least two of the tankers left at the end of February.

The three cargoes should be among vessels booked earlier, and more were expected to get shipped to China in the coming months, three Asia-based traders said.

In January, Archer Daniels



An employee walks past oil tanks at a Sinopec refinery in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. — Reuters

Midland Co Chief Financial Officer Ray Young said that China had bought “roughly 200 million gallons” (4.76 million barrels) of US ethanol for the first half of 2021.

That would be equivalent to around 15-20 vessels of the

renewable fuel, the traders said, mainly booked last year, when US ethanol prices hit their lowest point.

COFCO and Sinopec were among buyers of the US cargoes, traders had said. Two cargoes booked by COFCO

have already arrived in China recently while Sinopec is shipping imported ethanol to the domestic markets, said one China-based source familiar with the ethanol trade.

“Domestic grain prices keep rising, which has pushed up prices

The shipments may surpass the total amount of US ethanol that China imported last year, a positive development for the US ethanol industry, which has seen decreased demand because of the coronavirus pandemic and the US-China trade war

of domestic ethanol, and created great profit margin for importing ethanol,” said the source, who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

While China imported an annual record of 4.72 million barrels of US ethanol in 2016, it has not recently been a large importer.

However, tightening supplies of domestic corn used to make the biofuel, coupled with comparatively cheaper US prices

have spurred the need for imports. “Domestic corn is too expensive,” said a China-based trader with an international trading house, making imports profitable.

US ethanol to China on a CIF basis is currently quoted at around \$700 per tonne, while domestic ethanol in March is a bit over \$1,000 per tonne, according to the trader.

If all three tankers were filled to capacity, the cargoes would be equivalent to around 720,000 barrels of ethanol, more than the 506,000 barrels of US ethanol shipped to China in the whole of 2020.

The increased exports come as the US ethanol industry tries to return to more normal levels of production following the demand destruction from the pandemic. Ethanol production has increased to 849,000 barrels per day in the week to February 26, from a record low of 537,000 bpd last April, EIA data showed.

The United States and China signed a trade deal in January 2020, where China pledged to purchase more of American farm, energy and manufactured goods.

— Reuters



Export cars are loaded on a RoRo ship in the port of Hamburg, Germany. — AFP

German exports rise as China trade sizzles

BERLIN: German exports unexpectedly rose in January, buoyed by robust trade with China in a positive start to the year for manufacturers in Europe's largest economy.

Seasonally adjusted exports increased 1.4 per cent on the month after an upwardly revised increase of 0.4 per cent in December, the Federal Statistics Office said on Tuesday. Imports fell 4.7 per cent after showing no change in the prior month, an upward revision.

A Reuters poll had pointed to a .2 per cent drop in exports and a 0.5 per cent fall in imports.

January's 1.4 per cent increase in exports far surpassed even the most optimistic forecast. The trade surplus grew to 22.2 billion euros.

On the year, exports to China rose by 3.1 per cent. Exports to other European Union countries fell 6.0 per cent on the year, those to the United Kingdom dropped 29 per cent and those to the United States decreased by 6.2 per cent.

Thomas Gitzel, economist at VP Bank, described the overall rise in exports as “an extremely positive surprise” and expected further growth. — Reuters

TOKYO: Japan's economy expanded at a slower-than-initially-reported pace in October-December, with firms tightening spending on plant and equipment as the coronavirus pandemic clouded their business plans.

The slower growth was mainly due to a sharper contraction in private inventories and capital expenditure expanding less than previously thought in the fourth quarter, even as exports remained solid. Separate data showed household spending was hit by a much bigger annual drop in January than in the prior month, a sign the Covid-19 pandemic was keeping consumers cautious about shopping.

The economy grew an annualised 11.7 per cent in October-December, weaker than the preliminary reading of 12.7 per cent annualised growth to mark the second straight quarter of growth, Cabinet Office data showed on Tuesday.

The reading, which was weaker



A shopper in a face mask is seen at a shop selling office wear in Tokyo. — Reuters

than economists' median forecast for a 12.8-per cent gain, translates into a real quarter-on-quarter expansion of 2.8 per cent from October-December, versus a preliminary 3.0 per cent gain.

Capital spending grew 4.3 per cent from the previous quarter, lower than a preliminary 4.5 per cent rise, but outpacing the median forecast for a 4.1-per cent increase.

Vodafone towers unit set for 14.7bn euro valuation

British mobile phone giant Vodafone on Tuesday announced the price range for the upcoming German stock market flotation of its towers business, valuing the unit at up to 14.7 billion euros (\$17.4 billion).

The float of up to one-quarter of Vantage Towers comes amid increasing demand for mobile telecommunications connectivity across Europe, driven by data growth, 5G roll-out and regulatory coverage obligations.

Mobile phone giants are also floating or selling off their tower businesses in order to slash debt.

German-headquartered Vantage Tower will have its first day of trading on the Frankfurt stock market on or around March 18, with a price-per-share range of between 22.5 euros and 29 euros, Vodafone said.

The initial public offering (IPO) “implies a total market capitalisation for Vantage Towers of 11.4 billion euros to 14.7 billion euros”, it added. — AFP

Oil prices fall as supply risks abate, stronger dollar

Oil prices fell on Tuesday, reversing earlier gains, on receding fears of a supply disruption in Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, after an attack on its export facilities, and on concerns a stronger US dollar would crimp demand.

Prices rose earlier on expectations of a recovery in the global economy after the US Senate approved a \$1.9-trillion stimulus bill and on a likely drawdown in crude oil inventories in the United States,

Although vaccination started in Japan, it will take time to yield its impact, so the economy is forecast to go through some ups and downs

YOSHIKI SHINKE

Chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute

ups and downs,” said Yoshiki Shinke, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. “We expect the economy will pick up from the second quarter but it will be difficult to regain soon what it will lose in the first quarter.”

Private consumption, which accounts for more than half of GDP, rose 2.2 per cent from the previous three months, matching the preliminary reading.

— Reuters

PARIS

French economy to rebound with 5 per cent growth

The French economy will rebound strongly this year from a deep recession sparked by Covid-19, the country's central bank chief said on Tuesday. Growth will reach at least five per cent in 2021, Bank of France governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau told France Info radio.

“The recession is behind us,” he said. French GDP slumped 8.3 per cent in 2020, national statistics bureau Insee estimated in late January, saying that downturn had turned out to be less brutal



than originally forecast.

A massive drop in consumer spending was behind much of the 2020 decline, while investment and foreign trade held up well, it said. — AFP

LONDON

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SINGAPORE

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the world's biggest fuel consumer.

Brent crude futures for May fell by 46 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$67.78 a barrel by 0736 GMT, after earlier rising to a session high of \$69. — Reuters



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Setting up your own farm at home through hydroponics

Planting crops even without land is now possible through hydroponics — a method of growing plants without soil by using mineral nutrient solutions added to water. In Oman, one company specialises in hydroponics to help make sure food security in every home... **P20**

INSIDE STORIES

CINEMA



RESTORED CHAPLIN FILMS TO BE RELEASED IN CINEMAS WORLDWIDE

A hundred years since Charlie Chaplin directed and starred in his first feature-length film "The Kid", some of the silent comic's best-known movies are being restored to be released in cinemas worldwide... **Story on P19**

FASHION

GRAPHIC PRINTS AT VERSACE IN OFF-CALENDAR FASHION PRESENTATION

Italian fashion house Versace splashed graphic prints all over its designs for its fall line on Friday, unveiling the collection on its own time days after Milan Fashion Week wrapped... **Story on P19**



READ



THE SONG OF ACHILLES

BY MADELINE MILLER

A reimagining of Homer's "Iliad" that is narrated by Achilles' companion Patroclus.

CHANGING WORLD



TURKISH OLIVE FARMER BATTLES TO SAVE HER LAND FROM COAL MINE

Behind Tayyibe Demirel's olive groves in southwest Turkey lies a vast, grey expanse, stripped bare by a coal mine eating into the rolling hillside. On the horizon, heavy smoke billows from three giant chimneys of the power plant by the town of Yatagan... **Story on P18**

LITERATURE



IRISH NOVELIST EDNA O'BRIEN GRANTED FRANCE'S HIGHEST CULTURAL AWARD

Irish novelist Edna O'Brien was appointed a Commander in France's 'Ordre des Arts et Lettres' on Sunday, entering the exclusive ranks of those awarded the nation's highest cultural distinction... **Story on P18**



LITERATURE

Irish novelist
Edna O'Brien
granted
France's
highest
cultural award



IRISH NOVELIST Edna O'Brien was appointed a Commander in France's "Ordre des Arts et Lettres" on Sunday, entering the exclusive ranks of those awarded the nation's highest cultural distinction.

"For being a legendary writer who has enriched Irish literature in inestimable ways and for nurturing French literature we award you the insignia of Commander of "L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres," said French culture minister Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin in a pre-recorded online message.

Bachelot-Narquin praised O'Brien for a "steadfast commitment in favour of liberty, both in your writing and in your life" and for "having inspired countless women by the force of your words".

O'Brien, 90, is the author of 18 novels.

"This award is huge for me," she said in a pre-recorded message from her home in London.

"I will wear this medal... as being talismanic for the rest of my life."

Born in 1930 into a strict Catholic farming family in west Ireland's County Clare O'Brien's



father was an alcoholic and her mother saw writing as a sin.

"Writing was a very secret transaction because it was regarded as profane, both in our house and in my country, during my formative years," she explained in her acceptance speech.

O'Brien arrived on the literary scene in the 1960s, with a debut novel that was burned and banned in her native land.

"The Country Girls", about the sexual initiation of rebellious Catholic girls drawn from O'Brien's childhood experiences, is now a marker in modern Irish literature for its breaking of social and sexual taboos.

Her career spans decades with her most recent novel "Girl" published in 2019 – depicting the trauma of Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram militants.

O'Brien has already been awarded the Irish PEN Lifetime Achievement Award and the PEN/ Nabokov Award for work which "broke down social and sexual barriers for women in Ireland and beyond."

Her work is "like a piece of fine meshwork", wrote the late US author Philip Roth in the New York Times.

It is "a net of perfectly observed sensuous details that enables you to contain all the longing and pain and remorse that surge through the fiction," he said in 1984. — AFP

Turkish olive
farmer battles
to save her land
from coal mine



YATAGAN, Turkey: Behind Tayyibe Demirel's olive groves in southwest Turkey lies a vast, grey expanse, stripped bare by a coal mine eating into the rolling hillside. On the horizon, heavy smoke billows from three giant chimneys of the power plant by the town of Yatagan.

Determined to save her land and village, Demirel, a 64-year-old grandmother, has singlehandedly taken on the operators extending the mine to feed what is one of Turkey's largest power plants.

Last month, she won a court case against the expansion of the mine towards her village and, armed with information she herself uncovered from an earlier court ruling that said olive groves must be protected, she also won the appeal at the higher court.

Her victory in court halted plans for mine expansion, but Demirel fears her six-acre property is being surrounded.

"All the land around will be dug and plundered, and the olive grove will be stuck in the middle," she said. "I object. I will continue my struggle, and seek my rights. How am I supposed to come to my field? Land here from the sky with a helicopter?"

Campaigners say pollution from the coal mined and burned at Yatagan, 40 km (25 miles) from some of Turkey's Mediterranean and Aegean beach resorts, has led to major health and environmental damage.

Five villages have already



disappeared as mines serving the Yatagan power station have expanded, and Demirel's village of Turgut is now threatened. Across the province of Mugla 5,000 hectares, the equivalent of nearly 8,000 football fields, has been lost to mining in the last four decades, campaigners say.

Asked about its plans to expand the mine, Yatagan Power Plant said it has planted more than 1.5 million trees

in the region and its operations respect the environment and are carried out under the supervision of relevant Turkish ministries.

Limak, operating another plant in the region, told Reuters its production meets 5% of Turkey's power demand, with 1,050 mW installed capacity. The company added that its land purchasing practices were in line with laws and regula-

tions.

HEALTH COSTS

Across Turkey, authorities are pushing ahead with plans to more than double coal power capacity. The government says it has to reduce high import dependency for energy that accounts for a fifth of the total value of Turkey's imports and is a significant factor behind years of current account deficits.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), a European non-profit organisation measuring the impact of pollution estimates the healthcare costs of coal power generation in Turkey at up to 5.9 billion euros per year.

Deniz Gumusel, an environmental activist who co-authored a report on Turkey's coal power for HEAL, said three coal power plants in the region caused the death of 45,000 people in the more than 40 years since the first plant came online, mostly due to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

"This is like war, against people and against forests and ecosystems," she said.

But the determination of villagers and women like Demirel means there is still room for optimism, she insisted.

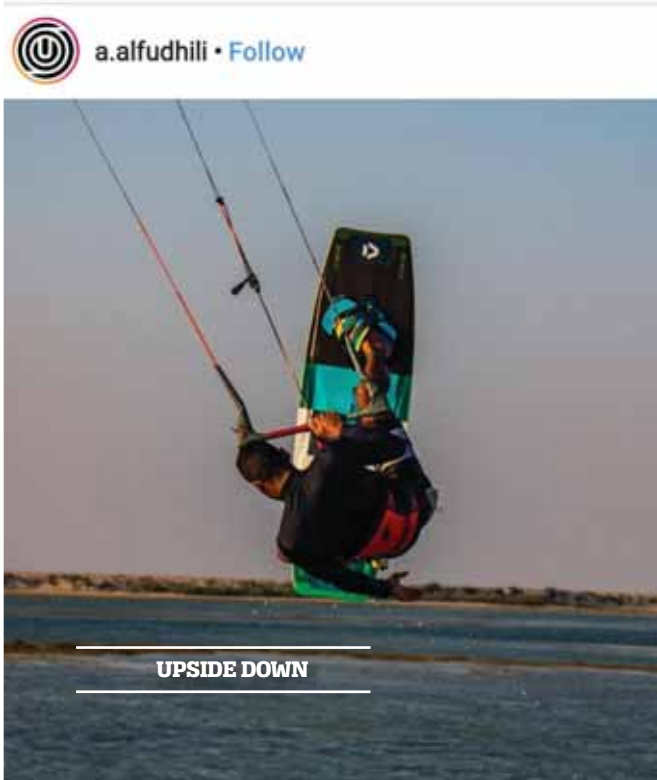
"Women are carrying out an incredible fight against this unjust coal business. They were very successful in stopping or slowing down the progression of the mines."

Looking out from her fields of olives to the open-pit mine, Demirel says that a few years earlier the area had been carpeted with tulips, poppies and daisies. "Which is better, a hell pit or



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



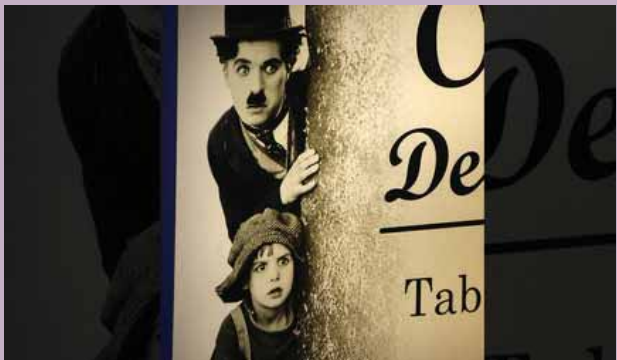
AROUND THE WORLD

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Restored
Chaplin
films to be
released
in cinemas
worldwide

A HUNDRED years since Charlie Chaplin directed and starred in his first feature-length film "The Kid", some of the silent comic's best-known movies are being restored to be released in cinemas worldwide. French film company mk2 and international distributor Piece of Magic said in a statement they had teamed up to mark the centennial. The Paris-based company's 2k and 4k restorations of Chaplin's films include classics "The Gold Rush", "City Lights", "The Circus", "Modern Times" and "The Great Dictator". mk2 will release a 4K restoration of "The Kid" in



France in the autumn while Piece of Magic will work with its network of exhibitors to release the film and others in around 50 territories as well as collaborate with mk2 distribution partners. "In 1921 'The Kid' confirmed Chaplin's stardom and extraordinary skills in the art of cinema", mk2 Chief Executive Nathanaël Karmitz said in a statement. "It is fitting that this year in partnership with Piece of Magic we return Chaplin to cinemas around the world and continue to maintain the legacy of his work, celebrating its modernity and emotions that live on today." The two companies said there would be new posters and trailers "designed for contemporary audiences" to mark the anniversary. — Reuters

Graphic prints
at Versace in
off-calendar
fashion
presentation

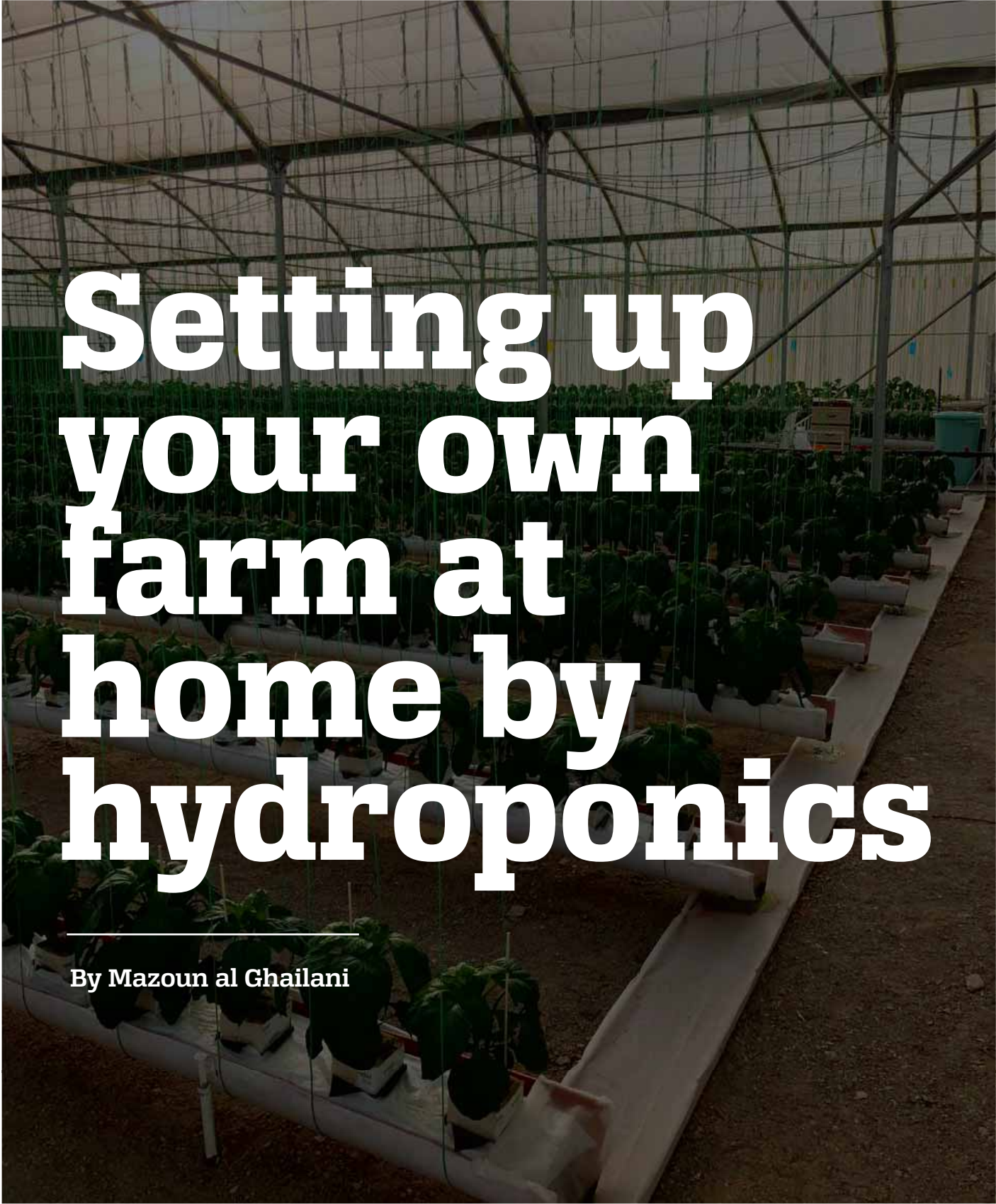


Italian fashion house Versace splashed graphic prints all over its designs for its fall line on Friday, unveiling the collection on its own time days after Milan Fashion Week wrapped. Designer Donatella Versace reworked the brand's Greca motif into a geometric pattern, "a dynamic and immersive 3D maze", for her womenswear and menswear creations and in the video presentation of the line, models posed, acted out scenes and strutted in a large maze-like set. Model Gigi Hadid kicked things off, dressed in a black crop top, skirt and coat. A selection of black outfits followed before Versace presented trouser suits, tops, dresses, skirts, jackets and handbags adorned in the Greca motif, in shades of brown, red and blue. The release of Versace's film came after its usual showcase, Milan Fashion Week, wrapped on Monday. Like many fashion houses, the brand, owned by Capri Holding, shared a video online rather than host the usual catwalk show due to COVID-19 restrictions. "I have realized that this is the future, the new way of communicating collections", Versace said in a statement, adding that models, like actors, brought "designs to life". "During the filming of this show I saw how important it is to give the models time to 'feel' the clothes they wear on the runway. Despite living in a digital era of immediacy, taking this time is crucial to form a genuine connection. This is what the present and future look like to me." Versace's jackets had rounded shoulders while dresses were cinched at the waist or came in metal mesh. The looks were completed with headscarves and platform shoes. For men, there were jacquard suits, jumpers and tops adorned in the Greca print. Models also wore shorts and cropped trousers. Versace also presented a graffiti Medusa smiley in the line, a play on the fashion house's logo. — Reuters



Instagram-ready:
Vietnamese
influencer
teaches art of
posing

HOW TO SMILE, where to place a hand, which direction to face: Young Vietnamese social media users are snapping up a popular influencer's course on posing for the perfect photo. In communist Vietnam, where 70 per cent of the population is under 35, the classes are particularly popular with young women. Instructor Pham Kieu Ly — who has hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram and TikTok — set up the \$130 course in Hanoi after women began asking her how to look their best in photos, largely for social media. The lessons also teach aspiring amateur photographers how to take snaps themselves. Ly said she saw women in the class who wanted "to learn how to pose and take photos to help their work, while others wanted to build confidence". Since the first class in September 2020, Ly's day-and-a-half-long tutorial has amassed a substantial following, attracting around 500 people from a range of professions, including online merchants and estate agents. "The image I am aiming to create is one of a successful businesswoman", said 29-year-old Nguyen Thi Thanh Loan, who works at an insurance company, and also wants to boost her photography skills during the course. Other participants said they were convinced beautiful photos would help them sell products on Facebook, which has more than 53 million users in Vietnam — over half the population. The platform has become a crucial marketing tool for local business. Nguyen Huong Tra, 29, who runs a homewear shop and sells candles and scented oils online, said: "In the past I didn't pay much attention to my images or number of followers on social media, but then I realised they are important to my business." — AFP



Setting up your own farm at home by hydroponics

By Mazoun al Ghailani

You don't have fertile land for planting? Or enough space to plant? Do you like to have some fresh vegetables to cook your favourite dish? With the evolution of agricultural methods in the modern era, you can create a farm in your home without soil and in a limited space estimated at one or two metres at the most. You can achieve self-sufficiency by growing agricultural crops of vegetables and fruits through the hydroponics system that is considered one of the smart agriculture methods of farming.

The Agricultural Future Company helps people to set up their own farm by providing the equipment needed that ease the hydroponics process. The general concept of the firm is the agricultural development that facilitates the agricultural systems in the

world and secure enough food for humanity.

"Our company brand name is based on the general concept of agricultural future. We are an Omani company working to apply the latest agricultural systems in the world, and we bring them to our homeland to keep pace with the global movement in providing food security in the best modern and safe global methods," Hamza al Salmi, Chief Executive Officer of Agricultural Future Company.

Hydroponics is an environment-friendly technology that can be used to grow any type of plant using a scientifically balanced food system. Cultivation technology without soil is not just an addition to normal soil cultivation but rather complements it. One hectare of hydroponics farms can produce between 200 to 300 tons of vegetables annually. That is

five to ten times more than any crop grown in open fields.

Globally, there is a limited number of crops grown using hydroponics such as tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, chilli peppers, bell peppers and strawberries. Ornamental flowers are among the most important commercial crops. But there are other emerging crops like herbs and pharmaceutical crops.

"We work on the latest technologies and agricultural systems, including hydroponics or cultivation without soil, aquaponics and other products used in modern agriculture," Hamza explained.

He added, "In my opinion, the importance of smart agriculture lies in containing the modern technology techniques in agricultural methods, which could help save labour costs and reduce consumption of water and fertilizer. It also

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increases the production of the crops, and produces safe and healthy crops for consumption."

Hydroponics limits the problems of drought as plants

absorb what they need from the water and save what's left. Remarkably, germs growth is minimal in hydroponics and the problem on grass is also eliminated.

