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Two men after Merkel's job

Tried and tested or comeback king?

BERLIN: The frontrunner to replace Angela Merkel as German chancellor is an experienced finance minister, but his opponent has the reputation of being a comeback king. The race to replace Merkel has boiled down to a competition between Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the centre-left Social Democrats and Armin Laschet of Merkel's CDU-CSU conservative alliance. Here's a look at the two main pretenders to Merkel's throne.

Safe pair of hands

As finance minister and vice-chancellor under Merkel, Scholz is one of Germany's most influential politicians with a reputation for being meticulous, confident and fiercely ambitious. He enjoys a close relationship with Merkel and has even sought to position himself as the true Merkel continuity candidate, appearing on the cover of the Sueddeutsche Zeitung magazine adopting her famous "rhombus" hand gesture.

Nicknamed the "Scholzomat" for his robotic speeches, Scholz has hardly stood out for his charisma in the run-up to the election and has admitted himself that he is "not someone who is particularly emotional in politics". But the 63-year-old has also benefited from not making any embarrassing mistakes on the campaign trail. When he was attacked by Laschet during a TV debate over police searches car-

ried out at the finance ministry, Scholz kept his cool, accused Laschet of "twisting the facts", and was promptly voted the winner of the debate.

Born in the northern city of Osnabrueck, Scholz trained as a lawyer and specialised in labour issues before being elected to the national parliament in 1998. He married fellow SPD politician Britta Ernst that same year. He was the mayor of Hamburg for many years, overseeing the development of the wildly expensive but cherished Elbphilharmonie concert hall.

But generally speaking, he is seen as fiscally conservative and a staunch defender of Germany's famed budget discipline - an approach that has at times left him marginalized within his own workers' party. Scholz was overlooked in a leadership vote in 2019 in favor of two relatively unknown left-wingers, but has got behind the SPD's flagship policies in the election campaign, backing a planned wealth tax and an increase in the minimum wage.

Comeback king?

Laschet's election campaign has been marred by gaffes, but the affable Rhineland has a reputation for endurance and what Der Spiegel magazine has described as an ability to "sit out" his opponents - a talent that may yet land him Germany's top job. The CDU chief won the conservatives' nomination to be chancellor candidate after a drawn-out battle with the

more popular Markus Soeder of the CSU, the CDU's Bavarian sister party.

Asked in a recent TV interview whether he thought he was often underestimated, Laschet replied that "many have certainly miscalculated". Laschet was born in Aachen, the spa city in western Germany near the border with Belgium and the Netherlands where his father fed the family digging for coal. "When you're down in the mine, it doesn't matter where your colleague comes from, what his religion is or what he looks like. What is important is, can you rely on him," he told party colleagues earlier this year.

Laschet, 60, has a reputation for pragmatism and the ability to unify, famously standing by Merkel during the fallout from Germany's 2015 refugee influx. "Polarizing is easy - anyone can do it," he told a party conference in January. "We have to speak plainly, but not polarize. We have to be able to integrate. Keeping a society together and bringing it together, that is hard work."

Laschet's hero is Charlemagne, the king of the Franks credited with uniting Europe whose empire was based in Aachen, and his family has even said they are direct descendants. The father-of-three was elected to the Bundestag German parliament in 1994 and to the European Parliament in 1999, and has been the state premier of North Rhine-Westphalia since 2017. — AFP

Violent clashes in Melbourne

MELBOURNE: Several police officers were wounded and hundreds of protesters were arrested in Australia's second-most-populous city yesterday in violent clashes at an anti-lockdown march. Officers used pepper spray and made over 200 arrests in Melbourne as several hundred attendees flouted stay-at-home orders and marched through an inner-city suburb. The illegal gathering comes as the city goes through its sixth lockdown since the pandemic started, with the wider state of Victoria reporting over 500 cases of COVID-19 yesterday.

Police said six officers were taken to hospital after they were pelted with projectiles and trampled in clashes with the crowd of around 700 people. "What we saw today was a group of protesters that came together, not to protest freedoms, but simply to take on and have a fight with the police," Victoria Police Commander Mark Galliot told media. Police attempted to reduce access to the centre of the city, blocking roads and stopping public transport in a bid to avoid a repeat of violent scenes at a rally that drew thousands last month.

But marchers then relocated, with footage from one incident showing a crowd charging through a police line as scuffles erupted along a tram route. Huge numbers of police managed to deter a similar gathering in Sydney, with officers swarming a park where the protest had been due to go ahead. New South Wales Police said they arrested around 20 people in the city, mainly across the public transport network, while several others were arrested in smaller gatherings around the state. — AFP

Yemen rebels execute nine

SANAA: Yemen's Houthi rebels said they executed nine people yesterday for involvement in the killing of one of their top leaders in a 2018 air strike claimed by Saudi Arabia. Saleh Al-Sammad was head of the Houthis' supreme political council and his death three years ago was seen as a major blow to the Iran-backed rebels who control Sanaa. The pro-rebel Saba news agency said the nine were shot by a firing squad at a square in the Yemen capital.

They were among 16 people convicted of involvement in his killing by a Houthi court. Seven other people - including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and former US president Donald Trump - were tried in absentia by the court and also sentenced to death. Sammad was killed in April 2018 alongside six other people in an air strike in the western Yemeni province of Hodeida. "The general prosecution has carried out the death sentence against nine people involved in the murder" of Sammad, Saba reported.

"They were shot to death in Tahrir Square... in the presence of senior Houthi leaders and Sanaa residents," the agency added. Saudi Arabia said later that it carried out the air strike. "The heroes of the Royal Air Force were able to successfully target the leader

of the Houthi militia Saleh Al-Sammad," Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States, Prince Khaled bin Salman, tweeted at the time.

Prince Khaled said the strike was overseen by his brother the Saudi crown prince, after Sammad threatened a wave of missile strikes against Saudi Arabia. The Houthis are battling the Saudi-backed Yemeni government - and a military coalition spearheaded by Riyadh - for control of the impoverished country. The conflict began in 2014 when the Houthis seized Sanaa, prompting the Saudi-led coalition to intervene the following year. Since then, tens of thousands have been killed and millions pushed to the brink of famine in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP



Announcement to Tender No. (01 – 2021/2022)



License for the planning, development, completion, operation, maintenance, utilisation and investment of **Sheikh/ Jaber Al Ahmad Al-Sabah** Causeway sites comprising of North and South Islands and North and South Banks.



The Council of Ministers General Secretariat (CMGS) announces the issuance of Tender No. (2022/2021 – 01) regarding, License for the planning, development, completion, operation, maintenance, utilisation and investment of Sheikh/ Jaber Al- Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway sites comprising of North and South Islands and North and South Banks for the benefit of the Public Authority for Roads & Land Transportation (PART) taking into consideration the specifications and general conditions contained within the tender documents, to be obtained from the (CMGS) – Seif Palace – Gate No.4, during the official working days.



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