

HM receives phone call from Pompeo of US

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a phone call on Monday from Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State. During the call, aspects of the existing cooperation and matters of common concern between the two friendly countries were reviewed, as well as the regional and international developments and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. — ONA

Some countries prise open lockdowns

ROME/LONDON: Countries from Italy to New Zealand have announced the easing of coronavirus lockdowns but Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, back at work on Monday after being hospitalised with the disease, said it was too early to relax restrictions there.

Nearly 3 million people have been infected by the coronavirus across the world and 205,948 have died, according to a Reuters tally of official figures. But many countries are looking to ease lockdowns as rates of infections fall and fears of economic ruin rise.

The world's worst pandemic in a century, which started in China in December before creeping across the globe, has forced a dilemma upon



Kilian, 6, wears a protective face mask as he jumps from a bench, after restrictions were partially lifted for children, during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Igualada, Spain on Sunday. — Reuters

governments. People cooped up in their homes for weeks on end are growing frustrated and anxious about what the future holds. SEE P5

Ramadhan Mubarak

2020/1441 AH

4

Ramadhan Tuesday 28/4/2020

FAJR: 04:15

DHUHR: 12:09

ASR: 03:35

MAGHRIB: 06:39

ISHA: 07:54

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DON'T JAM INTERNET DURING RUSH HOURS

SLOW LANE: USERS SHOULD STAY AWAY FROM ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT DURING DAY TIME

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

People must skip online entertainment between 9 am and 6 pm as it will slow down the Web during rush hours, urged the Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) on Monday. Users should avoid unnecessary video calls not only during rush hours but rather all the time, it said.

Staying away from online movies and other videos during peak hours will help meet the needs of e-learners, government and private sector employees working from home. "Also avoid sending large files via social media applications to avoid pressure on the network", the regulator said.

It said the speed of the Internet decreases if more devices are connected to the modem.

■ STOP UNNECESSARY VIDEO CALLS

■ ENGAGE CHILDREN IN ACTIVITIES AWAY FROM SCREEN

■ AVOID WATCHING ONLINE VIDEOS AND MOVIES FOR LONG TIME

■ DON'T SEND LARGE FILES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA APPS

■ USE MOBILE PHONE FOR CALLS SPARINGLY TO AVOID NETWORK PRESSURE

■ UPDATE ANTIVIRUS SOFTWARE IN DEVICES PERIODICALLY

Users have been urged to use more of fixed Internet and voice calls as much as possible. "For example, use landline instead of mobile phone to reduce the pressure on networks", it said.

"Encourage children to do more tasks creatively away from the screens. Do not allow them watch videos on different platforms for long time", it added.

Always update the electronic devices with the latest software versions and antivirus, TRA cautioned.

According to a recent report, there are 3.9 million Internet users in Oman, which include 1.6 million Facebook users and 200,000 Twitter users.

It may be also noted that the usage of online streaming services including Netflix increased by 140 per cent, entertainment games by 93 per cent, WhatsApp by 36 per cent, Facebook 20 per cent, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat 16 per cent.

Masks, gloves must to enter Mawaleh market

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Masks and gloves are mandatory for shoppers in Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits at Mawaleh. "Wearing masks and medical gloves is must for all those who enter the market", Muscat Municipality said on Monday.

While retail activity will be resumed from Wednesday from 12 noon until 8 pm throughout the week, the market will be closed on Friday for maintenance, sterilisation and cleaning. Wholesale trading activities will start at 4 am and continue till 11 am.

In the decisions posted online, the civic body said, "the decisions are part of the efforts to apply regulatory measures including traffic laws to ensure safety and health of the shoppers and others in the market". Accordingly, light vehicles are prohibited from entering the market.

"Vehicles will be directed to the parking space located on the western side of the market where more than 370 parking spots will be provided and planned for", the municipality said. However, individual visitors can enter the market through the side gates.

"Entry to market is allowed only to shoppers in the age group between 12 and 60 years", it said. "The services of workers along with shopping carts will be provided to transport the items till the parking slot free of cost", the statement said.

Meanwhile, officials from the Municipality closed a commercial establishment in the wilayat of Bausher for its failure to take preventive measures as directed by the Supreme Committee tasked to deal with COVID-19.

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SQU Council reviews progress of online learning



MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Council on Monday held its third meeting of academic year 2019-2020 under the chairmanship of Dr Rawya bint Saud al Busaidiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Head of the SQU Council.

The SQU Council reviewed the progress of online learning emergency plan being implemented by the university amid circumstances imposed by coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

It also looked into the future plan of academic programmes and higher studies and assessed the extent to which these conform to the SQU's policies and strategic and executive 5-year plan (2021-2025).

The Council took note of SQU's obtaining advanced ratings for five of its programmes in accordance with QS 2020 ratings:

The SQU ranked as follows:

- * (201-250) global rating band in the field of Forests & Farming;
- * (301-350) global rating band in the field of chemical engineering;
- * (451-500) global rating band in the field of medicine;
- * (551-600) global rating band in the field of information and computer sciences.

The SQU Council also approved extension of employment of some college deans and it approved students lists of Fall 2019 for students of PhD, Masters and Bachelor's degrees. — ONA

GCC civil aviation panel discusses steps to address COVID-19 impact

MUSCAT: The Sultanate on Monday took part in the extraordinary meeting of GCC Civil Aviation Executive Committee. Oman was represented at the meeting by Dr Mohammed bin Nassir al Za'abi, Chief Executive Officer of the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA).

The meeting looked into coordination of efforts to address the economic and operational impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the civil aviation sector.

It discussed appropriate means of alleviating the impact of the pandemic on GCC-based airline companies, pending the anticipated graduation, resumption of business in line with the visions and decisions of member states.

The meeting also raised the legal implications of the pandemic vis-à-vis international laws and conventions organising civil aviation.

PACA had prepared a 'recovery plan' and procedures for graduation, resumption of some activities of the civil aviation sector in the Sultanate in accordance with recommendations



of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

PACA's plan covers all components of civil aviation in the Sultanate at three levels.

The first level has been submitted to the Supreme Covid-19 Control Committee for its perusal and

comment. The resumption of aviation activity in the Sultanate will be based on the decisions of the Supreme Committee. — ONA

Sultanate has sufficient number of test kits

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health has confirmed that it has sufficient number of coronavirus testing kits, all of which are molecular tests that meet the standard set by the World Health Organization and US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Molecular tests for rapid detection of COVID-19 deliver results in 30 to 45 minutes while the standard test produces results in three and a half hours.

The infection curve's upward movement has been slow thanks to restrictive measures and there is no other way but to commit to the social distancing and preventive measures, Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni,

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health told *Oman Arabic*, sister publication of the *Observer*.

The peak of the pandemic is the period when a country records the highest number of COVID-19 cases but we cannot say that we have reached the peak unless we pass it, Al Hosni said.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Sultanate the infection rate has hovered around 1.2 and 1.4 which means 10 coronavirus patients can transmit the disease to 12-14 other people. According to the indicators, social and physical distancing measures were more effective among Omanis than

residents.

He added: "Only when the number of COVID-19 cases come down and less cases are registered compared with the previous days based on a sufficient number of tests, then we can say that we have passed the peak of the pandemic. The restrictive measures can be lifted when we are confident that the number of coronavirus cases has begun to decline which can be guaranteed only by conducting sufficient tests, at least 30 per cent of the total population as recommended by some epidemiology research centres. This target has not been met in the Sultanate so far but a total of 36,000 tests have conducted thus far".

51 new coronavirus cases, 364 recoveries reported

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

The Ministry of Health announced 51 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, taking the total to 2,049 including 10 deaths and 364 recoveries.

Monday's figures include 37 Omanis and 14 expatriates.

It may be noted that only 16 of the 51 cases reported on Monday were from Muscat.

Region-wise, Muscat has 1,464 cases (+16), 232 recovered, 10

deaths; South Batinah 213 cases (+16), 23 recovered; South Sharqiyah 107 cases (+5), 3 recovered; North Batinah 87 cases (+2), 31 recovered; Al Dakhiliyah 87 cases (+6), 51 recovered; Al Dhahirah 36 cases (+2), two recovered; North Sharqiyah 27 cases, eight recovered; Dhofar 14 cases (+1), eight recovered; Musandam five cases, three recovered; and Buraimi five cases, three recovered.

No cases have been reported from Al Wusta.

IN BRIEF

India's Kerala begins registration for NRIs to return home

MUSCAT: Indian state of Kerala has started the registration for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in the GCC who wish to return once the flights are resumed.

The registration can be done at <https://www.registernorkaroots.org/>

According to the latest available figures, over 200,000 expatriates have registered since the process started at 6.30 pm on Sunday, April 26.

More requests are expected in the coming days as the government has not declared any deadline to register on the website.

"All Keralites residing in different parts of the world can register on the website after they have got themselves tested for COVID-19 and declared negative", official sources said.

According to official estimates, up to 550,000 people from Kerala are expected to return.

Rafo transports patients from Muscat to Salalah

MUSCAT: A transport aircraft of the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) carried out a two-way transport operation for three sick citizens with their companions to the Governorate of Dhofar after they completed the necessary treatment procedures in the Royal Hospital.

They were transferred from Musannah air base to Salalah air base.

This comes within the framework of the humanitarian services provided by the Sultan's Armed Forces and other departments of the Ministry of Defence to citizens and residents, along with other government institutions. — ONA

Students can apply for ticket compensation online

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has announced that students studying abroad who have not applied for ticket compensation (return home) will be able to complete the process on the ministry's website. Starting today, the students can avail of the facility until May 3.

RNO ships supplies to Musandam



MUSANDAM: The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), represented by the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), continues to provide support to the Governorate of Musandam by shipping fuel and oil derivatives as well as medical essentials and food staples to meet daily needs of citizens and residents in the governorate.

The SAF works side by side with the other relevant departments to support national efforts within the framework of the plans and measures aimed to stymie the virus spread and mitigate its impact on citizens and residents.

The SAF continues to do its part to ensure proper implementation of the decisions and measures taken by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and alleviating its repercussions on the Sultanate. — ONA

RAO Science Club comes up with innovations



MUSCAT: The Science Club of Royal Army of Oman (RAO) rolled out a number of innovations and inventions in a bid to combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). These include a smart sterilization chamber, ultraviolet paper sanitizer,

smart face device for facial protection and triple breathing system.

The innovations come in continuation of the RAO's plans to boost national efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. — ONA

Auction Announcement

Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C.hereby announces auction as mentioned in the following table:

Auction No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	Tender Price R.O
AUCTION (1/2019)	AUCTION OF ELECTRICAL MATERIALS AND SCRAP BY CLOSED ENVELOPES	05/05/2020	12/05/2020	300
	The Site Visit will be as per the attached table in Auction document			

Notes:

- Interested Companies or individuals having a valid Registrations may obtain tenders documents through scm.tenders@mzec.co.om, on working days from 09:00 am till 02:00pm. Value of each tender document copy is non-refundable.
- Offers should be submitted in a sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman of Internal Tender Committee, Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. marked with the auction number and subject. Other marks or reference whatsoever should be printed on the envelope. The identity of the bidder should not be revealed and should be submitted before 10:00 A.M. on the assigned date for submission of the auction.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of (1%) valid for (90) days as a bid bond of the tender value and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and any offer is not including (1%) bid bond will be rejected immediately.
- Preview of the material will be during the formal working hours on the dates specified above.
- All bidders are requested to wear proper PPE while attending the site visit
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the Highest tender.

(WE LIGHT...WE CARE)
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How legal is the cause you are donating to?

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Donating and contributing to a cause is part of human nature, but there needs to be caution on where the money might actually end up, urge authorities.

It is illegal in the Sultanate to collect donation for any cause without prior permission from the competent authorities.

In an exclusive interview with Observer, Senior Public Prosecutor, Salim bin Nasser Khalfan al Busaidy from the Public Prosecution, explained why the law had been introduced and why it is not allowed for anyone to collect money from the public without following the legal procedure.

“In general, all acts are allowed unless restricted by law. The Omani legislation has banned all forms of money collection without obtaining a licence from a competent authority. Therefore, collecting money from the public irrespective of the cause is a crime punishable under the law”, he explained.

The Omani legislation addresses this issue in articles (299) and (300) of the Penal Code issued by the Royal Decree (7/2018). Article (299) states: “Whoever calls for donation, or collects money from the public, using any means, without a licence from the competent authority, shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a period not less than a month and not exceeding (3) three months, and a fine not less than (200) two hundred Omani rials and not exceeding (600) six hundred Omani rials, or either one of these two punishments.

“The court may adjudicate the confiscation of funds obtained from the crime. If the crime is repeated, the sentence stipulated in the preceding paragraph shall be aggravated provided it does not exceed the double”, he noted.

Article (300) of the same law states the following: “Whoever collects money from the public, using any means, and transfers them abroad, without a licence from competent authorities, shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a period not less than (3) three months and not exceeding a year, and a fine not less than (1,000) one thousand Omani rials and not exceeding (2,000) two thousand Omani rials, or either one of these two punishments. The court may adjudicate the confiscation of funds obtained from the crime. If the crime is repeated, the punishment stipulated in the preceding Paragraph shall be aggravated provided it does not exceed the double”.

What many individuals or organisations overlook is the fact is that the Omani legislation has made



the condition that a prior permit must be obtained from a competent authority which is Ministry of Social Development, as per the terms, rules and procedures for issuing permit for collecting money from the public issued by the Ministerial Decision No 53/2010 in line with Non-Governmental Organisation Law issued by the Royal Decree No 14/2000.

When asked what is the rationale behind illegalising collecting money from the public without a licence, Al Busaidy said, “The process of collecting money from the public poses many risks especially with spread of incidents in fraud and misappropriation of funds by individuals with ill intention to commit criminal operations like drug and human trafficking, arms dealings, money laundering in addition to funding terrorist attacks that target civilians.

In reality, many people appeared to collect “donation” from the public without obtaining a permit from the concerned authority while claiming that the donation was for humanitarian purposes. However, further investigations revealed that such donations did not reach its advertised humanitarian destinations. Instead, some people took advantage for personal gains and to commit violations that put the community and state interest at risk”.

He pointed out that to ensure that money reach its humanitarian destinations and to provide a legal framework for donation and money collection, the Ministry of Social Development does not issue licenses except for reputable and transparent institutions and organisations.

“Regulating donation and money



Salim bin Nasser Khalfan al Busaidy

It is illegal in the Sultanate to collect donation for any cause without prior permission from the competent authorities

collection contributes directly in the elimination of all fraudulent operations in which criminals take advantage of the public willingness to help others and persuade them to donate money that are used later on in crimes that impact the community and individuals”, he added.

According to the Senior Public Prosecutor, there have been incidents of collecting money projecting various causes.

“Collecting donation and money from the public without a licence is common. People receive message on

their phones to donate for building mosques, for charity and for helping people in distress. Some messages indicate that donation would be sent outside the country to help poor people who suffer from starvation or conflict. Many of these invitations for charity do not have permits from the Ministry of Social Development. Therefore, Public Prosecution coordinates with the other concerned authorities to eliminate such phenomena and track those people”, he noted.

So how can one know and ensure they are contributing to the right cause as many people would want to contribute during the holy month of Ramadhan?

“Before I answer the question, I would like to draw out that the Ministry of Social Development only issues permits to organisations registered at the Ministry’s records. Unregistered organisations will not receive permits to collect money from the public. Besides, permits are not given to individuals but rather to legal entities like registered NGOs and charitable organisations.

Prior to deciding to donate your money, you should look for registered NGOs and charitable organisations that have licenses to collect money from the public or look for the official approval in the advertisement. Also, you should ensure that the ad is legitimate and permitted.

You can go to the Ministry’s official website to look for registered charitable organisation or access Oman Charitable Organisation official website to make donation. The latter is responsible for charitable works inside and outside the country. You can donate online with ease and without the need to leave your home”.

To the question, was this law introduced to combat money laundering and how successful has it been since the law was introduced in 2018, Al Busaidy replied, “In fact, money laundering operations are very complex and diverse. They require scrutiny and in-depth inquiry and investigation. Sometimes, collecting money from the public is misused to commit money laundering in order to legitimise the proceeds of crimes by making multiple small bank deposits through different individuals under the cover of collecting donation for charitable purposes. Thus, illegalising collecting money from the public without a licence under the Penal Code has indeed contributed in minimising money laundering crimes by closing one of the methods used by money launderers”.

He pointed out that establishing control on money collection means the permits are given to organisations trusted by the state.

“It also means that individuals without permits cannot claim that money under their possession, which may be the subject of money laundering offence, is money collected from the public for charitable purposes since the act itself is a crime punishable under the law. The court may confiscate all money under the possession of the money collector. This is a huge contribution in the combating money laundering crime”.

So what is the biggest concern?

“The biggest concern is the fear of misusing such funds in criminal acts and for purposes other than what was called for. This includes using such funds in drug trafficking, contrabands or in any other criminal purposes whether inside the country or outside by transferring funds to other countries in order to be used for illegitimate purposes that are detrimental to others. The Sultanate of Oman strives to combat this phenomenon that hides dark elements if misused”.

The Public Prosecution has been spreading awareness regarding collecting money from the public without a licence.

Steps are taken by the Public Prosecution to develop legal culture in public on various subjects. With respect to this topic in hand, Public Prosecution has addressed the subject in many specialised TV and radio programmes in order for the public to arrive at the correct legal information and avoid falling victims to illegal operations and to identify the appropriate donation channels for charity.

In addition, the Public Prosecution posts legal information on various social media platforms.

Upgrade programme enrolment opens

MUSCAT: The Research Council (TRC) has announced that the registration is open for the 4th edition of the Upgrade programme, a programme that transforms the best graduation projects in the 4th Industrial Revolution technologies into successful ICT start-ups to bring socio-economic benefit to Oman.

Upgrade is a competition-based programme in which winners will be assisted to transform their graduation projects into start-ups in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector on topics, such as Smart Cities, Internet of Things, Information Security, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data and Blockchain.

The registration period will end by the end of May 2020. The participating projects will then be sorted and filtered by a jury consisting of the programme partners, following a series of personal interviews to choose the best three winning projects.

The process of incubating and developing the winning projects will start by the programme partners after choosing the three winning projects.

The programme will provide the winners with incubation services, business and marketing consultation, networking and mentoring opportunities, as well as educational awareness programmes that include a group of workshops and lectures in various universities and colleges in the Sultanate.

Upgrade is a collaborative partnership between TRC, for administration and management, Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), for financing emerging companies and covering the logistics costs of the programme, Oman Technology Fund (OTF), for providing training and investment preparation, the National Youth Committee, for developing professional and leadership capabilities, Sas for Entrepreneurship, for embracing and developing start-ups, the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada), for providing commercial, financial and marketing guidance and lastly Al Rafd Fund, for providing financial support and media promotion for SMEs arising from the programme after passing the incubation and development stage. — ONA

Registration for National Research Award 2020 concludes tomorrow

MUSCAT: The registration period for the seventh cycle of the National Research Award (NRA 2020) of the Research Council (TRC) is closing on Wednesday, April 29, at 2 pm.

The NRA is divided into two categories — Best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (Senior Specialist or higher in the medical field) and Best published research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder).

As for the research fields, it consists of six fields and they are Education and Human Resources, Information and Communication Technologies, Health and Social Services, Cultural, Social, Basic Sciences, Energy and Industry, Environmental and Biological Resources.

Interested applicants can apply through (home.trc.gov.om/NRA/SubmissionForm.aspx). Some of the general conditions are that research article must be of relevance to the Sultanate of Oman and falls



under one of the six research fields of the award.

The published research must not have won any other award nationally or internationally. The award is limited only to original

research studies and articles, only one application per cycle is allowed.

The applicant must provide written consent from each team member to prove his or her approval to participate in the competition.

Only complete applications for the award, submitted electronically on TRC’s website, and supplemented with all the required documents as attachments, will be considered for evaluation. — ONA

Ramadan Iftar Program

HALAL FOOD

OMAN CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "He who provides a fasting person something with which to break his fast, will earn the same reward as the one who was observing the fast, without diminishing in any way the reward of the latter."

The Oman Charitable Organization is pleased to announce that it will receive donations for Ramadan Iftar Program in Sultanate of Oman for the year 1441 AH AD 2020 through the following accounts :

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Ramadhan



goodness lasts forever

WHETHER IT IS
THE PASSAGE OF
TIME, OR WHAT,
OMAN IS THE
QUIETEST, MOST
AMENABLE,
GENTLE NATION
ONE WOULD
EVER VISIT OR LIVE
IN, AND
RAMADHAN HERE
IS SPECIAL TO
EVERYONE, YET
THE GOODNESS
AND KINDNESS
OF RAMADHAN
LASTS ALL YEAR
ROUND

RAY PETERSEN

I have been asked if I would share my Ramadhan reflections, being a resident, teacher, lecturer and journalist in the Sultanate for more than 10 years.

My initial experience of Ramadhan was while working in Dubai for three years, where I had a mixed international workforce to supervise consisting of British, South African, Australian, New Zealand, Indian and Pakistani employees. We would start work at 3 am daily, go through until 8 or 9 am, then take a break, returning at 3 pm till around 6 pm. We were working those hours to avoid the intense heat of the middle of the day, so Ramadhan did not have a significant effect upon our working days, or even our lives at that time.

What was noticeable however was the ground-staff, the Indians and Pakistanis, interacted so much better during the observance of Ramadhan, and were happier and livelier, the whole place just seemed to run so much easier for the month. Not like the other eleven months of the year when the two groups 'co-existed', but it was always an uneasy 'peace'.

Offence would be easily taken, minor issues were exaggerated and the cricket matches they played daily, were sometimes just an excuse for conflict. But during Ramadhan, all was sweetness and light. The European expats each year would 'pass the hat around', and give the ground-staff the

do things during Ramadhan to comply with its requirements, for although I am not of the faith, I do not wish to antagonise, offend or disrespect those who are, or their religion.

Am I inconvenienced by the shorter workdays, and the altered opening hours of retailers and services? I think everyone who experiences their first Ramadhan here gets caught out in some way. Equally, you soon learn to adjust, and it does not remain an issue. I think another reality is that few European expats eat at restaurants here during the day in any case, so their being closed is no inconvenience at all.

Have I attended an iftar meal in Oman? Yes, both community and private iftars, and the amount of food is always staggering. As someone said, "It is like having Christmas Dinner everyday for a month". And like Christmas Dinner for we Christians, somehow, all the food does seem to find a home. I understand that many people here, in preparing their banquet, will have also considered how they can package and distribute the 'leftovers' to the less affluent, whoever they may be. That is immensely praiseworthy.

On the whole, we come to appreciate and respect Ramadhan for what it is, and try not to intrude upon the reflective nature of this remarkable time of year, when millions band together in a month long statement of support for their faith. Ramadhan Mubarak.

FATWA

Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili
His eminence grand mufti of Oman

Question

Answer



Over 2 million Australians download COVID-19 app

PRIVACY WORRIES: App uses Bluetooth signals to log when people have been close to one another

SYDNEY: More than two million Australians have downloaded an app to trace contacts of COVID-19 patients hours after its release, the government said on Monday, as states set out plans to expand testing for the infection.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has said more testing and widespread use of the CovidSafe phone app — which has angered some privacy campaigners — are among the main conditions for easing nationwide lockdowns.

Australia has so far confirmed around 6,700 cases of the novel coronavirus and just 83 related deaths, way below figures reported in the United States and other hotspots - something the government has put down to its border closures and other measures.

Health Minister Greg Hunt said the tracing app launched late on Sunday had been downloaded by more than 2 million people - about 8 per cent of the population - as of 7.p.m. (0900 GMT) on Monday.

The government has said it wants that proportion to reach 40 per cent. “This effort will help protect ourselves, our families, our nurses and our doctors,” Hunt said in an emailed statement.

The app, which is based on Singapore’s TraceTogether software and uses Bluetooth signals to log when people have been close to one another, is meant to help medics trace people potentially exposed to infections.

Civil liberties groups have raised fears that apps being considered and used by a number of governments could invade privacy. But Canberra says its software does not record people’s location and has safeguards built in.

ASYMTOMATIC TESTING

Just seven new infections were reported across Australia in the last 24 hours, according to a Reuters tally of announcements from state and territory health departments.

Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy said on Monday officials



will expand testing to start tracing asymptomatic cases - people who have caught the infection without showing symptoms.

Daniel Andrews, premier of Australia’s second most populous state, Victoria, said staff would open pop-up testing sites in shopping centre car parks and test people in their homes and offices.

The states of Queensland and Western Australia have already said they will ease some restrictions this week, as both have had new cases in the low single digits in recent days.

The most populous states of Victoria and New South Wales, which have the country’s coronavirus hotspots, are maintaining strict social and business restrictions.

Morrison’s handling of the pandemic has helped his popularity soar, according to a Newpoll survey conducted for The Australian newspaper that was released on Monday.

His approval rating has risen 27

points since the first week of March to 68 per cent - the best for a leader since the end of 2008, the poll showed.

Morrison has pledged spending worth more than 10 per cent of GDP, including \$83.94 billion subsidy to employers to keep staff they might otherwise have let go.

Still unemployment is expected to top 10 per cent, and the head of Australia’s central bank last week said the country would suffer its biggest economic contraction since the 1930s in the first half of this year due to the containment measures.

Morrison has also antagonised China, Australia’s largest trading partner, with calls for an independent investigation into the global spread of coronavirus.

China’s ambassador to Australia on Monday hinted locals may shun Canberra’s goods because of Morrison’s remarks, though Australia’s Foreign Minister Marise Payne cautioned against “economic coercion”.

— Reuters

SOME COUNTRIES PRISE OPEN COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS

ROME/LONDON: Countries from Italy to New Zealand have announced the easing of coronavirus lockdowns but Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson, back at work on Monday after being hospitalised with the disease, said it was too early to relax restrictions there.

Nearly 3 million people have been infected by the coronavirus across the world and 205,948 have died, according to a Reuters tally of official figures. But many countries are looking to ease lockdowns as rates of infections fall and fears of economic ruin rise.

The world’s worst pandemic in a century, which started in China in December before creeping across the globe, has forced a dilemma upon governments. People cooped up in their homes for weeks on end are growing frustrated and anxious about what the future holds.

And with economic activity from shops and bars to factories and tourism severely curtailed, prolonged recessions are forecast for many countries.

But with no antidote yet found for the coronavirus, leaders are also acutely aware that a second wave of infections could sweep over their

Nearly 3 million people have been infected by the coronavirus across the world and 205,948 have died. But many countries are looking to ease lockdowns as rates of infections fall and fears of economic ruin rise

fishing, surfing, hunting and hiking this week for the first time in more than a month as it begins to ease its way out of a strict lockdown.

About 400,000 people will return to work after the country shifts its alert level down a notch at midnight on Monday, but shops and restaurants will remain closed.

New Zealand’s 5 million residents were subjected to one of the strictest lockdowns in the world, with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern closing offices, schools, bars and restaurants, including take away and delivery services, on March 26.

In Norway, schoolchildren from first to fourth grades returned to schools for the first time since mid-March, while a range of small businesses, including hairdressers, were allowed to open.

Germany’s economy minister urged its 16 states on Monday to reopen slowly. As the number of new infections has fallen, many businesses like smaller stores or car dealerships have been allowed to reopen and some students are returning to schools.

In Spain, one of the worst-hit countries, children went outside on Sunday, emerging from their homes for the first time after six weeks of

living under one of Europe’s strictest coronavirus lockdowns.

Israel on Sunday allowed some businesses to reopen and said it was considering letting children return to school.

Croatia on Monday began easing curbs, allowing smaller shops, libraries and museums to reopen. Serbia allowed small businesses and food markets to open their shutters, eased an overnight curfew and allowed elderly to venture outside three times a week.

Romania said it would not extend the current state of emergency past May 15, when people will be able to move around with documentation.

In the United States, which has recorded the world’s highest infection and death tolls, critics have accused President Donald Trump of mixed and confusing messages on the coronavirus as states have bickered with the White House over how to handle the outbreak and when to reopen the economy.

Georgia, Oklahoma and several other states took tentative steps at restarting businesses on Friday, despite disapproval from Trump and medical experts.

— Reuters

What would happen to North Korea if Kim Jong Un died

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has not been seen in public for more than two weeks, missing commemorations for a key political anniversary, and reports he underwent a cardiovascular procedure have spiralled into speculation he could be incapacitated or even dead.

Both Seoul and Washington have played them down, but there has been no concrete proof of life in Pyongyang’s state media, beyond reports of messages sent in his name.

AFP looks at some questions and answers on what could happen if Kim, the third generation of his family to lead the North, died.

How would the world learn of his death?

The North is extremely secretive, and doubly so about its leadership. Kim’s father and predecessor Kim Jong Il had been dead for two days before anyone outside the innermost circles of North Korean leadership was any the wiser.

On past precedent, the first indication will be an announcement of a special broadcast on state television. If the camera cuts to a woman in a black dress, Kim is dead.

Ri Chun Hee, the North’s veteran newsreader, has for decades announced key milestones in the North, with her voice brimming with joy for successes and tears flowing for bad news.

When she declares a successful nuclear test or missile launch, she wears a pink joseon-ot, a traditional Korean dress known as hanbok in the south.

But she wore black to reveal the deaths of both Kim Jong Il in 2011 and his father and predecessor, the North’s founder Kim Il Sung in 1994.

Will there be another Kim?

The North is officially known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea but has been ruled by members of the same family since its foundation in 1948.

The claim to legitimacy of the Workers’ Party is founded in Kim Il Sung’s fight against Korea’s Japanese occupiers and later the US-led United Nations forces during the Korean War.

The party maintains extensive control of society — “Single-Minded Unity” is one of the North’s most enduring slogans — and no-one expects any kind of popular uprising in the event of Kim’s death.

“North Korean generals and top politicians will not start fighting for power or it will be a limited fight for



power and they will accept a new leader who is likely to be somebody of the Kim family,” said Andrei Lankov of Korea Risk Group.

Who are the contenders?

Kim is said to have three children — only the gender of the second one, a girl, is known — but they are far too young to take over.

His sister Kim Yo Jong is one of his closest advisers, acting as his envoy to the South’s Winter Olympics in the South, accompanying him on his diplomatic forays and recently issuing political statements in her own name.

She is an alternate member of the politburo of the ruling Workers’ Party, and currently the most prominent of Kim’s relatives, but the North is socially conservative and has never had a woman leader.

Kim’s eldest half-brother Kim Jong Nam — who could traditionally have expected to inherit — was brazenly assassinated in 2017, smeared with a deadly nerve agent at Kuala Lumpur’s international airport in a killing most analysts say could only have come from Pyongyang.

Kim has an elder full brother, Kim Jong Chol, who is known to be an Eric Clapton fan and has shown no political ambition.

There is also Kim’s wife Ri Sol Ju, who has enjoyed a higher public profile than her predecessors and was given the title of First Lady in 2018.

Any other notables?

Kim Pyong Il, his father’s half-brother — the Kim family tree is complicated by several of its members having a series of wives or consorts — was the North’s ambassador to several eastern European countries for decades.

But he was recalled to Pyongyang last year from the Czech Republic, his most recent posting, and has not been heard of since. — AFP



A child plays football with his father at Can Pere Antoni Beach in Palma de Mallorca, on Sunday during a national lockdown to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease. After six weeks stuck at home, Spain’s children were being allowed out today to run, play or go for a walk as the government eased one of the world’s toughest coronavirus lockdowns. — AFP



Virus drives Tehran cabbies around the bend

AHMAD PARHIZI

Usually Tehran's tens of thousands of taxi drivers have to battle maddening traffic but now the coronavirus is driving them around the bend. Since it first emerged in Iran in mid-February, the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease has claimed 5,800 lives and infected more than 91,000, according to Iran's government.

It has also put the brakes on most forms of transportation, and taxi services have been among the hardest hit in Tehran, a city of more than eight million people. "So many taxis, but no passengers," lamented 52-year-old Mohammad, pointing to lines of yellow cabs hoping for a ride at Aryashahr station, a transport hub in west Tehran.

The situation was "catastrophic" for the entire sector, he said. "How can we pay the rent, the water and electricity bills, or even for the car?" his colleague Homayoun, 60, chipped in.

Mohammad is angry at the

government and its insistence on respect for the rules of social distancing, which in his view discourage people from taking any form of public transport.

In Aryashahr, most of the drivers have installed transparent partitions for the passenger compartments of their cars to isolate themselves from customers. In the hope of winning back clients, they also apply copious amounts of disinfectant on their vehicles.

A driver named Rouhollah was lucky enough to get three customers, and with one last spray of disinfectant on his cab's door handles he was good to go.

No less than 80,000 taxi drivers are authorised to work in Tehran, according to Alireza Qanadan, head of licensing for the municipality.

Those suffering the most from the outbreak were the roughly 2,000 cabbies attached to the capital's two airports and bus terminals providing long-distance connections to other provinces, he said.

Those suffering the most from the outbreak were the roughly 2,000 cabbies attached to the capital's two airports and bus terminals providing long-distance connections to other provinces

"Their revenues have fallen by almost 90 per cent" due to the coronavirus, Qanadan said.

In a bid to combat the spread of the virus, the authorities banned inter-city travel at the end of March.

Since April 20, Iranians have once again been allowed to travel between provinces but this has not brought a

return to normal for taxi services.

On average, the daily earnings of all drivers in the capital are 64 per cent lower than they were before the health crisis, Qanadan said.

Taxis operating in Tehran were suffering from the fact that now "many people use their own cars to get to work for fear of illness", he added.

One commuter summed it up on Twitter. "I always used to take a taxi to work but now, with the coronavirus, I have to take my car and leave home an hour early to find a place to park," Hamid wrote.

The municipality is also encouraging the use of private cars. In response to the coronavirus, it has lifted restrictions on traffic that had been imposed on central Tehran to combat the city's often heavy air pollution.

For the drivers of taxis and ride-hailing services alike, the phased resumption of economic activity allowed in Tehran since April 18 has so

far hardly improved their lot.

"Before the coronavirus, I used to wait a maximum of 10 minutes to get a passenger, but these days I sometimes have to stand on a street corner for two hours," said Bahram, a driver for Tapsi, an Iranian version of Uber.

Since the Persian New Year holidays more than five weeks ago, the 37-year-old said he had only earned about 12 million rials (\$76), less than a third of his usual takings.

Another Tapsi-affiliated driver, Alireza, 49, spoke of a similar drop in income. He said he was getting by for the time being thanks to a loan from the company.

In order to help drivers — 13 of whom have died from COVID-19, according to official figures — the municipality had extended their work permits free of charge, Qanadan said.

For the most vulnerable of them, he added, city hall has also distributed sanitary articles and even food. — AFP



Merkel faces growing criticism over virus strategy

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has been praised at home and abroad for her reaction to the coronavirus crisis, but as voices of discontent grow louder, support for the government's strategy could be on the wane.

Though Germany began to lift lockdown measures last week, Merkel has urged caution and slammed growing impatience to shake off the curbs on public life introduced a month ago to slow contagion.

The measures have proved successful so far, with Germany maintaining a mortality rate of just 3.7 per cent in the pandemic, far lower than major European neighbours.

The restrictions have also met with public approval. Almost three quarters of the population said they supported them in a Kantar poll published on Friday.

In full-blown crisis just a few months ago, Merkel's CDU/CSU conservative alliance has meanwhile rebounded in the polls, jumping ten points in the last two weeks to 38 per cent.

Yet the mood could be about to change. Wolfgang Schaeuble, an elder statesman of German politics and current president of the Bundestag lower house, warned that extended restrictions would impinge on fundamental citizens' rights.

"When I hear that protecting lives should come above everything else, I don't think that is absolutely true," he told Berlin daily Der Tagesspiegel on Sunday.

Merkel also provoked the ire of regional leaders when she suggested last week that they had been too eager to relax restrictions.

Though Germany began to lift lockdown measures last week, Merkel has urged caution and slammed growing impatience to shake off the curbs on public life introduced a month ago to slow contagion

Armin Laschet, state premier for Germany's most populous region North-Rhine Westphalia and a candidate to succeed Merkel as CDU leader, protested that the discussion over how to lift lockdown measures was "appropriate". "It is of course still a question of life and death," he told public broadcaster ARD on Sunday night.

Yet he insisted that the negative effects of lockdown must also be "weighed up", pointing in particular to children "who have had to stay at home for the last six weeks".

He also attacked what he saw as the pessimistic predictions of some medical experts, pointing out that "40 per cent of intensive care beds are empty" in his state.

Germany's most popular newspaper Bild echoed Laschet's words in a scathing editorial on Monday, accusing Merkel of being "stubborn, pig-headed and bossy".

Largely muted in the crisis until

now, Germany's opposition parties are also beginning to grow more critical of the government's course.

The Greens, still the highest polling opposition party despite a recent slump, have urged more caution. On Sunday, co-leader Annalena Baerbock slammed plans to allow Bundesliga football to resume without spectators from next month.

The leader of the liberal FDP Christian Lindner warned that consensus over coronavirus measures was breaking down, declaring the "end of national unity".

His party's concern over both the fate of small and medium-sized businesses, as well as the erosion of civil liberties, is also shared by more extreme groups.

Far left and far right protesters have assembled in Berlin every Saturday in recent weeks, calling for "democratic resistance" against what they claim are authoritarian and unconstitutional coronavirus restrictions.

Police arrested around 100 of an estimated 1,000 protesters last Saturday and a further demonstration is planned for May 1.

The far-right AfD, Germany's largest opposition party by number of MPs, has also declared its opposition to lockdown.

"The absolute shutdown was avoidable and (the government) is now missing a chance to end it," claimed AfD lawmaker Sebastian Muenzenmaier, adding that "all shops must be opened: give the people back their liberty!".

Weekly newspaper Die Zeit warned the AfD could "profit from the long term consequences" of the virus such as mass unemployment. — AFP

Record military spending in 2019: SIPRI study

Global military expenditure saw its biggest uptick in a decade in 2019, researchers said Monday, marking the first year two Asian countries were among the top three spenders.

The world's nations spent a combined \$1.9 trillion (1.78 trillion euros) on their militaries in 2019, according to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Compared to 2018, that represented an annual growth of 3.6 per cent, the largest spending growth since 2010. "Military spending has reached the highest point since the end of the Cold War," Nan Tian, a researcher at SIPRI, said.

Driving the increase are the world's largest spenders, headed by the US, which spent \$732 billion in 2019, a 5.3 per cent increase, alone accounting for 38 per cent of global spending.

2019 marked the second year of growth in US military spending after seven years of decline. For the first time, two Asian countries were among the top three, with China and India spending an estimated \$261 billion (up 5.1 per cent) and \$71.1 billion (up 6.8 per cent) respectively.

While Chinese expenditure over the past 25 years has closely followed the country's rapid economic expansion, their investments also reflect their ambition of a "world class military".

China's ascent also in part helped explain India's rise. "India's tensions and rivalry with both Pakistan and China are among the major drivers for its increased military spending," SIPRI researcher Simon Wezeman said in a statement. The world's top five spenders, which also included Russia and Saudi Arabia, together accounted for over 60 per cent of total military expenditure.

According to SIPRI, other notable developments included Germany, which increased spending by 10 per cent in 2019 to \$49.3 billion, the largest percentual increase of all the top 15 spenders.

Germany's increased spending could in part be explained by an increased perception of threat from Russia, according to the report's authors. While Tian noted that "military spending growth has accelerated in recent years," he also said that this trend could be reversed as a result of the new coronavirus pandemic, and its economic fallout. As the world heads for a potential global recession, Tian argued that governments will have to weigh military spending against other sectors, such as health care and education.

Looking at the historical data, that fall in spending would however likely not last, according to Tian who recalled the financial crisis of 2008, when military spending fell in subsequent years as countries, especially in Europe, imposed austerity measures. — AFP

OMAN  DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED 15 NOVEMBER 1981

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
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COVID-19: PDO to produce 100,000 litres of sanitiser

NATIONAL ENERGY COMPANY TO RAMP UP PRODUCTION OF VIRUS-DESTROYING LIQUID TO SUPPORT DEMAND ACROSS ITS CONCESSION AREA

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Having undertaken the in-house production of over 20,000 litres of sanitizer for free distribution across its vast concession, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) – the nation's biggest oil and gas producer – plans to manufacture an additional 100,000 litres of this commodity as part of its support for national efforts to thwart the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Last month, at a time when supplies of sanitizer were desperately

low – both domestically and globally – PDO's Production Chemistry team came up with its own homegrown version of the virus-busting gel. Using locally sourced ingredients, it formulated a lab-produced variety that was tested and found to be on par with internationally approved sanitizer formulations – all in under three days.

In the ensuing weeks, the company dispatched in excess of 20,000 litres of the liquid to sites across its concession area the benefit of employees, contractor staff, community centres and clinics.



FURTHERMORE, AS A GESTURE TO THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, PDO HAS OFFERED A TOTAL OF 150 ROOMS, ALONG WITH CATERING FACILITIES, PRIMARILY AT ITS MINA AL FAHAL CAMP.

“The team is planning to produce a further 100,000 litres in the near future and is working to secure additional

ingredients for sustained production,” said PDO in a report on its pandemic prevention efforts published in the latest edition of its in-house newsletter, Al Fahal.

PDO, according to the report, is also working closely with the Ministry of Health to identify and purchase essential equipment and supplies such as ventilators, medications, advanced testing machines, protective masks, disposable face shields, gloves and laboratory reagents. A special team is also reviewing options for 3D-printing of protective aids that are currently in

short supply. Additionally, PDO has seconded two senior medical lab technicians from its Medical Clinic to assist with coronavirus testing at the Central Health Laboratories of the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, as a gesture to the Ministry of Social Development, which is overseeing the management of quarantine and isolation facilities earmarked for returning Omanis, PDO has offered a total of 150 rooms, along with catering facilities, primarily at its Mina Al Fahal camp.

GLOBAL DOLDRUMS

Oil prices skid on oversupply, storage concerns



The sun sets behind an oil pump outside Saint-Fiacre, near Paris, France. – Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Monday on concerns about scarce storage capacity and global economic doldrums from the coronavirus pandemic.

US oil futures led losses, falling by more than \$2 a barrel on fears that storage at Cushing, Oklahoma, could reach full capacity soon.

US West Texas Intermediate June futures fell \$2.86, or 16.88 per cent, to \$14.08 a barrel by 1100 GMT. Brent crude was down 83 cents, or 3.9 per cent, at \$20.61 a barrel. The June Brent contract expires on Thursday.

Oil futures marked their third straight week of losses last week — and have fallen for eight of the past nine — with Brent ending down 24 per cent and WTI off around 7 per cent.

The June WTI contract's price fall may have been partly triggered by investors moving to later months after the May contract lapsed into negative territory for the first time ever before expiring last week.

The front-month contract was trading at lower-than-usual volumes.

“The market is very concerned of a repeat of negative pricing as the Cushing storage and delivery hub saturates,” Harry Tchilinguirian, global oil strategist at BNP Paribas in London, told the Reuters Global Oil Forum.

“The shift of open interest away from June will have negative consequences for the liquidity of the contract, potentially leading to greater volatility in its price,” he added.

US crude inventories rose to 518.6 million barrels in the week to April 17, near an all-time record of 535 million barrels set in 2017.

Cushing, the delivery point for WTI, was 70 per cent full as of mid-April, although traders said all available space was already leased.

Global economic output is expected to contract by 2 per cent this year, worse than the financial crisis, while demand has collapsed 30 per cent due to the pandemic.

In the US, a record 26.5 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits since mid-March, and the Congressional Budget Office predicted that the economy would contract by nearly 40 per cent annually in the second quarter. — Reuters



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Unaudited condensed financial statements 31 March 2020

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

The Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company is pleased to submit their report together with the financial statements of the Company for the 3 month period ended March 31 2020.

Annual Ordinary General Meeting ("AGM") and Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM"):

Pursuant to the Capital Market Authority circular no KH/3/2020 dated March 18 2020 with regard to suspending all Annual General Meetings of SAOG companies until further notice, the Company AGM has been postponed accordingly. The CMA decision was based on the decision issued by the Supreme Committee dealing with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) to ban all mass gatherings, events, and conferences in the Sultanate with effect from March 18 2020.

The EGM that was planned to approve the Company's revised Articles of Association (the "Aa") to that required by the new Commercial Company Law has been postponed as well.

Health & Safety

There has been no Loss Time Incident during the first 3 months of 2020 and the Health and Safety performance has been excellent. On March 31 2020, Sohar Power has accumulated 2,619 days without loss time accident.

The Company has closely monitored the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic and the directions and decision issued by Supreme Committee dealing with the Coronavirus (COVID-19). In line with its role as an "essential service", the Company and the plant Operator have activated the Business Continuity Plan and implemented different measures to ensure the safety of the staff and the continuity of the business during the exceptional situation.

Operations and Maintenance

The plant achieved an excellent reliability level of 99.89% and 100% for power and water respectively during the first quarter of the year.

The Company exported a net power of 85 GWh and delivered 0.53 million m3 of potable water to its customer.

The load factor of the power plant represented 6.64% of its maximum capability and 3.91% of the water plant maximum capability. The production level is much lower than the production of 61.2% and 71.4% for the power and water plants, respectively, in the same period of the previous year. This is due to the water demand being fulfilled mainly by the new desalination plant commissioned around August 2019. The water plant was kept under preservation and available for startup as and when required to meet the water demand.

The Authorities approved the total plant shut down to undertake the annual maintenance on January 11 2020 for 15 days.

All Gas turbines underwent regular annual inspection during the last winter outage.

The Company undertook its performance test on fuel gas for the Contract Year starting on April 1 2020, successfully demonstrating the availability of the Guaranteed Power and Water Capacity to its customer. The performance test on fuel oil waived by OPWP as a precautionary measure in view of COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial Results

Revenues at the end of March 2020 amount to RO 7.2 million as against RO 15.3 million at the end of March 2019, reduced mainly due to lower load factor.

The Direct costs for the first 3 months have decreased from RO 14.0 million in 2019 to RO 2.7 million in 2020. The decrease in direct cost is mainly due to lower gas fuel cost due to lower consumption.

The Company recorded a net profit of RO 0.1 million during the period, compared to a net loss of RO 0.4 million in 2019.

Long term loans were repaid and swaps were settled on their due dates. An additional amount of RO 1.0 million was repaid to the lenders under the cash sweep mechanism in place since 2015. The hedging deficit on Company's swap agreements, at the close of business at March 31 2020 was RO 5.2 million, in comparison with valuations as of December 31 2019 of RO 4.2 million. As per IFRS, hedging deficit is calculated on each balance sheet date and it represents the loss, which the Company may incur, if it opts to terminate the swap agreements on this date. However under the terms of loan agreements, the Company is not permitted to terminate its swap agreements and, as such, the loss is considered to be notional.

The term loan facilities agreement contains mandatory cash sweep prepayment provisions effective since

September 30 2015, consisting in accelerating the repayment of the long term loan during the duration of the contract with our customer. As a consequence, no further amount will be available for distribution as dividend to shareholders until the full repayment of the loans, unless the debt can be restructured.

There are no legal proceedings against the company as of 31 March 2020.

We expect the Company to operate safely, reliably, and deliver a continuous supply of power and water to its customer during the summer period started on April 1 2020.

Following the qualification and issue of RfP in October 2019, for the 2022 Power Procurement process launched by OPWP, SPC has been following the timeline in terms of submission of various documents as called for in the RfP. The process is expected to conclude by June / July 2020.

Wim Alen
Chairman of the Board

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.

Unaudited condensed statement of financial position as at 31 March 2020

	31 March 2020 RO'000	31 December 2019 RO'000	31 March 2020 USD'000	31 December 2019 USD'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	90,790	93,630	235,819	243,196
Right-of-use assets	339	376	881	976
Total non-current assets	91,129	94,006	236,700	244,172
Current assets				
Inventories	705	705	1,831	1,831
Trade and other receivables	15,500	14,650	40,259	38,052
Bank balances	1,942	4,998	5,044	12,982
Total current assets	18,147	20,353	47,134	52,865
Total assets	109,276	114,359	283,834	297,037
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	22,101	22,101	57,405	57,405
Legal reserve	4,160	4,148	10,805	10,774
Accumulated Losses	(9,072)	(9,177)	(23,564)	(23,836)
Shareholders' equity	17,189	17,072	44,646	44,343
Hedging deficit - net of tax	(3,808)	(3,140)	(9,891)	(8,156)
Total capital and reserves	13,381	13,932	34,755	36,187
Non-current liabilities				
Hedging deficit	5,162	4,152	13,408	10,784
Non-current portion of long-term loans	53,497	57,777	138,953	150,070
Provision for decommissioning costs	1,701	1,676	4,418	4,353
Non-current Portion of deferred revenue	1,499	1,881	3,894	4,886
Non-current Portion of Lease Liability	243	236	631	613
Deferred tax liability	9,007	9,261	23,395	24,055
Total non-current liabilities	71,109	74,983	184,699	194,761
Current liabilities				
Current portion of long term loans	8,981	8,649	23,327	22,465
Current Portion of Lease Liability	150	150	390	390
Current Portion of deferred revenue	1,531	1,533	3,975	3,982
Trade and other payables	13,670	13,795	35,508	35,831
Amount due to a related party	176	235	457	610
Provision for taxation	278	1,082	723	2,811
Total current liabilities	24,786	25,444	64,380	66,089
Total equity and liabilities	109,276	114,359	283,834	297,037
Net assets per share	0.078	0.077	0.202	0.201

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss for the period ended 31 March 2020

	31 March 2020 RO'000	31 March 2019 RO'000	31 March 2020 USD'000	31 March 2019 USD'000
Revenue	7,243	15,327	18,813	39,810
Cost of revenue	(5,552)	(14,058)	(14,421)	(36,512)
Gross profit	1,691	1,269	4,392	3,298
Other income	56	56	145	145
	1,747	1,325	4,537	3,443
Expenses				
General and administrative expenses	(189)	(308)	(490)	(803)
Finance costs	(1,436)	(1,272)	(3,730)	(3,301)
	(1,625)	(1,580)	(4,220)	(4,104)
Profit/(loss) before tax for the period	122	(255)	317	(661)
Income tax expense	(5)	(98)	(12)	(255)
Net profit/(loss) after tax for the period	117	(353)	305	(916)
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.001	(0.002)	0.001	(0.004)

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss for the period ended 31 March 2020

	31 March 2020 RO'000	31 March 2019 RO'000	31 March 2020 USD'000	31 March 2019 USD'000
Net profit/(loss) after tax for the period	117	(353)	305	(916)
Other comprehensive income:				
Items that may be reclassified into profit and loss				
Fair value gains on interest rate swaps	(321)	(88)	(836)	(229)
Related taxation	140	(76)	364	(197)
Total other comprehensive income for the period	(181)	(164)	(472)	(426)
Total comprehensive income for the period	(64)	(517)	(167)	(1,342)



44,083 SMEs registered till March 2020

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) till the end of March 2020 stood at 44,083, which is an increase by 13.7 per cent compared to the same period of 2019, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with 34 per cent SMEs registered till March 2020, followed by North Al Batinah with 16 per cent, Al Dhakhiliya with 13 per cent, Dhofar with 8 per cent, and the rest of



governorates with 29 per cent.

14,857 SMEs were registered in the Governorate of Muscat till the end of March 2020, followed by North Al Batinah with 6,967, Al Dhakhiliya with 5,569, Dhofar with 3,710, South Al Batinah with 3,267, and North Al Sharqiyah with 2,996 SMEs registered.

This was followed by Al Dhahira with 2,623 SMEs, South Al Sharqiyah with 2,505 SMEs, and Al Buraimi with 926 SMEs, in addition to 495 SMEs in Al Wusta and 168 in Musandam till March 2020.

The total number of SMEs registered in February 2020 stood at 43,592, compared to 43,134 in January 2020.

Oman Arab Bank launches ‘Online Learning Hub’



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced that it is developing a first-of-its-kind interactive digital learning hub in the Sultanate. The learning platform is developed to upskill the youth and to prepare them for the job market in the future.

The Learning Hub will launch on May 4, 2020, with a comprehensive set of workshops that are focused on accelerating students and entrepreneurs’ personal and professional growth and delivering the skills, competencies, tools and metrics needed to drive growth and value in their careers and businesses. The learning platform will focus on various topics, including design thinking, innovation, business model canvas, the latest trends in technology, leadership development, self-development, and much more.

Commenting on this unique initiative, Adil al Rahbi (pictured), the Head of Human Resources Division at OAB, shed light on the role that these new initiatives play in bridging the gap between traditional learning methods and the requirements of today’s job market, by providing students with an opportunity to develop their skills and, in turn, strengthen their future employment prospects.

“We wanted to offer Oman’s youth access to an interactive online learning community, regardless of the sustained impact of COVID-19; with an opportunity to acquire the skills they need, share knowledge, and unlock their full potential so that they can excel and thrive in the future.

The interactive online workshops will see a much more hands-on experience and breaks away from the traditional theoretical curriculum,” Al Rahbi added.

Leen al Atassi, Head of Innovation at OAB, added, “We’ve designed The Learning Hub to support and empower students and budding entrepreneurs to learn new skills, understand core concepts that can sharpen their ability to apply the latest innovation concepts, and have the confidence to take on new challenges. We have collaborated with some of our key strategic partners to deliver these programmes, including GBM, IDO, and Phaze Ro.

The interactive workshops will focus on design thinking principles, enablers of innovation, critical reflection analysis, the business model canvas, turning an idea into a proof of concept, new trends in technology, pitching to potential investors and many other topics that would help people navigate this evolving landscape.”

NBC participates in online start-up weekend competition

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

The National Business Centre (NBC), which operates under the auspices of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), took part in the global online start-up weekend competition that aimed at crafting new ideas to fight coronavirus (COVID-19) with the participation of 83 countries around the world. NBC participated in this virtual event alongside Riyadh and in cooperation with Al Rud’ha, Al Jabr Company and Techstars.

During the competition, NBC offered incubation opportunities for the winning projects in case they are in line with the incubation terms, as well as the opportunity of joining the pre-incubation programme. Moreover, a number of NBC officials took part in the event as mentors to offer advice



and guidance to the participating teams.

The three-day virtual version of the start-up weekend competition featured a series of workshops to develop the presented ideas. From the Sultanate, Wareed won the first place for offering an online medical platform that easily connects those infected with COVID-19 with their doctors.

Pick Pack came in second place for their idea of facilitating shipments of SME products and home projects by providing product design and packaging services. The third place was awarded to Joy team for providing an online educational platform for the students and for people with special needs.

Mazoon Electricity holds online training programmes for staff

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

With an aim to raise competency levels across the company, Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, has arranged training programmes for its employees through online platforms.

Mazoon Electricity activated the online courses in the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation and with the intent to continually develop employee competencies. This also comes within the framework of the company rolling out several precautionary measures and business endurance plans to ensure uninterrupted workflow.

Through the portal, www.electrical-engineering-portal.com, employees are provided free online courses on topics pertaining to the industry. The training covers all engineering areas, which are in different online training interventions such as videos, drawings, articles, e-books among others.

Additionally, employees have been provided with a trusted online package of courses related to different fields through the website www.udemy.com.

Udemy is a leading global marketplace for teaching and learning, connecting millions of students to the skills they need to succeed.

While online training courses are cost-effective,



convenient, flexible and easy to access, they offer options to select specific topics from module of users’ choice. The courses cover a very diverse range of topics, across categories and sectors.

The online courses also give employees access to the latest skills their jobs require. Online learning allows reaching out to employees quickly while enjoying substantial savings in travel, time, and administration costs. Above all, online training offers employees access to any kind of resources they need from across the world.

Prep recovery for post-oil COVID-19 squeeze



CHRIS WOOD

Let’s use today’s financial squeeze as a springboard for more resilient and focused growth. Yes, that’s an optimistic approach, but is there any other choice for energy markets right now? We are entering the worst economic blow since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

There isn’t much breathing room between the demand destruction wreaked by COVID-19 – sadly, taking more than 200,000 lives so far – and the tsunami of global oversupply depressing oil prices. For one, US oil plummeted below zero on April 21 – for the first time in history. Never before has the marine fuels supply chain – refineries, ports, storage operators, shipping companies et al – faced such a powerful pressure cooker. We are in entirely uncharted waters. But that doesn’t mean business stops. It just needs to be more determined, more collaborative and learn from each other.

GREEN SHOOTS AHOY

Strong demand is emerging in both the UAE’s Port of Fujairah and across Asia, thanks to the returning appetite of China, the world’s biggest oil importer. We’ve just reported



AMID THE UNCERTAINTY, ONE POINT IS CLEAR. PATIENCE WILL BE VITAL IN ENSURING WE HAVE A STEADY AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY; THINK RABBIT VERSUS THE HARE. FOR NOW, FIND YOUR ‘SPRINGBOARD’ FOR RECOVERY AND GET AS MUCH LIFT AS POSSIBLE.

a record high quarterly shipment volume of 1.3mn metric tons of ultra-low sulfur fuel oil (ULSFO) across Fujairah, the world’s second largest bunkering hub, and Singapore, the world’s biggest. This isn’t to say all is well in the industry, but they are encouraging signs.

In one sense, timing has been fortuitous. The industry would probably not have been as well placed to deal with today’s crisis without the start of IMO 2020 on January 1. Firms have spent the last eighteen months improving the efficiency of their balance sheets in order to cope

with the higher fuel prices that were anticipated once lower sulfur fuel oil became compulsory this year in one of the biggest changes in marine fuels since the early 1900s.

Yet instead, fuel prices have fallen from \$700/mt in January to \$240/mt today – a 65 per cent decline that provides relief to many stakeholders who now find themselves in an unexpected economic battle.

Cash reserves will be especially valuable as demand inevitably picks up and those with deep pockets are the most agile and able to lock in market share.

REALISTIC GOALS

Real recovery is unlikely gain any significant momentum before 2021, for economic uncertainty remains rampant. Some countries are still at the peak of their demand destruction amid COVID-19 and others may still be affected, i.e. African nations, collectively home to 1.2bn people. It took years for the world to regain its financial footing after the global recession of 2008 and today’s crisis is far more unpredictable. We only need to walk into our local shop to see how the global supply chain and the energy industry facilitating it are

suffering: empty shelves and reduced stock abound.

Some solutions to accelerating the recovery may not be popular. The money that governments worldwide are providing in huge stimulus packages must come from somewhere. Amid the uncertainty, one point is clear. Patience will be vital in ensuring we have a steady and sustainable recovery; think rabbit versus the hare. For now, find your ‘springboard’ for recovery and get as much lift as possible.

[Chris Wood is Managing Director, Uniper Energy DMCC]

Airbus warns staff on jobs with its survival at stake



Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury poses before Airbus's annual press conference on full-year results, in Blagnac, France. – Reuters

PARIS: European planemaker Airbus issued a bleak assessment of the impact of the coronavirus crisis, telling the company's 135,000 employees to brace for potentially deeper job cuts and warning its survival is at stake without immediate action.

In a letter to staff, Chief Executive Guillaume Faury said Airbus was “bleeding cash at an unprecedented speed” and that a recent drop of a third or more in production rates did not reflect the worst-case scenario and would be kept under review.

Airbus said it did not comment on internal communications.

The letter was sent to employees late on Friday, days before the company is due to give first-quarter results overshadowed by a pandemic that has left airlines struggling to survive and virtually halted jet deliveries since mid-March.

Airbus has begun implementing government-assisted furlough schemes starting with 3,000 workers in France, “but we may now need to plan for more far-reaching measures,” Faury said.

“The survival of Airbus is in question if we don't act now,” he added.

Industry sources have said a new restructuring plan similar to its 2007 Power8 which saw 10,000 job cuts could be launched in the summer, but Faury indicated the company was already exploring “all options” while waiting for clarity on demand.

People familiar with the matter say Airbus is also in active discussions with European governments about tapping schemes to assist struggling industries, including state-guaranteed loans.

It has already expanded commercial credit lines with banks, buying what Faury described as “time to adapt and resize”.

To stem the outflow of cash, Airbus this month said it would slash benchmark narrow-body jet production by a third to 40 jets a month. It also issued targets for wide-body jets implying cuts up to 42 per cent compared with previously published rates.

“In other words, in just a couple of weeks we have lost roughly one-third of our business,” Faury wrote in the letter, which was earlier reported by Bloomberg News. “And, frankly, that's not even the worst-case scenario we could face”. — Reuters

US economy faces historic shock, with 16 per cent joblessness possible

WASHINGTON: The shuttering of the US economy due to the coronavirus pandemic is a shock of historic proportions that will likely push the national unemployment rate to 16 per cent or higher this month and require more stimulus to ensure a strong rebound, a White House economic adviser said.

“It's a really grave situation,” President Donald Trump's adviser, Kevin Hassett, told the ABC programme “This Week.”

“This is the biggest negative shock that our economy, I think, has ever seen. We're going to be looking at an unemployment rate that approaches rates that we saw during the Great Depression” of the 1930s, Hassett added.

Lockdowns across the United States to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus have hammered the economy, shuttering businesses and sending unemployment skyrocketing.

A record 26.5 million Americans have filed for jobless benefits since mid-March, and retail sales, homebuilding and consumer confidence have all cratered.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office predicts US gross domestic product will contract at nearly a 40 per cent annual rate in the second quarter, with unemployment cresting at 16 per cent in the third quarter. But even next year, the CBO sees the jobless rate still averaging above 10 per cent.

Before the pandemic struck, the US jobless rate had been hovering at a 50-year low of 3.5 per cent.

“I think the unemployment rate is going to jump to a level probably around 16 per cent or even higher in the next jobs report,” due on May 8, providing April employment statistics, Hassett told reporters at the White House.

Hassett added that the second-quarter drop expected in the nation's GDP would be a “big number.”



A pedestrian passes a mural at the entrance of the Iowa Veterans Home in Marshalltown, Iowa. – Reuters

A RECORD 26.5 MILLION AMERICANS HAVE FILED FOR JOBLESS BENEFITS SINCE MID-MARCH, AND RETAIL SALES, HOMEBUILDING AND CONSUMER CONFIDENCE HAVE ALL CRATERED.

“I think the next couple of months are going to look terrible. You're going to see numbers as bad as anything we've ever seen before,” Hassett said, referring to US economic data.

“We're going to need really big thoughtful policies to put together to make it so that people are optimistic again,” Hassett added.

Trump's advisers want to hone a list of five or six ideas to present to Congress to help clear the economic carnage, Hassett said.

“I'm sure that over the next three or four weeks, everybody's going to pull together and come up with a plan to give us the best chance possible for a V-shaped recovery,” Hassett told ABC. “I... don't think you get it if we don't have another round of really

solid legislation.”

A “V-shaped recovery” is one in which an economy bounces back sharply after a precipitous decline.

The US Congress has already approved \$3 trillion in coronavirus relief in a show of bipartisan support for laid-off workers and an economy in free fall.

Lawmakers are now poised for a battle over federal assistance to state and local governments whose budgets have been shattered by a plunge in tax revenue even as they have had to take extraordinary measures during a pandemic that has caused a US death toll approaching 55,000.

New York City needs \$7.4 billion in federal aid to offset economic

losses from the coronavirus, its mayor said on Sunday. “If New York City is not (made) whole, it will drag down the entire region, and it will hold up the entire national economic restart,” Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat, said on the Fox programme “Sunday Morning Futures.”

Like de Blasio, many of the nation's governors - Democrats and Republicans alike - have pressed the Trump administration and Congress to come forward with a sizable relief package.

“We will have state and local (aid), and we will have it in a very significant way,” House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the top Democrat in Congress, said on CNN's “State of the Union.”

“The governors are impatient,” Pelosi added. “Their impatience will help us get an even bigger number.”

Trump has shown a willingness to support aid for cities and states, but some fellow Republicans - including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell - have voiced wariness, citing a mounting federal debt load.

McConnell, in remarks that have drawn sharp rebukes from various governors as well as Democratic lawmakers, has suggested that states should declare bankruptcy instead.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, asked whether Trump would support providing hundreds of billions of dollars to the states, said any further relief would have to receive support from both parties.

“This is a war. We'll win this war. If we need to spend more money, we will, and we'll only do it with bipartisan support,” Mnuchin told “Fox News Sunday.” — Reuters

BoJ to expand stimulus again as virus pain deepens

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan (BoJ) is expected to expand monetary stimulus on Monday for the second straight month to ease corporate funding strains and finance huge government spending aimed at combating the deepening economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Such a move would put the BoJ in line with other major central banks that have unleashed unprecedented amounts of monetary support amid the health crisis.

Sources said the BoJ is likely to take further steps to ease funding strains for companies

whose sales have collapsed, such as boosting purchases of corporate bonds and commercial debt.

The central bank may also clarify its commitment to buy unlimited amounts of government bonds by scrapping loose guidance to buy them at an annual pace of 80 trillion yen (\$744 billion) per year, say sources familiar with its thinking.

Removing the guidance will be largely symbolic, they say.

The BoJ has only purchased less than 20 trillion yen per year, as the bank's huge presence



A Japanese flag flutters atop the Bank of Japan building in Tokyo. – Reuters

in the market allows it to control yields with fewer purchases.

“Still, it's something the BoJ could contemplate,” one of the sources said. “By showing its resolve to buy bonds aggressively, the BoJ can send a message it is working closely with the government by keeping borrowing costs ultra-low,” the source said, a view echoed by another source.

At the meeting on Monday cut short by a day as a precaution against the spread of the pandemic, the BoJ is widely expected to keep its interest rate targets unchanged. — Reuters

China's industrial firms' profits contract in March



An employee wearing a face mask works on a production line manufacturing socks for export at a factory in Huzhou's Deqing county, Zhejiang, China. – Reuters

BEIJING: Profits at China's industrial firms fell in March although at a slower pace than in the first two months,

with many sectors seeing significant declines, suggesting the economy is still struggling to resume production after

The world's No 2 economy is limping back after weeks of near paralysis caused by the health crisis and tough containment measures, but recovery has been patchy with worries about a second wave of infections and a global recession.

the coronavirus outbreak.

The world's No 2 economy is limping back after weeks of near paralysis caused by the health crisis and tough containment measures, but recovery

has been patchy with worries about a second wave of infections and a global recession adding to the challenges for policymakers.

China's industrial firms earned 370.66 billion yuan (\$52.43 billion) in March, down 34.9 per cent from a year earlier, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed. This follows a 38.3 per cent slump in January-February, the steepest drop since at least 2010.

For the quarter ended March, industrial firms' profits fell 36.7 per cent on an annual basis to 781.45 billion yuan.

Electronics and drinks manufacturers saw some recoveries in profits from the first two months, the data showed. Eight out of 41 sectors surveyed marked profit increases in March, better than only four in January-February.

The advanced manufacturing

sector, as well as private, small-scale and foreign invested companies all saw narrower drops in profits in March compared with the first two months.

But we still cannot be optimistic about the profits situation, said Zhang Weihua, an official at the bureau.

Market demand has not recovered completely, and production costs remain relatively high, Zhang said in a statement published alongside the data.

The deep drop in industrial firms' profits comes as China's economy shrank for the first time since at least 1992 in the first three months. Factory gate prices, a key barometer for industrial demand, posted the deepest deflation in five months in March.

“China has faced a continued fall in demand for goods from foreign economies due to COVID-19's impact on those economies' job markets and wages growth,” said Iris Pang, chief

economist, Greater China for ING.

“Industrial profits will have to rely more on domestic demand. But conditions are not much better in China.”

Beijing has stepped up tax and credit relief for virus-hit firms since February, including cuts in borrowing costs.

However, top policy advisers are still calling for stronger fiscal stimulus as soon as possible.

Beijing's policies are less aggressive than the quantitative easing of other major central banks and it balances the need for stimulus against high household and corporate debt

Chinese President Xi Jinping has said Beijing will step up investment in traditional industries such as transportation and energy as well as new infrastructure areas including 5G and artificial intelligence to boost the economy. — Reuters



Care for street cats during lockdown and Ramadhan

GEORGINA BENISON

While keeping ourselves safe and healthy during this stay-at-home period is of prime importance, spare a thought for Oman's street life; bin cats still need to eat and drink. I had a word with Senior Nurse Sarah at Al Qurum Veterinary Clinic and we talked about the basics of providing food and water for stray animals in the environment.

Some residents may have been influenced by false fears that animals can carry the coronavirus. In general there has been no research to show that COVID-19 affects or is transmitted via stray cats and dogs. However, during this time these animals are indirectly suffering as a result of the closure of restaurants, beaches and local parks where they would normally eke out a living, feeding on picnic scraps or left-overs at the end of a working day.

"Since lockdown we have seen dramatic rises in the admittance of emaciated, starving animals. It's very sad when this happens to helpless, innocent animals. Luckily, kind members of the public bring the animals in and are willing to contribute to treatment".

Sarah went on to explain, "Owing to the lack of food available, the animals become very weak and then are more susceptible to dangerous infectious diseases like feline panleukopenia (FPLV) which is a fatal disease in cats and kittens. Dogs become more exposed to canine Parvo-virus and Distemper".

Sarah suggested ways to help stray animals in a safe and effective way: "Recycle your takeaway dishes or plastic containers; make them usable to put food and water freely for the animals to use. Stray animals are not fussy when it comes to food, they are happy just to have food in their bellies. Feed left-overs from dinner, raw or cooked cuttings from meat and fish. If you wish to purchase cat food they will appreciate any brand, wet or dry! You may wonder where to put the food down; it can be placed anywhere in stray cat or dog populated areas. If it is a residential area, simply place the dishes by waste bins where people are less



likely to be". But be sure to come back later to clear up and throw the left-overs in the bin!

Some people may be worried about contraction of COVID-19 when trying to feed the strays. The vets at Qurum Clinic responded, "It is highly unlikely you will come into contact with COVID-19 as you feed the animals. Simply wear masks and gloves and use hand sanitiser as you would if you were going out for necessities.

They advise not to touch the animals as you are not aware of their temperament, and they can be dirty from climbing in bins or resting in sand". During Ramadhan, there tends to be plenty of good quality food left over from iftar, and by sharing it with needy animals the message of generosity would be upheld as well as minimising unnecessary food waste. Animals tend to hide and sleep during the heat of the day too, so as long as there are water sources available they will become accustomed to waiting until well after dark for food.

On the issue of the ever expanding stray animal population in Oman, the safest and easiest way to control reproduction is TNR (Trap, Neuter, Release). This is when the animal is either castrated or spayed by veterinary professionals in a safe and humane operation.

Most veterinary clinics in Muscat support members of the public and charities (such as Tail of the Tiger or Omani Paws) trying to control the overpopulation of stray animals. Most Veterinary Clinics provide humane traps for rent to catch the animals safely, and offer discounted rates for neutering strays. It should be stressed that Veterinary Clinics in the capital have been able to remain open during this sensitive time by following the recommended safe practice guidelines and distancing.

Furthermore, most Muscat clinics do have enough medication for their patients during this period, contrary to fears, and supermarkets have maintained their normal stocks of pet food, tinned and dry. So during this unprecedented experience of Ramadhan in the time of coronavirus, we can still take care of our urban co-habitants with little or no cost, nor threat to our own well-being.

HOW ANELKA, DROGBA BLAZED TRAIL WITH CHAOTIC SEASON IN CHINA

SHANGHAI: A pay dispute, an eccentric owner and smashed-up furniture — and arguing with fans for refusing to bow.

When Premier League stars Didier Drogba and Nicolas Anelka made surprising moves to China in 2012, they put Chinese football on the map.

Carlos Tevez, Marouane Fellaini and others would ultimately follow as money poured into the Chinese Super League, but the former Chelsea duo's chaotic spell served as a cautionary tale.

Anelka lasted only one, turbulent year at Shanghai Shenhua while his fellow forward Drogba did barely six months at the club.

Drogba signed in June 2012 at 34, just weeks after he scored the winning penalty for Chelsea in the Champions League final against Bayern Munich.

"For me it would have been easy to go to another team in Europe but I chose China because of the challenge," he said at the time, after becoming one of the world's best-paid players on a reported \$300,000 a week.

Hundreds of Shanghai Shenhua supporters mobbed the Ivorian as he touched down in Shanghai.

"Shenhua's nuclear bomb has arrived," Shenhua goalkeeper Wang Dalei said.

“
For me it would have been easy to go to another team in Europe but I chose China because of the challenge.

DIDIER DROGBA,
Former Shanghai Shenhua player

Anelka managed only three goals in 23 matches before both departed China in January 2013.

'I DON'T CARE'
So what went wrong?
Shenhua, one of the traditional heavyweights of Chinese football, were owned at the time by video gaming mogul Zhu Jun, who fancied himself as a player on occasion.
Zhu made Anelka China's first direct import from the Premier League and he also lured another famous Frenchman, Jean Tigana, as coach.
But the ex-Fulham manager was hit by a player revolt against his training methods and was sacked after just five games in charge. Upon learning his services were no longer required, Tigana departed the stadium before kick-off for a home game, leaving Shenhua without a coach for the match and empty seats in the dugout. — AFP



Pakistan's Umar Akmal banned for three years

LAHORE: Controversial Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal was banned on Monday from all forms of cricket for three years after pleading guilty to failing to report match-fixing approaches, the country's cricket board announced.

Umar, who turns 30 in May, withdrew last month from challenging the charges.

Umar's ban is effective from February 20, when he was provisionally suspended by the board under its anti-corruption code, which states a player must report being approached to fix games.

The decision was announced by a disciplinary committee after a brief hearing of the Pakistan Cricket Board.

Umar burst onto the scene with a century in his first Test in 2009, but his career has been marred by disciplinary problems, resulting in various bans and fines.

He was arrested in February 2014 after a scuffle with a traffic warden who stopped him for a signal violation. Umar last represented Pakistan in two Twenty20 internationals against Sri Lanka in Lahore last year, falling to first ball ducks on both occasions.

He has so far played 16 Tests, 121 one-day games and 84 Twenty20s for Pakistan. — AFP



French Open champ turns shelf stacker during pandemic

FRANKFURT: A year after winning the men's doubles title at Roland Garros, German tennis player Kevin Krawietz is helping out during the coronavirus pandemic by stacking shelves in his local supermarket.

"I've been working for a discount supermarket on a 450 euros (\$488) basis for a few weeks now," Krawietz, who won the 2019 French Open title with Antoine Mies, told magazine Der Spiegel.

Munich-based Krawietz, ranked 13th in doubles, says that as a pro he has a special permit to "train three or four times a week" at a local tennis hall. The 2020 tennis season has been decimated by the coronavirus and the French Open has been postponed from May until September.

When not training, Krawietz, 28, is busy stacking shelves during the pandemic. Germany currently has 155,193 cases of the virus and 5,750 deaths so far.

"I sort out the shelves, make sure the sausage and cheese is well stocked and sort out the empty boxes," he explained.

"Last week, I was on security duty at the entrance, spraying shopping trolleys with disinfectant."

Krawietz had been considering "a normal job", but "thanks to coronavirus, I now have the opportunity to do so".

He says the experience gives him a greater "appreciation" of his career as a tennis pro.

"My colleagues are sometimes in the shop from half past five to fill the shelves," he said.

"I, on the other hand, have had the luxury of being able to turn my hobby into my profession."

Krawietz and Mies enjoyed a breakthrough year in 2019, backing up victory in Paris by reaching the semifinals of the US Open.

Before that however, Krawietz admits often having struggled to make ends meet, "some years I finished in the red".

"Once I won a little over a thousand euros in prize money for a tournament in Italy, that was my weekly salary," he added.

"I have to pay tax on that, take out travel expenses and the fee for a coach. There was not much left."

He backed Novak Djokovic's recent calls to set up an aid fund to help low-ranking pros struggling financially.

"That can certainly help some players survive," said Krawietz.

"But all in all it would be nice if we — independent of coronavirus — could make it possible to make a good living out of the sport even beyond the Top 100." — AFP





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F1 season set for Austria start as French GP cancelled



LONDON: Formula One boss Chase Carey on Monday targeted the coronavirus-hit season eventually starting in Austria on July 5 after the French Grand Prix was cancelled and fans barred from the British race at Silverstone.

The French Grand Prix, which was to have been held on June 28, was the tenth race of the season to be scrapped or postponed.

"We're targeting a start to racing in Europe through July, August and beginning of September, with the first race taking place in Austria on 3-5 July weekend," Carey said in a statement.

"September, October and November, would see us race in Eurasia, Asia and the Americas, finishing the season in the Gulf in December with Bahrain before the traditional finale in Abu Dhabi, having

completed between 15-18 races."

Carey's statement followed quickfire announcements from the French organisers and a statement from the owners of the Silverstone track where the British Grand Prix is due to take place on July 19.

"Given the evolution of the situation linked to the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the French Grand Prix takes note of the decisions announced by the French state, making it impossible to maintain our event," the race's managing director Eric Boullier said.

It joins nine other races in the decimated 2020 championship to be either cancelled (Australia, Monaco) or postponed (Bahrain, China, Vietnam, Netherlands, Spain, Azerbaijan, Canada).

Organisers of the race at Le Castellet

We're targeting a start to racing in Europe through July, August and beginning of September, with the first race taking place in Austria on 3-5 July weekend.

CHASE CAREY,
FORMULA ONE CHIEF

were forced to act after President Emmanuel Macron's announcement last week that the lockdown in France will be extended until May 11 and public gatherings banned until mid-July.

Ruling out holding the race behind closed doors, Boullier said: "Le Castellet are already turning towards the summer of 2021".

'RACES WITHOUT FANS'

In a series of coordinated announcements, Silverstone's owners then announced that no spectators would be able to attend the British Grand Prix but that they hope it will go ahead as scheduled.

"I am extremely disappointed to tell you that we are unable to stage this year's British Grand Prix in front of the fans at Silverstone," the circuit's managing director Stuart Pringle

stated on Silverstone's Twitter account.

"We have left this difficult decision for as long as possible, but it is abundantly clear given the current conditions... that a grand prix under normal conditions is just not going to be possible."

F1 supremo Carey said he expected "the early races to be without fans" but hoped that spectators would be allowed back "as we move further into the schedule".

He added: "We still have to work out many issues like the procedures for the teams and our other partners to enter and operate in each country."

"The health and safety of all involved will continue to be priority one and we will only go forward if we are confident we have reliable procedures to address both risks and possible issues." — **AFP**