

HIS MAJESTY SENDS GREETINGS
TO QUEEN ELIZABETH II

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Queen Elizabeth II of the Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Head of the Commonwealth on the occasion of her birthday. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to Queen Elizabeth and the friendly British people further progress and prosperity.

P4

'FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD': COVID-19 IN DAKHILIYAH



P10

THE SWEET SIDE OF SUGARCANE FARMING



P12

LEAGUES READY TO PLAY BEHIND 'CLOSED DOORS'



Royal Decree fixes official holidays

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued a Royal Decree No 56/2020 fixing official holidays.

Article (1) sets official holidays for units of the State's Administrative Apparatus (Government units), legal entities and establishments of the private sector as follows:

New Hijra Year on the 1st of Muharram.

The Prophet's Ascension on the 12th of Rabee Al Awwal.

Al Isra W'al-Miraj on the 27th of Rajab.

Anniversary of National Holiday on the 18th and 19th of November.

If one or both days of the weekend coincide with the above-mentioned holidays, it will be substituted by one day. It is permissible to modify the date of National Day if deemed necessary.

Eid al Fitr holiday begins on the 29th of Ramadhan and continues till the 3rd of Shawwal.

Eid al Adha holiday begins on the 9th of Dhul-Hajjah and continues till the 12th of Dhul-Hajjah.

Friday shall be substituted if it falls on the first day of either Eid.

Article (2) cancels Royal Decree No 76/96, and so shall anything that contradicts this Decree or contravenes with its provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced with effect from its date of issue. — ONA

MUSCAT LOCKDOWN TILL MAY 8

STRICT BAN ON HOLDING OF RAMADHAN GATHERINGS, INCLUDING MASS IFTARS

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee entrusted with handling the developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic held a meeting under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamood bin Faisal al Busaidy at the General Diwan of the Ministry of Interior, on Monday.

Attended by all committee members, the meeting followed up the deployments of COVID-19, and discussed measures for containing the outbreak and handling its repercussions.

On the occasion of the advent of the holy month of Ramadhan, the Supreme Committee extended greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Omani people and the Arab and Muslim peoples, praying to Almighty Allah to lift the COVID-19 pandemic from the whole humanity and grant everyone good health and tranquillity.

The Supreme Committee has taken a number of new decisions related to precautionary measures that should be followed during Ramadhan.

The Supreme Committee has decided to extend the lockdown of Muscat Governorate until 10 am on



NEW COVID-19 TRACKING SYSTEM

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee on COVID-19 has launched a monitoring platform at the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Technology and Communications.

The monitoring platform, known as 'Tarassud Plus', will enhance the Ministry of Health's current monitoring system by diagnosing, following-up and tracking the medical condition of individuals infected with COVID-19, who are under quarantine, by using artificial intelligence technology and advanced tracking technologies.

Friday (May 8). The Supreme Committee called upon everyone to avoid all sorts of gatherings during the holy month of Ramadhan, and decided that closure of mosques will continue during Ramadhan except for the call to prayer including for Taraweeh prayers.

The Supreme Committee issued a strict ban on holding of Ramadhan gatherings, including mass iftars be it in mosques or other places like tents and public areas.

The committee has banned social, sporting and cultural gatherings and all sorts of social activities during Ramadhan.

The Ministry of Health on Monday announced the registration of 144 new positive cases with coronavirus in the Sultanate. 58 of the new cases are Omanis and 86 are non-Omanis.

This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 1,410, in addition to 7 deaths. The ministry also pointed out

that 238 cases have recovered.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health has procured one million Hydroxy-chloroquine pills, the drug approved by the ministry for the treatment of coronavirus sufferers, from India.

The ministry has expressed thanks to the relevant authorities in India for granting an exceptional permit required for purchasing the drug through diplomatic communication between the two countries.

— ONA

Bracing for different Ramadhan this year

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

After a few days, Muslims around the world would celebrate the holy month of Ramadhan, which comes this year exceptionally during Covid-19 outbreak that has brought

about unprecedented changes in all aspects of life, being it public or otherwise. It is expected also to change the familiar face of this special month as well.

Just months ago from now, no one would have imagined that this fasting month would be devoid of

its most important characteristics and peculiarities: family feasts and mass iftar, and prayers of Tarawih. Ramadhan mainly symbolises gatherings, but apparently it will be unfamiliar this year.

Opinions of many social media activists have confirmed that they

will miss the collective rituals and established customs during this month as the most prominent distinguishing group rites will be lost. It will be confined to individual worship with the family inside the house instead of the manifestations of collective worship. **DETAILS ON P3**



OMAN
Observer
DAILY

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team

Mohd Al Rashdi : Head Office	99841230	m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com
Ali Al Maashari : Head Office	99639264	wadialmeeh@yahoo.com
Bakhit Al Shihri : Salalah Office	92998577	bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com
Abdullah Al Abri : Nizwa Office	99429094	nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om
Musalam Al Saidi : Suhar Office	99429192	sohardaily@outlook.com



Tracking, testing and treating COVID-19

TARASOD PLUS: New integrated platform with mobile app and bracelet to monitor and respond to the medical needs of individuals

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with studying scopes for a mechanism to deal with developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on Monday launched a monitoring platform (Plus) at the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Technology and Communications.

The monitoring platform, known as “Tarasod Plus”, will enhance the Ministry of Health’s current monitoring system by diagnosing, following up and tracking the medical condition of individuals infected with COVID-19, who are under quarantine, by using artificial intelligence technology and advanced tracking technologies.

“Tarasod Plus” is an integrated platform having International Standards developed by highly qualified local personnel in a way that is fully compatible with the Ministry of Health’s existing application “Tarasod”.

The initiative gets the support of Oman

Information Technology and Communications Group, eMushrif company, and Oman Broadband company. It comes as part of initiatives supervised by the State’s General Reserve Fund.

The platform consists of two main systems. The First system is a medical test program (qScout) developed by “Qure.ai” and Al Borkan Company to register individuals and follow-up the development of their medical condition on a daily basis. It also monitors the spread of the pandemic and sets priorities by using Artificial Intelligence technology to minimize the intervention of medical personnel in early quarantine stages.

The system is used during primary infection indicators by spotting only the cases that require medical care and directing them to medical institutions. So, it supports the overall medical system by minimizing and scheduling visits to medical institutions, focusing only on



cases that need medical examination.

The system uses an automatic communication system that communicates with an infected person and quarantined individuals through a medical algorithm that can analyse an individual’s condition through questions. It guides them whether to stay at home in quarantine or establishes/schedule communication with one of the specialized medical institutions or refer them urgently to the nearest medical institution, if needed.

The Ministry of Health can monitor, through screens, the medical condition of infected and quarantined persons and it can estimate the number of cases that can be developed and their location, in order to proactively prepare for receiving cases.

The Second system is a medical supervising system (hMushrif) developed by eMushrif which is a tracking and follow-up system for infected and medically quarantined

individuals. It uses a mobile app, along with a hand bracelet to determine the patients’ location through their mobile phones or any other mobile devices.

The gadget relays (submits) an instant report to the competent authorities about the movements and locations that a quarantined or infected person visits. It can also send alerts if this person leaves the quarantine location or tries to take off the bracelet.

The authorities in charge of the app can identify the infected persons once they get near them. The system also allows the authorities concerned to automatically identify the quarantined person through face detection technology.

It is worth noting that the system detects a positive case during or after the quarantine period through the information provided by the bracelet or smart application according to advanced algorithms. — ONA

ADVISORY ON PPE DISPOSAL



Muscat Municipality has issued guidelines for the safe disposal of the personal protective equipment (PPE) used as preventive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Oman participates in Arabosai meeting

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SFAAI), took part in the extraordinary meeting of the Executive Council of the Arab Organisation for Supreme Audit Institutions (Arabosai), which took place through video conferencing from Tunisia on Monday. The Sultanate’s participation was represented in the meeting by Shaikh Nasser bin Hilal al Ma’awali, SFAAI Chairman.

The meeting, convened with the participation of chairmen of SAIs member states, aimed to prepare



a special action plan to face the spread of coronavirus pandemic and its impacts on the capacities of the

No import of livestock without approval

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries announced that with effect from April 26, no live animals will be exported without the prior approval from the ministry.

The ministry directed livestock exporters to obtain export permit three days prior to the date of export on the website: <https://sites.google.com/view/qrn-oman>. Livestock exporters seeking export permit are required to enclose a copy of the import permit for livestock from the importing country.

Besides, the livestock should undergo 3-day quarantine before being exported but that period may vary as per to the requirements applied by the importing country.

Oman Airports develops device for airfield lighting

MUSCAT: Oman Airports’ maintenance team has succeeded in developing a portable drilling coring machine with a special application designed to install airfield ground lighting of Muscat Airfield at Muscat International Airport.

The initiative of developing this machine to satisfy the needs of both repair and replacement of AGL fittings and it is a vital part of the company’s efforts in response to trends of reducing the operational costs of government companies, also as part of its ongoing efforts to find approved alternatives for

specialized services.

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Hinai, senior airport systems manager at Muscat International Airport Maintenance Department, said that this step came as a result of the maintenance team’s efforts to find an in-house solution using team expertise. Such an approach is well engorged and supported by Oman Airports executive management; the specialized team made tremendous work in designing and modifying an existing core machine used normally in construction work to fulfil the special requirement of AGL installation kit.



Hospital administrators review services

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate General of Specialized Medical Care, on Monday held a meeting through video conferencing involving hospitals’ directors.

The meeting, chaired by the MoH’s Director General of Specialized Medical Care Dr Kadhim Jafar Suleiman, aimed at addressing spectrum of topics related to strengthening hospitals performance amid the current spread of COVID-19 pandemic and the pressure it places on the various health services.

The meeting touched upon the commencement of the first phase of ventilators distribution to hospitals in addition to other preventive and consumable materials used during COVID-19 patients screening.

Furthermore, the meeting discussed the distribution of COVID-19 testing machines (PCR) to number of hospitals, as well as regulating work at the hospitals’ outpatient clinics and performing necessary surgeries.

A number of different topics and proposals were reviewed in the meeting towards promoting hospitals services amid the coronavirus pandemic. — ONA



Use of wells, aflaj for other purposes prohibited



SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has prohibited the use of wells and aflaj for any purpose other than irrigation of crops, existing homes, green houses and service facilities within the agricultural land where they exist.

This is one of the many decisions regulating the land use issued by Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi.

Another major decision is the conditional exclusion of approval to change the use of the land to a non-agricultural purpose "if the change is to establish investment projects that add value to the economy".

The projects, according to the decision issued through Ministerial

Resolution No 84/2020, establishments of private or international school, specialized universities or colleges and closed commercial complex.

Also included in the projects are hospitals or specialized medical centres, tourist hotel or resort or activities related to agricultural, animal and fisheries.

"As for agricultural land irrigated by wells, approval may be granted to change its use to a non-agricultural purpose, in whole or in part, after obtaining written approval from the ministry", the regulations stipulate.

According to Article 14 of the regulations, agricultural land may not be leased for a purpose except in accordance with the conditions that include the landlord being the owner of the agricultural land, and that the

lease period not be less than a calendar year.

With regard to the establishment of housing units on agricultural land irrigated by wells, the regulations stipulate, it is not permissible to establish residential units on agricultural land irrigated by wells unless the ministry gives permission.

The resolutions also set conditions for the construction of housing units including the area of the land, ownership and building area of the ground floor or all the floors combined together.

For separation or construction of mosques, schools of the Holy Quran or public councils from agricultural land irrigated by wells, permission can be obtained in accordance with the law.

Bracing for different Ramadhan this year

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

After a few days, Muslims around the world would celebrate their most sacred month, Ramadhan, which comes this year exceptionally during COVID-19 outbreak that has brought about unprecedented changes in all aspects of life, being it public or otherwise. It is expected also to change the familiar face of this special month as well.

Just months ago from now, no one would have imagined that this fasting month would be devoid of its most important characteristics and peculiarities: Family feasts, mass iftar and prayers of Taraweeh. Ramadhan mainly symbolises gatherings, but apparently it will be unfamiliar this year.

Opinions of many social media activists have confirmed that they will miss the collective rituals and established customs during this month as the most prominent distinguishing group rites will be lost. It will be confined to individual worship with the family inside the house instead of the manifestations of collective worship.

Salem al Rashedi said: "Ramadhan will definitely be different, as we will miss the Taraweeh prayers and mass iftar organised in the neighbourhood and mosques. Rather, one will be in his home with his family only.

"It will not be easy to get used to a different Ramadhan," said Muhammad Shahrazad, a



resident of the Sultanate. He continued, "I live with my family here, but I am sad for those who live alone away from their families. They were also relying on iftar gatherings to live the spirit of the holy month in the mosques, and now I do not know how it will be".

On the other hand, some believed that the preventive measures taken by the authorities, such as restricting movement and preventing gatherings, would allow more time for worship and prayers during Ramadhan.

Meanwhile, another group felt that social media would ease the sufferings of not meeting relatives and friends during the month.

Fatima, a housewife, said: "Do not make Ramadhan sad, be happy, decorate home, new dress and prepare Ramadhan food, visit others in visual communication through technological means, spend beautiful times in exchanging stories and memories and this cloud will vanish and the virus will end up without returning and we will be back to our life better than before.

Ramadan Iftar Program

RAMADAN MUBARAK

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 :

Omantel users cost 1 RO Send Donate to 90022	National Bank of Oman 1 0 4 9 3 3 7 7 9 8 0 0 1
Ooredoo users cost 1 RO Send Donate to 90909	Bank Dhofar 0 1 0 4 0 6 0 9 0 9 0 0 0 1

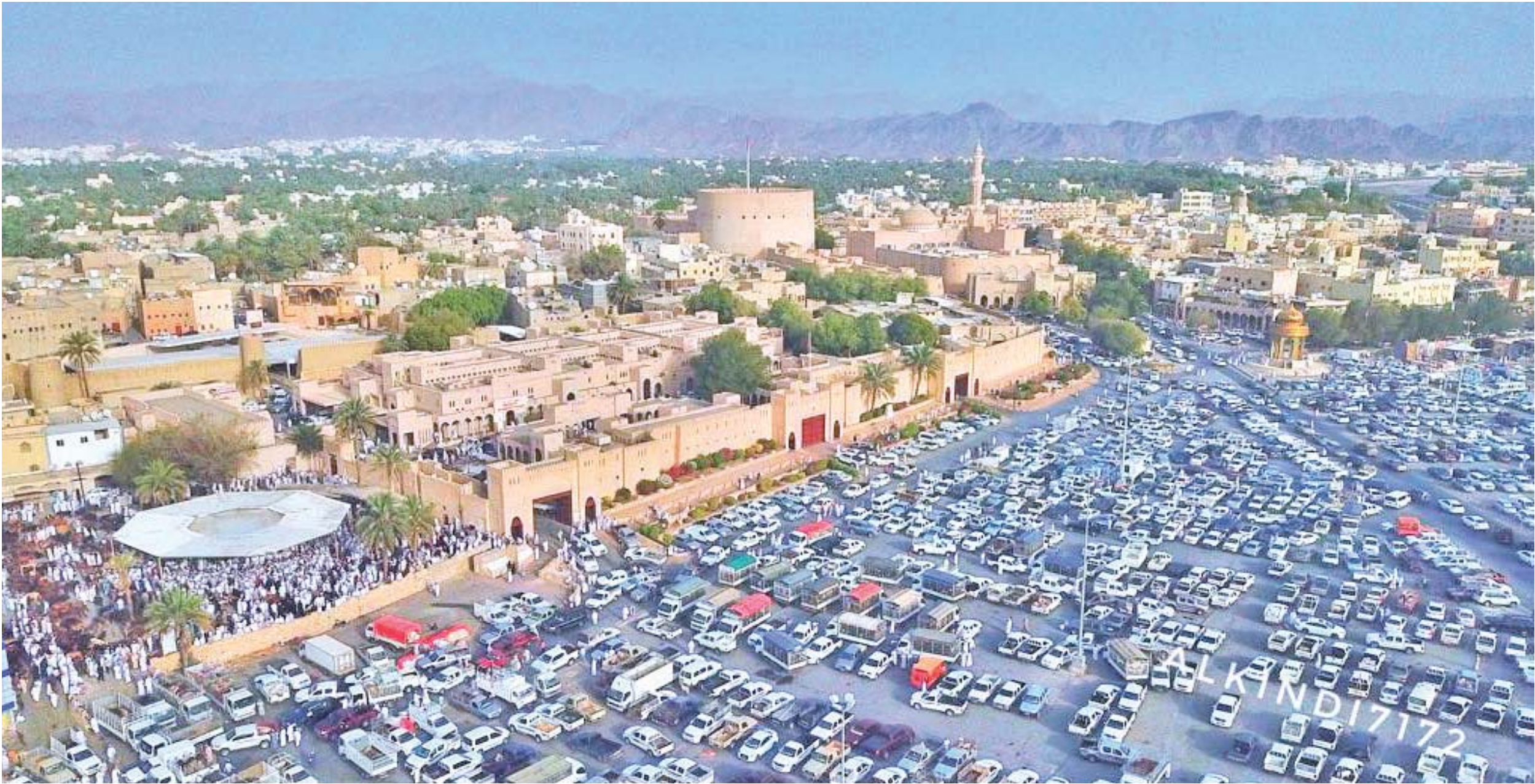
Or donate via devices automated payment of a company "ONEIC"

www.donate.om



‘FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD’

COVID-19 IN DAKHILIYAH



RAY PETERSEN
NIZWA, APRIL 20

Far from the madding crowd may be an alluring Thomas Hardy novel, but it is also an apt description of the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, where Nizwa is now a bustling, thriving, centre of commerce. Well, at least it was... until the pandemic struck. It is now a very much muted environment, as the local population responds to the Supreme Committee issued directives on society responses.

Doctor Niren Sachdevra, a prominent member of the local Indian community told the Observer, “COVID-19 has been a disaster, as even the loss of a single life is a tragedy, and there are proving to be severe economic consequences for so many. However, that can be balanced to some extent by the greater emphasis on families and family time, specially parent and child bonding, meditation, and prayer”.

A statistical assessment of the current COVID-19 situation in the governorate is possible via the government statistics, and for now the signs are positive in the hinterland, with 56 identified cases, and half of those have recovered thus far. An unnamed physician was cheered by the current Dakhiliyah situation saying, “Of course we are busy, and have screened maybe 40-50 people for the virus. All of these proved negative, so that’s very positive. We see every patient as a potential COVID-19 case, so we are very much committed to using the appropriate PPE and insist that all of our clients do the same, for their sake as much as ours”. In fact, it appears, given the timeframe, the region may have ‘dodged a massive bullet’. “With the huge numbers of students from so far and wide at the colleges, and the university, the fact that no outbreaks took place on any of the campuses is an absolute miracle”, said another.

The concerned wife of a third medical professional explained that, “Although my husband’s working hours, and his exposure, have been reduced, he is still in a high-risk environment, and that’s a huge concern for us”. This is an entirely understandable emotion under the



circumstances and highlights the debt all societies owe to their health professionals for their commitment to their patients and society.

Meanwhile, the students are having difficulty coming to terms with the social upheavals that COVID-19 has wrought, one complaining, “My parents won’t let me go out of the house”, she lamented, “and it’s been a month now, and I’ve only spoken to my other friends on the phone!” However, she did understand that it was for her own good, and if everyone was similarly restricted, “this will end more quickly”. This mixture of frustration and pragmatism appeared deeply characteristic of the region, not only among the young.

Those engaged in higher education have commented on the number of challenges facing them with the compulsory e-learning. “It’s not as simple as just saying, ‘let’s e-teach’, and everything will be fine”, said one. “The teaching dynamic is massively different, and students and teachers are having massive Internet difficulties. Working from home is

great in one respect, but our service packages require enhancement as we are doing work level duties, from home. The difference is huge!” This will be one certain consequence of the pandemic in the region, surely, is to improve Internet services.

Muscat resident Canadian, but working in Nizwa, Dr Mila Gabruk felt that the virus could significantly affect the interior if a ‘stay at home Ramadhan’ is a consequence of the pandemic, with Nizwa being generally more conservative than the capital, saying, “That would be big change for people there if the prayers, iftars and general observance of Ramadhan were affected. There is no doubt though, that we are being well informed, and the government is doing a good job to keep everyone safe”.

An un-named local resident commented on the government measures put in place by the Supreme Committee saying, “It has been a practical, typically Omani response to say that treatment is free for all, Omanis and expatriates, and again says much about our beautiful

country”. Many of the expatriates commented positively on this policy and collectively agreed that the government has been very positive.

Sandy and Malcolm Veitch from the North of England live in Birkat al Mouz, and Sandy reflected that, “There’s no place we would rather be right now, as Britain is a small island with a large population. Here we have sunshine, a secluded walled garden, and mostly, social distancing is being maintained. We miss all our family and friends at home but, as Dame Vera Lynn sang, “We’ll Meet Again”.

Another European expat explained that, “Here we are very fortunate that in a country the same size as the UK there are so few people, so it at least gives us a genuine opportunity to isolate ourselves, and as there have been strict controls on the pricing of sanitizers, masks and gloves it is not expensive, and it is all in our own hands to keep ourselves safe”.

A third, an expatriate housewife thought, “People generally live much more conservatively here. We don’t dine out as much or have as expensive

tastes I think”. She laughed too saying, “I see people on the Internet begging where to find extravagant items during the lockdown, and I think to myself, that’s silly, I wouldn’t put my life at risk trying to find that!”

The retail sector response has been very diverse, and very much individual, with “Some humble cold store shopkeepers and staff being way ahead of the basic needs in terms of precautions,” according to one local, while the, “delayed responses from medical, and larger retail outlets was disappointing”. “They now appear to have their precautions in place”, said another. Major supermarkets are providing sanitizers, clear screens at weighing points and checkouts, and trying to do their best to respond to social distancing requirements.

It’s clear though, that they are certainly challenged by some of their ‘less than aware’ customers. “You wouldn’t believe it!” said one shopper, “You leave a 2-metre gap to the person in front and next thing, someone, or more, have jumped in, honestly! Then do you think they will move?” While

another reported, “I saw shoppers, with no gloves, pick a bunch of grapes, eat a couple, and put the bunch back. Ugh!” Local restaurants meantime do appear to be responding appropriately to the ‘takeaways only’ orders, while international brands and takeaway places like Pizza Hut and McDonald’s here are providing hand sanitizer. “Pizza Hut is very strict on meeting customer’s outside and social distancing”, said one of their customers cheerfully.

Mothers don’t have it easy just now, with Yesha Srivastava saying, “Being a Mum is challenging at any time and keeping Anvisha (3) separated from other kids means she has so much energy, and it’s very difficult to channel that energy. I’m worried too that her screen-time has increased disproportionately, just adding to my worries”. The theme of children, albeit from another perspective was continued by another European mother who finds it scary that, “It’s almost ominous, not hearing the kids laughing and shouting while they play. It’s normally comforting, and I miss the noise”.

The oilfield services industry in the interior is, as one executive put it, “Definitely feeling the pinch, and it’s difficult to see the economy recovering from this quickly due to the glut in oil production. I know it’s not a Coronavirus thing, but coming at the same time as the oil over-supply, we are going to need to get back to work soon, or we will be in a massive hole we can’t get out of”. His comments were a sobering reminder of just how invasive and intrusive the effects of COVID-19 are.

The region, overall, appears with the limited coverage possible, to be accepting the ‘stay at home’ and social distancing policies in a measured manner, certainly not enthusiastically, but with that pragmatism identified earlier. It is not a wholesale embrace, perhaps rooted in the region’s cultural conservatism, but by the institutional expatriate community at least, with grateful thanks. Dr Sachdevra probably spoke for the entire region as he offered, “We pray to the Almighty that we will learn from this experience, and that a permanent and lasting solution can be found”.

16 killed in Canada’s worst-ever mass shooting

OTTAWA: A man disguised as a police officer went on a shooting rampage in Canada’s Nova Scotia province, killing 16 people, in the deadliest such attack in the country’s history, officials said, adding that the suspected gunman was also dead.

Several bodies were found inside and outside a residence in the small town of Portapique, about 100 km north of Halifax, what police called the first scene, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) said.

Bodies were also found at other locations.

Overnight, police began



Flags of Nova Scotia and Canada fly at half-mast after the shooting rampage. — AFP

advising residents of the town, already on lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic, to lock their doors and stay in their basements. Several homes in the area were set on fire as well.

Police identified the man believed to be the shooter as Gabriel Wortman, 51, who was thought to live part-time in Portapique.

Authorities said he wore a police uniform at one point and made his car look like a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer.

Police first announced that they had arrested Wortman at a gas station in Enfield, outside Halifax, but later said he had died. It was not

clear how, and they did not explain further.

While they believe the attack did not begin as random, police did not say what the initial motive was.

In a statement, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said: “As a country, in moments like these, we come together to support one another. Together we will mourn with the families of the victims, and help them get through this difficult time.”

The number of victims in the Sunday’s rampage exceeds the shooting at Montreal’s Ecole Polytechnique in 1989, which killed 14 women and injured 14 others.

— IANS/AFP

IN BRIEF

Americans protest restrictions



WASHINGTON: Protests flared in US states over stay-at-home orders while governors disputed President Donald Trump’s claims they have enough tests for the novel coronavirus and should quickly reopen their economies.

An estimated 2,500 people rallied at the Washington state capitol in Olympia to protest Democratic Governor Jay Inslee’s stay-at-home order, defying a ban on gatherings of 50 or more people. Despite pleas from rally organisers to wear face coverings or masks as public health authorities recommend, many did not.

In Denver, hundreds of people gathered at the state capitol to demand the end to Colorado’s shutdown. As protesters clogged streets with cars, healthcare workers in scrubs and face masks stood at intersections in counterprotest.

The United States has by far the world’s largest number of confirmed coronavirus cases, with more than 750,000 infections and over 40,500 deaths. — Reuters

PRAY AT HOME DURING RAMADHAN

STAY SAFE: Saudi Arabia’s top religious body stresses the importance of preserving life in Islam

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia’s top Islamic authority has called on all Muslims around the world to perform prayers at home during the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan in accordance with health guidelines to fend off the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The lunar fasting month, expected to start this week, is marked by intense worshipping, but most Muslim countries have closed mosques and banned mass prayers to contain the respiratory illness, reports Efe news.

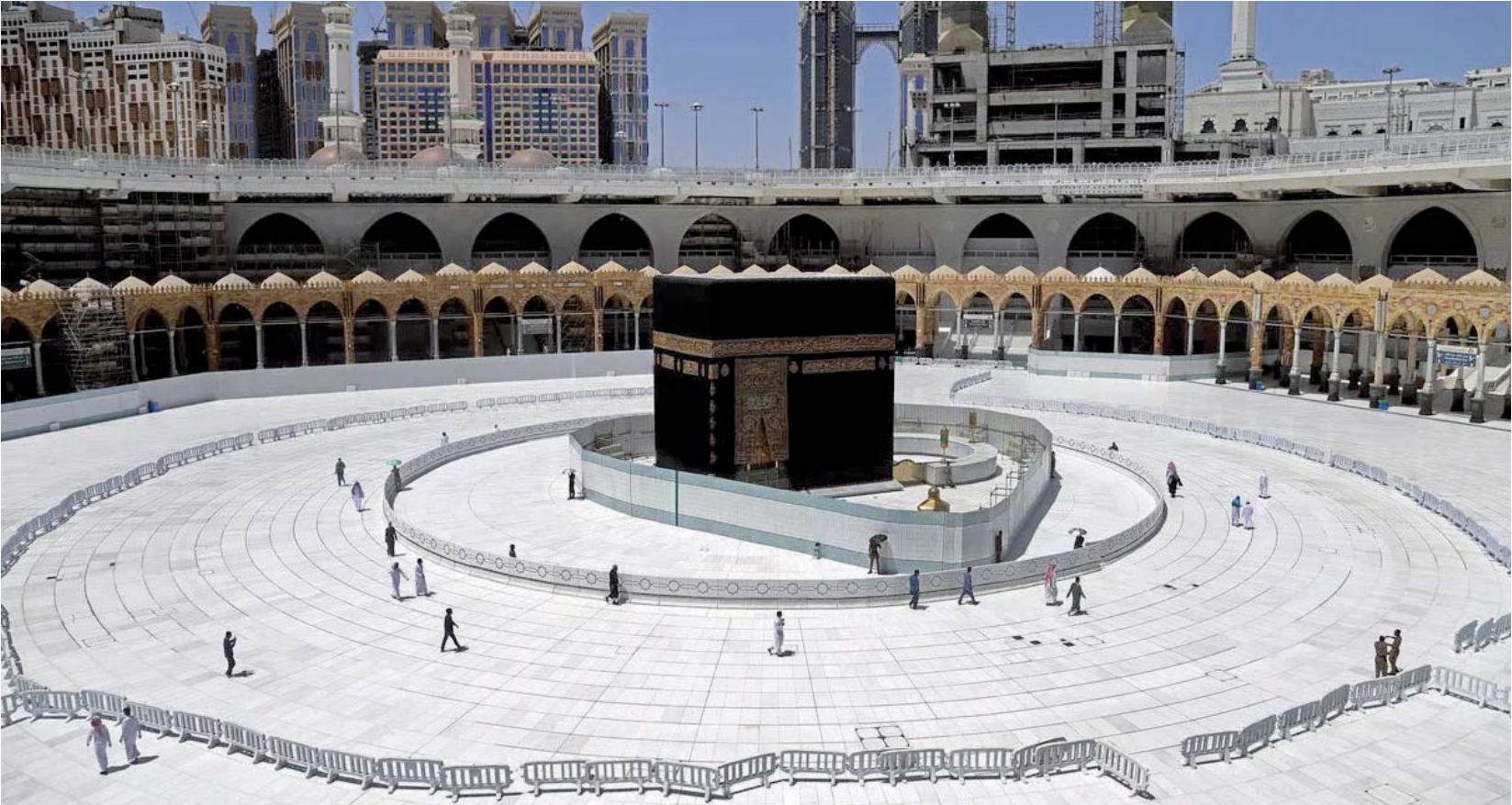
“Muslims must avoid gatherings, given that the gathering is considered the main cause of the spread of infection, according to relevant medical reports,” said the Saudi Senior Scholars’ Council, according to state-run Saudi news agency SPA.

Among the significant features of Ramadhan is a special nightly prayer called “taraweeh” usually performed congregationally at mosques.

The council added that Muslims should perform communal prayers, including taraweeh, at home if authorities in their respective countries advise it.

The council continued to advise against group meals during Ramadhan and stressed the importance of preserving life in Islam.

Saudi Arabia has suspended congregational prayers in mosques and temporarily halted pilgrimage to holy Islamic sites as part of restrictive measures against the outbreak of the pandemic.



Ramadhan is considered an auspicious period to travel to Mecca to perform the year-round umrah pilgrimage, which Saudi authorities suspended last month due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the usually packed area around the sacred Kaaba empty. — Reuters

The kingdom has so far reported 8,274 COVID-19 confirmed cases, the highest among the Arab countries, with a death toll standing at 92.

Religious authorities in the United Arab Emirates too on Monday said medical workers treating COVID-19 patients are exempt from fasting

during Ramadhan and urged Muslims not to congregate for prayers during the holy month.

The Emirates Fatwa Council said in a statement carried on state media late on Sunday that all healthy people are obliged to fast but medical workers on the frontline of the novel coronavirus

pandemic need not do so “if they fear that fasting could lead to weakening their immunity or to losing their patients.”

It said Muslims should comply with physical distancing while praying during Ramadhan and the Eid Al Fitr holiday that marks its end.

The UAE has suspended prayer in all houses of worship including mosques as part of containment measures.

“Congregating to perform the prayer could endanger lives, an act that is strictly forbidden in Islam,” said the statement. — IANS/Reuters

Harry, Meghan blacklist UK tabloids

LONDON: Prince Harry and his wife Meghan blacklisted four major British tabloids, accusing them of publishing stories that were “distorted, false and invasive beyond reason”, UK media reported.

In a scathing letter to the editors of the Sun, Daily Mail, Mirror and Express, the couple, who have formally stepped down as senior members of the British Royal family, said there would be “no corroboration and zero engagement” with the newspapers, the Guardian said.

“This policy is not about avoiding criticism. It’s not about shutting down public conversation or censoring accurate reporting,” according to a purported copy of the letter shared by Financial Times media reporter Mark Di Stefano on Twitter.

But they did not want to be used as “currency for an economy of clickbait and distortion”.

“The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have watched people they know — as well as complete strangers — have their lives completely pulled apart for no good reason, other than the fact that salacious gossip boosts advertising revenue,” according to an excerpt published by the Guardian. —AFP

S Koreans return to work, parks, malls

SEOUL: South Koreans are returning to work and crowding shopping malls, parks, golf courses and some restaurants as South Korea relaxes social distancing rules amid a continued downward trend in coronavirus cases.

A growing list of companies, including SK Innovation and Naver, has ended or eased their work from home policy in recent weeks, though many continue to apply flexible working hours and limit travel and face-to-face meetings.

Parks, mountains and golf courses brimmed with visitors over the weekend, while shopping malls and restaurants were slowly returning to normal.

South Korea’s ongoing recovery from the first major coronavirus outbreak outside China paints a stark contrast to many other countries where metropolises remain sealed off and sweeping stay-at-home orders are in place.

“I’m a member of a community football club and we went out to play on Saturday for the first time in two months,” said Kim Tae-hyung, a 31-year-old power plant engineer living in Seoul. “We were wearing a mask while we played, still worried about the coronavirus, but the weather



Parks, golf courses and malls were crowded on the weekend as South Korea eased virus restrictions. — Reuters

was nice and I felt so refreshed.”

South Korea extended its social distancing policy for another 16 days on Sunday but offered some relief for religious and sports facilities previously subjected to strict restrictions.

The decision is aimed at cautiously reopening Asia’s fourth-largest economy as daily infections continue to hover around or less than 20, most

arriving from overseas.

Seoul’s defence ministry also said on Monday that the military is resuming medical screening for candidates while considering easing restrictions on travel and guest visits.

The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) reported 13 new cases on Monday, a day after posting just eight — the

first single digit daily rise since the February 28 peak of 909. The death toll stands at 236.

Health authorities urged vigilance, warning new clusters could still emerge at any time, especially after South Korea held the first national election last week since the epidemic began, and ahead of long holidays starting next week. — Reuters

Lab shut due to false diagnoses

JERUSALEM: Israel’s Ministry of Health has announced the shutting down of a coronavirus testing laboratory because of 19 wrong diagnoses.

The lab, located at the Weizmann Institute of Science (WIS) in central Israel, began operating on April 10, Xinhua news agency. On April 17, Assuta Hospital in southern Israel said that nine patients, who were admitted to the COVID-19 ward after being tested positive in the WIS lab, were actually healthy. Similar cases were found in two other hospitals in Israel.

WIS said then that the ministry rechecked the lab tests results before referring the subjects to the hospital. The institute also blamed the ministry for “evading responsibility”. — IANS

18 soldiers killed in Taliban attack

KABUL: Eighteen Afghan soldiers were killed and three others injured in a Taliban attack in Takhar province, an official confirmed on Monday.

The attack started at midnight after dozens of Taliban militants launched an offensive on a district police station and a nearby military camp in Khwaja Ghar district, the provincial police spokesman told Xinhua news agency.

The militants who came from mountains tried to overrun the district police station and seize the control of the district, but their plan was thwarted by the security forces. Several militants also sustained casualties based on the bloodstains on the clash site, the official noted. — IANS





Can we turn this disaster into an opportunity?

“W

e can't let this disaster go waste. We have learnt much in the last few weeks. We now know that we can build hospitals in a matter of days, we can design and manufacture new equipment in weeks, we may not love China, but many of our supplies depend on them. We know we have improved in managing disasters, we can release billions for our poor, our health care infrastructure is inadequate and we all love our planet,” states Alpesh Patel a tech entrepreneur and author of the book ‘Chalta Hai India’.

Patel finds the silver lining amidst the crisis and speaks about the opportunities which may arise from this.

This pandemic should be a wakeup call to start focusing on building a good quality healthcare system for the masses. By allocating investments towards this, the government can also boost the economy and generate employment.

Governments should build a state-wise healthcare index, setup healthcare knowledge exchange forums for states. The pharma players should move towards high-end activities like vaccine development.

Handling of coronavirus indicates India has gradually improved in managing disasters. UN has often praised disaster management capabilities of Odisha. Other states need to replicate and institutionalise these capabilities.

India is overly dependent on supplies from China. China has increased its trade surplus from under a billion dollar in 2001 to a massive \$63 billion in 2017-18. We need to find ways to start producing the goods imported from China locally.

As the world suffers from a pandemic that originated from China, India should offer itself as a balancing force and push harder for a permanent membership of

Governments should build a state-wise healthcare index, setup healthcare knowledge exchange forums for states. The pharma players should move towards high-end activities like vaccine development

the United Nations Security Council. India needs to address the opportunity of gradually replacing China as world's manufacturing hub. During last few weeks, Indian firms have shown that they can innovate, rapidly design and mass produce ventilators, testing devices,

hazmat suits and disinfection chambers. We should realise that we can rise from being assemblers to mass producers of quality products.

India needs to up its game in the technology sector. During coronavirus pandemic many states deployed drones for disinfection, robots to dispense medicines and launched IT apps to trace the infected. Indian start-ups need to innovate more, leverage AI and Data Science and launch products for the world. Aadhar based digital cash transfer to the poor became a boon during the pandemic. Government needs to ride on this success and further push the infrastructure for DBT.

As we respond to this pandemic, it will be considered acceptable to take liberties with fiscal deficit numbers and inflation. The government should take this opportunity to infuse liquidity, cut taxes

and aid SMEs to revive the economy. The government now also has a stronger reason to speed up disinvestment process to get out of businesses and focus on governance.

When stories about the planet turning greener, skies bluer and animals freer emerged, everyone loved them. Countries are now more prepared to take serious action to save the planet and India has a record of being at the forefront of this. India should make fresh attempts to gather funds, implement policies and technologies to tackle climate change.

Tapping the above opportunities will not be easy as it will call for perseverance, courage, reforms and collaboration with world leaders. But if we can continue to operate in ‘war mode’ even after coronavirus is defeated, we can aspire to achieve these. This disaster has offered us yet another opportunity. — IANS



Local residents pick asparagus as they work at Dyas Farms as foreign workers are missing from the country's fields in Sevenscore. – Reuters

Coronavirus crisis draws more workers to farms

NATALIE THOMAS & JAMES DAVEY

T

housands of Britons have answered the call for backbreaking work on the country's fruit and vegetable farms this summer as the coronavirus crisis keeps Eastern European workers away but it may still not be enough to secure the harvest.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) says 70,000 to 80,000 jobs need to be filled and the clock is ticking. Already asparagus and cucumbers are being picked, in May it's strawberries, raspberries and spring onions, then in June peas and beans.

A shortage of labour could mean millions of tonnes of fruit and vegetables are left unpicked in British fields or composted.

For a decade the industry has been almost totally reliant on seasonal migrant workers from European Union member states Romania and Bulgaria taking short-term jobs that British workers don't want to do.

Even before the lockdowns and travel restrictions imposed by governments across Europe to curb the spread of the coronavirus, British farmers were having to adapt to tougher labour conditions following the UK's decision to leave the EU.

While the health emergency has greatly exacerbated the supply of foreign workers, it has, however, also created a giant labour pool in Britain, as workers have been laid off or

furloughed, students released months before their normal summer holidays and low-risk prisoners freed from jails.

Recruitment agencies have seen a surge in interest, though some farmers remain wary based on their previous experience with British workers.

“Whenever we’ve had locals come, they last a couple of days or a week,” said Alex Myatt from her farm in Kent, southeast England. “In three years we haven’t had one local person last a season.”

Myatt said her family-owned fruit farm had received more than 700 applications for seasonal labour, including from chefs, construction workers and film and theatre workers.

The farm typically employs 180 people at the peak of the season and is still hopeful that some Romanian workers will return, with a few flights starting to arrive in the UK.

Stephanie Maurel, chief executive of Concordia, a labour agency charity that is one of Britain's biggest recruiters of agricultural workers, said the response to its “Feed the Nation” campaign had been “phenomenal” to date, with applicants from every corner of the country and every industry.

But though vacancies for April have been filled she anticipates a future shortage.

“As the harvesting season begins

for the vast majority of farms and crops from May onwards, we still have thousands of roles available for people who are in need of a job,” she said.

Some 36,000 people have registered interest and over 6,000 have conducted a video interview, she said. But over the last 10 days, while nearly 900 people have been offered jobs, only 112 have agreed contracts.

Mark Bridgeman, president of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), said British workers would eventually return to their normal jobs once the lockdown eases.

“As things start being unlocked that will be the challenge,” he said.

For those Britons who do take a job, sticking with it, day-in, day-out, through the harvest season will be hard graft.

“Yesterday was very tough, the backs of your legs are aching, the bottom of your back. But after a couple of weeks you get used to it, your legs stretch,” said Craig O’Brien, a bricklayer before the lockdown who has just started picking asparagus at David Hartnoll’s farm in Devon, southwest England.

“I’ve got three children so I need to be working,” he said, adding that while he has picked before, it’s not a job for everyone. “You’ve really got it in you or you haven’t.”

— Reuters

Indians build own lockdown barricades in Mumbai slums

O

n homes that are cramped, stuffy and increasingly low on food, residents of Mumbai's huge Dharavi slum are struggling under India's nationwide lockdown.

In Dharavi, where an estimated one million people live, residents are stretching out meals and relying on donations. But anxiety has been building since the lockdown began on March 25.

“I used to feed my children when I went out for work, but now there is only sorrow and no work,” said Najma Mohammad, who was employed at a garment shop that has closed. Her son and two daughters rely on food handouts from neighbours, she added.

Dharavi, believed to be Asia's largest slum, is a tough place to be confined, and also one of the most vulnerable to the new coronavirus because of the density of its population and poor sanitation.

Hundreds of people sometimes share the same bathroom. Access to clean water is not guaranteed. Soap has become a luxury.

“Anything can happen. There are nine people in this room, all of us could be in danger,” said migrant worker Namchand Mandal, who is from the northeastern state of Jharkhand.

Dharavi has 71 reported cases so far, but experts fear that number will accelerate higher.

“I am really worried it is just a matter of time,” virologist Shahid Jameel said of Mumbai's slums, which are home to an estimated 65 per cent of the city's core population of around 12 million. Anxious residents have tied handkerchiefs or shirt sleeves around their faces in lieu of proper masks. Some have also barricaded alleyways using carts, bicycles and sticks. Signs warn outsiders to keep away.

Still, many residents say it is impossible to stay confined in small rooms, which are sometimes shared by day labourers who work different shifts.

Deep in the slums, people throng informal markets. Some adults kill time playing chess or watching videos on their cell phones. Children play cricket and cards.

One tailor opened his small shop early in the morning, saying he wanted to make a little money before police arrived later in the day to enforce the lockdown.

Officers have punished lockdown violators by making them sit in the sun, do squats or by hitting them with sticks, according to a witness.

“It's very difficult. No one listens to us,” said one police officer in Dharavi, adding that some bank employees shared special passes with friends so they could move around. Mumbai police did not respond to a request for comment. — Reuters

OMAN  DAILY
Observer

ESTABLISHED 15 NOVEMBER 1981

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450, 24649451, 24604563, 24699437
Fax: 24699643

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
Fax: 23293909

NIZWA OFFICE

Tel: 25411099
P.O. Box 955, P.C. 611

ADVERTISING

AL OMANEYA ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 3303, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: SWITCHBOARD: 24649444
DIRECT: 24649430/24649437/24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT

AL OMANEYA for Distribution & Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

Website: omanobserver.om

e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
subscribe@oeppa.om

business

MUSCAT STOCK MARKET

3,483.89



CRUDE OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$24.87

Brent Crude \$28.34

Light Crude \$18.20



follow us @oman_biz

www.omanobserver.om

editor@omanobserver.om



*Terms & conditions apply



First 5000 transactions for FREE*

Send money INSTANTLY across the world with **WesternUnion®WU**

Via BankDhofar Mobile Banking App! Anytime, Anywhere Securely!

BankDhofar, the first bank in the Sultanate to make sending money easier with Money Transfer Service from Western Union through BankDhofar's Mobile Banking App.

Pay only OMR 1.500 per transaction to any country across the world.

*Subject to one free transaction per customer.
For more information
https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/Electronic_Channels.aspx



بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

the best bank for you

2479 1111 | www.bankdhofar.com

SECURED

PLATFORM

New CMA rules for listed firms to convene GMs

ELECTRONIC PORTAL OF MUSCAT CLEARING AND DEPOSITORY COMPANY (MCDC) IS NEW PLATFORM FOR CONVENING OF GENERAL MEETINGS (GMs) SUSPENDED ON ACCOUNT OF PANDEMIC

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced resumption of general meetings of joint public stock companies and investment funds via the electronic portal of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCDC), which were suspended in mid-March in line with the guidelines of the Supreme Committee tasked managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The decision to resume the convening of general meetings was made after the establishment of a suitable setting that enables all the listed companies and funds to convene their meetings virtually.

The rules for convening the general meetings of the issuers of securities via electronic means were issued vide Decision E/25/2020 of the Chairman of the Capital Market Authority and the completion of the electronic portal executed by MCDC in collaboration with Omantel and Blockchain Solutions and Services as a local, secure portal to facilitate the convening of general meetings.

Shaikh Abdullah Salim al Salmi (pictured), Executive President of the CMA said: "We appreciate the cooperation and coordination between the CMA as the regulator and supervisor of the capital market and MCDC which collaborated with Omantel and Blockchain Solutions

and Services to develop a local and secure solutions according to local requirements to enable the companies and funds to convene their annual general meetings in light of the exceptional circumstance due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

"The issuance of the rules enables the shareholders and unit-holders an opportunity to participate in the general meetings without the need to physically attend but via electronic means and take part in the consideration and voting on the agenda which will ensure wider participation by investors in the general meetings not only in the current circumstances but at all times in the future as shareholders will be able to attend physically or through the system.

"The portal administered by MCDC will be the secure system for convening general meetings and prepared according to the legal and procedural requirements for such meetings, and all proceedings, voting and counting the votes in the election of the directors will be through the portal further to the features of the portal such as security, confidentiality of information and was prepared locally by Omanis in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations and technical needs for convening such meetings. "The electronic portal allows shareholders and unit-holders



to vote on any item in the agenda three days before the date appointed for the general meeting. The portal will keep the voting confidential and will not be revealed except during voting on the items in the day of the meeting. The system will be linked to the clearing system to ensure the vote will be of

The electronic portal allows shareholders and unit-holders to vote on any item in the agenda three days before the date appointed for the general meeting.

**SHAIKH ABDULLAH
SALIM AL SALMI**
Executive President, CMA

the security on the time of the general meeting which means a person who votes and then sells the security will not be entitled to such vote." Circular 8/2020 is a detailed guide

for listed companies and funds to convene the meetings, said Al Salmi, adding that CMA made a temporary decision to speed up convening the suspended general meetings by publishing their agenda 10 days before the meeting instead of 15 days.

He pointed out that the rules and procedures allow the shareholder to exercise his legal right to attend and vote in the general meeting either by attending personally to the venue of the meeting or via electronic means as well as regulating the candidacy procedures for the membership of the boards of directors and voting procedures. The rules also specified the mechanism of proving the quorum of the general meeting by three ways, by attending personally (when the circumstance allows) or via the link of the general meeting's page on the day of the meeting and the third way is prior voting on the agenda.

He added that shareholders and unit-holders cannot attend by more than one method and that the system allows the juristic person only to authorize another person to attend the meeting and vote on their behalf. The decision not to allow proxies for individuals was made to encourage their attendance and participation in the discussion to take part in the decision making process as the portal eliminated an obstacle preventing their attendance for being resigned

away from the venue of the meeting or inconvenient time and venue of the general meeting.

The Executive President called on all the shareholders and unit-holders to update their details especially their telephone numbers through MCDC website or alternative communication methods provided by MCDC as the entity that keeps shareholders and unit-holders details to ensure success of the process.

With regard to candidacy to the boards of directors the rules explain that the candidacy form shall be submitted to the company or fund after filling all the details five days prior to the date appointed for the general meeting for election of members of the board or fund management. The company or fund shall disclose the candidates who are eligible under the form approved by the legal advisor and their profile on the MSM website three days before the meeting and the issuer of the security shall ensure entry of the details of eligible candidates by the legal advisor to the general meetings system in collaboration with MCDC.

The rule stipulates in Clause (12) that the period for voting shall not exceed five minutes except the election of the members of the board of directors which is ten minutes and the chairman of the meeting will announce commencement and end of voting.

SAFEGUARDING JOBS

No layoffs yet of Omani manpower in oilfield sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

Timely interventions by the Ministry of Manpower have so far helped stave off mass redundancies in Oman's oilfield industry, which is bracing for sizable spending cutbacks in the wake of a dramatic decline in the international oil prices. According to the head of the Oil & Gas Sector Labour Union (OGSLU), companies threatening layoffs of Omani workers are being urged to stay the course for a little longer until alternative opportunities can be found.

"There are companies notifying the Ministry of Manpower of their plans to reduce their employee numbers, cut salaries, or shut down altogether because of the (downturn), but after discussions with the Ministry, they decide to pull on for a while," Said Ahmed al Mahrouqi, Chairman – Oil & Gas Sector Labour Union said. "Often, we are alerted by the employees themselves, following which we seek the intervention of the Ministry, which then obtains pledges from the companies to continue working for the time being."

Collapsing oil prices, which have seen Oman's crude benchmark lose almost 60 per cent of its value since the start of the year, is threatening upheaval in the Sultanate's Oil & Gas industry. Already, a number of leading players, most notably Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) – the biggest producer of hydrocarbons in the Sultanate – have notified contractors of their plans to scale down spending.



COLLAPSING OIL PRICES, WHICH HAVE SEEN OMAN'S CRUDE BENCHMARK LOSING ALMOST 60 PER CENT OF ITS VALUE SINCE THE START OF THE YEAR, IS THREATENING UPHEAVAL IN THE SULTANATE'S OIL & GAS INDUSTRY.

Speaking to the Observer, Al Mahrouqi said the threat of layoffs is likely to materialise if oil prices do not rebound quickly enough. "In terms of job losses, the situation is generally under control for now, but we don't know what is in store in May and after Ramadhan. If oil prices do not recover sufficiently, then we have reason to worry."

The Supreme Committee overseeing Oman's response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has made it possible for private companies to negotiate salary cuts for Omani staff during the period of the lockdown, subject of course, to final approval from the Ministry of Manpower. Expatriate labour deemed surplus can be laid off after their earned entitlements are fully cleared.

Contractors that have no work in hand are being encouraged to 'redeploy' their national staff to other contractors under the provisions of Article 48 of the Omani Labour Law, said Al Mahrouqi. 'Redeployment' – a widely used option to stave off retrenchment during the last oil price collapse in 2014 – 2015 – can help Omanis relocate to other employees, albeit with slightly modified terms and job responsibilities. "We are working with the Ministry and with the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) to help resolve manpower issues in the oilfield sector. Our goal is to safeguard jobs," he stated.

On Sunday, the Oil & Gas Sector Labour Union appealed to private companies to abide by Manpower Ministry guidelines eschewing the termination of Omani employees.



OTI becomes OQ
Trading Limited



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

Oman Trading International Limited (OTI), the marketing arm of OQ Company (formerly Oman Oil and Orpic Group), has announced a change in its legal name to OQ Trading Limited.

“This is to reflect our integration with Oman Oil and Orpic Group core businesses under a new brand identity called ‘OQ’, focusing on creating an integrated international energy company reflecting our Omani heritage.

Whilst excited to embrace the OQ branding, we are proud of the journey we have taken as OTI which has enabled us to develop and mature to a best in class operating model for commodity trading — focused equally on enhancing the value of Omani hydrocarbons and entrepreneurial third party trading,” the subsidiary said in message.

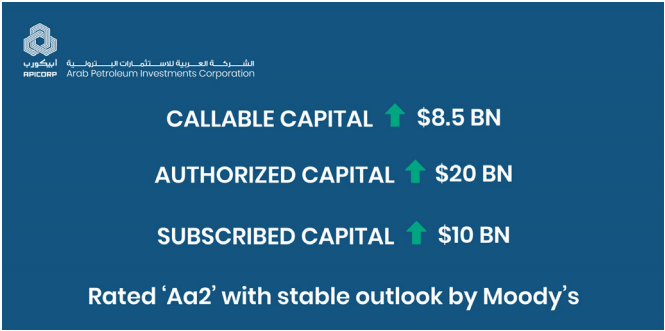
APICORP ratifies landmark
increase in callable capital

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation (APICORP), a multilateral development financial institution, announced on Monday that its General Assembly ratified a landmark increase in callable capital to \$8.5 billion at its Annual General Meeting (AGM), as well as a significant increase in authorized and subscribed capital. The increase, the largest in the Corporation’s history, is based on the recommendation by APICORP’s Board of Directors.

APICORP was established in 1974 by an international treaty between the ten Arab oil exporting countries, including the Sultanate of Oman. It aims to support and foster the development of the Arab world’s energy sector and petroleum industries. APICORP makes equity investments and provides project finance, trade finance, advisory and research.

The increase in the



capital reinforces long-term commitment towards APICORP’s sustainable growth plans for the benefit of its member countries. The callable capital increase further bolsters APICORP’s financial sustainability and resiliency and its overall financial position.

The Corporation’s authorized capital was also increased to \$20 billion and subscribed capital to \$10 billion, as well as transfer \$500 million from the Corporation’s general reserves and retained earnings into its issued and fully paid capital.

Dr Ahmed Ali Attiga, Chief Executive Officer of APICORP, said: “As we enter

the next stage of APICORP’s growth story and build upon its longstanding reputation as a trusted financial partner to the Arab energy industry, the capital increase will enable APICORP to fulfil its policy mandate by continuing to deliver sustainable impact-driven development projects and supporting investment activities. I appreciate the shareholders’ strong confidence in APICORP and their willingness to support it in its journey to support the growth trajectory in the regional energy and petroleum industries sector.”

Dr Sherif Elsayed Ayoub, Chief Financial Officer of APICORP, said: “The capital

increase serves as one of the cornerstones of APICORP’s growth plans as per our board-approved risk appetite and five-year corporate strategy. These include increasing our lending and investment capacity to better meet the ever-growing needs of our public and private-sector partners in the energy sector. This remarkable show of support from our member countries shall also cement APICORP’s profile as a financially strong, well-capitalized, highly-liquid and consistently profitable MDB.”

APICORP recently disclosed its financial results for the year ended 2019, posting strong results including a 17 per cent Y-O-Y increase in net recurring income to \$112 million, up from \$96 million at year end 2018. APICORP’s strong profitability in 2019 was driven by Corporate Banking and Treasury and Capital Markets, whose gross income increased 32 per cent and 24 per cent Y-O-Y to reach \$201 million and \$80 million, respectively.

Transfer funds through
BankDhofar Mobile Banking App

MUSCAT: BankDhofar announced a new feature in its innovative Mobile Banking App.

The first of its kind feature in the Sultanate will enable users of the app to transfer money from their credit card account to their operative account (current/savings) in few easy steps.

Commenting on the new added feature, Dr Tariq Taha (pictured), DGM and Chief Digital Banking Digital & Information Officer said: “At BankDhofar, we prioritize the convenience of our customers when it comes to their banking experience.

We constantly work on new services and solutions that are designed not only to cater to their needs but to exceed their expectations.

The new feature in our Mobile Banking, will enable our customers to transfer funds from credit card account to operative account at their convenience, without having to take the trouble of withdrawing the amount. In addition to this service, the award winning Mobile Banking App offers several cutting-edge services, making banking experience incomparable.”

BankDhofar’s Mobile Banking App offers a wide range of exclusive services which are available only with through its award winning App.

The services include; instant transfer to any Bank in the Sultanate, cardless cash, mobile top-up for all telecom providers in the Sultanate, increasing withdrawal limit to RO 5,000, among other services.



Oil falls as stocks fill, earnings set to shrink



A man wears a face mask at a Hidrosina gas station in Mexico City. – Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Monday, depressed full as the novel coronavirus pandemic destroys demand and as companies prepare to report

their worst quarterly earnings since the 2008 financial crisis.

Brent was down 73 cents, or 2.6 per cent, to \$27.35 a barrel at 0814 GMT.

The front-month May WTI contract CLc1 fell \$3.53, or 19.3 per cent, to \$14.74 a barrel.

At one point, it dropped by 21 per cent to \$14.47 a barrel, the lowest since March 1999, but the US sell-off was exaggerated by the imminent expiry of the front-month contract.

“The May contract is set to expire tomorrow, and the bulk of the open interest and volume is already in the June contract,” ING’s head of commodities strategy Warren Patterson said.

The June contract, which is more actively traded, fell \$1.45, or 5.8 per cent, to \$23.58 a barrel.

The volume of oil held in US storage, especially at Cushing, Oklahoma, the delivery point for the US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) contract, is rising as refiners throttle back activity because of weak demand.

“As production continues relatively unscathed, storages are filling up by the day. The world is using less and less oil and producers

now feel how this translates in prices,” Rystad’s head of oil markets Bjornar Tonhaugen said.

Floating storage in tankers is also estimated at a record 160 million barrels.

The mood in other markets was also cautious as the first-quarter earnings season gets underway. Analysts expect STOXX 600 firms to post a 22 per cent plunge in earnings, the steepest since the 2008 global financial meltdown, IBES data from Refinitiv showed.

In Japan, exports declined the most in nearly four years in March as US-bound shipments, including cars, fell at their fastest since 2011.

Forecasts from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and the International Energy Agency on the outlook for oil consumption have reinforced the bearishness.

The oil industry has been swiftly reducing output in the face of an estimated 30 per cent decline in fuel demand worldwide.

Production cuts from Opec and its allies, including Russia, will take effect from May. The Opec+ group has agreed to reduce output by 9.7 million bpd. — Reuters

CDB Financial
scraps purchase
of 29 Boeing 737
MAX jets



A Boeing 737 Max aircraft is seen parked in a storage area at the company’s production facility in Renton, Washington. – Reuters

SYDNEY: China Development Bank (CDB) Financial Leasing Co said on Monday it had agreed with Boeing Co to cancel the purchase of 29 undelivered 737 MAX jets, adding to a string of recent cancellations of the grounded airplane.

The model has been grounded globally for more than a year following deadly crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia.

“In light of evolving aviation market dynamics, we’ve been working together with Boeing over many months to re-calibrate our MAX orderbook to be in line with our long-term view of the market and related opportunities,” Xuedong Wang, chairman of CDB Financial unit CDB Aviation, said.

The lessor said it retained an order for another 70 of the planes that also have yet to be delivered.

Boeing recorded a total of 150 MAX cancellations in March, including 75 from Irish leasing company Avolon. Boeing remains in talks with regulators seeking approval to return the plane to service, but its customers have also seen a sharp fall-off in demand due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Boeing said in a statement it continued to partner with leasing company customers to help them balance their portfolios in a challenging market.

“As we work to return the 737 MAX to service, our focus remains on addressing our customers’ fleet needs while optimising the delivery of the more than 4,000 airplanes in our 737 backlog,” it said.

CDB Financial Leasing said that all 737 MAX 10 jets still on order will be switched to the smaller 737 MAX 8 model, and 20 deliveries will be deferred to dates in 2024, 2025 and 2026. — Reuters

China cuts key rate for second time this year

SHANGHAI: China cut its benchmark lending rate as expected on Monday to reduce borrowing costs for companies and prop up the coronavirus-hit economy, after it contracted for the first time in decades.

The one-year loan prime rate (LPR) was lowered by 20 basis points (bps) to 3.85 per cent from 4.05 per cent previously, while the five-year LPR was cut by 10 bps to 4.65 per cent from 4.75 per cent.

The move was the second cut to the lending benchmark rate this year, and the latest reduction in one of China’s key lending rates. Most new and outstanding loans are based on the LPR, while the five-year rate influences the pricing of mortgages.

All 52 participants in a Reuters survey had expected a reduction in the LPR at its monthly fixing. Most had forecast a 20 bps cut in the one-year rate but a more modest 5-10 bps in the five-year as Beijing tries to keep a lid on property prices.

“The asymmetric cut suggests that the authorities will stick to the tight housing policy. It will not be deemed as a tool to stimulate domestic demand, even at this difficult time,” said Xing Zhaopeng, markets economist at ANZ in Shanghai.



A woman wearing a face mask walks past the headquarters of the People’s Bank of China in Beijing. – Reuters

The Chinese economy shrank 6.8 per cent in the first quarter from a year earlier as the virus and tough containment measures shut down factories and shops and put millions out of work, data showed on Friday. That was the first contraction since

at least 1992, when quarterly records were first published.

While the country is restarting its economic engines, analysts say activity could take months to return to pre-crisis levels, with the likelihood of a global recession adding to the

pressure.

Jacqueline Rong, senior China economist at BNP Paribas in Beijing, said the marginal cuts to the 5-year LPR could be interpreted as “counter-cyclical relaxation” in the housing sector.

“Undoubtedly, the property sector has been the biggest driver of the economy, contributing more than exports to broad economic growth. Given the fact that the economy is facing such big downward pressure, even if there’s no epidemic this year, we expect to see some reasonable counter-cyclical relaxation in the housing sector.”

The cut to the lending benchmark rate had been expected after the People’s Bank of China (PBOC) lowered the interest rate on its medium-term lending facility (MLF) for financial institutions to the lowest on record last week. That gauge serves as the guide to the LPR. The interest rate on one-year now stands at 2.95 per cent.

Global central banks have rolled out unprecedented stimulus measures in recent weeks to mitigate the economic fallout from pandemic lockdowns and to keep cash-starved companies and consumers afloat.

The PBOC has stepped up policy easing since the outbreak intensified in mid-January, while the government has announced a host of fiscal measures from cheap loans to tax cuts and special bonds to fund infrastructure projects. — Reuters

COVID-19 stifles \$1 billion M&A deals globally

HONG KONG: For the first time since September 2004, no merger and acquisition deal worth more than \$1 billion was announced worldwide last week, according to data provider Refinitiv, as the new coronavirus stifles global M&A.

The dearth of mega deals comes as countries across the world have shut down large swathes of their economies as they battle the COVID-19 pandemic that has infected over 2.33 million people and claimed 165,000 lives.

Worldwide merger activity so far this year is down 33 per cent from a year ago and at \$762.6 billion is the lowest year-to-date amount for dealmaking since 2013, the data showed. The number of deals also fell 20 per cent year-on-year.

“We anticipate that there may be fewer signed deals announced this quarter as parties take longer to work through the impact of the COVID-19 situation,” said Robert Wright of law firm Baker McKenzie’s Asia-Pacific M&A group.

“However, where parties have completed underlying due diligence processes and where there remain strong fundamentals, we do expect to see a number of these deals to come back online.”

Companies have been walking away from announced transactions amid changed deal conditions and high levels of uncertainty.

Canada’s Alimentation Couche-Tard Inc on Monday said it would



George Washington is seen with printed medical masks on the one Dollar near Euro banknotes in this illustration. – Reuters

shelve its \$5.6 billion buyout of petrol station operator Caltex Australia Ltd, as fuel demand plunges and as companies look inward to get through the crisis.

Regulators worldwide have also toughened rules for foreign investments to protect national assets. India last week ruled that investments by an entity from a

country that shares a land border with it will require government approval in a move to curb “opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions”.

Australia and Germany have also

stepped up scrutiny over overseas investors.

With big deals largely put on hold as buyers wait to gauge the true impact of the pandemic, dealmakers

WORLDWIDE MERGER ACTIVITY SO FAR THIS YEAR IS DOWN 33 PER CENT FROM A YEAR AGO AND AT \$762.6 BILLION IS THE LOWEST YEAR-TO-DATE AMOUNT FOR DEALMAKING SINCE 2013, THE DATA SHOWED. THE NUMBER OF DEALS ALSO FELL 20 PER CENT YEAR-ON-YEAR.

are seeking other, related work on companies needing rescues, restructurings and potentially nationalizations as governments and central banks try to shore up their economies.

Still, efforts to recover from the virus-driven downturn are set to support M&A activity.

Some 56 per cent of more than 2,900 executives surveyed globally by consultancy EY were planning an acquisition in the next 12 months, as they need to look beyond the current crisis to secure long-term growth, the firm said in a March report.

“If there is any prolonged downturn due to the current crisis, executives may be bolder in their ambitions and look to acquire those assets that will help them accelerate into an upturn faster,” the report said.

— Reuters

VW settles emissions class action with three-quarters of claimants



A Volkswagen Beetle is reflected in the chrome of a wheel during the media day at the Canadian International AutoShow in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. – Reuters

HAMBURG: Volkswagen has reached settlements with 200,000 of the 260,000 claimants participating in a class action lawsuit brought by German consumer group VZBV over the carmaker’s rigging of diesel emissions tests, the carmaker said on Monday.

A further 21,000 cases were still being reviewed for possible payouts of between 1,350 — 6,250 euros (\$1,464.35 - \$6,779.38) per car and the deadline for participating in the settlement has been extended to April 30, VW added. The exact amount depends on the age and model of the owner’s car.

Volkswagen will pay out a total of 620 million euros. It had set aside 830 million to cover the costs of settlements with all participants of in the VZBV class action.

The deal marks a further step in the German carmaker’s efforts to make amends after it admitted in 2015 to using illegal software to cheat US diesel engine tests.

The effort has cost Volkswagen more than \$30 billion in vehicle refits, fines and provisions.

Nearly all US owners of affected cars agreed to take part in a \$25 billion settlement in 2016 in the United States, but VW has said there was no legal basis for consumers in Germany to seek compensation due to differences in law. — Reuters

UK finance jobseekers increase 43 per cent in Q1

LONDON: The number of UK finance professionals seeking new jobs rose by more than 40 per cent in the first quarter compared with the last three months of 2019, even as coronavirus forced employers to pause hiring and cut salary offers by 37 per cent, data released on Monday showed.

According to the latest Morgan McKinley London Employment Monitor, the UK financial services industry suffered a rapid slowdown in hiring in March, arresting a sharp post-Election rebound in January, when the number of available roles increased 97 per cent compared with December 2019 levels.

The number of available jobs dropped by 38 per cent, month-on-month, in March.

“Out of the frying pan and into the fire: we barely got to take a breath between Brexit and this new global crisis,” said Hakan Enver, managing director of Morgan McKinley UK.

“Thankfully, City employers are doing all they can to enable remote working to ensure the safety of employees as well as business continuity.”

HSBC HSBC.L, Barclays, Lloyds and



Workers head to work during the morning rush hour in Southwark in central London. – Reuters

Standard Chartered are among banks to have pledged not to cut any jobs in 2020 to lessen the

financial worries faced by staff as coronavirus pummels the global economy.

Japan exports slump as virus hits demand



Containers are pictured at an industrial port in Tokyo, Japan. – Reuters

TOKYO: Japan’s exports slumped the most in nearly four years in March as US-bound shipments, including cars, fell at the fastest rate since 2011, highlighting the damage the coronavirus pandemic has inflicted on global trade.

Monday’s bleak data underscored the challenges Prime Minister Shinzo

Abe’s government faces in dealing with a collapse in activity that is expected to send the global economy into its deepest slump since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

After a jump in virus cases, Abe expanded a state of emergency last week to include the entire country, which gave authorities more power

By region, exports to China, Japan’s largest trading partner, fell 8.7 per cent in the year to March, reflecting a slump in items such as car parts, organic compounds and chip-making machinery.

to push people to stay home and businesses to close. Japan has reported more than 10,000 infections and over 200 deaths.

Adding to worries the world’s third-largest economy is sliding into recession, Ministry of Finance data showed Japanese exports fell 11.7 per cent in the year to March, compared with a 10.1 per cent decrease expected

by economists in a poll.

That followed a 1 per cent fall in February and marked the biggest decline since July 2016, as shipments to Japan’s major export destinations from China, the United States to Europe were all battered.

“The impact is likely to continue in April and onwards, which will prevent economic activity from normalizing,” said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute. “That will keep trade volume constricted globally.”

Imports fell 5.0 per cent in the year to March, versus the median estimate for a 9.8 per cent decline, after the prior month’s 13.9 per cent drop, bringing the trade balance to a surplus of 4.9 billion yen (\$45.47 million).

By region, exports to China, Japan’s largest trading partner, fell 8.7 per cent in the year to March, reflecting a slump in items such as car parts, organic compounds and chip-making machinery.

China’s economy shrank for the

first time on record in the first quarter as the virus hit production and spending hard.

But while China is restarting its economic engines after bringing the outbreak under control, demand has plunged in many other countries after they imposed lockdowns to contain the pandemic.

US-bound shipments, another key market for Japanese goods such as cars and electronics, fell 16.5 per cent year-on-year in March, the biggest decline since April 2011, weighed by drops in demand for cars, airplane motors and construction and mining machinery.

Shipments to Asia, which account for more than half of Japanese exports, declined 9.4 per cent, and exports to the European Union fell 11.1 per cent, due to the globally spreading new virus.

The global economy is expected to shrink 3.0 per cent in 2020 in a collapse of activity that would mark the steepest downturn since the 1930s, the International Monetary Fund said last week. — Reuters



RUQAYA AL KINDI

From ancient source of soft and sweet watery culm for chewing to a proper source of sweetener in modern day life, the humble sugarcane has covered a long journey.

This unique feature of sugarcane has now been established. Since ancient times, Omanis have been closely involved in the cultivation of sugarcane and the production of red sugar, and the delicious sugar juice.

The Wilayat of Nizwa is famous for cultivation of sugarcane, to the extent that it has emerged as a big business for farmers in the wilayat and an important source of income.

The production of red sugar is one of the traditional Omani industries based on the wealth of Omani experience in the art of agriculture, crop care, land selection, and sweetness of water.

Follow-up, as well as, the stages of the growth of sugarcane for a full year starts in March and continues until the harvest season, that takes more than 11 months. The relationship of the farmers with this crop thus continues for a whole year.

Ali bin Saud al Kindi, was raised in Nizwa, and has been working since childhood in the field of agriculture, and he currently spends most of his time ploughing, irrigating and caring his farm, where he cultivates many crops, including sugarcane.

Al Kindi has lot of work to do before cane harvesting. "The time taken between cultivation and harvesting, is one year. In between I have to plough the farm, do planting, fertilising and constantly watering it to guarantee abundant production which meets with my needs," he said.

"Then I take care of sugarcane during its growth in terms of continuous watering (almost once per week), removing dry leaves, chipping the cane and cleaning it to grow up without hindrance," he added.

During the growth of sugarcane, "I tie the sticks together in order to be more solid and resistant to winds and climate conditions which the crop is exposed to," he said.

Al Kindi, as other farmers, loves the morning of March, when the time for harvest is due. In the early morning and after sunrise, workers prepare sugarcanes in the farm by cutting them, and then cleaning them from dry crusts, tying them in bundles in preparation for transporting them to the factory for squeezing of sugarcane juice.

"My factory is open for all people who cultivate sugarcane. They bring the sugarcane on daily basis, but according to a schedule I set and supervise to ensure that the work is done in an orderly manner," he noted.

"Then workers help me put sugarcane sticks in the squeezing machine to extract the juice which is locally called 'sharij'. The process was previously carried out by animals to run these machines, while now it works with electricity," he said.

After that, the workers set fire to boil the juice and remove impurities, and this process continues for about three hours until the juice is soft (cooked) and the water evaporates and turns into liquid sugar.

After cooking, the red sugar is transferred to a room where no sunlight is allowed. It is left in cement containers to dry and then transferred to pots of fronds to filter the juice from impurities. Then it becomes ready for sale and consumption, and has a shelf life of nearly two years.

Red sugar is usually the main product that is extracted from sugarcane, but there are other industries such as 'Zeej' which is less dense sugar and is used as a substitute for natural honey and palm honey (debs).

The 'Zeej' is manufactured with the same procedure of making red sugar, but the time taken is less. It does not have to be dried completely, as impurities are removed more than once, and upon ripening, rose water, cardamom powder and saffron are added and then put for sale.

Red sugar is very popular among Omanis, as it treats many diseases, especially intestinal diseases. It is also used as a warm drink during the winter season and cold beverage during the summer, and is widely used in Omani sweets like 'Halwa'.

The locally-manufactured red sugar industry is a source of income for many Omani families, and as Al Kindi indicates that its price varies from year to year, depending on the availability and quantity of the harvest.

In last two years, the red sugar witnessed increase in price. "Three years ago, the price of a kilo was RO 2.5, while this year it is available for RO 4. This is because, the number of farmers involved in sugarcane farming is more and the production was high compared to now," he explained.

"A lot of people come to buy red sugar from my factory, and we are open to delivery in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and sometimes in Muscat and Al Batinah governorates," he said.



Japan virus expert ‘pessimistic’ Olympics can be held in 2021

TOKYO: A Japanese expert who has criticised the country’s response to the coronavirus warned on Monday that he is “pessimistic” that the postponed Olympics can be held even in 2021.

“To be honest with you I don’t think the Olympics is likely to be held next year,” said Kentaro Iwata, a professor of infectious diseases at Kobe University.

Japan and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) agreed last month to delay the Tokyo 2020 Games until July 2021 after pressure from athletes and sports federations.

But in recent days, as the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread worldwide, there have been questions about whether even a year-long delay will be sufficient.

Iwata told a press briefing that the virus would have to be under control at home and abroad for the Games to take place “because you have to invite the athletes and the audience from all over the world”.

“Japan might be able to control this disease by next summer, I wish we could, but I don’t think that would happen everywhere on Earth, so in this regard I’m very pessimistic about holding the Olympic Games next summer.”

Iwata said he could only see the Games being held next year if they were significantly altered, “such as no audience, or very limited participation”.

Iwata made headlines earlier this year for his public criticism of Japan’s handling of the coronavirus-wracked Diamond Princess cruise ship that docked off the country’s coast.

Japanese officials opted to carry out an on-ship quarantine, but more than 700 people on board ended up contracting the virus, and 13 died.

The decision to postpone the Olympics is unprecedented in peacetime, and followed a wave of complaints from athletes facing travel bans and lockdowns.

The postponement is a huge undertaking, but organisers have insisted they are working towards

the new opening date despite ongoing uncertainty about when the pandemic will be over.

Speculative questions Asked about potential delays to the 2021 date, organisers said their “mission is to prepare the stage for next summer”.

“We do not feel it is appropriate to respond to speculative questions,” they said.

“With regard to countermeasures against COVID-19, Tokyo 2020 and the IOC have a framework for information exchange and are cooperating closely with the World Health Organisation.

“We will continue to work closely with relevant organisations and review all necessary countermeasures.”

Last week, Tokyo 2020 spokesman Masa Takaya told reporters at an online briefing there is “no Plan B” for the Games being postponed again.

But Iwata is not the only expert to have raised questions about 2021, with Devi Sridhar, chair of global health at the University of Edinburgh, warning last week that it was “very unrealistic” to think the Games could be held next year unless a vaccine is found.

“If we do get a vaccine within the next year then actually I think that (Olympics) is realistic. The vaccine will be the game-changer - an effective, affordable, available vaccine,” Sridhar told the BBC.

“If we don’t get a scientific breakthrough then I think that looks very unrealistic.”

The decision to delay the Games was a painful one for organisers and the IOC, which came in for criticism for the drawn-out decision to postpone.

Initially both officials in Japan and at the IOC insisted the Games could go ahead as planned, even as lockdowns around the world meant athletes were shut out of training locations and forced to stay home.

The virus had already wreaked havoc with preparations, forcing the cancellation of qualifiers, and alterations to test events. — AFP

English Premier League’s transfer market bubble set to burst



LONDON: The financial squeeze put on Premier League clubs by the coronavirus crisis could be felt across the continent in the coming months as the well to fund massive transfer fees runs dry.

For each of the past four summers, Premier League clubs have flexed their financial muscle to splurge over £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) on transfers.

That has helped spread the wealth of television contracts worth billions across Europe and crucially down the divisions to cash-strapped clubs in England.

Now even the world’s richest league is facing economic meltdown. Premier League matches have been suspended indefinitely with no return expected before mid-June at the earliest.

Broadcasters could be due a rebate worth a reported £762 million if the season is not completed and, even when the games do recommence, they are likely to be behind closed doors, quashing income from gate receipts.

Moreover, a number of major sponsors such as airlines and gambling companies have been just as badly hit by the COVID-19 shutdown, which is expected to lead to a curb on commercial revenue.

Rather than the usual arms race for talent, Premier League clubs are fret-



Gary Neville

ting about just meeting their wage bills for the next few months.

“Many clubs could be threatened by insolvency and transfer plans came to a standstill for most clubs because of the many uncertainties,” said Matthias Seidel, founder of Transfermarkt, a website specialising in transfer values.

According to Transfermarkt, 1.8 billion euros (\$2 billion) has already been wiped off the value of Premier League squads.

“There’s no doubt the actual value of players right now has gone down in all squads,” said Brighton owner Tony Bloom. “How much less, I have no idea. It depends on how the next few

months play out.”

VULTURES AND PREDATORS

Such uncertainty has led for calls to do away with transfers entirely to avoid the unseemly sight of clubs, who have asked staff to take pay cuts and in some cases relied on government money, spending money on new players.

“If you’re trying to get 30 per cent pay cuts from existing players, you may have to put a transfer embargo in place,” former Manchester United captain Gary Neville told Sky Sports.

However, embargoes may only accelerate fears that clubs lower down the pyramid will not survive the crisis.

Proceeds from transfer sales are commonly used in the lower leagues to cover running costs and will be needed even more without the regular income of gate receipts to rely on.

“I think there will be significant transfer fee deflation,” football finance expert Kieran Maguire said.

“There will be a significant number of clubs that when some form of transfer market returns, they will be close to going out of business and therefore will accept fire sale prices.

“The vultures and predators will pick off good players for very modest fees.” The fear for those reliant on trans-

fer fees, though, is that the damage has already been done.

Given the vast sums involved, transfer fees are very commonly paid over the course of a player’s contract.

Based on accounts published to the end of the 2018/19 season, Premier League clubs owed £1.6 billion in outstanding transfer payments, £900 million of which was to foreign clubs.

Maguire warns of the domino effect whereby if one club fails to meet its transfer debt, it could spark a series of defaulted payments on other deals or even worse force clubs into insolvency.

“The concern is that financial problems in one league could spread throughout the industry just like the pandemic,” he said.

Bundesliga chief executive Christian Seifert told the New York Times earlier this month that the transfer market will “collapse” and that “some leagues will understand that money is nothing that is coming automatically every month from heaven.”

That may have been a slight on the Premier League’s overindulgence on transfer fees.

But as the biggest spender, the economic earthquake felt by English football will ripple across Europe for some time to come. — AFP

Players joining exhibition events must be ‘vigilant’

MUMBAI: Players are free to participate in exhibition events while the professional tennis season remains shut due to the novel coronavirus but they must prioritise their health and remain vigilant against corrupt approaches, authorities have said.

Professional tennis came to a halt in March after countries started closing borders and imposed lockdown to contain the spread of the virus, and all events are currently suspended till at least July 13.

The tennis shutdown has left players in the lower tiers who depend solely on tournament winnings without the chance to earn a living.

“Players are self-employed independent contractors and, as such, are free to make decisions concerning their own activities during the time the Tour is suspended,” an ATP spokesman said on Monday.

Serena Williams’ coach Patrick

Mouratoglou said his tennis academy in south of France will host a five-week tournament starting in May that will give players the chance to get back on court during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The German state of Rhineland-Palatinate is also set to host an exhibition event without the presence of fans from May 1, according to The Telegraph newspaper.

Both events said they will comply with local physical distancing requirements and health protocols to ensure the safety of players, coaches and staff onsite.

“We understand that some privately organised exhibition matches may start to take place where and when local government restrictions allow, and these are attractive opportunities for our players to play some competitive matches and earn some income,” the ATP added.



“We also remind players of the need to prioritise health and safety and to follow any applicable governmental and health agency guidelines at this time as well as the applicable

provisions of the Tennis Anti-Corruption Program (TACP).”

While Australian Alexei Popyrin will take on world number 10 David Goffin in the opening match

at Mouratoglou’s academy, the event at the Base Tennis Academy near the small town of Hoehr-Grenzhausen will have no players currently ranked in top 100.

The Rafa Nadal Academy in Spain’s Mallorca is also considering turning its campus into a place where elite players can stay, train and compete in matches among themselves that will be televised around the world.

A 2018 International Review Panel report commissioned to address betting and integrity issues said that players in the lowest tiers were susceptible to corruption because of the difficulty in making a living.

The Tennis Integrity Unit (TIU) reminded the players that they will still be expected to uphold the anti-corruption principles despite the events being not recognised by any governing body.

“We understand that these will be attractive opportunities to many of you eager to play and to earn an income,” the TIU, which is tasked with tackling corruption in the game, said in a statement on its website. “While the playing opportunities created are welcomed, we must advise you that there may be an elevated risk of corruption and corrupt approaches in some of these environments.” — Reuters

sport



follow us @observersportz

www.omanobserver.om

editor@omanobserver.om



LEAGUES READY TO PLAY BEHIND 'CLOSED DOORS'

UEFA CHIEF CEFERIN BELIEVES THAT PLAYING WOULD AVOID HEAVY FINANCIAL LOSSES FOR LEAGUES



MILAN: Uefa president Aleksander Ceferin said on Monday that leagues across Europe were ready to return to action behind closed doors in a bid to limit the damage caused by coronavirus.

Football leagues have been suspended since mid-March due to the pandemic which has claimed more than 100,000 lives throughout the continent.

But the head of European football believes that playing would be an important step towards a return to normal life and avoid heavy financial

losses for leagues.

"I believe there are options that can allow us to restart cup championships and to complete them," Ceferin said in an interview with Italian daily Corriere della Sera.

"We may have to resume without spectators, but the most important thing, I think, is playing games.

"It is early to say that we cannot complete the season. The impact would be terrible for clubs and leagues. Better to play behind closed doors than not at all.

"In such hard times it would bring



Uefa president Aleksander Ceferin

happiness to people and a certain sense of normality even if the games can only be seen on TV.

"All activities are being organised to start again, everyone needs to find their lives.

"If safety measures are respected and if the authorities give the green light, the training could resume like the rest.

"Further consent will be needed for matches."

Ceferin said that if leagues returned "soon enough" then Champions League and Europa League

matches could "be played in parallel" with no date limit for the finals.

The Slovenian said he was not in favour of the season going into September and October as it "would have a heavy impact" on the 2020-2021 campaign.

"We can finish, but we must respect the decisions taken by authorities," he continued.

"The priority is the health of fans, players and coaches."

As for countries who have decided not to finish the season, Ceferin said that Uefa "will review the cases".

"Such decisions were not made alone," he said.

"Football is interconnected, we have seen how important it is for Uefa and leagues to work in good cooperation. The executive committee will review the cases."

He added: "Leagues are the revenue base for clubs nationwide. If completed, the financial consequences will be limited.

"Uefa, on the other hand, will lose a lot of money for postponing Euro 2020."

— AFP