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23 Ramadhan Sunday 17/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:00	04:06	04:33
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:31	03:33	03:40
MAGHRIB:	06:48	06:50	06:54
ISHA:	08:06	08:09	08:07

HIS MAJESTY GREETES KING OF NORWAY



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Harald V of Norway on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and long life to the King and the friendly Norwegian people more progress and prosperity. His Majesty the Sultan has received

thanks cable from Katerina Sakellariopoulou, President of Greece, in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on her election as president. The president expressed her sincere thanks to His Majesty for the greetings hoping for enhancing the existing bilateral cooperation between the two countries for the best interest of the Omani and Greek peoples.

Avoid social mingling or face action

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: People tend to get-together more often and with just a few days left for Eid al Fitr, chances are high that people get-together with near and dear ones. "People should make a conscious effort to keep away from each other and maintain social distancing at all possible areas", urged the Supreme Committee at its last meeting. The recent spike in the number of cases has been triggered by a number of illegal get-togethers and anyone doing so will be subject to legal action, the Supreme Committee has said.

TURN TO P2

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Sadly enough, some people are still not obeying the social distancing norms and are conducting mass gatherings for iftar which is a total violation of social distancing rules

DR AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL SAEEDI,
MINISTER OF HEALTH

CASES TO RISE, 404 IN A DAY

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN LABOUR CAMPS A MAJOR CONCERN

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Saturday announced 404 new cases with COVID-19, out of which 67 are nationals and 337 expatriates. Later in the day, the ministry has also announced the death of an 80-year-old citizen, taking the number of deaths in the Sultanate to 21. Among 404 cases reported on Saturday, 364 were from Muscat, taking the total from the capital to 3,831, including 16 deaths. Outside Muscat, South Al Batinah tops with 386 cases. Explaining the reasons for the number of cases, the ministry said the possibility of getting an infection is higher



if the physical distance between two individuals is less than 2 metres. It said the high number of cases reported in recent days is also because of the increasing number of COVID-19 tests at the rate of around 2,000 examinations

per day compared to around 1,000 to 1,500 tests a day. Additionally, high cases have been also due to the gathering of expatriate bachelor workers (labour camps) in places which are not suitable for social distancing.

TURN TO P2

SECOND PHASE OF FLIGHTS FROM OMAN TO INDIA BEGINS TODAY



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: To facilitate the return of stranded nationals in Oman, India will operate eight more special flights starting from Sunday, May 17. The schedules are Muscat – Trivandrum (May 17), Muscat – Hyderabad (May 18), Muscat – Bangalore (May 20), Salalah – Kozhikode (May 20), Muscat – Delhi (May 21), Muscat – Kannur (May 22), Muscat – Kochi (May 23), and Muscat – Trivandrum (May 23). In the second phase, there will be flights from Muscat to different destinations in India outside Kerala and Tamil Nadu. As in the case of two earlier flights, the passenger lists for all these eight flights will be finalised by the Embassy on the basis of the registration made by the nationals on its

website. Priority will be given to medical emergency cases, pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as to other Indian nationals who are stranded in difficult situations. The embassy will be contacting the shortlisted people for each flight directly through email/telephone. The cost of tickets will have to be borne by the passengers themselves and air tickets will be issued by the airline to shortlisted persons. All passengers are required to confirm acceptance of all conditions of travel, including quarantine requirements in India as well as health requirements to board the flight. The South Indian state of Kerala will get 5 flights, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru will get one each.

CASES CONTINUE TO RISE, 404 IN A DAY

FROM PAGE 1

In response to a question on whether COVID-19 is more dangerous for people with particular blood groups and other chronic diseases, the ministry said the virus is dangerous for everyone without exception and especially those with chronic diseases and the elderly. On queries based on the relationship between COVID-19 and any particular blood groups, the ministry said there is no firm scientific evidence, however, it is noted that infected people are mostly from the blood group ‘A’ and those with blood group ‘O’ are affected the lowest. It added that this conclusion is based on observations and not on a broad scientific study. Meanwhile, the Directorate-General of Disease Prevention and Control at the Ministry of Health and the directorates of disease prevention and control in the governorates held a virtual meeting on Saturday in presence of Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health. The meeting was aimed to follow up the daily COVID-19 cases reported from the governorates, investigate those coming in contact with coronavirus-infected people, identify

common source of infections, as well as review the developments in the investigation and response operations both at the central level and the governorates and follow-up the epidemiological situation and check the effectiveness of preventive and precautionary measures.

AVOID SOCIAL MINGLING OR FACE ACTION

FROM PAGE 1

Mass gatherings still exist and some people do not abide by social distancing despite repeated appeals from the authorities”, said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health. “Sadly enough, some people are still not obeying the social distancing norms and are conducting mass gatherings for iftar which is a total violation of social distancing rules”. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested a group of people while they were attending a social gathering and were referred to the judicial authorities in Al Sharqiyah on Saturday. “We receive tip-offs around the clock about social gatherings and such cases are dealt with immediately. The offenders have been referred to judicial authorities for further procedures”, the ROP said.

Eid Mubarak

On the occasion of Eid Al Fitr, Oman Arab Bank is delighted to announce that all eligible customers* will be offered a deferment of their personal loan installments, due for the month of May 2020, until the end of the loan term period. Customers wishing to not have their installments deferred are requested to kindly present a written confirmation to their local branch. For more information, call +968 2475 4444



عيد مبارك
Eid Mubarak



*Terms and conditions apply





Shops, habta markets in South Batinah to remain closed

MUSCAT: All shops and popular markets will remain closed in the South Al Batinah Governorate until further notice.

The Directorate General of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources in South Al Batinah Governorate said as per the decisions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 and based on the ministerial decision 96/2020, all shops and souqs will remain closed

in the governorate.

The decision also prohibits the staging of the Eid Habta market, the meeting place for the trading of livestock, and any commercial gatherings on the roads or inside villages and towns.

SFAAI heads meeting of pan-Arab capacity development panel

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SFAAI), headed an extraordinary virtual meeting of the Institutional Capacity Development Committee of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI), at the SFAAI headquarters in Al Bustan, on Saturday.

The meeting discussed the efforts of the member states in mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the capacity of the Arab audit institutions in terms of holding training courses and workshops enlisted in the committee's 2020 programme.

The meeting reviewed one of the axes of the emergency plan which was presented before the 60th meeting of the Organization's executive board regarding the reprogramming of training courses and workshops in a manner that accords with the emerging requisites of the Arab auditing bodies. It also reviewed the visions of the authorities of the committee as well as seek counselling from international and regional organisations. — **ONA**

ROLE OF MEDIA IN FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS HIGHLIGHTED

JEDDAH: The Union of OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) News Agencies (UNA) on Saturday held its first virtual forum under the chairmanship of Dr Majid bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Acting Minister of Media, Chairman of the Executive Council of the Union of OIC News Agencies (UNA).

Oman News Agency (ONA) was represented by Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Arami, Director-General and Editor-in Chief of ONA and Chairman of the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA).

The forum was aimed to highlight the role of news agencies as reliable sources of information in spreading awareness about the coronavirus pandemic. It also provided an opportunity for the news agencies to exchange their experiences in propagating knowledge and truthful information, in addition to refuting fake news and rumours. — **ONA**



Ministry of Higher Education

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education announces the tender shown in the following table :

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of tenders
07/2020 Recall (1)	Rehabilitation of Lighting & Audio Systems, Sur College of Applied Sciences Project	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Excellent, First - Second - Third - Fourth	RO 25/-	05/06/2020	25/06/2020

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will starting on Sunday 17/05/2020 at 07:30 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of Tender Committee
Ministry of Higher Education

www.mohe.gov.om





SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The oft-repeated outcry of excess food and its waste is almost nil this Ramadhan due to the COVID-19 restrictions on iftar gatherings and buffets at hotels.

Authorities and hoteliers admit that there is significant decrease in the food wastage even as the holy month is nearing to an end.

"During Ramadhan, households, hotels and organisers of mass meals tend to prepare more food than what is really required. But this year, with the ban on community meals and stay-at-home orders, not much food is prepared and wasted", said an official at Oman

LOCKDOWN LIMITS FOOD WASTE

**IFTAR GATHERINGS, BUFFETS MISSING
AS PEOPLE BREAK FAST AT HOME**

Environmental Service Holding Company (be'ah).

According to be'ah, people in Oman wasted over 13,000 tonnes of food in the first 10 days of Ramadhan, last year. "This is equivalent to food enough to feed 374,135 people everyday", it said.

People seem to be cooking what is required at homes. Unlike previous

years, they cannot move freely to the market places to gather food items. So people buy as per the minimum needs as the food is not shared by many people, he said.

This is indicative of the absence of the lavish spreads at the all-you-can-eat buffet seen normally throughout the country in

hotels, restaurants and homes for iftar and suhoor.

"The areas that witness maximum food wastage are mass community meals and open buffets during Ramadhan. All these activities are not seen this time due to the restrictions and have limited the waste of food", said Omer Afridi, owner of a Turkish hotel.

He said that unlike in the previous seasons, there are no leftovers these days as food is prepared only after receiving orders.

"With the ban on dining at restaurants, we are fully in to home deliveries. There is no food wasted in the restaurant kitchens as we only deal with orders available for the day", Omer said.



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NUST begins e-admission process

MUSCAT: The National University of Science and Technology (NUST) has launched the registration process for the new academic year 2020-2021, through an electronic registration system.

The university's College of Engineering, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, and College of Pharmacy have deployed an "electronic link" that allows students to get acquainted with the academic programmes and the registration mechanisms, in addition to the "Eulum Alwatania WhatsApp" service that is directly linked with the admission and registration officials at the university to answer all inquiries and to process applications received from within and outside of the Sultanate.

Admission is open through the university's website or by calling 93990917, as well as the toll-free number 80080002.

Bangladesh School Muscat offers 15% discount on fees

MUSCAT: Bangladesh School Muscat has announced a 15 per cent discount on tuition fees in light of deadly breakout of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors, Dr Mohammad Sazzad Hossain Chowdhury of Bangladesh Schools in Sultanate, also announced that all types of fines on late payment of fees and other payables will be waived off.

The discount of 15 per cent will be given to those parents who will clear all dues by June 4, 2020. Parents are advised to take this opportunity as it will not remain valid after June 11, 2020.

The Board has also decided to conclude the Academic Year 2019-2020 by June 11, 2020. The promotion will be given as per previous academic records of the students.



Net connect with family and friends across the globe

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Staying at home has emerged as an opportunity for families and friends to connect and re-connect, as Covid-19 has set new standards of working, living, eating and even meeting. They are confined in four walls of houses locally to maintain the best of social distancing, at the same time they are exploring ways to re-connect globally with their near and dear ones through various Internet platforms.

Rejin Thomas, a senior hotel executive, had almost forgotten that he belongs to a large family and a larger extended family, in pre-pandemic humdrums of life.

"Since office has shifted in my living room and I am trying my level best to maintain social distancing, a thought came in to connect to family and friends who are spread in many parts of the world. I made a list of my extended family with whom I grew up, played and finally settled in different professions. They eagerly accepted my request to connect as everyone was sailing in the same boat."

It was one of the most joyful experiences of Thomas's life when he saw childhood 'family buddies' on one Internet platform. "It was sense of joy as well as flow of emotions as there were some 75-80 people joined in one session and for almost for 30 minutes everyone was



silent watching each other trying to recognise old faces and new members — who came in course of time as children, wives and husbands — quite long after they got separated to fulfil life's responsibilities."

Similarly he was able to connect with school and college friends after 25 to 30 years. "It was

amazing and I call COVID-19 an opportunity to be able to connect with my loved ones. We were in touch but due to circumstances like office, time difference and most importantly our own selfish way of life, didn't allow us to connect earlier."

Similar is the case with Dennis D'Costa who is able to connect with his family and friends as far as Canada, UAE and India.

"More importantly this is the time when I am able to understand my children in a better way. I used to spare quality time for my children earlier also, but now I realise, that was not enough. I had my own excuses of office workload, meetings etc and my family was convinced with my situation," he said.

D'Costa admits that he is happy to engage with his children and elderly family members. "I tell bedtime stories, they are coming up with new skills of cooking, painting and singing etc and of course it is great time watching them grow."

For D'Costa connecting with friends and families is a great stress buster, "at a time when you are advised to stay home and stay safe."



Seek Laylat-ul-Qadr in odd nights



KABEER YOUSUF

Believers are engaging more into supplications, prayers, and other deeds such as zakat and sadaqa (two forms of supporting fellow beings) and the like as the holy month has entered into the most important and the last phase. Believers are seeking the 'night of power' or 'the promised night' also known as 'the night of greatest rewards' when the Holy Quran was sent down to mankind. Unlike in the mosques last year, houses are being converted into semi mosques for the whole family and stay indoors as part of 'ihtiqaf' which means stay overnight inside the prayer room. The odd nights of the last ten days, with strong probability for 27th night, is considered to be the 'Laylat-ul-Qadr', the night that is more powerful than 1,000 nights, and it keeps believers in the Sultanate along with their Muslim brethren across the world closer to Almighty engaging themselves in special prayers and supplications. Individually, each one prays 'Qiyamul Lail' which denotes long, standing supplications, which is a part of the last ten days of the holy month. "Allah Almighty has said in the

Holy Quran that there is a night in the odd nights of the holy month which is more powerful than 1,000 nights and it is the night when the Holy Quran, the guiding book for the entire mankind, is sent down to the people". Hazrat Aisha Radiallah Anha stated that Rasool Allah Peace Be Upon Him said, "Look for Laylat-ul-Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadhan". (Bukhari) Hazrat Aisha Radiallah Anha stated that as much Rasool Allah Peace Be Upon Him tried (Ibadat) in the last Ashra (ten days) of Ramadhan, did not try in any of the Ashra". (Muslim) Hazrat Aisha Radiallah Anha further stated, "I asked Rasool Allah, Peace Be Upon Him, If I find Laylat-ul-Qadar then what should I do? To this, Allah's prophet (PBUH) said, recite this Dua. "Allah Humma Innaka A'fuvun Tohib Bul Afva Fa'afu Anni". (Tirmidhi). Believers will continue to engage in prayers and supplications and 'Qiyamul Lail' prayers that keep them engrossed to the thoughts of Allah Almighty. All these will be followed by the preparations for Eid al Fitr after nearly thirty days of fasting, this year around, of course, without any celebrations, mass gatherings, mass prayers but at home, in the comfort of the family members only.

FATWA

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

Question

If my father pays zakat al fitr on behalf of me and my family though we are working and capable of paying?

Answer

There is no problem if you have already agreed.





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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

Disinfectant booths at Manila malls as virus lockdown eased

MANILA: Manila's malls set air- conditioners to warm and switched off free Wi-Fi to stop people lingering as many of them cautiously reopened on Saturday, after a two-month lockdown that brought the sprawling hubs of community life to a halt.

Just a trickle of customers showed up at the huge commercial centres in the Philippine capital, which usually attract millions of people each day and often contain churches, restaurants, gyms and event spaces.

"This is good for me, this is good for our economy", said Yuki Alvie Merano, 31, among the first in line to enter one mall, joking that shopping was "therapeutic".

Measures in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus included walk-in booths filled with clouds of disinfectant, distanced queues, temperature checks and mandatory masks.

Only a selection of shops were allowed to open, including those selling clothing, books and electronics -- but salons, cinemas and eat-in restaurants remained closed.

In mid-March a strict



Restrictions on movement were loosened in Manila to boost the economy. — AFP

lockdown was imposed that did not even allow most of the city's 12 million residents outdoors for exercise, although short trips to buy food were allowed.

These restrictions on movement were loosened on Saturday to give a boost to an economy battered by the COVID-19

pandemic, which has killed more than 800 people in the Philippines.

While authorities have begun to ease lockdown restrictions in the capital, confinement measures vary in severity in other parts of the country.

Shopper Alex Bajarias, 23, who had bought all his groceries online during

the lockdown, said he was unnerved by some people still standing so close to each other.

"There's not many people on the first day but I feel that as people get to know that more stores are open, there will be a rush for sure, which will make it even more scary", he said.

— AFP

Over 250 global artists urge Israel to end Gaza blockade

PARIS: More than 250 global artists and writers including rocker Peter Gabriel, Director Ken Loach and actor Viggo Mortensen have appealed to Israel to stop the "siege" of Gaza, saying the coronavirus epidemic could have a devastating effect in "the world's largest open air prison".

"Long before the global outbreak of COVID-19 threatened to overwhelm the already devastated healthcare system in Gaza, the UN had predicted that

the blockaded coastal strip would be unliveable by 2020", the online letter said.

"With the pandemic, Gaza's almost two million inhabitants, predominantly refugees, face a mortal threat in the world's largest open-air prison", it added.

Other signatories included poet Taha Adnan, Canadian writer Naomi Klein and British group Massive Attack.

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007 when Hamas started controlling the

enclave. Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since but reached a truce in late 2018 that was renewed after successive flare-ups last year.

"Well before the ongoing crisis, Gaza's hospitals were already stretched to breaking point through lack of essential resources denied by Israel's siege. Its healthcare system could not cope with the thousands of gunshot wounds, leading to many amputations", the artists said.

— AFP



Toys are disinfected at the Rothschild school in Nice, on the French Riviera. — AFP

Europe sees multiple cases of COVID-linked syndrome in children

PARIS: A new life-threatening inflammatory syndrome associated with COVID-19 has affected 230 children in Europe and killed two so far this year, a regional health body said, as medics worldwide were told to be on alert.

The Swedish-based European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said in a risk report that two children had succumbed to the condition: One in Britain and one in France.

The new coronavirus has so far taken its greatest toll on the elderly and those with chronic health conditions, but reports about the syndrome in children have raised fears it could pose a greater risk to the young than first thought.

At a briefing in Geneva, the World



I call on all clinicians worldwide to work with your national authorities and WHO to be alert and better understand this syndrome in children.

TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS,
WHO DIRECTOR
GENERAL

Health Organization (WHO) urged clinicians to be alert to the rare syndrome, but cautioned that links to COVID-19 were still unclear.

The condition, known as paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome

(PIMS), shares symptoms with toxic shock and Kawasaki disease including fever, rashes, swollen glands and in severe cases, heart inflammation.

“I call on all clinicians worldwide to work with your national authorities and WHO to be alert and better understand this syndrome in children”, said WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

On Friday, the WHO issued a preliminary definition of the syndrome, which it said had become more frequent during the current pandemic but has also appeared in children who did not test positive for COVID-19.

The condition affected children and adolescents showing fever for more than three days, with elevated markers of inflammation. — Reuters

Study shows income key factor in coronavirus cases

PARIS: People living in the most deprived areas of Britain are more than four times likelier to test positive for COVID-19 than those living in the richest neighbourhoods, new research showed on Saturday.

A University of Oxford study looked at more than 3,600 COVID-19 test results from national programmes and found that deprivation, age and chronic liver disease all increased the likelihood of testing positive.

Of that sample, the more than 660 people living in the most deprived areas, 29.5 per cent tested positive, compared with just 7.7 per cent of those in richer areas, the study showed.

Those aged 40-64 were at the highest risk, with 18.5 per cent of that age group testing positive compared to just 4.6 per cent of under 17s. A greater percentage of men (18.4 per cent) tested positive than women (13.3 per cent).

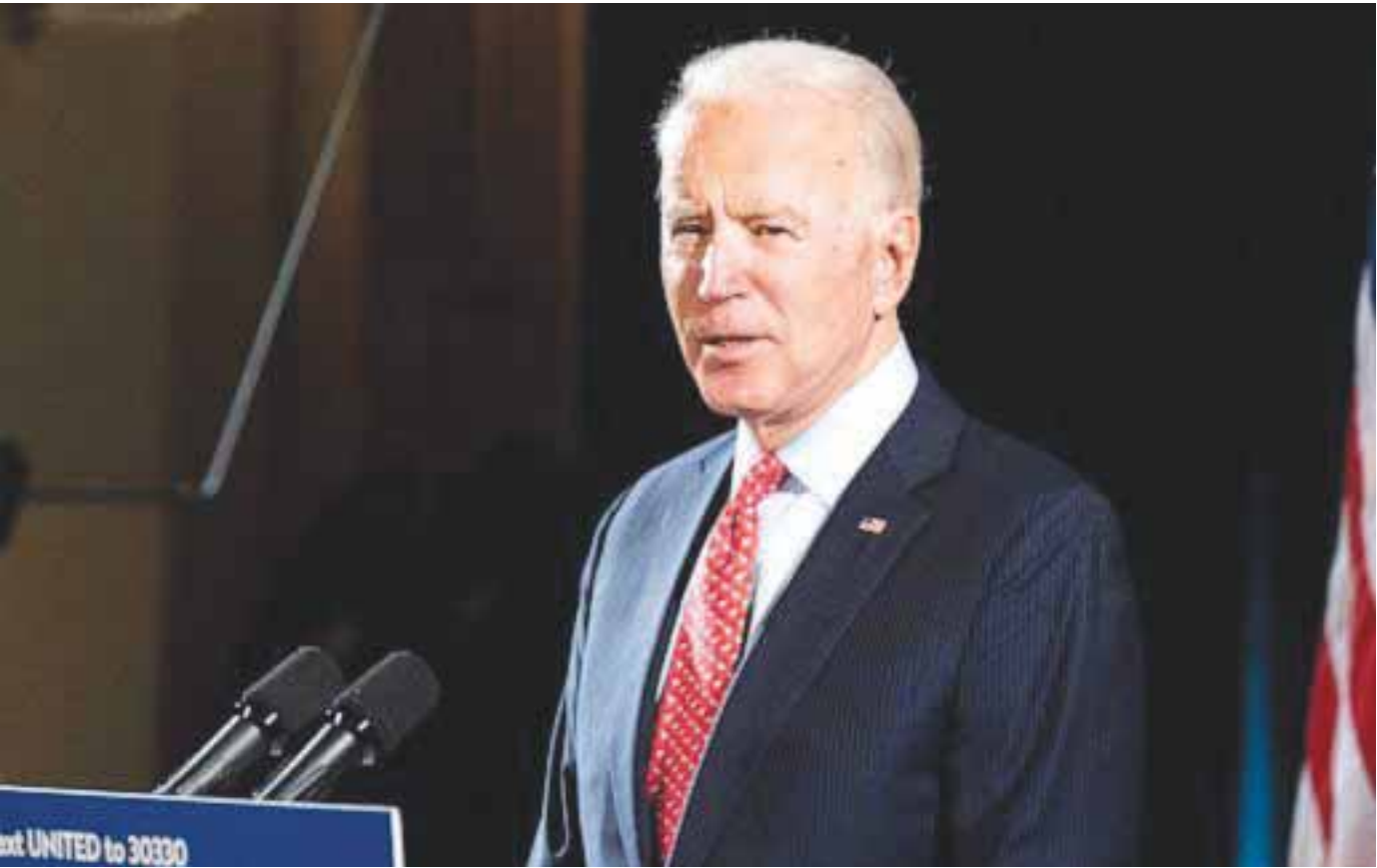
And people of black ethnicity were more than four times likelier to test positive than those of white ethnicity — 62.1 per cent vs 15.5 per cent. The authors, however, cautioned that the cohort of black people tested in the study was small — only 58 people.

“With each day that passes our knowledge of COVID-19 improves,” said Gayatri Amirthalingam, from Public Health England and co-author of the study printed in The Lancet.

“This analysis of primary care outcomes of individuals testing positive for virus is an important contribution to our wider understanding of how COVID-19 is affecting people of different demographic groups”.

— AFP

ANALYSIS



BIDEN FOCUSES ON ARIZONA AS KEY POLL STATE

EVAN HALPER

As Joe Biden struggles to build on his narrow lead in the industrial Midwest states that favoured Donald Trump's presidential campaign four years ago, his campaign is increasingly focusing much farther west — on a former Republican stronghold that could prove crucial for Democrats in the fall.

Arizona is fast becoming a central target of the Biden campaign as Trump falters in the state. Its electorate is being reshaped, with suburban Republicans unnerved by his handling of the pandemic, Latinos poised to vote Democratic in record numbers and an influx of progressive newcomers from California.

"We believe there will be battleground states that have never been battleground states before... Arizona on the top of the list," said Biden campaign manager Jen O'Malley Dillon, in a call with reporters on Friday. "We

are not only ahead (in Arizona), but we have a strong opportunity there to build our pathway to victory. The ground is there."

The emphasis on Arizona comes as Biden struggles to build a lead in some of the traditional battleground states. While polls show the former vice-president ahead comfortably nationwide, his advantage is razor thin in some pivotal Midwestern states that once formed a "Blue Wall" for Democrats — until 2016.

The closeness of the race in those states leaves the party fearing the prospect of again winning the popular vote nationwide, but losing the electoral college vote — as it did in 2000 and 2016 — because of state losses.

It also underscores the difficulty that Biden has had luring away from Trump the voters many Democrats were hopeful he could win back: white men without college degrees.

One new poll even showed Biden losing among voters in the 15 swing states decided by 8 percentage points or less in 2016, a third of which are in the Midwest. — dpa

The realities of COVID-19 could be timeless...



RAY PETERSEN

petersen_ray@hotmail.com

... If Oman does not get its act together!

I fully support the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health in their revelations of recent days, with respect to the COVID-19 situation in the Sultanate.

Oman has failed to appreciate the gravity of the situation, with far too many taking a position that says, "It can't happen to me," for whatever reason. The naivety, and that is a 'nice' way of putting it, of 300 people attending a wedding is simply beyond any form of understanding at all, while groups of young men continuing to congregate, and families, "Oh my God, have they no care for their children?" who still meet for extended family iftars, are quite obviously living in a different world!

Last week, a social media user in Muscat commented that his neighbours had a 'family Iftar' with four carloads of guests. He was vilified and harangued on the media by them who insisted upon their cultural and religious rights, and that he was wrong to speak out. The reaction by some users was appalling, and reaffirms for me the unpleasant, other

face, of social media. That poor man... all he was doing was insisting upon what the authorities had determined... No mass, or extended family iftars. No large, or group gatherings.

We also have the situation highlighted of the labour 'camps' and accommodation! For too long the unsanitary living conditions of labourers, mainly from South Asia has been tolerated as 'out of sight, out of mind.' However, now that there are health risks and consequences for the general population, there needs to be a rethink on this topic.

The comment was made by the authorities that a sponsor had "shrugged off his responsibilities," which makes it imperative that the same authorities do not shrug of theirs, to ensure those with that attitude are prevented from doing so ever again.

The 'illegals' too, working in the 'black economy,' sheltered by their friends, evading health authorities and ROP are said to number more than 100,000, so we could have that many 'tick-ing corona bombs,' in our community, and that's not good enough!

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this page are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.

FEATURES

YOGA
& RAMADHAN

KABEER YOUSUF

Ramadhan is a total abstinence from all material pleasures from dawn to dusk and a person who fasts through the day will have priceless benefits to his mind, body and soul.

Fitness enthusiasts find it better to indulge themselves in some exercise in the evening after the Iftar (breaking the fast) in order to maintain their physical fitness.

But how about adding some breathing exercises that will complement the thirty day-long pursuit of perfect harmony of all the organs, both internal and external?

Technology and innovation have, undoubtedly, opened up a lot of avenues for adults and kids but at the same time it has taken over our time to reflect and introspect. Here comes the need of practicing yoga as a means of life.

"If yoga and fasting can go hand in hand, the advantages of them together will be amplified physically and mentally as Yoga can improve the immune system, balance body metabolism, and reduce stress and anxiety, complementing the fasting person", says Anuradha Jayakumar, MSc Yoga QCI Level-2 and Yoga teacher.

Experts opine that Yoga is a natural booster which improves resistance and helps build a strong defense mechanism which in turn improves the body's immunity.

"Yoga as a means encourages healthy habits. Children learn self-awareness through yoga which supports positive mental health in



children", says Prema Arun, Co founder of Yoga City, a fitness yoga studio in Qurm.

Practice of yoga during fasting is more beneficiary for beginners of fasting, especially children. They usually tend to have mild headache, get lethargic, become stressed and have mood swings and the like. For them, non-intense yoga is recommended during fasting.

"The sedentary lifestyle led by today's kids leads to many health issues including bad posture. Most children are glued to the screen, making them overweight and obese. Yoga is a great way to improve one's body posture."

Yoga asanas (postures) help kids understand how different body parts work in sync with their breath to get the whole system together. This self-awareness helps them respect, love and take care of their body and food habits too.

It helps digestion as digestion gets slows down due to change in eating routine and Pranayama comes for the rescue and helps relieving the stress and in balanc-

ing the systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

Sun-salutation in low intensity can be practised with adequate intervals, and a few asanas and breathing techniques which help in body mechanism to function normally during fasting.

"Forward bending asanas help in cooling the body system, relaxes the heart and helps to pump the blood to brain in order to have good control over the mind. Yoga helps to balance the body and still the mind", adds Anuradha who is also the Country Head of International Yoga Professionals (IYP) Oman.

Nadi shodhana Pranayama or the Alternative nostril breathing helps to regulate the body temperature, calms down the mind, brings an awareness to their body and helps in better sleeping.

This breathing technique can be practised between 8 to 12 rounds at any time.

It also helps in removing the sluggishness, revitalizes the body, enhances the mental function and for soothing the nervous system.



Ramadhan in Uzbekistan, a rapidly changing nation

RAY PETERSEN

Uzbekistan is unique. Along with Lichtenstein, it is one of only two, double-landlocked countries in the world. Formerly part of the Soviet Union, the republic is Central Asia's largest supplier of electricity through its significant hydroelectric and solar energy investment. Since 2016, with a change in its leadership, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has embarked on an ambitious policy, termed 'A Quiet Revolution,' with the objective of a transition to a market economy, and appears to be making significant progress.

With a population of 32.5 million, and 93% Muslim, Uzbekistan has the largest Islamic population in Central Asia, however it could in no way be seen as a closed society, as many versions and degrees of Islam are practiced by a mainly Sunni population. This is almost certainly a consequence of the divide between reform and tradition, and the diverse effects of secularization, or disagreement in the

role of Islam in the continued development of the country.

"When it comes to Ramadhan," said Baha, an expat from Uzbekistan, "it is not extremely strict, and observing Ramadhan fasting is very much a personal choice. Even within families there may be different attitudes to the fast. It is acceptable to eat in public, and most restaurants remain open, though patrons who are dining will probably be obscured from passersby, out of respect for those who are fasting. Also, unlike in Oman, the hours of work are not adjusted or shortened."

Friends and families, in normal times, take turns at hosting each other during Ramadhan, for the Iftar, which is usually a big meal with three or four courses set on a low table called a dastarkhan. Traditionally, an Uzbek feast is eaten by hand and consists of starters of sweets like Kunzhutli Engok, Peanuts with sesame and fruits, then vegetables and salads, followed by soups such as a light savory Shurpa, or a much thicker, broth type, Mastava. The main course will usually be of Sashlyk, barbequed meat on skewers, Plov, a biryani type

rice dish, the always popular Beshbarmak, horsemeat and noodles, Manti, meat dumplings, and for something different, Naryn a spicy meat and noodle favorite. After the meal, kids in a typical Uzbek neighborhood go from door to door singing Ramadhan songs. They are given money and sweets, a bit like Halloween's trick or treating.

"Currently, there is a quarantine nationwide, and almost everything is closed," continued Baha. "People are only allowed to go out to buy groceries. There is no singing of songs and inviting friends and family members for Iftar, enjoying their fellowship, and company, as people are strongly advised to stay home. It is also now being advised that people should not fast if people have any of the symptoms of COVID-19, so Ramadhan in Uzbekistan will be a subdued occasion this year."

Of course, as has been identified in other countries this year, COVID-19 offers greater opportunities for religious and personal reflection, renewal of commitments to the faith and society, and a reminder of the charitable needs of the less fortunate.



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OMANI FIRMS WEIGH IMPLICATIONS OF NEW VAT DECISION



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT:Saudi Arabia's recent decision to triple its Value Added Tax (VAT) to 15 per cent has impacts for Omani firms currently trading in goods and services, or undertaking projects in that country, according to a Muscat-based tax expert.

Aabha S Lekhak (pictured), Director - Indirect Tax, KPMG Oman – part of a global network of professional firms providing Audit, Tax and Advisory services – said the move has potential ramifications for the profitability of Omani firms operating in that country.

Buffeted by collapsing international oil prices and the pandemic, Riyadh announced a dramatic tripling of its VAT rate to 15 per cent last week, bringing it close to the global average (15.44 per cent) and well above the average rate of indirect tax in Asia, South America, North America



The size and scale of the change coupled with the timing has the potential of impacting trade between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world, not only Oman.

AABHA S LEKHAK,
Director - indirect tax, KPMG Oman

and Oceania, according to Lekhak.

"The size and scale of the

RAMIFICATIONS: Tripling of VAT rate by Saudi Arabia can impact trade patterns, cash flows and profitability, says expert

change coupled with the timing has the potential of impacting trade between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world, not only Oman," she noted. **TURN TO P13**

**National Finance**
Co. SAOG

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E-mail: info@nationalfinance.co.om Website: www.nationalfinance.co.om

Invitation to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting & Ordinary Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of National Finance Co. SAOG (the "Company") are pleased to invite the shareholders for the company's Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) and the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held at 3.00 p.m. on Thursday, 4 June 2020, through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository Company ("MCDC") website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum for the first EGM and/or AGM is not met, Wednesday, the 10th June 2020, at 3.00 p.m. will be the date of the second EGM and/or AGM, through the aforesaid electronic platform to consider the following agenda:

First: The Extraordinary General Meeting:

- To consider and approve the proposal to amend the Company's Articles of Association to comply with the provisions of the new Commercial Companies Law issued by Sultani Decree No. 18 of 2019 as per (Annexure '1').

Second: The Annual Ordinary General Meeting:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors' on Company's activity and its financial position for the financial year ended 31st December 2019.
- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors' on corporate governance for the financial year ended 31st December 2019.
- To consider the statutory auditors' report and to approve the financial statements and the profit and loss account for the financial year ended 31st December 2019.
- To ratify the distribution of cash dividend to the shareholders paid as of 30 March 2020, at the rate of 11.08 baisas for each share.
- To approve the sitting fees paid to Directors' for attending meetings of the Board and sub committees for the previous financial year and to determine the Directors' sitting fees for the upcoming financial year, as per (Annexure '2').
- To consider and approve the proposed Directors Remuneration of RO 140,000 for the financial year ended on 31st December 2019.
- To consider the transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2019 (Annexure '3').
- To inform the Shareholders of the amounts paid towards social responsibility activities during the year ended 31st December 2019, as per (Annexure '4').
- To consider the allocation of an amount of RO 100,000 for Corporate Social Responsibility for the financial year ending 31st December 2020
- To ratify the donation made during this year to contribute in the efforts to combat Corona virus (Covid 19) for an amount of (RO 175,000) (Annexure 5).
- To appoint statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31st December 2020 and determine their fees.
- To elect the Board of Directors for a new term of office (from the shareholders and/or non-shareholders). Any person wishing to be elected to the Board of Directors may fill out the nomination form that can be obtained from the company's head office. The completed form should be delivered to the company's head office at least 5 days prior to the Annual Ordinary General Meeting, not later than Thursday 28th May 2020.

Pursuant to the Company's articles of association and General Meeting regulations, through modern technology means issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- A juristic person, exclusively, has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date set for the Meeting until the end of the voting process on the day of the Meeting, and in the event that the shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be invalid, and he must re-vote again on the day of the Meeting.

Any questions relating to this Notice should be addressed to Mr. R. Panneerselvam (Telephone No. +968 24470000/24470102 or email: r.panneerselvam@nationalfinance.co.om)

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisors



Sultanate's electricity production exceeds 4,000 GW per hour till February 2020

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's total electricity production until the end of February 2020 declined by 6.5 per cent to stood at 4,080.2 gigawatts (GW) per hour, compared to the end of the same period in 2019, which

stood at 4,365.6 GW per hour, according to the statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).
On the other hand, the water production of the Sultanate reached

446.1 million cubic metres till the end of December 2019, comprising an increase by 5.8 per cent, compared to the end of December 2018, which stood at 421.7 million cubic metres.

Omani company fabricates walk-in sterilisation kiosk

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT:Spurred by a wave of innovation sweeping across the Sultanate in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Suhar based Omani engineering firm has come up with a home-grown version of a 'Sterilisation Kiosk' designed for the external disinfection of individuals.

Placed outside a shopping mall, office building or mosque, for example, the walk-in style Sterilisation Kiosk can be used to deliver a fine spray of disinfectant liquid, thereby destroying any pathogen that may lurk on the clothes or person of the visitor before they enter a building.

The innovation is the handiwork of Triangle Engineering LLC, a manufacturing and services enterprises specialising in delivering state-of-the-art solutions, according to CEO Khalid al Jashmi.

"We came up with this sterilisation machine at the behest of a friend and specifically with the idea of keeping our staff creatively engaged during the period of the lockdown. So we studied the idea, put it down on paper, invited feedback from



fellow professionals, and finally fabricated it with our own resources at our workshop," Al Jashmi told the Observer.

The fully-functional prototype is fitted with a sensor that activates a spray system as soon as it detects the presence of a person at the entrance of the machine. Nozzles fitted on the roof and sides of the kiosks deliver a mist of any disinfectant deemed safe for humans.

While the prototype is destined for the premises of a major petrochemicals firm based in Suhar – a 'gesture of gratitude from us to them for standing by us through challenging times' – Al Jashmi says the company is now ready to commercialise the innovation.

With countries else-

NEW INNOVATION:

Life-size contraption has sensors and nozzles for delivering disinfecting mist that sanitises people before they enter a public building or private office

where in the GCC preparing to install sterilisation kiosks as part of their efforts to reopen their economies after an extended lockdown, the entrepreneur sees the potential for Omani companies and businesses to adopt similar measures in the Sultanate as well.

"We see the potential for these sterilisation machines to be used at the entrances of work-sites in the desert, outside shopping centres and mosques, public buildings, and so. Based on specific customer requirements, these machines can be upgraded to include thermal cameras for body temperature reading, UV lighting, and other fixtures.

Our goal, on the one hand, is to support the Omani government in its fight against the pandemic, while on the other hand, is to keep our talented workforce productively engaged during this difficult time."

Omani firms weigh implications of new VAT decision

FROM PAGE 12

In comments to the Observer, the tax expert warned that the move is likely to have an effect on the cash flow requirements for businesses in Saudi Arabia that import goods from Oman. "The former will now be required to pay import VAT at 15 per cent at the time of importation, unless they make changes to their supply chain.

It may also impact the profitability of businesses in Oman that procure goods from Saudi Arabia that do not qualify for zero rating/export and, therefore, attract Saudi Arabian VAT. In the absence of a tested or fully operative non-resident business refund scheme in Saudi Arabia, the VAT in that country in this case would become a cost."

Additionally, the decision may impact the profitability of businesses in Oman having projects in Saudi Arabia liable to Saudi Arabian VAT under contracts where the prices agreed are inclusive of all taxes. In the current circumstances, these unanticipated pressures on cash flows and/or profitability are capable of impacting the trade patterns between the two countries and the rest of the world.

The UAE, for its part, has said it has no immediate plans to follow suit. "This creates a disparity in the VAT rates in the region with UAE and Bahrain imposing VAT at 5 per cent and Oman, Kuwait and Qatar still preparing to implement VAT, and at the same time opens up potential arbitrage opportunities for businesses," Lekhak pointed out.

BUSINESS



Mazda: Beyond luxury lies 'Platinum'

MUSCAT: With the iconic Mazda Platinum series now available in Oman, Mazda presents discerning drivers in the Sultanate with a breathtaking vision of motor-ing beauty, and an exclusive new realm of luxury.

The Platinum series shifts drivers into a world which sees Mazda's highest specification interior and exterior enhancements combining with all the performance excellence and familiar luxury touches that come with the current CX3, CX5, Mazda 6 and CX9 range of models.

As the Japanese vehicle manufacturer states, "Beyond luxury lies Platinum".

The result is a vehicle that is the ultimate manifestation of the Mazda design ethos, with which owners can express a powerful statement of personal character inspired by the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai – the exploration of "what your reason is to be" – and which in Mazda terms is a profound recognition of "what drives you".

The Platinum series indulges drivers and their passengers with Napa leather seat upholstery, full seat adjustment and memory options, real wood panelling around the interior, frameless inner mirror, safety and performance additions like Smart City Brake Support Rear (SCBSR) technology and 360 degree viewing cameras, as well as other exquisite design features.

While the Platinum series' enhancements shift the vehicle into a new realm of luxury, each model continues to be powered by Mazda's ground-breaking SKYACTIV Technology, meaning that they continue to deliver exceptional all-round performance on the road.

Direct import of goods boosts commercial activity in Oman



MUSCAT: The direct import has helped in revitalisation of economic and commercial activities in the Sultanate. It also brought diversity in supplies and boosted price competitiveness, according to officials who lauded measures taken by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in cooperation with port and other concerned authorities to support direct import operations to deal with situation arising out the COVID-19 pandemic.

Besides helping with direct imports of vegetables, fruits, and other basic goods, the measures enabled businesses, owners of small and medium enterprises, companies and local agents to import the products directly from their countries of origin. It gave local consumers lots of choices, varieties of products all competitive prices. Dr Ahmed bin Mohammad al Abri, Chief Executive Officer of Marafi said: "The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Marafi are partners in all operations. These ports are windows which stimulate and facilitate import and export of raw materials and various

Marafi develops services of its ports and motivates the general dealers to use them for direct import and export. It has packages of incentives which include price reductions and ease of clearance.

products. The activity of these ports has left positive impact on the commercial and industrial activity in the Sultanate.

Marafi develops services of its ports and motivates the general dealers to use them for direct import and export. It has packages of incentives which include price reductions and ease of clearance.

The company has recently developed direct lines to support the local market of vegetables, fruits, food-stuffs, and so on.

Dr Ahmad bin Abdul Karim al Houthi, OCCI Board Member and head of the Chamber's Economic Committee, said: The direct import started on time after completion of all the basic facilities which the Sultanate needed. They include ports in the south or north of the country as

well as the government and private storage facilities to store large quantities coming to the Sultanate from different countries of the world. It is also necessary to encourage Omani factories to produce more good products and export to various parts of the world. Therefore, it is also important to find markets where we can re-export, as we do for Yemeni, Somali, Djibouti, Iranian and Pakistani and other markets as well as for countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Said bin Abdullah al Kharousi, Chairman - Omani Farmers Association, said: Direct import is very important as it reduces the cost and guarantees the arrival of high quality product, particularly during exceptional circumstance. It also helps keep Omani ports operational leading to growth in the economy. We should also look into the imported products with the view what we can produce locally and what farming we can do for certain vegetables and fruits. With this we will be able to keep flow of wealth within the Sultanate.



Madayn offers new package of investment incentives

MUSCAT: The decision by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) to amend its investment regulations now enables its industrial cities to enhance their competitiveness and give further impetus for investors, business owners and SMEs — local and overseas — to localise their businesses, according to Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO (pictured).



“This decision comes in continuity of Madayn’s role to diversify income sources and support the national economy through providing a set of incentives that contributes to the advancement of the business environment in the Sultanate,” Al Hasani said. He pointed out that the new incentives open the way for real estate investors and developers to invest in Madayn’s industrial cities and allow them to build, operate, manage, sell and lease industrial and commercial buildings and units. The incentives also include allowing investors to rent buildings and facilities that are built on the leased lands; and the investors may involve

new partners in the lease contract with Madayn, provided that the activity of the new partner complements the activity of the current investor. The amendments on the provisions of the investment

regulations also include reduction of up to 70 per cent of the fees for licensing the activity in the industrial cities.

The amendments also comprise granting activity licenses for those holding Riyadh certificate from the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, as well as reducing the fees for licensing the activity for small businesses that have not obtained Riyadh certificate. The amendments also include granting a new development license, development license/sub developer, and development license/operator.

Cumulative investment in Madayn’s various industrial cities has touched RO 6.69 billion by the end of 2019, marking an increase of RO 123 million compared to the volume of investments at the end of 2018.

Impact of coronavirus on Britain’s retail sector



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

Even before the full effect of this deadly virus is known — and that’s still a long while away — it has already made a severe impact on UK’s retail sector, among various others. Shops on struggling high streets and shopping centres may never reopen as retailers are forced into a more rapid retreat by coronavirus, one of Britain’s biggest landlords has warned.

Chief executive of British Land, the FTSE 100 giant behind a £4.8bn retail portfolio covering a vast area from north to south of the UK, Chris Grigg, said the outbreak would act as a “stress test” for retailers facing lengthy closures. Grigg said the mantra for many will be “never let a good crisis go to waste”. He said: “What you will see is that in less good places, retail won’t reopen. People are just going to say, ‘I’m sorry but we’re going because we now know what physical (stores) does for us and what it doesn’t.’”

Grigg’s comments follow forecasts from the Centre for Retail Research that more than 20,000 shops could close this year as COVID-19 accelerates the rise of online shopping. Some 235,000 jobs could be lost. “There aren’t enough retailers, they have got too much space and you can’t really easily transform that,” he added. While offices form the majority of British Land’s £11.7bn portfolio, barely one in 10 of its stores are open due to the lockdown.

The company has suspended its dividend until further notice while it negotiates with tenants over rent deferrals and has temporarily agreed to scrap rents altogether for its smaller occupiers. The spread of coronavirus has made the situation worse for the struggling UK high street stores that had seen a drop in footfall from the start of the year.

Even prior to the impact of the virus, in the first two months of the year, 18,248 retail jobs were lost and 1,211 shops closed according to the Centre for Retail Research.

However, shopping centres and retail parks remained popular, in part, because of their covered environment and ease of access.

The world’s second-largest clothes retailer, H&M, has said COVID-19 would accelerate the transformation to online shopping. Sales at the Swedish-based firm almost halved by April and it is talking of “tens of thousands” of lay-offs. Chief executive Helena Helmersson said: “The situation cannot be compared with anything we have ever experienced.” H&M has suspended its dividend, slashed investments, cut working hours for tens of thousands of employees and is in talks over extra credit facilities.

BUSINESS

US HOUSE PASSES \$3 TN CORONAVIRUS AID BILL

WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives on Friday narrowly approved a \$3 trillion bill crafted by Democrats to provide more aid for battling the coronavirus and stimulating a faltering economy rocked by the pandemic.

By a vote of 208-199 Democrats won passage of a bill that Republican leaders, who control the Senate, have vowed to block despite some Republican support for provisions aimed at helping state and local governments.

Republican President Donald Trump has promised a veto if it were to reach his desk.

However, the Democrats' measure could trigger a new round of negotiations with congressional Republicans and Trump, who have been talking about the need for new business liability protections in the age of coronavirus or additional tax cuts.

Democrats oppose both of those ideas.

Following the vote, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer announced that May



Police officers wearing face masks guard the US Capitol Building in Washington. — Reuters

27-28 would be set aside for voting on some sort of coronavirus-related bill if one is ready by then.

He provided no details on the contents of such a bill.

The US economy has suffered a devastating blow from the coronavirus outbreak. Some 36.5 million people — or more than one in five workers — in the United States have filed for unemployment since the crisis began.

The 1,800-page relief bill passed on Friday, called the Heroes Act, would extend to all corners of the

US economy. It includes \$500 billion in aid to struggling state governments, another round of direct payments to individuals and families to help stimulate the economy, and hazard pay for health care workers and others on the front line of the pandemic.

"Many of them have risked their lives to save lives and many of them may lose their jobs" as state and local government revenues plummet during the crisis, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said during a day-long debate. — Reuters

Fed warns of 'significant' financial vulnerabilities from pandemic



A cyclist passes the US Federal Reserve in Washington. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve warned Friday that the financial sector faces "significant" vulnerabilities due to the coronavirus pandemic, as businesses and households grapple with fragile finances for the foreseeable future.

In its latest report on financial stability, the Fed said the global pandemic imposed sweeping risks. While policy actions from the Fed and others have helped bolster the economy, and the banking system has withstood the initial downturn, the report warned of major risks if the pandemic proves lengthy or more severe than anticipated.

— Reuters

JC Penney files for bankruptcy protection

NEW YORK: JC Penney Co Inc filed for bankruptcy protection on Friday with plans to permanently close some stores and also explore a possible sale, making it the latest brick-and-mortar retailer to crumble as prolonged store closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic drive a final stake through long-troubled businesses.

The US department store chain, known for selling family apparel, cosmetics and jewelry at roughly 850 locations, said it reached an agreement with existing lenders for \$900 million of debtor-in-possession financing to aid operations while it navigates bankruptcy proceedings in federal court in Corpus Christi,



Shoppers enter and leave the JC Penney department store in North Riverside, Illinois, US. — Reuters

Texas.

The loan consists of \$450 million in fresh financing,

the company said. The balance is made up of existing debt being "rolled up" to be

given the same legal status as the new funding that JC Penney obtained, people familiar with the matter said. The retailer said it had an additional \$500 million in cash on hand before the bankruptcy filing.

While JC Penney plans to reorganise and emerge from bankruptcy proceedings after eliminating several billion dollars of debt, it will also explore a sale as part of the terms of its new financing, the company said. Media reported that the company was nearing a bankruptcy filing and negotiating the financing.

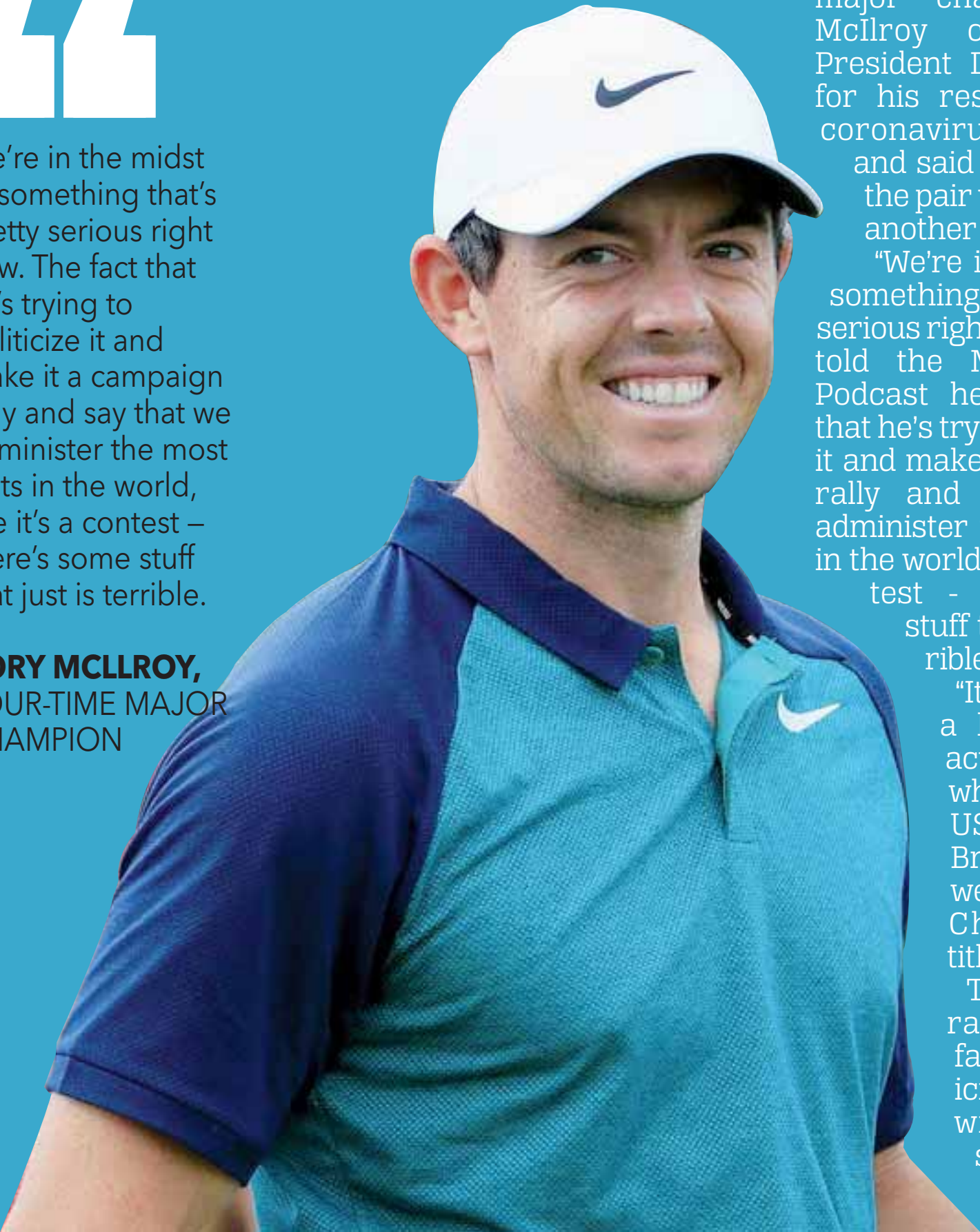
The company said it would begin closing some stores permanently in phases and would disclose further details soon. — Reuters

McIlroy slams Trump for coronavirus response

“

We’re in the midst of something that’s pretty serious right now. The fact that he’s trying to politicize it and make it a campaign rally and say that we administer the most tests in the world, like it’s a contest – there’s some stuff that just is terrible.

RORY MCLLOY,
FOUR-TIME MAJOR CHAMPION



NEW YORK: Four-time major champion Rory McIlroy criticized US President Donald Trump for his response to the coronavirus outbreak, and said it was unlikely the pair would meet for another round of golf.

“We’re in the midst of something that’s pretty serious right now”, McIlroy told the McKellar Golf Podcast here. “The fact that he’s trying to politicize it and make it a campaign rally and say that we administer the most tests in the world, like it’s a contest - there’s some stuff that just is terrible.

“It’s not the way a leader should act”, said McIlroy, who has won the US Open and British Open as well as two PGA Championship titles.

The world’s top-ranked golfer faced fierce criticism for playing with Trump shortly after

the Republican president’s inauguration in 2017, but said the interaction was not an endorsement.

“The day that I did spend with him and others was very enjoyable”, said McIlroy, who is from Northern Ireland. “That doesn’t mean that I agree with everything or, in fact, anything that he says”.

Trump has played with several current and former pro golfers, including Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, 2016 US Open winner Dustin Johnson and 2017 PGA Championship winner Justin Thomas.

“I don’t know if he would want to play with me again after what I just said”, said McIlroy. “I probably wouldn’t again”.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

McIlroy, 31, is set to compete in a two-on-two, \$3 million charity skins match on Sunday to benefit COVID-19 relief, teaming up with Johnson against Rickie Fowler and Matthew Wolff. — **Reuters**

‘Almost inevitable athletes will get COVID-19’

NEW YORK: NCAA President Mark Emmert acknowledged on Friday that when college sports return, it is “almost inevitable” that some athletes will contract the coronavirus.

In an interview with CNN, Emmert said, “We have literally a half-million student athletes. We’ve got 1,100 different schools that participate in NCAA sports – 19,000 teams, not 32 (teams like the NFL). So, to me, it’s

not if a student comes down with the virus, it’s when.

I think it’s almost inevitable with those kinds of numbers.

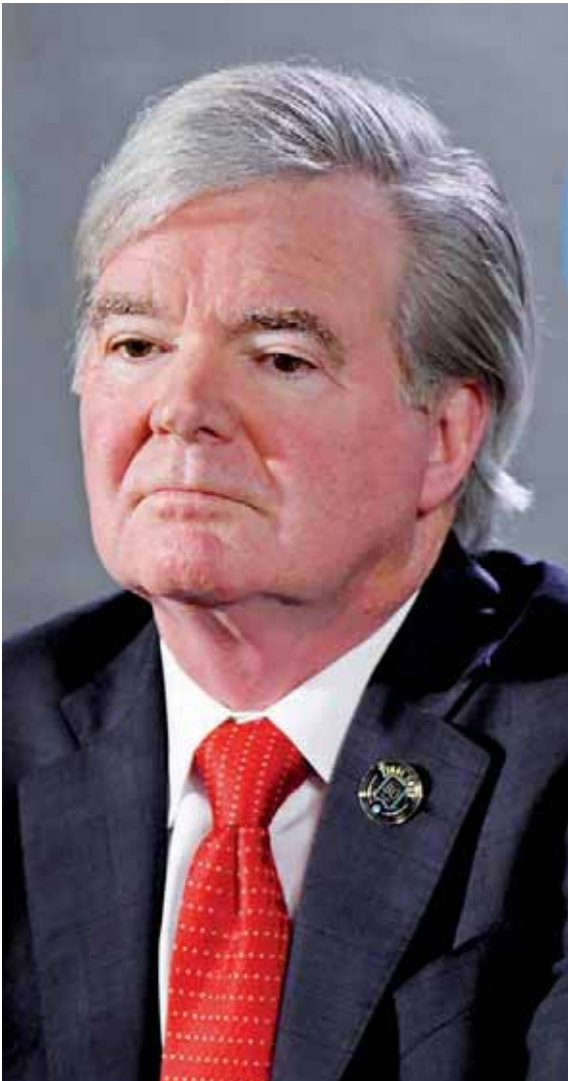
“And so you have to have in place the protocols for testing, for tracking symptoms, for tracking contact and the ability to quarantine individuals and those they’ve come in contact with when this occurs.

“Same thing with regular students. It’s impossible to believe that you can bring

40,000 students back to campus and all the faculty and staff and not have somebody sooner or later contract the virus. So it’s how you react to it that’s going to be critical”.

The NCAA’s request to conduct large-scale COVID-19 testing has been passed along to “everyone from President Trump on down”, according to Emmert. He added that he is optimistic such testing will occur.

— **Reuters**



SPORTS

ATHLETICS CHIEF SAYS SPORT COULD REBEL AGAINST PANDEMIC RULES



NEW YORK: World athletics chief Sebastian Coe has warned that sports leaders may rebel against pandemic restrictions as they struggle to get major events back on track.

Coe expressed the frustrations felt by many sports chiefs when he said it was crucial to get top events started again even as the coronavirus takes a mounting toll around the world.

"We have to be guided by what governments, the WHO and local authorities are telling us, but we also have to make our own decisions and

make sensible compromises", Coe, 63, told Indian television channel WION.

"There may be a moment when a sport decides that it is ready to stage events even if it is not always with the approval of those authorities. "We will be respectful, but we have to make decisions in the best interest of our sport and our athletes", the British former track legend insisted.

Athletics like other key sports has seen its calendar and finances badly hit by the postponement of this year's Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The world athletics championships planned for 2021 have had to be pushed back by a year to allow for a provisional plan to stage the Tokyo Games next year instead. Coe said no one could give a cast-iron assurance that the Olympics will be held.

"Speculating about something that is over a year away is unhelpful", said the former chief of the 2012 London Olympics.

"We are trying to give the athletes some clarity about the calendar and speculation from scientists and medical experts does not help. "I hope that the pandemic will be contained so that we don't have to cancel the Games". — **AFP**

WE HAVE TO BE GUIDED BY WHAT GOVERNMENTS, THE WHO AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE TELLING US, BUT WE ALSO HAVE TO MAKE OUR OWN DECISIONS AND MAKE SENSIBLE COMPROMISES

Sebastian Coe,
World Athletics chief

ALL EYES ON GERMANY AS BUNDESLIGA FOOTBALL RETURNS

FRANKFURT: The Bundesliga returns to action on Saturday with the resumption of the first top European league since the coronavirus lockdown watched closely to see if it provides a blueprint for other competitions.

Matches will be played behind closed doors and players and coaches, who have been in quarantine for the past week, must follow stringent hygiene guidelines.

In the highlight of six matches on Saturday, Borussia Dortmund host Schalke 04 in the Ruhr Derby at 1330 GMT, a fixture that would normally attract an 82,000 crowd to



Signal Iduna Park.

Professional football returned to western Europe earlier in the day as the second-tier Bundesliga 2 resumed with four matches at 1100

GMT. South Korean Lee Jae-Sung scored the first league goal in over two months when he gave Holstein Kiel a third-minute lead at Regensburg.

Although Germany has suffered far fewer deaths from coronavirus than other large European countries, it is still too dangerous for crowds to return.

On Sunday, Bayern Munich will resume their quest for an eighth successive Bundesliga title when they play in the capital against Union Berlin.

Bayern were four points clear at the top of the table when the season was suspended in March. An exciting Dortmund team featuring Norwegian striker Erling Braut Haaland and highly-rated English forward Jadon Sancho are in second place. — **AFP**

SPORTS

SQSA, TRAINING GROUND FOR FUTURE OMANI ATHLETES

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Sports Academy is one of the huge national sports projects which is run by the Ministry of Sports Affairs through the Directorate of Sports Development and Welfare.

One of the main roles of the academy is to discover potential athletes and provide them with the right technical and scientific follow up starting from early junior ages until reaching the national team level in direct cooperation with the sports associations, committees, youth training centres and medical sports centre.

Dr Mourad Fadhloun, the technical expert at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Academy, told Oman Daily Observer that the Academy implemented a proper scientific method from the first stages of exploring the potential athletes.

"The second step will be developing the selected junior athletes technically



at a well organised programme represented by Youth Training Centres.

After the graduation of the athletes from the junior training programme, they will be able to join any of the national teams through direct coordination between the Youth Training Centres and the related associations and committees.

The technical staff of Sultan Qaboos Sports Academy will monitor the



progress of the selected athletes in different associations and committees including the evaluation of their participation at domestic and overseas events.

Based on the performance level of the athlete with the national teams, the concerned technical staff of the academy will decide on ability of the athlete to benefit from the Sports Support Fund. The fund will provide a dedi-

cated budget on preparation of the player for the high profile events including the Olympic Games and continental events in direct cooperation with the associations and committees," he added.

The Tunisian sports expert stated that there is a proper methodology and many criteria on selection of the potential athletes. Several physical movement international tests will be done under direct supervision of qualified coaches and supported with assistant Omani technical team.

For instance, there are some special tests for athletics including: Peak anaerobic power, Eccentric utilisation ratio and Reactive Strength Index. Moreover, Oman Sports Academy provided the necessary workshops for all the coaches and the assistant technical teams to prepare them on doing the tests and train them with right techniques and rules to discover the future stars," he explained.

AHF announces new dates for U-19 handball championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Asian Handball Federation (AHF) announced the new dates for the 17th edition of Asian Under-19 Handball Championship which will be held in Iran during October 7 to 15 instead of the July 10 to 21.

AHF requested all the members including Oman Handball Association (OHA) to send a confirmation letter on participation at the Championship which will also act as qualifier for IHF Men's World U-19 Championship in 2021.

OHA approved previously the participation of



the Oman Under-19 Handball team at the 17th edition of Asian Under-19 Handball Championship.

Coach Adil al Hasani will preside over the technical staff of the national team (U-19) and Bader al Tamimi as assistant coach while Jamal al Dugehshi as team manger.

Oman hosted before two years of the previous edition of the same championship in Salalah with participation of 14 teams including Japan, China, South Korea, Lebanon, Qatar, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Chinese Taipei, Iran, India, Yemen and the Sultanate Oman.

South Korea had lifted the title after beating Japan in the final clash 26-25. Bahrain had positioned in third place as they had edged Saudi Arabia 29-28 in the third/ fourth match playoff. Hosts Oman had ended their campaign in the championship at the eighth place as they suffered a loss against Qatar 25-23.

On the other hand, AHF defined the rescheduling of the Asian Under-16 Handball Championship. The new confirmed dates will be from October 24 until November 3 in Kazakhstan as it was postponed from August 15 until 26 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

SPORTS

LONDON: Watford manager Nigel Pearson has raised the possibility of a coronavirus-related death should the Premier League season resume amid the pandemic.

English top-flight teams could return to some type of training next week following a Premier League meeting on Monday where medical protocols will be voted on and there are plans to get matches going again by mid-June.

Pearson, however, has doubts about 'Project Restart' with much of Britain still in lockdown due to COVID-19.

"God forbid we have a fatality," he told The Times. "People are closing their eyes to the threat."

"Yes, we would like to restart it but it's got to be

safe. We should be cautious. To ignore possibilities is foolhardy. It's about safeguarding people's health."

Pearson, whose Watford side are presently above the relegation zone on goal difference alone, added: "We have to try to believe (British Government) advice that we're being given that we've reached the peak but there's still an incredible number of people losing their lives through this."

"The death toll in the UK is anything between 33,000 and 38,000. That's filling our stadium and then filling it

half again. It's a sobering thought."

Meanwhile Norwich captain Grant Hanley has become the latest Premier League player to express concerns about a resumption of the season, with Manchester City's Raheem Sterling, Tottenham's Danny Rose, on-loan at Newcastle this season, and Brighton's Glenn Murray having already voiced their worries.

"I think the overall feeling is that players have got concerns," Hanley told Sky Sports.

"Looking at the protocols for going back to training, I think that's probably

fair enough. But it's just the next step after that, like where do we go from there? In terms of going back into contact training and games.

"My missus is pregnant and she's due at the start of July, so there's obviously worries there for myself. — AFP

PEARSON FEARFUL OF FATALITY IF PREMIER LEAGUE SEASON RESUMES



God forbid we have a fatality. People are closing their eyes to the threat. Yes, we would like to restart it but it's got to be safe. We should be cautious. To ignore possibilities is foolhardy. It's about safeguarding people's health.

NIGEL PEARSON,
WATFORD
MANAGER

