

Oman betters rank in global human development index

MUSCAT: The Sultanate has been ranked 5th in the Gulf region and 47th in the Arab world on the Global Human Development Report, 2019. The index published by the United Nations Development Programme covers 189 countries.

Said bin Rashid al Qatbi, Director-General of Social Sectors at the Secretariat General of the Supreme Council for Planning, said the Sultanate has advanced one rank compared with the 2018 report thus positioning itself among countries with high human development ranking.

Al Qatbi noted that the Sultanate’s advancement in the Human Development Index (HDI) is attributed to an increase in both life expectancy and mean years of schooling (MYS) and per capita income which increased to 37,039 in 2019 from 36,290.

The Sultanate has seen improvement in all of major indicators scoring 0.834 points in a 0-1 scale which measures the countries’ average achievements in the three major dimensions of human development namely: Long and healthy life, education and standard of living, Al Qatbi said.

— ONA



CLASSROOM COMES HOME

MAJORITY OF PARENTS SUPPORT REMOTE LEARNING BUT SOME ARE WARY ABOUT CYBER SECURITY AND COSTS

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, MAY 3

As educational institutions all across the Sultanate remain closed due to the COVID-19, most schools have dived headlong into online learning.

Although decisions about the pedagogy came in a rush following pressure from educators, parents and students, the question now being asked is how good is the new learning environment?

While there are varying opinions over traditional and online learning, some surveys suggest that the remote education is going to accelerate changes in the education industry.

For those of who were trained to teach face-to-face classes till now, it is time to experience online education experiment while students who shied away from direct interactions can foster remote instruction.

In a first of its kind survey among teachers, a whopping 87 per cent felt that it was exceedingly appropriate for them to teach students through remote technology.

“Though majority of teaching fraternity misses the physical presence of their students, teachers’ ability to adapt to the new mode of teaching has been phenomenal despite the fact that they needed to spend at least 5-6 extra hours of preparation

for each such session,” a senior official in the Board of Directors of Indian Schools revealed.

School Management Committees across all Indian schools in Oman have been proactive in putting the e-learning strategies in place from the moment the closure of educational institutions was announced in the Sultanate following the COVID-19 pandemic.

TURN TO P2

10
Ramadhan
Monday
4/5/2020

Prayer times

	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:10	04:15	04:40
DHUHR:	12:09	12:13	12:25
ASR:	03:34	03:36	03:36
MAGHRIB:	06:41	06:44	06:49
ISHA:	07:57	08:00	08:01

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Heavy rains in various parts of Sultanate

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Heavy rains were reported from various governorates of the Sultanate, especially South Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, and Dhofar Governorate on Sunday.

Rains were also reported in some areas as weather prediction suggested rain in Seih A'Rasiyat, Darbat, Taqah, Barka, Saham, Bahla, Yanqul, Ibra, and Shinas, among others.

Oman Meteorology had issued heavy rains alert in Dakhiliyah and South al Batinah from 2pm until 8pm on Sunday.

"Heavy rains in Dakhiliyah and South al Batinah governorates will be accompanied by active downwind and hailstorm, which will lead to the flowing of wadis and low horizontal visibility," an official



at Oman Meteorology said.

Oman Meteorology added that there has been a movement and intensification of clouds over the governorates of Musandam and Dhofar.

It also said there will be a possibility of rains in the governorates of Buraimi, Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, North and South Al Batinah, Muscat, and North and South East with separate

rain, with thundershowers in the coming days.

According to the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre, a trough of low pressure (Al Brakat Trough) will affect the Sultanate between May 2 and May 4.

The weather event will be associated with moderate to fresh southeasterly wind over governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar which will cause rising of dust.

85 NEW COVID-19 CASES REPORTED

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday announced 85 new positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate, of whom 21 are Omanis and 64 expatriates. This brings the total number of positive cases in the country to 2,568, in addition to 12 deaths.

The ministry also pointed out that 750 cases have recovered.

The MoH calls upon all to adhere to the health isolation procedures (in a room with attached toilet), as the isolated person is served from outside the room as per the guidelines. — ONA

Classroom comes home

FROM PAGE 1

"What appeared to be the most encouraging sign is the positive feedback we received from the parent fraternity regarding their satisfaction over the entire process of e-learning initiatives of Indian Schools," said the board official. The survey was conducted recently among teachers and parents of Indian school students.

More than 93.8 per cent of parents have expressed their utmost satisfaction over online teaching.

According to him, the remote teaching would continue till the time normalcy

is restored. However, some parents in a joint letter addressed to the Ministry of Education, expressed their reservations about the online classes although they are not against the new system of learning, pointing out the security issues involved in it.

According to them, some security breaches and unwanted video pop up during online classes.

"We do not want our kids to be exposed to any restricted content," they said in the letter asking whether any official give an assurance against security breach or loss of data.

They also lament that

their access to Internet is limited. Similarly, they say, "online classes for siblings also make it difficult as a parent to monitor them together and provide them with the laptops, phones at the same time."

Responding to their concern, the official clarified that such instances were very few and were at the start of the transition to online medium.

"Most schools are now utilising more secure and paid applications. Constructive feedback is taken on regular basis and improvement measures are done as soon as possible," he said.



Tender Notice

Jusoor Foundation is pleased to announce a tender for the construction services for Al Buraimi Science and Innovation Centre - Al Buraimi Governorate

One of the Corporate Social Responsibility Projects of OQ company, executed through Jusoor Foundation, the social arm of Sohar Aluminum, Vale, and OQ

Tender Fees

25/- OMR

Tender No.

50/2020

Companies Grade

Specialized companies in constructions with grade 2 and above.

Date of Tender Distribution:

Monday 4/5/2020

Last Date for Purchasing Documents:

Monday 11/5/2020 1:00 PM

Date for Site Visit:

Tuesday 19/5/2020 10:00 AM

Date of Tender Submission:

Thursday 4/6/2020 4:00 PM

Procedures



1 Purchase the tender documents by paying the fees to the bank account: Bank Muscat - account number 0423046447740016 and send the bank deposit receipt via email to obtain the project tender documents.

2 Submit the tender as an electronic copy signed and stamped on the original form prepared for the bids and on the attached quantities table in two separate emails, one for the technical offer and one for the financial offer tender@jusoor.om

► Jusoor Foundation reserves the right to accept or reject all or any of the offers that do not comply with the above conditions, extend the bid opening, and amend the bid document.

► Tender fee is not refundable.
► Tender Committee decision is final and binding.

For inquiries please contact us:
26762473 – 98230445

www.jusoor.om



Tender Notice

Jusoor Foundation is pleased to announce a tender for the construction services for Ibri Science and Innovation Centre - Al Dhahirah Governorate

One of the Corporate Social Responsibility Projects of OQ company, executed through Jusoor Foundation, the social arm of Sohar Aluminum, Vale, and OQ

Tender Fees

25/- OMR

Tender No.

46/2020

Companies Grade

Specialized companies in constructions with grade 2 and above.

Date of Tender Distribution:

Monday 4/5/2020

Last Date for Purchasing Documents:

Monday 11/5/2020 1:00 PM

Date for Site Visit:

Sunday 17/5/2020 10:00 AM

Date of Tender Submission:

Thursday 4/6/2020 4:00 PM

Procedures



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TRC STUDIES THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON OMANI FAMILIES



MUSCAT: As part of monitoring and analysing social changes in the Sultanate, the Social Observatory Research Programme of The Research Council (TRC) has conducted a seminar under the theme, 'The Omani family in light of the COVID-19 crisis' to understand how Omani families are facing the pandemic from the social and psychological standpoints.

The seminar was carried out virtually by Dr Said al Dhafri, Director of the Social Observatory, and managed by Safiya al Hashmi, Research Specialist at the Social Observatory, with the participation of a group of academics, specialists and professionals from various institutions.

The discussion revolved around the most prominent psychological, social, family, educational, economic and health challenges faced by Omani families during the COVID-19 crisis.

Sayyida Dr Taghreed al Said, Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), mentioned that one of the biggest challenges members of the Omani families face during this pandemic is being confined to their homes at all times. This includes the struggle of balancing personal and professional lives in the same space, managing distance learning, and coping with the challenges of working and studying at home, especially those in the 12th grade.

With regard to the psychological challenges, Dr Muna al Shukaili, Paediatric and Adolescent Consultant Psychiatrist at Al Masarra Hospital, indicated that feelings of anxiety, stress and fear might rise among individuals due to the pandemic, especially fear of being infected or losing a member of a family to the virus. She added that social isolation or physical distance may cause psychological pressure on people due to the lack of human communication.

Dr Nasser Abdelrasheed, Associate Professor of Psychological Counselling at Dhofar University, claimed that the effects of the pandemic psychologically depends greatly on the personality of the individual and the quality of life of his family, as some individuals may have increased negative influence, showing signs of tension and anxiety in an exaggerated manner, while others are able to control themselves due to having good

mental health.

As for social challenges, Dr Nasser al Jahwari, a cultural attaché at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the United Arab Emirates, stated that social distancing is the biggest challenge for Omani families, especially the lack of family gatherings and the inability to attend weddings, funerals, religious gatherings and so on.

THE SEMINAR WAS CARRIED OUT VIRTUALLY BY DR SAID AL DHAFRI, DIRECTOR OF THE SOCIAL OBSERVATORY, AND MANAGED BY SAFIYA AL HASHMI, RESEARCH SPECIALIST AT THE SOCIAL OBSERVATORY, WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF A GROUP OF ACADEMICS, SPECIALISTS AND PROFESSIONALS FROM VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS

With family challenges, Adnan al Farsi, Director of the Technical Secretariat of the National Committee for Family Affairs, added that some individuals will find it difficult to follow the instructions of the Supreme Committee with regard to the rules of social distancing; however, despite the difficulty, he stated that it is important for Omanis to follow the rules in order to overcome COVID-19.

For economic challenges, Dr Mohammed al Mamari, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs at Ibra College of Technology, mentioned that the challenges in this sector includes stopping small and medium projects whose owners depend heavily on their income, raising prices, especially masks and sterilisers, laying off some employees from their work, and many more.

For educational challenges, Prof Abdullah Ambusaidi, Professor of Curriculum and Teaching Methods of Science and Dean of Deanship

of Postgraduate Studies at SQU, claimed that pandemic has affected the educational sector on a national level. Due to the suspension of schools, it has led the country to move towards e-learning, in which both the teachers and parents play the role of a teacher at home.

Dr Maha al Ani, Director of the Student Counselling Center at SQU, pointed out that this crisis helped to highlight many behavioural problems of students, as family members sit for extended periods of time at home, allowing them to notice problems that they did not identify before, such as issues in the evaluation level of the students, the student's vision level, and many more.

Regarding the health challenges, Dr Muna al Saadoon, Member of the State Council and Dean of College of Medicine and Health Sciences, SQU, maintained that all health institutions must take preventive measures for this pandemic, such as wearing masks, using sterilisers, measuring temperature as well as practice physical distance while dealing with patients. She added that other health challenges include the fear of individuals of being exposed to the virus by going to the hospital when facing other medical concerns as well as the rescheduling of appointments and non-urgent operations for patients.

Furthermore, Dr Ali al Adwani, Educational Researcher at the Ministry of Education and a visiting professor at the University of Nizwa, stated that another health challenge is the illusion of being infected with the virus, which resulted in frequent visits to health centres and hospitals to detect the outcome of the disease, causing more burden to health institutions. He added that due to being confined to their homes and thus being consumed with TV and electronics more, children are more likely to develop loss of vision and obesity, causing an increase in diabetes and some endocrine diseases. — ONA

MoH opens blood donation centre

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health represented by the Department of Blood Banks Services has designated Al Seeb Stadium in the Wilayat of Seeb as a site for receiving citizens and residents wishing to donate blood, to supplement the Central Blood Bank during the remaining days of the holy month of Ramadhan.

The opening of an additional venue for blood donation emphasises the significance of this humanitarian deed as it triggers wider number of donors during Ramadhan.

Recognising that blood can save numerous cases requiring blood transfusion, the donors will be received daily as from Monday (May 4) from 8 pm to 11 pm during Ramadhan. Those who wish to donate blood must schedule a prior appointment by sending a WhatsApp message to 94555648. — ONA

New COVID-19 Outreach Centre attracts residents



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The new COVID-19 Outreach Centre for expatriates, which was opened on Sunday in Maabela Industrial Area in the Wilayat of Seeb, evoked good response from the residents around Seeb.

The expatriates who suspected COVID-19 symptoms lined up to get themselves tested and diagnosed for the same.

Ideally located within the Ministry of Heritage and Culture complex at the Seeb Industrial Area, this centre is the fifth of its kind opened by the Min-

istry of Health (MoH).

The other four testing centres that the MoH has employed to test people for COVID-19 are the visa medical centres in Darsait, Rusayl and Seeb Shiradi, and outreach clinic in Ghala.

More than 100 patients can be accommodated inside the centre at a time keeping the social distancing conditions.

It's open on all days except Friday, from 9am to 1pm, and any foreigner suspecting to have any symptoms of COVID-19 can walk in here to get themselves tested and diagnosed for coronavirus

Ramadan Iftar Program

RAMADAN MUBARAK

THE OMAN CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

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

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

Omantel users cost 1 RO Send Donate to 90022	National Bank of Oman 1049337798001
Ooredoo users cost 1 RO Send Donate to 90909	Bank Dhofar 01040609090001

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OCO Headquarters : Muscat Governorate , Al Khuwair 33 , Street No. 47, next to Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque, or one of its branches :

 South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate 25541087 Sor / Al-Musallab	 North Al-Batinah Governorate 26864241 Sohar / Al-Musallab	 Musandam Governorate 26731588 Khasab / Al-Shawbuh	 Dhofar Governorate 23234735 Salalah / Al-Saada
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Ramadhan



REASSURING FAMILY BONDING

KABEER YOUSUF

This year's Ramadhan is certainly different. Fasting, suhoor, prayers and social gatherings have all changed.

One of the great messages of the holy month of Ramadhan is the command to believers to revisit their relations with their fellow human beings around and spread a fragrance of bonhomie.

"Islam attributes paramount importance to unity, sharing, give and take and enhancing human relations so that the race will live in peace and flourish setting models for the generations to come", said Hatim Abdussalam, an Islamic scholar.

There are no iftar gatherings this year. No lengthy prayers, mass supplications or are there any beautifully lit up mosques welcoming believers for 'itkaf' (remaining inside the mosque's with prayers and supplications overnight).

But there is definitely something that is getting nourished. It's the relationships between the family members who are more connected emotionally during social distancing period than ever before.

Distant families meet

on video calls share iftar recipes and tips for cooking a favourite dish while close family members are finding it an opportunity to build relationships stronger.

"This year's Ramadhan is certainly different", says Mohsin al Balushi, a senior official at SalamAir.

"It (fasting and iftar) might look like people being severed completely but on the other hand, they are connected even better than before", he expresses

ONE OF THE GREAT MESSAGES OF THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN IS THE COMMAND TO BELIEVERS TO REVISIT THEIR RELATIONS WITH THEIR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS AROUND AND SPREAD A FRAGRANCE OF BONHOMIE

his optimism.

Every evening, all his family members assemble in and around the kitchen of his parent's home cutting fruits, frying snacks and cooking dishes which were not there last year.

"And this is when we discuss all matters concerning our lives and we pay extra attention to each other's lives and that gives all of us a good sense of purpose", Mohsin being a top aviation official who was busy with corporate

iftars last year, admits.

According to him, most of his friends find this Ramadhan to stay with their own families, parents, wife and children whereas they were busy with outside iftars till last year.

"Those who used to break their fast at the mosque's are well taken care by the government which distributed food kits well before the beginning of the holy month", said Badr al Wahaibi, an SME entrepreneur.

Human bonds are revitalised with the food kits and supply of provisions which have been taking place over the past few weeks. Additionally, ready to eat foods are distributed at the iftar time at various nooks and corners of Muscat.

"The real messages embodied in Ramadhan are Piety, Caring and Sharing for the Needy. The importance of Ramadhan is primarily the revelation of the Holy versus of Quran to the mankind and the Powerful Nights of the final part of this month. The caring and sharing for less privileged, feeling and experiencing the hunger of others and celebration of the revelation of the Holy Quran are the real messages of Ramadhan", adds C M Najeeb, a social worker and a logistics officer on the importance of building bonds during Ramadhan.

FATWA

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

Question

If someone broke his fasting on the first day of Ramadhan as he did not know that the crescent has been sighted the day before, is it permissible to fast that day?

Answer

He should make up for the missed fast day of Ramadhan, without controversy. The Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "Do not fast until you see the crescent and do not break your fast until you see it." In fact, one cannot fast unless he observed the crescent of Ramadhan.

EUROPE PREPARES TO EASE LOCKDOWNS AS SIGNS OF PANDEMIC EBBING

ROME: European nations on Sunday prepared for further cautious easing of coronavirus restrictions following signs the pandemic may be slowing, with hard-hit Italy set to follow Spain in allowing people outside after weeks of confinement.

More than 243,000 people have been killed and 3.4 million infected worldwide by the virus, which has left half of humanity under some form of lockdown and pushed the global economy towards its worst downturn since the Great Depression.

With signs that the spread of the disease is coming under control, parts of Europe, Asia and the United States have begun to lift restrictions to try to inject life into economies crippled by weeks of closures and ease the pressure on populations weary of confinement.

After a two-month lockdown, Italians on Monday will be allowed to stroll in parks and visit relatives. Restaurants can open for takeaways and wholesale stores can resume business, but there was some confusion about the extent of the easing. Romans were doing aerobics on their rooftop terraces and exercising indoors on Sunday and the squares in the city centre were mostly empty on the last day Italians were obliged to remain within 200 metres of their homes.

“On the one hand, we’re super excited for the reopening, we’re already organising various activities the kids will be able to do with their grandparents outdoors, workshops in the garden, that sort of thing. The kids can’t wait to see them,”



A woman works out in Valencia, Spain, on Sunday during the hours allowed by the government to go out and exercise, for the first time since the beginning of a national lockdown to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease. — AFP

said Rome resident Marghe Lodoli, who has three children.

Italian authorities have said some preventative measures are still needed in a country that has the second-highest number of virus deaths in the world after the United States.

Several industries including automobile sector and construction have already restarted work.

But Italy’s 20 regions have imposed their own regulations, leading to some confusion over what people can and cannot do. Veneto and

Calabria lifted their lockdowns early and allowed bars and restaurants to open with outdoor tables.

Elsewhere in Europe, Germany will continue its easing on Monday, while Slovenia, Poland and Hungary will allow public spaces and businesses to partially reopen.

In another sign of life returning, Germany’s minister for the interior and sport said on Sunday he supports a resumption of the country’s football season this month as long as teams respect hygiene conditions.

The British government

Italy will follow Spain this week in allowing people out to exercise more as virus curbs are eased

will unveil its own “roadmap” to ease the country out of lockdown this week, after Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the country was “past the peak” of the outbreak. With health experts

warning the disease could hit hard once again, governments are trying to balance easing up restrictions to help battered economies against the risk of fresh outbreaks.

Despite moves to ease curbs across the globe, more than 4.6 billion people are still on some form of lockdown or obligation to stay confined at home.

Most governments are sticking to measures to control the spread of the virus - social distancing and masks in public -- and more testing to try to track infections even as they relax curbs on

movement.

Face masks will be mandatory on public transport starting on Monday in Spain, where people were allowed to go outdoors to exercise and walk freely on Saturday after a 48-day lockdown.

Even as some European countries gradually lift restrictions, officials in Moscow — the epicentre of the contagion in Russia — urged residents to stay home.

With cases increasing by several thousand each day, Russia is now the European country registering the most new infections. — AFP

Vienna Airport to offer coronavirus tests to avoid quarantine

ZURICH: Vienna Airport will offer onsite coronavirus testing from Monday to enable passengers entering Austria to avoid having to be quarantined for 14 days.

Passengers arriving at the airport have been required to present a health certificate showing a negative COVID-19 result which is no older than four days, or go into quarantine. From Monday passengers can have a molecular biological (polymerase chain reaction or PCR)

COVID-19 test at the airport, and get the result in two to three hours, the airport said. “Air travel, whether business journeys or urgent trips... will thus become safer and easier,” it added on Sunday.

Last month Emirates, in coordination with Dubai Health Authority (DHA), said it was the first airline to conduct on-site rapid COVID-19 tests for passengers.

Austrian quarantines that have already begun can be ended if the person is found

to be clear of COVID-19, Vienna Airport said. The airport tests, which cost 190 euros (\$209), can also be taken by passengers leaving Vienna to demonstrate their virus-free status at their destination.

Vienna Airport is operating scheduled flights to Doha, Dortmund, Duesseldorf, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Lisbon, Minsk and Sofia, as well as charter flights and business trips. It has landing bans in force from flights from high risk areas. — AFP

Kim did not have surgery, South says

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not undergo surgery during almost three weeks of absence from public life, a South Korean official said on Sunday, as the two Koreas exchanged gunfire at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the two sides.

The government official declined to provide reasons, but said speculative reports that Kim had had an operation, citing some differences in his leg movements, were untrue.

“Our assessment is that (Kim) did not undergo surgery,” the official, who declined to be identified, told reporters. Asked if media reports of Kim having undergone a simple medical treatment were also untrue, the official simply said: “Yes.”

North and South Korea exchanged gunfire around a rural guard post, raising tension a day after North Korean state media showed Kim visiting a factory, the first report of him making a public appearance since April 11.

Multiple gunshots were fired from North Korea towards a guard post in South Korea, the South’s

Joint Chiefs of Staffs (JCS) said in a statement.

South Korea responded by firing two shots towards North Korea, the JCS said. No casualties were reported. After weeks of intense speculation about Kim’s health and whereabouts, which included one report he had undergone cardiovascular surgery, North Korea’s official media published photographs and a report on Saturday that Kim had attended the completion of a fertiliser plant.

Kim was seen in photographs smiling and talking to aides at the ribbon-cutting ceremony and touring the plant. State TV footage showed Kim’s leg movements appearing stiff and jerky.

The authenticity of the photos, published on the website of the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper, could not be verified.

Reclusive North Korea for years pursued nuclear and missile programmes in defiance of U.N. Security Council sanctions. Talks between North Korea and the United States, highlighted by three meetings between Kim and US President Donald Trump, are at a standstill. Reuters. — AFP



Coronavirus sweeping through US prisons

KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI

A massive wave of coronavirus infections is blasting through the world’s largest prison population in the United States even as officials begin opening up their economies, saying the disease has plateaued. One prison in Marion, Ohio has become the most intensely infected institution across the country, with more than 80 per cent of its nearly 2,500 inmates, and 175 staff on top of that, testing

positive for COVID-19.

Coronavirus deaths are on the increase in jails and penitentiaries across the country, with officials having few options — they are unable to force adequate distancing in crowded cells and facing shortages of medical personnel and personal protective gear everywhere.

The threat to the 2.3 million-strong US prison population was seen last week in the death of Andrea

Circle Bear, a 30-year-old native American woman from South Dakota.

Pregnant when she was placed in a Texas federal prison in March on drug charges, she soon became sick with the disease and was placed on a ventilator, and gave birth by C-section. She remained on the ventilator and died weeks later.

Riots over inadequate protection and slow responses by prison authorities have

already taken place in prisons in Washington state and Kansas. COVID-19 outbreaks among prison officers meanwhile have made the institutions even harder to manage.

At the understaffed, undersupplied Lansing Correctional Facility in Kansas on Thursday, 15-year prison guard David Carter resigned, saying it was better to go without pay than risk his health and that of his

family. “I can no longer be associated with a facility that is a ticking time bomb,” he said in a resignation letter.

The Marion prison outbreak is believed only the tip of the iceberg. Because of the hodge-podge of prison management — federal, state, and local authorities have their own, and many are run by for-profit private companies — testing and reporting has been haphazard.

— AFP



Hunters Brian Van Nevel and Nathaniel Evans take picture together in a national forest near Taos, New Mexico, where they see larger numbers of turkey hunters this season as more people go into the mountains to stalk the birds during the coronavirus pandemic. — Reuters

Americans turn to hunting for food

ANDREW HAY

D avid Elliot first thought of shooting an elk to help feed family and friends back in January when the United States reported its first novel coronavirus case.

Elliot, emergency manager at Holy Cross Hospital in Taos, New Mexico, had always wanted to go big game hunting and, with the pandemic spreading, there seemed no better time to try to fill his freezer with free-range, super-lean meat.

So for the first time in his life, despite not owning a rifle or ever having hunted large animals, he put his name in for New Mexico’s annual elk permit draw.

With some US meat processors halting operations as workers fall ill, stoking fears of shortages, and people having more time on their hands and possibly less money due to shutdowns and layoffs, he is among a growing number of Americans turning to hunting for food, according to state data and hunting groups.

“I understand some people might be driven by like antlers

With some US meat processors halting operations as workers fall ill, stoking fears of shortages, and people having more time on their hands and possibly less money due to shutdowns and layoffs, growing number of Americans turning to hunting for food

or some sort of glory. I don’t want to do that,” said Elliot, 37, who received a prized permit to shoot a female elk in an area of Taos County where herds of the animal graze in vast plains studded with extinct volcanoes.

Elliot plans to borrow a rifle and maybe even a horse to carry the elk back to his vehicle after the hunt in November. “I want to make sure it’s a clean, humane shot, as much as possible, and get a bunch of food.”

Game and fish agencies from Minnesota to New

Mexico have reported an increase in either hunting licence sales, permit applications, or both this spring.

Indiana saw a 28% jump in turkey license sales during the first week of the season as hunters likely had more time to get out into the woods, said Marty Benson, a spokesman for the state’s department of natural resources.

Firearm manufacturers have reported sales increases, and the FBI carried out 3.74 million background checks in March, a record for any month.

That followed a 255,000 fall in the number of hunters between 2016 and 2020, based on US Fish and Wildlife Service license data, a 2% fall, as fewer young people took up the activity, hunting advocates say.

Hank Forester of Quality Deer Management Association expects a resurgence after many Americans saw empty meat shelves at the grocery store for the first time during March and April.

— Reuters

UK PM says doctors had plan in case he died

ANDREW PARSONS

D octors treating Boris Johnson for coronavirus prepared to announce his death after he was taken to intensive care, the British prime minister said on Sunday, in his first detailed comments about his illness.

“It was a tough old moment, I won’t deny it,” he was quoted as saying by the Sun on Sunday newspaper in an interview. “They had a strategy to deal with a ‘death of Stalin’-type scenario. “I was not in particularly brilliant shape and I was aware there were contingency plans in place. The doctors had all sorts of arrangements for what to do if things went badly wrong.”

Johnson, 55, first announced he had contracted COVID-19 on March 27 but maintained he had only mild symptoms. Yet he failed to shake the illness after a week of self-isolation.

He was taken to hospital as a precaution on April 5 for further tests but within 24 hours was moved to intensive care.

The Conservative party leader spent three days receiving “oxygen support”, and admitted after his discharge on April 12 that his fight with the virus “could have gone either way”.

But although he told the newspaper he did think “how am I going to get out of this?”, he did not think at any point he was going to die.

Johnson, who returned to work last Monday and became a father again when his fiancée Carrie Symonds gave birth on Wednesday, said he was given “litres and litres” of oxygen in hospital. — AFP

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STRONG UNDERPINNINGS

Executive regulations issued for PPP, privatisation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership (PAPP) held its first meeting of the year on Sunday, with Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Minister of Commerce and Industry, in the chair.

During the meeting, the powers and prerogatives of the Authority, as well as the general framework governing the procurement of projects under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model were approved. In addition, the Board endorsed a strategy for privatisation of a number of projects, along with the underlying business rationales for privatisation, i m p l e m e n t a t i o n methodologies, and accompanying timeframes.

The Authority also issued Executive Regulations for the Law of Privatisation and Public Private Partnership (PPP), which is an important step to ensure the proper implementation of the provisions of the Partnership and Privatisation Law.

The bylaw includes detailed provisions and precise procedures that frame the processes of privatisation and partnership projects in accordance with the provisions set out in the statutes. These Executive Regulations will be posted on the website of the Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership (www.papp.om).

A number of projects proposed under Tawazun (Offset) were discussed. It includes a conceptual



BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY FOR PRIVATISATION AND PARTNERSHIP HOLDS ITS FIRST MEETING FOR THIS YEAR AND ADOPTS A NUMBER OF STRATEGIES

proposal for establishing a multi-sensor direct satellite reception station to receive satellite images with integrated capabilities to receive data and remote sensing, processing and distributing them to users and raise the degree of geospatial capabilities, while

developing other products from satellite imagery.

The initiative will be pursued in cooperation with the National Survey Authority to support the growth of sophisticated industries in, among other areas, advanced healthcare services, precision industries, oil and gas and others. The potential for localisation of spare parts and products industries will be explored as well.

Dr Dhafer al Shanfari, CEO, noted that the a number of new Tawazun projects are slated for launch, including the establishment of a Centre of Excellence aimed at transferring knowledge and developing basic skills in 5G technologies and the Internet of Things (IoT) in partnership with Ericsson, a research ship project and

a number of other projects.

The Authority for Privatisation and Partnership was established by Royal Decree 54/2019, which will contribute to strengthening the national economy through the Public Private Partnership Law and the Privatisation Law and the Oman Offset Programme (Tawazun).

These laws will support economic diversification and attract international investors, thereby revitalizing the private sector, improving services, operational efficiency and competition.

The Authority will work through its programmes to intensify its work with the private sector and expand partnership projects in the various growth sectors identified in the Oman Vision 2040 blueprint.

Oman’s first private power project transfers to state ownership

MAJOR MILESTONE: STATE-OWNED NAMA HOLDING ACQUIRES 25-YEAR-OLD MANAH POWER PLANT FOLLOWING EXPIRY OF POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Ownership of Manah Power — the first privately procured Independent Power Project (IPP) in Oman and the wider Middle East region at the time — transferred to the Omani government on May 1, 2020, marking a key milestone in the history of this pioneering venture.

It follows the expiry of a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) between United Power Company (UPC), a publicly traded joint stock entity, and state-owned Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the sole offtaker of all electricity and related water output under the sector law in the Sultanate. The Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) model under which Manah IPP



was developed in the nineties stipulated an eventual transfer of assets to the government – a feature that was conspicuously absent from subsequent IPP procurements.

On Sunday, Muscat-based UPC announced that OPWP — part of Nama Group (formerly The Electricity Holding Co) —

had exercised its prerogative on behalf of the Omani government to acquire the 264-megawatt (MW) gas-powered facility in line with the terms of the PPA.

It follows an earlier effort, albeit unsuccessful, by the state-owned procurer to negotiate an ‘Ancillary Services Agreement’ designed to maintain the

status quo beyond the contractual transfer date of May 1, 2020.

“After a detailed discussion, OPWP has now decided to pursue their right under the PPA for the transfer of the plant and staff to its nominee, Nama Holding Company, on 1 May 2020. We have initiated all necessary work

to process the transfer as per the aspiration of the Government of Oman,” said Murtadha bin Ahmed Sultan, Chairman of the Board of Directors, United Power Company, in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

Located in Wilayat of Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the gas-fired facility was the first privately developed and owned power plant when it was brought into operation in stages starting in 1996. The project provided a useful template for the procurement of new privately developed and financed power and water schemes that underscore the success of the Omani government’s pioneering efforts to unbundle, restructure and privatize this critical sector.

Unlike subsequent IPPs

that were developed under the Build-Own-Operate (BOO) model, Manah was conceived and implemented under the BOOT model at a time when Oman was blazing a new trail in privately procured power projects in the region.

“Manah is a unique case, because the asset transfers to the Government at the expiration of the current PPA in April 2020. OPWP is considering several options to allow operations to continue under a new PPA, including a possible sale of the asset in a competitive tender,” the power procurer had announced in 2017. “After transfer to the Government, Manah is expected to continue in service under a new PPA, although ownership options are still under consideration.”

Gold down, oil up on recovery hopes



OLE S HANSEN

The world, at least on paper, suddenly looked in a better place this past week with several pieces of COVID-19 related news spurring a recovery. Key commodities such as crude oil and gasoline found a bid following the recent collapse and mayhem while gold, the safe-haven metal, headed for its largest weekly decline in seven weeks.

Driving the change in sentiment was the first glimmer of light at the end of the very long coronavirus tunnel. This, after several European countries began preparations for partial re-openings together with the prospect or hope for a COVID-19 treatment drug emerging. These developments did at least temporarily reduce to focus on the steep rise in global unemployment and collapsing consumer confidence. They also increase the talk in the market that a V-shaped recovery would begin to emerge, thereby reducing the fallout from what has become the worst collapse the world has seen since the Great Depression.

We view the road to recovery unfortunately as being anything but V-shaped. While the short-term technical outlook for gold has deteriorated, the long-term fundamentals have not. On that basis we remain positive about the medium to long-term outlook for gold but also accept that the current drivers are evenly matched in terms of head and tailwind. We see the current and future price development being impacted by these risks:

UPSIDE:

Hedge against central monetization of the financial market; Yield curve control to push real yields - a key driver for gold - lower; A rising global savings glut at a time of very low and negative interest rates; DM investment demand off-setting weak EM consumer demand (China and India); Rising geo-political risks as the COVID-19 blame game begins (China vs rest of world).

DOWNSIDE:

Easing lockdowns and a potential treatment drug; V-shaped recovery hopes driving Wall Street further away from Main Street (rising



Despite record-high demand for bullion-backed ETF's, gold continues to find resistance ahead of \$1750/oz. The lack of price momentum has already seen hedge funds begin to cut bullish gold bets.

unemployment and collapsing consumer confidence); Plummeting jewellery demand in China and India; Risk of central banks selling gold as budget deficits rise and currencies weaken.

Despite record-high demand for bullion-backed ETF's, gold continues to find resistance ahead of \$1750/oz. The lack of price momentum has already seen hedge funds begin to cut bullish gold bets. In the week to April 21, the net-long held by speculators dropped to a near ten-months low following a 37 per cent reduction since February.

Silver's lack of performance, due to its industrial link, has led to an exodus from speculative investors. In the latest reporting week to April 21 the net long was cut to just 13,500 lots, down by 80 per cent since the February peak.

Silver's ratio to gold, which remains stuck at a multi-decade high above 110 ounces of silver to one ounce of gold, is likely to remain stuck with the short-term risk of moving even higher. This in response to weaker global growth as it reduces demand towards industrial applications. However, a renewed rally in gold together with the mentioned small net-long could provide some support from investors looking at its relative cheapness as an investment substitute to gold.

Hedge funds, or CTA's as some are also called, execute their models often not based on fundamentals but rather on technical and price-based signals. They tend to increase position size once they have established a profitable position (buying into strength while selling into weakness) until a

market reversal happens. While the gold market, in our opinion, is nowhere near a reversal, the current lack of momentum has driven long liquidation from this type of funds.

With this in mind we may see the short-term outlook being challenged with the risk of a deeper correction towards \$1655/oz and perhaps even \$1634/oz before the above-mentioned upside risks begin to reassert themselves again.

Crude oil spent the week trying to recover from the recent carnage which sent the now expired May WTI futures contract deep into negative territory. In order to avoid a repeat ahead of the July contract expiry on May 19, several changes have been introduced. The CME have raised the margin for holding a position while also capping limits on positions being held by futures tracking ETF's. Major commodity funds, such as the S&P GSCI, have already rolled exposure further out the curve, while several banks and brokers have introduced 'reduce only' rules on positions being held by its customers in the June contract.

The two fundamental drivers behind the first weekly gain in a month were the prospect of a pickup in demand as countries begin to exit lockdowns and a rush from producers, both Opec+ and others, to cut production in order to avoid forced shut-ins from lack of storage facilities.

If the world runs out of facilities to store unwanted crude oil, production needs to equal demand. That can only be achieved by a major cut in production, not necessarily from the high-cost producers,

but primarily from those not having a buyer for their oil. Norwegian-based Rystad Energy in their latest report said they expect demand to drop by 28 million barrels per day this month; by 21 million next month; and by 16 million in June. Goldman Sachs in another report saw global storage facilities filling up within the next month.

While prices used to settle physical transactions remain weak, we have seen speculative demand drive futures prices higher this past week. The saga of the under pressure USO oil ETF has not gone away but having been forced by regulators to roll their exposure further out the curve, the systemic risk of the ETF failing has eased. The lack of performance associated with this move away from the most volatile front month has finally, but unfortunately too late for many novice investors, begun to reduce demand. An example being a US-based trading platform which during the past month, when the ETF halved in value, saw the number of clients holding USO positions almost rise by a factor 10 before being cut by more than one-third in just one day on Thursday.

As mentioned, crude oil was heading for its first weekly gain in a month in response to production cuts being announced by others than just Opec+ and on signs that the coronavirus-driven plunge in demand has started to bottom out. Resistance at \$23.5/b on WTI and \$28/b on Brent could, however, cap the upside for now. The short-term outlook remains challenging as storage tanks continue to fill. The race to avoid tank tops and with that the risk of forced shut-ins remains a key risk and the futures market could be at risk of rising to levels not yet supported by developments in the cash market.

[Ole Hansen is Head of Strategy at Saxo Bank]

BUSINESS ALERT

Sohar Aluminium, CAS to support COVID-19 fight

MUSCAT:

In line with the efforts exerted by various public and private institutions, and the collaboration to combat the risks of Covid-19 pandemic, Sohar Aluminium and the College of Applied Sciences in Sohar joined efforts to fabricate and produce face masks to protect the medical staff in Sohar and Rustaq Hospital. This initiative comes within the framework of the social responsibility of both the company and the college.

A specialised team of academics from the college coordinated with the concerned departments in both hospitals to identify the essential requirements and needs during these difficult times and how to better utilize the capabilities available in the college. The discussions concluded to design and produce a facial mask in the college's laboratories with high quality and appropriate specifications to be used by the medical personnel dealing with COVID-19 patients. Sohar Aluminium funded the purchase of a 3D printer and the raw materials used to fabricate the masks. Also, a team of the company's volunteers participated in the assembly process. 600 masks are hoped to be produced soon.



Malabar Gold distributes food-kits across GCC, Far East

AS MILLIONS of people across the globe endure one of the biggest crisis the world has ever seen,

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers with over 250 stores globally, strengthens its CSR initiatives across GCC & Far East. In response to the rising severity and impact of the Covid-19 outbreak, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has initiated distribution of 15,000 food kits to stranded laborers and families affected by the crisis.



BankDhofar exclusive offers at Al Maha filling stations

BANKDHOFAR has joined hands with Al Maha to provide an exclusive offer for BankDhofar customers. As part of the offer, BankDhofar customers will get 10 per cent cashback on fuel filling at Al Maha filling stations.

Dr Tariq Taha (pictured), DGM and Chief Digital Banking Digital & Information Officer said: "At BankDhofar we are always keen to ensure our customer's satisfaction with our products, services and offers. We have collaborated with Al Maha, to introduce an exclusive offer for BankDhofar customers where they get 10 per cent cashback on their fuel filling. We encourage our customers to benefit from this offer by using their BankDhofar debit card at Al Maha filling stations. We look forward to provide more offers in the future."



OAB launches new digital platform for donations

IN LINE with its efforts to enhance its digital offerings and on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, Oman Arab Bank has launched a special platform dedicated to providing donations through the OAB app. Customers who wish to donate can select their preferred association and the amount, and donate through their mobile phones. Hilal al Siyabi (pictured), Head of Corporate Communications at Oman Arab Bank, said "We have decided to launch this initiative to offer our customers an opportunity to donate money utilising a quick and easy solution. We host several charitable associations on this platform and all that our customers have to do is select the relevant association they want to support and the process will be completed in a few seconds."



US aviation sector cuts more jobs amid travel crisis

WASHINGTON: The ongoing US travel crisis is causing thousands of job cuts as the aviation sector waits for passengers to return to the skies but braces for years of lower demand because of the coronavirus pandemic.

US airlines are slashing hundreds of thousands of flights, cutting schedules by 80 per cent or more through at least June and parking thousands of jets as demand for tickets has plunged by about 95 per cent. Airlines are requiring facial coverings and implementing new cleaning procedures to try to convince passengers it is safe to fly again, but also fear the weakened economy may further drag down demand.

Late Friday, Spirit AeroSystems said that in response to lower production rates from Boeing Co and Airbus SE it would layoff 1,450 workers in Kansas.

“This sudden drop in air travel has forced our customers to adjust to lower demand from airlines,



Flight attendants photograph a plane landing at Reagan National Airport while on a layover in Washington. — Reuters

many of which are seeking to defer or cancel airplane orders,” Spirit AeroSystems Chief Executive Tom Gentile told employees in an email seen by Reuters. “All indications right now tell us this lower demand for new commercial airplanes is likely to last for several

years.”

On Wednesday, Boeing Co announced it would cut some production rates and eliminate about 16,000 jobs worldwide, or 10 per cent of its workforce by year end.

Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun said he expects it will “take two

to three years for travel to return to 2019 levels and it will be a few years beyond that for the industry to return to long-term growth trends.”

The cuts in some areas, such as commercial airplanes, will be more than 15 per cent, Boeing said.

US AIRLINES ARE SLASHING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF FLIGHTS, CUTTING SCHEDULES BY 80 PER CENT OR MORE THROUGH AT LEAST JUNE AND PARKING THOUSANDS OF JETS AS DEMAND FOR TICKETS HAS PLUNGED BY ABOUT 95 PER CENT.

Delta Air Lines Inc said last week it does not expect air travel to recover for two or three years. More than 37,000 Delta employees have volunteered to take unpaid leave lasting from one month to a year.

American Airlines Chief Executive Doug Parker said in an interview on Thursday that the airline will be “smaller than we intended to be certainly into 2021.”

Labor union SEIU said Thursday at least 13,000 union members at airports have been laid off and another 1,000 layoffs are planned.

The US Treasury has not yet awarded \$3 billion in payroll assistance cash grants approved by Congress for airport

contractors such as baggage handlers and airplane caterers.

US airlines last month collectively were awarded \$25 billion in Treasury cash grants but as a condition must not fire workers or reduce through Sept. 30.

Numerous airlines have warned that without a dramatic turnaround in passenger numbers they will be forced to make new significant cuts before year end.

JPMorgan Chase said in a research note on Friday that “October 1st is likely to emerge as one of the darkest days in history for airline labor” — though it noted that Congress could opt to extend additional assistance.

United Airlines is reducing working hours by 25 per cent for 15,000 employees starting May 24, drawing criticism from an employee union and some US lawmakers who contend that the move violates the terms of the \$5 billion payroll assistance United is receiving from the Treasury.

— Reuters

Bounce in US stocks to face test as reopenings could fuel demand

NEW YORK: A bounce in stocks is likely to face a test in the coming weeks as investors try to gauge whether countries and US states emerging from lockdowns can arrest a sharp fall in economic growth without provoking a resurgence of coronavirus cases.

The S&P 500 has rallied about 30 per cent off its March lows, fueled by monetary and fiscal policy designed to stimulate the economy after the United States ordered country-wide lockdowns to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, which has surpassed 1 million cases in the United States.

With some optimism that the virus is peaking, 22 states, accounting for 38 per cent of gross domestic product, may be open within the next 10 days, according to a tally by Fundstrat.

“If you see a number of cases for a particular state that has opened up early



The New York Stock Exchange is seen in the financial district of lower Manhattan in New York City. — Reuters

starting to increase... that is going to be a worrisome sign,” said Robert Pavlik, chief investment strategist at SlateStone Wealth. “Because then this progress that we have made starts to get halted and... the market becomes more nervous that this is going to be a more protracted, slower restart.”

Investors are eager to look forward after the devastation the shutdowns have already wrought. Data this week showed the

US economy contracted in the first quarter at its sharpest pace since the Great Recession.

Another measure of the fallout will come next Friday, when the US government releases the country’s employment report for April. The US economy is expected to have shed 20 million jobs for the month, according to a poll.

As states allow certain businesses and activities to resume, investors are

seeking to determine if an eventual recovery will be “V-shaped” or one that is more drawn out.

A study by Goldman Sachs found that initial reopening timelines in other countries have often proven “too optimistic” and recovery is quicker in manufacturing and construction than in consumer services.

One state in focus is Georgia, which lifted a ban on eating in restaurants this week. Texas and Florida, two of the most populous US states, also announced plans to start reopening imminently.

Investors will also keep a close eye on reopenings in Germany, Europe’s largest economy, as well as other countries. In China, for example, “simply opening has not necessarily resulted in a return of consumer buying,” said Rick Meckler, partner at Cherry Lane Investments in New Vernon, New Jersey.

— Reuters

Japan April auto sales slump to nine-year low



A worker inspects a Mirai fuel-cell vehicle at the Motomachi plant in Toyota, Aichi, Japan. — Reuters

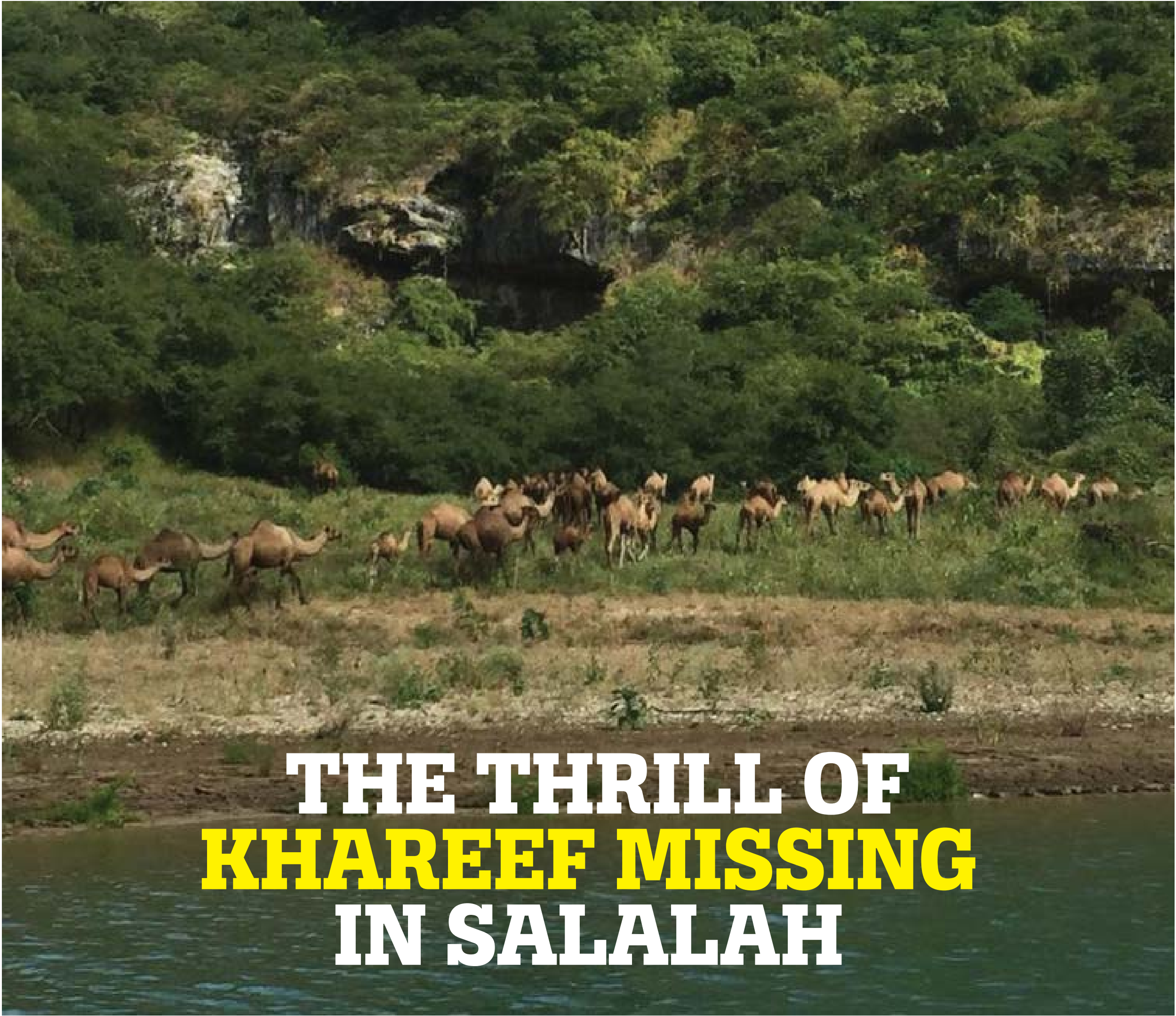
TOKYO: Japan’s monthly auto sales dropped to a nine-year low in April, industry data showed, after a state of emergency called by the government to contain the new coronavirus left showrooms deserted.

In the latest indicator of the widening impact of the virus on the world’s third-largest economy, vehicles sales fell 29 per cent in April from the same period a year ago to 270,393, according to data from the Japan Automobile Dealers Association and an association for dealers of Japan’s “kei” minicars.

The last time sales were worse was in April 2011, when Japan was struggling to cope with the impact of a massive earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster a month earlier.

Sales of minicars, which account for roughly four out of every 10 vehicles sold in Japan, tumbled 34 per cent last month, the Japan Minivehicle Association said. It cited a fall in production of the pint-sized vehicles as the further spread of the virus prompted closures at parts supplier plants overseas, leading to procurement issues.

— Reuters



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

This is the first time in so many years that the people in Salalah are not excited over the movement of summer clouds, which otherwise would have become talk of the town and treated as a good omen for the advent of khareef.

The obvious reason for this is COVID-19, which has resulted in the cancellation of the Salalah Tourism Festival (STF), an annual extravaganza popularly known as Khareef Festival among the locals.

It has dampened people's mood and their expectation of doing some seasonal business either at the Itin Festival Ground where a massive festival marking the season takes place, or many other direct and indirect businesses.

Giving an insight into



the situation a local businessman summarised, "The season will be there and there may be better season than previous years, but what we are going to miss in a big way is our business. I know many small businessmen who depend on khareef for their livelihood – they do brisk business during the season and depend on it the whole year".

Said Mohammed Bakheet, a businessman in Salalah, said the involvement of local people in tourism related

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS RESULTED IN THE CANCELLATION OF ANNUAL EXTRAVAGANZA SALALAH TOURISM FESTIVAL, DAMPENING THE PEOPLE'S MOOD AND THEIR EXPECTATION OF DOING SOME SEASONAL BUSINESS

businesses and jobs during the season are 'direct' and 'indirect'. Both the businesses are going to be affected as there would likely be restrictions on travels in Salalah during the season.

"There is mass involvement of local people in business activities during

the khareef season which range from renting their houses to selling agriculture products or even food and beverages".

All those who depend on such businesses are going to be affected due to the situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Salalah Tourism Festival (STF) itself cre-

ates many job opportunities for local businessmen and entrepreneurs", he said and stressed that it was far more important to save people's lives first. He put this situation as something forced upon the humanity globally as the impact of this pandemic is being felt all over the world and practically in every sphere of life.

It is important to think of roadside shops which do brisk business of local agriculture products during the season. "So high is the demand for

local agriculture products during the season that that we are not able to meet the demand for coconut, papaya and bananas. This year, however, is a different scenario altogether", said a roadside fruit seller in Hafa area.

Another small-time businessman drew attention towards many Omani housewives who take part in the 'Culture Village' and 'Traditional Food Court' at the STF where handicrafts and traditional Omani food items are sold.

"Both the sections are big crowd pullers, which ultimately add to the business of local people. Added with this are the restaurants located in the city. All sorts of visitors that come to Salalah as tourists boost business either by staying in hotels, eating in restaurants or even touring in and around Salalah", he said.



Pogba using lockdown to return after injury woes

MANCHESTER: Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba is using the coronavirus lockdown to step up his return to fitness after an injury-plagued season.

Pogba had made just eight appearances for United this season before the health crisis forced the suspension of the Premier League in March.

The French World Cup winner hasn't played a single match in 2020 due to his persistent ankle problems.

His last appearance came in a December 26 win over Newcastle, but Pogba has been keeping fit during the virus break and hopes to be ready if the Premier League can return in the summer.

"I have a little home gym in my house", Pogba told United's website.

"I can do some training, some running, some bike, go outside and do some things with the ball. I am just keeping busy and keeping healthy.

"We have got to stay motivated, there is no other choice. It is a period and we don't know until when it will be like this, but I still have goals in my head and one day hopefully this (pandemic) will stop.

"And then we have to get back on the pitch, so we have to be ready.

"For myself, I have been out for a long time as well, so for me I just want to come back playing football".

Pogba, 27, has been in regular contact with his United team-mates during the lockdown as they follow the club's fitness regime from home. — AFP

Oman U-16 team training virtually for AFC championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The head coach of Oman U-16 football team, Hilal al Oufi, said that the Oman Football Association (OFA) received a letter from Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on confirming the draw date of AFC U-16 Championship which is scheduled on June 16.

He added the letter included confirmation on the same previous duration of the championship which will be held in Bahrain during September 16 until October 3 despite the current situation of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The national coach told Observer that the things are still not clear on the COVID-19 global pandemic which may affect the top Asian events for the junior category. "The team will proceed ahead with the current online training until further notice from OFA on ability to train at the ground. Based on our training plan which was set previously, we have to be back to the camps in May. If the things move normally and back to normal situation, the team will have the first domestic camp on May 28 to June 13. After the internal camp, the team will travel to Tunisia for an external camp and it will included two preparatory matches based on their letter which was confirmed by OFA. Moreover, we are not assured if we will be able to attend this camp as the travel movement is blocked in almost all the countries due to COVID-19 coronavirus", he said.

The experienced coach in junior category, Hilal al Oufi, pointed out that the under way online training programme of the team changed



slightly. "Based on the previous days, we experienced from the "Zoom" application that some players are not able to join and connect properly at "Zoom". Accordingly, we changed the plan which was set by the fitness coach, Hasssan al Kassori who decided to send the fitness training plan to all the players through whatsapp application with supported videos and pictures on

how to perform the trainings. Then, the players had to re-send their videos back to the fitness coach to monitor the progress of physical level", coach added.

Oman junior team players reached a good shape of physical level as coach Hilal mentioned. "We have monitored the players progress at physical level and it is under control as 30 per cent of team preparation is based on that. We hope things will be fine in the forthcoming days and the players will be back to the field and train", the coach concluded.

The Sultanate U-16 football team reached the finals for the 11th time in history, had booked their slot in the qualification last September. Oman's junior team, coached by the national coach Hilal al Oufi, were placed as runner-up in Group D which clubbed hosts Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Syria teams after earning seven points. Oman was one of the four best second-placed teams alongside Yemen, Indonesia and Uzbekistan from the eleven qualification groups.

Oman Sail goes online with courses to boost knowledge, skills

MUSCAT: Oman Sail has taken the opportunity offered by the national 'stay at home' anti-coronavirus guidelines to launch online courses aimed at improving the skills of both sailors and their coaches. Running throughout the holy month of Ramadhan the courses are aimed at Oman Sail's sailing and fitness coaches, chief instructors and senior sailors in the performance team.

The courses will cover the latest technical updates in sailing, coaching and race management, ensure that key members of the Oman Sail team are maintaining their fitness levels, and provide an interactive platform for the exchange of knowledge and innovative ideas.

"These online courses provide an appropriate vehicle to keep our sailors, coaches and instructors involved and



motivated", said Rashid al Kindi, Oman Sail's Director of Sailing.

"Senior members of the performance team need to stay fit and focused so they will be ready to resume competition

once national and international restrictions are lifted, while it is also a valuable opportunity to invest in theoretical training and develop planning skills across the board.

"We know we will come through the current challenge together, and the online courses are a great opportunity for everyone at Oman Sail to maintain our shared vision and



stay positive as we look to the future".

The focused classes will cover the range of skills needed in competitive racing, from pre-regatta preparation, to performance monitoring and a detailed knowledge of the racing rules and technical adjustments.

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DE BRUYNE BELIEVES PREMIER LEAGUE WILL PLAY TO CONCLUSION

MANCHESTER: Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne believes the Premier League season will be finished despite the coronavirus pandemic “because the financial aspect is far too important”.

“My feeling is that we may be able to train again within two weeks. The government wants to restart football as soon as possible to give people something. I think this season will be finished,” De Bruyne told Belgian daily Het Laatste Nieuws.

“The financial aspect is far too important in the Premier League. If the season is not finished, it will cause serious problems,” he added.

Clubs were presented with the league’s “Project Restart” plans at a meeting on Friday and were told the remaining 92 matches of the 2019-2020 season must be played at neutral venues.

De Bruyne also said he was optimistic about City’s participation in next season’s Champions League. UEFA has banned the club from European competition for the next two years for “serious breaches” of financial fair-play rules.

“The club told us they’re going to appeal and that they’re almost certain to get their way. I’m waiting to see what happens, but I trust my club,” said De Bruyne.

The 28-year-old Belgium international admitted he would be forced to consider his City future if the ban was upheld.

“Once we know more, I will make a decision.

Two years without playing in Europe would be long but in the case of one year I might see,” he said.

— AFP

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MIDFIELDER

