

P9

TRUMP THREATENS
TARIFFS ON OIL
IMPORTS TO 'PROTECT'
WORKERS



P10

CHILL OUT IN
WADI AL FATAH!



P12

AT LEAST I CAN
BE WIMBLEDON
CHAMPION FOR TWO
YEARS, SAYS HALEP



OMAN

HM receives thanks
from King of Bahrain

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received thanks from King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Shaikh Ahmad bin Mohammed bin Salman al Khalifa. King Hamad expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation for His Majesty's condolences and fraternal sympathy. King Hamad prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the departed soul in peace, grant His Majesty good health and a long life, and protect him against all harms.

TO LATEST
GET NEWS

VISIT
www.omanobserver.om

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 36°C
MIN: 29°C

SALALAH
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 23°C

NIZWA
MAX: 39°C
MIN: 25°C

SUNRISE 05.54 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:38

DHUHR: 12:14

ASR: 15:42

MAGHRIB: 18:29

ISHA: 19:41



Global death
toll tops 65,000

LONDON: Pope Francis appealed on Sunday for courage in the face of the coronavirus pandemic that has claimed more than 65,000 lives across the globe in just three months.

US President Donald Trump has already warned Americans to brace for a “very horrendous” number of deaths in the coming days, as the number of confirmed cases there surged past 300,000 -- the highest in the world.

Queen Elizabeth II was also set to give a rare address on Sunday aimed at rallying Britain, where the government is warning of tougher measures on social distancing to try to curb surging infections.

The deadly march of the virus has left about half the planet confined to their homes, drastically altering life for billions of people and plunging the global economy into deep recession.

With over 1.2 million people confirmed to be infected, the virus is also putting massive pressure on healthcare services in nations both rich and poor which are struggling to find enough staff and equipment.

Despite Trump's bleak warning for the United States, there were glimmers of hope in hard-hit Italy, ground zero for COVID-19 in Europe and in Spain.

Over 47,000 global deaths have been recorded in Europe, with Britain reporting a new daily high in fatalities, taking the overall toll to 4,300.

The pandemic has hammered the global economy, with businesses hit hard as people are forced to stay indoors. — AFP



LIVING WITH LOCKDOWN

FINE BALANCE: PEOPLE FORCED TO WORK OUT OF HOMES DUE TO RESTRICTIONS ARE ABLE TO MANAGE WORK AND HOMELY DUTIES BETTER THAN EVER

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Even as the lockdown has left the public spaces deserted and eerily quiet, majority of the people in the capital city of Muscat appeared to have learnt to stay at home.

The streets are empty in the otherwise bustling downtown Ruwi and Muttrah after checkpoints were set up to control the movement of people as part of the measures to combat the spread of COVID-19.

With the security forces out to enforce the rules, citizens and residents are adapting to telecommuting or work at home.

Although the overall situation is tense, it is orderly everywhere with most people staying at homes, said A Shueili, a journalist in Al Amerat.

“I am getting adjusted to staying and working from home, although it is a first time experience. I find it a way of balancing work and life. I enjoy it”, he said.

Thanks to the technology, he said, working from home makes it easier as discussions with my staff relating to our activities can be done using video conferencing apps, he said.

“I host daily meetings with my staff through these apps and it works well”, Shueili said.

For Mohamed al Lawati, too, work from home provides an opportunity to restore the balance.

“It helps save a lot of time as we do not spend time on commuting. This can be used for spending time with family or for leisure”, he said.

He also said that working from

“
The advantage I find
is that I can use my
own space, my own
things and wear what
I like. In addition, it's
easier to do household
chores like washing or
cooking meals
YAKOOB AL BALUSHI

home can lead to fewer interruptions from colleagues and other problems including the rush of people coming and going at peak times.

But he did not forget to say, “You may of course find yourself getting distracted by family members or flatmates”.

Yakoob al Balushi, an employee with an event management company, said he is comfortable with working from home. “The advantage I find is that I can use my own space, my own things, and wear what I like. In addition, it's easier to do household chores like washing or cooking meals”, he said.

All businesses in the city have been shut except utilities, medical suppliers, logistics companies and food processing firms.

The vast majority of the population appeared to be following appeals to stay at home except to buy food, care for vulnerable people, do work deemed essential.

TURN TO P2

SHORT TAKES

Dial 99044949
to know
about
COVID-19

SALALAH: The Directorate General of Health Services in Dhofar has set up a hotline to receive people's concern about the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and give them necessary health instructions in this regard. The hotline number 99044949 is functional round the clock through which inquiries raised by the citizens and residents are answered.

“Generally we are advising the callers not to rush to the hospital if they have flu like symptoms. We are asking them to remain indoors as much as possible, self-quarantine and if needed we are offering them medical aid”, said an official of the Ministry of Health. The Operation Room is keeping track on all the guidelines of the Supreme Committee which is tasked with tackling the COVID-19.

PAGE 4

Some SMEs in
construction
can hire
expats

MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Minister of Manpower, issued a decision (127/2020) on Sunday that exempted some companies from the decision regulating the recruitment of expatriates in the construction sector and brick factories.

The exception will be made to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) owned by full-time employers to manage them, and those registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and insured with the Public Authority for Social Insurance. The new decision excludes establishments working in implementing government projects, the 'Excellent Grade' companies and the firms that employ 100 or more workers.

PAGE 3

Flight with
foodstuff
arrives, more
to follow

MUSCAT: The first shipment of vegetables and fruits from India, as part of the efforts by the ministry of agriculture and other competent authorities arrived at the weekend by Oman Air. “This is the first among the three Oman Air flights to arrive as part of the agreements with a number of exporting countries”, a statement from ministry said.

PAGE 2

Drivers better wear masks and gloves

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Motorists in the Sultanate are recommended to wear masks and gloves while driving for essential needs.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Major Mohammed al Hashami of Royal Oman Police (ROP) said the drivers should carry their identification (ID) and residence cards all times.

As restrictions continue in Muttrah along with some parts of Ruwi and Wadi Kabir, drivers from other parts of the Muscat Governorate cannot approach these areas.

“We would like to thank the community for following the directions regarding COVID-19 restrictions. There is no movement in the Wilayat of Muttrah as of now”, Major Al Hashami explained. “Drivers in other parts must have a clear explanation



for their travel. People from other parts of Muscat cannot come towards Ruwi as of now, but there are limited categories of professionals who are

permitted to drive to Ruwi due to their nature of work and the necessity. So an individual has to explain the reason. The movement control will depend

on the authority concerned in that particular area”, Major Al Hashami said.

The latest concern for the authorities in Ruwi and Hamriya has been the gathering of people at coffee shops. “We need to help each other by informing that it is not right to gather. While at coffee shops the points to remember are to maintain one-metre distance from each other, wear masks and gloves and pick up what you need and leave”, he said.

Maintaining social distance and staying at home is the best way to tackle the virus. The Royal Oman Police has now introduced drones to announce and request the public to return home if they find people outdoors. “Drones have been introduced to safeguard the officers who work in the frontline and drones cover the distance as well”, he said.

TURN TO P2



GCC health officials review steps

MUSCAT: The GCC Under-Secretaries of the Ministries of Health held a video conference meeting to discuss the latest developments of coronavirus (COVID-19). The meeting highlighted a number of issues including the minutes of the second meeting, which was held in the middle of last March, the daily report and suggestions, medical supplies stocks, readiness of the hospitals and the future procedures to be taken by the GCC states to curb the spread of COVID-19. The plans for evacuation of students and patients from abroad, as well as the necessity



of establishing medical supply manufacturing plants for such crises in the upcoming period have been also discussed during the meeting. The GCC Under-Secretaries praised the significant efforts

exerted by the staff working in the health sector and their contribution in tackling COVID-19, as well as the cooperation of the citizens along with the official and civil authorities in these exceptional circumstances. In addition, the Under-Secretaries urged all GCC citizens and residents to adhere to the infection control standards, avoid attending the gatherings as possible and maintain the preventive safety measures followed in such cases. They also stressed the importance of taking the information from official sources and not to pay attention to rumours and unofficial social media channels. — ONA

Living with lockdown

FROM PAGE 1
“It has been over a week the lockdown started. I watch the days go by one after another. I don't know how long days like this are going to last”, said Mubarak al Wahaibi, a retired schoolteacher in Ruwi. “But still it is good. We have to adjust ourselves to eradicate this virus, and to do this, all of us have to confine ourselves. If we don't do so, we spread the virus, and that's a bad thing. So yes, it's very, very good”, he said. But there is still some emotions triggered by the lockdown. Although it was panic in the initial time, it has come to almost an acceptance. “We have to accept this as reality, and we need to change our lifestyle to adapt to this new life”, said Mohsin Parampil, an Indian expatriate. For Mohamed Nooruddin, the present situation is like a battle for survival. “It is worse than a war. We are all affected. But the worst hit are our livelihoods. My company just said the management is analysing the situation. I'm not sure what that means”, he said.

Cargo flight with foodstuff arrives, more to follow from across world

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, APRIL 5
The first shipment of vegetables and fruits from India, as part of the efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and other competent authorities, arrived at the weekend by Oman Air. “This is the first among the three Oman Air flights to arrive as part of the agreements with a number of exporting countries”, a statement from the ministry said. According to the ministry sources, talks are under way to operate more air cargo flights from various source markets to ensure the supply of vegetables and fruits. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the ministry has been coordinating with Oman Aviation Group and local companies for direct shipment from a number of exporting countries. A press statement from the Lulu Group, which chartered the Oman Air special flight to bring the shipment from India, said it will be transporting direct shipments from other countries



as well. “Frequent schedules have been arranged to ensure the availability according to the requirements. These consignments are being imported from different parts of the world maintaining standard hygiene procedures”, it said. The first shipment contained 27,000 kg of foodstuff including fruits and vegetables. “In this present scenario, Lulu has come up to express its commitment to society and the nation. We have

chartered special cargo flights in partnership with Oman Air to import meat, fruits, vegetables, other necessary food stuff and other products to Omani market”, the statement said. The Lulu Group said it is committed to ensuring the availability of all necessary products all across the country. “We will be ensuring this through our sourcing offices in 22 countries which include UK, US, Spain, India, Sri Lanka and South Africa,” it said.

Researchers urged to come out with ideas, inventions

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, APRIL 5
The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has called upon the innovators and researchers to come out with ideas and inventions related to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) ranging from treatment-based inventions to methods for early detection of the virus through a device or product. The ministry encouraged researchers to submit initiatives related to the health sector or any other sector under the current circumstances, and to communicate with the ministry's Intellectual Property Department through e-mail and fill relevant form for the product. Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Under-Secretary of MoCI, extended thanks to the innovative Omani youths and stressed over the fact that the “ministry supports the local inventions of youths and facilitates the procedures and protects their

Dr Al Saeedi, explained his ministry's desire to see local industries in manufacturing health protective suits during this period, as there is a shortage of suits

rights as inventors”, while addressing the first virtual press conference of the Higher Committee in charge of tackling COVID-19. “The ministry, in cooperation with some innovative youths, has found an application to display fish prices in the wholesale market, which is a successful application. It has gained wide popularity and has achieved success with regard to reducing human flow into the market. The ministry proceeds to provide an environment suitable for ambitious youth ideas that primarily serves the society”, he said. The Minister of Health, Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, explained his ministry's desire to see local industries in manufacturing health protective suits during this period, as there is a shortage of suits that health workers use while dealing with infectious diseases. “It would be great if we can produce these suits at a time when we need them to fight the widespread Coronavirus,” he said.

Drivers better wear masks and gloves

FROM PAGE 1
Meanwhile, the message from the Oman Vs COVID-19 emphasised on how the movement of individuals between governorates contributes to the transmission of infection. The campaign explained how the movement can provide a greater chance for the spread of virus, contribute to the patient contacting other healthy individuals and this includes persons who may be infected with the virus before the symptoms occur.

“A large number of potential infections may occur among older people and patients with chronic diseases at the same time. It increases the pressure on the competent authorities to contain the virus”. The campaign pointed out that control and checkpoints are there “For your safety and those around you”. “It becomes a national duty to be committed, cooperate with the competent authorities and carry your required documents with you all the time”, it stated.

COVID-19 an existential threat to airport business; to lose 3.6 bn fliers

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5
An economic analysis by Airports Council International (ACI) World has found that, at a global level, the COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to wipe out two-fifths of passenger traffic and almost half of revenues for airports in 2020. In an economic bulletin published on Sunday, ACI World predicts that global passenger traffic close to two-fifths (38.1 per cent) will be lost as compared to the forecasted pre-COVID-19 figures. This is equivalent to 3.6 billion passengers in absolute terms. This shortfall in the number of passengers and the cancellation of flights will continue to result in reduced revenues. While the industry was expected to generate about \$172 billion, it is now predicted it could lose about 45 per cent or more than \$76 billion by the end of this year. “A drastic decline of such magnitude for the global airport industry represents an existential threat,” ACI World Director General Angela Gittens said. “A swift, effective and equitable economic policy response from governments is needed to protect millions of jobs, protect essential operations, and give the industry the greatest chance to weather the storm and recover quickly. “The global airport industry has faced multi-billion-dollar losses already in the first quarter of 2020, but it is now predicted that the impact of



COVID-19 will extend not only to the second quarter of 2020 but also the second half of the year. “Most experts in the air transport industry agree that recovery may take a year to 18 months to reach pre-crisis traffic levels and the industry may not record pre-COVID-19 traffic volumes again before the end of 2021. “A fair and equitable global economic policy response is required to safeguard essential airport operations, to protect millions of jobs worldwide, and to ensure the survival of the industry and lay the foundation for a fair recovery.” As revenues continue to contract rapidly, airports are taking all possible measures to preserve

While the industry was expected to generate about \$172 billion, it is now predicted it could lose about 45 per cent or more than \$76 billion by the end of this year
financial stability. While airports have high fixed and unavoidable costs, they are reducing, to a minimum,

variable costs by closing portions of infrastructure, postponing capital expenditure, and addressing staffing costs. These difficult decisions are not taken lightly but are necessary in response to the crisis facing the industry. As regards prospects for recovery, ACI believes it is reasonable to foresee faster recovery in domestic passenger traffic. In the case of international passenger traffic, however, the recovery will take longer, as any international flight implies reciprocal permissions, while various States will emerge from the current crisis at different times with varying pace of relaxation of the recently imposed restrictions.

Grocery kit for COVID-19 affected families



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5
The Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP), in coordination with commercial centres, has launched an initiative called Sallat al Khair, aimed at helping families whose lives have been affected by the measures to combat Covid-19. Under the initiative, 19 different commodities to meet the basic weekly consumer needs will be provided in one basket for RO9. It is expected to benefit those with limited incomes and social security

families. This initiative is aimed at helping people whose lives have been affected due to the suspension of commercial activities and the closure of many stores as part of the measures to limit the spread of Covid-19 virus. The PACAP has coordinated with the commercial centres to launch a new integrated basket, especially in wilayats that do not have branches of the major retailers. It has also finalised the date of launching the Ramadan kit at fixed prices in all wilayats of the Sultanate.



IN BRIEF

**Endowment ministry
waives rental payment
for shops**

MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, has issued a ministerial decision waiving rental payment for commercial stores and shops owned by the ministry's (endowments) establishment until the end of the mandatory closure period. The decision was taken in light of the precautionary measures taken by the Supreme Committee to close down all stores and shops located outside the commercial malls with the exception of grocery stores, clinics, pharmacies and optical shops in an effort to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

**Embassy to help
Pakistanis go home**

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Pakistan, Muscat, is collecting data of people who want to travel to Pakistan if any special flights are arranged from Oman. "All concerned are requested to kindly fill the details and send it to WhatsApp number +968-91373303 or at the following emails of the Mission – pakrep@omantel.net.om or parepmuscat@mofa.gov.pk" the embassy said.

**Complementary
certificate**

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education has decided to add the general education diploma qualification to the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra School and the Muscat Philharmonic Orchestra School of the Royal Guard (bilingual school & musical studies), to the rest of the qualifications issued by the ministry. The ministry explained that the second clause of the decision permits granting of a grade 12 complementary certificate to the students who did not meet the requirements of the general education diploma (private education). Thus, the complementary certificate only certifies that a student has completed grade 12 and, in this sense, it is not an equivalent of the GED diploma. The ministry explained that the decision has nothing to do with any mechanism for approving academic results of the general education diploma due to the exceptional situation resulting from the spread of the coronavirus.

New guidelines for construction jobs issued

EXEMPTION: Ministry of Manpower exempts some firms from the decision regulating recruitment of expats

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Minister of Manpower, issued a decision (127/2020) on Sunday that exempted some companies from the decision regulating the recruitment of expatriates in the construction sector and brick factories.

The exception will be made to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) owned by full-time employers to manage them, and

those registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and insured with the Public Authority for Social Insurance.

The new decision excludes establishments working in implementing government projects, the 'Excellent Grade' companies and the firms that employ 100 or more workers.

Article 2 of the decision stated that the employer must submit the following documents through the electronic licensing system in the

The exception will be made to SMEs owned by full-time employers to manage them, and those registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and insured with the Public Authority for Social Insurance

Ministry of Manpower: A copy of the municipal licence and the lease agreement, a copy of the agreement to implement construction work provided that it includes the duration, work to be executed, the value and that the agreement is translated into Arabic from an accredited translation office in the Sultanate if it is written in another language, a copy of the project

implementation order if the agreement is related to the implementation of a government project.

Article 3 stated that the employer shall be committed to the Omanisation percentages established in the facility, as follows:

The Omanisation percentage should not be less than 10 per cent for establishments in which the number

of expatriates is 99 workers or less, the Omanisation percentage should not be less than 12 per cent for the establishments in which the number of non-Omani manpower is restricted by more than 99 workers, appointing an engineer or technician, depending on the number of the non-Omani workforce, the absence of labour violations in the facility or expired work permits and the employer has paid all his fees.

If any institution operating in construction in the private sector wanted to recruit a non-Omani worker for an engineer or technician profession, it must also appoint an Omani in the same profession with the same number to get the license.

The same conditions apply for the recruitment of expatriates in brick factories.

Oman Data Park enables companies for remote operations

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Oman Data Park (ODP) has enabled many government organisations, companies and banks operating in the Sultanate to reorganise their technical networks and main systems to operate them remotely with complete security and without any hindrance. It has been carried out to mitigate the effects on the security of electronic networks and is in line with the decisions of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the situation arising due to the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

ODP's role comes as part of its efforts to increase information security in the country and provide assurance against security breaches during such crisis.

Engineer Maqbool bin Salim al Wuhaibi, CEO of ODP, said that the company, through its Information Security Centre, was working to make systems and networks safe and secure in the Sultanate of Oman and protect them from any cyber threats. The centre makes sure that continuous necessary protection standards are applied to ward off any infiltration or virus. Any electronic security threat to these systems is monitored and protection is provided against piracy and hacking.

Al Wuhaibi said that remote



We are assisting medium and small institutions so that they can install various platforms to help them continue their services to society in various fields

MAQBOOL AL WUHAIBI
CEO of Oman Data Park

working enables the work conditions of business entities to be continued at a record speed.

It is required in several sectors including banks and financing sectors which were recently requested to scale down their operations to reduce the spread of the virus. This has been done by providing advanced technical systems and solutions to help the employees do their job in a very simple manner with security. He said that the cloud solutions have two main qualities, namely remote operations and low capital and operational cost.

He stated that business entities needed innovative solutions to help them work from a distance and with high efficiency and low financial costs thus reducing their capital and operating costs during this crisis.

We advise all government and private sector organisations to use the

solutions and programs which have high security standards with their data stored carefully within the Sultanate. We have invested in the services of ODP to support in such requirements to reduce the capital and operational costs, on the one hand, as well as to increase the efficiency, on the other, he added.

Al Wuhaibi warned all companies and particularly addressing financial institutions against the risk of installing their systems and storing their data with cloud companies outside the Sultanate. He said that such practices have threats arising from electronic piracy or illegal exploitation of data.

Since its establishment, ODP is providing all means of cloud systems, various data centre services and advanced solutions of cyber security with all their necessary elements to empower the business entities of the

Sultanate. This is done so that the subscribers of these services can focus on their main services and increase their productive capacity while ODP takes care of management, operations and high-quality security of technical systems as well as advanced data security with low financial costs, he said.

He said that creating electronic service platforms and storing them securely in Oman has become essential, especially those which address the main requirements of livelihood of the citizens, such as the new app offering groceries and other electronic shopping platforms. Such storing services can strengthen them by providing necessary security systems of high quality so that they are not vulnerable to electronic piracy, sabotage and other hindrances.

The storage of data within the Sultanate and dealing with a national

company such as ODP guarantees confidentiality and privacy of information. It also provides the subscribers the necessary facility to directly communicate with an in-house team of engineers and technicians in case of any support on technical or security-related issues, he said.

Al Wuhaibi said that the company was providing all support to medium and small institutions and has made special packages for them to enable them to install various platforms. They provide their services to society in various fields, whether grocery, electronic shopping or delivery platforms.

ODP is providing advanced and innovative solutions as part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the field of artificial intelligence, big data and smart systems, which helps the Sultanate to continue its progress in the technology of the digital economy. This is because such solutions have positive effects on the economy in medium and long-term, he said.

Al Wuhaibi said that creativity and providing best advanced solutions have always been the priority of the company. These solutions make the work simple are more effective and efficient.

They also reduce the capital and operational costs associated with it. He said that so far the company

was successful in providing its cloud solutions to more than 550 companies inside and outside the Sultanate.

"Information security is key to these institutions. We have established a dedicated cyber security centre to serve these institutions using latest and advanced systems.

We feel proud that this cyber security centre is being run by industry qualified and competent Omanis who work round the clock to monitor and protect our customers against any cyber threat. Unfortunately, those who store their data outside, do not benefit from such a service, he said.

He said that the company has paid attention to supporting medium and small enterprises sector during these challenging times.

ODP has been working closely with investment funds supporting this sector as well as with concerned government organisations. ODP offers special packages as part of its social responsibility programme to help more than 30 small and medium enterprises make their headway towards success and expects the number to double very soon.

Al Wuhaibi said that the company was working to empower small and medium enterprises by providing them cost effective cloud and secure data centre services to build their companies easily and conveniently.



WHAT SHALL I DO IF I DOUBT COVID-19



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

What shall I do first if I suspect I have or any of my friends has the symptoms of the coronavirus infection? This is a question being asked by everyone these days for they are not sure what to do or whom to approach in such cases.

Keep aside the worries. Brushing aside the common belief that one must immediately visit hospital for treatment, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has said that one need not go to hospital unless the severity of the symptoms worsens.

“One need not go to hospital unless the severity of the symptoms worsens or you feel shortness of breath, which usually happens on the second week of the disease and in that case, one can call the call centre (24441999) for help”, a circular from the MoH has said.

“Self- isolation is the most effective precautionary measure to tackle the spread and to safeguard both himself and the people around him”.

The Ministry of Health has said that one need not go to hospital unless the severity of the symptoms worsens

Primary Health Centres (PHCs) are all equipped to receive such cases where the patient needs preliminary examination.

“The primary healthcare is our frontline post serving the public. Its prime role in cases of outbreak cannot be over-emphasised,” Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Health told the Observer.

“These PHCs will receive all patients and channel them according to the preset pathways. In addition, they play an outstanding role in cases carrying out identification and contact tracing”, the Under-Secretary added.

Hotline to answer people’s questions

KAUSHELANDRA SINGH
SALALAH, APRIL 5

The Directorate General of Health Services in Dhofar has set up a hotline to receive people’s concern about the novel coronavirus and give them necessary health instructions in this regard.

The hotline is working under the COVID-19 Operating Room, which is active round the clock as a follow- up office of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to maintain pace with any emergency situation. Several functionaries of the MoH are part of this Operating Room including the

Emergency and Crisis Department, Medical Response and Public Health and Relief and Shelter Centre of the Governorate.

The Operation Room is working in coordination with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the armed forces, civil and military authorities.

According to the sources in the DG Health Services in Dhofar, the hotline number 99044949 is functional round the clock through which inquiries raised by the citizens and residents are answered.

“We have been receiving all sorts of questions both from the citizens and residents about the COVID-19

The hotline is working under the COVID-19 Operating Room, which is active round the clock as a follow- up office of the Ministry of Health to maintain pace with any emergency situation

pandemic which has spread across the globe. Most of the queries are related to symptoms of cold and cough in which the callers want to confirm whether the symptoms are that of COVID-19 or just common

flu. We take time in understanding their concern and advise them according to their requirement”, said the source.

The Operating Room is working like a bridge between the Ministry

of Health and the common people on which people are sharing all sorts of information about the disease and soliciting support from the healthcare providers.

“Generally we are advising the callers not to rush to the hospital if they have flu like symptoms. We are asking them to remain indoors as much as possible, self-quarantine and if needed we are offering them medical aid”, said an official of the Ministry of Health.

The Operation Room is keeping track on all the guidelines of the Supreme Committee which is tasked with tackling COVID-19.

The Directorate’s Operation Room is in constant contact with the relevant authorities to follow up on all new developments through visual presentation. It also obtains reports and statistics from the Department of Control of Infectious Diseases and links the database to sites being used for geographical information systems.

Several teams and groups have been formed to identify suspected individuals and report any development to the competent medical authorities, which in turn, keep track on the cases of citizens and residents in Dhofar Governorate.



Pope Francis leads the Palm Sunday mass in St. Peter's Basilica without public participation due to the spread of coronavirus disease, at the Vatican on Sunday.

POPE OPENS HOLY WEEK AMID PANDEMIC; SAYS NOW IS THE TIME TO SERVE

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis marked a surreal Palm Sunday in an empty St Peter's Basilica, urging people living through the coronavirus pandemic not to be so concerned with what they lack but how they can ease the suffering of others.

The service, kicking off Holy Week events leading to Easter, usually attracts tens of thousands of people to a St Peter's Square bedecked with olive and palm trees. The service normally includes a long procession of cardinals, priests and faithful carrying palm fronds.

This time, it was held from a secondary altar behind the main one

Francis normally uses and attended by only about two dozen people, including a few aides, nuns and a scaled-down choir, all practicing social distancing.

The symbolic procession was only several metres long and a few potted olive trees were brought in.

The Mass was broadcast on television and over the Internet to many millions. Churches in countries around the world were holding similar, virtual services this week because of restrictions on gatherings.

Cutting a solitary figure, Francis listened as three priests read the gospel account of Jesus' entry into

“
Turn to God in the tragedy
of a pandemic, in the face
of the many false securities
that have now crumbled,
in the face of so many
hopes betrayed, in the
sense of abandonment that
weighs upon our
”

POPE FRANCIS

Jerusalem and being hailed as the messiah.

Holy Week marks the period when Christians commemorate events surrounding the key tenets of their faith - that Jesus was betrayed, crucified and rose from the dead.

In his sermon, Francis urged his listeners to turn to God “in the tragedy of a pandemic, in the face of the many false securities that have now crumbled, in the face of so many hopes betrayed, in the sense of abandonment that weighs upon our hearts”.

The pandemic could help transform fear into service, he said.

The Vatican has been in its own lockdown, mostly mirroring that in Italy, where more than 15,500 people have died since the outbreak of the new coronavirus epidemic in northern Italy on February 21.

There are nearly 125,000 cases of the virus in Italy and seven in the Vatican. The pope and his closest aides have tested negative.

“The tragedy we are experiencing summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that life is of no use if not used to serve others.

For life is measured by love”,

Francis said on Sunday.

“May we reach out to those who are suffering and those most in need. May we not be concerned about what we lack, but what good we can do for others”, he said.

All of the pope's Holy Week services, which normally draw tens of thousands of pilgrims and tourists to Rome, will take place in the empty basilica in a scaled-down version.

The Good Friday Via Crucis (Way of the Cross) procession, which normally takes place around Rome's Colosseum, will instead be held in the relatively small atrium of the basilica.

— Reuters

No parties, no problem: Introverts don't mind sheltering at home

CALIFORNIA: With her painting, baking and near-constant gardening, Stephanie Hollowell kept busy at home even before efforts to stem the coronavirus pandemic meant she had to stay inside the Dallas, Texas house she calls her little kingdom. She didn't invite people to come taste her prize winning cookies, or sample the sweet ground cherries that she grows. A proud introvert, public health orders to stay put suited her just fine.

“So many people are experiencing the painful aspects of this,” said Hollowell, an air traffic controller who took early retirement five years ago, when she was 50. “But basically my life has not changed one single bit”.

In the weeks since millions of people worldwide have been ordered to stay at home except for essential errands, the number of calls to psychiatrists has gone up as depression and anxiety wrack patients who lack social contact, and cannot even come in for an in-person therapy session. But for those who are more used to solitary pursuits, the time alone can



Burrell, left and husband Seifert, whose home-based business has been shuttered, at their home in Seattle.

be rejuvenating - and a relief from the distress brought on by news of the coronavirus and its ravages.

Cynthia Burrell, a massage therapist whose home-based Seattle business has been shuttered, said despite the loss of work she has enjoyed the quieter time with her husband. The couple, avid birders, miss their

outings with the local Audubon group, but have been amazed to watch a Bewick's wren gather up their cat's fur to line its nest. They have seen black-capped chickadees at one neighbour's house, she said, and chestnut-backed chickadees at another.

Gardening, sketching and watching birds in her yard has eased the near-

crippling anxiety she had felt about coronavirus in the weeks leading up to her state's shelter-at-home order. “It is almost like an introvert's dream”, said Burrell, 52. “You can't have a social life. You have to stay home on a Friday or Saturday night. It's honestly a huge relief to have less to do”.

SCI-FI AND NETFLIX

The American Psychological Association defines introversion as a personality trait in which people are more inwardly than outwardly focused, and relatively more reserved. The trait dwells along a continuum that culminates with extroversion, an outwardly oriented approach that includes people who are more outgoing and gregarious.

Because introverts tend to have fewer social interactions during the regular course of their days than extroverts, they may be better positioned to weather enforced time at home than extroverts - at least initially, said Matthias Mehl, a research psychologist at the University of Arizona, Tucson. — Reuters

Trump: ‘Going to be a lot of death’ in US next week from coronavirus

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump told Americans to brace for a big spike in coronavirus fatalities in the coming days, as the country faces what he called the toughest two weeks of the pandemic.

“There's going to be a lot of death”, Trump said at a briefing with reporters. He pushed back on criticism that the federal government has not done enough to get ventilators that many critically ill coronavirus patients need to survive to the states, saying some governors are asking for more machines than they will need.

“Fears of shortages have led to inflated requests”, Trump said of submissions his administration has received to dole out equipment from the strategic national stockpile.

The United States has the world's highest number of known cases of COVID-19, the flu-like respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus. More than 306,000 people have tested positive in the United States and over 8,300 have died, according to a Reuters

tally. White House medical experts have forecast that between 100,000 to 240,000 Americans could be killed in the pandemic, even if sweeping orders to stay home are followed.

“We are coming up to a time that is going to be very horrendous”, Trump said at the White House. “We probably have never seen anything like these kind of numbers. Maybe during the war, during a World War One or Two or something”.

‘LIKE A FIRE’

In the grimmiest day yet for the US state hit hardest by the pandemic, coronavirus-related illnesses killed 630 people in the last 24 hours in New York state, Governor Andrew Cuomo said on Saturday.

The disease has now killed 3,565 people in New York and the situation is particularly worrying on Long Island, east of New York City, where the number of cases “is like a fire spreading”, Cuomo told a news conference.

Chile drought triggers water shortage amid COVID-19

W

ith historically low river flows and reservoirs running dry due to drought, people in central Chile have found themselves particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus pandemic.

Years of resource exploitation and lax legislation have allowed most reservoirs in that part of the country to run dry. "There are now 400,000 families, nearly 1.5 million people approximately, whose supply of 50 litres of water a day depends on tankers," Rodrigo Mundaca, spokesman for the Movement for the Defence of Water, the Earth and the Protection of the Environment, said.

One of the main pieces of advice to protect people against coronavirus is to wash your hands regularly. "Living without water is awful", said Dilma Castillo, who lives with her children on one of the hills around El Melon, a town of 22,000 close to the seaside resort of Valparaiso whose river has dried up.

"The worst thing is that there's no awareness, even among the people here. I'm very distressed because it's humiliating to live in these conditions".

In the greater Santiago area and in Valparaiso, rainfall last year was almost 80 per cent below the previous record low. In the northern region of Coquimbo it was down 90 per cent.

Water tankers serve many homes, whose inhabitants come out to fill drums. The virus pandemic is highlighting "once more that where there is a model of the private appropriation of water... this condition does not guarantee people's human right to water and further weakens communities", said Mundaca. Chilean law states that water is a resource for public use, but it turned over almost the entirety of the right to exploit the resource to the private sector. In the Penuelas lake, an hour from Santiago, much of its bed appears

In the greater Santiago area and in Valparaiso, rainfall last year was almost 80 per cent below the previous record low. In the northern region of Coquimbo it was down 90 per cent

cracked by the sun.

"I've been coming here to fish for 20 years. At first we used to catch a lot... now we don't catch anything," Tomas Ruiz told AFP from the banks of what was left of the lake.

RESIDENTS ANGERED

Matias Asun, the director of Greenpeace-

Chile, said this week that the government of President Sebastian Pinera must "guarantee that there are no second-class citizens without the basics to protect themselves from COVID-19".

"Having soap is useless if there's not enough water to wash with it", he said. Chile has reported more than 3,700 coronavirus cases and 22 deaths.

Private exploitation of water wasn't a problem in times of abundance, as was the case until recently.

But the drought has brought a furious reaction from communities that have run out of water in a country that saw an outbreak of social unrest in October that only subsided when social distancing measures were imposed. Around 100 residents of El Melon occupied a well managed by the Anglo-American mining company, one of many multinationals exploiting Chile's vast copper reserves.

The occupiers are demanding that

the well be used to provide water to people living in the region rather than for mining activity, said Fabian Villarreal, 26, one of the activists.

Anglo-American sent a statement to AFP saying it was committed to the well-being of people living near its sites and was collaborating in the search for "solutions that allow for inhabitants in the area to rely on a permanent supply of potable water".

"The 1981 water code separates the ownership of water from the dominion of the land", said Mundaca. In Chile, "water is bought, sold or leased".

The General Director of Waters, Oscar Cristi, says the water rights have been delivered to private companies, but the state controls those rights and can limit the amount of water kept in reservoirs. However, the state has never exercised that right and if it did, it would have to compensate the private firms affected. – AFP



COVID-19's impact on region's conflicts

T

he novel coronavirus has put global trade on hold, placed half of the world population in confinement and has the potential to topple governments and reshape diplomatic relations. The United Nations has appealed for ceasefires in all the major conflicts rocking the planet, with its chief Antonio Guterres on Friday warning "the worst is yet to come". But it remains unclear what the pandemic's impact will be on the multiple wars roiling the Middle East.

SYRIA

The COVID-19 outbreak turned into a pandemic just as a ceasefire reached by the two main foreign power brokers in Syria's nine-year-old war – Russia and Turkey – was taking effect. The three million people living in the ceasefire zone, in the country's northwestern region of Idlib, had little hope the deal would hold. Yet fears the coronavirus could spread like wildfire across the devastated country appear to have given the truce an extended lease of life.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the month of March saw the lowest civilian death toll since the conflict started in 2011, with 103 deaths. The ability of the multiple administrations in Syria – the Damascus government, the autonomous Kurdish administration in the northeast and the militant-led alliance that runs Idlib – to manage the coronavirus threat is key to their credibility.

However the pandemic and the global mobilisation it requires could precipitate the departure of US-led troops from Syria and neighbouring Iraq. This in turn could create a vacuum in which the Islamic State extremist group, still reeling from the demise of

its "caliphate" a year ago, could seek to step up its attacks.

YEMEN

The Yemeni government and the Ansar Allah initially responded positively to the UN appeal for a ceasefire, as did neighbouring Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition in support of the government. That rare glimmer of hope in the five-year-old conflict was short-lived however and last week Saudi air defences intercepted ballistic missiles over Riyadh and a border city fired by the Iran-backed rebels.

The Saudi-led coalition retaliated by striking Ansar Allah targets in the rebel-held capital Sanaa on Monday. Talks have repeatedly faltered but the UN envoy Martin Griffiths is holding daily consultations in a bid to clinch a nationwide ceasefire.

More flare-ups in Yemen could compound a humanitarian crisis often described as the worst in the world and invite a coronavirus outbreak of catastrophic proportions.

In a country where the health infrastructure has collapsed, where water is a rare commodity and where 24 million people require humanitarian assistance, the population fears being wiped out if a ceasefire doesn't allow for adequate aid.

LIBYA

Much like Yemen, the main protagonists in the Libyan conflict initially welcomed the UN ceasefire call but swiftly resumed hostilities. Fierce fighting has rocked the south of the capital Tripoli in recent days, suggesting the risk of a major coronavirus outbreak is not enough to make guns fall silent.

Turkey has recently played a key

role in the conflict, throwing its weight behind the UN-recognised Government of National Accord.

Analyst Fabrice Balanche predicted that accelerated Western disengagement from Middle East conflicts could limit Turkish support to the GNA. That could eventually favour forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar, who launched an assault on Tripoli one year ago and has the backing of Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Western countries have been hit hardest by the pandemic, which could prompt them to divert both military resources and peace-brokering capacity from foreign conflicts.

A report by the International Crisis Group said European officials had reported that efforts to secure a ceasefire in Libya were no longer receiving high-level attention due to the pandemic.

IRAQ

Iraq is no longer gripped by fully-fledged conflict but it remains vulnerable to an IS resurgence in some regions and its two main foreign backers are at each other's throats.

Iran and the United States are two of the countries most affected by the coronavirus but there has been no sign of any let-up in their battle for influence that has largely played out on Iraqi soil.

With most non-US troops in the coalition now gone and some bases evacuated, American personnel are now regrouped in a handful of locations in Iraq. Washington has deployed Patriot air defence missiles, prompting fears of a fresh escalation with Tehran, whose proxies it blames for a spate of rocket attacks on bases housing US troops. – AFP

Pandemic amplifies poverty in UK

T

he coronavirus pandemic is increasing poverty in Britain, where levels are already high after a decade of austerity triggered by the global financial crisis, according to experts. Official data shows that more than 14 million people in the UK are classed as living in poverty, or nearly one-quarter of the population.

Some 4.2 million children are poor, or around 30 per cent of the total, government figures show. The situation is worsening with Britons losing jobs en masse as the UK experiences lockdown.

"The risk of poverty is particularly high for workers in sectors like hospitality and retail where people are more likely to be on low wages and in insecure work," said Dave Innes, head of economics at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, an organisation for social change. Over the past fortnight, almost one million adults in the UK have applied for Universal Credit, the government's main form of state aid.

That is nearly 10 times the level in an average two-week period. "If families who were earning decent wages before the pandemic move on to the Universal Credit, they will very suddenly find themselves living in poverty," said Louisa McGeehan, a director at Child Poverty Action Group UK.

As for families who were already classed as living in poverty prior to the outbreak – and whose children are stuck at home owing to schools being shut – the demands of online education add to the problem, she said. McGeehan noted that "a lot of schools are putting lessons on the Internet for children to do at home. "If those children are in households who don't have Internet or don't have a computer, they are not able to do that learning".

McGeehan told AFP: "We have a nation where a child poverty crisis has been amplified by the impact of coronavirus." But unlike the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis when the government slashed public spending, COVID-19 has sparked huge state stimulus, including a boost to Universal Credit. An adult receiving the benefit who is aged over 25 will receive £1,000 (\$1,239, 1,137 euros) extra per year. However an increase in the monthly amount to £400 remains far below the level of £600 considered sufficient for a single-person household to avoid "poverty" in the UK.

Meanwhile, foodbanks, which help feed the most vulnerable people including the homeless, are seeing fewer donations amid fallout from the coronavirus. The government is however still providing children who ordinarily received free school meals with lunches. "In my own school, we provide packed lunch that kids can come and pick up," said teacher Amanda Martin, who is also president of the National Education Union. – AFP

OMAN  DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED 15 NOVEMBER 1981

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

HEAD OFFICE

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

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
Fax: 23293909

NIZWA OFFICE

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

ADVERTISING

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

DISTRIBUTION AGENT

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

Website: omanobserver.om

e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om

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

NATIONAL GOALS

Duqm SEZ Authority sets up team to manage COVID-19



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

The Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm (SEZAD) has formed a dedicated team to develop a response plan to manage any coronavirus (COVID-19) infections in the SEZ. The team is led by Mahmoud bin Hamoud al Rawahi, Director General of Control and Compliance at SEZAD and includes representatives from a number of corporates operating at Duqm.

The decision, issued by Dr Ismail bin Ahmed al Balushi, CEO of the SEZ Authority at Duqm, authorized the team to seek assistance from different administrative departments of SEZAD and the projects operating in the SEZ, and request relevant data, information and supporting documents from these departments. Directors of these departments and projects have been directed to extend all possible support to the team.

The decision aligns with the efforts of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 to prevent and contain the spread of the pandemic. The SEZ Authority has already issued a number of circulars to companies operating in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm to abide by the decisions and instructions issued by the Supreme Committee.

Oman LNG earmarks RO 6 million for COVID-19 and job security causes

OF THE TOTAL FUNDING SUPPORT, RO 2 MILLION WILL GO TOWARDS SUPPORTING THE HEALTH MINISTRY’S CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT AND CONTAIN THE SPREAD OF THE PANDEMIC, WHILE RO 4 MILLION WILL GO INTO THE JOB SECURITY FUND SET UP BY HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Oman LNG has pledged a total of RO 6 million in funding for two strategic national initiatives – the fund set up by the Supreme Committee for COVID-19 and the Ministry of Health pandemic prevention and containment efforts (which will receive RO 2 million), and the Job Security Fund (RO 4 million) set up by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. In a statement, Oman LNG lauded the immense efforts and precautionary measures taken by the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health in dealing with this pandemic. The way in which the teams from different units of the government have been working tirelessly by introducing timely possible measures from setting



up of quarantine zones, testing thousands of citizens, flying back citizens to the homeland and ensuring the availability of critical facilities and needs for sustaining the requirements of both citizens and residents merit

“Our support to the Job Security Fund ties-in well with our ultimate goal of contributing to the country’s sustainable development especially in the push to provide job security for our Omani colleagues

HARIB AL KITANI
CEO, Oman LNG

great applause, it said. Harib al Kitani (pictured), Oman

LNG CEO, commented: “We express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the authorities for their efforts and precautionary measures to ensure the safety of our communities and people during such challenging times. We at Oman LNG have been accustomed to meet the country’s expectations from private sector in both good and challenging times.” Al Kitani thanked Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, and Salim al Aufi, Chairmen of Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG respectively, and Board of Directors of Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG for their full support to the company to undertake these initiatives. The contribution of RO 4 million towards the Job Security Fund will help support workers whose jobs

are impacted by the pandemic and the economic downturn, said Oman LNG. “Our support to the Job Security Fund ties-in well with our ultimate goal of contributing to the country’s sustainable development especially in the push to provide job security for our Omani colleagues. Job creation and training for employment have always been top priority at Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG. We are glad that oil and gas sector is leading in these initiatives and this contribution to the fund will go a long way to help our colleagues effected by the current situation,” said Al Kitani. The support comes as an extension of Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG national role and the fulfilment of their responsibility towards the society.

Omani economy to remain subdued in 2020, recover in 2021

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

A rebound in the Omani economy is anticipated in 2021 while the remaining part of 2020 is expected to remain subdued, weighed down by the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the slump in global crude prices, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). The apex bank made the observation in its newly published ‘Review of the Omani Economy: Jan – Sept 2019’, issued here this week. The report begins with a grim assessment of the outlook for the global economy adversely impacted by the pandemic. “Although the global growth was likely to improve in 2020 and beyond with continued policy support in large economies, the worldwide outbreak of Covid-19 coupled with subsequent economic lockdown and heightened uncertainty derailed the global recovery. It is now certain that world economy would witness a recession as bad as or worse than 2009,” the Central Bank said. It noted, however, the “exceptional and far-reaching fiscal and monetary measures” adopted by advanced economies and large emerging markets, as evidenced by the outlays



‘THE RECENT IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPORTANT POLICY MEASURES AND PROMULGATION OF SEVERAL CRITICAL LAWS (FOREIGN CAPITAL INVESTMENT, PRIVATISATION, PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP, BANKRUPTCY, ETC) ARE AIMED AT IMPROVING THE BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE NON-OIL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN THE SULTANATE’: CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN

of trillions of dollars in stimulus spending, aimed at addressing the public health crisis and alleviating its impact on the economy. “In view of a coordinated and

accentuated policy response, the global economy is expected to recover with a sizable rebound in 2021. Nonetheless, the expected recovery in 2021 would be at risk if liquidity problem turns

into a solvency issue and sudden stop of world economic activities persists and leads to bankruptcies and layoffs,” the CBO warned. Oman’s authorities, for their part,

have taken steps to support non non-oil economic activities, which remain important to ensuring sustainable growth over the medium to long run in the Sultanate.

“Hence, the recent implementation of important policy measures and promulgation of several critical laws (Foreign Capital Investment, Privatization, Public-Private Partnership, Bankruptcy, etc) are aimed at improving the business and investment environment to promote non-oil economic activities in the Sultanate,” the regulator said. Also playing a key role in ensuring macroeconomic stability is Tawazun, a high-powered committee set up by the Omani government in September 2019 with a “mandate” to chalk out a medium-term fiscal consolidation plan, the Central Bank pointed out. It nevertheless acknowledges that the pandemic, coupled with the burgeoning global downturn, “is expected to drive the world economy into a recession during 2020”, amid collapsing oil demand that has pushed oil prices to historical lows. Any sizable recovery in oil prices is unlikely during 2020 – an unfortunate outcome that will also have adverse implications for non-hydrocarbon activities, it said. “Considering the above factors, the outlook of the Omani economy appears to be subdued in 2020 but expected to improve in 2021,” the Central Bank stated.



Producers gunning to save oil from the abyss

OLE S HANSEN

The world remains in the midst of an unprecedented slowdown as the economic and humanitarian cost of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to rise. Lockdowns, social distancing and travel bans have hit the energy sector particularly hard as people stay at home while planes remain grounded.

The impact on commodities, depending on growth, demand and well-functioning supply chains, have predominantly been negative. Crude oil and related products have borne the brunt as demand has collapsed by an estimated +25 million barrels/day. Faced with the growing risk of running out of storage capacity within months and with that a total price collapse, supported an end of week rally. This on renewed hope that an emergency production cut could be agreed among major producers in and outside of Opec.

The agriculture sector have seen the negative impact of falling oil prices on sugar and corn through its biofuel link. Cotton has sold off in response to a collapse in clothes sales and lower prices for oil-linked synthetic fibers. Wheat and orange juice (not shown) meanwhile managed to notch up some gains on the initial hoarding of flour, bread, pasta and frozen orange juice by consumers forced to stay at home.

Industrial metals, led by copper, was heading for its first weekly gain in six. While demand has fallen, the price has been supported by the risk to supply from virus-related mining disruptions. In addition, the sector stands to benefit from government initiatives to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

Investment metals led by gold have seen a very mixed month. Gold has held its own with strong haven demand



THE MARKET RALLIED INTO THE WEEKEND ON NEWS THAT AN OPEC-ORGANIZED MEETING OF PRODUCERS ON APRIL 6 (TODAY) WOULD DISCUSS A 10 MILLION BARRELS/DAY PRODUCTION CUT

through ETF's offsetting headwinds from lower inflation expectations, a stronger dollar and weak demand in key markets such as India and China. Silver's 50 per cent link to industrial applications helped send it sharply lower with its relative cheapness to gold rising to a multi-decade high.

Extreme volatility reigns in the energy market as the market has swung between focusing on a total collapse due to lack of storage and renewed hopes about production cuts. Having fought off sellers at \$20/b, WTI crude oil surged on news that Trump was seeking a production cut deal with other major producers.

While countries like Russia and Saudi Arabia undoubtedly have been

shocked by the collapse in demand and price, it is the immediate threat to the North American oil industry which triggered the prospect for a deal to be struck. During the past week, several US and Canadian oil varieties traded below \$10/b and well below the cost of keeping operations alive.

The market rallied into the weekend on news that an Opec-organized meeting of producers on April 6 would discuss a 10 million barrels/day production cut. A cut of this magnitude would do little to offset the current loss in demand, estimated at between 20 and 35 million barrels/day. It would, however, buy the market a bit more time to recover from the pandemic before running out of storage capacity.

With current volatility above 100 per cent and the risk of renewed weakness, investors looking for a longer term bet on rising oil prices will be better off looking at individual oil companies with strong balance sheets or ETF's providing exposure to a basket of oil companies.

Gold has settled into a wide \$1570/oz to \$1650/oz range with current developments providing a case for a move in both directions. Sellers have been focusing on falling inflation expectations from lower commodity prices, a stronger dollar and weak demand from the world's two biggest buyers; China and India. The potential for the Russian central bank becoming a seller to fund a growing budget deficit

also attracted some attention.

Against these short term developments the continued strong demand for gold through ETF's highlights the continued demand for safe havens and alternatives to stocks and bonds.

As a recession takes hold, the potential for even more easing from central banks is likely to keep real yields, a key driver for gold, anchored in negative territory. In our Q2 Outlook published this week titled "A world out of balance" we focused on the aftermath of the current crisis.

The global economy has become a financialized super tanker fueled by credit and low interest. With helicopter money hitting the market over the

coming months, we see the tanker heading from a The Port of Deflation to a new destination called The Port of High Inflation. Into this period we want to be long volatility and commodities, such as gold.

Silver remains troubled by its March collapse to a multiyear low and so far it has only managed a weak correction back to \$14.50/oz. The gold-silver ratio has recovered to 112 from a peak above 125 (ounces of silver to one ounce of gold). For that to recover back towards its long term average close to 80 the demand outlook for industrial applications first need to stabilize. Some virus-related mining disruptions in Mexico, the world's biggest producer, could if realized also provide some support.

Cocoa is currently looking to establish support at \$2200/t after having fallen by 25 per cent since February. The coronavirus impact on demand has shifted the focus from a supply deficit to a surplus. Four weeks of aggressive selling has now cut the speculative position held by funds to neutral from a near record long. On that basis the price is now more receptive to price friendly news.

Sugar is another soft commodity that has seen a dramatic collapse in recent weeks. From a 3-1/2 year high at 16 cts/lb in February it hit 10 cents/lb this past week.

Sugar is often closely linked with crude oil as the demand from ethanol produces ebb and flow with the price of crude oil. The correlation increased during the past month as the corona pandemic and oil price collapse sent it tumbling. Having reached important support at 10 cents/lb the price is likely to be very receptive to further gains in the price of oil. Hedge funds held a net-short in the week to March 24, another requisite required for the market to attract renewed buying.

(Ole S Hansen is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank)



ASHRAF SHEET

POINT of VIEW

Preparing employees to be cybersafe when working from home

As companies across sectors encourage—and even mandate—that their employees work from home to protect themselves and others from the spread of coronavirus, IT professionals are tasked with the increasingly complex and challenging responsibility of cyber safety for employees' devices and companies' networks.

Individuals and organizations are likely to face increased cyberthreats from malicious actors attempting to target weakened network security as a result of more people teleworking.

For organizations that already offer work-from-home options for all or many of their employees, their network infrastructure and institutional awareness are most likely prepared to protect them from outside cyberthreats. But for companies and employees where the option to work from home is new, it is important that IT professionals and individual employees take the steps necessary to prevent attacks.

Infoblox recommends that businesses in Oman implement the following guidelines and best practices to ensure the security of their networks and corporate data while employees are working from home.

Develop and communicate clear and consistent cyber safety policies

It is essential that employees



have clearly defined IT policies and protocols in place for working from home. These cyber safety guidelines should include, but are not limited to:

- Making sure that employees use only approved devices to access and store corporate data, where possible
- Mandating the use of strong passwords—at least 12 characters—when accessing corporate networks; and
- Implementing multi-factor authentication—ideally with hardware tokens instead of text messages (which can be spoofed).

Leverage technological solutions for cyber safety

Companies most likely already

have a robust security infrastructure in place to ensure the cyber safety of their corporate networks. With users increasingly working from home, the traditional corporate security perimeter has vanished and VPNs are often no longer necessary to get work done.

Instead, employees are increasingly using cloud applications, many of which have not been vetted for security issues.

Network managers and security teams need to ensure that technologies used when working from home are ready and secure, including:

- Ensuring that all corporate security products are patched and updated to the most recent version

across users

- Providing a fast, secure, reliable and easy way to protect users, enforce acceptable use policies and ensure business continuity
- If they continue to use VPNs, ensuring that they are encrypted, updated and protected with strong passwords and 2-factor authentication
- Increasing the monitoring of endpoint, email and remote access security events.

Educate employees about the increased risk of cyberthreats

Above all, employers should make sure that employees are aware of the increased risk of cyberthreats tied to the coronavirus pandemic and

train them on how to avoid them, including:

- Alerting employees to expect an increase in phishing attempts and other malware, and to not respond to any emails seeking personal, corporate or financial information
- Reminding employees that malicious actors often disguise themselves using legitimate-looking email addresses and to verify a sender's identity before clicking on a link in an email. Avoid clicking on links in unsolicited emails and to be wary of email attachments (for example, malicious actors are using fears of coronavirus to distribute the LokiBot malware)

- Teaching employees how to make sure their work-from-home setup is secure and that WiFi and other devices are properly configured; and
- Re-enforcing with employees the importance of reporting suspected security events.

As networks continue to be more decentralized and more employees take advantage of the benefits of working from home, securing networks from malware and other cyberthreats will remain a challenge. Emphasizing and implementing these cyber safety best practices for working from home will help IT managers ensure that corporate networks remain cyber-safe.

(Ashraf Sheet, Regional Director, Middle East & Africa at Infoblox)

For companies and employees where the option to work from home is new, it is important that IT professionals and individual employees take the steps necessary to prevent attacks.

Opec+ meeting delayed as Saudi, Russia row over oil price collapse

DUBAI/MOSCOW: Opec and Russia have postponed a Monday meeting to discuss oil output cuts until April 9, Opec sources said, as a dispute between Moscow and Saudi Arabia over who is to blame for plunging crude prices intensified.

The delay came amid pressure from US President Donald Trump for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries led by Saudi Arabia and its allies, a group collectively known as Opec+, to urgently stabilise global oil markets.

Oil prices hit an 18-year low on March 30 due to a slump in demand caused by lockdowns to contain the coronavirus outbreak and the failure of Opec and other producers led by Russia to extend a deal on output curbs that expired on March 31.

Opec+ is working on a deal to cut the production of oil equivalent by about 10 per cent of world supply, or 10 million barrels per day, in what member states expect to be an unprecedented global effort including the United States.

Washington, however, has yet to make a commitment to join the effort and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday put the blame for the collapse in prices on Saudi Arabia — prompting a firm response from Riyadh on Saturday.

“The Russian Minister of Energy was the first to declare to the media that all the participating countries are absolved of their commitments starting from the first of April, leading to the decision that the countries have taken to raise their production,” Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said in a statement.

Putin, speaking on Friday during a video conference with government officials and the heads of major Russian oil producers, said the first reason for the fall in prices was the impact of the



Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud and Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak are seen at the beginning of an Opec+ meeting in Vienna, Austria, in this file photo. — Reuters

coronavirus on demand.

“The second reason behind the collapse of prices is the withdrawal of our partners from Saudi Arabia from the Opec+ deal, their production increase and information, which came out at the same time, about the readiness of our partners to even provide a discount for oil,” Putin said.

The Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud disputed Putin's claims, saying Russia had withdrawn and that statements about the kingdom's withdrawal from the Opec+ deal was devoid of truth, state agency (SPA) reported on Saturday.

Opec sources, who asked not be identified, said the emergency virtual meeting planned for Monday would likely now be postponed until April 9 to allow more time for negotiations.

Opec sources later downplayed the

Saudi-Russia row, saying the atmosphere was still positive, although there was no draft deal yet nor agreement on details such as a reference level from which to make the production cuts.

“The first problem is that we have to cut from the current production level now, not to go back to the one before the crisis,” one of the Opec sources said. “The second issue is the Americans, they have to play a part.”

Oil recovered from this week's lows of \$20 per barrel with Brent settling at \$34.11 on Friday, still far below the \$66 level at the end of 2019. Prices had their biggest one-day gain ever on Thursday when Trump said he expected Russia and Saudi Arabia to announce a major production cut.

The United States is not part of Opec+ and the idea of Washington curbing production has long been seen

as impossible, not least because of US antitrust laws. Still, the oil price crash has spurred regulators in Texas, the heart of US oil production, to consider regulating output for the first time in nearly 50 years.

But US Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette, in a call with oil industry leaders on Friday, did not mention the possibility of US production cuts, a source who listened to the call said.

On Saturday, US President Donald Trump focused instead on tariffs as a response to the oil price crash.

“If I have to do tariffs on oil coming from outside or if I have to do something to protect our ... tens of thousands of energy workers and our great companies that produce all these jobs, I'll do whatever I have to do,” Trump told reporters in a briefing about the coronavirus outbreak. — Reuters

Trump threatens tariffs on oil imports to ‘protect’ workers

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said he would impose tariffs on crude imports if he has to “protect” US energy workers from the oil price crash that has been exacerbated by a war between Russia and Saudi Arabia over market share.

“If I have to do tariffs on oil coming from outside or if I have to do something to protect our ... tens of thousands of energy workers and our great companies that produce all these jobs, I'll do whatever I have to do,” Trump told reporters in a briefing about the coronavirus outbreak.

Oil prices have dropped by about two-thirds this year as the pandemic crushes demand and as major producers Russia and Saudi Arabia boost output in a war over market share.

The United States in recent years has become the world's biggest oil producer, at times putting its exports in competition with Russia and members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or Opec.

As oil prices drop, many heavily leveraged US energy companies face bankruptcies and workers are at risk of layoffs. After meeting with industry executives on Friday, Trump said he was not considering tariffs at the moment, but it was a tool that could be used “if we're not treated fairly.”

Two major industry groups, the American Petroleum Institute and American Fuel &



US President Donald Trump addresses the daily coronavirus task force briefing in the press briefing room at the White House. — Reuters

Petrochemical Manufacturers, told Trump in a letter on Wednesday that tariffs on oil imports would jeopardize the domestic refining business as some plants depend on crude from abroad.

The United States imported more 1 million barrels per day of oil from Russia and Saudi Arabia combined in 2019, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

Trump reiterated on Saturday that Saudi Arabia had told him it had agreed with Russia to jointly reduce output by an unprecedented 10 million barrels per day or more. The countries have not confirmed the plan, other than saying they would discuss ways to stabilize global oil markets.

Opec and Russia have postponed a Monday meeting to discuss oil output cuts until April 9, Opec sources said, due to a Saudi-Russia dispute over who is to blame for plunging crude prices. — Reuters

GM's first quarter China car sales drop 43 per cent

BEIJING: General Motors Co's vehicle sales in China fell 43.3 per cent in the first three months of 2020 compared with the same period last year, the company said, as the coronavirus pandemic reduced demand in the world's biggest auto market.

The pandemic has killed over 3,300 people in China, the world's second-biggest economy, and caused the government to lock down parts of the country to contain the spread. The travel restrictions contributed to a 79 per cent drop in overall auto sales in February after a 19 per cent drop in January.

GM, China's second-biggest



A Cadillac Escalade SUV by General Motors Co of the US is displayed during the Auto China motor show in Beijing. — Reuters

foreign automaker, delivered 461,716 vehicles in the first quarter, the company said. The first quarter drop follows a second straight decline in annual sales in 2019. — Reuters

Exxon plays on virus worries in Baytown contract talks

HOUSTON: A union official accused Exxon Mobil Corp of using “scare” tactics and exploiting economic uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic in negotiations with workers at its Baytown, Texas, refinery, allegations the company denied.

Exxon has begun meeting with groups of union-represented employees after rejecting two contract extension proposals from the union, said Ricky Brooks, president of United Steelworkers union local 13-2001, which represents hourly workers at Baytown.

“They've begun in-house scare and misinformation meetings, leveraging the uncertainty of COVID-19 to get all of their issues and force the union to forego all of its issues,” Brooks said. “They have held the pattern wages hostage if the union moves to go to the table.”

Exxon spokesman Todd Spitler said the



A view of the Exxon Mobil refinery is pictured in Baytown, Texas. — Reuters

company's focus was on the safety of its workforce.

“While our goal is to continue to negotiate in good faith to reach an agreement, Exxon Mobil's primary focus remains the safety and health of our workforce and to do our part to manage the impact of the novel coronavirus in the community,” Spitler

said. “We reject these unwarranted claims. One only has to look at current market conditions to realize that this is simply not true.”

Plummeting demand for oil due to the pandemic, coupled with a flood of supply resulting from a Saudi-Russia price war, led US oil futures prices to crash 54 per cent in March.

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the new coronavirus. Pattern wages refers to the national pattern agreement reached in January 2019 between the USW International and US refiners that sets wage increases for all USW-represented workers.

Under the proposal rejected in January, pay was set to go up 3.5 per cent in the first year and 4 per cent in the second year. In the third year, the increase would match the pay hike in the new national agreement the USW will negotiate for oil industry workers with energy companies in January 2022. — Reuters

Investors look to coronavirus data to stabilise markets

NEW YORK: Investors are parsing a broad range of signals, from infection counts to more traditional indicators, for clues on the trajectory markets may take in coming weeks as the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus continues to spread.

Some point to signs that the worst of a vicious sell-off that took the S&P 500 down as much as 34 per cent from its record closing high may be fading, though markets remain turbulent and far off their highs.

Volatility has eased from its March peaks. Fewer US stocks are hitting new 52-week lows. Liquidity in fixed-income markets has improved, and credit spreads, while still wide, have come in from their March highs.

“Most of the damaging, indiscriminate selling was reached in mid-March,” said Keith Lerner, chief market strategist at Truist/SunTrust Advisory Services in Atlanta.

Economic indicators like employment data are only beginning to factor in the scale of economic damage wrought by the pandemic, leaving investors looking to various corners of the markets and information on the virus' spread to gauge the direction asset prices are likely to take.

Investor sentiment, often seen as a contrarian indicator, is one signal pointing to an eventual turnaround in US stocks. Bank of America Global Research's Sell Side Indicator in March dropped to 54.9 per cent. At that level or lower, US stock returns over the following 12 months have been positive 94 per cent of the time, the bank's analysts wrote.

Contrarian indicator means bearish investors may presage a bullish market — and vice-versa.

Some investors have also noticed parallels between the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the



A man wears a protective mask as he walks on Wall Street during the coronavirus outbreak in New York City. — Reuters

novel coronavirus, and movements in the Cboe Volatility Index, known as Wall Street's fear gauge.

The VIX, which climbed to its highest levels since 2008 amid the market sell-off, has closely tracked the

number of countries where the daily growth of coronavirus cases exceeds 10 per cent, according to Jason Hunter, head of global fixed income and US equity technical strategy at JP Morgan.

The index has fallen as the number of countries with a sharp rise in cases has abated.

“Any improvements in that trajectory have the potential to limit the severity of an equity index retest this spring,” Hunter wrote in a research note. “More importantly, how the outbreak story evolves over the summer and into the fall will likely dictate the overall duration and magnitude of the bear market.”

Tracking the number of US states with 10 per cent or higher daily growth in confirmed cases reveals a similar pattern, Hunter found. The index on Friday stood at 48.43, below its all-time closing high of 82.69 on Mar 16.

For now, the overall numbers look

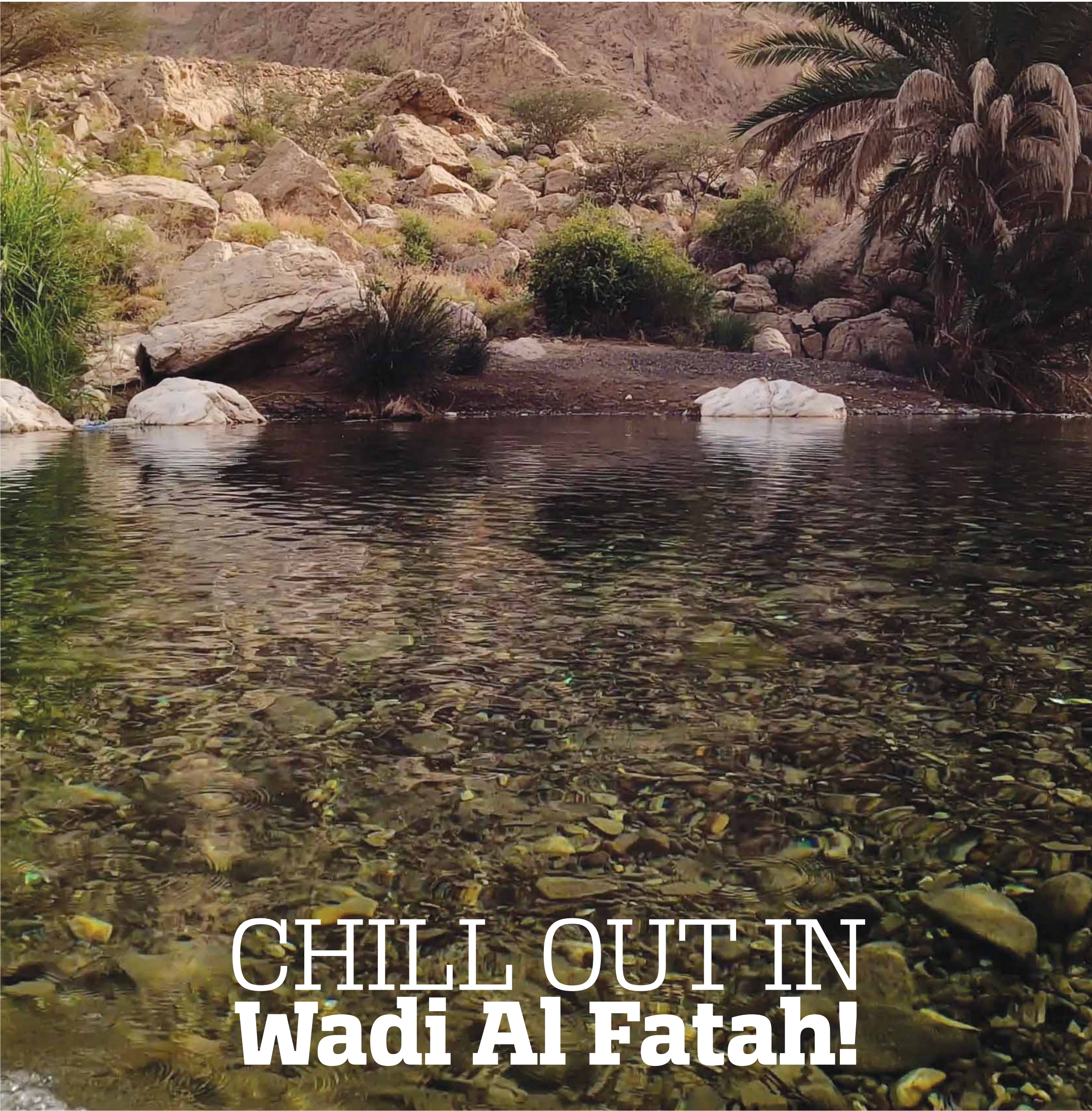
grim. Confirmed US cases surpassed 256,000 on Friday. More than 6,500 Americans have died, according to a tally of official data, and more than a quarter of those deaths have been in New York City.

Economic data have been just as dour. On Friday, the Labour Department's monthly payrolls report showed the US economy shed 701,000 jobs in March, ending a record 113 straight months of job growth. The previous day, the Labour Department reported that weekly US jobless claims hit a record 6.6 million.

That scale of market disruption has made some market participants more doubtful. Investors may be overly optimistic in their expectations for a sharp market rebound even if the number of US coronavirus cases flatlines earlier than expected, said Nancy Perez, senior portfolio manager at Boston Private. — Reuters

features

[Twitter](#)
[Facebook](#)
[Instagram](#)
[YouTube](#)
[follow us @omanobserver](#)
[www.omanobserver.om](#)
[observerfeatures@gmail.com](#)



CHILL OUT IN Wadi Al Fatah!

MAI AL ABRI

For many people, even the thought of visiting some new places gives them a thrill. Trying new things is not only alluring to curious people, it's irresistible. "Going somewhere new makes me feel more active. It forces me to see the world with new eyes. It allows me to step outside of my routines and review myself. Reconsider who I am, what I do and why I do it", says Abulrahman, who is passionate about visiting wadis in the Sultanate.

"I get very enthusiastic when the country witnesses rainy seasons or weather troughs. I plan ahead which wadis I should visit and I choose an entertaining companion. I try to enjoy myself to the maximum; however, I am very careful not to violate rules or endanger myself and others".

"The recent trough brought rains to almost all parts of the Sultanate", Abdulrahman adds. Striving to keep that feeling of excitement alive in between vacations to new places is the greatest challenge in life. I went to Wadi Al Fatah in Dhank, Al Dhahirah Governorate".

Wadi Al Fatah is one of the tourist attractions in Dhank, which is 40 km from the centre of the wilayat. The valley passes between the mountains and is characterised by an abundance of water throughout the year

Wadi Al Fatah is one of the tourist places in Dhank, which is 40 km from the centre of the wilayat.

The valley passes between the mountains and is characterised by an abundance of water throughout the year that increases after the rains. The wadi is surrounded by different types of trees and visitors find there a natural outlet to enjoy the place and its diverse natural features.

The wadi includes rocks of different shapes and colours. The falaj, which permeates the wadi, shows the splendour of Omani engineering in the ancient irrigation system, and it emphasises the profi-



ciency of ancestors in using the natural resources for the sake of human beings.

"Some migratory birds find the wadi as an ideal resting station and they stay there for some days or weeks, which contributes to enriching the valley's natural life and its diversity and making it a destination for tourists", Abdulrahman says.

The completion of the Al Khubayb-Dhank road that connects the wilayat with the highway of Yanqul towards Al Buraimi Governorate has contributed to a spike in the tourist flow to the wilayat and also facilitated access to the wadi, which is a major tourist attraction in Dhank.

He pointed out that Al Fatah has multiple aesthetic aspects and an environmental diversity that comprises high mountains with caves, flat plains and vast areas of agricultural land.

"The town is surrounded by a number of inhabited villages, and some of the people of these villages are engaged in the grazing of cattle. The wadi is a natural resort visited by tourists on most days of the year, especially weekends and mild winter days, to enjoy its natural beauty and its water flowing from the surrounding mountains", he adds.

Photos: Abdulrahman al Maamari



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

The head coach of the junior national basketball teams, Mladen Ostojic, stated that he is in a continuous follow up with the players during this tough situation of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Bosnian coach added the main directions and instructions to the players are based on some basics training including the stretching, fitness and stomach practices to keep them fit.

The coach, who was appointed in this position since February by Oman Basketball Association (OBA), pointed out to Oman Daily Observer.

"The preparatory plan for the junior teams had changed a lot but we are hoping the things will return back to the normal condition soon and will resume the training sessions," he added.

The former coach of UAE team took charge as head of the technical staff of the junior teams after the Serbian coach Marco Ku Rovek stepped down after being in the job for two years. The experienced coach in junior teams stressed on everyone including the players staying at home in this period to avoid spreading the

National junior basketball coach keeping players motivated



COVID-19 coronavirus but he advised all the players to allocate some time for the home training to manage their fitness level. "I am in direct contact with players accompanied with the

colleagues in the technical staff to direct the players to invest from this period to exercise and move the body. We informed them to decrease the allocation time for the TV watching



and video games," he added.

The new head coach of the Sultanate basketball for junior teams attended many matches during the junior leagues. "I was very close and I

watched many games at the under-14 league which ended for Seeb and Ahli Sidab came as runners-up while Al Mudhaibi team finished in third place. I hope to see more teams in the league

in the forthcoming seasons. There are many talented and good players (14 and 15 years old) who can be in the squad. They need more training and a right platform to gain the required technical skills and tactics. Our main target is to revamp the national squads and position the teams at the podium and top places," the 63 years old said.

Based on the previous set plan, the national U-15 team was supposed to take part at the GCC Basketball Championship which was scheduled to be held in August in Bahrain. It was the first assignment for the coach but the GCC executive committee decided to postpone the championship to the next year due to the recent COVID-19 coronavirus.

The coach Mladen Ostojic commented on the postponement of the tournament. "It is an expected decision due to the current circumstances. However, we will continue in our training programme if the things are back to the normal situation and that is our hope. Obviously, more training for this category of the players is essential and will keep them in the right shape for the future tourneys and events.



NBA, KNICKS, NETS HELP DONATE ONE MILLION MASKS

NEW YORK: The NBA, the New York Knicks and the Brooklyn Nets are collaborating with China's consul general Huang Ping to donate one million surgical masks to the New York City area, governor Andrew Cuomo announced on Saturday.

Cuomo announced the news on Twitter, saying, "New York thanks you. We are beyond grateful for this gift of critically needed (personal protective equipment)."

The masks will go to the city's essential workers battling the coronavirus pandemic.

Nets owner Joe Tsai and his wife, Clara Wu Tsai, have also donated 1,000 ventilators, which are expected to be delivered on Saturday from China. Cuomo said on Thursday the city was less than a week away from



running out of ventilators.

Tsai is the co-founder and executive vice chairman of the Alibaba Group, which previously donated a million masks and half a million tests to New York.

According to ESPN, the NBA, WNBA and their players have

combined to donate \$50 million toward coronavirus-related relief efforts.

New York reported a record one-day increase (10,841) in confirmed cases of COVID-19 from Friday to Saturday. Friday was also the deadliest day (630 deaths) in the state to this point. — Reuters

Pressure grows for shortened IPL behind closed doors

MUMBAI: Players are putting pressure on cricket authorities to plan a shortened Twenty20 Indian Premier League later in the year to "kickstart" the sports economy after the coronavirus lockdown.

The world's richest cricket tournament has been postponed until April 15, which coincides with the end of India's 21 day nationwide shutdown to halt the spread of the pandemic.

But with the number of cases and deaths rising and India isolated from international travel, few believe any sport will be possible in the sub-continent for at least three months.

"Let's say July-August is the earliest," said Kevin Pietersen, the former England batsman.

"I do truly believe the IPL should happen. I think every single player around the world is desperate to play the IPL," he said on Indian broadcaster Star Sports.

Pietersen suggested the eight-team tournament be shortened from its normal eight-week duration and played behind closed doors.

"There could be a way in which to get some money into the franchises, into the economy by having a situation where you use maybe three venues which are completely closed to fans," said Pietersen.

"And the players can still go out and play the tournament in three weeks or in four weeks.

"I think the fans need to understand they can't watch a live game at the moment and they might not be able to watch a live game for the foreseeable future."

The league is a huge revenue earner for the Board of Control for Cricket



I do truly believe the IPL should happen. I think every single player around the world is desperate to play the IPL
KEVIN PIETERSEN
Former England batsman

in India (BCCI) and is estimated to generate more than \$11 billion for the Indian economy.

Chinese mobile phone-maker Vivo paid \$330 million to be the league's top sponsor for 2018-2022.

Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar said the league, which involves stars such as England's

Ben Stokes, David Warner and Pat Cummins of Australia, and India captain Virat Kohli, will inject life into the virus-ravaged economy.

"The moment we get clearances from all the authorities that matter, the IPL should happen, only because it will kickstart the economy," said the cricketer-turned-commentator.

"Because when you talk about the IPL it's not just about the Mumbai Indians, or a (Mahendra Singh) Dhoni or a Virat Kohli, there are a lot of people who are making their livelihood through the IPL."

Stokes and Cummins have already voiced their eagerness to participate in the IPL.

Kolkata Knight Riders-contracted Cummins said "everyone's still really keen for it (IPL) to all go ahead".

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly has conceded the IPL will be a "truncated" affair if it happens at all.

— AFP

sport



LONDON: Simona Halep is trying to look on the bright side regarding the suspension of the tennis season due to the coronavirus pandemic, which means at least she will be referred to as reigning Wimbledon champion for two years. The Romanian former world number one produced a flawless performance to beat Serena Williams in last year's final but this week's cancellation of the grasscourt Grand Slam means she will not get to defend her title this summer. Halep, 28, is currently back in her native Romania where she has been locked down at home for 22 days, only popping out briefly to jog around the grounds of her residence. Asked about the Wimbledon cancellation, announced on Wednesday, Halep told Eurosport's Tennis Legends podcast: "I take it positively, because I am now the defending champion for two years. So, I have to live with that for one more year so that's a good thing again."

"I am excited that I will be able to play the first match on (the) Tuesday I think on Centre Court. So, I really want to make this experience. It's going to be great for sure." The WTA Tour and ATP Tour have been shut down until the middle of July, at least, but Halep is geared up for a longer suspension of the season, possibly the whole year. "I know that the worst scenario in my head is that this year is going to be cancelled and, yeah, I'm sure we're going to overcome this period if we listen and stay home safely," she said.

At least
I can be
Wimbledon
champion
for two
years,
says
Halep

"For the moment, I think it's going to be longer than July. We hope for the US Open (scheduled for Aug. 31 to Sept. 13) but it's not sure because New York is struggling now."

LOTS OF SLEEP

After so many years jet-setting around the globe, Halep said the enforced time off from the Tour had been welcome in some respects, even if the circumstances were dreadful.

"It's the longest period that I haven't touched a racket. Not the ball, the racket — since Dubai," she said. "And I want to keep it that way for one more month."

"I just kept it very safe because I am a little bit scared about it. And I just want to stay chilled. I wake up at around 10 or 11. It's very good to have a lot of sleep."

"No alarm clock, no schedule, so I just wake up. I have a late breakfast and then I do some running here in the complex. Because we are allowed to do it, it's a private residence."

"In the house I work on my core and my other exercises. So, every day I am working and I feel fit yes."

Halep said that while she missed her job, it was right that sport had faded into the background at a time of global crisis.

"It's just a world problem and I just want to say that it's safer that everything got canceled. It's not a small problem, it's a huge problem. And we just have to listen to what they say, to stay home and being very safe," she said.

"Tennis is not everything in my life."
— Reuters

