



Established 1981

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82 new cases as 364 recover in Sultanate

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced on Tuesday registration of 82 new positive cases with coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Sultanate. Forty of the new cases are Omanis and 42 cases are non-Omanis.

This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 2,131, in addition to 10 death cases. The ministry also pointed out that 364 cases have recovered.

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

The ministry also advises citizens and residents to keep on washing hands with water and soap, as well as avoiding touching the face, nose, mouth, eyes and follow healthy habits when coughing and sneezing. — ONA

SOME BUSINESS ACTIVITIES TO OPEN

SUPREME COMMITTEE STUDIES ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on Tuesday held a meeting during which it decided to open some business activities.

The meeting, held at the Ministry of Interior, was chaired by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.



The committee studied topics related to economic impacts of the pandemic, particularly commercial and industrial activities. It discussed some proposed solutions that consider public health and support the reopening of some business activities. Then, the Supreme Committee, after coordinating with some departments concerned in the public and private sectors, decided to open some commercial activities, and these include:

Vehicle repair workshops; fishing boat repair workshops;

car parts sale shops; outlets selling spare parts of fishing equipment; outlets selling electronic and electrical appliances and computers; outlets repairing home electrical appliances/equipment; satellite trans-

mission equipment outlets; car rental offices; equipment and machinery rent of-fices; sale in outlets special-ised in stationary and office supplies; printing presses; Sanad offices; quarries and stone crushers.

Customers visiting the above-mentioned shops, offices and outlets are prohibited from entering the workplace, and the services have to be limited to re-ceiving and delivering, according to the decision of the Supreme Committee.

The committee also decided to allow the opening of the following activities in condition that only two customers at a time is allowed to be inside the outlet.

5
Ramadhan
Wednesday
29/4/2020

Prayer times

	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:14	04:19	04:43
DHUHR:	12:09	12:13	12:26
ASR:	03:35	03:38	03:38
MAGHRIB:	06:39	06:42	06:48
ISHA:	07:54	07:57	07:59

Ramadhan Mubarak
2020/1441 AH
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1,600 medicines procured, just 16 in short supply

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospi-tal confirmed that it has pur-chased more than 1,600 medi-cines from several countries particularly from developed countries, and these medi-cines are made available to

patients at the hospital.

Refuting rumours on so-cial media about a servere shortage of medicines, the Royal Hospital said a lim-ited shortage of medicines has occurred due to re-

strictions on international shipments and decisions taken by some countries to halt export of medicines. However, only 16 out 1,600 medicines have recently been in short supply.

In a statement, the Royal Hospital said it has taken several measures to obtain medicines and that 4 out of the 16 medicines are expected to arrive in the coming days.



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Commercial establishments must take health preventive measures

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

All commercial establishments that have been allowed to resume operations are required to follow certain guidelines.

They should provide appropriate personal protection for every employee.

All employees should be urged to sterilize commonly-used devices and equipment such as phones, tablets and POS machines.

They should check clients and employees of any respiratory symptoms, temperatures, cough and runny nose. Those with these symptoms should be directed to the nearest health institution.

In the event that infected



cases are discovered among employees or if there are contacts with infected cases, the employees should follow the quarantine measures and provide suitable places for sanitary isolation. The committee stressed the importance of cleaning the frequently contacted surfaces such as handles for drawers, doors, tables, among others.

Employees and clients should adhere to the following guidelines — always washing hands frequently with soap and water, sterilizing them with alcohol sanitizers, avoid touching the eyes, mouth and nose. Be sure to cover the mouth and nose with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing. Avoid shaking hands.

Avoid sharing personal protective equipment (such as helmets, gloves and masks). Ensuring proper ventilation within the organisation.

Promote physical distance (minimum of two metres) between employees and clients within the organisation or work to set up transparent barriers within the institution.

Businesses should enable electronic and digital documents to minimize human contact.

Activating the appointment system for clients and reducing the time periods for the duration of their stay in the organisation.

They should avoid transferring the employees from one branch to another.

1,600 medicines procured

FROM PAGE 1

As for the Mitotane drug in question, the Royal Hospital said it used to import it from the United Kingdom in a limited quantity as it is prescribed to a small number of patients.

The Royal Hospital has been in contact with several international pharmaceutical companies to secure purchases of Mitotane, after the UK halted its import, and it is expected to arrive shortly. The Royal Hospital said it is working alongside relevant authorities to avoid any shortage of medicines, however, admitting that some shortages might occur as a result of the current coronavirus crisis, and considering that medicines are manufactured by certain companies due to property rights.

Some business activities to open

FROM PAGE 1

Automobile electrical outlets. Lube change outlets. Brake repair workshops. Tyre sale and repair outlets. The committee also decided to allow money exchange companies to resume their services.

The committee stressed that health precautions have to be strictly applied in all the above-mentioned business activities. The committee reiterated its call on members of the public to avoid assembling and any sort of gatherings to curb the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). It wished that all people be protected against all harm. — ONA

Prices of consumer goods, services in GCC increases



MUSCAT: The prices of consumer goods and services (excluding housing) in the GCC countries increased by 1.3 per cent in February, compared to the same period in the previous year.

According to the figures released today by the GCC Statistical Centre (GCC-SC), the transport group increased by 3.1 per cent, the culture and entertainment group by 2.7 per cent, food and beverage group, the tobacco group by 2.4 per cent each, the education group by 1.2 per cent, the restaurants and hotels group by 0.8 per cent and the furniture and household equipment group by 0.1 per cent.

On the other hand, the prices of the clothing and shoes group decreased by 1 per cent, the miscellaneous goods and services group by 0.9 per cent and the tel-

communications group by 0.5 per cent. The health group prices maintained its previous levels.

With regard to the contributions of the major groups to the general Gulf inflation last February, the Food and Beverage Group contributed by 0.6 percentage points, the transport group by 0.5 percentage points and the groups of Culture and Entertainment, Education and Restaurants and Hotels by 0.1 percentage points, each.

In terms of the contribution of the GCC in February, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributed 0.88 percentage points, the State of Kuwait 0.24 percentage points, the United Arab Emirates 0.12 percentage points, the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar 0.03 percentage points each and the Kingdom of Bahrain 0.02 percentage points.

ONLINE TUITIONS LURE PARENTS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

With the online classes initiated by both public and private schools since the COVID-19 stay at home protocol, there has been simultaneous trend of online 'tuition centres' that luring the parents and students with flexible timings, combo packages and 'better fees' at the virtual platforms.

A large number of such 'tuition centers' have mushroomed from around the world aiming to capitalise on the present predicament and what works well for them apparently is the lack of restrictions drawn by geographical boundaries.

"Yes, there are some online tuition centres sprouting around the world" said the educational adviser of a community school.

"They may offer various user-friendly packages to attract the par-

ents and children but their quality is still unknown to the end users" he said.

An online interview with one of the tuition centres revealed that this particular institution had started marketing themselves since Arab countries announced closure of schools and partial lockdowns weeks ago and that this Centre currently has managed to gain strength of more than 5,000 students in all the GCC countries.

"We are an online tuition platform developed to assist CBSE students. Parents can register and watch all the video classes five days for free. We have various combo offers on first come first served basis. We are available 24 hours if you need any assistance", the marketing personnel of the centre said.

"I wanted my son to join in 9th standard for private tuitions on-

line and my family friend suggested this centre. Currently, we are going through the free demo classes for a week before we decide on the same", mother of a student told the Observer.

Having banned home tuitions for money in most of the countries in the region, virtual classes may strive and children and parents are way better off as there is no stipulated timings set for the classes. Instead, a video for each chapter would be sent to the students from time to time with a few hours of personal attention that helps students clarify their doubts with the teacher.

However, the online home tuitions are not without any glitches.

"Lack of accountability and non-applicability of legalities or any jurisdiction keep the parents in a tricky situation", says Mohammed Haris, a legal expert in intellectual properties.

NEW CENTRAL LIVESTOCK MARKET TO COME UP IN AL SUWAIQ



The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources announced that a 1-million square metre land earmarked for the implementation of the Central Livestock and Slaughterhouse project in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, has been handed over to the investor. The project will create a quantum leap in the meat industry as well as contribute to finding new sale outlets and stimulate commercial activities, but most importantly the project will support the small and mid-sized enterprises operating in the meat sector.

Govt support key to restart Arab travel, tourism

COVID-19 IMPACT: Over a million permanent jobs to be affected in the region

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

The Arab travel and tourism industry, which represents an average of 14.2 per cent of the GDP of Arab countries, has about \$25 billion in tourism receipts, \$8 billion in revenue loss for Arab airlines and \$12.96 billion in tourism investments lost from the beginning of the year until late March 2020.

As per the available indicators from the booking sites of various airlines, scheduled international flights from Oman are unlikely to resume partially or fully before June 1.

“The COVID-19 crisis is threatening the loss of about one million permanent jobs and hundreds of thousands of seasonal jobs in the Arab world that depend for their livelihood in the travel and tourism sector”, said the Arab Civil Aviation Organization (ACAO) in a report.

It may be noted that millions of reservations done with airlines and at hotels have been cancelled in various countries, the flood of tourists to the world’s leading Arab touristic destinations has stopped, thousands of flights of Arab airlines



have been cancelled and 800 aircraft belonging to those airlines have been parked at airports.

To help jumpstart the economic contribution of the travel and tourism sector when this crisis is over, Arab Tourism Organization, ACAO and the Arab Air Carriers’ Organization have established a regional strategic team to develop a series of measures and action plans that would support the return of this sector to play its natural role in sustainable development.

Some steps suggested by the three organisations are: To provide tax exemptions to the relevant sectors for a period of at least two years.

To approve rescue plans and fiscal stimulus for the relevant

establishments to ensure the continuity of their workforce in order to provide a social safety net, in addition to providing for them a quick return to work as soon as this cloud passes.

To request lenders and service providers to provide a grace period for the institutions concerned before resuming payments of their dues.

Airport operators and air navigation services providers to exempt airlines from paying aircraft parking fees and also cancelling or reducing other airport and airspace user charges for a sufficient period of time to enhance the touristic appeal to Arab destinations.

Governments to compensate for

the new additional costs that relevant establishments are bearing and that relates to the containment of the virus and sterilization procedures.

Governments to cancel or simplify visas as much as possible, as well as reducing or eliminating visa costs.

Governments to reduce “unnecessary barriers” at ports and airports.

Governments to reduce taxes on travellers such as air travel

and hotel accommodation taxes. Governments to increase budgets for promoting touristic destinations.

The three organisations also called on governments to give the travel and tourism sector all the privileges that the industrial sector gets, as it is an engine for all other industries directly or indirectly, in addition to providing grants and financial facilities for small and medium-sized companies.

Local cloud development likely to bring rain

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

There are chances of rain as there is active cloud development over Al Hajar mountains forecast bringing in thundershowers associated with fresh wind and hail at times. According to the weather forecaster at the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre, the cloud development could generate rain for three days. The weather forecast states chance of convective clouds development with isolated rain occasionally and thunderstorms over Al Hajar mountains and the adjacent wilayat during afternoon.

“The ideal conditions prevail currently for the local development of clouds with sea breeze, wind direction, high temperature and humidity”, said the senior weather forecaster.

The clouds developed in the afternoon over Al Hajar mountains are expected to extend to Oman Sea coastal areas covering Muscat, South and North Al Batinah



and South Al Sharqiyah. During the rains the convective clouds could cause down draft winds causing sea to experience rough conditions. It is these clouds that cause turbulent clouds, explained the weather

forecaster.

“Gradually we are moving to the summer”, said the weather expert. Mainly clear skies are expected over most of the Sultanate with chances of late night to early morning low level clouds or fog

patches formation are expected along the coastal areas of the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dohfar.

Along the coastal areas of Oman sea winds will be easterly to northeasterly, light to moderate during day becoming variable light at night and along the coastal areas of Arabian sea and over the rest of the Sultanate governorates winds will be southeasterly light to moderate occasionally fresh along the coastal areas of Arabian sea.

The sea condition is expected to be moderate to rough along Arabian Sea coasts with maximum wave height of 2.5 metres, and slight along Oman Sea coasts with maximum wave height of 1.25 metres. Muscat is currently experiencing humidity ranging between 35 per cent and 95 per cent while Salalah has reported humidity rate ranging from 60 per cent to 85 per cent. Highest temperature was recorded in Fahud at 43 degrees Celsius followed by Ibri, Adam and Haima with 42 degrees Celsius.

Ramadan Iftar Program

RAMADAN MURAKKAB

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

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

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

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

Donations Portal for Charitable Organization

www.donate.om

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

South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate 24297961 / 24297960 OCOOMAN	North Al-Batinah Governorate 26864241 Sultan's Member	Musandam Governorate 26731588 Khawas HQ Shabab	Dhofar Governorate 23234735 Salalah / Al-saada
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OMAN UNITED INSURANCE CO. SAOG
P.O.Box 1522, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24477300, Fax: 24477323, E-mail: info@omanutd.com

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

The Board of Directors of Oman United Insurance Company SAOG have the pleasure to convene the honorable shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual Ordinary General Meeting scheduled on Wednesday 3rd June 2020 at 3:00 pm and 3:30 p.m respectively through the electronic platform assigned for holding the general annual meetings. Therefore you are kindly requested to login the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum for the above-mentioned two meetings or any of them is not completed, then the second meeting of the extraordinary and the ordinary general annual meetings will be held on Monday, June 8, 2020 at the same timing and via the above-mentioned online platform to discuss the following agenda:

First: The Extraordinary General Meeting

- To study and Approve the amended article of association of the Company in accordance to the requirements of Commercial Companies Law No. 18/2019 (as attached)

Second: The Ordinary Annual General Meeting

- To study and approve the Directors' Report on the company's operations and its financial position for the year ended 31st December 2019.
- To study and approve the Board report on the company's Corporate Governance for the year ended 31st December 2019.
- To study and approve of the Auditor's Report on the financial statements of the company for year ending 31st December 2019.
- To notify the shareholders with the cash dividends distributed to the shareholders on March 30, 2020, at a value of 30 baizas per share.
- To ratify the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors and to the Board's subcommittees during the year ended 31/12/2019, and to determine and approve the sitting fees for the year 2020 (As attached).
- To approve the proposed Board remuneration of. (RO 113,000) One Hundred Thirteen Thousand for the year 2019.
- To notify the shareholders with the related party transactions during the year 2019 (As attached).
- To approve the related party transactions which will be executed during the year 2020 (As attached).
- To notify the shareholders with the social responsibility contribution of RO. 30,000 (RO. Thirty Thousand) during 2019 (As attached).
- To study the proposal to allocate RO. 30,000/- (RO. Thirty Thousand) for social responsibility in the year 2020, and to approve the same.
- To notify the shareholders with the company's contribution of RO. 50,000 (RO. Fifty Thousand) in combating the Coronavirus (Covid-19) during the current year.
- To appoint Statutory Auditor for the year ending 30th December 2020, and approve their fees.

"According to the regulations issued by the Capital Market Authority in respect of using the modern online technology, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

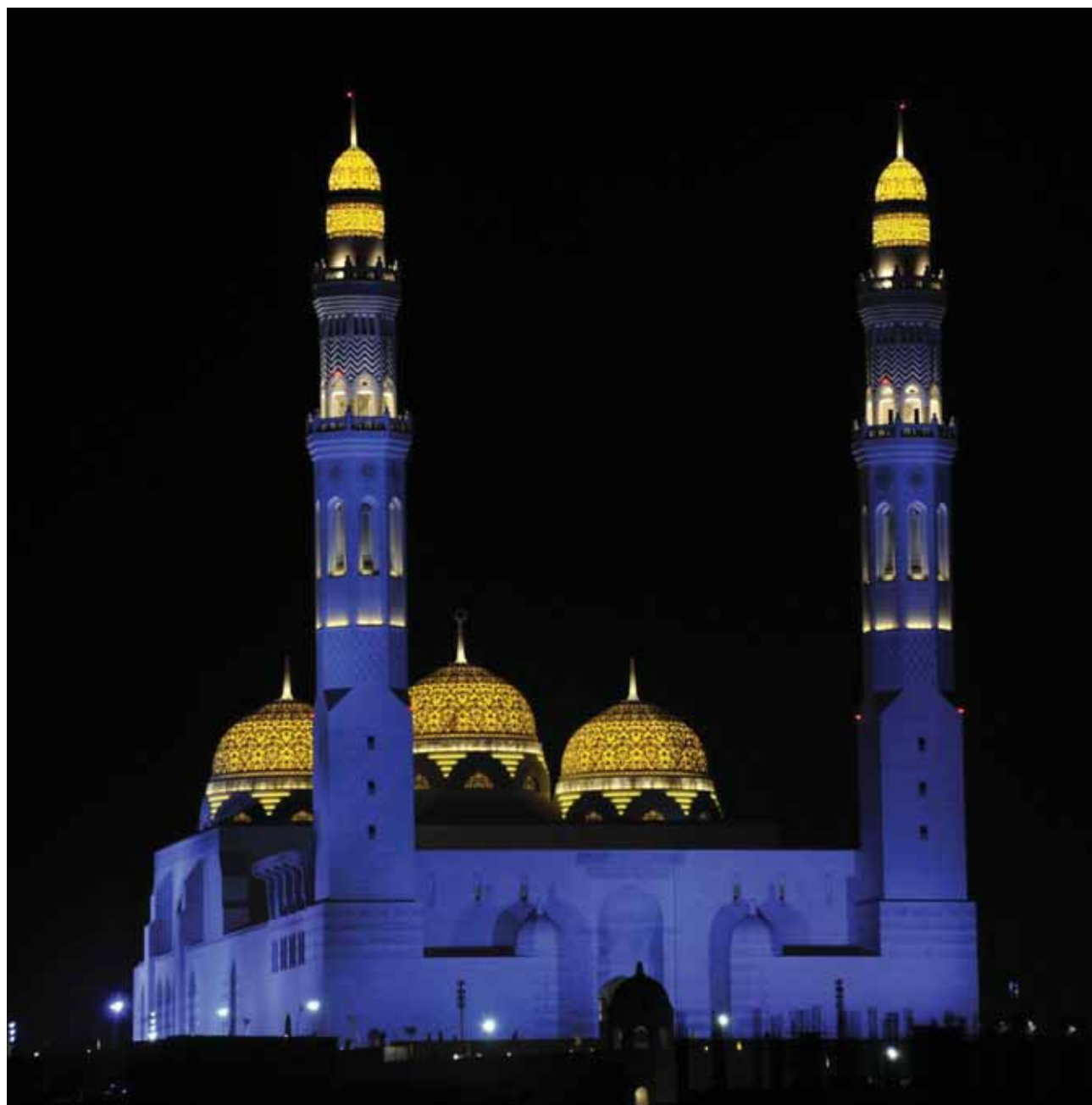
(A) A Juristic person, exclusively, has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the general meeting and vote on his behalf through online electronic platform, provided that this natural person has an investor number registered with the MCD.

(B) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days' prior the date of the meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. In the event that the shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled and he will have to vote again in the day of the general meeting.

For further information, please contact Mohamed Bin Qahtan Al Busaidi on Phone No. 24477373.

SALIM BIN NASSIR AL BUSAIDI CHAIRMAN	PWHC EXTERNAL AUDITOR	WESAM YOUSEF OBAID LEGAL ADVISOR
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Ramadhan



THE ESSENCE OF WORSHIP

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Ramadhan during COVID-19 has brought unique experience while practising fasting during the holy month.

Of course there are challenges like not being able to shop as done in the previous years. But this is an opportunity, says Hatim al Abdulsalam from the Islamic Information Centre, Oman.

It is an opportunity to practice minimalism because what the COVID-19 has led is to bring down extravagance.

Joy as an emotion that ought to exist throughout the year, but the month of Ramadhan gives us more joy because it is directly connected with our qualities and virtues said Hatim.

"In this difficult moment going through Ramadhan under the pandemic, I think it is an opportunity to be happy, because we are with our loved ones", he said adding, "the family ties have become closer. Previously we used to have Ramdhan gatherings with the extended family. Maybe we did not have the time for

ISLAM IS NOT JUST ABOUT RITUALS, IT IS ABOUT EVERY SINGLE THING WE DO. SO WHEN YOU ARE KIND, IT IS PART OF WORSHIP, WHEN YOU ARE GENEROUS, IT IS PART OF WORSHIP AND JUST LIKE WHEN YOU DO NOT WASTE FOOD. EVEN WHEN YOU ASK ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBOURS, IT IS PART OF WORSHIP AND SO IS THE WAY YOU WALK, EAT AND TALK AS WELL AS HOW YOU TREAT YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE PARTS OF ACTS OF WORSHIP. THEY ARE ALL ASPECTS OF WORSHIP AND ALL OF THESE ARE WAYS TO RECEIVE REWARDS FROM THE ALMIGHTY ALLAH

our close family members like our sons, daughters and spouse. But this Ramadhan for the first time in my life I lead prayers at home with my family – wife and children. It has not just brought joy for me but it has brought joy to the heart of my family".

The one-time opportunity has brought in unexaggerated and simple iftars, noted Hatim. "This aspect brings in joy too because we realise we are conserving the environment, we are only consuming what we need, we are not wasting food. This brings in joy because it is an act of worship", he explained.

The act of worship is related to our way of life too. "Islam is not just about rituals, it is about every single thing we do. So when you are kind, it is part of worship, when you are generous, it is part of worship and just like when you do not waste food. Even when you ask about your neighbours, it is part of worship and so is the way you walk, eat and talk as well as how you treat your employees are parts of acts of worship. They are all aspects of worship and all of these are ways to receive rewards from the Almighty Allah", Hatim explained further.

"So this is a festive season and a golden opportunity to gain more rewards with close loved ones even we are going through this pandemic", said Hatim.

FATWA

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

Question

Does vomiting invalidate fasting?

Answer

If a person vomited deliberately, it breaks the fast and he has to make up that day. If it happened unintentionally, it does not.



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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020/1441 AH

IN BRIEF

Pentagon releases 3 UFO videos to clear up misconceptions



NEW YORK: The US Department of Defense has released three short videos showing what appears to be unidentified flying objects.

The videos showing “unidentified aerial phenomena”, the term used by the Pentagon, were taken by US Navy pilots, one in November 2004 and the other two in January 2015.

Even before the US Department of Defense decided to authorise the release of the videos, they were circulating in the public domain after unauthorised releases in 2007 and 2017.

The US Navy previously admitted that these videos circulating in the public domain were not fakes.

“After a thorough review, the department has determined that the authorised release of these unclassified videos does not reveal any sensitive capabilities or systems, and does not impinge on any subsequent investigations of military air space incursions by unidentified aerial phenomena,” the US Department of Defense said in a statement. — **IAN S**

Governor of Pakistan's Sindh tests COVID-19 positive

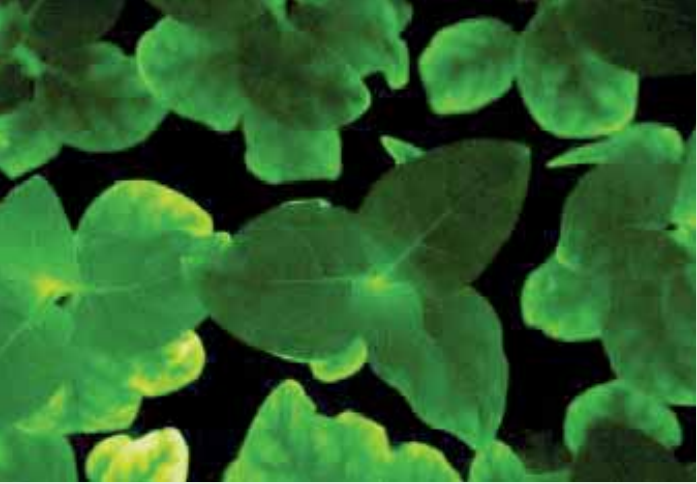
KARACHI: The Governor of Pakistan's Sindh province has tested positive for the COVID-19 and was self-quarantining at his residence following the test result.

“I have just been tested COVID-19 positive,” Imran Ismail said in a tweet late on Monday night.

Sindh province is the worst-hit in Pakistan. Of the total 13,947 cases in the country, Sindh accounts for 4,956 infections.

Samples for Ismail's test have been sent to a laboratory on Sunday, which came positive on Monday night. — **IAN S**

Scientists develop glowing plants with mushroom DNA



MOSCOW: An international team of scientists in London and Moscow have created bioluminescent tobacco plants using DNA from glowing mushrooms, according to a study published in the journal Nature Biotechnology.

“Plants containing the mushroom DNA glow continuously throughout their lifecycle, from seedling to maturity, and with no damage to their physiology,” the London Institute of Medical Sciences said in a statement announcing the publication.

The team, led by scientists Karen Sarkisyan and Ilia Yampolsky, reported that while the glow is not as strong as an electric light, it can be seen with the naked eye.

The process works by the plants converting a naturally occurring compound normally involved in strengthening their cell walls, caffeic acid, into the light-emitting compound luciferin. — **dpa**

Britain to become Europe's worst hit in pandemic

NEW ILLNESS: Doctors explore possible link between coronavirus and inflammatory disease in children

LONDON: Britain is on track to become one of Europe's worst-hit countries in the coronavirus pandemic, according to data on Tuesday that showed deaths from COVID-19 had already topped 20,000 by April 17, including a fast-rising toll in care homes.

The Office for National Statistics said the death toll involving COVID-19 in England and Wales was 35 per cent higher than the daily figures for deaths in hospitals released by the government as of April 17, according to official data that include deaths in the community.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said 21,284 people overall had died as of April 17 with mentions of



An ambulance drives past a church in Leicester. — Reuters

COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus, on their death certificates.

That was some 35 per cent higher than the 13,917 people who died in hospitals, as published by the government on April 18.

That takes the United Kingdom's total death toll as of April 17 beyond those reported by France — which also includes deaths in care homes — and Spain, according to Reuters calculations, though lower than Italy's total toll.

A trebling of deaths in care homes in England and Wales within the space of a few weeks contributed to a

far higher toll.

The ONS said that overall 7,316 people had died in care homes overall during the 16th week of 2020, almost treble the number reported in the 13th week.

According to figures released by the health ministry on Monday, 21,092 people had died in hospitals across the United Kingdom after testing positive for COVID-19.

DEATHS OF CHILDREN

Some children in the United Kingdom with no underlying health conditions have died from a rare inflammatory syndrome which researchers believe

to be linked to COVID-19, Health Secretary Matt Hancock said. Italian and British medical experts are investigating a possible link between the coronavirus pandemic and clusters of severe inflammatory disease among infants who are arriving in hospital with high fevers and swollen arteries.

Doctors in northern Italy, one of the world's hardest-hit areas during the pandemic, have reported extraordinarily large numbers of children under age 9 with severe cases of what appears to be Kawasaki disease, more common in parts of Asia. — **Reuters**

Arab doctor leads Israeli hospital's anti-virus fight

JERUSALEM: Each morning since February, Israeli Arab doctor Khitam Hussein has woken up before dawn to rush to a job on the frontline of the country's fight against the novel coronavirus.

Hussein, 44, has emerged as a prominent member of Israel's often marginalised Arab community which is now playing an essential role in confronting an unprecedented health crisis.

She heads the outbreak response at the Rambam Hospital near Haifa, the largest hospital in northern Israel, and has been working 12-hour days for months.

“It is incredibly difficult work, no day is like another,” she said.

“Our lives have been turned upside down.”

Israel has registered more than 15,000 cases of COVID-19, with 202 deaths.

Hussein said that amid the global pandemic, individual moments with patients have created some lasting memories.

She recalled an elderly couple arriving at the hospital, both seriously ill with the virus.

As the husband's condition deteriorated rapidly, they allowed the couple a final moment together.

“We allowed his sick wife, despite her



For Dr Khitam Hussein all that matters is saving lives — whether a patient is Arab or Jewish. — **AFP**

condition, to speak to her husband — to say goodbye,” she said. The husband died shortly after.

“As a human it's difficult, all the medical staff were saddened.”

TEARS DOWN A LINE

For Hussein all that matters is saving lives — whether a patient is Arab or Jewish.

She was born in the northeastern town of Rameh, but now lives in the city of Karmiel in the Galilee.

The coronavirus crisis has taken a heavy toll on her family life, she said.

For nearly two months she hasn't visited her ageing mother for fear of transmitting the virus. — **AFP**

Germany loses grip of downward trend in new infections

BERLIN: The number of new coronavirus cases reported daily in Germany is no longer in decline, disease control officials say in their latest report, in a blow to the country as it gradually lifts restrictions aimed at curbing the virus.

The report from the government's Robert Koch Institute released shows the reproduction number — the average number of people each infected person passes the virus on to — has ticked up to 1.0.

The figure had hovered at 0.9 in recent days, with officials stressing that the country will regress back into an exponential spread if it edges above 1.

— **dpa**



Genoa bridge 'completion' offers ray of hope

ARMAN SOLDIN & ELLA IDE

A final section of a new bridge in Genoa, built after a deadly 2018 motorway collapse, was to be slotted into place on Tuesday, providing a much-needed symbol of renewal for coronavirus-hit Italy.

Construction of the gleaming structure in northern Italy's coastal Liguria region has continued night and day throughout a national lockdown as the country has battled a virus that has officially killed nearly 27,000 people.

Sirens will sound as the last vast section of deck is put in place and one side of the Pol-

cavera valley is finally reconnected with the other, in a rare success story during Italy's worst crisis since World War II.

"Updates on the construction -- piece by piece, deck by deck, pillars and so on -- have become almost essential for many Italians," the Corriere della Sera wrote last Monday.

"They've allowed them to imagine a fresh start, allowed them to be proud."

Genoa's Morandi highway collapsed during heavy rain on August 14, 2018, hurling dozens of cars and several trucks onto railway tracks below and killing 43 people.

The bridge had been riddled with structural problems for decades, leading to expensive maintenance, and its collapse threw the spotlight on Italy's creaking infrastructure.

Famed Italian architect Renzo Piano designed the replacement, giving it a curved, gleaming underbelly evoking the hull of a ship in tribute to Genoa's maritime history.

The high-tech structure will have maintenance robots running along its length to spot weathering or erosion, as well as a special dehumidification system to limit corrosion.

"In building the bridge we've been up against time,

against the elements, against bad weather, against all the difficulties we've faced," Pietro Salini, CEO of Italy's biggest builder Salini Impregilo, told journalists last week.

"While the rest of the country was wondering how to shut down (as Italy went into lockdown in early March), here the question was how to go on," said Salini, whose company is rebuilding the bridge with shipbuilder Fincantieri.

Completion work for the new structure measuring about a kilometre (half a mile) will include tarmacking and the installation of transparent wind barriers and solar panels.

Stringent road tests will follow.

"We hope to have the first traffic cross the bridge by the end of July," Salini said.

Architect Piano, a Genoa native whose building designs include the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and The Shard in London, said the celebrations would be muted out of respect for the victims and their families.

Autostrade, which runs almost half of Italy's motorway network, has been accused of failing to maintain the bridge amid allegations of falsified safety reports and in-house pressure to slash maintenance costs. — AFP



Rebuilding a greener future. — Reuters

Fair and green coronavirus recovery

MEGAN ROWLING

Government efforts to help economies recover from the coronavirus pandemic could also tackle inequality and climate change through investment in energy-smart buildings, electric vehicles and other green measures, officials and economists said on Monday.

As 30 nations joined a two-day virtual climate dialogue, co-chaired by Germany and Britain, policy makers stressed that spending to head off a global depression due to COVID-19 shutdowns should not restart growth built on planet-heating fossil fuels.

"The climate crisis has not disappeared just because we are currently focusing on another acute crisis," said German Environment Minister Svenja Schulze.

The coronavirus outbreak had helped many around the world understand what it was like to live through a major crisis, she told journalists.

"I believe that in the future

people will be more willing to do something against the long-term environmental crisis that we will be faced with, if we don't act," she added.

The world may not yet have a vaccine for COVID-19 but it knows how to stave off climate change, she said.

Measures such as shifting to renewable, clean wind and solar power are "available, affordable and they make our lives better," she noted.

The German government said the Petersberg Climate Dialogue would focus on how to organise a green economic recovery after the emergency phase of the coronavirus pandemic.

The dialogue would also look at how countries could push forward with climate change action despite the postponement of the COP26 UN conference until 2021, German officials said.

As the dialogue got underway on Monday, ministers from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America

emphasised in recorded video statements the need for cooperation between countries in dealing both with the coronavirus pandemic and a warming planet.

Some also stressed the need to support the most vulnerable countries and communities, whose poverty puts them most at risk from health and climate threats.

"The COVID-19 crisis has further exposed the unacceptable levels of inequality in our societies, and we need to work even harder to level the playing field," said Rwandan Environment Minister Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya.

"But we must resist the temptation to revert to or ramp up polluting industries as part of a plan to create jobs," she added.

Eminent British economist Nicholas Stern said the first priority for governments should be to protect employment and prevent massive job losses as businesses large and small struggle to cope with weeks of closure. — Reuters

Self-isolation? Some in Georgia choose beach

MICHAEL MATHES

After being locked down for weeks, many residents in Georgia are thumbing their noses at the deadly coronavirus and seeking sanctuary in the sun, sand and waves of the southern state's beaches.

Under a cloudless blue sky with balmy temperatures and soft breezes rolling off the water, Tybee Island proved a powerful weekend lure on Saturday for Georgians desperate for any return to normalcy -- and an escape from self-imposed isolation.

"How long are we supposed to imprison ourselves?" a bikini-clad Mackenzie Scharf, 30, said as her five-year-old son flew a Spider Man kite.

"This is much safer than going grocery shopping."

One day after Georgia's governor allowed a limited reopening of thousands of businesses, several hundred people were enjoying Tybee Island's sprawling South Beach.

"It feels great -- like it's supposed to feel," said 39-year-old mother and housewife Rachel Lilly, barely lifting her head as she enjoyed her first beach trip of the year.

"I'm not concerned" about catching coronavirus, "as long as it's not packed," she said. "But if everyone does what we're doing, that's a problem."

Locals said Saturday was the busiest beach day of the year so far for Tybee Island, a laid-back tourist destination on Georgia's Atlantic coast.

Several hundred people were on the sand strolling, jogging, throwing footballs or wading in the mild waves. — AFP

OMAN  DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED 15 NOVEMBER 1981

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising
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PDO, other producers set to cut Oman's oil output

HISTORIC OPEC+ PACT: THE PLANNED PRODUCTION CUTS COME AS OMAN'S CRUDE BENCHMARK - THE OMAN CRUDE FUTURES CONTRACT (OQD) - PLUMMETED TO A NEW LOW OF \$16.82 PER BARREL IN TRADING ON THE DUBAI MERCANTILE EXCHANGE (DME) ON TUESDAY.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

Leading oil producers in the Sultanate are preparing to slash output during May and June 2020 in line with a pledge by the Opec+ alliance, which includes Oman as a signatory, to cut global production and help shore up record low international oil prices.

It follows a commitment by non-Opec producer Oman to cut 23 per cent of total production (using the October 2018 level as the baseline) as part of an historic pact by Opec and its allies to help bolster oil prices battered by the coronavirus pandemic and a damaging oil price war waged by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

The reduction will see Oman pare around 201,000 barrels per day (bpd) of its October 2018 baseline output of 883,000 bpd in line with the groundbreaking pact. This will be shared on a pro rata basis by all of Oman's top producers.



Majority state-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the biggest of the country's oil and gas producers, will cut production to 453,000 bpd, down from 588,000 bpd (per the October 2018 baseline) from oilfields across its Block 6 license.

Occidental Petroleum is limiting output to 88,000 bpd from its Mukhaizna (Block 53), 62,000 bpd from Block 9 and 6,000 bpd from Block 27. Daleel Petroleum's output from Block 5 will be restricted to 39,000 bpd, down from 51,000 bpd in October 2018. CC Energy

Development (CCED), operators of Blocks 3&4, will ease production to 30,000 bpd (down from 38,000 bpd). Three other producers - Oman Oil Company Exploration & Production (OOCEP) - part of OQ, Musandam Oil & Gas

Company (MOGC), and Hydrocarbon Finders (HCF) - are expected to pitch in with modest cutbacks as well. Oman's share of the Opec+ production cuts will decline to 161,000 bpd for the rest of 2020, before falling to 121,000 bpd for

the remainder of the agreed timeframe of the pact, which runs till April 2022.

As part of the landmark pact, Opec's 13 members joined forces with 10 non-member producers including Russia, to cut output by 9.7 million bpd during May - June 2020. The cuts will be further eased to 7.7 million bpd between July and December 2020, and then to 5.8 million bpd between January 2021 and April 2022.

The planned production cuts come as Oman's crude benchmark - the Oman Crude Futures Contract (OQD) - plummeted to a new low of \$16.82 per barrel in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Tuesday. It fell \$2.63 per barrel overnight, mirroring losses suffered by global oil benchmarks as prices plunged for a second successive day as traders fretted over rapidly declining storage capacity and concerns that growth in oil demand will not happen quickly enough.

Omani Port Community System to be developed as PPP project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

The development and operation of a National Ports Community System in Oman - an initiative to strengthen the Sultanate's credentials as a logistics-enabled economy - will now be pursued as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) based project.

Overseeing the delivery of the project is the recently established Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership (PAPP) which, earlier this week, invited suitably qualified consultants to participate in a competitive tender to provide Transaction Advisory Services underpinning the roll-out of a National Ports Community System for the Sultanate.

Interested consultants have until May 7, 2020



to collect a Request for Qualifications (RfQ) from the Authority to register their interest in participating in the tender.

The proposed Ports Community System (PCS), according to the Authority, will serve as a "Neutral and open electronic platform enabling intelligent and secure exchange of information between public and private stakeholders

in order to improve the competitive position of the port and air ports' communities".

Plans for a National Port Community System were first mooted by Tanfeedh (The National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification) in 2017 as part of over 100 'quick-win' initiatives designed to spur non-oil economic investment in the Sultanate.

LOGISTICS-ENABLED ECONOMY: PUBLIC AUTHORITY FOR PRIVATISATION AND PARTNERSHIP (PAPP) SEEKS CONSULTANT TO PROVIDE TRANSACTION ADVISORY SERVICES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF PORT COMMUNITY SYSTEM

A PCS has long been mooted as imperative to integrating the currently disparate systems currently operated by various the stakeholders who together make up the shipping, port, maritime and logistics community of the Sultanate.

It seeks to facilitate the exchange of information between multiple systems run by a variety of local and

international government and private entities, as well as support the integration and harmonization of the ports with other systems, such as the Bayan system of ROP Customs and One-Stop platforms.

Based on the 'single window' concept, the Port Community System (PCS) will optimize, manage and automate port and logistics processes via the establishment of a standardized platform that connects all transport and logistics chains.

Public sector stakeholders in the initiative include Asyad Group - the Omani government's transport and logistics flagship, as well as the three principal seaports at Salalah, Suhar and Duqm, Oman Aviation Group, the Directorate General of Customs (Royal Oman Police), and Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Oman's crude output totals 90.84 million barrels in Q1

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

The Sultanate's oil production, including condensates, stood at 90.84 million barrels during the first quarter of 2020 (January - March), according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Of this total, crude oil production was up 0.8 per cent at 77.78 million barrels, while condensates rose 28.4 per cent to touch 13.06 million barrels.

Oman recorded a daily average crude production of 998.3K barrels during the quarter ending March 31, 2020, against 970.5K barrels during the same period of 2019, the NCSI report added.

TURN TO PAGE 8



Cyber criminals stalk net users amid pandemic



HAIDER AL LAWATI

MUSCAT: Awareness plays a great role in educating people about the issues that are important to their daily lives, especially in the circumstances in which the world is going through as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic.

As people around the world are focused on fighting this epidemic, cyber criminals are employing phishing methods and other tactics to steal money from their victims. Often by sending fake mail to adults and children alike, they target the devices and programmes of users and render them vulnerable.

Cyber criminals know very well that people are dependent on their net-connected devices for their daily functions. Through a



AS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ARE FOCUSED ON FIGHTING THIS EPIDEMIC, CYBER CRIMINALS ARE EMPLOYING PHISHING METHODS AND OTHER TACTICS TO STEAL MONEY FROM THEIR VICTIMS.

variety of ways, they try to obtain private information about the bank accounts of their victims with the aim of their stealing funds or by sending malicious programs that disrupt or disable their devices.

It is imperative that

customers must be wary of these tactics and avoid providing any details of their bank account or any information about their bank cards. There are gangs that exploit the coronavirus crisis to win the confidence of unsuspecting users eager

for information on the disease or new banking or insurance products. It is important that recipients simply ignore these messages.

At the same time, it is useful to have good antivirus protection on your devices

in order to keep them safe from cyber criminals and hackers.

The mission of these criminals lies in the practice of electronic fraud and deceiving users to access their accounts. Users are advised not to open any

e-mails from unfamiliar senders, particularly those that solicit private information, such as passwords, and so on.

Banking institutions continue to send warnings urging their customers to first validate any requests for information from suspect sources. This requires the recipient to question the rationale behind these messages, and to contact his bank to validate any query. The volume of these messages has increased recently due to the outbreak of the virus, and therefore requires increased caution as well.

Our homework today requires backing up the information and data that we deal with, so that cyber criminals cannot take over and sell that information, or create a problem for ourselves.

It is unfortunate that such things happen at a time when the world is facing horrific deaths and grief from COVID-19, and thus merits greater vigilance and caution against online predators.

Port operations not impacted by pandemic countermeasures

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

Precautionary measures adopted by Omani ports to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have had no impact on cargo operations or the flow of international maritime traffic, Asyad Group — the Sultanate’s transport and logistics flagship — said on Tuesday.

In a statement, the

government holding company stressed its commitment to safeguarding the health of employees and the port user community based on international best practices and safety norms. Asyad considers its employees as an asset that is at the heart of its aspirations to become a leading logistics-centric institution in the world.

Asyad’s statement came on the occasion of the



World Day for Safety and Health at Work, which falls on April 28. Designated by

the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Day seeks to promote the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases globally.

Mohammed bin Hamad al Shueili (pictured), Deputy Head of Auxiliary Support for Institutional Cooperation at Asyad, said the group contributed to the sustainability of commercial and economic activities by ensuring

the uninterrupted flow of commodities while keeping its staff safe from COVID-19 infections. He attributed this success to the precautionary measures adopted by Asyad since the start of the pandemic.

Asyad’s subsidiaries handles direct connections to 86 commercial ports in 40 countries, generating around 200 visits in ship calls per week.

Oman’s crude output totals 90.84 million barrels in Q1

FROM PAGE 7

Oman exported 69.77 million barrels of crude during Q1 2020, against 72.56 million barrels during the same period in 2019, a drop of 3.9 per cent. China retained its position as the leading destination for Sultanate’s crude oil exports this year, with the country importing 61.26 million barrels of crude oil from Oman. This was followed by India (with 2.94 million barrels), and Japan (608,200 barrels).

Meanwhile, Oman’s natural gas production and imports rose 1.7 per cent to 11,048 million cubic metres (MNCM) during Q1 2020, up from 10,861 MNCM for the same period of 2019. Non-associated gas and imports rose by 1.8 per cent to 9,020 MNCM and associated gas production rose by 1.6 per cent to 2,028 MNCM, added the NCSI report.

The use of natural gas in industrial projects fell 13 per cent to reach 38 MNCM this year, against 44 MNCM for the same period of 2019. As much as 2,599 MNCM of natural gas was used in oil fields, against 2,239 MNCM units consumed for the same period in 2019.

Singapore faces deeper-than-forecast recession

SINGAPORE: A recession in Singapore’s trade-reliant economy could be deeper than forecast as the protracted nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to hamper a decisive rebound in global activity, the city-state’s central bank said. “There remains significant uncertainty over the severity of the downturn, as well as the eventual recovery,” the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) said in its semi-annual macroeconomic review.

“The materialisation of downside risks ... could tip the growth outcome in Singapore below the forecast range.”

Singapore’s current forecast for GDP is -4 per cent to -1 per cent, but growing risks to the



A view of an empty Merlion Park, as tourism braces for a steep decline following the outbreak of coronavirus disease along Marina Bay in Singapore. — Reuters

outlook include more stringent measures to contain the spread of the

coronavirus in Singapore and around the world, the central bank said.

It also flagged the collapse in crude prices, with oil-related industries

such as marine and offshore engineering and petroleum refining accounting for up to 4 per cent of Singapore’s GDP.

The MAS eased monetary policy last month as the economy faces its worst recession in its 55-year history.

The COVID-19 pandemic knocked Singapore’s economy in the first quarter, when it shrank 2.2 per cent - its sharpest contraction since the 2009 financial crisis.

Singapore has among the highest number of infections in Asia and has extended virus-fighting curbs, which include the closure of most workplaces and schools until June 1. The measures were initially set to run for a month until May 4. — Reuters

US imposes new rules on exports to China

WASHINGTON: The United States said it will impose new restrictions on exports to China to keep semiconductor production equipment and other technology away from Beijing's military.

The new rules will require licenses for US companies to sell certain items to companies in China that support the military, even if the products are for civilian use. They also do away with a civilian exception that allows certain US technology to be exported without a license.

They come as relations between the United States and China have deteriorated amid the new coronavirus outbreak.

The rules, which were posted for public inspection and will be published in the Federal Register on Tuesday, could hurt the semiconductor industry and sales of civil aviation parts and components to China.

The changes, which also expand the universe of items requiring licenses, affect Russia and Venezuela, too, but the biggest impact will be on trade with China.

"It is important to consider the ramifications of doing business with countries that have histories of diverting goods purchased from US companies for military applications," Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said in a statement.



Aides set up platforms for the members of US and Chinese trade negotiation delegations at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. — Reuters

Washington trade lawyer Kevin Wolf said the rule changes for China are in response to its policy of military-civil fusion: finding military applications for civilian items.

He said the regulatory definitions of military use and user are broad and go beyond purchases by entities such as the People's Liberation Army.

For example, Wolf said, if a car company in China repairs a military vehicle, that car company

may now be a military end user, even if the item being exported is for another part of the business.

"A military end user is not limited to military organisations," Wolf said. "A military end user is also a civilian company whose actions are intended to support the operation of a military item."

The rule change also requires that US companies file declarations for all exports to China, Russia and Venezuela regardless of value.

"Obviously this is intended to give the US government more visibility into the types of goods US exporters send to these countries and their customers," said Washington trade lawyer Doug Jacobson.

Another rule change involves eliminating civilian license exceptions for Chinese importers and Chinese nationals, as well as other countries, including Ukraine and Russia. The exceptions have applied to

certain integrated circuits, telecommunications equipment, radar, high-end computers and other items.

The administration also posted a third proposed rule change that would force foreign companies shipping certain American goods to China to seek approval not only from their own governments but from the United States as well.

The Commerce Department does not know the economic impact of imposing the re-export license, and will allow a comment period to gather information on the proposed change, a representative said.

Republican Senator Ben Sasse supported the new rules, saying Chinese leader Xi Jinping "has erased any daylight between China's businesses and the Communist Party's military."

The tightened restrictions have been in the works since at least last year, but senior US officials agreed to move ahead with them in late March.

John Neuffer, president and chief executive of the Semiconductor Industry Association, said the industry was concerned the broad rules will "unnecessarily expand export controls for semiconductors and create further uncertainty for our industry during this time of unprecedented global economic turmoil." — Reuters

Oil giant BP revises \$5.6 bn Alaska deal after oil price crash



BP workers are seen at an oil transit pipeline at the Prudhoe Bay oilfield in Alaska. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Oil giant BP Plc said it had amended financial terms of the \$5.6 billion sale of its Alaska business to Hilcorp Energy Co following the recent slump in oil prices, which may lead to a lower cash boost than initially planned.

The new agreement retains the original sale price but provides for vendor financing, smaller payments in 2020 and for cash-flow sharing in the near term, the British oil major said.

"BP remains committed to completing the sale, even in these volatile and difficult market conditions," Janet Weiss,

BP's Alaska president, said in a statement.

Its oil production in the state could shift to Hilcorp in June while Hilcorp separately pursues approvals for the purchase of BP's pipeline operations.

The state's pipeline regulator has raised questions about Hilcorp's funding for its Alaska operations.

Details on timing of the payouts or amounts of the financing were not disclosed. BP is scheduled to release first-quarter results on Tuesday and could provide additional details, a spokeswoman said. — Reuters

UK offers 100 per cent state-backed COVID-19 loans to smallest firms

LONDON: British finance minister Rishi Sunak bowed to pressure to do more to help companies survive the coronavirus shutdown, announcing full state guarantees on lending to Britain's smallest businesses.

Sunak, who previously opposed 100 per cent government backing for emergency credit for small firms, said the government would fully stand behind commercial loans of up to 50,000 pounds (\$62,000) to firms.

Banks handling the loans will not be required to run credit checks or assess the long-term viability of applicants. Firms will have no interest or repayments for the next 12 months.

"Some small businesses are still struggling to access credit," Sunak told parliament.

"If we want to benefit from their dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit as we recover our economy, they will need extra support."

Most British businesses have been shut to the public since March 23 under a government lockdown to slow the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory disease that the coronavirus



Britain's finance minister Rishi Sunak speaks during a news conference on the COVID-19 outbreak, at 10 Downing Street in London, Britain. — Reuters

can cause.

Government forecasters have said the economy could contract by 35 per cent in the second quarter of 2020, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday it was still too risky to relax the lockdown.

Britain last month announced an emergency 330 billion-pound credit scheme including loans of up to 5 million pounds for small and medium-sized companies, with state guarantees of 80 per cent.

But that programme got off to a slow start, with many companies saying they were struggling to get banks to approve their loans.

Sunak said banks had now provided 3.4 billion pounds in 20,000 loans via the government's Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS). The Bank of England had separately issued more than 14 billion pounds to bigger firms.

BoE Governor Andrew Bailey suggested this month that 100 per cent state guarantees for the smallest loans might break a backlog in loans applications.

The new scheme, which the government calls Bounce Back Loans, will open to businesses next Monday and aims to pay funds to firms within 24 hours of a successful application.

“Banks handling the loans will not be required to run credit checks or assess the long-term viability of applicants. Firms will have no interest or repayments for the next 12 months.”

RISHI SUNAK

British finance minister

Business organisations broadly welcomed the new scheme, but said time was of the essence for many small businesses struggling with cash flow.

"This new route for our smallest companies to apply quickly and get a fast decision will be crucial to those who have struggled to get a CBILS loan," British Chambers of Commerce Director General Adam Marshall said.

Sunak has sought to counter criticism about CBILS by highlighting the strong take-up for another emergency government scheme which pays 80 per cent of the pay of workers temporarily laid off by companies. — Reuters



LET'S READ

CHILDREN'S WRITING CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The winners of the 14th Let's Read Children's Writing Competition in association with Dar al Atta were recently announced. In the English category, the first prize went to Salma Yousuf al Farsi (10 years) of Injaz School, second prize to Anushka Saha (17 years) of Indian School Muscat (ISM) and the third prize to Aidan McBirnie (eight years) of Batinah International School in Suhar.

The theme given to the budding writers was 'Stories from Oman.'

"Congratulations to all the winners and let them keep writing!" said Jane Jaffer, founder of Let's Read.

"The response was not as much as what we usually have while the schools are open as they also encourage the students to participate. Under the current situation, we still had children come forward and participate. In total, six judges graded the writings," she added.

The winning stories are 'The

adventure of Meshmesh and Kishkish' in the first place written by Salma Yousuf al Farsi from Injaz School.

A starry secret in the second place written by Anushka Saha of ISM and Aidan McBirnie's Sea Monster Days of Batinah International School, Suhar.

All three stories have a sense of adventure and great read during the COVID-19 lockdown. Oman Daily Observer presents the three winning stories. This is "The adventure of Meshmesh and Kishkish (First Prize).

Once upon a time there were two donkeys who lived in Wakan village on a big mountain. Their names were Meshmesh and Kishkish. They were best friends and did everything together. One day they decided to go on an adventure to explore a new place. They saw a trail, so they followed it to a very big cave. Kishkish suggested: "Meshmesh let's go in the cave!" But Meshmesh did not think that this was a good idea. But Kishkish forced him; "You should go in first!", but Meshmesh refused to go in first.

Kishkish said to Meshmesh we should go into the cave together; they both agreed to the idea and went into the cave together. The first thing they saw was a giant tree filled with lots of different kinds of fruits: bananas, apples, blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, peaches and oranges and so much more. The two of them were extremely hungry and happily munched away on the fruit. They were so full and there were no more fruits on the tree. But suddenly the fruits grew back on the tree, so they thought it must be a magical tree. So the two of them went back to the village.

When they reached the village, they told all their friends and families about this magical tree and they took them to the tree to see this magic with their own eyes. Aydan, one of the other donkeys, asked Kishkish: "How did you find the magical tree?" Kishkish told him the story of the magical tree and how they had found it in the big cave. Aydan was a good friend of Meshmesh and Kishkish and became a part of their adventure. The very next day and for the rest

of the week the three friends ventured deeper and deeper into the cave and found many more magical trees. And every day they ate lots of fruits and brought big amounts back to Wakan village to share with their families and friends.

As they were always extremely tired on their way back home, having to climb 700 steps, they kept dropping some of the fruits on the ground. Until today the way to their home on top of the mountain is lined with beautiful fruit trees, which are nowhere else found in the whole region. Until today Wakan village is a magical place in the Hajjar mountains of beautiful Oman and everyone should go and see this amazing place.

Make sure to climb all the way to the top of the village, all 700 steps, and meet Meshmesh and Kishkish. But reaching the village is not as easy as some expect, it is a long drive from Muscat and also needs a four-wheel-drive vehicle to reach the village. Small cars are not allowed because you have to drive on a rough road to the top of a mountain.



'NEXT YEAR'S OLYMPICS WILL BE CANCELLED IF PANDEMIC NOT OVER'

TOKYO: The postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics will have to be cancelled if the coronavirus pandemic isn't brought under control by next year, the organising committee's president warned, ruling out further delays.

The comments, in an interview with a Japanese sports daily published on Tuesday, come as medical experts doubted whether the pandemic can be sufficiently contained by next year to hold an event drawing participants and spectators from around the world.

The pandemic has already forced a year-long delay of the Games, which are now scheduled to open on July 23, 2021.

But Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori was categorical when asked by

the Nikkan Sports daily whether the Games could be delayed until 2022 if the pandemic remains a threat next year, replying: "No."

"In that case, it's cancelled," Mori said.

Mori noted the Games had been cancelled previously only during wartime, and compared the battle against coronavirus to "fighting an invisible enemy".

If the virus is successfully contained, "we'll hold the Olympics in peace next summer", he added. "Mankind is betting on it."

Masa Takaya, a Tokyo 2020 spokesman, declined to comment on a possible cancellation of the Games and told reporters that Mori's remarks were based on "the chairman's own thoughts".

But the comments will add to growing questions

No, In that case, it's cancelled. If the virus is successfully contained, we'll hold the Olympics in peace next summer. Mankind is betting on it

YOSHIRO MORI
President, Tokyo Olympics
Organising Committee

about the postponement, decided last month after heavy pressure on the organisers and the International Olympic Committee from athletes and sports federations.

On Tuesday, the head of Japan Medical Association warned it would be "exceedingly difficult" to hold the Games next year if a vaccine has not been found.

"I would not say that

they should not be held, but it would be exceedingly difficult," Yoshitake Yokokura told reporters.

'VERY PESSIMISTIC'
And last week a Japanese medical expert who has criticised the country's response to the coronavirus warned that he was "very pessimistic" that the postponed Olympics can be held in 2021.

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

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

Games next summer," he said.

But Tokyo 2020 spokesman Takaya countered that even medical experts said it was too early to make a judgement on such a possibility.

Japanese officials and the IOC have said the Games will be a chance to celebrate victory over the virus, with some suggestions that the pandemic fight could even be incorporated into the opening ceremony.

Postponing the Games is an enormous logistical and financial challenge, with the final price tag for the delay still unclear.

In the interview, Mori said organisers were considering holding joint opening and closing ceremonies for the Olympics and the Paralympics in an effort to cut costs. — AFP

FATE OF HUNDRED IN BALANCE AS ENGLISH CRICKET CHIEFS MEET

LONDON: England cricket chief Tom Harrison says the controversial Hundred has become "even more important" due to the economic damage from coronavirus ahead of a meeting that will decide the fate of the new competition.

Last week, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) further delayed the start of the 2020 season until July 1 at the earliest but said the inaugural Hundred would be on the agenda this Wednesday.

The new 100-balls-per-side format, to be played by eight franchises rather than English cricket's established 18 first-class counties, is meant to start in July.

ECB officials have long insisted it will attract a new audience vital to safeguarding cricket's future, with some matches set to be broadcast live on terrestrial television.

But public health restrictions, the problems of bringing in overseas stars and the issue of launch costs at a time of economic crisis mean a delay appears inevitable.

"We'll look at how the situation impacts the Hundred, which was envisaged as being a tournament that enabled us to widen the audience for the game," said Harrison. — AFP

French football mourns Robert Herbin 'who made the impossible possible'

PARIS: French football is mourning Robert Herbin, the inspirational coach of the flamboyant Saint-Etienne team that was narrowly defeated in the 1976 European Cup final.

Herbin died on Monday aged 81 after being taken to hospital last week with heart and lung problems unrelated to coronavirus.

He played more than 400 matches for Saint-Etienne and later brought a cerebral approach to coaching, earning the nickname the "The Sphinx" as he dragged French football back into

the international spotlight.

France's national team slumped in the early 1970s, failing to reach the 1970 and 1974 World Cup finals, so the European run of Herbin's Saint-Etienne side caught the nation's attention.

The green-shirted team from central France that featured future France and Tottenham Hotspur manager Jacques Santini, midfielder creator Jean-Michel Larque and the talented Dominique Rocheteau as a substitute were beaten 1-0 by Bayern Munich at



Hampden Park in Glasgow.

Herbin recalled that he was convinced everything conspired against his team that night.

"It left a deep impression on me. I have never got



over it. I still think about it today.

I think the good Lord wasn't with us, neither were the goalposts or the crossbar," he told AFP in 2015.

St Etienne board mem-

ber Bernard Caiazza paid tribute to Herbin, saying:

"We will always remember a great international player but also an exceptional coach who brought the pride back to French

football at a time when we were at a low."

"He showed us that 'impossible' doesn't exist in football," St Etienne chairman Roland Romeyer said.

"That is how St Etienne beat the biggest clubs in Europe in the 1970s. His greatest achievement was to get a whole city and country behind the team. He had unbelievable charisma and power."

Herbin coached St Etienne for 14 seasons in all, from 1972 to 1983 and then again from 1987 to 1990. — AFP



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TOUR DE FRANCE SAFETY MEASURES

PARIS: Chris Froome's hunger for a fifth or even sixth Tour de France victory remains undiminished although he is unsure the race can go ahead in 2020 due to coronavirus, he told French daily L'Equipe in an interview published on Tuesday.

The Tour's postponement until late August suits the four-time winner who has been fighting to regain fitness from severe injuries sustained in a training crash last June.

"It's an advantage for me, the

race being put back, but it's not something to celebrate," said Froome.

The Kenyan-born racer feels the Tour may still be cancelled due to the pandemic, but is training hard for victory at his Monaco base.

"I'm confident I'll be 100 per cent fit at the starting line," said Froome, who turns 35 next month and who is in the final year of his Ineos contract.

"Maybe it won't take place, but I'm training as if it will go

ahead," he told L'Equipe.

"We have the new date and mentally I'm focused on being ready."

The Tour has been rescheduled to embark from Nice on August 29 from its original June start date in an attempt to make sure the sport's central financial pillar can be staged this season.

Froome, who had a brush with death in his crash at the Criterium de Dauphine in 2019, told L'Equipe health con-

"I'm confident I'll be 100 per cent fit at the starting line. Maybe it won't take place, but I'm training as if it will go ahead. We have the new date and mentally I'm focused on being ready"

CHRIS FROOME
Four-time TDF winner

cerns should stand above economic ones.

"It would be a pity if the biggest race of the season didn't go ahead, but people's health comes first," he said.

"I'm sure that neither the (French) government nor the (organisers) ASO will take risks with the riders, their teams and the public," added Froome who won the Tour in 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017.

After winning the Vuelta a Espana in 2017 and the Giro

d'Italia in 2018 to hold all three Grand Tours his star has waned.

His co-captain Geraint Thomas emerged as the 2018 winner while Ineos protege Egan Bernal claimed the 2019 title.

"My dream is to retire having won more Tour de Frances than any other rider," said Froome.

He needs one more to equal Eddy Merckx, Jacques Anquetil, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain, who have all won it five times. — AFP