

21 Ramadhan Friday 15/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:02	04:07	04:34
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:31	03:33	03:39
MAGHRIB:	06:47	06:49	06:53
ISHA:	08:05	08:07	08:06



HM, POMPEO DISCUSS BILATERAL RELATIONS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Thursday evening received a phone call from Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State. During the phone call, discussions were held on the solid bilateral relations between the two friendly countries in various fields, and consultations were held on the latest developments in the region. — **ONA**

TIME TO TAKE FIRM STEPS

VINOD NAIR & ONA

MUSCAT: Despite repeated appeals from the authorities, mass gatherings continue to take place as some people do not abide by social distancing norms. Speaking to the media at the 7th press conference of the Supreme Committee on Thursday, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, said: "Imposing curfew has been proposed by some citizens, and will be referred to the Supreme Committee, which is meeting on Monday, if people fail to follow lockdown rules. The minister expressed his thanks to the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and to all government, private and other parties for their continuous support to the Supreme Committee towards implementation of decisions the panel have issued as part of measures to manage the crisis. It was pointed out that 'a wedding was attended by 150 people a week ago, and none of them reported about the ceremony despite the instructions on mass gatherings', said the minister. The minister pointed out that mass iftar gatherings are still conducted and some people do not abide



OMAN REGISTERS
18TH COVID-19 DEATH

The Ministry of Health on Thursday announced the death of a resident aged 31, who had been suffering from coronavirus (COVID-19) disease. This brings the total number of COVID-19 related death cases in the Sultanate to 18. The ministry extended its condolences to the deceased's family, praying to the Almighty Allah to have mercy on the deceased's soul. Earlier, the ministry announced registration of 322 new positive cases within the Sultanate. Eighty of the new cases are Omanis and 242 non-Omanis.

by social distancing rules. An 18-year-old woman came to a health centre because of a wedding in which 300 people took part. He added: "A citizen with symptoms of COVID-19 had decided to have a normal life which caused the transmission of infection to his mother and sister who had kidney failure due to the virus. He transmitted the infection to 17 other people".

TURN TO P2

- 1 PROPOSAL BY SOME CITIZENS TO IMPOSE CURFEW WILL BE REFERRED TO SUPREME COMMITTEE
- 2 FAMILIES, SHOULD AVOID ANY GATHERINGS OR ACTIVITIES DURING EID AL FITR HOLIDAYS
- 3 EVERYONE SHOULD ABIDE BY 'STAY-AT-HOME' AND SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES
- 4 MORTALITY RATE IN THE SULTANATE AMONG COVID-19 PATIENTS IS STILL QUITE LOW, JUST 0.4%

FOLLOW PREVENTIVE MEASURES

FROM PAGE 1

The death rate in the Sultanate is low, and till date the total COVID-19 tests crossed 61,000, the minister added.

Speaking at the press conference, Brig Said bin Sulaiman Aasmi, said: "Families, should avoid any gatherings or activities during Eid al Fitr".

He added, "Many activities, including commercial ones, will be suspended if total curfew is imposed, and the decision will be taken later by the Supreme Committee".

A total of 96 people are admitted to hospitals, including 31 in intensive care units.

Dr Al Saeedi, said: "We have identified some commercial activities which can be started, and will be presented at the meeting of the Supreme Committee next week".

Almost RO 4 million was spent on conducting tests and the Ministry of Health is currently examining 1,500-2,000 samples per day.

The lockdown in Muscat and other places will continue until May 29, and if positive results appear, the lockdown will be lifted before that date.

He said the cases in Muttrah are on the rise, with the majority of recorded cases from Wadi Kabir, Al Hamriya, and Muttrah Souq area.

It may be more harmful to wear gloves than not to as those who wear gloves may touch their face after touching contaminated areas, and the glove may be removed and not disposed of in a proper manner. It is necessary to wear face masks in crowded places.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Dr Al Saeedi reaffirmed that the Supreme Committee is fully aware of the economic, health and social impacts of the disease.

Acting from this high level of awareness, the committee seeks to strike a balance in its decision aimed to serve the public interest, said the minister, adding that the panel coordinates with



government and private sectors and owners of privately-owned businesses, particularly where it pertains to economy and business.

The minister said that the Supreme Committee understands the challenges posed to owners of small and medium enterprises due to closure of businesses. It is aware that, the longer the lockdown, the heavier the losses incurred, but it is also aware that any immature reopening of business activities will have major negative consequences.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al Sarmi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Brig Said bin Sulaiman al Aasmi, Director-General of Operations at Royal Oman Police and Dr Saif bin Salim al Abri, Director-General of Contagious Diseases Surveillance and Control Department at the Ministry of Health, were also present at the press conference.

STAY HOME

Thanking citizens and residents, the minister exhorted all to continue to maintain 'Stay-at-Home' and social distancing measures, as well as avoiding assembling and all types of gathering.

The minister pointed out that the Supreme Committee's meeting on Monday, will monitor the situation and explore options ahead of Eid al Fitr holidays. Enough epidemiological data is



Every expatriate has a sponsor and the sponsor should bear the responsibility of his/her treatment. As for those who have health insurance, their insurance companies should bear the cost of their treatment.

available now, said the minister, who warned that in case gatherings are not moderated during the Eid holidays, the number of infected cases will go up.

Speaking about the current situation, Dr Ahmed said that the Sultanate registered a total number of 4,341 cases of infection with COVID-19 and 18 deaths, while the number of people who recovered from the disease stood at 1,303. As many as 96 patients are hospitalised, of them 31 in intensive care units (ICUs). Unfortunately, ICU cases took longer than expected, said the minister, but he reaffirmed that mortality rate in the Sultanate among patients infected with COVID-19 is still quite low, just 0.4 per cent.

The minister cautioned that the issue of free

medication for all expatriates in the Sultanate has been wrongly understood. "Every expatriate has a sponsor and the sponsor should bear the responsibility of his/her treatment. As for those who have health insurance, their insurance companies should bear the cost of their treatment. The issue is under discussion with insurance firms", he said.

The minister expressed his concern about some expatriates' failure to stick to the instructions. He deplored this behaviour as equally the fault of some sponsors and firms that he described as "negligent" and "irresponsible". Testimony to this is the case of residence of 70 workers in a single house and the nonchalance of the company's owner, who totally shrugged off his responsibility after epidemiological investigation indicated that one of the workers was infected.

ACTION AGAINST OFFENDERS

Royal Oman Police and the departments concerned will step up action against offenders, said the minister, noting that many of them are now behind bars for committing similar crimes. It is time for authorities to take more deterrent action against offenders, said the minister.

He added that anyone who feels any symptoms should visit any government or private health establishments for check-up.

COVID-19

WHY HIGH NUMBER OF CASES IN LAST TWO DAYS

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Oman has reported an alarming 298 and 322 cases in the last two days, respectively, leaving many residents to wonder whether measures in place are not working. This has resulted in some to clamour for stricter measures including an imposition of a curfew.

These concerns had been addressed by the Supreme Committee on Covid-19 in its 7th press conference with the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, breaking down what has been going on behind the scene.

"The negligence by some companies and sponsors caused more cases," Al



Saeedi said. "A person with Covid-19 lives with 70 expatriates and the sponsor takes no responsibility," he added.

This was elaborated by Dr Saif al Abri who said, "The reason behind the rise in the number of cases

in the past two days is due to the spread in the housing camps of some companies that did not have facilities for social distancing."

"We have detected cases in truck drivers and cargo operators between the governorates. Yesterday, more

than one case was diagnosed from delivery teams," he added.

"You [employers] need to provide isolation places for those who are positive and also isolation places for those who are in contact with positive cases," Al Saeedi instructed.

The experts, however, did not find any correlation between the rise of the cases and the opening of commercial activities.

"We cannot say that the increase in the number of cases is due to the opening of activities. It is mainly due to the increase in gatherings," Al Saeedi said. He added that "mass iftar gatherings still exist and some people do not abide by social distancing."

Need to safeguard heritage sites stressed

MUSCAT: The Culture Department in Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) held a videoconferencing meeting to discuss the exceptional situation experienced by Arab countries and countries of the world, as well as the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the state of preserving heritage sites and cities.

The forum included two sessions. In the first session, Karim al Hendili,

Culture Program Officer at the UNESCO Office in Morocco, spoke about the role of UNESCO in supporting efforts to plan the future of urban heritage sites in the Arab countries after the coronavirus crisis, in addition to considering the development of the heritage and culture sector as an important part of the comprehensive development of Arab countries. He also highlighted the responsibility to preserve urban heritage as a com-

prehensive national responsibility.

The second session addressed the experiences of member states in the Pan-Arab Architectural and Urban Heritage Observatory in minimising the repercussions of this pandemic. The observatory stressed the need to employ modern technology, especially artificial intelligence, in the management of urban heritage, and support civil initiatives in preserving urban heritage. — ONA





SAFETY CONCERNS OVER HOME DELIVERY SERVICES

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) said that cases were detected in truck drivers as they moved to various places or from those who came to the Sultanate through border crossings, said Dr Saif al Abri, Director General of Diseases Control, at the press conference on Thursday.

He added, "Yesterday, more than one case was diagnosed with delivery teams".

The authorities added that the products bought online are safe, but there is concern over the safety precautions undertaken by some delivery companies.

Earlier too, MoH had con-

firmed that five cases were recorded in one family due to contact with a home delivery team.

It called on everyone to adhere to preventive measures when shopping and receiving goods from home delivery teams.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) and Riyada have asked customers to follow preventive measures when receiving orders from delivery companies.

MoCI in cooperation with the Rafd Fund and the Public Authority for SME development launched Shop from Home initiative on Twitter. The initiative comes in the wake of a set of decisions taken by the Supreme Committee for dealing with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Online shoppers urged to stay vigilant

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Even as it seeks to encourage home businesses in the country, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has urged customers to be careful while doing online transactions.

MoCI said consumers must make sure before purchasing online whether the companies are registered in the Sultanate.

It added that all relevant details can be availed at the Invest Easy portal by entering the name of the company or trademark.

They said it pursues the principle of encouraging innovative online services to help home businesses and small and medium and enterprises promote their products.

The businesses, however, should commit themselves to acquire the home business licenses or the commercial registration number to get the confidence of consumers.

Eight arrested for drug smuggling



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police on Thursday arrested four expatriates of Asian nationalities in possession of 498 capsules, 2kg of heroin anesthetic, 19kg of Cannabis anesthetic and 3kg of Anesthetic crystal.

In another raid, Police Coast Guard in Dhofar Governorate Command arrested drug trafficking boat off Wilayat Taqah beaches. Four people were held and 2,613 packages of khat anesthetic were seized. Legal actions have been initiated against them.

Do not respond to your friend's message request



KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: IT experts and cyber specialists have warned mobile phone users not to respond to a request apparently from one of your close friends seeking some message just landed in your phone.

The advice comes in the wake of several Muscat residents receiving WhatsApp messages on their phones seeking them to share the OTP number just messaged

to you by the service provider.

“Such messages are yet another attempt by the cyber frauds to steal your valuable data, one usually saves on phone and to free you from funds in the bank and to tarnish your dignity in the society”, Mohammed al Mashari, an IT professional supporting cyber security told the Observer.

On Wednesday morning, Xavier received a WhatsApp message on his phone from Radhesh Menon, a PR and event management profes-

sional, requesting Xavier to share the OTP number that was just messaged to him by the service provider after Radhesh wrongly gave his friend's number. As he was innocuously about to share the number, he smelled something fishy and rang Radhesh up to check if everything was okay.

“I was really taken aback when Radhesh told me that his phone was hacked by someone and the entire contact list on his phone has been receiving messages, apparently from his

phone requesting them to share some secret numbers,” Xavier told the Observer.

“I was woken up last Wednesday to a flurry of calls seeking if I was okay and upon smelling a rat, I checked my phone and found that I was not able to open it, instead, the miscreant kept on sending messages to all my contacts. The worst thing is that the same message has been sent to all my clients and senior officials and all,” Radhesh said.

ILLEGAL HAIR CUTTERS, TAILORS ARRESTED

STAFF REPORTER

SAHAM: A number of expats were arrested in the Wilayat of Saham for illegal tailoring and hair cutting in violation of the orders issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling COVID-19.

The arrests were made when a joint team from Saham Municipality and Royal Oman Police raided a house occupied by expat workers who were involved in illegal tailoring activities. The municipality also raided three different locations used for shaving and hair cutting.



Disposable face shields for COVID-19 frontline workers

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Manpower, represented by the Higher College of Technology (HCT), has made more than 6,500 disposable medical face shields to be used by frontline health workers treating COVID-19 patients.

Salwa bint Sultan al Habsiyah, head of costume design section at HCT, said: “The idea to design and make protective shields emerged after the start of the coronavirus pandemic and following coordination with the Ministry of Health to ensure that the products meet the required medical specifications followed by



the MoH. We made several prototypes until we found the one that befits the measurements and the materials available for us.



Unleash the positivity within you

KABEER YOUSUF

This year's holy month has been confined in lockdown and is being celebrated within the four walls of everyone's house with immediate family members around. Just as Ramadhan entered its third and final phase, people share the great positivity that they have been able find in the face of negativity. Let's see what a cross section of people has to say.



ing on our lives and trying to figure out our shortcomings. May Allah guide each one of us and keep us firm on the right path. May He forgive us our errors, protect and preserve us. May this month be filled with His abundant blessings. In each challenge there is an opportunity and Allah desires good for his subjects. Let us all make it to our benefit and stop complaining. For temporarily closing a Mosque, let there be hundreds of permanent home mosques blossom in the same vicinity.

Adel al Balushi, SalamAir

We are 11 brothers and I'm the youngest one and we all assemble at my mother's place for iftar every year. Such was the Ramadhan till last year and we consider them as the most precious days and nights in our lives. However, this year, due to lockdown, none of my brothers or sisters were able to reach my mum's home except me. And see, I'm sharing these divine, precious days and iftars with my mum. A blessing in disguise, yeah? My brothers must be missing these days with mum but with God's grace, we are going to have those days next year, God willing.



Babu Rajendran, General Manager, KTT & Co LLC

I have been fasting for several years and I don't like to count the number of years. I would like to continue as long as the Almighty gives me health to do so. I think this is the 27th year or more ever since I came to this beautiful country. I keep asking this question, what makes me fast? Purely my association and friendship with my Omani brothers/friends is the reason. During my earlier days in Oman my Omani friends used to ask me in the month of Ramadhan if I was fasting and my answer was 'no'.



C M Najeed

This is the first Ramadhan in our generation that the whole family is together at home. How nice, it's for families to pray, fast and have iftar together. Perhaps this is what Allah wanted. People were too busy not having time for their families. He has brought them together now. We are spending this month reflect-



Sheena Hiren

Oman is a second home to me and my family, husband Hiren Dath and son Hriday, and we experience a great amount of tolerance and will power that we cascade down to our staff. Fasting has got some intricate values of patience, love and you name it. Truly, it's a holy month for all those who fast as well as those who don't.

FATWA

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

Question

If a fasting person indulged in a backbitting against an oppressive woman in a moment of anger, does it invalidate the fast?

Answer

No, it does not. Backbitting in the absence of a person who frankly acts in a unjust way does not nullify one's fast. Allah knows best.

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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

WHO warns virus may be here to stay as toll nears 300,000



GENEVA: The coronavirus may never go away and populations will have to learn to live with it just as they have HIV, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned, as the global death toll from the disease nears 300,000.

There were also gloomy forecasts from the US Federal Reserve, which said prolonged shutdowns to stem the spread of the virus could cause lasting economic damage in America.

Washington ratcheted up tensions over the pandemic by accusing China of trying to steal research into a vaccine, while US President Donald Trump upped the rhetoric with a colourful phrase that could anger Beijing.

"We just made a great Trade Deal, the ink was barely dry, and the World was hit by the Plague from China. 100 Trade Deals wouldn't make up the difference — and all those innocent lives lost!" Trump tweeted.

The United States logged more than 1,800 deaths on Wednesday, bringing the nation's total to 84,059.

The president has increasingly looked to pin the blame on China, where the virus first emerged late last year.

Two US security agencies piled fur-

ther pressure on Beijing on Wednesday by saying Chinese hackers were attempting to steal intellectual property related to treatments.

"China's efforts to target these sectors pose a significant threat to our nation's response to COVID-19", the FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said.

Neither agency offered evidence to support the allegation.

A vaccine could allow countries and economies to fully re-open from lockdowns and potentially earn millions of dollars for its creators. But the WHO said the virus may never be wiped out entirely.

"This virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities and this virus may never go away", said Michael Ryan, the global health body's emergencies director in Geneva.

"HIV has not gone away — but we have come to terms with the virus".

The prospect of the disease hanging around leaves governments across the world facing a delicate balancing act between suppressing the pathogen and getting economies up and running. — **AFP**

Tears, joy as care home residents get visits via 'box of emotions'

MONTIJO: Maria das Mercês struggled to hold back tears after she saw her 90-year-old father at a Portuguese care home — chatting to him from inside a glass booth erected in front of a window to allow elderly residents to visit family during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Makes you want to hold him", Mercês, 63, said after a 15-minute visit to the "box of emotions", as the contraption is known.

"I don't think I would be able to resist if the glass window wasn't here".

Opened earlier this month at the Montepio nursing home in the town of Montijo across the River Tagus from Lisbon, the air-conditioned glass box sits outside the building alongside one of the rooms. Residents can sit and talk with their relatives using a microphone set up on both sides.

Mercês is one of the many Portuguese with relatives in care homes who are finding it tough to cope with a ban on visits imposed to protect the frail



residents from contagion as part of a lockdown declared nearly two months ago.

Around 14 per cent of the around 2,500 care homes in Portugal reported coronavirus cases, according to the government.

Portugal, which has reported more than 28,000 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and 1,175 deaths — a fraction of the toll in neighbouring Spain, started to ease the lockdown on May 4. — **Reuters**

WORLD



Weakened by war and floods, Yemen fights twin health threat

MUKALLA: In a crowded street in southern Yemen's port city of Mukalla, people move between food vendors, buying what they need for iftar.

Not far from this market, in the neighbouring town of Al Sheher, Yemen's first case of COVID-19 was reported on April 10. Yet, as customers do their shopping in Mukalla, there is no sign of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Nobody keeps their distance and there isn't a mask in sight. Food sellers handle raw meat, swat at flies and exchange cash without wearing gloves.

Like many locals, Mohammed al Jumahi, who sells salted fish in the market, is not convinced the virus is a serious threat — despite posters everywhere telling people to practice social distancing and wash their hands.

But if an outbreak were to happen in Mukalla, the capital of the southern province of Hadhramout, he knows his town would be brought to its knees, he said. "As you can see, if the virus occurs here, it would spread so quickly", he said as he sliced fish for a customer using bare hands. Crippled by civil war, severe food shortages and now a wave of diseases linked to recent heavy rains, Yemen's shattered healthcare system is being pushed to the brink of collapse by these pressures and the novel coronavirus, health experts warn.

In late April, the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) declared self-rule in the country's south, including Aden, the interim seat of the Saudi-backed government, saying it wanted to take control of efforts to mitigate the damage from floods and curb the coronavirus spread.

Doctors in Aden said the move has worsened Yemen's problems, setting back a truce between the STC and the internationally recognised government that was meant to focus both sides on ending the conflict with the Ansar Allah movement.

Yemen has announced 72 confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus and 13 deaths, according to a Reuters tally. But health experts believe the real number of cases is far higher, given the lack of tracking and testing capabilities in the poorest country in the country. — **Reuters**

INDIA TO PROVIDE FREE FOOD GRAINS TO MIGRANTS

NEW DELHI: India will provide free food grains to millions of migrant workers hardest hit by a weeks-long lockdown as well as offer employment under a rural jobs programme, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday.

The government will spend Rs 35 billion (\$463.06 million) on food for nearly 80 million migrant workers over the next two months, Sitharaman told a news conference.

The allocation is part of a Rs 20 trillion (\$266 billion) fiscal and monetary package to prop up the ailing economy. Millions of workers have fled large towns and cities after they lost their jobs during the lockdown, which is aimed at curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"The government is concerned about migrant workers", Sitharaman said, and had provided funds to states to provide shelter, food grain and transport for migrants.

Since April, the government has spent Rs 100 billion to offer work to near 23 million unemployed people in rural areas under the ongoing rural job guarantee pro-

gramme, she said.

The government also plans to extend a bank loan interest subsidy programme for affordable housing to rented housing for migrant workers, she said.

On Wednesday, it announced new credit lines by offering bank guarantees on loans of over \$60 billion to small businesses, shadow banks and power companies.

In an address to the nation on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the package was equivalent to 10 per cent of India's gross domestic product, and was meant to support workers and businesses reeling from the impact of the prolonged shutdown.

Under lockdown since late March, India has reported more than 78,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among its 1.3 billion population, with over 2,500 deaths from the lung disease.

Economists said new measures would have a limited impact on the government's fiscal spending as large parts of funding for migrant workers, farmers and small businesses was through state-run banks and financial institutions. — **AFP**

ANALYSIS



EUROPE STEPS UP REOPENING, UNVEILS PLANS FOR TRAVEL

DAMON WAKE & ISSAM AHMED

Europe moved ahead with its emergence from coronavirus lockdown and laid out plans for summer tourism, but the pandemic gathered pace elsewhere and America's virus pointman warned against reopening the United States too quickly.

Britain followed France, Italy and Spain in easing its lockdown but only in England, where people were given more freedom to leave their homes and return to their jobs if they cannot work remotely.

Austria said its borders with Germany would reopen from mid-June and Berlin said it aimed to end virus checks at its land borders in about a month.

Desperate to save millions of tourism jobs, the European Union set out plans for a phased

restart of travel this summer, with EU border controls eventually lifted and measures to minimise the risks of infection, like wearing facemasks on shared transport.

"Today's guidance can be the chance of a better season for the many Europeans whose livelihood depends on tourism and, of course, for those who would like to travel this summer," EU Commission executive vice president Margrethe Vestager told reporters.

But with the global death toll from the coronavirus exceeding 292,000, the picture was grim in other parts of the world.

Russia, now the country with the second-highest number of virus cases, recorded more than 10,000 new infections after authorities this week eased restrictions to allow some people back to work. — AFP

Solar parks kick-start India's clean energy transition

AAKANKSHA KHAJURIA

Renewable energy in India has taken centre stage with a significant development of energy infrastructure and attracted foreign capital to achieve the economic goals, as ultra-mega solar parks kick-start the country's clean energy transition.

With an aim to transform the country's polluting fossil fuel-based power sector into a renewable energy-based, low-cost, reliable and low-emission system, the country has set an impressive target of installing 175 GW of renewable energy by 2021-22 and 275 GW by 2026-27.

"To achieve this, India has pioneered the ultra-mega solar parks and, in the process, overcame a range of challenging obstacles. Indian utility-scale solar parks have kick-started India's energy sector transition," said Kashish Shah, a researcher analyst at US-based Institute.

The country's approach towards building ultra-mega power plants attracts global capital from some of the most renowned domestic and international renewable energy

developers. This gives investors an opportunity to join a \$500-700 billion renewable energy and grid infrastructure investment boom in the coming decade.

The ultra-mega power plant concept involves a state government or local distribution company facilitating a single central grid connection and taking on the procurement and time delay risks relating to land acquisition.

The country's approach towards building ultra-mega power plants attracts global capital from some of the most renowned domestic and international renewable energy developers

"This approach has been instrumental in driving economies of scale and attracting global capital into India's renewable energy over the last five years, with an immediate boon in the form of a halving of solar tariffs to a record low of Rs 2.44 per kilowatt-hour achieved in mid-2017," said Shah.

— IANS

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Salalah Port foresees 20pc decline in local trade volumes

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Port of Salalah anticipates limited impacts to its mainstay transshipment business on account of the global COVID-19 pandemic, but foresees a roughly 20 per cent slump in local import and import volumes over the remainder of 2020.

The transshipment and logistics hub overlooking the Indian Ocean is banking on the diversification of its commodity profile and service offerings to boost revenues, according to a top official of the maritime gateway.

“While it is difficult to predict full year impact at this stage due to the uncertainty of the situation, based on available intelligence, we expect the impact on the transshipment volume, which constitutes 95 per cent of our overall volume, to be limited due to our ongoing mitigation plans with (principal customer) Maersk, the impact of the local export / import trade is being assessed but initial indications expect a drop of about 20 per cent for the rest of the year,” said Ahmed bin Nasser al Mahrizi, Chairman.

Writing in the Directors' Report of the company's performance for the quarter ended March 31, 2020, Al Mahrizi cautioned that the global shutdowns triggered by the pandemic are expected to “negatively impact the overall container trade”. Shipping lines face a cumulative loss of over \$23 billion this year alone, he warned.

While the outlook for Salalah Port appears “posi-



itive” over the immediate short term, the longer term outlook remains “uncertain” due to the continuing decline in global demand coupled with supply chain disruptions, the Chairman noted.

“We are also closely working with our main customer to mitigate the potential drop in volumes through new value added services and supply chain support options. All initiatives will however be assessed to ensure that these options do not hinder the ability of the port to continue to operate as a regional transshipment hub,” he stated.

Salalah Port handled 1,167K TEUs of containers during the first quarter of this year, which was up 28 per cent over corresponding figures for Q1 2019. The

MITIGATION MEASURES:
Falling demand for some export commodities in key markets like India and South East Asia is expected to weigh on general cargo outflows

uptick was attributed to the resumption of normal operations at the Container Terminal following disruptions caused by Cyclone Mekunu nearly three years ago.

General cargo volumes, chiefly limestone, gypsum, methanol and cement, rose

marginally to 4,350K tons during Q1 2020, as compared to 4,324K in Q1 2019. However, with the demand for some of these commodities expected to dip, notably in India and South East Asia, volumes at the General Cargo Terminal are expected to fall during 2020-2021, according to the Chairman.

“The port, however, continues to see success from its focus on diversification of its commodities and customers with new revenue streams accruing from RORO carriers and Aid & Relief operations. Recent successes in securing business for providing value added services have also resulted new avenues of diversification of revenue streams and mitigate the downside in volumes,” he added.

Enhanced cybersecurity an imperative as pandemic continues



The COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment where cyber threat actors can exploit information technology infrastructure, technology use, and human behavior. These adversaries target fearful populations in addition to security gaps created by remote work.

Across the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region, awareness of current threats — namely, denial-of-service attacks, remote work exploitation, phishing and financial scams, and misinformation campaigns — can help mitigate cyber risks as the threat landscape changes due to COVID-19.

In denial-of-service (DoS) attacks, threat actors render machines, networks, tools, or websites unavailable to users. With a large portion of the population operating remotely, DoS attacks are an increased risk as workers depend entirely on network reliability. Additionally, threat actors are aware that governments and enterprises prioritize availability and

performance of critical applications and networks. This may lead to security lapses — potentially creating vulnerability points in less secure areas of a network or via routes created to facilitate remote work.

Similarly, cyber risks posed by exploitation of remote work are significant. There are numerous vulnerabilities for threat actors including personal computing devices, home Wi-Fi networks, and free or low-cost telephone and video conferencing services. These vulnerabilities create opportunities for threat actors and can result in data loss including personally identifiable information or sensitive corporate data.

Companies and entities in MENA are acutely vulnerable. While multi-national corporations are well-positioned for remote work, the same is not true for many local organisations. As COVID-19 lockdowns started in March, just 12 per cent of Gulf companies had remote work arrangements. These entities also often lack corporate virtual private networks (VPNs), secure con-

Fear and uncertainty over the pandemic allow cyber criminals to thrive; but governments, enterprises and individuals can enhance cybersecurity with some simple measures

ferencing capabilities, two-factor authentication, and other measures to provide security in a distributed environment.

Phishing and financial scams are similarly growing. As workplace policies change in response to the outbreak, there is a heightened risk of employee missteps or mistakes that could facilitate threat actor access to corporate networks. Across the region, governments and financial institutions including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE), and Dubai Financial Services Authority

are messaging that individuals and entities face a great risk of attack and exploitation. A UAE consortium consisting of the UAE Banks Federation, CBUAE, and the Abu Dhabi and Dubai police forces launched an anti-fraud awareness campaign to combat this risk. With Trend Micro reporting more than 3,000 COVID-19 cyber attacks across the Gulf between January and March — including over 600 cases of email phishing in the UAE — these attacks are likely to increase throughout the crisis.

Lastly, misinformation campaigns pose a risk as the information environment is ripe for exploitation given the fear and uncertainty surrounding COVID-19. Across the Gulf, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait have issued warnings for those caught spreading misinformation; however, this threat will persist throughout the duration of the crisis.

(By Souheil Moukaddem,
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BUSINESS

Stocks drop for third day as recovery hopes falter

LONDON: World stock markets fell for a third day running on Thursday after a sobering warning from the World Health Organization that the coronavirus may never go away.

The head of the Federal Reserve quashed talk of US interest rates going negative to kickstart investment and new outbreaks of the virus in South Korea and China and some dour assessments of the global economy aroused concern too.

Europe's main bourses sank 1.5 per cent in early moves as traders once again took shelter in safe-haven government bonds.

"The path ahead is both highly uncertain and subject to significant downside risks," the Fed Chair Jerome Powell said of the economy, as he warned of a recession worse than any since World War Two.

His suggestion that the Fed's firepower may not be sufficient to avert deep damage also clearly spooked markets. He called



for additional fiscal support but a \$3 trillion stimulus bill seems to have run aground with senate Republicans for now.

Asian markets had followed Wall Street lower overnight with MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares finishing down 1.3 per cent and Japan's heavyweight Nikkei closing 1.75 per cent in the red.

"We don't think the market is going to re-test the

lows, but it's probably seen its best also, so I'm expecting a correction," said Tony Huntley, chief investment officer at Melbourne-based fund manager Adanson Capital. "The issue is whether we get a second wave (of coronavirus infections) ... that would be my greatest fear."

China has re-imposed movement restrictions near its borders with North Korea and Russia after a new outbreak was detected

there and South Korea is working to contain an outbreak centred around bars and nightclubs in Seoul.

"It is important to put this on the table: this virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities, and this virus may never go away," WHO emergencies expert Mike Ryan told an online briefing on Wednesday.

Bonds and the dollar had both rallied after Fed Chief Powell talked down the prospect of negative interest rates in the United States. Yields on benchmark US 10-year Treasuries fell to 0.6185 per cent having been 0.74 per cent just over a week ago.

European bond yields continued to fall for the most part too, despite more government spending which will ramp up debt levels. Italy's government had unveiled its second fiscal package on Wednesday evening, worth 55 billion, or roughly 3 per cent of its 2019 nominal GDP.

— Reuters

Millions more file for jobless benefits

WASHINGTON: The global novel coronavirus crisis continues to batter the US labour market, with millions more Americans, including white collar workers, filing for unemployment benefits last week as the hit from the pandemic spills over into a broader swath of the economy.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits totalled a seasonally adjusted 2.981 million for the week ended May 9, the Labour Department said on Thursday. While that was down from 3.176 million in the prior week and marked the sixth straight weekly drop, claims remain astoundingly high.

Economists polled by



Reuters had forecast applications for unemployment benefits totaling 2.5 million in the latest week. Claims have been gradually decreasing since hitting a

record 6.867 million in the week ended March 28.

The weekly jobless claims report, the timeliest data on the economy's health, cements economists'

expectations for a third straight month of massive job losses in May. The report came a day after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned of an "extended period" of weak growth and stagnant incomes.

"We are on the back end of the first wave of layoffs, but now we are transitioning from the natural-disaster phase to the recession phase," said Josh Wright, chief economist at Wrightside Advisors in New York. "That's why so many white collar jobs are still being lost. We effectively amputated a large section of the economy, and we are going to limp along afterwards."

— Reuters

IEA STILL SEES RECORD 2020 OIL DEMAND FALL



LONDON: Oil demand is still set for a record fall in 2020, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Thursday, but it trimmed its forecast for the drop citing easing lockdown measures.

Demand is expected to fall by 8.6 million barrels per day (bpd), the IEA said in its monthly report, raising its estimate by 690,000 bpd compared to last month.

Around 2.8 billion people will be living under confinement measures aimed at containing the novel coronavirus at the end of May, down from 4 billion in April, the Paris-based IEA said.

In revising its forecast, the energy watchdog cited stronger-than-expected mobility in some European countries and the United States as well as higher Chinese demand as it recovers from the virus outbreak.

"Economic activity is beginning a gradual-but-fragile recovery. However, major uncertainties remain. The biggest is whether governments can ease the lockdown measures without sparking a resurgence of COVID-19 outbreaks," it said.

Led by the United States and Canada, producers outside the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies like Russia, the so-called OPEC+ grouping, saw a fall in April output by 3 million bpd compared to the start of the year.

The IEA predicted that by the end of 2020, the United States would be the biggest single contributor to supply reductions, down 2.8 million bpd year on year.

"It is on the supply side where market forces have demonstrated their power and shown that the pain of lower prices affects all producers," the IEA said.

But IEA director Fatih Birol said on a call with reporters that recently announced output cuts by major Gulf Arab producers would likely not be enough to balance global markets.

"I am happy to see Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Kuwait - on top of their existing commitments - are now going to make further cuts. I do welcome them. Whether or not this is enough, I do not think so," Birol said on the call after the IEA released its monthly report.

"We are seeing the early signs of a start of recovery, but it is far too early to say we are soon going to reach the rebalancing of the markets," he added, renewing a call to OPEC+ countries to consider further cuts.

The shortage of oil storage capacity worldwide and especially in the United States has added markets and weighed on crude prices in recent weeks, but the IEA predicted a recovery was likely approaching.

— Reuters

Malaysia drops 1MDB money laundering case against "Wolf of Wall Street" producer



Riza Aziz, stepson of former Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak, arrives at a court in Kuala Lumpur

KUALA LUMPUR Malaysian prosecutors on Thursday dropped a \$248-million money laundering case against a producer of Hollywood film "The Wolf of Wall Street" and the stepson of former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak, citing a deal for an undisclosed amount of funds to be paid to the government.

Riza Aziz, the co-founder of Red Granite Productions that was behind the 2013 Oscar-nominated film, was charged with five counts of money laundering last year over allegations that he had received \$248 million misappropriated from state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). — Reuters

Sharp oil price pullback unlikely: Goldman

NEW YORK: The risk of a sharp pull-back in oil prices has decreased as the rebalancing of the crude market gathers pace, Goldman Sachs said, aided by a gradual lifting of coronavirus lockdowns and a faster-than-expected fall in output.

The Wall-Street bank raised its May global demand estimate by 1.4 million barrels per day (bpd), but still sees a decline of 16 million bpd from pre-COVID levels. However, recovering demand and lower output would push the global oil market into deficit in June, it said in a note dated May 13. — Reuters





ASPIRATIONS OF OMAN CULTURAL SPORTS

DR BADRIYA LISTS SUCCESSFUL DOMESTIC EXPERIENCE WITH CULTURAL SPORTS SECTOR

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: It is preferable that sportspersons, athletes and sports lovers should be aware of adequate cultural sports practices. They need to enhance knowledge and experience in different fields of sports. Besides, there should be a clear understanding about right values, attitudes and beliefs about sports, competition and best nutrition methodology.

Dr Badriya al Haddabi, Head of Physical Education & Sport Sciences Department at Sultan Qaboos University and Chairperson of Oman Badminton Committee, presented a paper during Sports Media Forum in Muscat last year. The paper was titled 'Oman's cultural sports... Hopes and aspirations'.

She told Oman Daily Observer that the paper made an essential introduction of the cultural sports. She commenced with a clear definition of cultural sports.

"This category includes sports with values in health, social, behavioural and educational aspects of the society. It is called cultural sports in general. Sports culture is defined as knowledge of different individual and group sports and its related rules and regulations", she added.

Commenting on the significance of cultural sports, Dr Badriya said: "It supports spreading sports spirit among the athletes and raise the awareness of sports in general. Based on many researches done, cultural sports is ranked as an effective factor for human development. Also, it encourages the individuals in the community to make initiatives and excel in it. It also helps in defining

the society's strong points and its best ways to develop and improve", the head of Physical Education & Sport Sciences at SQU explained.

Dr Haddabi pointed out that there are two main types including the physical cultural sports and non-physical cultural sports. "Human element is the main factor of the physical cultural sports through building the sports infrastructure by developing the sports complexes and stadiums. The second type is classified as those adhering to the customs, traditions, concepts, values and beliefs that certain peoples and societies believe in".

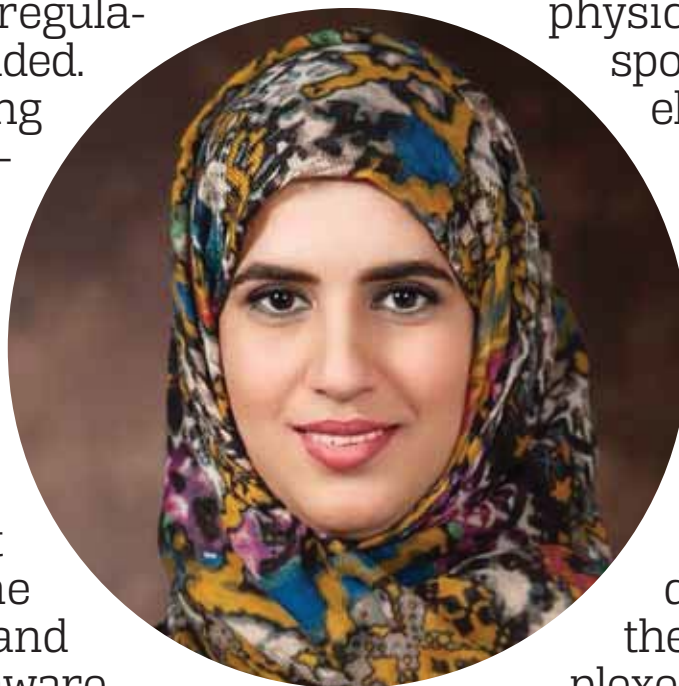
The chief of Oman Badminton Committee highlighted her presenta-

tion on successful domestic sports cultural programmes.

"We have many best Omani examples for cultural sports namely climbing the sands mountains in Musannah, sandboarding at Rimal al Sharqiya (Wahiba Sands), scuba diving at Oman Diving Centre and many other locations and practicing mountaineering in Jabal Shams", she said.

Dr Haddabi affirmed that, Tour of Oman, is one of the modern top sports event in the Sultanate which spreads messages on the importance of cycling for health of people besides to its other benefits to the country.

"Many new sports applications which helps to do daily sports workouts are ensuring the importance of sports in people's life. These applications are advanced and give you encouragement to continue in the sports practises as you will receive clear data on your workouts", she concluded.



GOLF RETURNS WITHOUT FANS IN S KOREA

YANGJU (South Korea): Players were ordered to keep two metres apart and there was no touching the flag sticks without gloves as women's professional golf returned post-coronavirus in South Korea on Thursday.

Spectators were barred from the Lakewood Country Club as the KLPGA

Champion-ship, a domestic tournament, got under way with world top-10 players Park Sung-hyun, Kim Sei-young and Lee Jeong-eun in the field.

In an unusually quiet round in Yangju, north-east of Seoul, none of the trio could break par, with Park and Lee carding one-over 73s and Kim 74. Joint leaders Bae Seon-woo, Kim Char-young and Hyun Se-lin all shot 67.

The tournament, normally overlooked outside South Korea, is the first high-level women's golf to be played since the US-based LPGA suspended its season in February.

With sports fans around the world long deprived of live action, rights have been sold to broadcasters in countries including the US, Canada and Australia.

"Interest is very high since this is the first golf tour in the world amid the pandemic," the KLPGA said in a

statement. To avoid any coronavirus infection, players were advised to keep two metres (six feet) apart on the course and minimise physical contact, while touching the pin without gloves was prohibited.

Players also had to wear masks before and after their rounds, but could choose whether or not to do so during play – with most deciding against.

Apart from the host broadcaster, media were restricted to the first and 10th tees, with personnel required to wear face masks at all times. "I was surprised to see so many camera crews at the first tee, feeling as if I was seeing a gallery," Park said.

"From the second tee, it became all quiet and you could hear every little sound," she added. "It felt a little boring, yet refreshing."

South Korea is a hot-house for women's golfing talent, with eight players in the current world top 20.

Park, the world number three and a double-major winner, sixth-ranked Kim – a nine-time winner on the LPGA Tour – and number 10 Lee Jeong-eun are part of a 150-strong field chasing the \$180,000 winner's cheque from a tournament-record purse of \$2.5 million.

— AFP



South Korea's Choi Ye-rim plays at the 42nd KLPGA Championship which is held without spectators at the Lakewood Country Club in Yangju, South Korea. — Reuters

SPORTS



SAINZ, RICCIARDO

MAKE MOVES

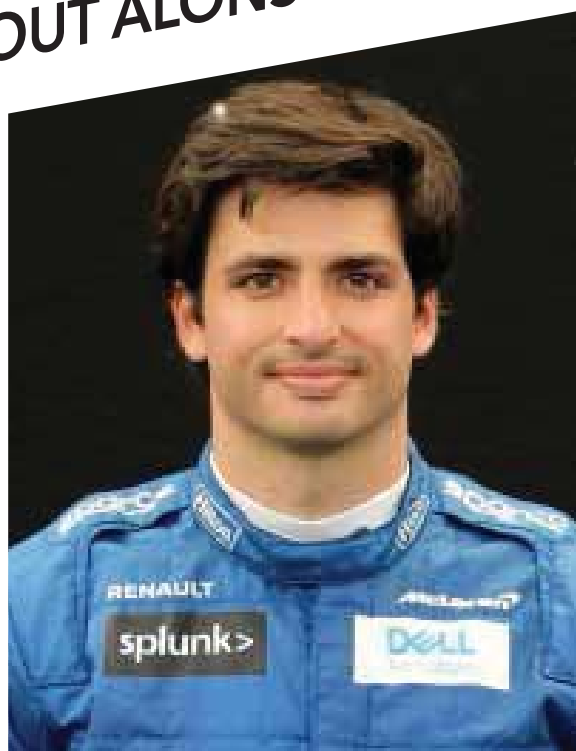
■ SAINZ TO JOIN FERRARI IN 2021 ■ RICCIARDO TAKING SPAINIARD'S PLACE AT MCLAREN
 ■ SPECULATION ABOUT ALONSO'S FUTURE ■ HAMILTON SURE TO STAY AT MERCEDES

LONDON: Spaniard Carlos Sainz will make a dream move to Ferrari next year, with Australian Daniel Ricciardo replacing him at McLaren, as Formula One's driver carousel took another big twirl on Thursday with the 2020 season yet to start.

Ferrari said 25-year-old Sainz, who replaces four times world champion Sebastian Vettel alongside young Monegasque Charles Leclerc at the sport's most glamorous team, had signed for 2021 and 2022.

Vettel's departure at the end of a season so far stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic was announced on Tuesday, with the German's next move uncertain.

"With five seasons already behind him, Carlos



has proved to be very talented and has shown that he has the technical ability and the right attributes to make him an ideal fit with our family," said Ferrari principal Mattia Binotto.

The move also ends speculation about Lewis Hamilton's future, with the 35-year-old Briton now sure to stay at Mercedes as he chases a seventh title to equal Michael Schumacher's record.

Ricciardo will depart



Renault after opting for McLaren, the former world champions he rejected in 2018 when leaving Red Bull.

"Signing Daniel is another step forward in our long-term plan and will bring an exciting new dimension to the team, alongside Lando," said McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown, announcing a multi-year arrangement.

The Australian, a seven times race winner with Red Bull, will be the experi-

enced man alongside 20-year-old Briton Lando Norris, with McLaren also switching from Renault to Mercedes engines in 2021.

"Adios amigo! It's only been a year, but it's been a pleasure," Norris told Sainz in a Twitter post. "We've had some good laughs and made a few memories. Give it your all mate and let's give this year the send off it deserves."

Ferrari will be Sainz's fourth employers after a 2015 debut with Italy-based Toro Rosso, followed by stints at Renault and McLaren.

Remarkably, he was not the first choice for any of his first three teams until landing one of the most coveted seats on the grid.

He will now follow in the footsteps of boyhood hero, friend, compatriot and double world champion Fernando Alonso, who also went from Minardi (Toro Rosso's predecessors), to Renault, McLaren and Ferrari.

— Reuters