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11th death reported as Oman sees 74 new cases

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Thursday announced the death of a female citizen aged 33, who had been suffering from coronavirus (COVID-19). This brings the total number of COVID-19 related death cases in the Sultanate to 11.

The ministry extended its condolences to the deceased's family, praying to the Almighty Allah to have mercy on the deceased's soul and grant her family patience. Earlier, the ministry announced registration of 74 new positive cases with coronavirus in the Sultanate. 39 of the new cases are Omanis and 35 non-Omanis. This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 2,348, in addition to 11 deaths. The ministry also pointed out that 495 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.

It 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 following the healthy habits when coughing and sneezing. — ONA

7 Ramadhan Friday 1/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:12	04:18	04:42
DHUHR:	12:09	12:13	12:26
ASR:	03:34	03:37	03:37
MAGHRIB:	06:40	06:43	06:48
ISHA:	07:55	07:58	08:00

HM LENDS UNLIMITED SUPPORT

NO INDICATORS AS OF NOW SHOW THAT CORONAVIRUS IS ABATING

ZAINAB AL NASSRI/ONA
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, has said that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is lending unlimited support in the war against coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Dr Al Saeedi, member of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments of coronavirus, said at a virtual press conference on Thursday that the number of registered positive cases in the Sultanate stood at 2,348. The death toll stood at 11, while 495 patients recovered, said Dr Al Saeedi, adding that 65 patients are hospitalised, of them 17 in the Intensive Care Unit.

The press conference, the fifth held by the Supreme Committee since the outbreak of the pandemic, saw the participation of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Chairman of the Public Authority for Radio and Television (PART), Member



Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi

Decision on schools will be taken soon

A decision on opening of the schools will be taken soon, said the member of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 at a press conference on Thursday. Dr Abdullah al Harrasi, Chairman of Public Authority for Radio and Television (PART) and member of the Supreme Committee, said, "The subject of education is a matter of concern of every family who has children in schools and it was discussed many times in our meetings". A decision will be issued soon regarding education in a manner that is acceptable to everyone, he said. All schools in Oman are currently conducting online classes. With scheduled summer vacations fast approaching from Mid-June, both school administrations and parents are looking for clarity in terms of semester exams, the effectiveness of prolonged online classes, revised curriculum, evaluation of students' academic performances, among others..

of the COVID-19 Control Committee, Eng Issam al Zadjali, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, Ali bin Mohammed al Abri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of

Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, Dr Saif bin Salim al Abri, Director-General of Disease Control and Surveillance at the Ministry of Health and Brig

Hassan bin Ali al Mujaini, Head of Public Morale, Ministry of Defence.

The minister reaffirmed that no indicators, as of now, show that the virus is abating, as the Sultanate has not yet reached the peak of the pandemic curve.

The Supreme Committee will take a decision on whether or not to allow celebration of Eid al Fitr at the right time, said Dr Al Saeedi, adding that the call to end Command and Control Checkpoints between governorates of the Sultanate was based on the view of the Health Ministry that traffic between wilayats in the daytime is very low during Ramadhan.

In reply to a question, the minister said that studies on the virus are still on and results differ from one country to another, but, he confirmed, it is not possible to predict the date when the coronavirus curve peaks. He explained that countries announce peaks when the number of cases subsides consistently.

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Oman holds emergency meeting of Arab FMs

MUSCAT/CAIRO: The Arab Foreign Ministers Council on Thursday held an emergency meeting under the chairmanship of the Sultanate via video conferencing.

Oman was represented at the meeting by Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, who heads the current session of the council.

Alawi said that this extraordinary session is first one of its kind to be convened via virtual video conferencing due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The meeting was called for by the State of Palestine,

and supported by all Arab countries, to discuss action that Arab countries can take in view of Israel's execution of plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, a step rejected by all.

The annexation is in contradiction of the international law, as well as international peace charters and the two-state solution, said Alawi.

He added that, as part of the international community's responsibility — particularly the Security Council and the UN general assembly, for the protection of global peace and security, notably in the Middle East — all Arab League member states call for international



action to prevent Israel from carrying out its plan of settlement, occupation and

annexation of Palestinian lands.

Israel's execution of

its scheme will threaten international peace and security and entail adverse

consequences that nobody can predict, said Alawi.

He added that Arab countries urge Israel to work for peace in the interest of all.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the Arab League, said that the main purpose of the current extraordinary session of the Arab League Council is to sound the alarm on the regional and international risks involved in Israel's annexation of parts of the West Bank.

Arab countries also looked into ways of assisting the Palestinian government to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic. — ONA

Outgoing WHO Representative lauds Oman's COVID-19 strategy

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

The World Health Organization (WHO) has lauded Oman's universal health policy of equal opportunity for healthcare and called it 'unique' which has been evident, according to the outgoing country representative, Dr Akjimal Magtimova.

"The universal health coverage remains a priority under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and the Sultanate continues to demonstrate its commitment to equal access to diagnostics and treatment for entire population, evident in



times of recent disease outbreak and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic", said Dr Akjimal Magtimova, WHO Representative to the Sultanate of Oman.

"Omani professionals have shown profound dedication and aptitude for national emergency response and global cooperation in advancing science and technology well reflected in the current COVID-19 pandemic".

She lauded the support and cooperation that the country extended to her during her tenure, as she moved out of Oman to her new assignment in the Syrian Arab Republic as Head of Mission on Thursday.

"I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to all Omani officials, diplomats, public health community and counterparts in the Sultanate for their great cooperation in this relatively short yet extremely rich and fulfilling period of my assignment as WHO Representative in Oman", she said in her farewell message.

Molecular pathology lab opens in Salalah

SALALAH: The Molecular Pathology Laboratory was opened at the Specialized Clinics Complex in "Sultan Qaboos Hospital" in Salalah under the auspices of Shaikh Muhanna bin Saif al Lamki, Deputy Governor of Dhofar.

The opening of the laboratory comes within the framework of the Ministry of Health' interest in providing various health services in all governorates of the Sultanate, due to the importance of laboratory tests in diagnosing various diseases. The laboratory equipment, funded by the Salalah Mills Company, worth about RO 150,000.

The laboratory is equipped with the latest equipment and technologies for viruses and infectious diseases, in addition to the rehabilitation and training of Omani



specialists and technicians in the laboratory, and the application of the quality system.

The laboratory is prepared to perform any future tests in genetic diseases and any other tests required by the diagnosis using the most recent methods.

During the inauguration of the Molecular Pathology Laboratory at Sultan Qaboos Hospital, an agreement was signed between the Ministry

of Health and the Salalah Mills Company to finance laboratory equipment that had been purchased and recently installed in the laboratory. The agreement was signed by Dr Khalid bin Mohammad al Masheikhi, Director General of Health Services in the Governorate of Dhofar and Shaikh Ahmed bin Abdullah al Rowas, Board Chairman of Salalah Mills Company.

— ONA

Community nursing helps in tackling virus spread

MUSCAT: Community nursing is playing a vital role to curb the spread of infectious diseases, and following safety procedures and measures.

Aisha bint Salim al Ghamariah, Director of Nursing in the Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate (DGHS-Muscat), pointed out that it has been emphasised on the nursing and dressing staff in the DGHS-Muscat health institutions to follow the professional safety standards and the infection control



measures when dealing with the suspected cases. They have also trained to triage the cases in the initial examination room.

The Airport Clinic has been backed-up with nursing and dressing staff to assist in examining

the arrivals coming from different countries and educating them about the isolation and instructions that should be followed in cooperation with other health workers.

The Director of Nursing said that a nursing team

has been formed to operate the hotline in the operations room of the Directorate, as well as receiving calls from the isolated persons and their families.

Al Ghamariah added that the isolated persons are under continual follow-up by the health centres in order to monitor the developments and guide them in case any improvement may occur. The institutional isolation is currently under the management of the Nursing Department around-the-clock.

Ramadan Iftar Program

HARAMAIN CHARITY ORGANIZATION

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

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

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Media role in crisis cannot be ignored: Harrasi

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT, APRIL 30

The role played by media persons in the dissemination of news should be not ignored, said members of the Supreme Committee at a press conference on Thursday.

“We have learned that some media organisations are reducing the salaries of

their employees. Journalists are also soldiers of our nation, especially in the light of this pandemic. We hope that these organisations will take into account the importance of the role of the media during this period”, said Dr Abdullah al Harrasi, Chairman of Public Authority for Radio and Television (PART) and member of the

Supreme Committee.

He added, “The news and decisions issued by the Supreme Committee are published through the Omani News Agency (ONA), the official source for such news in the Sultanate, in addition to the official television channel and the official media. There is no monopoly on the updates issued by the

committee”.

He said that the role of the Omani media in the next stage is to ensure that the reopening of some activities, should not be understood as that the crisis is completely over.

The media should reaffirm the importance of the commitment to preventive measures and health re-

quirements in activities that have been reopened.

The media should focus on the importance of providing rapid response to rumours by strengthening the means of communication with the community.

Harrasi said the decision to reopen certain businesses was to kickstart the economic activities that were

affected by this pandemic.

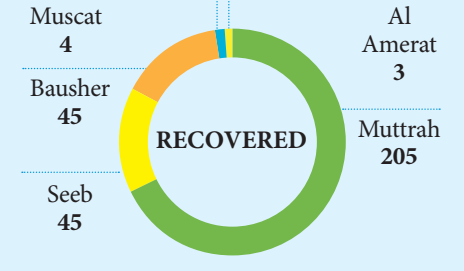
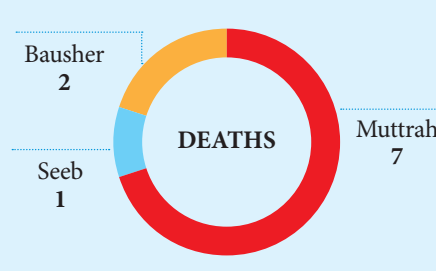
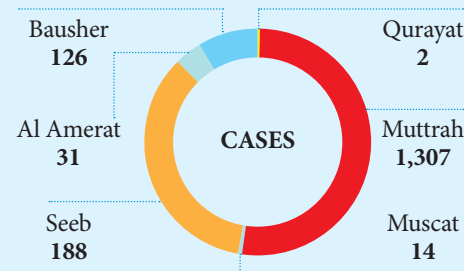
He said, “If we don’t commit with the slow re-opening that’s currently happening, then we will go back to spreading the virus”.

It may be noted that rumours are now occurring less due to the constant warning issued about that the legal actions that will be taken against the offenders.

1,307 COVID-19 CASES IN MUTTRAH, 188 IN SEEB

The Ministry of Health in Oman has announced 74 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday, taking the total to 2,348, including 10 deaths and 495 recoveries.

REGION-WISE CASES IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE
CASES: 1,668 (+47); RECOVERED: 302; DEATHS: 10



NO SIGN OF COVID-19 END VERY SOON

FROM PAGE 1

The minister pointed out that, so far, the ministry conducted tests on more than 40,000 people and that the Central Laboratory has been expanded in Salalah city and it will start conducting diagnoses in Dhofar from Friday.

Dr Al Saeedi said that COVID-19 mortality rate is very low in the Sultanate, 0.5 per cent. The Governorate of South Al Batinah registered the highest number of positive cases, said the minister who explained that no area will be locked down unless it is confirmed to have experienced community-based transfer of infection. He said that most cases in the Sultanate happened due to known causes, including patients

mingling with other people.

Institutional isolation is available in all governorates of the Sultanate, the minister said, adding that “we have not yet attained a point of recovery due to the fact that the virus is still propagating and that preventive measures have to be maintained”.

The minister urged owners of companies and officials of other sectors to shoulder their responsibilities. He cited cases of negligence in three establishments in Muttrah, the first of which caused the infection of 108 people with COVID-19, the second 30 cases and the third 14 cases.

The minister pointed out that a large volume of health data issued about the pandemic show that another

phase of the disease might be in the making. Co-existence in the current circumstances requires adherence to precautionary measures and instructions issued by the departments concerned, he stressed.

“I came to know that some media establishments cut down the salaries of their employees. A media person/journalist is in fact a member in the nation’s troops, particularly during the current pandemic”, said Dr Abdullah, who called upon media establishments to consider the significant role of journalists who need to be socially and economically at ease.

Muscat Municipality Chairman Eng Issam al Zadjali said that most of the re-opened activities related to

the automobile sector due to vehicles’ importance to individuals and establishments, both in civil and military services. The conditions governing the opening of establishments relate directly to health and safety concerns, said Al Zadjali, adding that a committee headed by the Minister of Health is discussing the conditions needed to achieve compliance to health precautions. Al Zadjali admitted that misinterpretation of the decision (of the Supreme Committee) was behind the offences registered against some establishments which did not fully understand the decision.

Ali al Abri of the Regional Municipalities and Water Resources Ministry reaffirmed

the existence of a good level of coordination between government departments whose activities are partly opened. He commended compliance with social distancing and full sterilization in the permitted activities as indicative of co-operation and understanding. Brig Hassan al Mujaini of Morale Guidance said that the lockdown of Muscat Governorate was due to changing variables, which may change later. He added that the assessment of the situation in any governorate depends on health reports according to which checkpoints are set up if necessary.

Brig Al Mujaini explained that due to the nature of their work, medical crew have a special status when moving

between governorates.

Dr Saif al Abri said that, thanks to the implementation of proper health precautions, the Sultanate’s pandemic curve is quasi-flat.

He cautioned against any compromise of health precautions when re-opening activities. He said that the proportion of COVID-19 infection in Muscat is more among expats, while in other governorates it is more among Omanis.

Brig Al Mujaini added that some patients deliberately hid epidemic investigation information, especially where such information relates to their jobs and their workplaces, but unfortunately we discovered that some others pick up the infection from there.

Hospital team excels in fight against virus

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT, APRIL 30

The medical team dedicated to combat COVID-19 pandemic at Al Nahdha Hospital has been rendering excellent services to humanity on a 24X7 basis and has gained praises from the Ministry of Health (MoH). This is one of the main hospitals tasked with the great national cause.

The team headed by Dr Hamed al Harthy, Executive Director, has so far attended many positive COVID-19 patients and suspected cases, as the team was the force behind many COVID-19 positive patients who left the hospital successfully.

“We render testing serv-

ices and have carried out scores of tests so far and dealt both positive and negative cases till now”, said Dr Al Harthy, Director, Al Nahdha Hospital.

Commenting on the preparations of the hospital when WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, he said elaborate changes to the existing structure and systems were made in order to help support the nation in treating and controlling the spread.

“We divided our emergency department into two separate areas, one to receive the COVID-19 cases and the other to receive normal cases. They are following guidelines and pathways in managing and administering the cases”, he said adding that the team



goes by the principles of avoiding infection to non-COVID case patients while admitting treating and transporting the cases.

The hospital received a PCR Machine which is a Polymerase chain reaction testing that allows the team to get results in a couple of hours against the previous one where it was longer for

the results to arrive to the hospital.

“Prior to the introduction of the PCR machine, we were sending the specimen to the Central Laboratory and results took nearly 48 hours whereas we are now able to give it in a few hours”, Dr Al Harthy said.

A special attention is paid to the health and safe-

ty of the doctors, nurses and other health workers as their health matters more and they are educated and trained on regular basis on the safety and the utilisation of the PPEs as the hospital lays prime importance in the health and safety of the healthcare workers.

“Our facilities are accessible for any person symptomatic to COVID-19 to get a test done any time of the day”, adds Doctor Hamed.

Health workers who are working with COVID-19 cases directly wear PPE set that isolates them and ensures their safety during the delivery of care, where infected patients are given lifesaving treatment.

“Constant training and

education added with huge volumes of information and expertise are put into action in order to serve the COVID-19 patients”.

Al Nahdha Hospital adopts a strict protocol to protect the medical and auxiliary medical staff, and the hospital gives top priority to staff safety. It does not compromise on the quality of care and precautions taken in every visit to the patients.

When the world is witnessing the COVID-19 predator and victim news on a daily basis, these front-line warriors in the battle, the doctors, nurses, paramedics and administration staff are standing head and shoulders above the rest in readying to sacrifice for the sake of the society.

Ramadhan



A TIME FOR PRAYER, HUMILITY AND HOPE

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

Dawn to dusk fasting and prayer timings are same, but there is something which is making the Ramadhan of 1441 AH different from all the previous Ramadhans. One and only factor responsible for this difference is the coronavirus pandemic, which is not allowing people to meet and greet, share the Ramadhan delicacies and forcing them to pray at home.

To avoid gathering, the mosques are closed for prayers. People are missing the mosques, especially for the Taraweeh, which is a special prayer during the holy month. For many, this is the first Ramadhan when they are offering the Taraweeh prayer at home.

Ramadhan has many dimensions, says Dr Abdulraoof Ahmed Ismail, Faculty at CAS Salalah. "On the one hand it is deeply spiritual, while intensely physical on the other. We experience Ramadhan at the personal as well as social levels both of which contribute to the spiritual and physical aspects of fasting. What is missing in this time around is the social experience, the unique feeling of togetherness."

He says that the believers around the world, including him, are missing congregational Taraweeh prayer, which only the calm nights of Ramadhan can offer. "Even though, I can offer it at home, I miss the experience of standing shoulder to shoulder with others in the house of Allah, an experience right from the childhood. This time, there is no community iftar, no spiritual gatherings and friendly visits. And on a personal note, no more Ramadan drives on weekends to the unique beauty of Omani countrysides. But this has taught humans how vulnerable the so called 'most intelligent' Homo-sapiens are in front of a sub-microscopic parasite. And with this humility, we enter this year's Ramadhan.

For Mohammed al Mashani, CEO National Feed, Ramadhan this year is uniquely different "because we have to fast for a whole month separated from the ones we love. As we all know, the fasting is never easy without gathering with families, neighbours and

friends. However, this year will be my first Ramadhan in isolation."

He feels this as an opportunity to be close with his own family, pray and meditate.

Dr Akram Ali, Senior Geologist, finds Ramadhan humdrums a miss but admits that this Ramadhan is special for him for the time devoted to himself, away from many distractions. "I do miss my friends and extended family members during prayers and daily iftars, but I find it an opportunity to practice simplicity. As I remember, this is the first time in my life when I am doing Taraweeh prayer at home. I take it as the God's wish and pray the almighty to give us respite from the pandemic," he said.

Similar is the situation with Dr Ahmed al Shanfari, Director Agricultural and livestock Research, Dhofar. The difference lies in religious practices due to the coronavirus pandemic. He is missing the community prayers at the mosques, "especially in the holy month of Ramadhan in which the reward is doubled. Also, I am missing the social dimensions of Ramadhan by cutting visits to family, relatives and friends in order to prevent the spread of this disease. It of course has psychological impact on people. I pray to the almighty to lift this scourge, heal every patient and restore normalcy as soon as possible."

Dr Syed Ahsan Jamil, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dhofar University, admits "Ramadhan this year is very different. The great enthusiasm with which we all used to fast and go to mosque on the call to prayer is missing this time. Friends in Salalah used to vie with each other to organise iftar parties and it was a great feeling going and meeting."

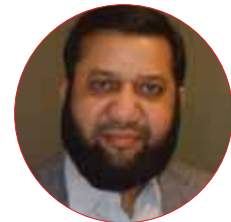
For Mohammed al Mashani, GM Corporate Communications, Port of Salalah, the Ramadhan spirit is the same as before. The COVID-19 crisis has put some restrictions in terms of offering Taraweeh prayer at home and breaking the fast with close family members instead of extended family. "Staying home is the theme of the time. For me, apart from going to work, I am spending most of the time at home with the family, reading books, watching TV and doing some sport activities to keep fit.



Dr Abdulraoof
Ahmed Ismail



Mohammed al
Mashani, CEO
National Feed



Dr Akram Ali,
Senior Geologist



Dr Ahmed
al Shanfari



Dr Syed
Ahsan Jamil

FATWA

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

Question

Are breastfeeding mothers and pregnant women exempted from fasting?

Answer

They are allowed to break their fasting if they fear for themselves and their children to ward off hardship. However, they have to make up that day and pay ransom (fidyah) for the missed fasts.



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LEBANON CRISIS



The Lebanese cabinet met on Thursday to approve a long-awaited plan to rescue the debt-saddled economy from its worst crisis in decades, following a third straight night of violence across several cities. Protesters lobbed fireworks and stones at soldiers who pushed them back with rubber bullets and set a central bank building ablaze in a fresh wave of angry street protests. — Reuters

S Korea leads virus success in Asia

ENCOURAGING SIGNS: No new domestic coronavirus cases; Infections dwindle in China

SEOUL/BEIJING: South Korea, once one of the hardest-hit countries in the coronavirus pandemic, reported no new cases on Thursday, boosting hopes of an eventual return to normality as US scientists hailed the results of a major drug trial.

The good medical news caused equities to rally, despite mounting deaths worldwide and abysmal economic figures caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

Data showed the pandemic, which has killed more than 224,000 people, has plunged the United States into its worst economic slump in a decade, and has left Germany expecting its biggest recession since the aftermath of World War II.

But for the first time since



People wearing face masks walk on a street in central Seoul. — Reuters

the new disease was detected there in mid-February, South Korea reported zero new infections.

The East Asian nation had the world's second-largest coronavirus outbreak for a period after the virus emerged in China late last year. But with an aggressive test-and-trace strategy

and widespread social distancing, it has managed to bring the spread of the pathogen under control.

"This is the strength of South Korea and its people," said President Moon Jae-in as he announced the milestone.

Meanwhile in the first proof of successful

treatment, a clinical trial of the drug remdesivir showed that patients recovered about 30 per cent faster than those on a placebo.

"The data shows that remdesivir has a clear-cut, significant, positive effect in diminishing the time to recovery," said Anthony Fauci, the top US epidemiologist.

HOPE IN ASIA

South Korea's virus death toll is around 250 — vastly lower than that of Italy, Britain, Spain and France, which have each recorded more than 24,000 fatalities, and the United States, topping the table with a third of global deaths.

Other parts of the region have seen similar success in their fight against the virus.

— AFP

IN BRIEF

Yemen reports first two deaths from coronavirus

ADEN: Yemen reported multiple coronavirus infections and deaths linked to the disease for the first time and an official in the southern port of Aden said the number of cases was very likely to increase in the coming days.

The United Nations has said it fears the novel coronavirus could be spreading undetected in a country where millions face famine and lack medical care after Yemen announced its first COVID-19 case in the southern Hadhramout province on April 10. The health minister told Yemen TV late on Wednesday that five COVID-19 cases with two deaths were reported in Aden and noted that the prevalence of other diseases with similar symptoms, such as dengue fever, made it difficult to detect coronavirus infections without testing. — Reuters



Yemen caption: A girl wears a protective face mask amid fears of the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Sanaa.

Thunberg donates to children

STOCKHOLM: Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg has donated a \$100,000 prize she won from a Danish foundation to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for use against the COVID-19 pandemic, the world body said on Thursday.

"Like the climate crisis, the coronavirus pandemic is a child rights crisis," Thunberg, 17, was quoted as saying in the UNICEF statement. — AFP

Arakkal's death was suicide: Police

DUBAI: The death of a United Arab Emirates-based Indian industrialist last week was a suicide, Dubai Police has confirmed. Dubai Police told Gulf news that Joy Arakkal, originally from Kerala, committed suicide on April 23 by jumping from a building in Business Bay.

"We received a report about a man plunging to his death from the 14th floor of a friend's building on Thursday. The businessman committed suicide over financial problems," Brigadier Abdullah Khadim bin Sorour, director of Bur Dubai Police Station, told Gulf News. — IANS

Youngest COVID-19 survivor

MANILA: A 16-day-old baby in the Philippines has become the youngest patient to recover from COVID-19 in the country, the Department of Health said on Thursday. At just five days old, Kobe Manjares was admitted to the National Children's Hospital in Manila, where he tested positive for the novel coronavirus, reports Efe news. He was treated there for the next 11 days. "The DOH applauds our valiant healthcare team for this feat," the Department said on its Facebook page. — IANS

Kim Jong-un's sister in spotlight as rumours persist

SEOUL: Kim Yo-jong, the younger sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, has been seen exerting increasing clout in Pyongyang as of late, raising the possibility of her succeeding her brother amid speculation that he may be seriously unwell, a South Korean legislative think-tank has said.

In an analysis report of the latest meeting of the North's Supreme People's Assembly held earlier this month, South Korea's National Assembly Research Services projected that the 32-year-old Kim

Yo-jong's reappointment to the Workers' Party politburo "will strengthen the governing foundation of the Paekdu bloodline (in North Korea)," reports Yonhap News Agency.

The Kim dynasty is often referred to as the "Paekdu bloodline" in the North, as Mount Paekdu, while widely disputed by outside experts, is known in the country as the birthplace of Kim Il-sung, the nation's late founder.

"This suggests the possibility of expanding her status and role as official successor," the report said.



While she rocketed to international attention during the 2018 Olympics, Klm Yo Jong is a somewhat mysterious figure. — AFP

The report comes amid media speculation that Jong-un might be seriously ill.

Unconfirmed rumours spiked after he skipped an annual visit to the mausoleum of his grandfather Kim Il-sung on the late national founder's April 15 birth anniversary, the North's most important national holiday, Yonhap News Agency reported.

"Kim Yo-jong has virtually taken on the role of the party's core, undertaking the responsibility of the party's monolithic leadership system," the report said.

— IANS



Importing through Omani ports in time of crisis

Many of us are concerned about indirect imports of essential goods and commodities coming through foreign ports. This is also due to the concern that the required flow of these goods into the country, particularly during this time of emergency and hardships caused by the ongoing crisis resulted from coronavirus pandemic, is maintained. The ratio of our imports by land borders is 70 per cent of the total imports. But the pandemic has come to change many concepts and corrected many of our practices regarding direct imports through Omani ports. These ports could help us meet all our requirements of essential goods and commodities. This is because they are fully prepared and equipped to meet our needs as they are connected to all ports around the world. This is the reason most of the businessmen and importers are now using

the pandemic for direct imports through our own ports, and planning to continue import and export from them even after the crisis. This is the result of the investments and efforts made by the authorities concerned in the development of these ports and providing all required facilities. These initiatives have positive impact on our markets, national industrial development which helped increase export and import activities. These days there are direct imports from 86 ports from 40 countries of the world. Cargo ships are making 200 trips per week to Omani ports. This has helped correct the misconception that only the government is involved in export and import activities. Actually, this is primarily the responsibility of the businessmen, importers and exporters to utilise the facilities

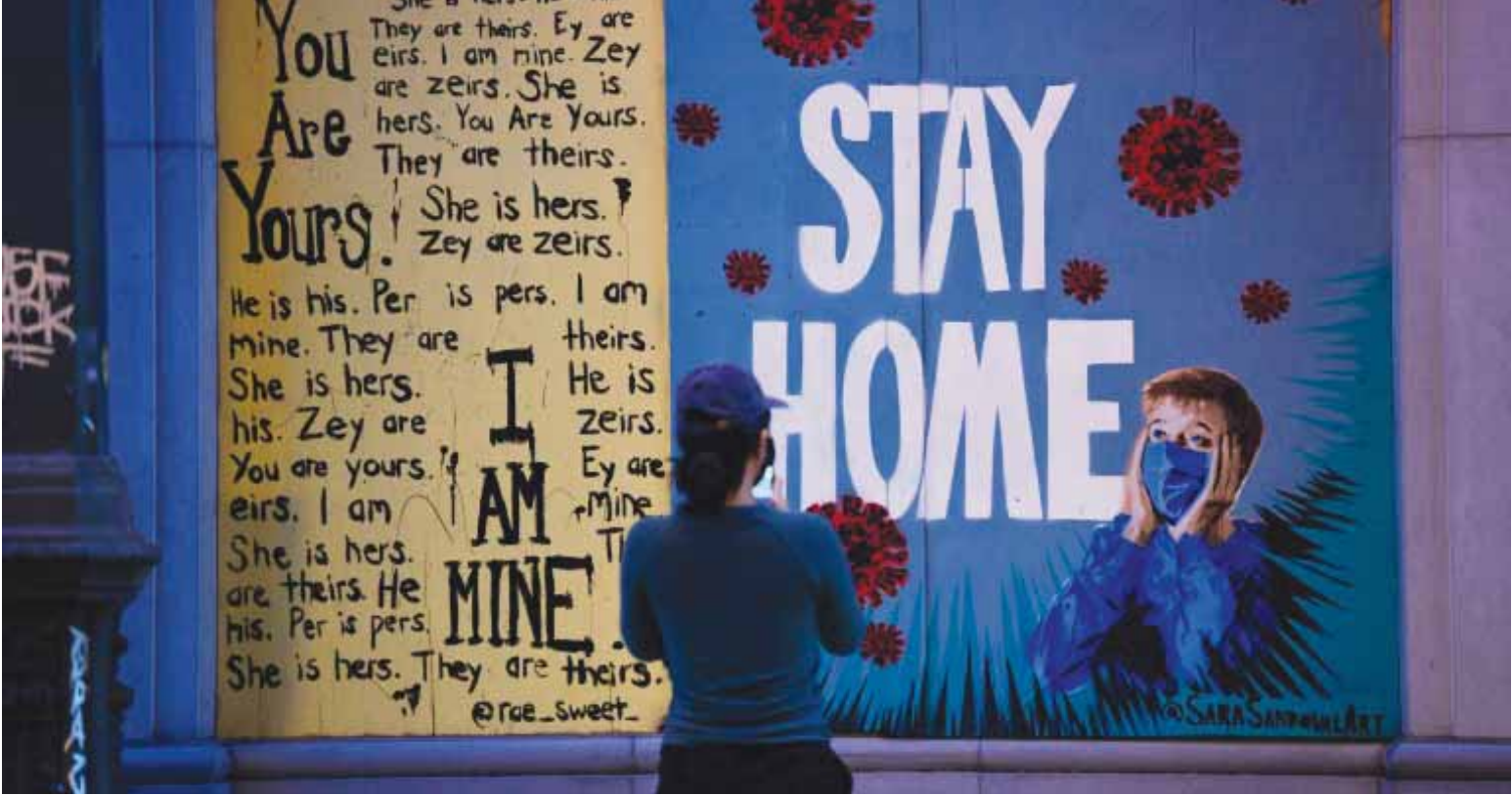
and incentives to support the local market, re-export to foreign markets by adding value to it and enter into manufacturing which will ultimately help the Omani industry grow, revitalise national economy and the government vision to strengthen the sources of income is achieved. Today, 90 per cent of the goods are cleared within an hour of their arrival at the Omani ports through Bayan system, which is managed by the Directorate General of Customs of the Royal Oman Police. In addition to this, 22 per cent of the goods are cleared even before their arrival at the ports. What more, a trader or an importer would want? They are satisfied that their imported goods and commodities need not have to face the hassle of passing through all these procedures and pay custom

duties etc. Today, at the height of this crisis, we see that the prices of vegetables and fruits are going down. This is due to the direct import from the countries of the origin. On the contrary, this time the prices were supposed to increase. This is also what is reflected in the prices of goods, commodities and consumer items of daily use. The importers and businessmen must realise that if this is the best option in the time of crises, then what is the best option in normal conditions. We understand that some traders and businessmen have previous arrangements with other ports which have warehouses and who also deal with shipping companies and provide other related issues, which is difficult in this time of urgency. But now in this crisis, the picture has become clearer

contrary to what was achieved by the efforts of convincing and marketing of these facilities over the previous years. Lot of efforts were made in the past to encourage the business community to use these ports as they get lot of incentives. Of course, the crises which we all are experiencing is very painful. But at the same time there are lot of lessons to be learnt. These crises are guiding us towards the right path and correcting lot of our misconceptions. If we would import through others' corridors, it would serve only their interests. We are hopeful that this crisis will motivate businessmen and traders to use our own ports and the facilities. This is needed always, not only in the time of crisis. This crisis is expected to correct our course of action and practices.



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A woman stops to view a public art installation in Los Angeles. – AFP

Hopes rise as US scientists hail drug trial

US scientists have hailed a potential breakthrough in the coronavirus fight after a trial showed patients responding to an antiviral drug, fuelling global hopes for a return to normal despite mounting deaths and abysmal economic figures. The news was enough to propel a rebound on Wall Street even after data showed the pandemic had plunged the United States into its worst economic slump in a decade, and Germany predicted its biggest recession since the aftermath of World War II. It came as the World Health Organization's emergency committee was due to meet later in the day for the first time in three months to discuss the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed more than 226,000 lives worldwide. A clinical trial of the drug

remdesivir showed that patients recovered about 30 per cent faster than those on a placebo, in the first proof of successful treatment against the new disease. "The data shows that remdesivir has a clear-cut, significant, positive effect in diminishing the time to recovery," Anthony Fauci, the top US epidemiologist who oversaw the study, told reporters. Fauci likened the finding to the first retrovirals that worked, albeit with modest success, against HIV in the 1980s. Remdesivir failed in trials against the Ebola virus and a smaller study, released last week by the WHO, found limited effects among patients in Wuhan, China, where the illness was first detected in December. Senior WHO official

Michael Ryan declined to weigh in on the latest findings, saying he had not reviewed the complete study. "We are all hoping — fervently hoping — that one or more of the treatments currently under observation and under trial will result in altering clinical outcomes" and reducing deaths, he said. US President Donald Trump has accused the UN health agency of not responding quickly or aggressively enough, although critics say he is trying to deflect attention from his own response. Itching to return to the campaign trail as he faces re-election, Trump announced he would resume travel next week with an event in the battleground state of Arizona — but not yet resume rallies, as contagion remains a risk. — AFP

Afghan peace process risks collapse as violence flares

Two months after the US and the Taliban signed a deal Washington heralded as the way to end Afghanistan's war, violence is spiralling out of control and experts say a fragile peace process risks collapse. Dozens of Afghan security forces and Taliban fighters have been dying almost daily with civilian casualties rising across the country as both sides ramp up operations. The insurgents have been emboldened by a deal that gave them many concessions in exchange for few commitments, fuelling their surge of attacks in recent weeks, analysts say. The timing could hardly be worse, as Afghanistan also grapples with a coronavirus epidemic. The peace "process isn't dead yet, but it is on life support", said Ashley Jackson, a researcher at the Overseas Development Institute. "It's anyone's guess how much time we have before it does begin to irrevocably fall apart." An Afghan official said that on average, the Taliban have launched 55 attacks each day since the deal signing in Doha on February 29, while a UN agency reported that Afghan forces are causing more child deaths than the insurgents — mainly from air strikes and shelling. — AFP

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Oman oil soars \$6.46/b ahead of global output cut

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Oman's benchmark Crude Oil Futures Contract soared \$6.46 a barrel on Thursday to settle at \$26.61 per barrel in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The upsurge, witnessed in major oil markets around the world, came as OPEC and non-OPEC producers — together known as the OPEC+ alliance — prepare to cut millions of barrels per day in output starting from May 1, 2020 as part of a landmark deal to shore up international oil prices. Oil prices were also buoyed by signs that the US crude glut is not growing as quickly as expected and that fuel demand battered by COVID-19 restrictions is starting to pick up.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures climbed to a high of \$17.75 a barrel and were up 9.2 per cent, or \$1.39, at \$16.45 at 0640 GMT. The US benchmark surged 22 per cent on Wednesday. Brent was up 5.6 per cent, or \$1.27 at \$23.81 a barrel in light trading, with the June contract expiring on Thursday. The contract hit a high of \$25 earlier in the session, having posted a 10 per cent gain on Wednesday. The most active Brent crude contract for July was up \$1.15 or about 5 per cent, at \$25.38 a barrel. US crude inventories grew by 9 million barrels last week to 527.6 million barrels, US Energy Information Administration data showed, well below the 10.6 million-



The sun is seen behind a crude oil pump jack in the Permian Basin in Loving County, Texas, US. – Reuters

barrel rise analysts polled by Reuters had expected. US gasoline stockpiles fell by 3.7 million barrels from record highs the previous week, with a slight rise in fuel demand offsetting a rebound in refinery output. "If we see a continuation of this trend in the coming weeks, it could suggest the worst might be behind the oil market," ING's head of commodities strategy Warren Patterson said. Adding to positive sentiment, China Petroleum & Chemical Corp (Sinopec) said on Thursday its daily sales of refined oil products have risen to more than 90 per cent of levels seen before the coronavirus outbreak. (With input from agencies)

Shell cuts dividend for first time since World War II

LONDON: Royal Dutch Shell RDSa. cut its dividend for the first time since World War Two on Thursday as the energy company retrenched in the face of an unprecedented drop in oil demand due to the coronavirus pandemic. Shell also suspended the next tranche of its share buyback programme and said it was reducing oil and gas output by nearly a quarter after its net profit almost halved in the first three months of 2020. Shell's shares in London had slumped 7 per cent by 0753 GMT, sharply underperforming rival BP which was down 2.2 per cent. For years, Shell has taken pride in having never cut its dividend since the 1940s, resisting such a move even during the deep downturns in the oil market of the 1980s. Some investors, however, had called on major oil firms to break an industry taboo and consider cutting dividends, rather than taking on more debt to maintain payouts.



A Shell logo is seen reflected in a car's side mirror at a petrol station in west London, Britain. – Reuters

"Given the risk of a prolonged period of economic uncertainty, weaker commodity prices, higher volatility and uncertain demand outlook, the Board believes that maintaining the current level of shareholder distributions is not prudent," Shell Chairman Chad Holliday said. He also said the cut in Shell's payout was a long-term "reset" of the company's dividend policy. Shell said it would reduce its quarterly dividend by two-thirds to 16 cents per share from the 47 cents it paid each quarter in 2019. If

maintained for 2020 as a whole, Shell would save about \$10 billion. Shell is the first of the five so-called Oil Majors to cut its dividend because of the fallout from the coronavirus crisis. BP and Exxon Mobil have said they will maintain their first-quarter dividends while Total and Chevron have yet to report first-quarter results.

'NECESSARY EVIL'

The dividend cut also comes after Shell this month laid out the oil and gas sector's most extensive strategy yet to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. — Reuters

Port of Salalah | ميناء صلالة

NOTICE TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Salalah Port Services Co. SAOG (the **Company**) invites shareholders to attend the annual ordinary general meeting (**AGM**) to be held on Monday, 11 May 2020 at 2:00 pm, via the electronic platform for convening general meetings which can be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company website (www.mcd.gov.om), if quorum is not met, a second annual meeting shall be held on Monday, 18 May 2020, at 2:00 pm, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the Company's activities and its financial status during the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
2. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the organization and management of the Company (Corporate Governance Report) during the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
3. To consider and approve the performance of the Board of Directors report for the financial year ending 31 December 2019.
4. To consider the Auditor's report and approve the financial statements (Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account) for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
5. To disclose the distribution of dividends of 20 baiza per share to the shareholders registered with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company SAOC as at 24 March 2020, for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
6. To ratify the sitting fees payable to the Board of Directors for attending Board meetings and subcommittee meetings for the 2019 financial year and to determine the sitting fees for the 2020 financial year.
7. To consider and approve the proposed distribution of RO150,000 being remuneration for the directors for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
8. To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
9. To disclose voluntary contributions which have been made to support community services during the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
10. To consider and approve setting aside RO100,000 in support of community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2020.
11. To disclose voluntary contributions, amounting to RO 12,000, which have been made during this year to support the efforts to combat the outbreak of the CoronaVirus (COVID19).
12. To appoint the auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2020 and determine their fees.

In accordance with the Company's Articles of Association and the rules for convening general meetings via electronic means issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- a. A legal (juristic) person, exclusively, shall have the right to appoint a natural person, as proxy, to attend the general meeting, and vote on decisions taken on his behalf using electronic means. Such natural person must have an investor number registered with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company SAOC.
- b. Shareholders will be able to vote for the items set out in the agenda starting from 3 days prior to the meeting date up until the end of the voting process for that particular item presented in the agenda on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's shareholding is increased or decreased, then such shareholders votes will be void, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the general meeting.

All invitees are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the stated time.

For any queries relating to the above agenda, please contact Mr. Ashwani Jhamb (+968-23220512/ 99291760 or at info@salalahport.com).

Chairman Auditors Legal Advisor



Coronavirus savages US economy in Q1; bigger hit still to come



Pedestrians wearing masks walk in front of shuttered buildings in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, US. – Reuters

WASHINGTON: The US economy contracted in the first quarter at its sharpest pace since the Great Recession as stringent measures to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus almost shut down the country, ending the longest expansion in the nation's history.

The drop in gross domestic product (GDP) reported by the Commerce Department on Wednesday

reflected a plunge in economic activity in the last two weeks of March, which saw millions of Americans seeking unemployment benefits. The rapid decline in GDP reinforced analysts' predictions that the economy was already in a deep recession and left economists bracing for a record slump in output in the second quarter.

"If the economy fell this hard in the first quarter,

with less than a month of pandemic lockdown for most states, don't ask how far it will crater in the second quarter because it is going to be a complete disaster," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFG in New York.

Gross domestic product declined at a 4.8 per cent annualized rate last quarter, weighed down by a collapse in spending on health care as dentists' offices closed

and hospitals delayed elective surgeries and non-emergency visits to focus on patients suffering from COVID-19, the potentially lethal respiratory illness caused by the virus.

That was the steepest pace of contraction in GDP since the fourth quarter of 2008. Households also drastically cut back on purchases of motor vehicles, furniture, clothing and footwear. Receipts for transportation, hotel accommodation and restaurant services also plunged.

Businesses further tightened their purse strings and liquidated inventory, helping to overshadow positive news from a shrinking import bill, the housing market and more spending by the government. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast GDP falling at a 4.0 per cent rate last quarter.

The economy, which grew at a 2.1 per cent rate in the fourth quarter, was in its 11th year of expansion, the longest on record. — Reuters

VW, Toyota delay US production restart, citing supplier concerns



A general view of the Volkswagen construction plant which reopened after closing down last month due to the coronavirus disease outbreak in Bratislava, Slovakia. – Reuters

NEW YORK: Volkswagen AG and Toyota Motor Corp said they will delay restarting US production amid the coronavirus pandemic and concerns about the automotive supply network.

VW said it is indefinitely delaying the resumption of production at its Tennessee assembly plant that had been set to restart on May 3.

Toyota said it will delay the resumption of North American manufacturing operations to the week of May 11 from the week of May 4 after an "extensive review with our supplier and logistics network."

The German automaker in a statement said that before it sets a new date it "will weigh the readiness of the supplier base, as well as market demand and the status of the COVID-19 outbreak." VW's US production has been suspended since March 21. Automakers had

hoped to begin restarting production in early May but face hurdles including orders in key states like Michigan that limit non-essential business operations. Germany's BMW AG said Wednesday it plans to restart work at its Spartanburg, South Carolina, plant on Monday at about half the factory's capacity and then "carefully ramp up production."

Detroit's Big Three automakers have been in regular talks with the United Auto Workers (UAW) union on the conditions needed to resume production, but the companies not appear likely to resume US production before May 18 at the earliest.

UAW spokesman Brian Rothenberg said the union continues to "have discussions about key health and safety issues and science that need to be in place for a restart."

— Reuters

Samsung's phone fortunes wane in second quarter

SEOUL: When the coronavirus outbreak in China disrupted global smartphone production in February, Samsung looked set to weather the crisis better than most thanks to its limited exposure there and launches of pricey 5G phones. Its fortunes are reversing.

The world's biggest smartphone vendor, Samsung Electronics Co in full, warned on Wednesday of a significant drop in mobile earnings in the second quarter, as recession fears dampen demand for high-end models and carriers in major



The logo of Samsung Electronics is seen at its office building in Seoul, South Korea. – Reuters

markets delay the rollouts of fast 5G networks.

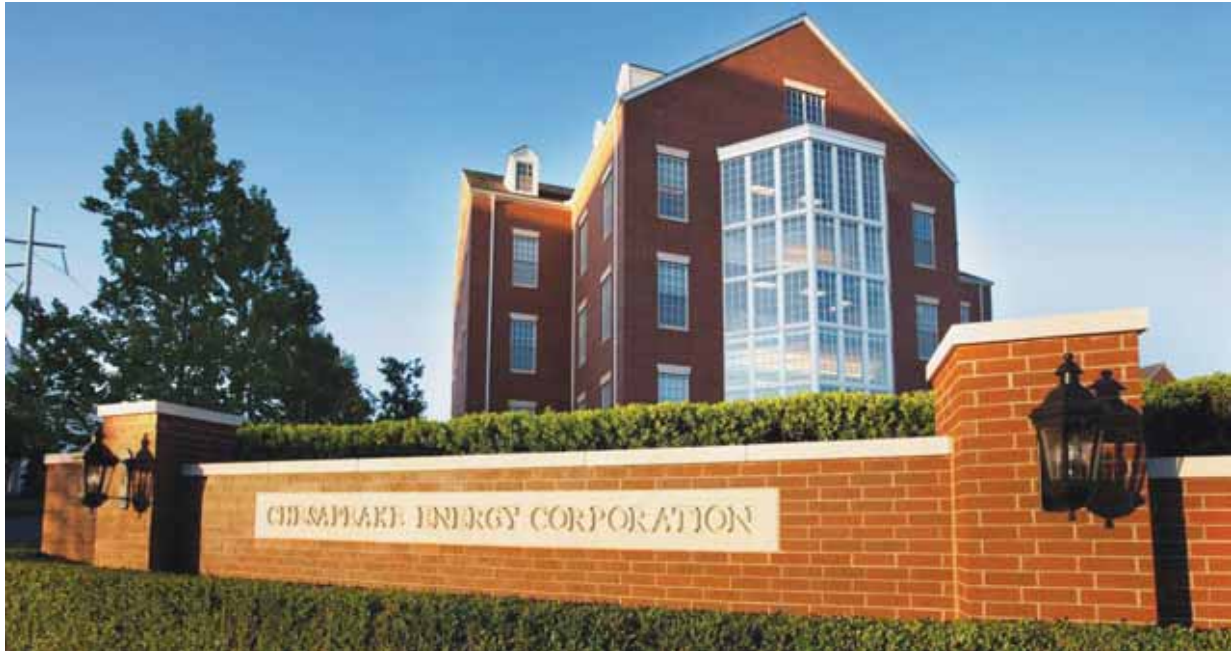
The COVID-19 pandemic is hitting all vendors hard. But Samsung's strategy of focusing on 5G in advanced markets like Europe and the United States - it captured nearly three-quarters of global 5G phone sales last year - plus dwindling market share in some emerging markets could put it in a deeper quagmire.

By contrast, American arch-rival Apple Inc now looks better positioned as China, which accounts for roughly 15 per cent of its revenues has reopened shops. — Reuters

Chesapeake Energy preparing bankruptcy filing

NEW YORK: Chesapeake Energy Corp, the oil and gas exploration and production company that was at the forefront of the past decade's US shale boom, is preparing a potential bankruptcy filing as it grapples with an unprecedented rout in energy prices, people familiar with the matter said on Wednesday.

The Oklahoma City-based company, cofounded by late wildcatter and outspoken natural gas proponent Aubrey McClendon, has held



Chesapeake Energy Corporation's 50 acre campus is seen in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. – Reuters

discussions with creditors about a possible loan that would aid operations while it navigates bankruptcy proceedings, the sources said. The loan could total roughly \$1 billion, though its size remains in flux, one of the sources added.

Such loans, referred to as debtor-in-possession financing, are key to companies seeking Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection because they help them sustain as much of their business as possible during court proceedings.

Chesapeake's discussions about possibly obtaining bankruptcy financing are in early stages, and the company has made no final decisions about how it plans to address its debts, the sources cautioned. It could attempt to persuade creditors to restructure its debt outside of bankruptcy proceedings, said the sources, who asked not to be identified because the matter is confidential.

Chesapeake did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

— Reuters



GROOMING DOMESTIC COACHES VITAL FOR OMAN SPORTS

COACH WALEED LISTS MAIN FACTORS IN PREPARING A PROFESSIONAL COACH

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Coach is the mastermind in any sports who directs his players to implement different tactics to reach the desired goals. Developing a pool of domestic professional coaches is important for the growth of a sporting nation rather than depending on foreign coaches.

Coach Waleed al Kiyumi shared his thoughts on the main factors to prepare a successful domestic coach.

“I believe the coach is the main player in any sports including football. He can

instill confidence in players for the teams’ success,” Al Kiyumi told Oman Daily Observer.

“Developing a professional coach requires a clear programme covered by many proper scientific methods. It is great to learn from the external technical experts but developing the domestic coach is a necessity and will lead for better results,” he added.

Waleed, former player of Al Khabourah and Al Shabab, said building the right and qualified technical sports leaders require many steps.



Waleed al Kiyumi

“The first step is to establish a technical committee with members of sports academicians who will map the preparation of

the sports coaches. Another essential point is to have a real partnership among the universities to create a diploma programme in sports training.”

“In Oman, we have a similar programme but unfortunately there was no sustainability in the project that did not proceed further. Adding more disciplines and majors in the colleges and universities including sports medicine, media sports, physiology, movement science and other related majors will help in this regard,” coach Waleed said.

Al Kiyumi, who is the head of Youth Training Centre at Ministry of Sports Affairs, affirmed on necessity of development workshops.

“Another essential factor is involving the domestic coaches in the right technical development workshops. It should include different theoretical and practical sessions alongside continuous evaluation and assessment to improve their level and selecting the best candidates.

The last item is working on the top domestic coaches who qualified from

all the stages and develop them through a well-coordinated programme which should be run by a government entity and in presence of right lectures and trainers,” he ended.

During the past 10 years, Waleed donned different roles in his sports career. He had played in Omantel League and first division league with Al Khabourah and Al Shabab clubs as a player. He had a professional experience in Qatar Stars League with Al Markhiya club. Then, he was the manager of Oman Under-16 squad last year.

FORMER US GYMNASTICS COACH HANEY SUSPENDED FOR EIGHT YEARS

WASHINGTON: Former US Olympic gymnastics coach Maggie Haney has been suspended for eight years for verbal abuse and mistreatment of athletes, media reports said.

On its online list of suspended and restricted persons, USA Gymnastics said Haney, 42, was “suspended from all contact” from Thursday until April 30, 2028.

Haney was accused of verbally abusing and mistreating gymnasts, forcing them to train even if injured, media reports said.

Haney owns the MG



Elite Gymnastics in Morganville, New Jersey, where she trained Laurie Hernandez, who won gold at the 2016 Rio Games, and Riley McCusker, who was on the US team that

won gold at the 2018 Doha World Championships.

The suspension was handed down by an independent panel after hearings into complaints of abuse against her, the

New York Times said on Wednesday.

Hernandez testified against Haney and McCusker wrote a letter critical of the coach, The Orange County Register reported.

Haney is barred from membership of the federation and is not allowed to train any athlete from USA Gymnastics or its member clubs for eight years.

She will have to undergo a two-year probation at the end of that period before any eventual return to the sport.

Haney’s case comes dur-

ing a troubled time for US gymnastics, which is still shaken by the scandal over former national team doctor Larry Nassar who was jailed for sexually abusing dozens of athletes.

In 2018, Nassar was sentenced to 40-125 years in prison for abusing female gymnasts while supposedly treating them.

The federation in January offered Nassar’s victims a \$215 million settlement, which has been criticised by some of them, including Olympic medalists Simone Biles and Aly Raisman. — AFP

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FERRARI QUASH QUIT REPORTS

FORMULA ONE IS DUE TO INTRODUCE A BUDGET CAP OF \$175 MILLION IN 2021

LONDON: Ferrari have said they remain committed to Formula One after reports on Thursday that the sport's oldest and most successful team could walk away if a proposed budget cap for 2021 was set too low. Britain's Guardian newspaper suggested Ferrari were prepared to quit in a headline, later replaced, over an interview with team boss Mattia Binotto. A Ferrari spokeswoman said Binotto had not men-

tioned the team leaving Formula One. "On the contrary, he said that we would not want to be put in a position of having to look at further options, besides continuing racing in F1, for deploying our racing DNA," she added. Binotto had told the Guardian that a drastic budget cut, called for by some teams as they face the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, put at risk hundreds of jobs at their Maranello

factory. "The \$145 million level is already a new and demanding request compared to what was set out last June," he said. "It cannot be attained without further significant sacrifices, especially in terms of our human resources." **TEAMS OPPOSE BUDGET CAP** Formula One is due to introduce a budget cap of \$175 million in 2021 but

teams are discussing reducing that. The Italian said the teams had different characteristics, some privately run while others were part of major manufacturers operating in different countries and under different legislation. "Therefore it is not simple and straightforward to make structural changes simply by cutting costs in a linear fashion," he added. "We are well aware that F1 and indeed the whole world

right now is going through a particularly difficult time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "However, this is not the time to react in a hurry as there's a risk of making decisions on the back of this emergency without clearly evaluating all the consequences." Red Bull boss Christian Horner, whose team were dominant before Mercedes won the last six championships, is also opposed to a

budget cap below \$145 million. Mercedes are supportive of further cuts. Formula One has already delayed until 2022 the implementation of major technical rule changes planned for 2021, with teams using the same cars next year as this. The season has yet to start with nine races called off, including the showcase Monaco Grand Prix in May which has been cancelled. — Reuters