

P9
DONALD TRUMP
TO CONSIDER
HALTING SAUDI
OIL IMPORTS

P10
SPREADING
LOVE THROUGH
COOKING IN
QUARANTINE

Resident 8th victim as Oman reports 98 new cases

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

A 53-year-old resident from Muscat became the eighth victim of COVID-19 as Sultanate reported 98 news cases on Tuesday. Among the new patients, 39 are citizens and 59 expatriates taking the total cases to 1,508, said the Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday announced 98 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to the Sultanate to 1,508, including eight deaths and 238 recoveries.

Among the new patients, 39 are citizens and 59 expatriates.

Region-wise Muscat has 1,164 cases (156 recoveries, 8 deaths), Al Dakhiliyah 57 cases with 30 recoveries, South Batinah 116 cases with 19 recoveries, Musandam five cases, Al Dhahirah 17 cases with two recoveries, South Sharqiyah 55 cases, North Sharqiyah 20 cases, Buraimi four cases, North Batinah 60 cases with 24 recoveries and Dhofar 10 cases with four recoveries.

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT

MAX: 31°C
MIN: 24°C

SALALAH

MAX: 31°C
MIN: 26°C

NIZWA

MAX: 32°C
MIN: 22°C

SUNRISE 05.45 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:27

DHUHR: 12:12

ASR: 15:39

MAGHRIB: 18:33

ISHA: 19:46

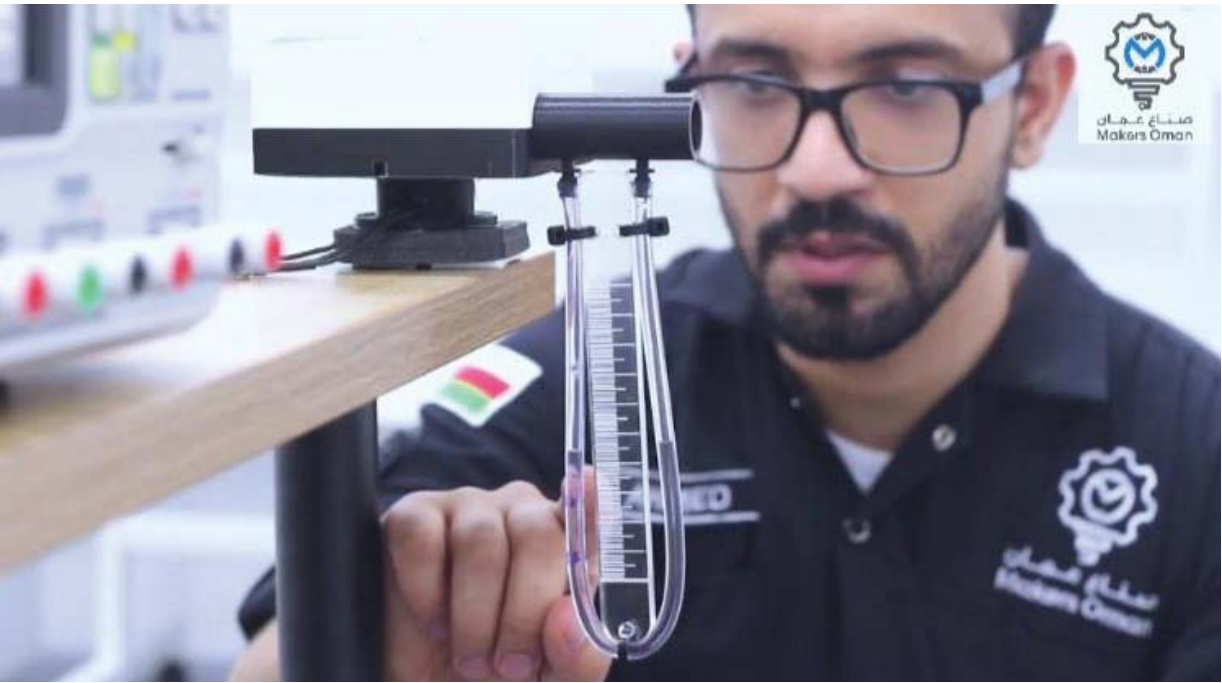
Youths develop e-ventilator to fight virus

MUSCAT: Sonnaa Oman or Oman Makers Centre, based at Muscat Innovation Complex of The Research Council (TRC), has developed a digital artificial respiration device by simulating a ventilation system approved in the Sultanate's government hospitals.

The new system was developed after seeking the advice of specialists in the health sector, including engineers and doctors. It simulates all the details and configuration of the existing system.

The model has been subjected to additional tests over the past weeks to ensure its smooth functioning prior to the start of production of similar systems.

Suleiman al Saqri, of Oman Makers Centre (OMC), said that the initiative comes in conjunction with national efforts to contain COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out that the new system differs in its design from the manual system through the addition of globally approved standards in



quality and efficiency of performance.

OMC puts safety on top of its priorities, said Al Saqri, hoping that the new system will be a precursor

in the growth of a local culture of innovation to be espoused by national cadres in addressing challenges. He added that the prototype proved to

be a success as a practical, safe and reliable device.

OMC, or Sonnaa Oman, is one the leading national projects set

OMC, or Sonnaa Oman, is one the leading national projects set up through strategic partnership between TRC, the Public Authority for Privatization & Partnership and other partners

up through strategic partnership between TRC, the Public Authority for Privatization & Partnership and other partners. Sonnaa Oman occupies an area of 1,500 square metres and it is supplied with state-of-the-art equipment. It is run by Omani youths.

— ONA

SHORT TAKES

Enough stock of essentials for Ramadhan

MUSCAT: The Sultanate has sufficient stock of essential food items to meet the demand during the holy month of Ramadhan and prices in the local market will be subject to close monitoring, according to the Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP). The PACP, in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MoAF), has ensured the availability of essential commodities that are high in demand during the month and consulted major retail chains to make sure there is no scarcity of any product. The Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserve has ensured adequate availability of basic food items and commodities as well as consumer goods in all the governorates. **SEE P2**

Citizens' awareness helped stem virus spread in Musandam

MUSANDAM: Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, commended the community's full commitment and awareness about the coronavirus, which in turn contributed to limiting the cases in the governorate. He said the governorate has been on a high readiness since the appearance of COVID-19 as the health sector's teams in the governorate have been fully prepared to curb the spread of the disease. **SEE P3**

Nod for Oman Arab Bank's merger with Alizz Bank

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced that it has received the approval of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on the proposed merger with Alizz Islamic Bank. The merger, which is expected to be complete before the end of 2020, will result in the transformation of Alizz Islamic Bank as Oman Arab Bank's subsidiary specialising in Islamic banking. Rashad al Musafir, CEO of OAB, confirmed that the proposal received the approval of the CBO and that it is set to start moving forward to obtaining the go-ahead from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) and other regulators. **SEE P7**

Seeb, Al Amerat slaughterhouses ready for Ramadhan

SEEB: Muscat Municipality confirmed the readiness of the two central slaughterhouses in Seeb and Al Amerat to meet the needs of citizens for fresh meat during Ramadhan. The working hours for Seeb and Al Amerat slaughterhouses during the holy month will be in two shifts; the first slot is for meat companies from 6 am until 9 am and the second slot for citizens and expats from 9 am until 1 pm. **SEE P2**

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Enough stock of essentials for Ramadhan

MEETING DEMAND: PACP consults major retail chains to make sure there is no scarcity of any product; prices under control

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

The Sultanate has sufficient stock of essential food items to meet the demand during the holy month of Ramadhan and prices in the local market will be monitored closely, according to the Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP).

The PACP, in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MoAF), has ensured the availability of essential commodities that are high in demand during the month and consulted major retail chains to make sure there is no scarcity of any product.

Speaking to the Observer, Omar bin Faisal al Jahdhami, Vice Chairman of the Consumer Services and Market Watch, PACP said, “We work very closely with the ministry and the retail chains to ensure there is no scarcity of essentials especially during the holy month of Ramadhan”.

“We consult all retailers and check the prices based on the local



production and import of various. Prices are very much in alignment

with the demand and supply of the market”, he added.

The Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserve has ensured adequate

availability of basic food items and commodities as well as consumer

goods in all the governorates following which the Ministry of Commerce and Industry offered free storage space for traders who wanted to buy more stocks. Programmes for direct import from ports and airports under a well-studied plan that ensure adequate stocks are also in place.

He is hopeful, based on the recent series of imports of around 329 shipments weighing 6,580 tonnes of vegetables and fruits over the past 11 days at the Central Fruits and Vegetables Market in Mawelah. These imports are mostly from Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, India, Egypt, and South Africa.

“The availability of fruits and vegetables are ensured with these imports and no price hike will be allowed unless there is a legitimate reason behind it”, Al Jahdhami said.

He added that if any trader wanted to revise the price of any item, he needed to get prior permission from the PACP.

IN BRIEF

Seeb, Al Amerat abattoirs ready for Ramadhan

SEEB: Muscat Municipality, represented by the Directorate General of Health Affairs, confirmed the readiness of the two central slaughterhouses in Seeb and Al Amerat to meet the needs of citizens for fresh meat during Ramadhan.

Qais bin Suleiman al Koshari, Director General of Health Affairs, Muscat Municipality, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the working hours for Seeb and Al Amerat slaughterhouses during Ramadhan will be in two shifts, the first starts from 6 am until 9 am, which is a given to the livestock (sheep and goats) for companies and meat sales companies for consumers in the markets of the Governorate of Muscat.

The second shift starts from 9 am until 1 pm. It will be given to the livestock of citizens and expatriates in the wilayats of the Governorate of Muscat throughout the week.

He explained that the slaughterhouses have different types of livestock and cows that meet the needs of consumers.

— ONA

100,000 dates packets to be distributed

MUSCAT: As part of its national duty to provide food security to the Sultanate, especially during the holy month of Ramadhan, the Nakheel Oman Development Company will donate 10000 packets of dates.

The dates will be distributed to the needy families in association with charitable associations.

Nakheel Oman is part of the Directorate General of Million Date Palm Plantation Project.

GCC health officials review situation



MUSCAT: The GCC Under-Secretaries of the Ministries of Health held on Tuesday their fifth video-conference meeting to discuss the latest developments regarding the coronavirus.

The meeting reviewed minutes of the fourth meeting, which was held last week, and focused on the health

sector after the end of this pandemic.

Furthermore, the under-secretaries reviewed the number of PCR tests that were undertaken for COVID-19 cases and discussed the precautionary measures to protect the health professionals, as well as the financial impacts of this pandemic on the health sector generally.

The under-secretaries praised the significant efforts exerted by the staff working in the health sector and their contribution in tackling COVID-19, as well as the cooperation of the citizens along with the official and civil authorities in these exceptional circumstances.

— ONA

Panel debates termination of staff



MUSCAT: The committee tasked with reviewing issues related to the termination of national workforce in the private sector held its third meeting under the chairmanship of Hamad bin Khamis al Amri, Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Manpower for Labour Affairs, on Tuesday.

The committee discussed the results reached so far with regard to the termination of national

workforce with 17 companies willing to dismiss national workers of which 13 companies agreed to back down on their termination decisions after discussion with the committee.

The committee addressed the remaining 4 companies to withdraw their decisions pertaining to the dismissal of national workers for non-compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 pandemic as well as

the violating Article (1) of the ministerial decision No 124/2020 which stipulates that companies should inform the committee three months prior to the date of termination.

The committee directed the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions to urge employers to refrain from dismissing Omani workers. — ONA

1,000 beds ready for institutional isolation in SEZAD



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Four locations have been prepared for institutional isolation and medical care purposes related to COVID-19 in the Duqm Special Economic Zone, said Dr Ismail bin Ahmed al Balushi, CEO, SEZAD.

All institutional isolation centres have been furnished with

around 1,000 beds funded with the support of companies operating in the governorate, which will be handed over to the Ministry of Health for supervision.

Some of the projects operating in the governorate have prepared over 500 beds to quarantine their employees upon return from a leave of two weeks.

Majid al Futtaim exempts tenants from paying rents

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

The Majid al Futtaim (MAF) Group has decided to exempt the tenants of the shops in the group's malls in the Sultanate from paying rentals until the end of the application of COVID-19 preventive measures.

MAF properties in Oman include City Centre Muscat and City Centre Qurum, among others.

It may be noted that except for groceries (supermarkets) and pharmacies, all shops in the malls are closed as part of the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

“Oman chamber thanks Majid al Futaim (MAF) for their immediate response as the group exempted tenants of commercial shops at its shopping centres from paying rentals”,

a statement said.

It may be recalled that Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) had directed the owners of commercial centres and real estate to take into account the current conditions of rented tenants and affected stores by COVID-19 precautionary measures.

It urged them to include measures such as exempting the tenants from reducing or postponing rents during the current stage. OCCI also called on private sector institutions to reduce the number of employees at workplaces and instead encourage work through virtual channels, in line with the decisions of the Supreme Committee.

It urged private sector institutions to comply with hygiene and other COVID-19 prevention requirements.

Amouage produces sanitizers to help fight COVID-19

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Amouage has adapted its factory operations in Muscat to produce hand sanitizers in support of the country's fight against COVID-19.

Produced in accordance with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, the alcohol-based hand-rubs were donated to various government entities to help protect all the brave men and women on the frontlines.

This initiative by Amouage was made possible with support from Oman Air, ADA Cosmetics

International, GAC and Wildvertising, who came together to address the potential risk of a product shortage.

“These are challenging times as the world battles this pandemic, and we felt it is our collective responsibility to provide relief wherever we can. Hence, the decision was made to channel our resources, along with our partners, into making hand sanitizers.

“They are not for commercial sale and will be donated, enabling a greater number of people to continue safeguarding themselves and others from the spread of the virus. Our hearts and prayers are with everyone



affected and those who are on the frontlines to keep us safe”, said Marco Parsiegla, Amouage's Chief Executive Officer.

While its stores are temporarily closed, Amouage's factory operations were adapted to incorporate the production of hand sanitizers.

The company has been working closely with its team to follow the government's directives in dealing with COVID-19, adhering to all safety and precautionary measures such as distancing and hygiene to ensure the health and well-being of its workforce.

Dr Rajendran Nair, a poor man's medical college

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Dr Rajendran Nair or Nair doctor, was, as one of his patients put it, a poor man's medical college. For the last 45 years, people mostly poor expats flocked to his small clinic off Ruwi High Street regardless of ailments.

The rate was same for the last 25 years; RO 1 for consultation and RO 3 if there were any medical procedures. It was for a reason because Dr Nair saw his medical practice as a service not a profession.

As COVID-19 reached Oman, Sashi Andy, who was with the doctor for the last 25 years, brought up the subject of closing the clinic during the period to which doctor replied, "Then who would look after my poor patients?"

Many of his patients had moved on to other parts of Muscat but doctor always wanted to be in Ruwi because he was concerned about his patients from la-bour force.

"But once his children called up from India, who are doctors themselves, he agreed that age is a factor and closed the clinic. He has always been on top of precautions but somewhere along COVID-19 took over just around that time", said Sashi.

PRAYERS POUR IN

When the news spread that Dr Nair had contracted the deadly virus, all prayed for his speedy recovery. The priest at a church was surprised when he received requests from hundreds of people from different communities to pray for Dr Nair's recovery. His patients silently went on to seek for help through their prayers no matter where they came from or which religion they belonged to. But the good doctor succumbed to the coronavirus last week.

Hailing from Chengannassery, Kottayam in the Indian state of Kerala, Dr Rajendran Nair, MBBS, MS, began his medical career in Muscat in the summer of 1975. His first clinic was in Muttrah across the Mina Sultan Qaboos Port and thus began his career with one of the earliest clinics in the private health sector.

His young wife joined him in Oman after six months. "His family is his patients and staff; only then us", Valsala Nair, wife of Dr Nair, reflected in this difficult time. But the family is proud like all of his patients that Dr Nair continued his service until coronavirus claimed him.

Dr Nair bid final goodbye to the land he held close to his heart, whose citizens and residents he healed with his kind heartedness and professionalism. He was soft natured but strict when patients did not follow instructions.

HIS FAMILY WAS HIS PATIENTS AND STAFF, ONLY THEN US, VALSALA NAIR, WIFE OF DR NAIR, REFLECTED IN THIS DIFFICULT TIME. BUT THE FAMILY IS PROUD LIKE ALL OF HIS PATIENTS THAT DR NAIR CONTINUED HIS SERVICE TO THE PEOPLE OF MUSCAT UNTIL CORONAVIRUS CLAIMED HIM

Within one year being in Muttrah, Dr Nair had moved his practice to the happening place then – Ruwi High Street. And then on, there was no looking back for him and his life revolved around his patients.

HEALING TOUCH

Muscat of the 70s may not have had many diagnostic centres and labs but Dr Nair did not need them either as he was already gaining popularity for his sharpness in diagnosis.

"I am already missing him. He was indeed a very nice and caring person. The ease with which he diagnosed almost any disease or ailment was amazing. My family and I always went to his clinic for the past 35 plus years", said K M Nadeem who arrived in Oman in April of 1976.

"Dr Nair is a pioneer in the private sector healthcare. He has left a legacy", said V T Saileswaran, Managing Director of Apollo Hospitals Muscat. "I am very saddened because doctor is known to me for the last 30 years and he is a kind and warm hearted person. He will always be in our memories and my prayers and thoughts are with his family. I offer them my deepest condolence".

WHY RETIRE?

For Abraham Mathew, Malayalam Wing Convener of Indian Social Wing, Dr Nair had been his family doctor and closest friend since 1985. "What has always amazed me is Dr Nair's diagnosis. Once after an ailment was cured, he looked at me and said, 'What is important is that you have recovered. In medicine recovery is important.' The loss of Dr Nair is irrepressible. When we spoke about retirement he said, "Why retire? When we find joy in our work we must continue as long as one can".

And he did. He worked and considered being there for his patients a top priority until he could physically do so. For sure he must have had thoughts of his patients until it was time to go but Dr Nair never ceased his practice even at 76. He left as a hero. Dr Nair's final rites were performed in Suhar on Monday.

Awareness helped stem virus spread in Musandam: Governor

READINESS: The governorate on high alert since the appearance of COVID-19



MUSANDAM: Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, commended the community's full commitment and awareness about the spread of the novel coronavirus, which in turn contributed to limiting the cases in the governorate.

He said in a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA) that the governorate has been on a high readiness since the appearance of COVID-19 as the health sector's teams in the governorate have been fully prepared to curb the spread of the disease.

Regarding coordination with authorities in the United Arab Emirates, he added that there is a continuous coordination between the various sectors of the two countries to facilitate entry of land trucks, especially to the Wilayat of Madha.

He emphasised the role played by the branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the governorate in coordinating with various authorities in the private sector.

He touched on the contributions provided by this sector, including

a company that provided a ferry for transporting goods from the Governorate of North Al Batinah to the Governorate of Musandam and the contribution of a number of businessmen in distributing food supplies to all wilayats of the governorate.

On the role of the investment sector in the governorate, he said that the investor "goes wherever opportunities exist" and these opportunities must provide the potential and infrastructure, confirming that the development of ports in the governorate is necessary

because Musandam is a coastal governorate whose requirements come across the sea, considering that the development of the ports Dibba, Khasab and some other landing sites will secure these needs permanently.

He also stressed the importance of securing the road linking the Wilayat of Dibba and the Niyabat of Lima to the Wilayat of Khasab, explaining that this road can facilitate the internal movement within the governorate, which is still taking place through the ferries.

— ONA

Omani doctors to continue services in UK hospitals

LONDON: A number of Omani doctors dispatched by Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) to the United Kingdom (UK) have decided to stay and continue their work in British hospitals, following the spread of the novel coronavirus in various countries of the world.

Dr Sultan bin Saif al Kalbani, orthopaedist on training scholarship in the Spine Surgery Fellowship Programme in the city of Nottingham, UK, said that the humanitarian motives and the altruism that characterises the Omanis are the reasons for his and his colleagues' decision to stay in British hospitals, following the developments caused by the coronavirus.

He explained that his presence on the frontline with his fellow doctors in the United Kingdom in dealing with patients infected with the virus adds value to his professional and specialized career in orthopaedics in Nottingham.

It is noteworthy that OMSB, in cooperation with health institutions in the Sultanate, sends Omani doctors to a number of countries such as the United Kingdom, France and Ireland in order to raise their capabilities and acquire the professional skills in accordance with international standards in a bid to achieve more quality in the field of healthcare in the Sultanate.

— ONA



SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
52/2020	Calibration of Radiation & Quality Analysis Measurement Units at Directorate of Project and Engineering Affairs	30/April /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 20/May/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O. 25/= Per set
56/2020	Design and Build of Multi-Level Car Parking Phase II at The Royal Hospital	30/April /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 27/May/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O. 295/= Per set
57/2020	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for CT Scanner at Sumail Hospital in Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate	30/April /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 27/May/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O. 25/= Per set
58/2020	Provision of Operation and Maintenance Services of Sewage Treatment Plant at the Royal Hospital	30/April /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 27/May/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O. 25/= Per set
59/2020	Provision of Safe Disposal of Waste Chemical and Hazardous Substances Services for Various Health Establishments	30/April /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 27/May/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O. 25/= Per set
60/2020	Supply of Surgical Items (Telescopic Nail)	07/May /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 03/June/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O. 25/= Per set
61/2020	Supply of Surgical Items (Ophthalmic)	07/May /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 03/June/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O. 25/= Per set
62/2020	Provision of Operation and Maintenance Services for Information System at the Royal Hospital	07/May /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 03/June/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O. 25/= Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24166670
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Ramadan Iftar Program

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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Send **Donate** to **90022**

Ooredoo users cost 1 RO
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ENSURE USE OF LEMON, GINGER AND TURMERIC IN YOUR FOOD AND HOT DRINKS AS THEY HAVE ANTIOXIDANT PROPERTIES

BOOST IMMUNITY TO WARD OFF THE VIRUS

It is very important to have enough fluids, fruits and vegetables, as these are required for adequate vitamins, minerals and electrolyte consumption, says **Shabib al Kalbani**, Clinical Nutritionist, Ministry of Health



BETTER AVOID

PROCESSED FOOD AND SUGARY BEVERAGES MAY BE AVOIDED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AS REFINED SUGAR CAN DEPRESS IMMUNITY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Amid rising number of COVID-19 cases, it is quite normal to ask 'what to do' to keep the virus away. And the most common answer is 'having a diet that builds immunity' to prevent the disease.

Shabib al Kalbani, Clinical Nutritionist, Ministry of Health, puts stress on having warm beverages and soups rich in broth and vegetables. "It is very important to have enough fluids, fruits and vegetables, as these are required for adequate vitamins, minerals and electrolyte consumption".

The dietician stressed that everyone must ensure use of lemon, ginger and turmeric in their food and hot drinks as they have antioxidant properties. He also suggested including natural honey in daily diet.

Talking about nutrition he asked not to go for processed food and sugary beverages. "Processed food and sugary

beverages are to be avoided as much as possible as refined sugar can depress immunity".

"There is no particular research to combat the coronavirus with nutrition, but a balanced diet has the capacity to improve immunity that can fight the disease. This is particularly important for the elderly and children. Nutrients that have been implicated in improving immunity include vitamin A, C and E and minerals such as selenium, iron and zinc", he explained.

This is why the vitamins are extremely important Kalbani pointed out. "Vitamin A for example, forms the cell barriers in the skin, the respiratory tract and the digestive tract, plus it forms antibodies to ward off infection causing pathogens (these are found in salmon, kingfish, nuts, seeds, wholegrain and legumes) beta carotene, which is converted to vitamin A is also found in carrots and pumpkins. Vitamin C and E for example, help build collagen, and protect cells from free radicals, those of which can cause oxidative stress. Vita-

min C is found in citrus fruits, berries, broccoli and capsicum. And vitamin E is found in most vegetable oils and seeds such as sunflower seeds and flaxseeds".

Even with all the nutrients included in the diet, safety measures are the most important factors, noted the dietician. "It is important to follow the guidelines issued by the government like self-isolation, washing hands thoroughly and frequently, avoiding handshakes and maintaining a required distance between people".

FOOD HYGIENE

It is important, according to him, to choose raw materials carefully and watch for food labels, date of production and date of expiry. Make sure as well that animal protein sources are cooked thoroughly before serving to avoid food borne illnesses.

Drinking enough fluids along with regular servings of fruits ensures a good amount of electrolytes and minerals is consumed.

Those who are diabetic need to fol-

low the advice given by their dieticians or doctors to have their blood glucose within normal range.

Furthermore, Kalbani explained that there is some misconception regarding nutritional supplementation (those that come in the form of pills).

"People are tech savvy these days and will search far and wide for information through search engines and most probably through unreliable sources, and then will go to nearby pharmacies to ask for these. Supplements in general are not regulated by any well-known authority and their consumption does not require medical prescription. However, overdosing of these substances can induce toxicity and can interact with prescribed medications. So even though certain nutrients play a vital role in building immunity, it is better to be taken from natural sources as nutrients work in harmony with each other rather than individually. In any case it is important to consult his/her physician before taking any supplement", he advised.



President Trump suspends immigration over COVID-19

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's response to the coronavirus took an even sharper political turn on Tuesday after he seized upon the crisis in a controversial move to suspend immigration, and as he planned to meet with the governor of New York, the hardest hit state.

Trump is also seizing the moment to launch a sweeping effort to repeal or suspend federal business regulations in a separate executive action, the Washington Post reported on Tuesday, citing two unnamed people familiar with the planning.

The developments came as Trump planned to meet on Tuesday with New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who has clashed with the administration over its response to the crisis, emerging as a foil to the president with a calm and fact-based approach.

New York is at the epicentre of the crisis, accounting for nearly half of the deaths across the country, and has taken a cautious stance on reopening businesses and schools. On Monday, New York City said that concerts and other large events would be cancelled through June, a contrast with some southern states like Georgia and South Carolina which are taking steps this week to relax their lockdowns.



On Tuesday New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio warned Trump that he could "kiss his re-election goodbye" if he did not address the shortage of testing supplies and provide more federal assistance to cities and states with battered finances.

"These are the two things he has dropped the ball on," de Blasio said on CNN, describing Trump's comments on immigration as a diversion. "You are not going to have a restart and economic recovery if cities and

states are back on their heels."

Trump announced his move on immigration on Twitter late on Monday, suggesting it would prevent further contagion from outsiders while saving American jobs.

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States," he said in a tweet.

Trump has for weeks asserted the US outbreak would have been much worse had it not been for his earlier efforts to "ban" air travel from China — the origin of the pandemic — even though thousands of people, according to the *New York Times*, continued to arrive from China after restrictions took effect.

The White House declined to immediately offer further details on the reasoning behind the decision, its timing or its legal basis.

Democrats swiftly condemned the announcement, "You cut off immigration, you crater our nation's already weakened economy," Julian Castro, a Cabinet secretary in the Obama administration and a former presidential candidate, said on Twitter. "What a dumb move."

Others said Trump's action made sense. "With tens of millions of Americans who want to work full-time not able to, most immigration makes no sense today, and to allow it to continue at its current level at this time would show a callous disregard for those enduring deep economic suffering," Roy Beck, president of NumbersUSA, a group advocating lower immigration levels.

— Reuters

US eyes reports on Kim's health; S Korea, China cast doubt

SEOUL: South Korean and Chinese officials on Tuesday cast doubt on reports North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was ill after media outlets said he had undergone a cardiovascular procedure and was in "grave danger," as US officials closely eyed the reports.

Daily NK, a Seoul-based speciality website, reported late on Monday, citing one unnamed source in North Korea, that Kim was recovering after undergoing the procedure on April 12. The North Korean leader is believed to be about 36.

"We're monitoring these reports very closely," US President Donald Trump's national security adviser, Robert O'Brien, told Fox News in an interview on Tuesday, but he gave no other details.

Two South Korean government officials rejected an earlier CNN report citing an unnamed US official saying Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in grave danger after surgery, but they did not elaborate on whether Kim had undergone surgery. The presidential Blue House said there were no unusual signs coming from the reclusive, nuclear-capable state.

Bloomberg News separately quoted an unnamed US official as



saying the White House was told that Kim took a turn for the worse after the surgery.

Kim is the unquestioned leader of North Korea and the sole commander of its nuclear arsenal. He has no clear successor and any instability in the country could be a major international risk.

The state KCNA news agency gave no indication of the whereabouts of Kim in routine dispatches on Tuesday, but said he had sent birthday gifts to prominent citizens.

An official at the Chinese Communist Party's International Liaison Department, which deals with North Korea, said the source did not believe Kim was critically ill. China is North Korea's only major ally.

— Reuters

Biden raises over three times as much money as Trump in March

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK: US presidential candidate Joe Biden raised more than three times as much money for his campaign than President Donald Trump managed in March, a potential sign of voter enthusiasm for the Democratic challenger.

Biden's campaign said on Monday it took in \$46.7 million last month despite the coronavirus health crisis that has disrupted fundraising for US politicians and hit donor finances.

It was a record haul for the former vice-president and well above the \$13.6 million that Trump's campaign raised, which was a decline from the prior month.

Still, Biden is entering the general election contest with a smaller war chest than what Trump, a Republican, has been amassing since 2017, according to disclosures filed by the two campaigns to the Federal Election Commission.

Biden ended March with \$26.4 million in the bank, an increase from February but well below Trump's \$98.5 million.

Earlier this month, Biden became the Democrat's defacto nominee to take on Trump in the November election after rival Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders dropped out of the contest. — Reuters

40m Pakistani children miss anti-polio vaccine

ISLAMABAD: Tens of millions of Pakistani children are missing their anti-polio vaccination due to the coronavirus lockdown, raising fears that more children will contract the crippling disease this year.

Pakistan launched a polio eradication programme in 1994 and the country came very close to eliminating it but recorded a five-year high of new cases amid vaccine boycotts and attacks on health workers in 2019. "We had to cancel the nationwide anti-polio vaccination campaign scheduled in April due to the coronavirus lockdown," a senior official at the programme said on Tuesday.

At least 40 million children under the age of five have missed the vaccine. The periodic vaccination campaigns have been suspended until June.

"The missed campaign is going to

have a really bad impact because we missed one last April and there were 146 cases in 2019," he said.

This year's case count has already reached 41 and the country has diverted all the resources from its fragile health system to fight coronavirus.

"We have all the arrangements for the campaign in which more than 250,000 health workers will be going door-to-door to administer the vaccine as soon as the situation normalises," said Safdar Rana, who leads the vaccination drive.

Pakistan's anti-polio drives have often ran into trouble due to attacks on the teams administering the vaccine and campaigns against the vaccination.

Gunmen shot and killed two policemen deployed on security detail for polio vaccinators in the



north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in February.

In April, an immunisation campaign was suspended after a video that purported to show schoolchildren falling ill after they were given the vaccine went viral on social media.

The disease spread in Pakistan's mountainous north-west near the Afghan border, which has remained under the control of militants for years. In 2019, 92 new cases were reported from the region.

Polio cases peaked at 306 in 2014, the year an offensive against the Taliban began, but there had been a sharp reduction since.

The case count fell to 54 in 2015 and stood at 20 or less in the three years that followed, according to official statistics.

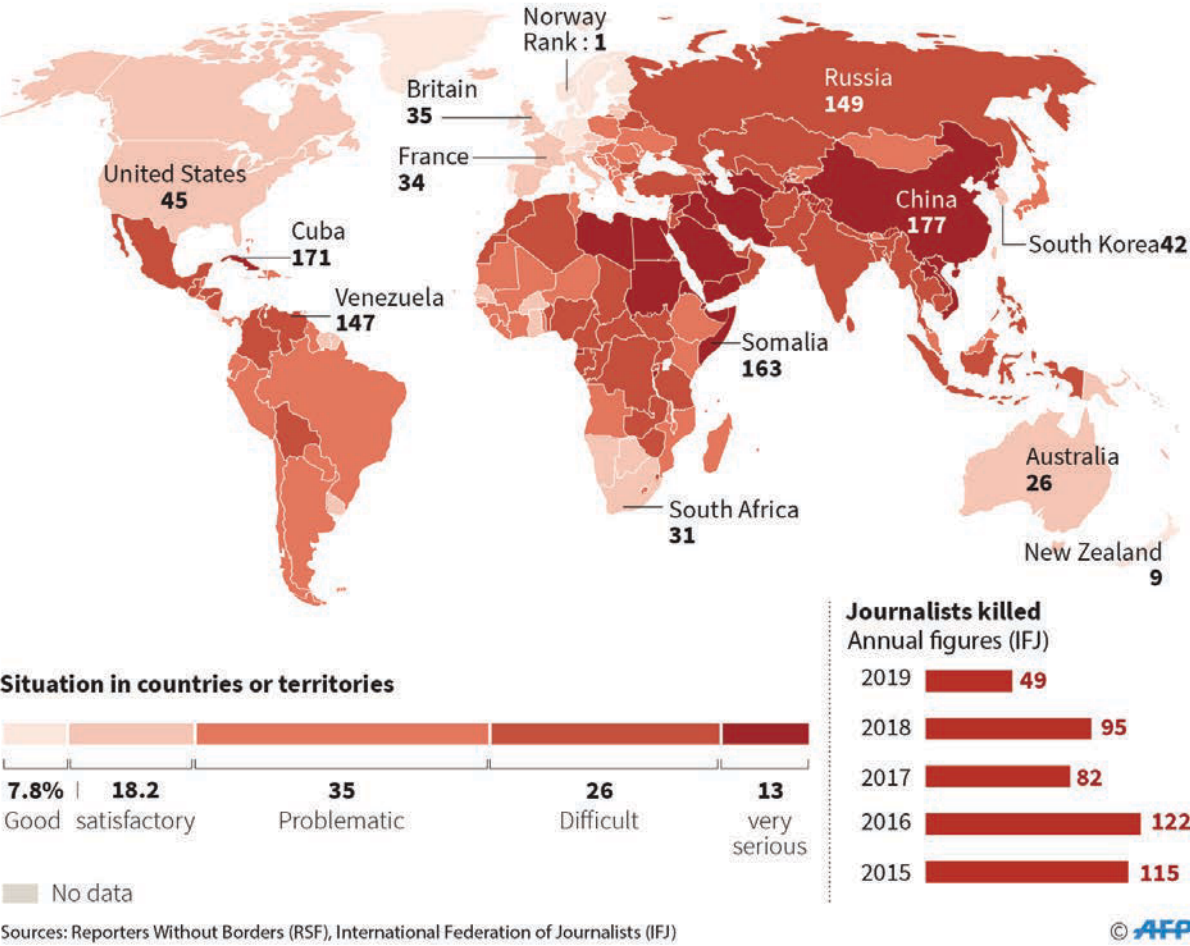
The UN-funded drive to vaccinate children faces opposition from militants and religious conservatives, who believe the vaccine, administered in multiple rounds, is intended to make Muslim children sterile.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are among a handful of countries where polio is still prevalent. — dpa

Coronavirus pandemic 'amplifies press freedom threats'

Press freedom in 2020

World ranking produced by Reporters Without Borders



PARIS: The coronavirus pandemic is exacerbating threats to press freedom around the world, with authoritarian states including China and Iran suppressing details of the outbreak, activists said on Tuesday. Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in its annual press freedom rankings that the pandemic was "highlighting and amplifying the many crises" already casting a shadow on press freedom.

The outbreak had encouraged some regimes to "take advantage of the fact people are stunned and mobilisation has weakened to impose measures that would be impossible to adopt in normal times", RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

The rankings saw few major changes from last year, with Nordic countries regarded as the most free and isolated states, Turkmenistan and North Korea footing the list of 180 countries.

RSF accused China and Iran -- in 177th and 173rd place respectively -- of censoring major coronavirus outbreaks.

Alluding to accusations that Beijing concealed the initial extent of the outbreak, it said China "maintains its system of information hyper-control, whose negative effects for the entire world have been seen during the coronavirus public health crisis".

While Norway topped the index for the fourth year in a row, Finland was again the runner-up. North Korea took last position from Turkmenistan, and Eritrea continued to be Africa's lowest-ranked country at number 178

Europe has also not been immune — Hungary, under Prime Minister Viktor Orban, has passed a special law on false information which RSF called a "completely disproportionate and coercive measure".

It added that there was a "clear correlation" between suppression of media freedom in response to the coronavirus pandemic and a country's ranking in the index.

While Norway topped the index for the fourth year in a row, Finland was again the runner-up. North Korea took last position from Turkmenistan, and Eritrea continued to be Africa's

lowest-ranked country at number 178.

The third biggest leap was by Sudan, which rose 16 places to 159th after the removal of president Omar al Bashir.

France lost two places to rank 32nd, with journalists in the country sometimes the victims of police violence at demonstrations, the report said.

Published annually by RSF since 2002, the World Press Freedom Index assesses factors such as media independence, self-censorship, the legal framework and transparency based on a questionnaire filled out by experts.

Turkey, where President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been repeatedly criticised for cracking down on press freedom, rose three places to 154th but RSF said this was because of "other countries falling" rather than positive change.

It said censorship of the media, especially online media, has been stepped up in Turkey and the country was "more authoritarian than ever". Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, in 149th place, is also persevering with "efforts to control the Internet, using ever more elaborate methods", it said, citing a law that would allow the country to disconnect the Russian Internet from the rest of the world.

— AFP



No restraint, no reproach, it’s screen time!

A

ll of us are going through different emotional states as COVID-19 has touched every corner of the world and its impact is felt by everyone in the country. Yes, all are hunkered down with daily life coming to an indefinite pause.

With more than 130 countries having imposed restrictions on the movement of almost three billion people not only in their respective countries but also across the border, communication channels including voice and video are bringing changes to the lockdown era.

People are responding in different ways depending on their personal situations. They are increasingly connecting to the outside world through screens they might have once regarded with restraint or even reproach.

As a colleague of mine pointed out, “it’s time for reconections and

reunions. Persons who have not spoken for years are now connecting. And they find some kind of a comfort while talking to each other.”

Since many of us are cut off from normal social interaction, we are opting for voice and video calls as the next best thing.

In every conversation, whether with colleagues or loved ones, topic is about the contagion. The talk ends with an overwhelming assurance that one is not alone in the crisis.

The fact is that persons who disliked phone or video chatting are now hooked to the apps. Leave alone watch parties, there are groups that gather other callers to pray together through video conferencing.

People are now becoming aware of the need for staying in contact with their fellow beings. Even persons who have been neglected will speak with you now if you pick up the phone and

Parents should use the extra time they spend together with their children while in lockdown to learn more about each other’s worlds, both digital and physical. They should play games together with children. It is a good way to ensure that they stay safe. It can also be a lot of fun!

call.

Despite that fact that we are increasingly reliant on digital technology and it has become a lifeline

for those of us confined to our homes what we ignore to realise is the fact that our children are watching us all the time.

And so, they see how much time we’re on social media. As the schools are closed, a lot of kids have no choice but to turn to their screens for learning and any kind of socialising.

According to UNICEF, more than 1.5 billion children and young people have been affected by school closures worldwide. Many are online now taking classes and socialising.

“Under the shadow of COVID-19, the lives of millions of children have temporarily shrunk to just their homes and their screens,” points out Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF.

Video games and social media can offer meaningful experiences during a pandemic like connectedness in a time where social interaction is reduced; entertainment when options are

limited; and a tool to help take the edge off of anxiety and fear.

But advises the global agency, “legitimate reservations around the content of some video games and a range of online risks that might befall children playing them can be mitigated by active parenting strategies”.

Parents should use the extra time they spend together with their children while in lockdown to learn more about each other’s worlds, both digital and physical. They should play games together with children. It is a good way to ensure that they stay safe. It can also be a lot of fun!

At the same time, parents should let children know that this is an unusual era in which the rules are a little different — and that when life goes back to normal, the rules will change again. Schools, parks and libraries will reopen, and families will be able to return to rules that make most sense for them!



SAMUEL KUTTY

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A white-bellied pangolin which was rescued from local animal traffickers is seen at the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) office in Kampala, Uganda. — AFP file picture

Humans to blame for COVID-19, other ‘zoonoses’

STÉPHANE ORJOLLET

W

hether it came from a bat or a pangolin is not certain, but one thing is: the coronavirus outbreak that has killed tens of thousands and turned the world upside down comes from the animal world.

It is human activity that enabled the virus to jump to people, and specialists are warning that if nothing changes many other pandemics of this nature will follow.

The name given to diseases transmitted from animals to humans is “zoonoses”, based on the Greek words for “animal” and “sickness”.

They are not new -- tuberculosis, rabies, toxoplasmosis, malaria, to name just a few, are all zoonoses.

According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), 60 per cent of human infectious diseases originate from animals.

This figure climbs to 75 per cent for “emerging” diseases such as Ebola, HIV, avian flu, Zika, or SARS, another type of coronavirus. The list goes on.

“The emergence of zoonotic diseases is often associated with environmental changes or ecological disturbances, such as agricultural intensification and human settlement, or encroachments into forests and other habitats,” said a 2016 UNEP report.

Gwenaél Vourc’h of INRAE, a French public research institute, also blames human activity for the crossover between species.

A key area of concern is deforestation to make way for agriculture and intensive livestock farming.

Domesticated animals are often a “bridge” between pathogens from the

wild and humans. The widespread use of antibiotics in the livestock industry has also led to bacterial pathogens building up immunity to front-line drugs.

Urbanisation and habitat fragmentation are also highly disruptive of the balance between species, while global warming can push disease-carrying animals into new territory.

The novel coronavirus is believed to have emerged in a wet market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Scientists think it originated in bats and could have been passed on via another mammal like a pangolin, an endangered species whose meat and scales are highly prized in parts of Asia.

But researchers have yet to come up with a definitive answer on how it migrated to people.

The only sure thing is that human activity facilitated the jump.

“The process that leads a microbe, such as a virus, from a population of vertebrates such as bats to humans is complex, but driven by people,” says Anne Larigauderie, executive secretary of IPBES, the panel of UN experts on biodiversity.

“People, through their actions, create opportunities for the microbes to come closer to human populations.

“The rate of global change in nature during the past 50 years is unprecedented in human history, and the most important direct driver of change in nature is land use change.”

Beyond the current outbreak of coronavirus, IPBES estimates that zoonoses kill some 700,000 people a year.

A study by American researchers published last week and completed

before the new coronavirus outbreak identifies rodents, primates and bats as hosts of three-quarters of viruses transmitted to humans.

But domestic animals also carry about 50 per cent of the zoonoses identified.

In terms of endangered wildlife, the study shows that those who share the most viruses with humans are precisely “populations declining due to exploitation and loss of habitat”.

Christine Johnson, of the University of California veterinary school, who led the study, blames the human urge to “alter the landscape”.

“This also increases the frequency and intensity of contact between humans and wildlife -- creating the perfect conditions for virus spillover,” she says.

According to Larigauderie, this coronavirus outbreak may just be the tip of the iceberg.

“Increased trends in land use change, combined with increased trends in trade, and global travels, are expected to increase the frequency of pandemics in future,” she says.

“Transformative change is needed in order to find a solution to this global tragedy.” Vourc’h is also calling for a systemic response.

“Beyond the essential response to each epidemic, we must think about our model... rethink our relationship with natural ecosystems and the services they provide,” she says.

The 2016 UNEP report, which noted that “ecosystem integrity underlines human health and development,” said effective strategies already exist to control most neglected zoonoses. The main constraint, however, appeared to be “lack of investment”. —AFP

How can oil prices be negative?

JEAN-LOUIS DOUBLET

W

hile a fall in oil prices is hardly a surprise after coronavirus lockdowns hit demand just as producers had hiked production in a war for market share, how could they go negative?

Many no-doubt-thought there had been a glitch when the May futures contract for US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) closed Monday in New York at -\$37.63. So crude oil producers were willing to pay someone to take the product off their hands.

The May WTI contract plunged as the contract expires on Tuesday when the owner of the contract is technically supposed to take delivery of the crude. And that is the problem: The oil storage terminal in Cushing, Oklahoma where WTI is delivered is nearly full given the ample US production and refineries slowing their output as gasoline demand drops.

Meanwhile, pipeline capacity to get it out is limited. “The oil price reflects the economic value of oil less than the cost of storing oil,” said Stephen Innes, Chief Global Market Strategist at AxiCorp.

“As WTI requires physical delivery and storage is very expensive to access, the cost of storage in May exceeded the economic value of oil in May.”

Thus, traders were ready to pay others to take it off their hands. Other US oil contracts have also turned negative recently as storage options run out.

The crash also called attention to the fact that most oil trading is in futures, not physical barrels of oil.

With a such a contract the delivery of the commodity is carried out at a later date.

Futures trading help market participants by allowing them to lock into prices, either to sell or buy, but also allows for speculation.

Those who speculate on oil futures and never want to hold it had to get out of the WTI May contract before it expires on Tuesday, adding to the downward pressure.

It is instructive to look at the June WTI contract, which has also been falling, but was going for around \$16.60 in afternoon European trading on Tuesday.

The major international benchmark, Brent, is already trading on June. It held around \$20 on Tuesday but this is also considerably lower than even in recent days.

Holders of these contracts won’t need to accept delivery until June, when many hope demand for gasoline and jet fuel to pick up as countries ease their lockdowns.

But that is just an expectation, and much will also depend on what oil producers do. —AFP

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Khazaen to boost direct imports, food security

NEW OPPORTUNITIES: KHAZAEN DRY PORT, FOOD CLUSTER, PRE-BUILT WAREHOUSES TO COMPLEMENT LOGISTICS SERVICES

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Khazean Economic City (Khazaen) is envisioned to play a key role in driving Oman's direct imports and boosting food security through its vital component and anchor projects such as Khazaen Dry Port and the Food Cluster Project. Oman is witnessing a steady growth in shipping and maritime traffic across its ports, the new dry port comes as an important addition to the logistics infrastructure linking the Sultanate's sea ports to its commercial, industrial and economic areas. Khazaen Dry Port will be Oman's trans-shipment hub that will offer customs-bonded services and opening up opportunities across the warehousing services value chain.

Set to cover 250,000 sqm, Khazaen Dry Port will substantially speed up the movement of containers and cargo, improve logistics services, reduce the total cost of outbound and inbound goods, provide container maintenance services, as well as services related to government clearance.

This anchor project, for which Khazaen has signed last year an agreement with Marafi to develop and operate the port along with its partners, the port is currently in its design phase with work progressing as planned with the target to begin commercial operations before the end of 2020.

Boosting and complementing the Government's food security plans, Khazaen is planning to accommodate a well-designed Food Cluster project. A state-of-the-art facility designed



to cover an area of almost 1 million sqm, the Food cluster will enhance the value chain of Oman's food industry. The first phase of the food cluster will include the central fruits and vegetables market as an anchor project which will act as an enabler and marketplace for the food industry in Oman, local agricultural and food products.

The new central market will be the source of fresh produce and a platform for wholesale trade, which will cater to address the increasing demand for food consumption in Oman and the region. Khazaen is in the final stages



KHALID AWADH AL BALUSHI
CEO, Khazaen Economic City

“Oman is witnessing overall growth despite global challenges. The Sultanate remains a vital market for several industries, including the food industry.

of awarding the project to a leading developer and will be announced early second half of this year.

Phase 2 of the Food City will include related industries like food processing, packaging, canning and preservations. Khazaen is also targeting international companies that operate across the food industry value chain besides local and global investors to establish their businesses at the City and use Oman as a regional and global hub while benefiting from the well-established logistics gateways across the country, Khazaen's strategic location in the heart of Oman.

In order to support the government initiatives, Khazaen is promoting business investment opportunity for pre-built warehousing complex, this project will offer modern storage facilities that business owners and investors seek.

The pre-built warehouses located next to Khazaen Dry Port and close to the central fruit and vegetables market will be developed over an area of up to 100,000 sqm.

These facilities will also fulfil the requirements arising from the increasing activities at the Suwaiq port, which is just 30 minutes' drive from Khazaen Economic City.

Khalid Awadh al Balushi (pictured), Chief Executive Officer of Khazaen Economic City said: "Oman is witnessing overall growth despite global challenges. The Sultanate remains a vital market for several industries, including the food industry. Growing food demands of Oman's population require a solid shipping and logistics infrastructure to be in place and Khazaen fulfils this foresight with the Khazaen Dry Port, Food cluster and warehousing facilities.

These facilities complement each other in the direct imports and in maintaining food security in the Sultanate. We are proud that these infrastructural components along with associated services offered, are contributing to the overall goals of achieving food security, economic diversification and attracting investments. Once completed, these projects will further boost Oman's growth potential."

Sohar Port East project to create 100 hectares of new land

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Sohar Port and Free Zone (SOHAR) is embarking on the implementation of its 'Sohar East Development' project – the second of three reclamation initiatives that will add new land for industrial and economic investment at Oman's leading industrial and commercial gateway.

The SOHAR East project centres on the development of the erstwhile 2D Container Terminal to create around 100 hectares of new land, along with 2,000 metres of new quay walls for investment.

An Omani-Dutch joint venture (comprising of YAS Engineering of the Sultanate and Witteveen+Bos of the Netherlands) is already providing consultancy services to Sohar Industrial Port Company (SIPC) – the developer – in undertaking the engineering design as well as providing project management services for the SOHAR East Development initiative. SIPC is a 50/50 partnership of the Omani government (represented by the Ministry of Transport) and Port of Rotterdam of the Netherlands.



The roughly 2km-long former Terminal 2D (on the left) is proposed to be converted into new acreage for industrial investment as part of Sohar Port's East Development project.

NEW EXPANSION: OMANI-DUTCH CONSULTANCY TO UNDERTAKE ENGINEERING STUDIES, PROJECT MANAGEMENT COVERING DEVELOPMENT OF ERSTWHILE TERMINAL 2D TO CREATE NEW ACREAGE AND 2,000 METRES OF NEW, MULTIPURPOSE QUAY WALLS.

With almost all of the industrial port's estimated 2,000 hectares of land already committed for investment, SOHAR has its sights on a trio of expansion projects that will ease demand for new land. Its first reclamation project – dubbed

SOHAR South – is already well underway with the first phase of around 50 hectares nearing completion for investment.

A further 150 hectares are being earmarked for reclamation and development.

SOHAR East Development, on the other hand, centres on the utilisation of reclaimed land located in the port basin opposite the current existing quay wall. The reclamation area of around 100 hectares is expected to complement the Steel, Aggregate and Food Clusters in the port, according to SIPC.

In addition to the creation of 100 ha of new real estate for industrial investment, the development will also result in the establishment of 2,000 metres of multipurpose quay walls. This will allow for the new industrial tenants to enjoy direct access to the waterfront.

Access from the landside to the new SOHAR East Development is via a service corridor at the north part of the basin. The service corridor will be suitably developed to include roadways and a drainage channel linking the new reclamation with the landside.

Recently, SIPC floated a tender for conducting a geotechnical investigation for the SOHAR East Development, underscoring efforts to press ahead with the implementation of this key expansion initiative.

OAB wins regulator nod to acquire Alizz Islamic Bank



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced that it was given the green-light by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) to acquire Alizz Islamic Bank SAOG (AIB) and to eventually become a publicly listed entity.

The revelation came in a filing by OAB's majority shareholder, Oman International Development & Investment Co SAOG (OMINVEST), to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Tuesday.

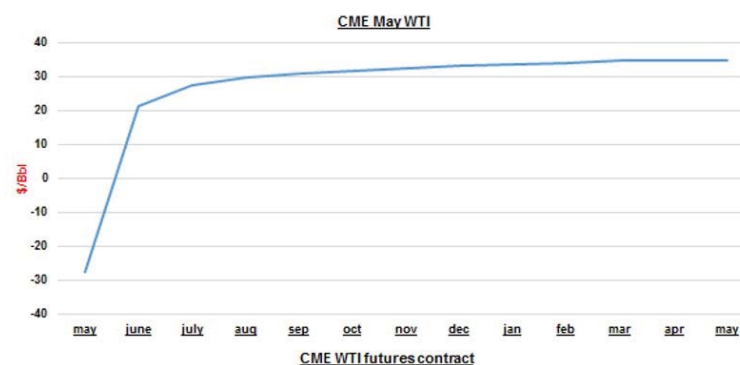
In the filing, OMINVEST referred to its disclosure dated January 16, 2020 pertaining to OAB's "proposed transaction" with Alizz Islamic Bank. It proposed (i) Alizz Islamic's acquisition as a fully owned Islamic banking subsidiary of OAB and its conversion into an SAOC entity, (ii) the transfer of the assets and liabilities of Al Yusr Islamic Window to Alizz Islamic Bank SAOC, and (iii) the conversion of OAB SAOC into an

SAOG entity. Announcing the banking regulator's nod for the transaction, OMINVEST said: "We would like to disclose that OAB has received regulatory approval for the proposed transaction from the Central Bank of Oman, and is in the process of obtaining further regulatory approvals from the Capital Market Authority and other regulatory bodies. Further updates shall be duly disclosed to the market as the transaction progresses."

Established in 1984, Oman Arab Bank's is one of Oman's largest lenders with operations spanning Retail banking, Corporate banking and Project finance, Investment banking, trade finance and most recently, Islamic banking. Its shareholders are: Oman International Development & Investment Co SAOG (OMINVEST) (50.99 per cent), Arab Bank Plc (49 per cent), and Oman Real Estate Investment and Services SAOC (0.01 per cent).



May WTI settles negative on rush for longs to cover positions before expiration



OIL IS LESS THAN ZERO

CHRIS MIDGLEY

On Friday, Open Interest was 108 MMB. Why so much open interest? This was most likely traders seeing value in buying Nymex WTI May-June spread at -6\$/bbl, a king's ransom for a month's storage! On tonight's settlement this had blown out to more than a \$50/barrel negative spread, so arguably, if you can find a way of renting someone's tanks for a quick in-out you would do this. While most futures traders will be unable to take deliver we may see a record amount committed at expiry tomorrow. Cushing is only 70 per cent full right now, so along with those who were short the contract today, some operators could make a lot of money if they can take delivery, but those caught long have taken what could be as much as a \$0.5 billion bath!

After hours May NYMEX WTI has already retreated to negative \$14/barrel and we'd expect this to narrow back in while the June contract should roll down.

However, Dated Brent priced at 19.09 and ICE is about \$26/bbl despite the 10 per cent sell off on ICE, which still remains relatively strong; and in our mind, Brent and June WTI still need to fall a little further to force more curtailment of production and balance the market effected by the collapse in demand due to Covid-19.

Other notations:

May WTI settled on Monday at NEGATIVE \$37.63/Bbl, with limited liquidity and with offers chasing bids in a vacuum. Undoubtedly, one of the most volatile days in the history of oil pricing, considering that as of Friday, the May WTI futures contract settled at around \$18.50/Bbl.

Open Interest on May WTI as of Friday's close was around 108,000 contracts for positions to be unwound or to go into a delivery process (which normally does not exceed 3,000 contracts) in 2 days (today and tomorrow). For each long futures contract there is a correspondent short contract.

With May WTI weakening during the day, longs without capacity to receive physical delivery in Cushing were forced to liquidate their length in order to avoid delivery, causing this incredible selling pressure amplified by the absence of bids.

The market will adjust and WTI will not trade at negative prices generally. This event is totally related to the current contract expiration.

However, Platts Analytics outlook is for global crude supply to rapidly fill available storage onshore and afloat. As that happens, prompt prices will weaken further and producer takeaway will be constrained, ultimately limiting production.

[Chris Midgley is Head of S&P Global Platts Analytics]



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 21

The GCC construction market is estimated at \$2.4 trillion, with over 23,000 active projects at the end of Q1 2020. BNC Network, the largest construction intelligence platform in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), issued the 17th edition of the BNC Projects Journal titled: *Code Blue*.

The latest BNC Projects Journal stated that the GCC construction market shifted focus towards driving ongoing projects to completion in Q1 2020 and was cautious in new announcements as well as contract awards. \$48.4 billion worth of projects were completed in Q1 2020, driven by the UAE and Saudi Arabia with 38

OMAN MARKET: NEW PROJECTS WORTH \$21 BILLION WERE ANNOUNCED IN Q1 2020 WITH THE LARGEST CONTRIBUTION BEING MADE BY THE UAE WITH 59 PER CENT MARKET SHARE FOLLOWED BY QATAR AND OMAN.

per cent and 27 per cent contribution respectively.

"As COVID-19 infects the global economy, no industry or business is truly immune. The obvious fallout in terms of delays due to the disruption to work on sites, material supply disruptions due to closed factories and shipping delays are symptoms of an economic disease that can and must be addressed," said Avin Gidwani, CEO of Industry Networks.

New projects worth \$21 billion

were announced in Q1 2020 with the largest contribution being made by the UAE with 59 per cent market share followed by Qatar and Oman.

"The economic malady affecting construction is clearly contagious but unlike the coronavirus, it spreads only when businesses break connections in the flow of commerce by breaking their commitments to pay," mentioned Avin Gidwani. He added, "We must remember that this disease isn't just testing our business acumen – it's

testing our humanity."

The total value of contracts awarded in Q1 2020 was \$23.5 billion, while \$3.1 billion worth of contracts were awarded in March. The energy sector registered \$12.9 billion worth of project awards in Q1 driven by the UAE and Saudi Arabia with 42 per cent and 40 per cent contribution respectively.

The GCC Construction sector registered a 4 per cent YoY growth in March which was primarily driven by the energy sectors with oil & gas and the utility sector expanding by 16 per cent and 7 per cent YoY respectively. The industrial sector grew marginally by 4 per cent YoY while the GCC transport sector contracted by 5 per cent YoY.

Omantel eFloos digital wallet enables money transfers

MUSCAT: Omantel reaffirms its commitment to offer value added services. With the introduction of "eFloos" digital wallet, customers can make safe and swift payments, especially through the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, where social distancing is required to stop the spread of the virus.

The digital wallet, which was launched in March 2019 in collaboration with Sohar International and Arab Financial Services (AFS) enabled over 12,000 users to perform transactions to India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nepal, UK, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt and the Philippines through a mobile application without the need for a bank card.

As a pioneering technological innovation in financial transactions industry, the digital wallet "eFloos" has been well received and widely used. Although it was initially confined to transactions among eFloos users only, the digital wallet currently enables its users to perform fund remittances with users of other digital wallets or banks in the Sultanate.

Since launch, the number of users of the digital wallet "eFloos" has been growing



reaching 12,000 users now, while the number of registered trademarks accepting payment option through eFloos has reached 547 trademarks.

Commenting on this, Mohamed al Hakmani; Omantel's Senior Manager of Emerging Services – Consumer Business Unit, said: "We strive at Omantel to align our efforts and initiatives with Oman Vision 2040 through continuous investment in ICT infrastructure and solutions. Last year when we were planning to offer a fintech solution that offers users ease of cashless payment and remittances, we entered into

partnership with Sohar International, a leading bank in the Sultanate of Oman to launch eFloos in March 2019. We are proud of the customers' response that saw the number of users growing to 12,000 now".

"Nowadays, with the current exceptional circumstances of Covid-19. Customers are reconsidering the cash they handle on daily transactions, contactless and digital payment methods are a safer alternative that offers more secure transactions and less physical interaction. The eFloos digital wallet witnessed continuous upgrades including improved application user interface and adding new features, countries and languages.

Besides, we have broadened the scope of users benefiting from this application. All this is aimed at providing a seamless and safe payment experience for our customers." Al Hakmani added.

Customers can credit funds to their accounts through more than 140 Omantel bill payment machines available across various governorates in the Sultanate or by using debit cards issued in the Sultanate of Oman.

HSBC cuts top investment bank jobs despite wider firing freeze

HONG KONG:

HSBC has cut a number of top management roles in its investment bank, memos seen by Reuters showed, a sign that Chief Executive Noel Quinn is pressing on with plans to shake up the group despite having put a wider job cut programme on hold.

CEO Quinn last month announced a temporary halt to plans for 35,000 redundancies across the bank because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Quinn, who took on the permanent CEO role in March after a lengthy audition process during which Chairman Mark Tucker courted several external candidates, faces a nightmarish task to steer Europe's biggest bank through the crisis.

HSBC's twin homes of Britain and



China have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, while cuts to central bank interest rates worldwide will curb the bank's already pressured profits and it faces a shareholder revolt in Hong Kong over dividend halts.

The new strategy for the bank that Quinn announced in February already needs overhauling, as the lender tries to adapt to the crashing global economy.

"It's hard to feel anything but sympathy for Noel who's doing okay in exceptionally tough circumstances," said Hugh Young, managing director at Aberdeen Asset Management Asia. Quinn's management reshuffle includes cutting the regional head roles of the Global Banking & Markets (GBM) business which houses HSBC's investment banking activities, the memo said. — Reuters

Whistleblower awarded \$11m after suppression of gold audit

LONDON: A British court awarded \$11 million in damages and expenses on Friday to a former partner at global accounting firm Ernst & Young who exposed money laundering at a major gold refinery in the United Arab Emirates.

Amjad Rihan claimed he was pushed out of EY after raising concerns about irregularities at precious metals dealer and refiner Kaloti in 2013, according to a ruling from High Court judge Timothy Kerr.

He ruled that EY had helped cover up results of an audit led by Rihan of Kaloti's business practices, including that it paid billions of dollars in cash for gold without adequately checking its origin, and bought gold bars from Morocco coated in silver to avoid



Their work ultimately resulted in sanctions against the refiner and contributed to significant changes in the sourcing of precious metals and the regulation of refiners in Dubai.

ERNST & YOUNG

export restrictions.

Rihan resigned from EY in 2014 and leaked his findings to the media,

sending shockwaves through an industry under increasing pressure to refuse gold used to finance organised crime, conflict and human rights abuses.

A lawyer representing Kaloti, which was the UAE's largest gold refiner in 2013, had no immediate comment. Kaloti has previously denied wrongdoing.

EY, one of the world's "Big Four" accounting firms, said it was surprised and disappointed by the ruling.

"We will appeal and, therefore, not comment in detail," EY said in a statement. "It was the work of an EY Dubai assurance team that uncovered serious irregularities and reported them to the proper authorities."

Their work ultimately resulted

in sanctions against the refiner and contributed to significant changes in the sourcing of precious metals and the regulation of refiners in Dubai."

In his claim, Rihan said he had struggled to find work after being driven out of EY. Kerr awarded him \$10.8 million in damages and 117,960 pounds (\$147,000) in expenses.

"The EY organisation was supposed to have a written whistleblowing policy, though I have no evidence that it had one," Kerr said in his 133-page ruling.

"It is generally known to professional persons such as accountants that to become a whistleblower often involves a major risk of financial loss through subsequent 'unemployability,'" Kerr said. — Reuters

US oil futures plumb historic lows below zero

LONDON: US oil futures traded in negative territory on Tuesday, after sinking nearly \$40 the previous session in their first ever dive below zero, as concern grew the sector will run out of storage for a glut caused by the coronavirus lockdown.

Global benchmark Brent crude also fell in response to the collapse of demand following reduced economic activity.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for May delivery traded at minus \$2.58 a barrel by 0807 GMT, up \$35.05 from Monday's close when the contract settled at a discount of \$37.63 a barrel.

The slump in the US contract was exaggerated by the looming expiry late on Tuesday of the front-month contract for delivery of oil in May when the lack of storage is set to be particularly acute.

The more-active June contract slipped 23 cents, or 1.1 per cent, to \$20.20 a barrel. June trading volumes were roughly 80 times those of the expiring May contract.

Global benchmark Brent crude for June delivery was down \$3.22, or 12.6 per cent, at \$22.35 per barrel.

"Demand destruction from COVID-19 will see a slower than expected reopening of the US economy," Edward Moya, senior market analyst at brokerage OANDA, said. "The WTI crude June contract was able to hold the \$20 a barrel level and is seeing a modest gain following the painful rollercoaster of the May contract."

Restrictions on movement to try to contain the novel coronavirus have reduced oil demand by an estimated 30 per cent, resulting in a huge surplus of crude in need of storage.



A 3D-printed oil pump jack is seen in front of a displayed stock graph and '\$0 Barrel' words in this illustration picture. — Reuters

Oil crash hits stocks, dollar gains as investors shun risk

LONDON: Global stocks fell on Tuesday, a day after US crude oil prices turned negative for the first time, as dismal company earnings reports underlined worries about economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic.

The dollar rose against a basket of peers as investors shunned riskier assets. MSCI's All Country World Index, which tracks stocks across 49 countries, was down 0.8 per cent. European stock markets followed their Asian counterparts lower, with the pan-European STOXX 600 index down nearly 2 per cent in early deals.



A man in a mask walking past a screen showing stock prices outside a brokerage in Tokyo. — AFP

Monday's historic plunge in oil, which saw some prices reach -\$40 a barrel, is the result of growing crude stockpiles and a squeeze on storage space as lockdowns to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus slash global fuel use.

West Texas Intermediate continued to trade in negative territory on Tuesday, at -\$4.55 a barrel. "I have always thought of oil a little bit like a currency; it stores value, is controlled by world leaders and makes the world go round," said Gregory Perdon, Co-Chief Investment Officer at Arbuthnot Latham. — Reuters

The slump in the US contract was exaggerated by the looming expiry late on Tuesday of the front-month contract for delivery of oil in May when the lack of storage is set to be particularly acute.

The main US storage hub in Cushing, Oklahoma, the delivery point for the US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) contract, is expected to be full within weeks.

Anxious to bolster the earnings of the US oil industry, US President Donald Trump said on Monday his administration would consider halting Saudi crude oil imports.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and its allies, including Russia, a grouping known as Opec+, agreed this month to cut output by 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd).

But that cut will not take place before May, and is not considered enough to restore market balance.

"The recently agreed supply cuts do little to solve the near-term oversupply problem in the global market," JBC Energy said in a note.

US crude inventories were expected to rise by about 16.1 million barrels in the week to April 17 after posting the biggest one-week build in history, five analysts polled by Reuters found. — Reuters

Donald Trump to consider halting Saudi oil imports

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said that his administration was considering the possibility of stopping incoming Saudi Arabian crude oil shipments as a measure to support the battered domestic drilling industry.

"Well, I'll look at it," Trump told reporters at a daily news conference after he was asked about requests by some Republican lawmakers to block the shipments under his executive authority.

Trump said he had heard the proposal immediately before the news briefing. "We certainly have plenty of oil, so I'll take a look at it," he said.

US crude oil futures collapsed to trade in negative territory for the first time in history on Monday, amid a coronavirus-induced supply glut. Futures ended the day at a stunning minus-\$37.63 a barrel as desperate traders paid



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

to get rid of oil as storage space was close to running out.

The collapse in prices has threatened to

tilt the once-booming US oil industry into bankruptcy.

Trump described the drop as short-term and stemming from a "financial squeeze," but said the oil industry was hurting from a lack of demand, as states have imposed stay-in-place restrictions to curb the spread of the virus.

"The problem is no one is driving a car anywhere in the world, essentially. ... Factories are closed, businesses are closed," Trump said. "We had really a lot of energy to start off with, oil in particular, and then all of a sudden they lost 40 per cent, 50 per cent of their market."

He said the global producer group known as Opec+ had agreed to cut production by some 15 million barrels per day, and said weak prices could force more declines for economic reasons.

"They have to do more by the market, it's the same thing over here. If the market is the way

it is, people are going to slow it down or they're going to stop. That's going to be automatic, and that's happening," Trump said.

Trump reiterated that his administration plans to top up the nation's emergency crude oil stockpile as prices plunge.

The Department of Energy is in the process of leasing some of the roughly 77 million barrels of available space in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to US oil companies to help them deal with dearth of commercial storage as the coronavirus outbreak crushes domestic energy demand.

The administration initially wanted to purchase the crude oil directly, but Congress has yet to approve the funding.

Asked if he still wanted lawmakers to approve the funding, Trump said the space in the SPR would be filled either way. — Reuters

Nissan to shut down global headquarters



Nissan Motor's logo is pictured at its headquarters in Yokohama, Japan. — Reuters

TOKYO: Nissan Motor Co said that it would temporarily shut down operations at its global headquarters and other facilities in Japan through early May to contain the spread of the coronavirus at its sites.

The Japanese automaker said that it would reduce operations to a minimum level at its head offices in Yokohama along with other non-production facilities, including in nearby Atsugi, Kanagawa Prefecture, where its main R&D centre is located.

The 16-day closure will run between April 25 and May 10, affecting a total of 15,000 employees, the company said in a statement.

Like many of its global rivals, Nissan has shuttered most of its global production facilities due to the virus, and operations at many of its vehicle plants in Japan have been suspended since earlier this month due to plummeting demand.

Even before the spread of the coronavirus, Nissan's sales and profits had been slumping and it was burning through cash, forcing it to row back on an aggressive expansion plan pursued by ousted leader Carlos Ghosn. The automaker is due to announce a new recovery plan next month, and sources have said that executives see the need for the company to become much smaller company, selling 1 million less cars than its current annual target of 6 million units. — Reuters

US Treasury releases \$2.9 bn in airline support



Delta Air Lines passenger planes are seen parked due to flight reductions made to slow the spread of coronavirus disease, at Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport in Birmingham, Alabama. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury Department said it had disbursed \$2.9 billion in initial payroll assistance to 54 smaller passenger carrier and two major passenger airlines, while it finalized grant agreements with six major airlines.

The Treasury is initially giving major airlines 50 per cent of funds awarded and releasing the rest in a series of payments.

In total, Treasury is awarding US passenger airlines \$25 billion in funds earmarked for payroll costs. Major airlines must repay 30 per cent of the funds in low-interest loans and grant Treasury warrants equal to 10 per cent of the loan amount, while airlines receiving \$100 million or less do not need to repay any funds or issue warrants to the government.

Treasury said on Monday it had finalized grant agreements with Allegiant Air, American Airlines

Group Inc, Delta Air Lines Inc, Southwest Airlines Co, Spirit Airlines Inc, and United Airlines Holdings Inc.

Air carriers have been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic and seen US travel demand fall by 95 per cent.

Southwest said it would receive half of the \$3.2 billion payroll award immediately and the remainder in installments during May, June and July.

Separately, Treasury said Alaska Airlines, Frontier Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines, JetBlue Airways Corp and SkyWest Airlines had also indicated that they planned to participate. The 12 major airlines represent nearly 95 per cent of US airline capacity.

Airlines receiving funds cannot lay off employees before Sept. 30 or change collective bargaining agreements and must agree to restrictions on buybacks, executive compensation and dividends.

Treasury is now considering separate requests for additional assistance from another \$25 billion loan fund for passenger airlines. United said on Monday it was seeking \$4.5 billion in loans from the program, while American said last week it was applying for a \$4.75 billion loan under that program, and Alaska and Horizon said they were applying for \$1.1 billion in loans.

United said on Monday it expected to cut passenger capacity by 90 per cent in June.

Treasury is still considering how to award \$4 billion in payroll assistance to cargo carriers and \$3 billion to airport contractors like airplane caterers.

Estimated global airline losses from the coronavirus pandemic have climbed to \$314 billion, 25 per cent more than previously forecast, the International Air Transport Association said last week. — Reuters



Spreading love through cooking in quarantine



THIS IS A TOUGH TIME, BUT PEOPLE ARE OVERCOMING THESE DAYS BY COOKING NEW RECIPES AND TRYING NEW FOOD AT HOME. MOST OF THE FAMILIES ARE INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH THEM AS AN INDOOR ACTIVITY THAT WOULD KILL THE BOREDOM OF CHILDREN A LITTLE

If there is a show that bound children and parents, it must be a cooking programme where the whole family can sit together and enjoy watching the local or universal recipes. Now, more than ever, home is where many of us are seeking refuge and solace in the light of the novel coronavirus.

This is a tough time, but people are overcoming these days by cooking new recipes and trying new food at home. Most of the families are including children with them as an indoor activity that would kill the boredom of children a little.

These days, it seems like everyone has started baking. Instagram, tik tok and other social media means are filled with raspberry scones, blueberry muffins, chocolate chip cookies, Nutella banana bread, cream cheese-topped brownies, bis-

cuits, and other sweets.

As the coronavirus pandemic spreads through the world and people are increasingly practising social distancing to slow the spread of the disease, people are spending a lot more time in their homes than they used to. With work-from-home directives, and many public spaces all shut down, people are turning to cooking while self-quarantined not just for sustenance but for comfort and entertainment too.

"I do know that walking into the kitchen to make yourself something to eat — no matter your situation and how you feel about it — is always a good thing, a nourishing act," says Bushra al Naabi, a chef.

Sharing food, as Bushra did with her sister, as well as sharing food experiences can also help create a sense of community while we're socially isolated.

"While we can't leave our homes and see our friends in

real life, we can gather on Instagram (@boshy0790) to discuss what we're cooking and swap recipe ideas. Talking about cooking has become the new online support group, something

we share while we all try to get through this strange, scary time together", she explains.

"While we have been stuck at home, cooking and baking have become an outlet to channel all the fears and anxieties. Sure, part of it is functional: We have to eat, and restaurants are shut down — other than for delivery and pickup orders — so home cooking is simply necessary, says Khalsa al Abri, a teacher.

Even for those of us who cook regularly before the term "social distancing" arrived in our community, we're still cooking more meals at home than we might have in the past. For those who used to have three meals a day, now it is the three meals plus the two side meals at noon and afternoon, not to forget, late night meal.

For Aziza, who is cooking for income, the situation now is more enjoyable. Even though we have to keep two metres of space

between ourselves and other people, some are still using cooking as a way to connect with people while maintaining a safe distance. Aziza has started delivering her baked goods to friends and neighbours, doing what she calls "distanced deliveries".

"I'll bake or cook things and then go out on a long walk or a ride and drop off goodies on doorsteps," she says. "It's a way for me to get some fresh air and also bring a little joy to friends and family during this uncomfortable time," Aziza shares.

Cooking itself may be a solo activity, but during this period of social distancing, it has also served as a tool to bring communities together in new ways, even when they can't gather together for a meal. "We're all looking for slices of happiness, and cooking and baking during quarantine have allowed that to happen both online and offline," says Aziza.

NFL superstar Brady kicked out of park closed due to virus

NEW YORK: American football superstar Tom Brady was found exercising in a Florida city park closed due to the coronavirus and kicked out, the local mayor said.

Brady, 42, moved to Tampa recently after signing a contract with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, closing a successful two-decade stint with the New England Patriots.

During a daily update on Monday on the virus, Tampa mayor Jane Castor said a warden spotted someone exercising alone in one of the city's parks, which are closed to prevent help curb the spread of the COVID-19 disease.

"She went over to tell him that it was closed and it was Tom Brady," she said.

"Sorry @TomBrady! Our @tampaparksrec team can't wait to welcome you and our entire community back with even bigger smiles — until then, stay safe and stay home as much as you can to help flatten the curve" the city said on its Twitter account.

Brady, married to Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bundchen, announced on March 20 that he was leaving the Patriots after winning a record six titles and signing a two-season contract with the Buccaneers, for which he was reported to earn \$50 million. — AFP



SWEET DREAM, JORDAN'S 1992 OLYMPIC JERSEY SELLS FOR \$216,000

NEW YORK: Michael Jordan's US Basketball "Dream Team" jersey from the 1992 Barcelona Olympics sold for \$216,000, Robert Edwards Auctions said on Monday.

The winning bid was the second-highest ever for a Jordan jersey, after the \$274,000 paid for his 1984 Olympic singlet.

Jordan inscribed the white mesh jersey on the right breast with "Best Wishes/Michael Jordan."

The gold medal winning 1992 US men's Olympic basketball team, nicknamed "The Dream Team," included, along with Jordan, Hall of Famers Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Scottie Pippen, Karl Malone, Patrick Ewing, Charles Barkley, Clyde Drexler, John Stockton, David Robinson and Chris Mullin.

"Michael Jordan is arguably the most iconic athlete of all-time,



winning six NBA titles and two Olympic Gold medals," Robert Edward Auctions President Brian Dwyer said in a statement. "Collectors relished a rare opportunity to own Jordan's jersey from the 1992 Dream Team — the greatest basketball team ever assembled." — Reuters



Kyrgios no fan of Slams without crowd

MUMBAI: As Grand Slam governing bodies ponder over the perfect blueprint of future events amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, Australian world number 40 Nick Kyrgios has said he does not want to play in a major in the absence of crowd.

The tennis season was suspended in March due to the pandemic and the shutdown will continue at least until mid-July with countries closing borders and going into lockdown to contain the spread of the virus.

The French Open, the first Grand Slam to be hit by the spread of the coronavirus, moved the claycourt event to September 20-October 4 from its traditional May start while the Wimbledon championships, set to begin in late June, were cancelled.

The organisers of the US Open said last week that playing the hardcourt Grand Slam without fans is on the table but highly unlikely.

The Australian Open organisers have said they were also exploring all options, including the possibility of running an event just for broadcast.

"100% no," the mercurial Kyrgios, who always draws huge numbers on court, told fellow Australian Thanasi Kokkinakis on an Instagram chat when asked if he would play a Grand Slam without fans in the stands.

Kyrgios, who was placed on probation by the governing body of men's tennis over his on-court behaviour last year, emerged as Australia's hero earlier in 2020 during the bushfire crisis.

His "bad boy" image has been transformed since his appeal to the tennis world kickstarted a campaign

The organisers of the US Open said last week that playing the hardcourt Grand Slam without fans is on the table but highly unlikely

that raised millions of dollars for the victims of the crisis before and during the Australian Open Grand Slam in Melbourne.

The Australian Open, which started in January, has so far been the only Grand Slam that was not impacted in 2020. "These extraordinary times dictate a need for agility and extensive planning that explores a very wide range of options," Tennis Australia Chief Executive Craig Tiley said this month. "We have to be prepared for a changed environment.

"For example, with such a high-dependency on international travel we are looking at what we might have to do if players need to be quarantined for any length of time before being allowed to freely move around Australia.

"Another example is if mass gatherings are still not allowed or severely restricted next year, we are looking at the possibility of running an event for broadcast. These are just two of many scenarios we have to examine."

— Reuters

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I said it when I left D.C., (MLS) have to take on the rules that Europe and the rest of soccer are taking. Although they might not want to, and I know the rest of US sports don't do that, but if they don't, then they will never get there (the level of European leagues)

WAYNE ROONEY, FORMER ENGLAND CAPTAIN

‘MLS MUST REMOVE SALARY CAP TO COMPETE WITH EUROPEAN LEAGUES’

NEW YORK: Major League Soccer (MLS) must remove caps on salaries if it is to fulfil its potential and compete with Europe's top leagues, former England captain Wayne Rooney has said.

The salary cap was introduced to help level the playing field by preventing teams from spending big on players. It has worked to an extent, with 10 different teams crowned MLS Cup champions over the last 13 seasons.

Rooney, who spent one-and-a-

half seasons at D.C. United, said that although salary caps were common in other American sports leagues, it was not feasible if the MLS wanted to be compete with European leagues in attracting top talent.

"There is so much potential there, so much potential. There is so much of a market," Rooney said on the Perfect Soccer's Ask A Pro Show podcast.

"I said it when I left D.C., (MLS) have to take on the rules that Europe and the rest of soccer are taking.

"Although they might not want to,



and I know the rest of US sports don't do that, but if they don't, then they will never get there (the level of European leagues)."

The MLS has a Designated Player Rule that allows teams to sign players that will be outside the salary cap, which allowed them to sign players such as Rooney, David Beckham, Thierry Henry and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

However, Rooney believes salary cap rules prevent players from signing for American clubs in their prime,

choosing instead to have a short stint during the twilight of their careers and earn a big paycheck.

"They get players like me and Zlatan, but I can't give them Wayne Rooney from 10 years ago. Zlatan can't give himself from 10 years ago," Rooney, who now plays for Championship club Derby County, added.

"We can give you ourselves from now, we can go there and earn a decent amount of money and give the fans some entertainment, but we can't give you our full potential." — Reuters