

12
Ramadhan
Wednesday
6/5/2020

Prayer times

	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:09	04:15	04:39
DHUHR:	12:09	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:33	03:36	03:35
MAGHRIB:	06:42	06:45	06:50
ISHA:	07:59	08:01	08:02

Ramadhan
Mubarak
2020/1441 AH
OMAN
OBSERVER



UN THANKS HIS MAJESTY

MUSCAT: Rosemary A Dicarlo, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peace-building Affairs extended her thanks and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Sultanate, for the generous assistance to the United Nations Mission in Al Hudaydah, Yemen, during a temporary repositioning of some mission personnel.

“This help was critical to the United Nations during an extremely challenging period”, she said.

It is worth mentioning that the Sultanate had facilitated the arrival of personnel of this mission in a ship to Salalah and then they were evacuated by aircraft to their destinations. — ONA

LOCKDOWN TILL MAY 29

ACADEMIC YEAR FOR SCHOOLS ENDS ON MAY 7

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: As Muscat continues to top coronavirus cases in the Sultanate, the Supreme Committee decided to extend the lockdown in the governorate until May 29. The decision was taken by the committee in a meeting presided over by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior and Chairman of the committee, on Tuesday in Muscat.

The Supreme Committee also decided to end the School Year for schools (2019-2020) on May 7. The committee authorised the Ministry of Education to endorse a suitable alternative to calculate results for promotion from class 1 to 12 and their equivalents.

The extension of Muscat lockdown comes amid increase in the number of



Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy
Minister of Interior and Chairman of the committee

cases to 2,735 in the Sultanate. Oman reported 98 new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday which include 42 Omanis and 56 residents. 42 patients recovered from the coronavirus.

The Directorate General of Customs (Oman Customs) decided to close the clearance offices in Al Wajajah border post from May 6. Oman Customs said that the closure is following recommendations of the Ministry of Health.

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IS HOME DELIVERY SAFER THAN REAL SHOPPING?

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Millions are living in self-isolation globally in an attempt to limit the spread of COVID-19, which has resulted in empty streets and abandoned shopping carts out of fear that they may carry thousands of fingerprints of people who may be infected with coronavirus. They found a substitute in electronic shopping to keep safe.

Everything that enters our homes has become frightening. So, can we catch the virus through a pizza box, mail envelopes or a shipment of Eid clothes that we ordered online and



ments of the shipping companies, as your safety is your own responsibility. Some companies advertise to keep their customers informed that delivery workers are taking all precautions and goods are sanitised all the time. But confidence may be impossible for delivery workers who continue to deliver orders in 8 to 12 business hours and are struggling to reach hand-washing facilities or supplies of tissues and masks."

She added that all we have to do is wash our hands after touching them, use water and soap for washable things, and provide alcohol and disinfectants for what is not right to wash. "You can also dispose of the outer packaging of the product, and any other bags or even bill and throw it out of the house," she explained.

She also said "Be careful when dealing with cash, wash your hands immediately after touching them. It is, however, preferable to pay by the card whenever possible."

Al Rashdi mentioned that it is probably best to leave parcel and non-spoiling products, such as clothes and appliances, in a separate place for several days before using them. "To ensure perfect safety for your health, you should clean all the products you receive using alcohol wipes, or spray alcohol on them and leave it until it dries before usage."

Al Rashdi also said, "It is better that you stand at a sufficient distance while dealing with a delivery guy who has visited dozens of houses before you. Do not agree to touch a device or an electronic pen that many other people would have already dealt with or to receive the bill with a naked hand. "Your awareness when dealing with these surfaces is no less important — and perhaps more important — than the way you handle bags and cans."

get it delivered to our doorstep?

Experts say it is technically possible for a package or mail coming to your home to be contaminated with a virus caught somewhere by those who handled it.

The competent authorities in the Sultanate announced a few days ago confirmed cases of COVID-19 as a result of home delivery, which sparked concern among people who thought that not leaving home and choosing the delivery service in the circumstances imposed by the pandemic is 100 per cent safe.

Many research centres announced that it is possible for a person to become infected with Covid-19 by touching a surface or something that contains the virus, then touching his mouth or nose, or perhaps his eyes, while acknowledging the existence of some hypothetical risks of the virus staying alive on mail and goods for hours and maybe days.

So what should be done when dealing with delivery packages?

Fayza al Rashdi, a marketing official in one of the private companies, says, "Do not trust the advertise-



OMAN

CITIZEN 13TH VICTIM OF CORONAVIRUS, 98 NEW CASES REPORTED

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: A 67-year-old citizen succumbed to COVID-19, bringing the total number of deaths to 13, as Oman announced 98 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday.

Fresh cases included 42 Omanis and 56 expatriates. At the same time, 42 patients recovered from the virus infection.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has confirmed COVID-19 cases from home deliveries in some wilayats.

"Five cases were recorded in one family due to contact with home delivery personnel," said a statement.

The number of cases in Muscat has gone up to 1,958, including 552 recoveries.

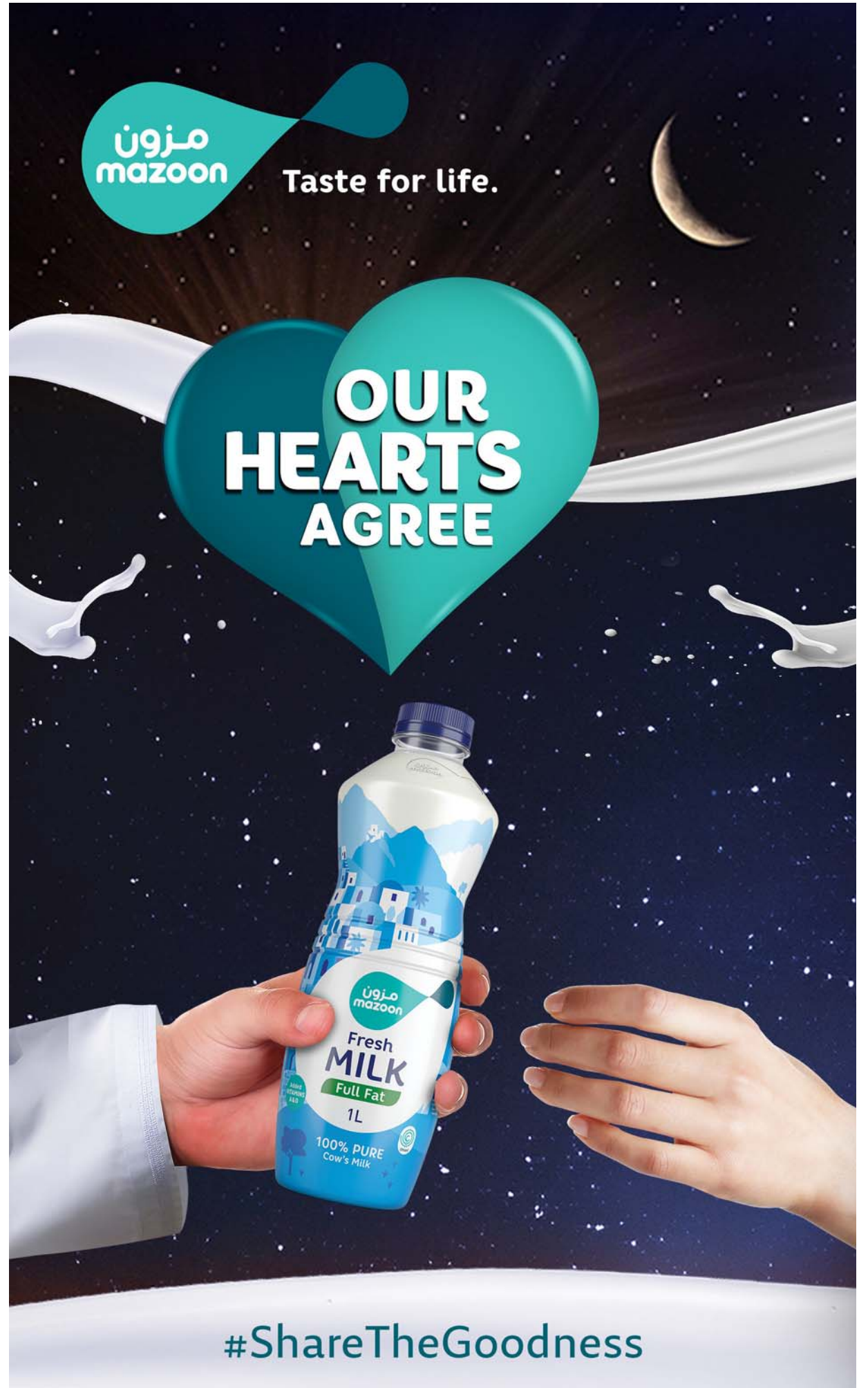
In the capital, Muttrah has 1,493 cases, including eight deaths and 378 recoveries followed by Seeb (230), Bausher, (164), Al Amerat (52), Muscat (16) and Qurayat (3).

South Batinah has 273 cases of which 125 are in Barka and 37 in Rustaq.

South Sharqiyah has 132 cases of which 115 are in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

North Batinah has 133 cases of which 34 are in Shinas. Al Dakhiliyah has 121 cases of which 58 are in Nizwa.

Al Dhahirah has 50 cases of which 37 cases are in Ibri. North Sharqiyah has 35 cases, Dhofar has 17 cases, Salalah 15, Al Wusta 2, Musandam 6 and Buraimi 5 cases.



Multi-Story Car Parking at KOM

Tender No: SIS/002/2020 مناقصة رقم:

مبنى المواقف متعدد الطوابق بواحة المعرفة مسقط

شموخ للاستثمار والخدمات ش.م.ع.م
Shumookh Investment and Services SAOC

Shumookh investment & services Company (SIS) is a closed joint (S.A.O.C) governmental Company established in October 2010 in the sultanate of Oman and is owned by (Madayn) and Omani pension funds. The company is initiated by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estate (Madayn) as its investment arm. It is based in Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), with primary focus on industrial estate in Oman belong to Madayn.

The Internal Tender Committee in Shumookh Investment & Services SAOC invites experienced architectural and engineering consultancy firms to participate in the following Request for Proposal (RFP)

Required services: Architectural, Engineering & Supervision Services	DOCUMENT COST 250 OMR
Project: Design, Construction & Commissioning of Multi-story Car Parking Building at Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM)-Muscat	Non-Refundable

RFP ANNOUNCEMENT DATE	WEDNESDAY, 06 TH MAY 2020	
RFP DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION DATE	SUNDAY, 10 TH MAY 2020	
SITE VISIT	SUNDAY, 17 TH MAY 2020	10:00 AM
RFP QUERY & CLARIFICATIONS PERIOD (FROM- TO)	FROM SUNDAY, 17 TH MAY 2020 TO SUNDAY, 24 TH MAY 2020	
RFP SUBMISSION DATE	THURSDAY, 11 TH JUN 2020	12:00 PM

Interested firms can obtain RFP document upon depositing prescribed tender fee in (Account Number 0104-0613086-001 - name of Shumookh Investment & Services SAOC - Bank Dhofar), and sending application letter or/request with mentioning the tender Number along with deposited receipts to the following email address: tender@shumookh.om
Responses to RFP should be submitted in close sealed envelopes and addressed to Chairman of the Internal Tender committee as instructed in RFP document. Envelopes to be delivered prior RFP submission date and time to SIS office at KOM
Bid bond equivalent to 1% of gross offered value in a form of bank guarantee or certified cheque to be submitted. Further details are explained in the RFP.
RFP technical and commercial proposals should be presented in separate envelopes with no indication of bidder's name
And to be delivered to the company's headquarters in Knowledge Oasis, Muscat (fifth building (KOM5), third floor).

Important Notice: **SIS** has the right to select any offer or to perform a retender without any obligation to bidders



شموخ للاستثمار والخدمات ش.م.ع.م
Shumookh Investment and Services SAOC

شركة شموخ للاستثمار والخدمات ش.م.ع.م هي شركة مساهمة عمانية مغلقة تأسست في أكتوبر 2010 م في سلطنة عمان تملكها المؤسسة العامة للمناطق الصناعية (مدائن) وصناديق التقاعد العمانية، تأسست بمبادرة من (مدائن) كذراع استثمارية لها، وموقعها في واحة المعرفة مسقط، وكما تسعى شموخ لتطوير مشاريع البنية التحتية وتشجيع الاستثمار في المناطق الصناعية التابعة لمدائن.

تدعو لجنة المناقصات الداخلية لشركة شموخ للاستثمار والخدمات ش.م.ع.م شركات الإستشارات الهندسية ذات الخبرة للتقدم للمناقصة التالية:

الخدمات المطلوبة: طلب تقديم العروض لخدمات التصميم والهندسة المعمارية والاشراف الهندسي.	تكلفة مستند المناقصة: ريال عماني 250
المشروع: تصميم و بناء و تشغيل مبنى المواقف متعدد الطوابق بواحة المعرفة مسقط (كوم).	غير قابلة للاسترجاع

تاريخ الدعوة للمناقصة	الأربعاء 6 مايو 2020 م
تاريخ بدء توزيع المناقصة	الأحد 10 مايو 2020 م
زيارة الموقع	الأحد 17 مايو 2020 م
فترة تقديم الاستفسارات عن المناقصة (من - إلى)	من الأحد 17 مايو 2020م إلى الأحد 24 مايو 2020 م
تاريخ تسليم العروض	الخميس 11 يونيو 2020 م

يمكن للشركات المتخصصة في الأعمال المذكورة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة عن طريق إيداع رسوم شراء مستند المناقصة إلى (حساب بنك ظفار رقم الحساب: (0104-0613086-001) باسم شموخ للاستثمار والخدمات ش.م.ع.م)، وإرسال رسالة الطلب مع ذكر رقم المناقصة مرفق بها إيصال الإيداع إلى البريد الإلكتروني الاتي: tender@shumookh.om
وتقدم المقترحات في مظاريف مغلقة مفتومة بالشمع الأحمر موجهة إلى رئيس لجنة المناقصات الداخلية لشركة شموخ للاستثمار و الخدمات وفقا للتعليمات الواردة في مستند المناقصة.
تقديم سند ضمان يعادل 1% من إجمالي القيمة المعروفة في شكل ضمان مصرفي أو شيك مصدق لتقديمه مع المناقصة وفقا للتعليمات الواردة في مستند المناقصة.
تقدم العروض الفنية والتجارية في مظاريف منفصلة دون الإشارة إلى اسم المتقدم للمناقصة ويتم تسليمها إلى مقر الشركة في واحة المعرفة، مسقط (المبنى الخامس الطابق الثالث).
ملاحظة مهمة: شركة شموخ للخدمات والاستثمار لها الحق في اختيار أي من العروض أو إعادة طرح المناقصة دون أي التزام لمقدمي العروض.

Community apathy raises many an eyebrow in Dakhiliyah

RAY PETERSEN

MUSCAT: Despite the significant progress being made in the fight against COVID-19 concerns have been expressed among sections of the community that compliance with governmental regulation and advice are as widespread as they should be.

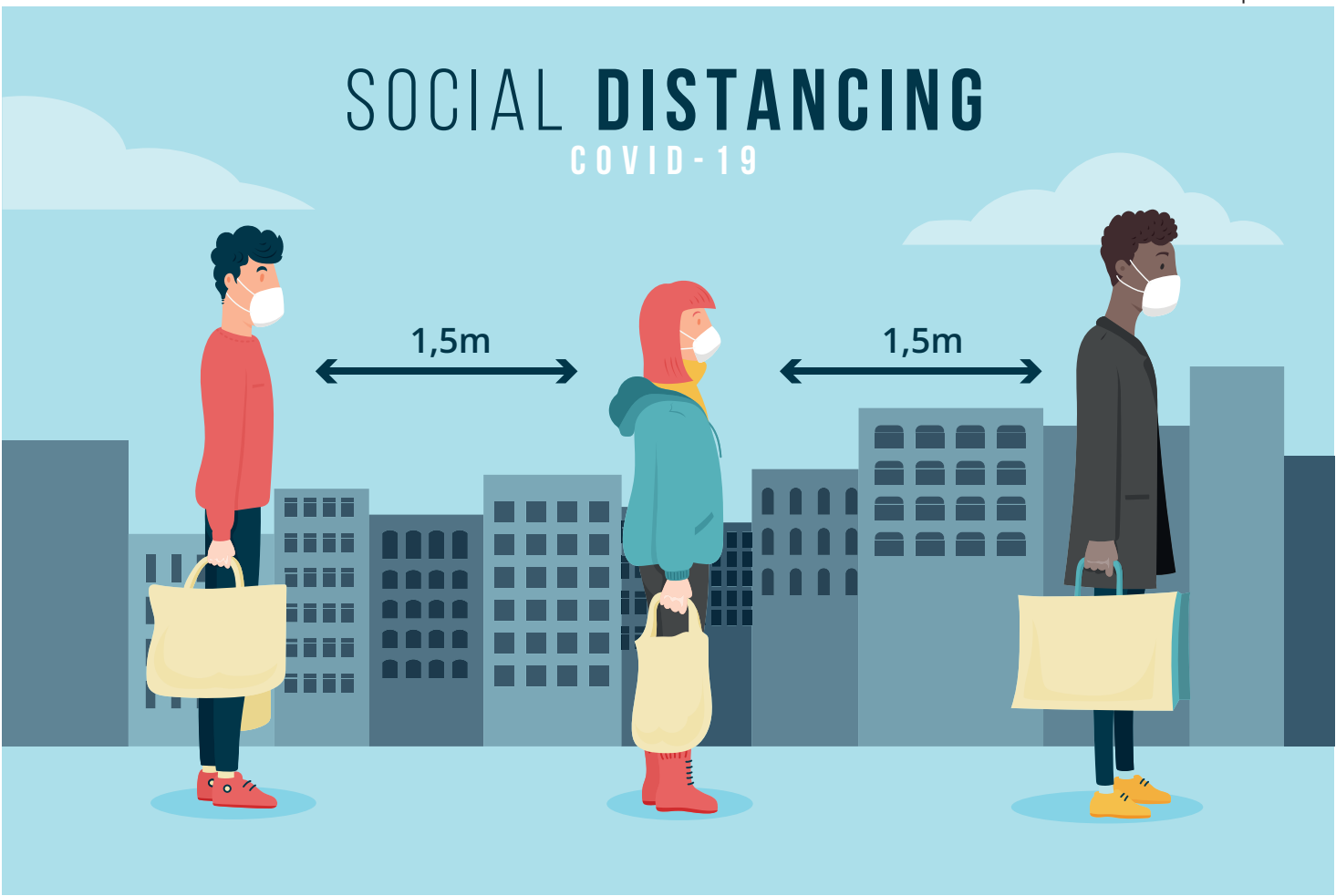
Social distancing is not being widely observed to the extent required to eradicate COVID-19 in several obvious situations. Motorcycles with pillion passengers are just one of several concerns, and when questioned about this in Nizwa one young motorcyclist just laughed and explained how he "Goes too fast for Corona!" Multiple occupancy vehicles, clearly not family members, and none wearing any masks, were commonplace outside local restau-

rants, ordering fast food to go.

The local hypermarkets in the malls of Nizwa have been pro-active in providing hand sanitizer and latex gloves for customers, however, not all are using the gloves, and few are attempting any form of social distancing as recommended as a basic requirement of COVID-19 resistance.

Still, people walk in twos and threes with no change, some holding hands. ATM machines and exchanges are still places of congregation, and banks have made little obvious change to their operations, with no masks in one major bank (though gloves were worn), and no gloves or masks in the other.

Groups of young people are still walking and congregating together, seemingly with no fear of the consequences of their actions.



Not maintaining COVID-19 protocols cause for concern

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Notwithstanding a brilliant defence against COVID-19 in the capital city of Muscat, there are reports of lax approach in faraway governorates where people are seen without masks and gloves at public places and even in hypermarkets.

Not maintaining social distancing is also a matter of concern among those who are following all possible protocols suggested by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and other competent authorities.

"Maybe they are more than assured after looking at the numbers which suggest maximum cases of COVID-19 are there in Muscat and whatever is there in other wilayats like Nizwa, Salalah, Suhar and Sur etc, is very less", said a Salalah resident expressing concern over the trend.

"Since protection is the only solution of the disease as of now, people should not take it for granted. Everyone knows how it magnifies... they should respect the efforts of the country being taken to handle the COVID-19 outbreak. It is everyone's responsibility to abide by the simple safety protocols against the virus that include

wearing mask and gloves while going out of the house, keep maximum possible hand hygiene and maintain social distancing as much as possible", he said.

Most of the hypermarkets are allowing restricted entry by checking body temperature at the entrance and only 10 to 20 people at a time. They are also keeping sanitisers at entrance and exit gates and regularly cleaning shopping carts. It is pathetic, however, to see some people just walking without any precaution and protection.

Similar is the situation at ATM machines, where some people hardly have patience to maintain proper distancing.

"Not everywhere the people from Royal Oman Police (ROP) can go and regulate. This is everybody's responsibility to maintain social distancing and adopt all necessary measures on their own to keep the virus at bay", said schoolteacher Abdullah Khatiri.

It is advisable for everyone to carry his own mask and gloves before visiting any shopping complex or even attending any emergency outside, he said and added even if you have to go to your own office, please use a mask and take care of hand hygiene.

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 :

Omantel users cost 1 RO
Send Donate to 90022

National Bank of Oman
1049337798001

Ooredoo users cost 1 RO
Send Donate to 90909

Bank Dhofar
01040609090001

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

Donations Portal for Charitable Organization
www.donate.om

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

South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate
25541087
Sur / Al-musalla

North Al-Batinah Governorate
26864241
Suhar / Hamra

Musandam Governorate
26731588
Khasab / Al-Shaib

Dhofar Governorate
23234735
Salalah / Al-saada

www.oco.org.om
charity@oco.org.om
24297961 24297960
OCO OMAN

First flight to India on May 9

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: As part of the repatriation mission to take back Indian citizens stranded abroad due to COVID-19 pandemic, the first flight from Oman to India will take off on May 9.

According to a statement from the Indian Embassy in the Sultanate, an Air India flight will fly to Kochi, in the South Indian state of Kerala, with 250 passengers aboard.

The second flight to Chennai will depart on May 12.

The passenger lists for both the flights are being finalised on the basis of information received by the embassy through a post on its website and social media.

“Priority will be given to medical emergency cases, pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as to other people who are stranded in difficult situations”, the embassy said in a statement.

However, according to the statement, the cost of tickets will have

to be borne by the passengers themselves and air tickets will be issued by the airline only after clearance by the embassy.

“The embassy is in the process of contacting the short-listed people for each flight directly through e-mail/telephone”, the statement said.

Other conditions for travel including quarantine requirements in India as well as health requirements to board the flight will be conveyed in due course and will have to be accepted by each passenger.

The embassy will also inform details of further flights to different destinations in India as soon as the same are decided.

“Since there are a large number of requests which have been received by the embassy, it would take time for everyone to be accommodated. We seek patience and cooperation from all as this massive task of repatriation of stranded Indians is undertaken by the Government of India”, the embassy appealed

through the statement.

In view of the social distancing norms prescribed by Government of Oman to contain the spread of COVID-19, visits to the embassy may be avoided without appointment.

For any queries, the following details may be used:

Embassy helpline numbers: +968-24695981, 80071234 (toll free), +968-93577979 (WhatsApp)

Email: cons.muscat@mea.gov.in

Ending weeks of uncertainty over the return of Indian citizens stranded in the Gulf region including all the GCC countries and elsewhere, the Indian Government on Monday announced the details of its mega plan for phased repatriation from May 7.

According to a statement in India, after reaching their destinations, the evacuees would have to register on the Indian government’s Aarogya Setu app which has been developed to alert about COVID-19 crisis and alerts regarding it.

Face masks to be mandatory for air travel: IATA



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: International Air Transport Association (IATA), the body representing global airlines, has recommended the wearing of masks on flights to prevent the spread of coronavirus when flying restarts. The decision is important because apart from special repatriation flights, many airlines including Oman Air are gearing up for resuming services from the first week of June.

“Resumption of flights will depend on the decision of the competent authorities, but preventive measures will be taken both by the airline and at airports,” said a source in the civil aviation authority.

David Powell, the medical adviser to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), said that while normal seat allocation can be maintained, it was recommending the mandatory wearing of masks or face coverings on board.

OMAN OBSERVES WORLD HAND HYGIENE DAY

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Hand washing is one of the most effective actions everyone can take to reduce the spread of infections including the COVID-19 virus. Health workers and community members can help to prevent infections by practising regular and frequent hand washing, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

With this vision, World Hand Hygiene Day (May 5) is celebrated in Oman with this year’s theme of ‘Save Lives: Clean your hands’. It aligns with the International

Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.

Oman’s hospitals and clinics, both government and private, emphasised on the importance of hand hygiene in healthcare facilities, thus protecting healthcare workers and patients from infections on World Hand Hygiene Day.

“We raised extensive awareness on the importance of hand hygiene and



Noora al Zadjal

educated our staff more on the topic of current importance,” said Noora al Zadjal, Head of Infection Control Department at Al Masarah Hospital.

“This year’s campaign aimed to recognise nurses and midwives in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as front-line heroes who deserve recognition, acknowledgement and protection, and to highlight their critical role in infection prevention and control.”

“Good hand hygiene is crucial to improve patient safety and is becoming the front line of defence for the

healthcare team, including nurses and midwives. Now more than ever, the ‘Save Lives: Clean Your Hands campaign’ is vital – in our region and all around the world – to promote hand hygiene and combat the novel corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic,” Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean said, adding that hand hygiene is a vital infection prevention and control (IPC) measure that has been proven to improve the quality of patient care and decrease infections acquired during healthcare.

OMAN

Let us salute the 'white army'

AMAL AL RIYAMI

NIZWA: Doctors, nurses, paramedics, ambulance drivers and other medical staff have been ceaselessly working in Oman and across the world since the emergence of COVID-19. They constitute the first line of defence for nearly 4 million people, despite the risks.

They are not only more susceptible to infection, but they can also be a source of transmission to their patients and their families.

Tedros Adhanom, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said that in some countries 10 per cent of health staff have been infected with coronavirus.

The health workers of Nizwa Hospital are part of the white army of the Sultanate. They are tirelessly working to ensure the health of the people. Nizwa Hospital takes a number of precautions to protect its health workers and patients.

The hospital admits only emergency cases to protect patients from infection and reduce the workload on the hospital.

A temperature test is done for everyone who enters the hospital.

If a patient has COVID-19 symptoms, he/she will be placed in quarantine. The hospital communicates with the infected persons twice a day to check on their health status.

If one doesn't have facility for home isolation, he/she will be shifted to institutional quarantine.

The hospital ensures that health workers wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Likewise, any employee who has any of the symptoms of the disease must stay at home.

Dr Ali al Busaidi, Head of the Emergency Department,



Photo by SAMI AL HINAI

THE HEALTH WORKERS OF NIZWA HOSPITAL ARE PART OF THE WHITE ARMY OF THE SULTANATE. THEY ARE TIRELESSLY WORKING TO ENSURE THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE

said: "We ask the patients whether they have fever, cold, throat pain or respiratory disorders. If there are any suspected cases, they will be shifted to isolation rooms away from other patients. Then nose and mouth swabs are taken and sent to the central laboratory. If the condition is stable and has minor symptoms, then he does not need blood tests", he said.

Dr Ali al Busaidi said 80 per cent of the patients need not be hospitalised and can go home. Those who have symptoms such as chest inflammation are admitted for intensive medical care.

"Test results are not accurate. If we have doubts about a person whose test results are negative, then we re-examine him for the second time and sometimes for the third time to confirm", Dr Ali al Busaidi said.

The samples are sent to Muscat. It takes between 48 and 72 hours.

If a person is infected with the virus, the case will be transferred to internal medicine department. Dr Mohammed bin Khalfan al Shuraiqi, internal medicine specialist, said: "The patient will be under observation to monitor the heart rate, oxygen and temperature. We have a COVID-19 therapeutic protocol. We have two types of patients. If a normal person completes 7 days and becomes asymptomatic, we contact with an infection protection control team and we tell them that this patient is stable and ready to leave the hospital.

The team coordinates with the family to isolate him at home for a week. If the patient is a health worker, then this patient will be screened again to make

sure that s/he is not carrying the virus anymore".

The doctors said the majority of the cases who were in the hospital are stable. They do not need intensive care.

They are very few and most of them are elderly people. There was no case of pulmonary failure or the need for artificial respiration. And no cases reached intensive care. Most of the patients have recovered. Most of the infected are young people.

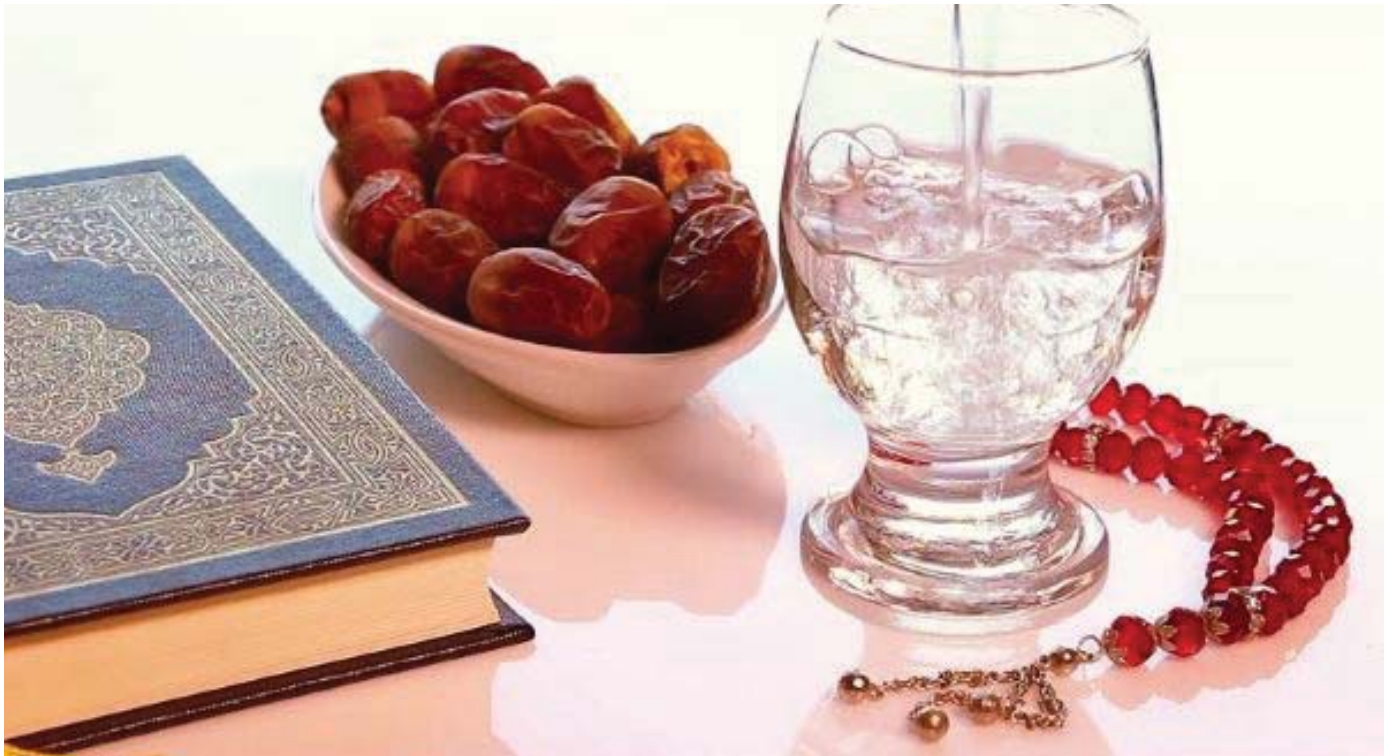
Jalal al Busaidi, a COVID-19 patient from Nizwa, said: "My symptoms were very mild for five days.

The severity of the disease began in the sixth day and lasted until the tenth day. I lost my sense of smell and taste, lost my appetite and lost 3 kg weight. During my isolation, I got in touch with another COVID-19 patient I felt very comfortable.

Thank God, I was isolated in the house with continuous follow-up from the hospital until I recovered completely from the disease".



FASTING RISKY FOR CHRONICALLY ILL



SAMUEL KUTTY

As the COVID-19 continues to rage the world, many are deliberating whether fasting in Ramadhan increases the risk of the coronavirus pandemic, especially in people with chronic diseases.

The doubts gathered steam after warnings circulated on social media that fasting during Ramadhan, when a person refrains from drinking any kind of fluid, might contribute to dryness of the throat, thus accelerating a lung infection from the coronavirus. Also circulated were messages that fasting could weaken the immune system, causing health problems to some people, especially the elderly.

Medical experts and World Health Organization also started advising people to drink plenty of fluids, particularly by gargling with warm water to keep the throat and airways moist. According to Muftis in Islam, there are legitimate reasons why one can be excused from fasting as mentioned in the Holy Quran, such as illness and travel.

Islam says sick people need not fast because it can put their lives at risk. While echoing the same belief, Dr Basheer Alikaparmpil, Specialist in Internal Medicines at Bader al Samaa Hospital, said that people with chronic medical conditions should check with doctors before fasting. "People with non-communicable diseases and pregnant women in particular should be cautious, especially in view of the coronavirus pandemic that they follow-up with the doctors about their health

conditions", he said.

Although there is no evidence to suggest an adverse effect from fasting during the pandemic on asymptomatic healthy individuals who have previously fasted safely, patients with fever and prolonged illness are prone to severe dehydration.

As such, suggests a study by the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at Oxford University, these patients should not fast (or cease fasting) and ensure adequate hydration.

Fasting in Ramadhan involves abstention from drinking any fluids during daytime. Whilst dehydration during the fast is expected, whether fasting leads to chronic dehydration is unclear. Patients with symptoms due to COVID-19 infection such as fever, loss of taste and fatigue may be at higher risk of dehydration. The link between dehydration and outcome in COVID-19 infection is still emerging.

As Dr Basheer puts it, "The COVID-19 infection is a double challenge for people with diabetes". Late diabetic complications such as diabetic kidney disease and ischaemic heart disease may complicate the situation for people with diabetes, making them frailer and further increasing the severity of COVID-19 disease and the need for care such as acute dialysis.

Some findings indicate that COVID-19 could severely cause heart problems. According to International Diabetic Federation, diabetic or heart patients must consult doctors before undertaking fasting, taking into account the severity of illness and the level of risk involved.

FATWA

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



Question

Does having taste of blood in one's mouth invalidate the fast?

Answer

No, it does not if he tried his best to avoid swallowing. However, he is urged to spit it out as much as possible. Allah knows best.



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YouTube f @ omanobserver

Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

WORLD

World leaders pledge \$8 bn to fight COVID-19, but US steers clear

BRUSSELS: World leaders and organisations pledged \$8 billion to research, manufacture and distribute a possible vaccine and treatments for COVID-19 on Monday, but the United States refused to contribute to the global effort.

Organisers included the European Union and non-EU countries Britain, Norway and Saudi Arabia. Leaders from Japan, Canada, South Africa and dozens of other countries joined the virtual event, while China, where the virus is believed to have originated, was only represented by its ambassador to the European Union.

Governments aim to continue raising funds for several weeks or months, building on efforts by the World Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and wealthy individuals, and turn the page on the fractious and haphazard initial response around the world.

"In the space of just few hours we have collectively pledged 7.4 billion euros (\$8.1 billion) for vaccine, diagnostics and treatment" against COVID-19, the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said after chairing the online event.



An airport employee wearing a "Smart-Helmet" portable thermoscanner to screen passengers and staff for COVID-19, stands at boarding gate on Tuesday at Rome's Fiumicino airport. — AFP

It was however unclear what was new funding, as commitments made earlier this year may also be included, EU officials said.

Donors included pop singer Madonna, who pledged 1 million euros, von der Leyen said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has recovered from a life-threatening battle with COVID-19, said the search for a vac-

cine was "the most urgent shared endeavour of our lifetime", calling for "an impregnable shield around all our people". EU diplomats said the United States, which has the world's most confirmed COVID-19 cases, was not taking part.

A senior US administration official declined to say specifically why the United States was not participating. "We support this pledging

effort by the EU.

It is one of many pledging efforts that are going on and the United States is at the forefront", the official told reporters by telephone.

President Donald Trump said last month that he would halt funding to the World Health Organization, whose director general addressed the conference, over its handling of the pandemic. — Reuters

Lifeline for social entrepreneurs

SARAH SHEARMAN

LONDON: A group of 40 global aid agencies and charities launched an alliance on Monday to help social entrepreneurs weather the coronavirus crisis, saying they provided a vital safety net for some of the world's poorest people.

Backed by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the alliance is made up of 40 leading global organisations including the Schwab Foundation, Yunus Social Business and USAID.

Members of the partnership, called the COVID Response Alliance for Social Entrepreneurs, collectively

support more than 15,000 social entrepreneurs who help vulnerable and marginalised groups in about 190 countries.

"Social enterprises support the poorest of the poor and most vulnerable in our world... We have to help them help others," Saskia Bruysten, CEO of Germany-based fund Yunus Social Business, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone.

With many countries living under strict lockdowns, it has become harder for social entrepreneurs - many of whom are directly responding to the crisis - to keep their businesses afloat. Some of them are seeing revenue

plunge or being forced to cease operating.

"We don't know of course how long these lockdowns are going to take so we don't know if we are going to be able to save everyone ... but we are right now saying 'let's give it a shot'", Bruysten said.

The alliance, which also includes the Skoll Foundation, Ashoka, the IKEA Foundation, the Global Impact Investing Network and Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, has collectively raised \$75 million to help social entrepreneurs in the crisis.

—Thomson Reuters Foundation

ANALYSIS

Green recovery can revive economies



Smoke billows from a fire in an area of the Amazon rainforest near Porto Velho, Rondonia State, Brazil. — Reuters file photo

MATTHEW GREEN

Massive programmes of green public investment would be the most cost-effective way both to revive virus-hit economies and strike a decisive blow against climate change, top US and British economists said in a study published on Tuesday.

With co-authors including Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz from Columbia University and prominent British climate expert Lord Nicholas Stern, the findings are likely to fuel calls for “green recoveries” gathering momentum around the world.

“The COVID-19 crisis could mark a turning point in progress on climate change,” the authors wrote, adding that much would depend on policy choices made in the next six months.

With major economies drawing up enormous economic packages to cushion the shock of the coronavirus pandemic, many investors, politicians and businesses see a unique oppor-

tunity to drive a shift to a low-carbon future.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva called for green recoveries last week, and the concept has emerged as a political fault line from the United States to India and South Korea.

While think-tanks and investor groups have also been making the case for tailoring recoveries to accelerate a transition away from fossil fuels, the study aimed to assess such proposals in the light of new data.

The authors examined more than 700 economic stimulus policies launched during or since the 2008 financial crisis, and surveyed 231 experts from 53 countries, including senior officials from finance ministries and central banks.

The results suggested that green projects such as boosting renewable energy or energy efficiency create more jobs, deliver higher short-term returns and lead to increased long-term cost savings relative to traditional stimulus measures. — Reuters

Don't forget kids



SAMUEL KUTTY

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Coronavirus is on a rampage across the world. Oman is no exception. Most of us are now confined to homes. Streets are silent, and the yells and laughter of our children in the parks, are missing.

While our eyes are firmly focused on the struggle to defeat this invisible enemy, let us spare some thoughts for our children who are living without schools and their life limited to the four walls. They are the passive victims of family stress including job loss, and anxieties over health and finances.

Adding to the impact is the excessive use of cellphones and other digital devices, especially most schools moving classes online. With the increasing number of educational apps and the focus on e-learning, the use of mobile phones has increased manifold.

The situation complicates as a majority of parents are now working from home.

Managing time between work and taking care of children has become a daunting task. Everyone is wondering about a solution to this serious problem.

A UN report has revealed that self-isolation has driven more and more children to move online during the pandemic, leading to an unprecedented rise in screen time and raising safety risks for millions of young people. Increased and unstructured time online may also expose children to potentially harmful contents.

At this juncture, schools should take steps to update current safeguarding policies to reflect the new realities for children learning from home and ensure that they have continued access to school-based counselling services. And parents should speak to their children to keep a track on how and with whom they are communicating online and set new social media rules.

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FEATURES



An Algerian Ramadhan



RAY PETERSEN

Looking around the world, and at the way Ramadhan is celebrated, I found a former expatriate American teacher from the University of Nizwa, Amanda Amarotico, who converted to Islam during her time here, and also married Samir, in 2017, while in the Sultanate. The couple had difficulty finding employment in a shrinking job market, and the couple have subsequently returned to the city of Oran, in Algeria. Oran is the second largest city behind Algiers. The city is known as 'The City of the Lions,' and is the birthplace of the famous fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent. Interestingly, the observance is known in Algeria as 'Sidna Ramadhan,' or 'our master's Ramadhan.'

Hana Saada wrote that, "It is traditional also in Algeria to clean and prepare local mosques, and to do a house 'Spring clean,' prior to Ramadhan, so as to welcome guests and visitors to a sparkling clean house, and many women will take advantage of the time of year to insist upon new cutlery and kitchen utensils, and sometimes even carpets and rugs, so the markets do a thriving trade in the month leading into Ramadhan."

Amarotico, herself now firmly established in Algeria, ruefully explained that "This year will be vastly different with coronavirus. Last year we would walk the promenade along the sea-front, with many others, enjoying the beautiful Mediterranean Sea breeze in the evening. Many people would be out and about, shopping and going to cafeterias on the promenade (corniche) and tea being sold by the vendors. It was so nice, but this year there will be none of that."

"None of the mosques are open, and no traditional

gatherings with friends and families in the evenings, but usually the closer family will have Iftar together. Two women friends I worked with all morning preparing the evening's food, rest and read the Quran in the afternoon. We usually break our fast with dates, laban, milk, water, and a soup called Harira, a delicious traditional soup with tomatoes, chick peas, and lentils.

Then we will go to maghreb prayer. After prayers, we take the main, Iftar meal, which will probably include an olive tagine with chicken, fish and lamb. Or maybe slow cooked meat, Jwaz, or roast whole meats, Mechoui, and stuffed grape or cabbage leaves called dolma. Another soup, Chorba hamra fdaouech, is made with lamb, vermicelli and vegetables, lots of salads, vegetables, and traditional breads kesra and khobz eddar, complete a wonderful main meal."

She laughed, "all in all, that's too much food after a fast, and then there are the sweets." The traditional favourites are well known

all around the Mediterranean and Middle East for their sweetness and texture without being sticky. Tamina is a semolina and honey-based dish eaten with a spoon, and in small amounts. Chamia is a semolina and almond cake usually taken with coffee, while Mkhabez is a traditional pastry. The piece de resistance, however, is a melt-in-the-mouth Makroud el louse, a flourless cookie.

All the talk of food does not diminish the fact that Algerians observe their Sidna Ramadhan with any less religious vitality than is appropriate. The call to prayer is followed by trumpet blasts and green lanterns being lit and hung high in the mosques, to advise of the time for Iftar. Readings of the Holy Quran, and Quranic memorisation contests are also high-profile televised events in the country.

Every country is slightly different in its observance of the most important religious month of the Islamic calendar, and Algeria simply adds to the jigsaw.

BUSINESS

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Union appeals for cooperation in averting Omani oilfield job losses

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: The Oil and Gas Sector Labour Union (OGSLU) has warned oilfield contractors against using the pandemic as an excuse to lay off Omani workers in contravention of legal statutes.

It comes as many Omani workers have taken to social media to protest the threatened termination of their services or wage reductions, allegedly in violation of established norms

Speaking to the Observer, Said Ahmed al Mahrouqi (pictured), Chairman - Oil & Gas Sector Labour Union, acknowledged that the Union has been receiving reports of financially hard-pressed employers apparently taking advantage of the crisis to let go of their workers.

"There is no specific number of those laid off to date, but we are getting semi-weekly, if not daily, updates on the situation. We can say there are notifications of hundreds of layoffs, but there are procedures and controls in place before (companies can go down this road). Also, there is a committee set up in the Ministry of Manpower that is concerned about laid-off Omani workers."



**RISEING CONCERNS:
'HUNDREDS' NOTIFIED
OF POTENTIAL LAYOFFS,
SAYS HEAD OF OIL AND
GAS SECTOR LABOUR
UNION**

Oman's oil and gas companies have begun cutting back on investments in their respective concessions, primarily on account of the dramatic slump in crude prices, but also partly because of measures imposed by authorities to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The Oil & Gas Sector Labour Union has been monitoring developments from the outset of the crisis, said Al Mahrouqi.

"There is joint cooperation between the Sector Union, the General Federation, Ministry of Manpower, and Ministry of Oil and Gas on the issue of laid-off workers and for their possible redeployment in other jobs. We understand there is also some cooperation between the Ministry of Oil and Gas and Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) on some labour related proposals."

The official urged contractors and service providers not to use the pandemic as a cover to retrench national workers or reduce their wages. While admitting that the crisis is impacting some companies financially, he however sought to remind employers that they are bound by legal statutes, and more recently, by the directives of the Supreme Committee. **TURN TO P12**

Pact signed to develop Oman's ICT ecosystem



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC) signed on Tuesday a memorandum of understanding with leading telecom solutions provider Huawei to launch a new collaborative effort to develop Oman's digital society and ICT ecosystem. The MoU was signed by Dr Salim bin Sultan al Ruzaiqi, CEO of MTC and Chen Bing, CEO of Huawei Oman.

This MoU represents a long-term cooperation programme between MTC and Huawei Oman to develop the ICT sector in the sultanate. The MoU will see the two entities work together to foster knowledge transfer, develop Oman's ICT talent, and establish new digital processes that will streamline the Sultanate's communications, amongst other benefits.

Dr Al Ruzaiqi, CEO of MTC, said: "We are pleased to tie up with Huawei today to empower the Omani talents and innovators in ICT field. Through this MoU with Huawei, we will use technology to enhance government services, enable businesses to thrive, and build ICT talent and knowledge throughout the Sultanate."

He further added: "One of the key component of this partnership is the cooperation to launch and promote the apps developed by the trainees at Center for Mobile Apps Development through Huawei Mobile Service (HMS) as well as adopting the immerging 4IR technologies to create digital solutions directed towards different life aspects."

BUSINESS

Oman's Jindal Shadeed eyes stake sale: Report

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Indian conglomerate Jindal Steel and Power Limited (JSPL) is weighing a strategic stake sale in its wholly-owned integrated steel complex, Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel (JSIS), located within Sohar Port on the Sultanate's Sea of Oman coast.

The announcement came in an interview by a top JSPL boss to a leading Indian newspaper on Tuesday.

JSPL Chairman Naveen Jindal was quoted by The Economic Times as saying that the group is mulling plans to offload part of its stake in the Oman steel-maker to a strategic investor – part of a wider effort by the Indian business house to reduce its substantial debt pile.

Significantly, a proposed stake sale effectively marks a departure from the group's earlier move to offer part of its equity for public investment via an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

"For a long time, JSPL explored the option of an IPO to encash a part of its Oman operations. But it has



DEBT REDUCTION STRATEGY: INDIAN-BASED PARENT ORGANISATION DITCHES IPO PLAN AND MULLS STAKE SALE TO STRATEGIC INVESTOR INSTEAD

dropped the IPO plan and may go for stake sale," Naveen Jindal told the business daily this week.

The revelation comes against a backdrop of "record-breaking" achievements at the group's Oman subsidiary.

Last month, Jindal Shadeed announced that it had wrapped a banner fiscal year in terms of its operational performance.

The company's financial year runs from April 1 to

March 31. "We are happy to report that 2019-20 was a record-breaking year when it came to our production units," said Jindal Shadeed in a series of tweets.

"All three of our production units performed at their highest ever annual capacities – better than their nameplate production capacities for the month of March 2020," it noted.

The Direct Reduction Iron (DRI) plant, which is the centerpiece of the Sohar com-

plex, achieved its "highest annual production" of 1.775 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) in 2019-20, surpassing its previous best of 1.547 MTPA achieved during the previous fiscal year, the company said.

This compares with a nameplate capacity of 1.5 MTPA, attesting to its superior operational performance during the year.

Likewise, the Steel Melting Shop (SMS) recorded its "highest annual production" of 1.87 million tons in 2019-20, surpassing its previous high of 1.71 million tons in 2018-19, the company said.

Occidental Oman sponsors E-Preparation platform for teachers

MUSCAT: In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Occidental Oman has sponsored the establishment of an electronic preparation platform to serve over 50,000 teachers within the Ministry of Education schools system across the Sultanate.

The E-Preparation Platform aims to contribute in the enhancement and efficiency of online education in Oman, as schools have been following an E-learning based system following rising challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. The system would enable teachers to prepare lessons and material electronically, and conduct daily tasks outside of student teaching, without the need for physical administrative meetings and



office attendance.

The project was implemented in line with the Educational goals of Oman Vision 2040, and is intended to streamline teachers' daily tasks within the current period, as well as serve as a teachers' platform when schools reopen in the future.

The E-Preparation Platform will include features for study materials, classes, scientific lessons, educational goals, and teaching strategies.

Union appeals for cooperation in averting Omani oilfield job losses

FROM PAGE 11

Job losses among expatriate workers, Al Mahrouqi acknowledged, were expected to accelerate going forward as employers are obliged to ease their dependence on foreign labour in line with government policies and guidelines.

Al Mahrouqi thanked the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the care and concern afforded to workers during this difficult time. Efforts exerted by the authorities, together with the operators, will help sustain the livelihoods of workers, many of whom have loans to repay. Concluding, he added: "We urge oilfield companies to engage with us in a constructive dialogue that will enable both sides to come up with appropriate solutions to safeguard the interests of workers and employers alike. We request them not to take any (unilateral) decisions in the form of wage cuts or layoffs without getting the sanction of the Ministry of Manpower and other relevant authorities."

BUSINESS

Pandemic highlights importance of local pharma industries



Haider al Lawati

haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The COVID-19 pandemic and the oil crisis offer many lessons to the world, especially for countries in the region that still depend on oil as a major source of income and revenue.

These crises motivate us to accelerate economic diversification, to take advantage of our available resources, as well as to show more interest in operating the national workforce, which will help in circulating liquid funds within countries and reduce the large monthly financial transfers for expatriate workers.

There are many economic sectors that can be focused on in the GCC states and establish them individually, bilaterally or collectively, including pharmaceutical industries projects that value millions of dollars in annual revenue.

These crises have proven necessary to have them especially in such circumstances.

We see today that we are neglected in the pharmaceutical industries, while we have spent billions of dollars during the past decades on projects and areas of luxury without paying attention to the urgent issues of our societies, not to mention the other billions that are spending in order to ignite and wage wars in the region and beyond.

For decades, we have been calling for industrial integration in the Gulf to ensure that our needs and our commodities of food, medicine, medical equipment, etc. are available whenever we want, but only less has been achieved, while we have been competing with each other in many industrial projects that lead to the loss of some annually.

In the past years, the GCC countries were able to establish a health council among them, but the mission of this council lies in finding a unified system for registering medicines and ensuring their quality and effectiveness.

It also deals with the accuracy of the information related to its manufacture in accordance with

international specifications and standards, regardless of the high price of these medicines in local markets, while the beneficiaries of this are a group of foreign personalities and merchants who control the markets of this necessary commodity.

We appreciate the effort made by the Council to work with its competencies in this regard, such as unifying the registration of pharmaceutical companies, regulations and procedures of registering those companies, standardizing drug pricing, increasing integration and coordination among member states.

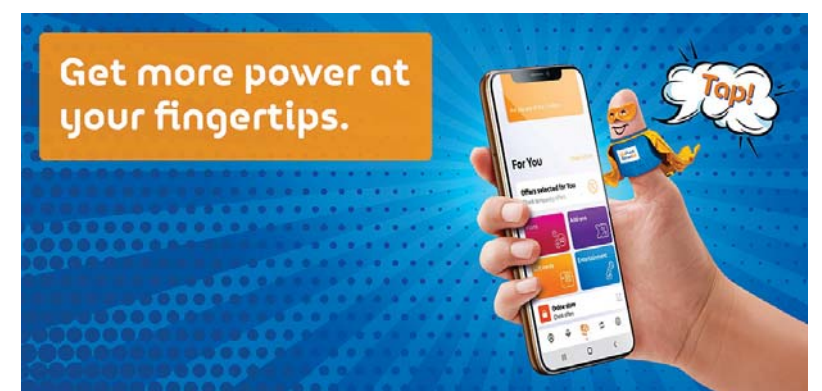
All of these issues are important to the citizen and resident of the region, because these information help to ensure the application of the principles of good manufacturing by companies to medicines, and to monitor their side effects, in addition to using those drugs in an optimal manner and at the lowest costs, and that access to them is safe, effective and affordable.

But what we lack in the region is to have integrated pharmaceutical industries and projects that are distributed among our countries so that we can dispose of them if we need to produce more of them at a time of distress and disease.

We know that the US and European countries avoid giving us the knowledge and expertise necessary for the pharmaceutical industry in the region because of their knowledge that allowing the creation of a pharmaceutical industrial base in the region will reduce the import of medicines from their countries, which are sometimes sold at fictional prices, not to mention what the Gulf citizens spend on the treatment sector annually abroad as a result of lack of specialized hospitals in the region.

Today we must return attention to that, and strengthen coordination between the Gulf health ministries to consider all issues of concern to the people of the region, whether of products, medical devices, medicine, and everything related to human health in general.

Omantel App provides unmatched digital services during COVID-19



MUSCAT: Omantel's smartphone and tablets App which has been recently fully revamped as part of Omantel's plan and efforts to enrich its customers' experience provides many new unmatched features that have proven effective and important in the time of coronavirus spread in Oman.

The updated application features a modern design and sets new benchmarks aimed to enrich users' experience in the Sultanate and the region as well. It is a one-stop-shop which offers all mobile, fixed and internet services. The app has been well received due to the multiple features it offers; and in particular being user-friendly, its simple design, in addition to the face or fingerprint recognition technology further enriching the user experience.

Apart from the services the App offers to consumers – the new Mobile App also provides services to corporate customers enabling them to benefit from a wide array of services and features.

The application features state-of-the-art security standards giving customers peace of mind and unmatched services such as buying new devices, applying for home internet as well as Baqati and Hayyak requests without the need to visit any of Omantel's outlets which have been closed as part of the national plan to defeat the spread of COVID-19 in Oman.

Omantel App also offers eSIM activation for the first time in the region. The eSIM allows customers to use up to 9 numbers at the same time without having to physically switch between SIM cards.

Commenting on this, Dr Jihad Ahmed al Ansari, Senior Expert Digital Services at Omantel said, "Omantel Mobile App that was launched a few years ago has been well received by our customers. As part of our constant pursuit to enrich their experience, facilitate their use of the various services offered by the company and subscribing to additional services, along with the payment of service bills, we initiated a full revamp of the App to make it simple and user-friendly."

Nissan to retrench further in new plan to focus on US, Japan, China



People walk past a dealer shop of Nissan Motor in Tokyo. — AFP

TOKYO: Nissan Motor Co Ltd will pull back from Europe and elsewhere to focus on the United States, China and Japan under a plan that represents a new strategic direction for the embattled carmaker, sources said.

The “operational performance plan” is due to be announced on May 28 and goes beyond fixing problems from ousted leader Carlos Ghosn’s aggressive expansion drive, the people said.

Pursuit of market share, particularly in the United States, led to steep discounting and a cheapened brand. Under the new, three-year plan — reported here for the first time — Nissan aims to restore dealer ties and refresh lineups to regain pricing power and profitability, the people said.

— Reuters

General Electric to cut 13,000 aviation jobs

NEW YORK: General Electric Co said it was planning to cut the global workforce of its aviation unit this year by as much as 25 per cent, or up to 13,000 jobs, including both voluntary and involuntary layoffs, citing prolonged aircraft reduction schedules caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The job cuts are the latest mounting woes for the aviation sector that are now expected to last into 2021 as US passenger air travel demand has fallen by 95 per cent.

Last week, Boeing Co said it would cut 10 per cent of its global workforce, or 16,000 jobs, as it has slowed some production rates, while supplier SpiritAero Systems Holdings said on Friday it is cutting another 1,450 jobs in Kansas.

GE shares were down 4 per cent on at \$6.23.

The GE Aviation job cuts are part of the \$3 billion in cost and cash savings announced by the company last month and include previously announced cuts, including a 10 per cent cut to its US workforce announced in March.

GE Aviation Chief Executive David Joyce told employees



A General Electric (GE) sign is seen at the second China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai, China, in this file photo. — Reuters

on Monday the “deep contraction of commercial aviation is unprecedented, affecting every customer worldwide.

Global traffic is expected to be down approximately 80 per cent in the second quarter.”

GE Aviation previously issued furloughs impacting about 50 per cent of its US maintenance, repair and overhaul employees and new engine manufacturing. It also imposed a hiring freeze, canceled a salaried merit increase and dramatically reduced non-essential

spending.

Neither GE nor Boeing opted to apply for government assistance from a \$17 billion US Treasury fund for national security related companies. Boeing said it would rely on \$25 billion raised in a new bond offering.

Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun said last week he expects it will “take two to three years for travel to return to 2019 levels and it will be a few years beyond that for the industry to return to long-term growth trends.” — Reuters

Australia losing \$2.5 bn a week in virus shutdown

SYDNEY: Australia’s economy is losing Aus\$4 billion (\$2.5 billion) every week its virus shutdown continues, with GDP forecast to plunge 10 per cent in the June quarter, according to figures announced on Tuesday.

The country has enjoyed success in curbing the spread of COVID-19, with new daily cases slowing to single digits or zero across most regions.

But Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said measures to curb coronavirus were dealing a heavy blow to the economy, with GDP forecast to fall 10 per cent in the June quarter.

“For every extra week that the current restrictions remain in place, the Treasury estimates that close to \$4 billion will be reduced in economic activity, from a combination of... reduced workforce participation,



A medical personnel administers tests for the COVID-19 at the Bondi Beach drive-through testing centre in Sydney. — Reuters

reduced productivity, and reduced consumption,” he said.

The estimate came as the Australian

Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported a 7.5 per cent drop in jobs — which it said was equivalent to about 700,000 workers out of an active workforce of some 13 million — in the five weeks to April 18.

A third of workers in the worst-affected hotel and hospitality industries lost their jobs, along with 27 per cent of people in the arts and recreation sectors.

The Treasury has previously estimated the unemployment rate will double to 10 per cent by the middle of the year because of the coronavirus shutdowns, leaving about 1.4 million people out of work.

The ABS also reported that 31 per cent of households nationwide had seen their finances worsen.

— Reuters

BUSINESS

Asian stocks, oil boosted by moves to loosen lockdowns



People are seen on a pedestrian overpass with an electronic board showing the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock indexes at Lujiazui financial district in Shanghai, China. — Reuters

HONG KONG/NEW YORK: Asian stocks rose on Tuesday, tracking a late Wall Street rally as governments eased coronavirus lockdowns while oil extended gains on expectations fuel demand would begin to pick up.

European stocks were set to follow suit, with FTSE futures up 1.31 per cent and EuroSTOXX 50 futures 1.5 per cent higher, after sharp falls on Monday. US stock futures rose 0.75 per cent.

Amid light trading volumes, with China, Japan and South Korea closed for public holidays, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan rose 0.84 per cent.

The gains were led by Australia's ASX 200, which rose 1.42 per cent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng climbed 0.84 per cent.

Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at CMC markets, cautioned against reading too much into the day's moves in

Asia, with few meaningful leads for investors.

"While the rises are good to see, much of the region is still on holiday, and (Australian) volumes are down 10 per cent and that means this won't be too convincing for traders," he said.

The Asian rally followed late US gains with the S&P 500 ending up 0.42 per cent, driven by technology names such as Microsoft, Apple and Amazon.

The upturn followed more optimistic statements from the governors of California and New York for reopening businesses. Several other countries including Spain, Italy, Nigeria, India, and Malaysia also tentatively eased lockdowns.

Brent crude rose 4 per cent to \$28.30 a barrel, up for a sixth straight day, and US crude rose 6.03 per cent to \$21.60 a barrel, as countries began loosening coronavirus restrictions and crude supply cuts took effect. — Reuters

US tariff exemptions sought for China-made goods



Chinese and US flags flutter near The Bund, before US trade delegation meet their Chinese counterparts for talks in Shanghai, China. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: Major US firms and trade groups want the US Trade Representative's Office to waive tariffs on a wide range of Chinese-made products as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, including drones, robots, personal computers and 3D printers.

In March, USTR said it would not impose tariffs on ventilators, oxygen masks, and nebulizers after previously granting exclusions on a large number of health-related products. At the time, the agency opened a docket for businesses and others to raise concerns about existing tariffs "relevant to the medical response to the coronavirus."

The Consumer Technology Association (CTA) and several other industry bodies said in letters made public on Monday that the waivers should be far broader than those directly related to COVID-19 medical care.

Tariff waivers should be granted for sensors and cameras used by doctors to provide telehealth services, robots that can sterilize infected surfaces, 3D printers, drones that can deliver medical supplies, wireless hotspots and laptops for schoolchildren and networking equipment in data centers, for example, CTA said.

"These tariffs are not only a barrier to the entry of necessary products, they are a tax on businesses and consumers that has become ever more harmful as many enter 'survival mode,'" the group wrote USTR.

The National Elevator Industry asked USTR to lift duties on elevator and escalator parts and components that are "essential to the functions of healthcare facilities, hospitals and medical equipment factories." — Reuters

UK economy set to shrink 7pc or more, April PMIs dive

LONDON: Britain's economy is on course for an unprecedented 7 per cent quarterly contraction after measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus forced business closures across the country last month, a business survey showed on Tuesday.

IHS Markit said its monthly Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for the services sector fell to its lowest since the survey started in 1996, dropping to 13.4 in April from 34.5 in March, only a fraction better than an initial flash estimate of 12.3.

Last week's manufacturing PMI was similarly dire, and IHS Markit said that taken together, they pointed to the deepest economic downturn "in



General view of the Canary Wharf financial district London, Britain.

— Reuters

living memory".

A composite PMI of the two sectors dropped to 13.8

in April from 36.0 in March, far below the 50 mark that divides growth

from contraction.

"The April survey reading is consistent with the economy falling at a quarterly rate of approximately 7 per cent, but we expect the actual decline in GDP could be even greater," IHS Markit economist Tim Moore said.

Britain's services PMI does not include retailers, who have been hardest hit by store closures since the March 23 lockdown, or many of the self-employed.

Last month government budget forecasters set out a scenario under which the economy could contract as much as 35 per cent in the three months to June due to the lockdown and for annual output to fall by the most in more than 300 years. — Reuters

Euro zone producer prices plunge in March

BRUSSELS: Euro zone producer prices suffered their steepest fall since the 2008 financial crisis in March, data showed on Tuesday, dropping by more than expected as the COVID-19 pandemic sharply reduced demand for energy.

The European Union's statistics office Eurostat said prices at factory gates in the 19 countries sharing the euro fell by 1.5 per cent month-on-month in March for a 2.8 per cent year-on-year decline.

The former was the steepest decline since November 2008. Economists polled by Reuters had expected drops of 1.3 per cent for the month, and 2.6 per cent year-on-year.



A man wearing a protective mask pushes a shopping cart in an almost empty street during the coronavirus disease outbreak in Rome, Italy.

— Reuters

Producer prices show inflationary pressure early in the pipeline because unless their changes are absorbed by retailers and intermediaries, they directly affect the final price for consumers.

Energy prices tumbled 5.5 per cent on the month and by 11.3 per cent year-on-year in March pulled down by the oil-price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia and falling demand for fuel as economies around the world ground to a halt because of the pandemic.

Without the volatile energy component, industrial producer prices fell only 0.2 per cent on the month and were 0.2 per cent higher year-on-year. — Reuters

SPORTS



‘Returning before US Open unrealistic’

TOKYO: Rising American tennis star Taylor Fritz said on Monday that he is in the best shape of his life preparing to come out of quarantine but believes it is unrealistic to expect that to happen before the US Open in August.

With both the ATP and WTA tours suspended until mid-July at the earliest due to the coronavirus pandemic, Fritz is making the best of isolation at his house in Los Angeles.

The world number 24 has a gym set up at home and use of a private tennis court.

“I am spending more time working out than in training these days. There is nothing else I can really do,” Fritz said on Monday.

Fritz said he could play tomorrow if the tour restarted and believes his extra work during isolation could pay dividends when play resumes.

“I could (play) right now. I have been

practicing enough to keep my level and then with all the gym stuff I have been doing I am in the best shape ever,” he said.

“I am ready to go.”

“I am spending more time working out than in training these days. There is nothing else I can really do

TAYLOR FRITZ
World number 24

“I think this time is going to be really interesting when all the players come back to play because then you are going to see which players took the time to work on their fitness and get stronger and what players didn’t work during this time.” The coronavirus outbreak has played havoc with the tennis season, causing the cancellation of Wimbledon and pushing the French Open back until September.

Tournament organisers are hopeful that the US Open, scheduled to begin in New York on August 25, can go ahead but Fritz isn’t so sure.

“They are aiming for a certain time, but I think that time is a little bit unrealistic,” he said.

“The goal is to play the US Open but personally I don’t know how they are going to be able to do that.”

“They want to be optimistic but it is tough as it keeps being pushed back.”

GOOD PLACE

The enforced break came at a bad time for Fritz, who reached his first ATP Final before losing to Rafael Nadal at the Mexican Open.

“That was a really big result for me so I would say that after that my season was going really well and I was excited to bring that momentum into Indian Wells and Miami,” said the 22-year-old.

— Reuters

Winningest NFL coach Don Shula dead at 90

LOS ANGELES: Don Shula, a masterly coach with a square jaw who won more National Football League games than anyone else and guided the Miami Dolphins to two Super Bowl titles and the only perfect season in league history, died on Monday at 90.

Shula, whose NFL coaching prowess with the Dolphins and the Baltimore Colts from 1963 to 1995 made him one of the most famous sports figures in America, died peacefully at his home, the Dolphins said in a statement.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said Shula will be remembered as one of the greatest coaches and contributors in the history of American football.

“He was a remarkable teacher and mentor who for decades inspired excellence and exemplified integrity,” said Goodell. “His iconic legacy will endure through his family and continue to inspire generations to come.”

The 1972 Miami Dolphins team that Shula guided stands as the only team in NFL history to post a perfect record - 17-0 - as they marched to a Super Bowl victory over the Washington Redskins. The next season, Shula led them to a second straight victory in the Super Bowl, America’s biggest sporting event.

His coaching record in 33 NFL seasons, including regular season and playoff games, was 347 wins, 173 losses and six ties. No coach won more NFL games. Only one other coach, Chicago Bears stalwart George Halas, exceeded 300 wins, with 324. Shula took six teams to the Super Bowl, winning twice.

“I want to count my blessings. I’ve been able to do something for a lifetime that I have enjoyed doing,” Shula, with sunglasses, combed-back white hair and his trademark jutting jaw, said in 1997 as he was enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. “I’ve had good health and I’ve met a lot of great people along the way.” — Reuters



SPORTS



SAM CANE NAMED AS NEW ALL BLACKS CAPTAIN

WELLINGTON: Loose forward Sam Cane was named as the new captain of the All Blacks on Tuesday, taking over from the retired Kieran Read as the three-time world champions enter a new era.

Cane, 28, already captains the Waikato Chiefs in Super Rugby and has been part of the All Blacks' leadership group for several years.

But the 68-Test veteran's selection as skipper comes as a minor surprise, with lock Sam Whitelock widely considered the frontrunner to replace Read.

Coach Ian Foster, installed after last year's World Cup, described the hard-tackling Cane as a "follow-me" type of leader who also had a deep understanding of the game.

"There's massive respect for Sam amongst the players and management, and he's perfectly placed to lead the All Blacks into the future", said Foster.

Cane, a World Cup winner with New Zealand in



There's massive respect for Sam amongst the players and management, and he's perfectly placed to lead the All Blacks into the future.

IAN FOSTER,
ALL BLACKS
COACH

2015, said he was looking forward to the challenge.

"It's honestly just a massive honour and privilege, couldn't wait to tell my parents honestly", he said.

Cane made a remarkable comeback last year after breaking his neck playing against the Springboks in 2018, returning after seven months from a fracture that doctors said was only millimetres from paralysing him,

"It seems like a long time

ago but it's not really and it was a pretty crazy turnaround", he said.

"I just feel very lucky to be able to play rugby, first and foremost".

Foster acknowledged Whitelock and Brodie Retallick were contenders for the role but said appointing Cane "has been my gut feeling for a while".

"He's a straight shooter, he walks the talk... he can annoy you at times, he comes and asks a lot of questions, he challenges, and I think that's exactly what we want out of an All Black captain", he said.

Bledisloe Tests 'very possible'

The All Blacks are rebuilding after a string of retirements following their semifinal exit at last year's World Cup in Japan, including Foster's predecessor as coach Steve Hansen.

With rugby currently shut down because of COVID-19, Foster said promoting Cane would give him time to settle into the position.

— AFP

Nadal pessimistic about return to action before 2021

MADRID: Rafael Nadal does not expect to return to play competitive tennis until 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has decimated much of this year's calendar.

"I hope we can return before the end of the year but unfortunately, I don't think so", the world number two told Spanish newspaper El Pais on Tuesday.

The pandemic has led to the cancellation of Wimbledon and the postponement of the French Open to September, while the status of the US Open, scheduled to take place as usual in late August, is still unclear.

Nadal, however, said he had practically written off the remainder of the year and was looking to the Australian Open in January 2021 as the next tournament he will play.

"I would sign up to being ready for 2021", the Spaniard added.

"I'm more worried about the Australian Open than what occurs at the end of this year. I think 2020 is practically lost. I hope we can start up again next year, I really hope that's the case". — Reuters



SPORTS



“

We trained all the time at home, we had ergometers and a room bike, so we were in shape, we just have to get back into rowing shape, rowing technique

VALENT SINKOVIC
Olympic sculls champion

Olympic champions back on the water as Croatia eases lockdown

ZAGREB: Olympic sculls champions Valent and Martin Sinkovic have returned to outdoor training after lockdown restrictions in Croatia were relaxed.

Croatia entered lockdown in March to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus, but with cases declining the government has eased the curbs on movement.

The Sinkovic brothers, who won the men's double sculls event at the Rio Olympics in 2016, have spent the lockdown training at home, but carried their boat out to Lake Jarun in Zagreb for a light session on Monday.

"We trained all the time at home, we had ergometers and a room bike, so we were in shape, we just have to get back into rowing shape, rowing technique", elder brother Valent told Reuters.

"That will take more than a week, probably a couple of weeks".

The Tokyo Olympics, originally scheduled to start in July, have been postponed to July 23-August 8, 2021, due to the outbreak, but younger brother Martin said the change in dates had not



affected him.

"I honestly don't think about it too much. I prepare as if it was going to be the Olympics", he said. "I had that attitude before they postponed it this year.

"Hopefully everything will be fine. I don't want it to be delayed again, but it is how it is and we'll adjust to the new situation".

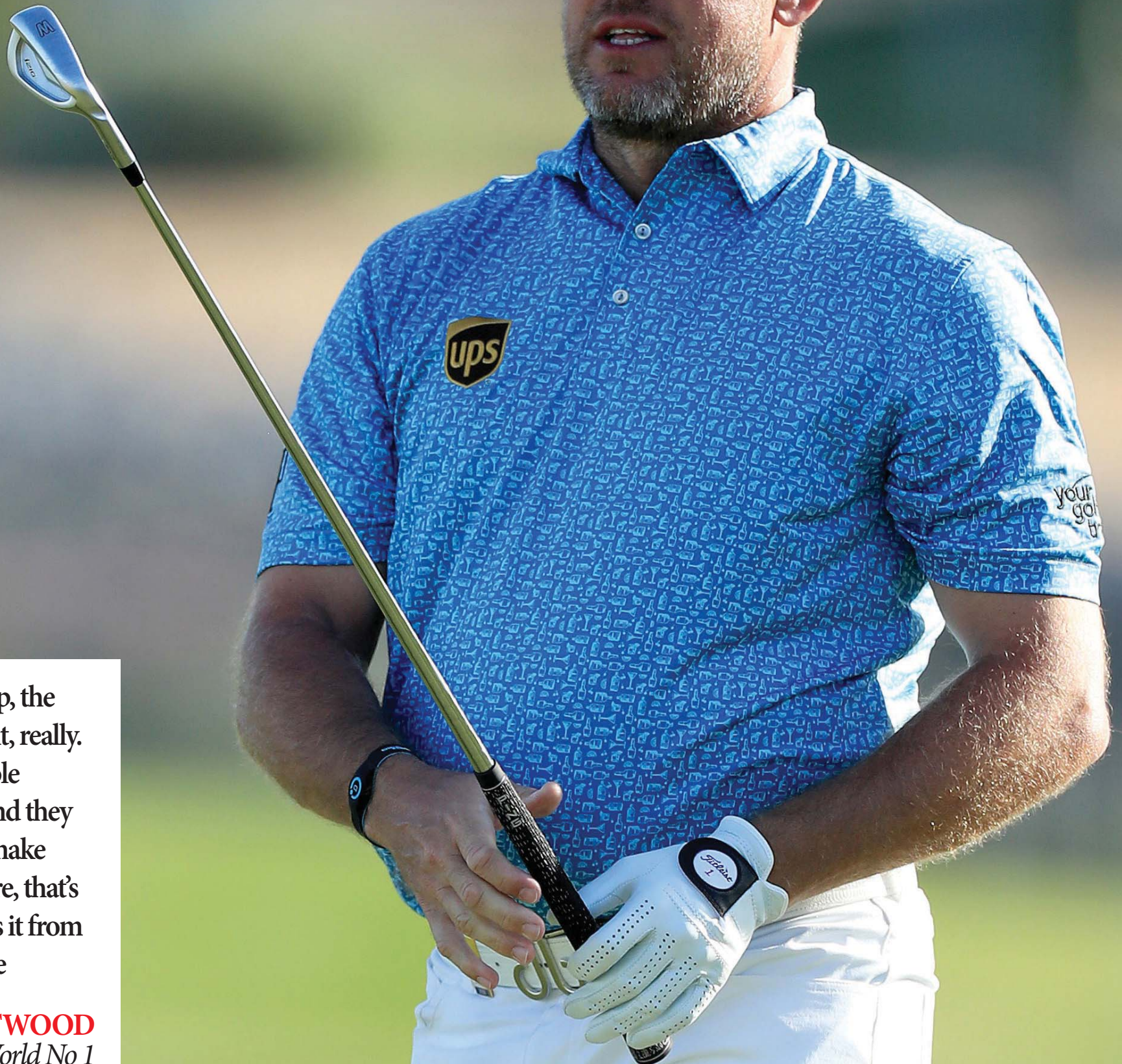
"We motivate ourselves day after day, we try to be better, we try a better technique", he added. "Now our focus is more on ourselves than on competition". — Reuters

SPORTS

“

The Ryder Cup, the crowds make it, really. It's an incredible atmosphere and they (the crowds) make the atmosphere, that's what separates it from everything else

LEE WESTWOOD
Former World No 1



‘Tough to visualise Ryder Cup without fans’

NEW YORK: Former world No 1 Lee Westwood joined the chorus of players questioning whether the Ryder Cup should be played in September if fans will not be permitted on the course.

“The Ryder Cup, the crowds make it, really,” Westwood told talkSPORT, per Sky Sports. “It’s an incredible atmosphere and they (the crowds) make the atmosphere, that’s what separates it from everything else.”

“The fans have chosen one side or the other rather than cheering for good shots or the players. It’s a tough one to visualise, someone holing the winning putt and turning to an empty stand with their arms in the air. If there’s one sporting event that needs the fans, it’s the Ryder Cup.”

While European team cap-

tain Padraig Harrington said the event might have to “take one of the team” and be played without fans this year, current No 1 Rory McIlroy said last month that a Ryder Cup without fans is “not a Ryder Cup.”

That sentiment was echoed by second-ranked Jon Rahm.

Last week, Rahm said that the event isn’t “worth playing” without fans.

The Ryder Cup is scheduled to be played at Whistling Straits in Wisconsin from September 25-27.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, PGA of America CEO Seth Waugh said this year’s Ryder Cup could take place without fans. Harrington said that while playing without fans might not be in the best interest of the event, it might serve the greater good of the sport.

“You don’t just get golf fans watching the Ryder Cup, you get actual sports fans and it captures everybody’s imagination,” Westwood said. “At some point we’re going to have to come out of this and give people something to watch and entertain people. Ryder Cup is just another one of those things.”

“We’re just on a watch and wait style of thing with the Ryder Cup. September is still quite a long way away so we can just bide our time before we can make a decision, and there’s a lot of things to take into account. I’m glad it’s not me who has to make that decision!”

Three of the four annual majors have been rescheduled and The Open Championship was cancelled. The current plan calls for the PGA Tour to

resume in mid-June, with at least the first four events being contested without fans.

“If those PGA Tour events go well, behind closed doors, then we’re far more likely to see a Ryder Cup as normal,” Harrington said.

“It massively increases the odds of being with fans because by September we may have moved on. I assume there’s no chance of a vaccine (by September) so we’re looking at how well contained it is by then and how treatable it is.”

Rahm has heard that discussion, but told Sky Sports that, “for me, A Ryder Cup without the spectators is just not a Ryder Cup.” If it was up to me, and I hope I’m not alone in this, I think they should just delay it and be able to get it done in 2021 with spectators.” — **Reuters**