

P9

JAPAN PREPARES NEAR \$1 TRILLION STIMULUS TO CUSHION VIRUS IMPACT ON ECONOMY



P10

LIFE THROUGH THE LENS



P12

WADA CHIEF WARNS AGAINST DOPING DURING CORONA CRISIS



HM discusses COVID-19 with leaders



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday spoke to Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait; Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar; King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa of Bahrain, and Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India over phone to discuss coronavirus situation.

The conversations touched on existing ties of cooperation

between the Sultanate and the respective countries. They also reviewed the efforts being exerted at different levels to curb the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and alleviate its impact on humanity.

The leaders wished His Majesty Sultan Haitham good health, happiness and a long life and the Omani people further progress and prosperity.

HM ISSUES FIVE ROYAL DECREES

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday five Royal decrees on Tuesdau

Royal Decree No 44/2020 endorses the Sultanate of Oman's joining the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) scripted in New York on December 20, 2006.

Article (1) approves the Sultanate of Oman's joining the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) scripted in New York on December 20, 2006 in accordance with the version

attached to this decree, without prejudice to the reservations below:

First: The Sultanate of Oman declares that it does not recognize the specialties (discretions) of the committee tasked with cases of enforced disappearance as stated in Article (33) of the aforementioned convention.

Second: The Sultanate of Oman announces that it is not bound by the provisions of Clause (1) of Article (42) of the aforementioned convention.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the above-mentioned

Convention Joining Document in accordance with the provisions of the convention, while observing the reservations stated above.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall take effect from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 45/2020 endorses the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment scripted in New York on December 10, 1984.

TURN TO P2

Sultanate in transition towards summer

Mahout and Haima touched 42 degrees Celsius on Tuesday while Nizwa, Marmul, Duqm and Thamrait recorded 40 degrees. Should that indicate arrival of summer?

"Not really", says Meteorology Specialist at the Public Authority for Civil Aviation adding, "We are in the transition month. The summer in Oman starts in May and lasts until September or October".

The humidity in Muscat is ranging between 25 per cent and 50 per cent, while it is between 45 per cent and 85 per cent in Salalah. The humidity has been higher in the coastal areas of Oman while the days are hot and dry in the desert. Currently it is high pressure over the Sultanate and according to the experts at Met Office, stable weather is being expected with some low level cloud formation along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and Al Wusta Governorate with late night and early morning fog patches.

TRA to ensure better connectivity

The Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) Oman has issued different measures as part of its endeavour to safeguard connectivity as the Sultanate is gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the measures are expected to mitigate some of the operational challenges, they also extend to pricing with TRA urging providers to review prices and introduce incentive offers to services.

"Licensed telecom operators may review the prices of their packages and introduce incentive offers to enable nationals and residents to achieve the maximum possible benefits from the telecommunications services during this emergency case", the statement said. **SEE P3**

Support nurses and midwives

On the World Health Day (WHD) themed "Support nurses and midwives," Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, thanked nurses and the health workers for their significant efforts, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak. In the midst of this global coronavirus pandemic, nurses and other health workers are at the forefront of the COVID-19 response, providing high quality, respectful treatment and care, leading community dialogue to address fears and questions and, in some instances, collecting data for clinical studies. They often work in challenging circumstances providing care to patients and risking their own lives while they fight for the lives of others. **SEE P4**

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 34°C
MIN: 22°C

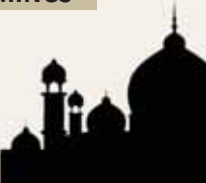
SALALAH
MAX: 32°C
MIN: 23°C

NIZWA
MAX: 38°C
MIN: 22°C

SUNRISE 05.52 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:35
DHUHR: 12:14
ASR: 15:31
MAGHRIB: 18:30
ISHA: 19:42



18-month-old baby recovers from virus

PEAK 2-3 WEEKS AWAY: EPIDEMIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION CAMPAIGN TO START IN MUTTRAH

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

In a big boost to the battle against COVID-19, an 18-month-old baby became the youngest in the Sultanate to survive the coronavirus infection, announced the Ministry of Health on Tuesday.

The government has warned that the situation is yet to peak in the country even as the country reported on Tuesday the highest number of COVID-19 cases in a single day.

The MoH announced the registration of 40 new confirmed cases, bringing the total cases to 371. It added that six patients have recovered from the infection.

With 73 cases reported in the last

two days, Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, in separate interviews, said the peak of the pandemic in Oman is two to three weeks away.

"The peak of COVID-19 in the Sultanate is likely to start, according to current data, within two to three weeks from now", he said. The cases could hit 1,500 during that period, he said. He said the government has started an epidemiological investigation campaign by visiting every house in Muttrah.

He added that a large number of test kits have arrived which will help intensify the campaign to stop community spread.

The minister said that a large number of expatriates are also getting

Special flights to bring citizens from abroad

MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Sultanate in Tanzania has announced the operation of a Oman Air flight for those who wish to return to the Sultanate. Similarly, flight will be operated from Karachi, Pakistan to bring the citizens. An additional plane will take off from Auckland, New Zealand on April 10 in coordination with Qatar Airways to bring back Omani students. Another flight on April 10 will bring Omani students from the Australian cities of Melbourne, Sydney and Perth.

SEE P3

affected, which is a cause of concern. Out of 371 cases, 219 are Omanis and 152 are expatriates.

The infant, who caught the disease from one of his parents, was admitted to hospital's paediatric ward after suffering from rapid breathing and mild cough. He was under a two-day observation for investigation, scan and treatment. The baby is now in a good health after being discharged from hospital.

The capital continues to top the list with 293 cases and 29 recovered, followed by Al Dakhiliyah (23 cases), South Batinah (16), Musandam (3), Al Dhahirah (3), South Al Sharqiyah (1), Buraimi (1), North Batinah (22), Dhofar (8). North Al Sharqiyah recorded the first case on Tuesday.

WhatsApp makes it impossible to forward a viral message to more than one chat

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook Inc's WhatsApp tightened message forwarding limits on Tuesday, restricting users to sharing forwarded content one chat at a time after a jump in messages touting bogus medical advice since the start of the coronavirus crisis.

The pandemic, which has killed more than 70,000 people worldwide, has been accompanied by what the World Health Organization (WHO) has called an "infodemic" of misinformation, prompting governments and other authorities to urge social media companies to do more to combat the problem.

WhatsApp, which has more than 2 billion users worldwide, said in a blog post it made the change after observing



a "significant increase" in the number of forwards since the start of the coronavirus crisis.

"We believe it's important to slow the spread of these messages down to keep WhatsApp a place for personal conversation", the statement said.

A WhatsApp spokesman said the new limit was in place indefinitely.

The service has been imposing gradual

curbs on message forwarding since 2018, after viral rumours on its platform triggered a wave of mass beatings and deaths in India.

Since last year, users have been able to forward a message to only five individuals or groups at once, down from an earlier limit of 20. The app also labelled any messages that had been forwarded more than five times.

Facebook and Twitter (TWTR.N) have responded to the deluge of inaccurate medical information posted in recent months by barring users from posting misleading information about the coronavirus, including denials of expert guidance and encouragement of fake treatments.

But direct content moderation is not

possible on WhatsApp, where chats are protected by end-to-end encryption blocking even the app itself from viewing content shared by users.

That allows groups of hundreds of people to exchange texts, photos and videos, with no way to monitor the messages' origin or full reach.

WhatsApp said in its blog post that the previous limits set on forwards led to a 25 per cent decrease in such messages.

The app also encourages people to flag suspicious content to fact checking organisations and has enabled the WHO and national health authorities to share reliable information about the new coronavirus on the service using automated accounts. — **Reuters**



ARE CHILDREN VULNERABLE TO COVID-19?

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

While the novel coronavirus continues to harvest thousands of new cases and hundreds of deaths daily around the world, parents have fears of the possibility of their children being infected with the virus. However, the percentage of COVID-19 cases among children is low compared to adults, suggest some statistics.

Dr Jumana al Abduwani, Head of Child Health Section at the Ministry of Health, said that children cannot be excluded from having COVID-19 as there are several under- 19 cases reported from around the world. Even in the Sultanate, as announced days back, there is a one-year- old child who was infected but is now recovered and discharged from the hospital.

About symptoms, Al Abduwani explained that the symptoms of the disease are flu-like symptoms and they are same in children as in adults. “Fever, cough and trouble breathing are some symptoms. The severity may vary from person to

person depending on the immunity of the body, the doctor said.

She further urged parents to adhere to their kids’ vaccination timetable. “In parallel with the necessity to adhere to the instructions of the Ministry of Health to avoid crowded places in order to prevent the spread of the virus, it is also necessary to take vaccinations prescribed for the child while taking the necessary precautions when visiting health establishments”. She advised “not to postpone the vaccinations because it may lead to more serious diseases”.

Dr Jumana advised to be careful and take precautions at home by sterilising door handles and wiping surfaces with disinfectants, as well as caring for personal hygiene by hand washing. “It is important to train children on this issue and educate them about social distancing under this situation so that they get trained in healthy habits and improve their lifestyle”, she emphasised.



PACP receives 2,300 complains in just 10 days

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

As many as 2,300 complaints relating to various violations on the markets were received by the Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP) just in a period of 10 days.

According to PACP, the complaints were received through different channels during the period from February 25 to April 5.

“Of the total number of cases, 893 complaints were filed through social media channels, while others were made online or through call centres”, said Khalid bin Mansour al Anqudi, the head of PACP’s communication centre.

He said that majority of the complaints related to price rises, violations of safety specifications and standards, failure to compliance with food safety norms and absence of labels on different products.

While the PACP’s offices in all the governorates received complaints, the highest was in Muscat with 287 complaints followed by Suhar with 282, Al Seeb 279. Nizwa and Salalah a received 123 and 98 complaints, respectively. The lowest number of complaints was registered in Dibba with two complaints.

Al Anqudi said that the authority has initiated action in all the cases in accordance with the laws relating protection of consumer rights.

HIS MAJESTY ISSUES FIVE ROYAL DECREES

FROM PAGE 1

Article (1) approves the Sultanate of Oman’s joining the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment scripted in New York on December 10, 1984 in accordance with the version attached to this decree, without prejudice to the reservations below:

First: The Sultanate of Oman declares that it does not recognise the specialty (discretion) of the anti-torture committee stated in Article (2) of the aforementioned convention.

Second: The Sultanate of Oman declares that it is not bound by the provisions of Clause (1) of Article (30) of the aforementioned convention.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the

above-mentioned Convention Joining Document in accordance with the provisions of the convention, while observing the reservations stated above.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall be enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 46/2020 endorses the Sultanate of Oman’s joining the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights scripted in New York on December 16, 1966.

Article (1) approves the Sultanate of Oman’s joining the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights scripted in New York on December 16, 1966 without prejudice to Oman’s reservations to the provisions of (A, D) of Clause (1)

of Article (8) of the aforementioned Covenant pertinent to “the right to form syndicates” and “the right to strike” for employees in government units.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the above-mentioned Covenant’s Joining Document in accordance with the provisions of the covenant, while observing the reservations stated above.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and takes effect from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 47/2020 ratifies the Agreement Between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of India on Mutual Waiving of Visas for Holders of Diplomatic, Special,

Service and Official Passports, signed in Muscat City on February 11, 2018.

Article (1) ratifies the above-mentioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and be enforced on its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 48/2020 amends some provisions of Royal Decree No 29/2019 on the appointment of members of the Human Rights Commission.

Article (1) appoints Khalid bin Ahmed bin Said al Saadi, as Member of the Oman Human Rights Commission, to replace the member whose name is stated in Clause (3) of Article (1) of the above-mentioned Royal Decree No 29/2019. — ONA

SAF, ROP continue efforts to check virus



The military and security services continue to control the checkpoints on the roads linking the governorates.

MUSCAT: The Sultan’s Armed Forces alongside the other security services continue to provide support to the relevant departments to carry out the directives of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the spread of the coronavirus in the Sultanate.

The joint national work mechanisms between the state’s military, security and civil bodies have already been fully activated within the context of the ongoing efforts aimed to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of this, the Sultan’s Armed Forces, represented by the Medical Services Department, continues to provide medical support to citizens and residents as the Armed Forces Hospital in Salalah, in cooperation with the health institutions in Dhofar Governorate, is bracing to set up field hospitals and deploy them when required.

The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) is making great efforts to transport goods and equipment while maintaining a high level of preparedness to facilitate any difficulties that would face the citizens and residents in all governorates of the Sultanate.

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) is transporting petroleum products to the Governorate of Musandam as

part of a plan aimed to support the other state sectors which have been affected by the ongoing measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus. RNO is providing great services to ensure an interrupted flow of essential commodities for citizens and residents.

On the other hand, the military and security services continue to control the checkpoints on the roads linking the governorates. Joint units from the Sultan’s Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police (ROP) have activated joint checkpoints in Al Wusta Governorate in implementation of the Supreme Committee’s decision to limit the movement of citizens and residents between the governorates.

The SAF and ROP call upon all citizens and residents to abide by the instructions issued by the Supreme Committee and the relevant authorities which aim to stem the spread of the coronavirus outbreak. SAF and ROP direct all motorists to carry their ID cards and labour cards commending the cooperation of citizens and residents with the officers at the checkpoints.

The SAF stressed that everyone should stay at home and avoid going out unless it is extremely necessary. — ONA

Oman in transition towards summer

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

Mahout and Haima touched 42 degrees Celsius on Tuesday while Nizwa, Marmul, Duqm and Thamrait recorded 40 degrees. Should that indicate arrival of summer?

“Not really”, says Meteorology Specialist at the Public Authority for Civil Aviation adding, “We are in the transition month. The summer in Oman starts in May and lasts until September or October”.

The humidity in Muscat is ranging between 25 per cent and 50 per cent, while it is between 45 per cent and 85 per cent in Salalah. The humidity has been higher in the coastal areas of Oman while the days are hot and dry in the desert.

Currently it is high pressure over the Sultanate and according to the experts at Met Office, stable weather is being expected with some low level cloud formation along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and Al Wusta Governorate with late night and early morning fog patches.

The summer has specific dynamics in weather patterns of Oman that

is due to the various features of the Sultanate ranging from Al Hajr Mountains to the water bodies that shapes the coast of Oman and not to forget the desert.

Summer in Oman brings in the late afternoon rains to Al Hajr Mountain, the monsoon (Khareef) to Salalah and the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone. The thermal lows experienced over the Empty Quarters and other areas of the region influences the southwesterly winds and monsoon in the Arabian Sea.

“Thermal lows are a result of dynamics due to the wind circulation experienced in Oman and the adjoining areas of the Arabian Peninsula including India and Pakistan. It is the dynamics of southwesterly circulation of air. The thermal can be found over the Empty Quarters and the region and it also has an impact on the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea and is associated

with the development of the monsoon system which is known as the Indian Monsoon System”, explained Mansoor Hilal al Shabibi, Meteorology Specialist at PACA.

Yet another intriguing feature of summer in Oman is the mixing zone known as the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone.

“The Inter Tropical Convergence Zone is found along Oman’s coast through Dhofar and Sharqiyah where there is a maritime air convergence and experiences the thermodynamics of tropical and continental air from the Arabian Sea and with an exception of Al Hajr’s formation of cloud development and summer time convections”, he explained.

Al Hajr Mountains become very active during the summer months generating late afternoon rains at times frequently even with thunder showers which meteorologists say are

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IN SALALAH

TRA measures to ensure better connectivity

PRICE REVIEW: Licensed telecom operators may review the prices of their packages and introduce incentive offers

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

The Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) Oman has issued different measures as part of its endeavour to safeguard connectivity as the Sultanate is gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 12-point plan provides details about how the Sultanate's telecom regulator is working with operators and service providers.

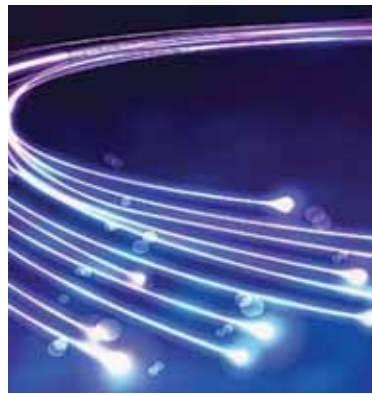
"In line with the efforts taken by the Sultanate to prevent the spread of coronavirus, TRA Oman has taken a number of measures to ensure the continuity of the telecom services and avoid network congestion due to increased demand", the telecom regulator said in a statement.

While the measures are expected

to mitigate some of the operational challenges, they also extend to pricing with TRA urging providers to review prices and introduce incentive offers to services.

"Licensed telecom operators may review the prices of their packages and introduce incentive offers to enable nationals and residents to achieve the maximum possible benefits from the telecommunications services during this emergency case", the statement said.

Employee protection is a major point asking telecom companies "to find mechanisms and means to ensure the continuity of service and avoid termination of service to any services or small businesses in case of inability to pay due to COVID-19 disruption



The 12-point plan provides details about how the Sultanate's telecom regulator is working with operators and service providers

and communicate alternatives and available payment mechanisms".

Other points in the measures taken by the regulator include coordinating with the licensees to ensure the business continuity for the provision of telecommunications services and

maintain its quality during the current circumstances and apply succession planning if required.

It calls for providing free distance learning facility in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to all educational institutions with websites

ending with (edu.om) in order to spare parents and students from any extra financial burdens.

The measures also aim at ensuring an easy access to networks from multiple points through several access points from different areas.

It allows the licensees to provide telecommunications services by activating the wireless broadband service through WFB-LTE-FDD using the 4G frequencies that were temporarily licensed for the mobile telecommunications services.

Other points in the measures include instructions to the licensees to take all the preventative measures within the environment of business companies to curb the spread of the Coronavirus and protect their

employees against infection.

As part of the measures, it has been allowed to use VoIP applications such as Skype for Business, Google Meet, Zoom and WebEX and encourages the licensees to operate the National Roaming Facility whenever necessary.

It offers "an opportunity for the licensees to use additional frequency bands without obtaining radio licence during this period if necessary". It will allow them to use the planned frequencies required for "delivering services or connect the base stations".

Further, TRA will "assign licensed companies with additional spectrum, especially in the C-band, to improve the quality of service and mitigate the pressure on the telecommunication networks if they wish".

Muttrah residents commend govt steps

MUSCAT: Citizens in the Wilayat of Muttrah in the Governorate of Muscat have expressed their deep appreciation for the great efforts taken by the Government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to contain coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In particular, they commended the precautionary measures announced by the Supreme Committee, including the total lockdown of the Wilayat of Muttrah and the ensuing flow of foodstuff and other requirements to the wilayat as soon as the confinement started to take place in the morning of April 2.

Dr Said bin Salim al Wahaibi, Member of Majlis Ash'shura, said that the relief aid is made in coordination with the Office of Wali of Muttrah, Al Rahma Association,

Muttrah Charity Team, Oman Charitable Organisation (OOC) and a group of restaurants and outlets.

He added that contact with members of the Supreme Committee has secured ongoing support and that this goes hand in hand with public awareness efforts to maintain a Stay-at-Home safeguard.

Dr Tahira bint Abdulkhalik al Lawatia, who represents Wilayat of Muttrah at Majlis Ash'shura, said that assistance is extended to Omani and expatriate families alike in the locked down wilayat.

Tawfeeq bin Abdulhussein al Lawati, Head of Muttrah Charity Team, said that his team lent support, in particular, to families subsisting on day-to-day incomes hit hard by the



closing of shops and the cessation of tasks, such as taxi driving and teaching instruction, tailoring, sewing and shop-keeping.

Al Rahma Association gave out foodstuff enough to sustain the livelihood of needy families for a period of 15 days, he said, adding that Oman Charitable Organisation distributed 2,000 food baskets containing rice, flour, cooking oil and sugar to needy families, enough to cover a period of one month as a first stage to support the Wilayat of Muttrah's estimated 10,000 Omani families and 180,000 expats.

Salim bin Mohammed al Ghammari, Member of the Municipal Council, Muttrah, said

that the Wali's Office launched a collaborative initiative aimed to collect zakat and distributed the alms to the needy in the wilayat, inhabited by about 230,000 people, of them 40 per cent are Omanis.

Al Ghammari pointed out that there is still scope for collecting donations through the OOC, Al Rahma Association and other private agencies.

Ali Ibrahim Shunon, OOC's CEO, said that two teams of volunteers, operating under the charitable organisation, sprang to action to lend support to low-income families whose livelihood was impacted by the lockdown in the Wilayat of Muttrah.

Another 7 teams, using 7 trucks,

continued to operate around the clock on distributing provisions to families in the area of Hamriya. The teams, which worked in accordance with a tight timeframe, covered the whole area and completed the distribution of 2,000 parcels of 15 basic foodstuffs, with each parcel weighing 80 kilograms.

Thanks to the support of Royal Oman Police (ROP), the teams who met their schedule and are proud to be in service of the dear homeland, said Shunon, noting that, just within 48 hours, the OOC formed teams of volunteers, with 1,169 youth including doctors, nurses and engineers ready to answer the national call of humanitarian action in any part of the Sultanate. —ONA

Special flights to bring back citizens

MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Sultanate in Tanzania has announced the operation of a direct Oman Air flight for those who wish to return to the Sultanate.

The flight will leave from Dar-es-Salaam at 2.20 pm and at 3.50 pm from Zanzibar on April 10.

"The embassy requests citizens who are in Tanzania and who wish to return to reserve their seats with the Oman Air Office", the statement said.

PAKISTAN

The Embassy of Oman in Islamabad and the Consulate General in Karachi announced on Tuesday that SalamAir will be operating a special flight on April 10 to help Omani citizens in Pakistan return home.

The embassy has called on all Omani citizens wishing to return to the Sultanate to go to Karachi, where the flight will be operated on Friday (April 10) morning. For more details and coordination, contact the following numbers: Islamabad: +92-3145181819 Karachi: +92-

3333224248 Earlier, the embassy had reassured the Omani citizens present in Pakistan that the necessary arrangements have been made and in coordination with the relevant Pakistani authorities to return them to the homeland as soon as possible.

NZ AND AUSTRALIA

The Consulate General of the Sultanate in Australia said that an additional plane will take-off from Auckland, New Zealand on April 10 in coordination with Qatar Airways to bring back Omani students.

The Consulate General has called on the Omani scholarship students in New Zealand who are willing to return to the Sultanate to complete the travel booking. It also directed the Omani students who showed their desire to come back to complete their booking on one of the flights departing for the Sultanate on April 10 from the Australian cities of Melbourne, Sydney and Perth.

— ONA



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SALUTE TO HEALTHCARE WORKERS ON WORLD HEALTH DAY



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

Thousands of healthcare workers, doctors, nurses and paramedics were all out there on duty 24X7, taking part in the battle against the pandemic on this World Health Day which falls on April 7 every year.

Nurses and midwives are the people who devote their lives to caring for mothers and children; giving lifesaving immunisations and health advice; looking after older people and generally meeting everyday essential health needs. They are often, the first and only point of care in their communities.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the world

needs 9 million more nurses and midwives if it is to achieve universal health coverage by 2030.

On this World Health Day, observed this year as the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, WHO celebrates the work of nurses and midwives.

“Around the world nurses are demonstrating their compassion, bravery and skills as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, World Health Day, we celebrate the work of nurses and midwives and remind world leaders of the critical role they play in keeping the world healthy”, said the WHO Representative to the Sultanate.

THE WHO OBSERVES
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According to the annual report released by the Ministry of Health, there are nearly 9,000 doctors, about 20,000 nurses and nearly 2,500 pharmacists working in Oman’s healthcare sector. As many as 266 government health clinics and 1,000 private clinics are operating in the country.

In order to be truthful to their profession, these medical practitioners sacrifice a lot of things which a commoner can’t even imagine.

“Yes, we do sacrifice a lot in life wherever in the world we are. We know it for sure that in service to humanity, we need to let go so many things”, Dr Benny Panakkal, Medical

Director, Badr al Samaa.

“Health is everyone’s responsibility”, says Salu Jose, Academic Coordinator of Mental Health Nursing programme, Higher Institute of Health Specialties.

“The potential risks healthcare workers are facing are numerous. Compared to many professions healthcare workers’ sacrifices are high in magnitude. This includes the long years of study, nature of work, life-long learning, potential health hazards they face at work, emotional stress, burnouts (especially health workers in critical care areas) make them heroes”, adds Salu.

The first report titled ‘State of the World’s Nursing Report’ by WHO

and Partners Nursing Now and the International Council of Nurses highlights the status of nursing around the world (with regional and country data) and makes a series of recommendations to strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce - a need that is being starkly highlighted by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The report provides an in-depth look at the largest component of the health workforce and identifies important gaps and priority areas for investment to strengthen nursing around the world.

With this in mind, the World Health Assembly has designated 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.

Role of nurses and midwives hailed

MUSCAT: On the occasion of the World Health Day, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, expressed his warmest thanks to the nurses in particular and the health workers in general for their significant efforts, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The minister also praised the role and achievements of the

staff working in the health sector including doctors, administrators, and technicians throughout this period.

“The current situation makes the theme of the World Health Day and the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife even more relevant and meaningful as we acknowledge and pay tribute to all health workers. We

need to ensure that all nurses and midwives operate in an environment where they are safe from harm, including those providing services in countries in emergency. We need to ensure that they have access to a functioning healthcare service”, said Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

“If we do not strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce, healthcare systems will be unable to provide efficient and quality care. Investing in nurses and midwives improves health, promotes gender equality and supports economic growth. On this World Health Day, as we acknowledge the critical contribution of nurses and

midwives in improving health systems, I call on Member States to accelerate efforts and invest in nurses and midwives to address the alarming shortage in this vital health workforce, which is compromising the efficiency and quality of health services in our region”, Dr Al Mandhari stated.

UK PM in intensive care, needed oxygen after COVID-19 symptoms worsened

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was in intensive care on Tuesday after receiving oxygen support for serious COVID-19 complications, leaving his foreign minister to lead the government's response to the accelerating outbreak.

Johnson's personal battle with the virus has shaken the British government just as the United Kingdom enters what scientists say is likely to be one of the most deadly weeks of the pandemic, which has killed 5,373 people in Britain and 70,000 worldwide.

Johnson, 55, was admitted to St Thomas' Hospital across the River Thames from the House of Commons late on Sunday after suffering persistent coronavirus symptoms, including a high temperature and a cough, for more than 10 days.

His condition rapidly deteriorated over the next 24 hours, and he was moved to an intensive care unit, where the most serious cases are treated. Although he had received oxygen, his office said on Monday he was still conscious and was moved to intensive care in case he needed to be put on a ventilator.

"He's not on a ventilator no," Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove told LBC radio on Tuesday. "The prime minister has received some oxygen support and he is kept under, of course, close supervision."

"The prime minister is in intensive care, being looked after by his medical team, receiving the very, very best care from the team at St Thomas' ", Gove said.

PM duties for Raab

Johnson is the first leader of a major



power to be hospitalised for the new coronavirus. While Britain has no formal succession plan should a prime minister become incapacitated, Johnson had asked Foreign Secretary

Dominic Raab to deputise for him "where necessary", Downing Street said. Raab entered Downing Street on Tuesday to chair the government's COVID-19 emergency response

meeting.

Earlier on Monday, Johnson had said he was in good spirits and Raab had told a news conference that the prime minister was still running the

Boris Johnson, 55, was admitted to St Thomas' Hospital across the River Thames from the House of Commons late on Sunday after suffering persistent coronavirus symptoms, including a high temperature and a cough, for more than 10 days

government, although Raab also said he had not spoken to him directly since Saturday.

Raab takes the helm at a pivotal time. The official death toll in the United Kingdom currently stands at 5,373, and last week the health minister said the deadliest peak for deaths was projected to be Easter Sunday, April 12.

The United Kingdom is in a state of virtual lockdown, a situation due to be reviewed early next week, and some ministers have suggested it might need to be extended because some people were flouting the strict rules.

The pound edged lower against the dollar and the euro in Asia on Tuesday, trading at \$1.2234 following a 0.3 per cent decline on Monday.

— Reuters

India allows limited exports of anti-malaria drug after Trump warns of retaliation

NEW DELHI: India, the world's main supplier of generic drugs, said on Tuesday it will allow limited exports of the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine that US President Donald Trump has touted as a potential weapon in the fight against the coronavirus.

The Indian government had put a hold on exports of hydroxychloroquine as well as on the pain reliever, paracetamol, saying stocks were depleting because of the hit to global supply chains after the coronavirus emerged in China late last year.

But Trump spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the weekend seeking supplies and on Monday said India may face retaliation if it didn't withdraw the ban on exports.

India's neighbours, including Nepal, have also sought the anti-malaria drug.

"It has been decided that India would licence paracetamol and HCQ in appropriate quantities to all our neighbouring countries who are dependent on our capabilities", said Indian foreign ministry spokesman Anurag Srivastava.

"We will also be supplying these essential drugs to some nations who have been particularly badly affected by the pandemic", he said.

Use of hydroxychloroquine has soared as the United States has quickly become the epicentre of the pandemic, though doctors prescribing it have no idea whether it works.

US fatalities from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus, hit 10,902 on Monday, rapidly closing in on Italy and Spain, the countries with the greatest loss of life to date, according to a Reuters tally of official data.

In addition, the Indian government said it was lifting curbs on the export of 24 pharmaceutical ingredients and medicines made from them that includes several antibiotics, such as tinidazole and erythromycin, the hormone progesterone and Vitamin B12.

"After having confirmed the availability of medicines for all possible contingencies currently envisaged, these restrictions have been largely lifted," foreign ministry spokesman Srivastava said.

— Reuters

Robots replace Japanese students at graduation amid coronavirus

TOKYO: Spring graduation ceremonies in Japan have been cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic, but students at one school were able to attend remotely by controlling avatar robots while logged on at home.

The robots, dubbed "Newme" by developer ANA Holdings, were dressed in graduation caps and gowns for the ceremony at the Business Breakthrough University in Tokyo.

The robots' "faces" were tablets that displayed the faces of the graduates, who logged on at home and controlled the robots via their laptops.

One by one, the robots motored towards the podium to receive their

diplomas. School staff clapped and said "congratulations!" as University President Kenichi Ohmae placed the diplomas on a rack mounted on the robot's midsection.

"I think this is truly a novel experience to receive a certificate in a public area while I am in a private space", Kazuki Tamura said via his computer avatar when receiving his master's degree diploma.

The university hopes its approach can be adopted by other schools looking to avoid mass gatherings.

Reflecting the human world, however, the school limited the ceremony to just four graduates so that the robots could practice social distancing amid the pandemic.

—Reuters



Riding out the pandemic, Rio surfers catch a wave of controversy

RIO DE JANEIRO: Despite stay-at-home orders aiming to protect people from the new coronavirus, many of Rio de Janeiro's famous beaches have been buzzing with surfers seeking to catch the season's first big swell.

That has thrown surfers such as Guilherme Faria headlong into a public debate about the legal limits on outdoor sports - in his case, a question that will be soon be decided by a judge.

The 22-year-old said he was catching 9-foot curlers on Copacabana Beach on Sunday morning when a policeman with a whistle between his teeth hauled him out of the water and down to the station.

"Unfortunately, surfing is now a crime", said Faria, who received a court summons - seen by Reuters - after his booking. "I hope I don't end up with a criminal record for something as silly as that".

A few hours later, even with the threat of a fine, Faria and his board were back in the Copacabana surf.

Like thousands of Rio's famously sporty locals, Faria could not resist the call of the outdoors. The esplanade lining the city shore is packed with joggers. Groups of spandex-clad bicyclists zip up and down the city's serpentine mountain roads.

On March 17, city and state officials implored residents to stay at home, nominally closing beaches and city parks as the coronavirus pandemic tears through Latin America's third-largest city.

Rio is Brazil's second-most infected state, according to the Health Ministry, which reported 12,056 confirmed coronavirus cases across the country as of Monday.

Some athletes have complied, citing the danger of spreading the disease en route to beaches. Many argue that sports-related injuries

could divert vital medical resources away from the coronavirus fight. The debate has also roiled other solo sports, from skiing to climbing.

"There are different opinions among different sports associations. New guidelines come out every week", said Ana Carolina Corte, the official doctor for the Brazilian Olympic Committee. She added that some sports could still be done "alone, without crowds, without running alongside other people".

Even legal decrees have been subject to debate. The governor of Rio state, for instance, banned "spending time at beaches", as some might describe a surfer bobbing in the water, but not a roller skater gliding past.

Yet some surfers have argued they merely cross over the sand to enter the ocean or even enter the water via rocky outcroppings. Still, many athletes acknowledge their concerns pale next to the challenge

Brazil faces. State governors, including those in Rio de Janeiro, have warned that underfunded public healthcare systems could soon collapse.

Bruno Bocayuva, a surfing journalist in Rio, has given up surfing for weeks in favor of jumping rope, doing push-ups and keeping in shape any way he can.

"I'm really missing that sensation of being in the water, of paddling, of catching a wave, of connecting with nature through surf, which provides such an intimate connection. But I know this is the moment to think of the collective good", he said.

"I'm letting this wave pass, to surf the next one in the near future". Perhaps due to its high visibility or anti-establishment vibes, surfing has emerged as unique target of ire across the region.

In Costa Rica, a video on social media last week showed a police officer apparently firing a gun in the

direction of 28-year-old law student Rafael Villavicencio as he left the water.

Reuters could not verify the video's authenticity. The head of the Costa Rican police said they had opened an investigation into the incident.

Argentina's media heaped scorn on one surfer for entering the country from Brazil with boards on the roof of his car. The man later violated a mandatory quarantine, according to police.

Argentine President Alberto Fernandez called him "an idiot" on national television.

Similarly, Peruvian authorities raised eyebrows when they nabbed two surfers in a highly publicized operation involving a police helicopter.

In Brazil, a surf-crazed nation where urban beaches are often clogged before and after work, the debate has taken an acrimonious

and even political turn.

President Jair Bolsonaro has berated Rio Governor Wilson Witzel for closing beaches, calling the move "dictatorial". Bolsonaro's son Eduardo, a congressman from Sao Paulo state, just down the coast, argued in a Facebook post on Thursday for a decree to allow surfing that conforms with social distancing.

With or without a decree, many surfers are simply doing what they can to dodge attention - and each other.

"I came early to avoid this total isolation controversy", said Ricardo Bacao, a 65-year-old surfer from Rio's Ipanema neighborhood, as he exited the water on Sunday morning.

"In the same way that people run, they hike, they ride bikes, somebody can grab a board, leave the house, go directly to the water, paddle and go home". — Reuters

Online meal firms hit by coronavirus crisis

T

he lockdown of millions of people at home across the globe due to the coronavirus should have been the perfect recipe for success for the burgeoning online meal delivery market.

But some of the world's largest players, including Uber Eats and Just Eat, which is being bought by Takeaway.com, have been hit by a double whammy: restaurant suppliers have been ordered to shut and with more time at home to cook for themselves, some people appear to have lost their appetite for takeaway.

While many restaurants have switched to offering takeaway, giving the online services a bump in members signing up, some of the world's biggest food chains using the apps, such as McDonald's and Wagamama, have closed for the time being.

Data from SimilarWeb, which tracks downloads and use of smartphone apps and websites across key European markets, highlights the scale of the slowdown

across Europe as the pandemic spread and governments ordered people to stay at home.

In France, Spain and the United Kingdom, Just Eat and Uber Eats saw drops in average daily users ranging from 2 per cent to as much as 23 per cent in March, compared with the averages for January and February. Deliveroo also saw falls in France and Spain, although a small increase in the United Kingdom, the data shows.

The falls reflect a big drop in repeat customers. Some 90% of activity on apps is reorders, according to SimilarWeb.

The data is in stark contrast to the double-digit percentage increases in grocery delivery volumes over the same period as people rushed to stock up as they went into lockdown.

The numbers offer a glimpse into how the virus has quickly changed people's food ordering and cooking habits and has put the brakes on a fast-growing industry.

Before the virus, the European industry,

Restaurant suppliers have been ordered to shut and with more time at home to cook for themselves, some people appear to have lost their appetite for takeaway

worth about \$16.5 billion in revenue, was expected to grow by 10 per cent per year over the next decade, according to Statista.

Just Eat and Deliveroo declined to comment on the data. An Uber spokesman said the impact of the virus had varied widely across Europe, but it had seen big increases in restaurants and shops signing up to its app.

In other parts of the world, the picture is less clear. Takeaway.com has seen early signs in Asia of a pick-up in demand after a slowdown in the early stages of lockdowns there. Giving the first insight into the impact in China, the original epicentre of the outbreak with the first lockdowns, Chinese food delivery service Meituan Dianping said last week it expected to report a first-quarter loss after a drop in orders.

In the United States, Grubhub said demand for takeout appeared to be recovering in some parts of the country, but it was a different picture in places including New York, where a bustling restaurant scene has battered down the hatches as restrictions kick in.

Uber Eats, Grubhub, Delivery Hero and Just Eat Takeaway - whose merger is awaiting UK regulatory approval - have offered incentives to restaurants, including cutting commission or delivery fees and signing up new members more quickly,

to improve their cashflow and help them through the crisis.

That should provide a boost to their own membership numbers in the long run once orders improve. Grubhub signed up more than 20,000 new restaurants in March, far exceeding its previous monthly record of 5,000, said Maloney. Deliveroo got 3,000 new UK restaurants on board last month, a spokesperson said.

The loss of business has prompted some to branch into new markets. Delivery Hero is expanding into supplying groceries to customers stuck at home and Uber Eats has broadened its grocery offering by teaming up with supermarkets like Carrefour.

Uber Eat's grocery and convenience store sales have more than doubled in some European cities, the Uber spokesman said. Delivery Hero is offering its grocery service for free and is trying to make it pay by selling high-margin consumer products, CEO Niklas Ostberg said. — **Reuters**



Lockdowns, initially slated to last 14 days, began in Lagos and the capital, Abuja, on March 30.

Saving lives, but ruining livelihoods in Africa

ALEXIS AKWAGYIRAM, MFUNEO TOYANA

I

n a dark ground-floor room in Lagos, dressmaker Kemi Adepoju gazes at a pile of dresses she has made but which cannot be collected due to the lockdown in force to slow the spread of the new coronavirus.

"This lockdown came upon us suddenly. I used all my money to buy fabric. If I had known, I would have ... used it to buy food instead," said the mother-of-two, who runs her business from a room she rents in the Iwaya suburb of Nigeria's largest city.

Like millions in Africa, Adepoju works in the informal sector, which accounts for more than 85% of employment across the continent and will be largely bypassed by meagre economic support measures that cash-strapped governments are rolling out.

The International Monetary Fund said in a blog on the outbreak's impact on Africa last month that "social distancing" was not realistic for the most vulnerable, and the notion of working from home was only possible for the few.

"The very measures that are crucial to slowing the spread of the virus will have a direct cost on local economies," it said. "The disruption to people's daily lives means less paid work, less income, less spending, and fewer jobs."

Lockdowns, initially slated to last 14 days, began in Lagos and the capital, Abuja, on March 30.

The government of Africa's most populous country has announced a repayment moratorium for government loans made to small businesses ranging from market traders to farmers, and has said it will offer similar relief to large companies.

Muda Yusuf, director general of the

The International Monetary Fund said in a blog on the outbreak's impact on Africa last month that "social distancing" was not realistic for the most vulnerable, and the notion of working from home was only possible for the few

Lagos Chamber of Commerce, said the self-employed in cities would not benefit from these measures because they are aimed mainly at rural areas and no relief has been offered on commercial loan repayments.

"These measures are not likely to trickle down to people in the informal sector," he said.

The government says it has begun making cash transfers to the country's poorest households, but many hawkers and other informal traders do not have bank or mobile money accounts to pay into even if they were eligible.

Some 60% of Nigerians do not have a bank account, according to the World Bank.

There is a danger that government support will not reach those who need it most, said Tunde Ajileye, a partner at risk consultancy SBM Intelligence.

The coronavirus crisis has piled more pressure on the Nigerian government's finances at a time when it was already struggling with a slump in the price of oil, the mainstay of the economy.

Even South Africa, the continent's most developed economy, has not been able to promise a massive fiscal stimulus to cushion the coronavirus blow, with the economy already in recession and unemployment hovering around 30%.

It has announced tax relief for small businesses worth 500 rand (\$26.50) per month for each worker for four months, and will permit businesses with revenue of 50 million rand (\$2.66 million) or less to delay paying 20% of their employee tax liabilities over four months.

But no support has been offered so far to the informal economy, which provides employment to 25-30% of South African workers, according to the World Bank.

For many, all they can do is hunker down for a 21-day national lockdown to end, and hope business will pick up again.

"I work in a public space, which puts me at risk," said Natasha Mbayo, a hairdresser in Johannesburg's inner city. "Once everything is fine, I can get back to earning money."

Others are defying the lockdown to survive.

"I know I am not supposed to be sitting here selling, but I don't have a choice," said 69-year-old Lucy Malimele, who was selling spinach at a quieter-than-usual market in the crowded township of Soweto one day last week.

"If I didn't come, I would not have had money for these two loaves of bread."

Malimele has sold fruit and vegetables at the Kliptown market since 1983, relying on the trade to feed her family, including eight grandchildren.

— **Reuters**

Social groups urge debt relief for poor countries

N

early 140 campaign groups and charities urged the IMF and World Bank, G20 governments and private creditors on Tuesday to help the world's poorest countries through the coronavirus crisis by cancelling debt payments.

The call, spearheaded by the British-based Jubilee Debt Campaign, comes a day before a Group of 20 working group tasked with the coronavirus response for developing countries is due to meet.

Separately, Ghana Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta, who chairs the Development Committee advising the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), singled out China - Africa's largest bilateral creditor - to do more to relieve its debt burden.

The Jubilee Debt campaign urges the immediate cancellation of 69 poor countries' debt payments for the rest of the year, including to private creditors, estimating that it would free up over \$25 billion for the countries, or \$50 billion if extended through 2021.

Major governments and institutions are already pushing for some of the measures the groups are calling for.

The IMF is making \$50 billion available from its emergency financing facilities and some 80 countries have already asked for help. The World Bank has also approved a \$14 billion COVID-19 response package.

The institutions are also making a joint push for official bilateral creditors to allow low income countries to suspend their debt service payments for 14 months from the start of May.

But Tuesday's message from the charities and campaign groups echoed the recent concerns of African governments - that it won't be enough. Ethiopia said in a proposal submitted ahead of the G20 meeting that Africa alone is likely to need \$150 billion of support.

When the IMF and World Bank launched their Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief programme in 1996, nations mainly owed money to wealthy countries and multilateral institutions. No longer. China's government, banks and companies lent some \$143 billion to Africa between 2000 and 2017, according to Johns Hopkins University, while African governments have taken on over \$55 billion in international commercial debt in the past two years alone.

Experts say any effort to provide a debt moratorium or more comprehensive debt relief to developing countries will struggle without China taking on a key role in the process. Yet, Chinese officials have said little publicly about their stance.

The debt campaign group's statement, whose signatories included the likes of Oxfam and Save the Children, also called for the creation through the United Nations of a systematic and enforceable process for sovereign debt restructurings. — **Reuters**



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GCC securities regulators discuss sustainability of equity markets during COVID-19 crisis

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

The Committee of Presidents of GCC Securities Commissions held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the efforts of the GCC stock market regulators to support the markets during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The meeting, which took place on April 5, reviewed developments in the GCC stock markets and the impact of the pandemic. Abdullah Salim al Salmi (pictured), Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), represented the Sultanate during the meeting.

The meeting comes as part of the role of the GCC securities regulators to enhance financial stability, financial diversity and protection of investors and stakeholders in securities from manipulation of markets based on the available tools of the regulators and preventive measures.

The committee reviewed the methods adopted by the GCC capital markets regulators to ensure continuation of the business of the markets through regulatory facilities, electronic transformation, remote work and coordination of each regulator with the monetary institutions and central banks in the GCC states to support the market through economic and financial packages launched by



THE PRESIDENTS OF THE GCC SECURITIES COMMISSIONS EMPHASIZED THE STRENGTH OF GCC FINANCIAL MARKETS AND THEIR ABILITY TO FACE THE CHALLENGES AND CRISIS AND THAT THEY ARE CLOSELY MONITORING THE POTENTIAL IMPACT TO FEND OFF THE RISKS AND TAKE THE REQUIRED MEASURES.

GCC governments and instructions to government funds to increase their investments in the stock exchanges and other stimulus packages adopted by



GCC states to mitigate the economic and financial impact resulted from the outbreak on the listed companies in the GCC states.

The committee affirmed efforts to monitor and follow up the

developments in the local and global markets and continuous communication between the stock exchanges to assess and monitor the development of the crisis and take the required precautionary action to hedge

the risks and support the operational structure and infrastructure of the financial market and supervising general meetings through technology. The presidents of the GCC securities commissions emphasized

the strength of GCC financial markets and their ability to face the challenges and crisis and that they are closely monitoring the potential impact to fend off the risks and take the required measures.

Tethys Oil revises 2020 capital expenditure citing COVID-19

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

Tethys Oil AB, through its wholly owned subsidiary Tethys Oil Oman Onshore Limited, has put in place plans to enable reduced expenditure in 2020 in response to the sharp drop in oil prices and increased uncertainty resulting from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. While maintaining an unchanged production guidance, the range for 2020 capital expenditure is expected to be lower and somewhat wider than previously communicated, the Swedish oil company said.

The upstream energy firm continues to plan for a first exploration well on Block 49, a pure exploration play acquired in late 2017, and works to secure a suitable drilling rig. Discussions with rig contractors are progressing. At the end of March 2020, the Company received final government approval for its acquisition of a 20 per cent interest of Block 56. Testing operations of wells on Block 56 have been ongoing throughout the first quarter.

Magnus Nordin, Tethys Oil Managing Director, said: "The situation we are currently experiencing is unprecedented. The COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme volatility in energy prices provides a tremendous challenge to the entire world. Tethys



THE UPSTREAM ENERGY FIRM CONTINUES TO PLAN FOR A FIRST EXPLORATION WELL ON BLOCK 49, AND WORKS TO SECURE A SUITABLE DRILLING RIG.

Oil is working closely with all relevant authorities and partners to assure our personnel is safe and that operations can continue as close to normal as possible. Our strong financial position offers further security for all Tethys Oil's stakeholders at this difficult time. The plans we have put in place aim to assure that Tethys Oil stays cash flow positive for the full year 2020 (before distributions to shareholders) at an oil price of \$30 per barrel. We are hopeful things will normalise soon but until that happens, we will follow the situation very closely and are prepared and ready to take whatever action necessary to ensure our staff's safety and the company's financial stability."

"Plans have been put in place to enable the reduction

and deferral of certain capital expenditures while maintaining production levels and flexibility in response to further changes in the market environment. Tethys Oil now expects total investments in oil and gas properties for the full year 2020 to be in the range of \$50m – \$64m (previously \$64m – \$71m)," the Managing Director added.

The production guidance range of 12,600 – 13,400 barrels of oil per day of annual average production from Blocks 3&4 in Oman before government take remains unchanged. The guidance on operating expenses also remains unchanged and is expected at or around \$11.5 per barrel for 2020. At current oil prices and revised expenditure guidance, Tethys Oil expects its net entitlement

of oil production to be 52 per cent in 2020.

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, necessary precautions have been put in place to protect Tethys Oil's employees, contractors and partners. The Company is following the recommendations and guidelines provided by relevant authorities and industry groups closely. Staffing both in Muscat and Stockholm offices has been reduced as employees have been equipped to work remotely and most physical office meetings have been replaced by video conferencing.

Tethys Oil's management and board of directors continue to follow developments closely in order to ensure a high level of preparedness. On Blocks 3&4 the operator has put a number of precautionary

procedures in place to allow for work in the field to continue safely. Already high standards of hygiene have been raised and shift procedures changed to allow for a minimum of physical contact between shifts. Contingency plans are in place, should supply lines or oil transportation infrastructure be impacted.



المنطقة الحرة بصلالة
SALALAH FREE ZONE
Notice (2)

In reference to the Salalah Free Zone Company's Invitations to tenders announced on 16, 17/March/2020, please be informed by the amendment of last date of collection and submission tender document:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of document collection	Last date of document submission
SFZ-SUA-2020-002	Developing, Operating, & Managing of International Lab Centre at SFZ Area	13/04/2020	21/04/2020

The bidders can receive and submit the tender document in SFZ Salalah main office or SFZ Muscat office in Shatti Al Qurum.

PO Box 87, PC 217, Tel: 23132500, Fax: 23132400
Website: www.sfzco.com

Tender Announcement

مدائن
madayn

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
3/2020/PEIE/HQ-3	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR STUDY AND PREPARE PROJECT PROFILES FOR BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN INDUSTRIAL CITIES, KOM AND MFZ & CONDUCT OF DETAILED FEASIBILITY STUDIES FOR SPECIFIC INVESTMENT PROPOSALS CONSIDERED BY MADAYN	22-04-2020	17-05-2020	Business/ Investment	First and Above	100

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the 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 given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders. And hard copy of the same should be submitted manually to the Tender and procurement department in Rusayl Industrial City.

- Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
- eTendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and +968 24166670, 24166409 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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m t f y o o

SPOT

LIGHT

SPOTLIGHTING OMANI ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND TECH INNOVATION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Behar set to launch new portal for retail fish shopping

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

Buoyed by the success of its fledgling platform for wholesale trades in fresh fish, Behar – the only such portal of its kind in the Sultanate – is now preparing to roll-out its spinoff catering to the retail market.

Behar Plus will offer an online marketplace for fresh fish sellers and stores to offer their merchandise to individual customers in the first such platform primarily targeted at the retail segment of the market, said a co-founder of the popular start-up.

“We are preparing to launch in the coming days a portal that will allow for individual consumers to check out what’s on offer in their neighbourhood fish stores or local outlets, select the fish and quantities they want online, and request delivery of the purchased items at their doorstep,” said Salim al Huseini, one of four enterprising Omanis who came together to launch Behar a week ago.

“Unlike the parent portal, Behar Plus makes it simple for individuals and families to do all of their shopping for fresh fish online, without having to step out, and thereby adhere to the ‘stay at home’ guidelines championed



by the Omani authorities amid the current pandemic,” Salim explained.

“Once rolled out, Behar Plus will invite fish stores to register as sellers. For now, any payment to the seller can be settled at the time of delivery of the goods.”

Behar is one of three Omani start-ups selected by Oman Technology Fund (OTF), a specialised government-backed fund that invests in IT and innovative start-ups, for funding support from an endowment of RO 1 million earmarked for Omani entrepreneurial initiatives spawned by the COVID-19 crisis.

Behar came online earlier this month in the wake of the shuttering of the Wholesale Fish Market at Al

Behar is a portal that will allow for individual consumers to check out what’s on offer in their neighbourhood fish stores or local outlets, select the fish and quantities they want online, and request delivery of the purchased items at their doorstep

SALIM AL HUSEINI
Entrepreneur

Fulaj in Wilayat of Barka– part of measures by the Omani government to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus. Fishermen and brokers can now use this integrated platform

to offer their fresh merchandise to leading supermarket chains and other distributors operating across the Sultanate. As a bidding platform, sellers quote

a minimum price as the starting bid on their goods and solicit offers from registered wholesale buyers. Offers close within five minutes of the goods being posted on the website with the highest bidder eventually clinching the deal.

Shedding light on the process, the entrepreneur explained: “Say a fisherman drives in from Suhar to sell a truckload of fresh fish on the Behar portal. Arriving at Al Fulaj Market, the merchandise is properly sorted according to their different fish types and sizes. They are checked for quality and freshness. Pictures are snapped and posted online, along with the seller’s minimum price. Once sold to the highest bidder, the successful

bidder turns up at the market, settles the payment, and takes delivery of the merchandise. All of these transactions typically take place between 10 am and 3 pm.”

Given the popularity of the platform, Behar plans to expand its geographical coverage for the benefit of wholesale sellers and buyers elsewhere around the Sultanate, according to Salim.

“We have plans to extend our reach to places like Suhar, Qurayat, and so on. But this can only happen once public fish markets reopen in these areas, which is likely only during the post-pandemic phase. Additionally, we have plans to introduce online payment facilities,” he added.

Coronavirus muddies US economic data as business closures push down response rates

WASHINGTON: A near total closure of US businesses as authorities try to control the spread of the novel coronavirus could make US economic data unreliable in the coming months and harder to get a clearer picture of the severity of the recession caused by the virus.

Government agencies such as the Labor Department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Commerce Department’s Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) compile data, including the closely watched employment report, by collecting information from businesses and households through in-person and telephone interviews.

Investors, policymakers and businesses rely on economic data to make critical decisions. The coronavirus’ impact on data collection was already felt in March’s employment report, with decreases in response rates.



A paramedic wheels a patient into an emergency arrival area at Elmhurst Hospital during the outbreak of the Covid-19 in the Queens borough of New York City, New York. — Reuters

With at least 90 per cent of Americans now under some form of a lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus, economists say data collection will be severely constrained.

“This won’t necessarily bias the numbers stronger or weaker but it will add considerable sampling error to those numbers,” said Michael Feroli, an economist at JPMorgan in New York.

“Given the inherently backward-looking nature of economic data, economic policymaking is often compared to driving by looking in the rearview mirror. In coming weeks that mirror will be exceptionally foggy but we can be fairly certain that we are driving into a wall.”

According the BLS, the response rate for the household survey, from which the unemployment rate is calculated, had a 73 per cent response rate in March, down about 10 percentage points in recent months.

The survey of establishments from which nonfarm payrolls are derived had a collection rate of 66 per cent last month. That was about nine percentage points lower than average. — Reuters

Cemex resumes Mexico operations after brief pause due to COVID-19

MEXICO CITY: Mexican cement company Cemex said it would resume operations in the country, hours after announcing a pause, as fresh guidelines from the government permitted such a move.

“In accordance with the technical guidelines published today in the official Mexican gazette, the company will resume operations in Mexico to support the development and the economy of the country during the COVID-19 contingency,” Cemex said.

The company, which operates in more than 50 countries, had earlier in the day said owing to government guidelines it would suspend



A cement plant of Mexican cement maker Cemex is pictured in Monterrey, Mexico. — Reuters

operations until at least April 30.

Cemex also said it has improved its liquidity position with a \$1.14 billion revolving credit line and by receiving almost \$500 million from asset sales. — Reuters

Pact inked for operation of customs area in Al Mazunah Free Zone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has signed an agreement with Al Madina Logistics Services to manage and operate the customs area services at Al Mazunah Free Zone on Oman’s border with Yemen in Dhofar Governorate.

The agreement aims at raising the efficiency of handling operations, and management of loading and unloading containers and trucks at the land port. The agreement was signed by Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Director General of Al Mazunah Free Zone, and Mahmood bin Sakhi al Balushi, CEO of Al Madina Logistics.

Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Director General of Al Mazunah Free Zone, stated that the agreement aims at developing and improving the logistics operations in the free zone and enhancing the smooth flow of goods and containers through import and export operations.

“These efforts shall serve the suppliers, exporters, economic sectors and the investors in the free zone,” Al Balushi said, adding: “As a national



GROWING INFRASTRUCTURE: Madayn signs deal with Al Madina Logistics Services to operate and manage customs area facility at free zone on Oman’s border with Yemen

company, Al Madina Logistics Services enjoys rich experience in managing dry ports. Its management and operation of the customs area at Al Mazunah Free Zone shall create an adding value for the suppliers, exporters and investors.”

On his part, Mahmood bin Sakhi al Balushi, CEO of Al Madina Logistics, emphasised that the pact supports the efforts undertaken by the government for the logistics sector and to emphasise on the importance of collaborating with the private sector to offer logistics services.

“Al Madina Logistics is one of the leading national companies in managing inland ports as it established the first inland port in Oman that was inaugurated in 2010 under the name of Muscat Container Depot,” Mahmood al Balushi pointed out.

Al Mazunah Free Zone has witnessed notable growth during the first quarter of the current year in spite of the current global conditions. The volume of imported goods to the free zone has touched 87,341 tons by the end of March 2020, noting an increase exceeding 44 per cent

compared to 60,628 tons during the same period of 2019.

In addition, the total number of incoming vehicles has reached 2,066 by the end of March 2020, marking a growth rate that exceeds 500 per cent and an increase of 1736 vehicles compared to the same period of 2019.

It should be noted that Al Mazunah Free Zone currently offers all the services required by the investors through its one-stop-station. These services include obtaining and approving certificates of origin, and applying and renewing membership certificates.

Through the one-stop-station, Madayn aims at saving time and effort as well as facilitating the services offered to the investors and business owners. A variety of services related to investment activities can be accessed and transactions can be completed within a period not exceeding three hours through the one-stop-station. The one-stop-station at the free zone includes several public and private bodies such as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Manpower, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and insurance companies.

Japan prepares near \$1 trillion stimulus to cushion virus impact on economy

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday declared a state of emergency to fight new coronavirus infections in major population centres and unveiled a stimulus package he described as among the world's biggest to soften the economic blow.

The state of emergency, giving authorities more power to press people to stay at home and businesses to close, will last through May 6 and be imposed in the capital, Tokyo, and six other prefectures — accounting for about 44 per cent of Japan's population.

"The most important thing now is for each citizen to change our actions," Abe said in televised comments made at a meeting of a government task force.

"If each of us can reduce contact with other people by at least 70 per cent, and ideally by 80 per cent, we should be able to see a peak in the number of infections in two weeks," he said.

His cabinet will also finalise the stimulus package worth 108 trillion yen (\$990 billion) — equal to 20 per cent of Japan's economic output — to cushion the impact of the epidemic on the world's third-largest economy.

That exceeds the equivalent of 11 per cent of US output for the stimulus package laid out by President Donald Trump and 5 per cent of output for Germany's package.

Abe said direct fiscal spending would amount to 39 trillion yen, or 7 per cent of the economy, more than double the amount Japan spent



A worker cycles near a factory at the Keihin industrial zone in Kawasaki, Japan. — Reuters

following the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers.

Japan has been spared the big outbreaks of the coronavirus seen in other global hot spots, but a recent, steady rise in infections in Tokyo, Osaka and other areas led to growing calls for Abe to announce a state of emergency.

Coronavirus infections in Tokyo more than doubled to about 1,200 in the past week, with more than 80 new ones reported on Tuesday, accounting for the highest number in the country. Nationwide, cases have climbed past 4,000 with 93 deaths as of Monday.

Abe has stressed that the state of emergency will stop short of imposing a formal lockdown as seen in other countries.

The emergency gives governors the authority to call on people to stay at home and businesses to close. With no penalties for ignoring the requests in most cases, enforcement will rely more on peer pressure and respect for authority.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said the city was in talks with the central government to decide what types of facilities it would ask to close or curtail business hours, while reiterating there

Abe's cabinet will also finalise the stimulus package worth 108 trillion yen (\$990 billion) — equal to 20 per cent of Japan's economic output — to cushion the impact of the epidemic on the world's third-largest economy.

factories," he told reporters earlier, adding there was no sign of disruption to Japan's grain imports.

But the restrictions will add to pains the virus is inflicting on the world's third-largest economy, which is seen as already in recession as supply chain disruptions and travel bans chill factory output and consumption.

Metropolitan Tokyo alone accounts for about 20 per cent of Japan's overall gross domestic product.

Japan will sell a record amount of additional bonds worth more than 18 trillion yen to fund the package, adding to its huge debt which is twice the size of its economy. While the stimulus could ease the immediate damage from the pandemic, lawmakers are already calling for even bigger spending to prevent bankruptcies and job losses.

— Reuters

Fed to provide financing against new US 'payroll protection' loans

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve on Monday moved to bolster a new small-business lending programme by allowing banks to turn those loans over to the US central bank for cash, easing concerns among banks about getting stuck holding the low interest loans.

The Fed said it would announce details later this week of a new term financing arrangement for loans made under what is known as the Payroll Protection Programme, part of the federal response to the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Term financing facilities have been a staple of the Fed's crisis response, encouraging banks to make loans for a variety of purposes with the understanding that they could turn them over to the central bank, get cash and continue lending.

The programme is similar to the arrangement the US government has with mortgage agencies like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, whose stamp of approval on a loan makes banks more willing to lend.

In this case the very existence of the Fed programme - assuring banks they could unload the Small Business Administration loans when they want - could make the programme more attractive to lenders, given the fees of up to 5 per cent banks can earn for what now amounts to processing the paperwork.

The Payroll Protection Programme is one of the key measures adopted as part of a more than \$2 trillion effort to offset the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis, which has forced large portions of the US economy to shutter.

It dedicates \$350 billion for loans so small businesses can keep paying workers and meet basic expenses like rent.

The rollout of the programme has been fitful, however. Some bankers have said they remain unclear about their potential risks if the loans go bad - even though the Treasury Department has said it would guarantee them in most instances. — Reuters

Golden Skies Ventures bids \$2.5 billion for ailing Malaysia Airlines

KUALA LUMPUR: Privately held Golden Skies Ventures (GSV) has made a \$2.5 billion offer to fully take over the holding company of ailing state carrier Malaysia Airlines, with financing from a European bank, its executives said on Monday.

GSV, which was set up by former Malaysia Airlines officials and professionals with aviation experience, made the proposal a month ago, as airlines around the world were hammered by travel restrictions following the coronavirus pandemic.

"(We have secured) in excess of \$2.5 billion from the bank. We will take about three to four months to get the long-term financing," Chief Executive Shahril Lamin said.

GSV said it also has a commitment from a Japanese private equity firm



A Malaysia Airlines plane is seen at Kingsford Smith International Airport in Sydney, Australia. — Reuters

to inject immediate funds into the aviation group through an equity deal.

It declined to name the firms involved, adding it was in talks with other foreign banks and private

equity firms for further funding.

GSV has submitted its proposal to Morgan Stanley which has been hired by the aviation group's sole owner, sovereign wealth fund Khazanah Nasional Bhd. — Reuters

Oil prices rise as hopes build for production cut

TOKYO: Oil rose on Tuesday amid hope that the world's biggest producers of crude will agree to cut output as the coronavirus pandemic crushes demand, even as analysts warn a global recession may be deeper than expected and big production cuts will be needed.

Brent crude LCOc1 was up by 80 cents, or 2.4 per cent, at \$33.85 a barrel by 0657 GMT after falling more than 3 per cent on Monday. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CLc1 was up by 83 cents, or 3.2 per cent, at \$26.91 a barrel, having dropped nearly 8 per cent in the previous session.

The world's main oil producers including Saudi Arabia and Russia are likely to agree to cut output at a meeting on Thursday, although that would depend on the United States joining in, sources said.

But the threat of a major recession hangs over the market due to the



An oil pump jack pumps oil in a field near Alberta, Canada. — Reuters

halt of much economic activity as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, with half the global population under some form of lockdown or social distancing measures.

"Anything less than a coordinated global cut is going to be disappointing to the market, as further price declines will be necessary to shut in enough output," said Greg Priddy, director global energy at Stratfor in Houston.

— Reuters

Britain's supermarkets wrestle with demand conundrum

LONDON: Britain's big supermarkets fear they won't be able to supply the country's 60 million people without longer opening hours or a relaxation of social distancing rules introduced to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Industry executives speaking on condition of anonymity said they expected a jump in demand once Britons under lockdown had worked through supplies amassed at the start of the crisis and as shoppers stocked up for the long Easter weekend holiday.

What's more, the lockdown has temporarily transferred the eating out market - bars, cafes, restaurants, school meals and workplace canteens - to the home, shifting about 30 per cent of the nation's food consumption back to stores.

"The problem is, can you feed 60 million people at the rate you can

get people through the stores with that social distancing?" one industry executive said.

In the four weeks before the government restricted movement and announced social distancing rules on March 23, UK grocery sales leapt 20 per cent as Britons stockpiled an extra 1 billion pounds worth of food in their cupboards and freezers.

Sales growth has slowed over the past fortnight as stores cut their opening hours, limited the number of customers allowed in at any one time and restricted sales of some items - all leading to long queues outside many supermarkets.

But executives believe the drop in demand will be short-lived as people shop for the Easter break and because of the pressure on supplies as everyone eats at home. Big supermarkets are



Shoppers queue to enter a Sainsbury's supermarket in West London. — Reuters

budgeting for a 15 per cent to 20 per cent rise in sales volumes during the lockdown, said one source with knowledge of the matter.

That's one reason why Britain's

big four - market leader Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons - are recruiting tens of thousands of staff. The other reason is to cover absenteeism, currently running at

15 per cent-20 per cent, according to industry sources.

Supermarket online delivery businesses, which accounted for about 8 per cent of the grocery market before the health crisis, are being ramped up to meet some of the extra demand. But even if delivery capacity doubled, some 85 per cent of the market would still need to be served by stores.

Supermarkets fear that under the current restrictions, they simply cannot physically meet the demand.

"The current social distancing approach that's being taken by the supermarkets can't sell that 85 per cent number," another industry director said.

"The numbers don't work ... you're either going to have to extend the opening hours, or you're going to have to change the rules on social

distancing," he said.

At the outset of the crisis, some supermarkets shortened their opening hours to give staff more time to rest, restock shelves and prepare online deliveries.

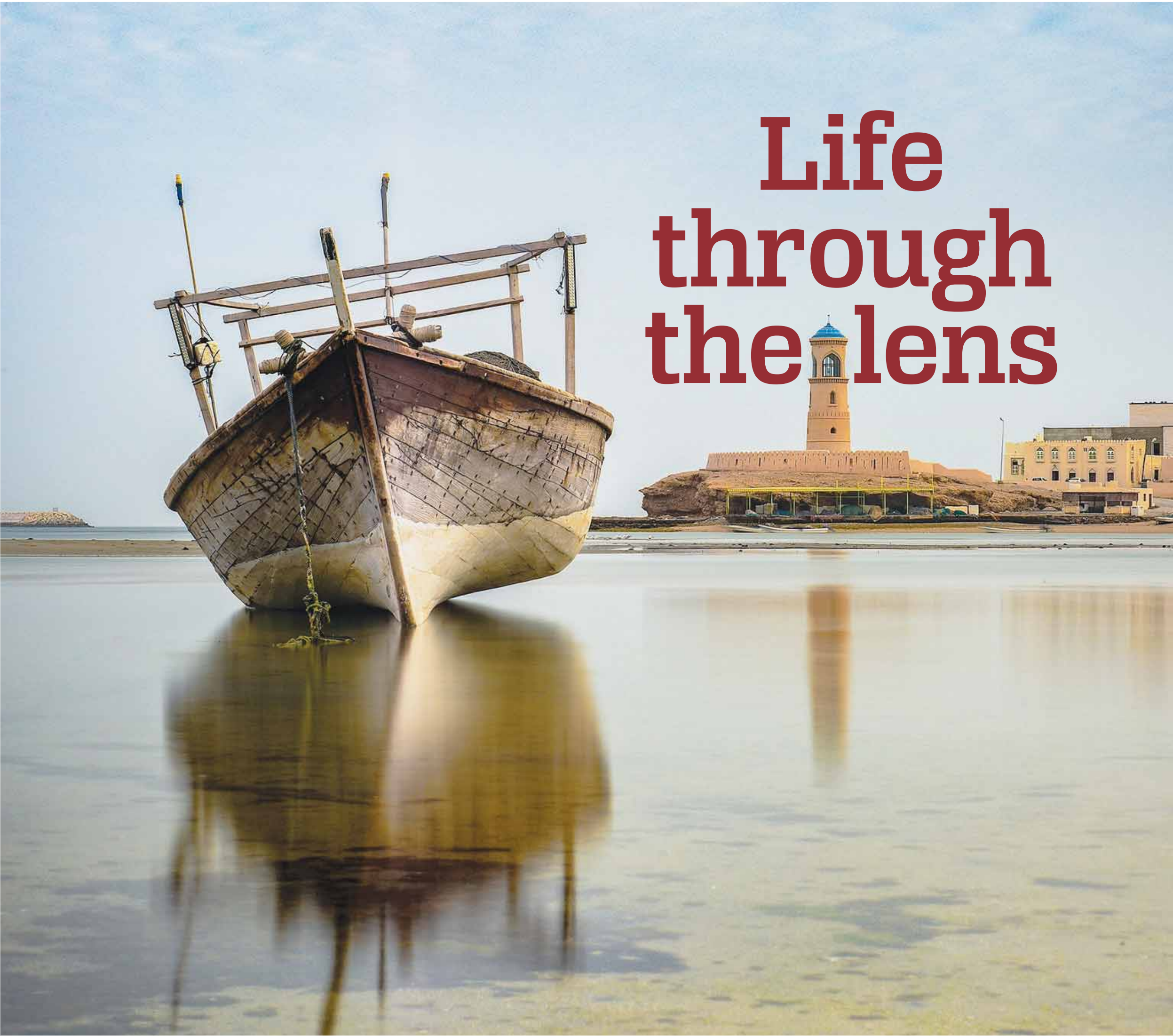
"You've got a twin tension here. You'd rather keep the store closed for longer so you can get merchandising done and your online picking done, but you'd rather open the store for longer so that you have less customers in at any given time," he said.

"Mathematically, that's the quadratic equation that you're trying to solve."

Supermarkets may try to boost customer numbers in stores when they are confident all will either be served by a staff member behind a screen, or they can use self-scan tills, industry sources said. — Reuters

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Life through the lens

MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

The facial wrinkles and details attract amateur photographers first, as they think these features tell the story of a whole life. Taken by emotions, most of the photographers document their first album in portrait, before they move to wider scopes.

The same steps were followed by Omani photographer Suleiman al Mukhaini of Sur, who is now interested in various fields of photography as he is also a videographer.

In 2014, Suleiman went on a trip with his colleague Tariq al Arami, who suggested to Suleiman that he pursue photography.

“My main hobby is designing, and I did not think about photography until I undertook that trip with my friend. Photography is an essential part of designing, I bought a camera, and at the beginning I didn’t know how to use it until I started attending workshops to learn more.”

Suleiman started his photography journey with the portrait photography that shows the facial features which attract him the most.

Suleiman loves to take spontaneous photos of people without telling them at the moment that he is taking a picture of them. “For many photographers, especially beginners, the biggest challenge is recognising and capturing spontaneous moments; those candid images when people behave naturally and are unaware of the camera. It’s easy to click posing pictures, asking them to stop what they are doing, but some of the best people pictures are those in which they are acting naturally and providing facial expressions and gestures that could never be staged”, he explained.

The hobby slowly improved when Suleiman started attending workshops conducted by professional photographers to improve his skills in photography.

“I learned from many photographers through continuous lessons and workshops.



Omani photographer Suleiman al Mukhaini of Sur, who is interested in various fields of photography, started off his journey with the portrait photography that showed candid emotions

Those veterans include Hussein al Bahrani, Majed al Zaabi and Abdullah al Shayji from Kuwait,” he says.

Suleiman’s passion for photography led him to search for another field to experience. Aerial photography was the second avenue for him to discover the beauty of the Earth and highlight spatial features in remote areas that humans cannot reach.

Through this field, he wishes to show the beauty of nature in the Sultanate with its various terrains, including plains, mountains, valleys and beaches. He is always trying to photograph the ancient and touristic places to show their features professionally and from a previously unseen



angle. He makes preparations before proceeding to take the shot, such as exploitation of lighting, colours, and elements that constitute the photo in guiding the eye to the main subject of the photo, as he considers consistency as the most important element of a photo. He said, “The more the elements are consistent, homogeneous and complementary, the more the image is striking.” One of the unforgettable photos by Suleiman is the picture of the Milky Way galaxy from the archaeological site Kibaykib Tombs.

From his point of view, a successful photographer is the one who educates himself by reading books, magazines, brochures specialising in photography and attending other photographers’ exhibitions to see their works. Seminars and competitions also play a crucial rule in updating the person with the latest changes in photography.

Photography has changed Suleiman’s life in several aspects, the most important is to focus on making decisions before starting work.

He moved to commercial photography in order to develop his skills. Here, his work requires good imagination to produce new ideas. It seems that it is difficult to pursue photography as a profession in the job market.

“There are many photographers who have long experience in this field. But I have proven my presence with the quality that I offer and I am still in the education phase and development”, he said.

Commercial photography has contributed to developing Suleiman’s marketing skills. “Commercial photography helps me to market myself to companies and get the support I need to get my projects, and have the ability to produce interesting new ideas that attract customers. The way is long. It needs patience but finally you will get there. Just have faith”, he adds.

Liverpool make U-turn over furlough scheme

PREMIER LEAGUE LEADERS DITCH PLAN AFTER TOP CLUBS SLAMMED FOR USING PUBLIC FUNDS

LONDON: Liverpool were forced to apologise as the Premier League club ditched their controversial plan to furlough non-playing staff during the coronavirus on Monday, while Fifa urged players and clubs to reach agreement over wage reductions.

Liverpool faced stinging criticism from fans and former players after revealing over the weekend that they wanted to use the UK government's furlough scheme.

Fenway Sports Group, Liverpool's US-based owners, wanted to put around 200 staff on enforced leave during the pandemic while the government paid 80 per cent of their wages.

Fellow top-flight teams Tottenham, Newcastle, Bournemouth and Norwich have already furloughed staff, but it was table-toppers Liverpool -- with pre-tax profits of £42 million (\$51.7 million) for the 2018-19 season -- who came in for the most criticism, in part due to their reputation as a club with a strong bond to Merseyside's working-class community.

The fierce backlash sparked a sudden climbdown as Liverpool chief executive Peter Moore wrote an open letter to supporters announcing they would opt for "alternative means" to the furlough route after consulting "key stakeholders".

"We believe we came to the wrong conclusion last week to announce that we intended to apply to the Coronavirus Retention Scheme and furlough staff due to the suspension of the Premier League football calendar, and are truly sorry for that," wrote Moore.

Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher tweeted: "Well done @



PeterMooreLFC @LFC a big mistake initially & thankfully now it's been put right."

With the Premier League postponed indefinitely because of the virus, Manchester City, bankrolled by Abu Dhabi's Shaikh Mansour, said they would not be using the government's job retention scheme, with Manchester United set to follow

their example.

Liverpool's U-turn came as England's top-flight teams, among the richest in the world, were under increasing scrutiny, with government ministers warning bosses and players they should "think carefully" over their next moves.

The highest-paid Premier League players such as Manchester United

goalkeeper David de Gea and Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne command eye-watering salaries, reportedly nearing £20 million (\$25 million, 23 million euros) a year.

PAY-CUT ROW

Fifa on Monday urged clubs and players to reach agreement on taking

wage reductions in order to protect clubs who are suffering financial damage, sources at world football's governing body said.

It also recommended that players' contracts be extended until the end of the interrupted football seasons and that the transfer window should not open until that time.

The call from Fifa comes as Premier

Fifa urged clubs and players to reach agreement on taking wage cuts to protect struggling clubs

League clubs are locked in talks with players and their representatives about taking pay cuts.

The English top flight is lagging behind other European leagues.

In Spain, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid players have agreed to pay cuts of 70 per cent.

Meanwhile, the chief executive of England's Professional Footballers' Association, the players' union, said he would not take a cut to his £2 million salary.

"The PFA will make donations and the PFA is involved in the players' charity," Gordon Taylor told The Guardian when asked directly if he would accept a reduction in salary.

Taylor added his members believed the Premier League's suggestion of a proposed 30 per cent wage reduction across all top-flight clubs was impractical given the teams' differing financial positions.

"You can't have one suit fitting all sizes because there is such a variance in income and expenditure," he said.

But in the latest sign of the financial crisis caused by the coronavirus, England manager Gareth Southgate and the Football Association's top earners have agreed to take wage cuts of up to 30 per cent. -- AFP



Mueller extends Bayern stay until 2023

BERLIN: Bayern Munich forward Thomas Mueller has signed a new deal that will keep him at the club until 2023, the Bundesliga champions announced on Tuesday.

"I'm happy that we've reached agreement with Thomas. Thomas is a special player for us, a figurehead for the club and our fans, a leader who shows the way on the pitch and has achieved a lot with FC Bayern," Bayern's sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic said in a statement.

Mueller, 30, has played more than 500 times for Bayern since rising through the youth ranks to reach the first team in 2008, winning eight league titles, five German Cups and the 2013 Champions League.

The new deal comes after he worked his way back into the team under coach Hansi Flick after being frozen out by previous coach Niko Kovac.

Flick himself signed a deal last week to become permanent coach until 2023 after guiding the reigning champions back to the top of the Bundesliga.

Mueller has played 100 times for Germany and was a key part of the 2014 World Cup-winning team. But coach Joachim Loew announced after the team's flop at the 2018 World Cup that Mueller no longer figured in his plans for the national team. — AFP

New plans needed for Tokyo Olympics preparation: Kadhim



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 7

On March 24, the organising committee and International Olympic Committee agreed on the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games to 2021 due to the recent global coronavirus pandemic. This decision has given more time for many countries that were lacking the preparation for the biggest sports event.

Kadhim al Balushi, Oman's Chef de Mission at 2016 Rio Olympic Games, shed his thoughts on the postponement of Tokyo Olympics.

"Based on my personal experience with the sports associations in the Sultanate, we are lacking proper studies of our failure in the previous Olympic and Asian Games. Let's take some real examples, after 2016 Rio Olympic Games and 2018 Asian Games in

Indonesia, the Sultanate could not earn a single medal. However, there was no quick response from the associations and committees to address the weak points. Moreover, all the associations and committee remained with their same plans without benefiting from the previous participations," he said.

Al Balushi, also Oman Chef de Mission at 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, highlighted that each sports association and committee should prepare an applicable strategic plan. "I recommend that all the sports associations should make revised long-term plans for four and eight years including applicable ways to implement this strategic sports project."

"In addition to that, the plans should include comprehensive participations to earn qualification for the Olympics. The technical follow-

up committee of Oman Olympic Committee should clear these plans by the sports associations also," he added.

PRIVATE SECTOR SUPPORT

A strategic partnership with the private sector entities will be important to achieve the dream of capturing the first historical Olympic medal. Kadhim raised this suggestion and explained: "Olympic medal is a national project which requires full support from government as well as from the private companies. Many private companies in other countries are supporting their talented athletes' preparatory plans for the Olympics. I believe this step will be crucial and will support the country to achieve the first Olympic medal."

Commenting on Oman's participation at the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, Kadhim stressed that



Omani athletes performed reasonably well considering the less period of preparation.

"Oman hockey team finished among the top six teams in Asia while sailing team was very close to snatch the bronze medal. The beach volleyball

team reached the quarterfinal stage for the first time. Looking at these results, we can understand that implementing a strategic and long-term plan will help us win the medals," the Sultanate's experienced sports chef de mission concluded.

sport



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PARIS: Athletes are fooling themselves if they think they can use the chaos caused globally by the coronavirus pandemic to cheat, according to World Anti-Doping Agency president Witold Banka.

The Pole said physical testing might be virtually at a standstill but Wada and national anti-doping agencies possessed other weapons they can deploy in the fight against doping.

Canada and Russia have gone public in saying they have suspended their testing programmes while the British anti-doping body has significantly reduced its testing.

“COVID-19 is not a space for the athletes to cheat,” Banka said in a phone interview from his home in Poland.

“They should not feel it is a time for cheating. Otherwise, the anti-doping agencies will use their weapons to catch them.”

The 35-year-old former Polish sports minister, who only took up his post on January 1 after being elected to replace Craig Reedie, said he hoped it would not take long once the pandemic was over to return testing to its “full power”.

In the meantime Wada would rely on other means to keep tabs on athletes.

“Testing is not our only weapon and we have some strong ones,” Banka said.

“There is the athlete biological passport, there is long-term analysis of samples, there is intelligence.

“The biological passport is a useful tool for the profile of the athletes.

“Also they are still obliged to tell us of their whereabouts even if we cannot go and test them.”

Banka is mindful however that on a global basis, combating the coronavirus is the number one priority.

“Anti-doping is not as important as people’s lives,” he said.

The former international 400 metres runner said he had been in regular contact with leading sports bodies including the International Olympic Committee and the National Anti-Doping Organisations to discuss the current situation.

“We issued guidelines for them that cover a number of areas that may be affected by COVID-19.”

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

The pandemic has forced Banka to put on hold several ideas he wants to implement, especially a bid to increase funding for the anti-doping fight.

“I am pursuing the idea of a Solidarity Fund to serve regions like Africa, for example, where they have very limited anti-doping systems (there is just one accredited laboratory in South Africa),” he said.

“We are still working on that, this is a very important issue.”

He aims to encourage sponsors and corporate partners to back the fight against doping with hard cash.

“The idea is to get them to contribute a minimum of their sponsorship investment in sport (to anti-doping efforts).”

Such corporate involvement could go some way to resolving an age-old problem for Wada, and one Reedie frequently raised — that their budget is insufficient for the size of the task they face.

“We are a strong organisation with powerful tools,” said Banka.

“But taking into account our budget, \$36-40 million a year, that is not in line with the expectations towards the organisation expressed by our stakeholders. We want, or rather have to, increase it.

“That is why we are looking for some alternative sources of funding.”

Banka said proudly that Wada “plays many roles” and achieves a lot even with the budget constraints but stresses that with extra funding “it could do a lot more”.

“One aspect we would like to address is that at the 2016 Rio Games, 10 per cent of the medallists came from countries who either have very weak anti-doping systems or none at all,” he said. — AFP

Wada chief warns against doping during corona crisis

PHYSICAL TESTING MIGHT BE VIRTUALLY AT A STANDSTILL BUT WADA AND NATIONAL ANTI-DOPING AGENCIES POSSESSED OTHER METHODS, SAYS BANKA