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26 Ramadhan Wednesday 20/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	03:59	04:04	04:32
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:30	03:33	03:42
MAGHRIB:	06:49	06:52	06:55
ISHA:	08:08	08:10	08:09

Safety onus on shop owners



MUSCAT: While the Royal Oman Police (ROP) have been entrusted with enforcing the laws by the Supreme Committee tasked with COVID-19, the business owners have to ensure strict implementation of the safety protocols to curb the spread of coronavirus.

“The onus is now with the owners that they not only have to ensure that all the safety measures are in place at their establishments but also have to confirm that the visitors, too, comply with them”, said an official at Muscat Municipality.

Any apathetic or recalcitrant attitude from customers should be reported to the authorities, he said.

The Supreme Committee on Monday advised the ROP to monitor the compliance of decisions by the commercial establishments and other institutions and also authorised them to impose fines and preventive detention of the violators in accordance with the law that deals with the COVID-19 violations.

TURN ON P2



HM sends message to Qatar Emir

DOHA: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a verbal message to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar, pertaining to the strong fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries and means of enhancing them, as well as consulting on the most prominent regional issues of common concern. The message was delivered by Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, when Shaikh Tamim received him in the Qatari capital, Doha on Monday. — **ONA**

HM congratulates Cameroon President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent congratulations to President Paul Biya of the Republic of Cameroon on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes to President Biya and his country's friendly people. — **ONA**

Your favourite livestock is just a mobile tap away

Zainab al Nassri

MUSCAT: If you miss the traditional markets, which come live ahead of Eid al Fitr, due to coronavirus lockdown, don't be disappointed. Your livestock is just a mobile tap or a click away.

Tharwa, a start-up funded by Oman Technology Fund, is offering online auction of cattle and livestock which will continue till May 21.

Over 700 buyers have already



registered at the site, which offers sheep, goats, cattle and camels from Oman, Somalia, Sudan, Australia and South Africa by 105 sellers in the Sultanate.

Samira al Esry, co-founder of Tharwa said, “It witnessed a good turnout from both sellers and buyers. Although it is a new experience, number of visitors and the registered ones are increasing daily and we receive many calls via customer service lines”.

TURN ON P2

SAFETY ONUS ON SHOP OWNERS

FROM PAGE 1

“It is not mandatory to open stores on this date, but we encourage you to open with all precautions in place as soon as possible. After all, complying fully with the new health protection measures is paramount in the battle against the pandemic”, he said. The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources on Monday announced the list of over 60 commercial activities that have been exempted from the lockdown measures.

The municipality on Tuesday said that the decision does not include the shops located in the commercial centres, Muttrah and the industrial area of Wadi Kabir and those inside the malls. However, all other parts of Muscat Governorate can reopen the commercial activities listed by the ministry. Faizal Ahmed, Sales Manager with a leading supermarket chain, said that they have rolled out all safety measures, including guidelines to the staff, in accordance with the protocol issued by the authorities. “There are still some unruly customers who do not follow the rules. We have to struggle with them”.

According to the municipality, watches and accessories stores and perfume shops, flower shops, boutique and shops selling Abaya, beauty and make-up tools are allowed to open their businesses. “Utensil shops and communication service halls can also resume work, provided they adhere to social distancing and apply precautionary measures and safety requirements”, it said.

12 FIRMS OUT OF 15 REVOKE DECISION TO LAY OFF STAFF

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Manpower committee tasked with examining the issue of dismissal of national workforce from private sector companies, held its fifth meeting on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Hamad bin Khamis al Amri, Under-Secretary for Labour Affairs at the Ministry of Manpower.

The committee reviewed the procedures undertaken by the work teams in the governorates which held negotiations with 15 companies, of which 12 companies reversed earlier decisions to lay off

national workforce with the remaining 3 companies refusing to do so, thus prompting the committee to take legal action against them.

Meanwhile, the committee approved the transfer of complaints by companies regarding wage reduction to the work teams in the governorates.

The work team in each governorate will hold discussions with the respective company and representatives of the

workers' union to evaluate the complaints and take suitable decisions vis-à-vis labour disputes.

THE MINISTRY OF
MANPOWER COMMITTEE
APPROVED THE TRANSFER
OF COMPLAINTS BY
COMPANIES REGARDING
WAGE REDUCTION TO
THE WORK TEAMS IN THE
GOVERNORATES

YOUR FAVOURITE LIVESTOCK IS JUST A MOBILE TAP AWAY

FROM PAGE 1



“Tharwa replaces traditional habta. It is an electronic livestock market for auctioning off local livestock. The idea of auctioning the

livestock comes from the original Omani Eid traditions. One of these practices is buying meat from habta markets across the wilayats”, said Al Esry.

She mentioned, “In view of the current conditions of COVID-19 pandemic and to avoid transmission, Tharwa is gearing up to organise a habta for local livestock in coordination with livestock owners in various governorates. A live and direct auction will be conducted in each governorate to provide livestock to the various wilayats of the Sultanate, as well as providing livestock home delivery service through a local delivery network of 300 Omani youth registered on the platform”.

Al Esry confirmed that the auction hour was extended from 10 am to



8:30 pm due to more demand. “As for now the ordered livestock will be delivered next day. Our future plan is to develop better delivery network, and that is why we have contracted delivery services companies as well as some individuals. We are also keen to strengthen the cooperation with the official authorities to serve this sector

and develop it better”, Al Esry said. Local and imported livestock owners can market and sell their products easily on www.tharwaoman.om. Interested livestock owners and buyers can call 71193935 for details. This platform is jointly supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Al Bashayer Meat Company.

THREE FLIGHTS TO CARRY INDIANS HOME TODAY

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Three flights of Air India Express will carry Indians in Oman to three destinations in India, as part of the second phase of the national repatriation programme on Wednesday. Accordingly, IX 818 will carry passengers from Muscat to Bangaluru at 1.15pm (arrival: Bangaluru at 6.15 Local Time); IX 714 from Muscat to Kannur at 3.15pm (arrival: Kannur at 8.30pm LT); and IX 342 from Salalah to Kozhikode at 3.25pm (arrival: Kozhikode at 8.40 LT). This is part of the total of 11 flights which are scheduled to fly Indian nationals from the Sultanate to various Indian destinations, the first of which took off from Muscat International Airport to Thiruvananthapuram at 1.15 pm on May 17. Pregnant women, people needing urgent medical attention, stranded visitors, workers who lost their



FLIGHTS FROM TOMORROW	
Thursday, May 21	Muscat -Kozhikode
	Muscat -Delhi
Friday, May 22	Muscat-Kannur
Saturday, May 23	Muscat - Kochi
	Muscat-Thiruvananthapuram
	Muscat-Gaya
(Courtesy: Indian Embassy, Muscat)	

jobs due to downsising, infants, and people having family emergencies are given priority to board the flights, according to Indian Embassy sources. The Government of India added three more flights to

Oman Air brings citizens, residents from London

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Oman Air operated a flight from London to Muscat, which departed on Monday (May 18), to bring 37 Omanis back to their homeland, along with 31 residents. The aircraft, which landed here early on Tuesday morning, transported expatriates who chose to leave the country. The airline also operated a chartered flight to London on May 12, for a large Oil & Gas company with major business activities in Oman. That flight carried 169 passengers; the return flight brought 126 passengers to Muscat. All guests and crew took extensive safety precautions before, during, and after the flights.

Strong relations with Palestine commended

RAMALLAH: Dr Laila Ghannam, Governor of Ramallah and Al Bireh, received Salim bin Habib al Amiri, Chargé d'affaires of the Sultanate's Embassy in the State of Palestine, in her office on Monday. The governor informed the Sultanate's envoy of the brutality and persecution inflicted on the Palestinian people by the Israeli government. The governor commended the strong Omani-Palestinian relations affirming that the Palestinian people, while facing the threat of the coronavirus outbreak, stand firm against the occupation which hampers their daily life with arrests, break-ins and demolition of houses and by adopting the policy of collective punishment. The latest demolition was that of Al Barghouthi's house.



Al Amiri underscored the historic relations with the Palestinian people affirming the Sultanate's support to the Palestinian cause and the rights of the Palestinian people of liberation and the establishment of an autonomous state. — ONA



Muscat Municipality

Announcement No. 33/2020

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No. E.Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/045	(2020/MM/QS/26)	Consultancy Services for Supervision of Construction of Storm Water Drainage in Muscat Governorate Phase 1 (E- Tender)	Rial 40	09/06/2020	29/06/2020	Specialist

Tender Conditions:-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Original Tender Bonds will be requested later on to be submitted to Muscat Municipality, and A soft copy of the same must be uploaded in the Etendering System.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

COMMERCIAL RESTRICTIONS TO CONTINUE IN MUSCAT CITY

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Despite the decision to allow commercial activities in the country, there will be restrictions in Muscat city, which is still under lockdown.

Muscat Municipality issued a clarification, which said the activities allowed to reopen will not include shops located in the commercial centres (malls), Muttrah and the industrial area of Wadi Kabir.

Barber and tailoring shops will remain closed while laundries can operate only if they have contracts with government and commercial agencies. Also, only automatic washing and steam-ironing only will be allowed.

Marble, granite and ceramic shops are allowed to reopen provided they follow rules of social distancing.

Women's garments,

including those selling abayas, beauty kits, perfumes and watches have been allowed to open and use online services and home deliveries.

Stores of telecom providers have been allowed to open with social distancing guidelines.

Muttrah has been under isolation since April 1, while there has been increasing number of cases in Hamriya and Wadi Kabir.

Municipality also urged commercial establishments to follow guidelines specified by the Ministry of Health, which include, always wash hands frequently with water and alcohol-based sanitisers, refrain from sharing personal protective equipment (such as helmets, gloves and face masks, a minimum number of direct contacts as possible and avoid physical



No barber and tailoring shops to open

Laundries can operate only on a contract basis

Shops dealing in women's garments and abayas can offer online delivery

No shops to open in malls, Muttrah, Wadi Kabir industrial area

greetings such as handshaking and hugging, introduce an appointment or token system for clients and reduce the time periods for their presence in the organisation, provide appropriate personal protection means and equipment for each employee, sanitise all devices and equipment including phones. It urged the shop owners to direct the employees to the

nearest health institution if they exhibited any symptoms.

It called for intensifying the cleaning process at the workplace and the workers' residences using the recommended cleaning fluids.

It advises to wear the muzzle (or masks) tightly to reduce the space between the face and the muzzle (masks) and avoid touching them.

Ramadan Iftar Program

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

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

Omantel users cost 1 RO
Send **Donate** to **90022**

National Bank of Oman
1049337798001

Ooredoo users cost 1 RO
Send **Donate** to **90909**

Bank Dhofar
01040609090001

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

Donations Portal for Charitable Organization
www.donate.om

OCO Headquarters : Muscat Governorate , Al Khuwair 33 , Street No. 47, next to Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque, or one of its branches :
South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate 25541087
North Al-Batinah Governorate 26664241
Musandam Governorate 26731586
Dhofar Governorate 23234735

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North Al-Batinah Governorate 26664241
Musandam Governorate 26731586
Dhofar Governorate 23234735

Traders upbeat as some curbs eased

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Traders, vendors, service providers as well as consumers in the country are high on positive spirit after opening their commercial establishments following the Supreme Committee's instructions pertaining to resumption of commercial activities within the strict guidelines of the Supreme Committee soon.

The anticipation went fast among the business community after Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, had announced that plans were under way to let some more sectors operate according to the

norms set by the Committee. Accordingly, retail outlets that sell essentials, perfumes, gifts and the like along with service providers are in the hope that a wide range of sectors would benefit out of the announcement. "We have been supplying dry fruits and other foodstuff across the country and business has been affected like nothing especially during the season of Ramadhan. I know all sectors have been affected by the COVID-19 and we hope that things are going to change soon just as the Eid is round the corner", Mohammed Ashraf, a wholesaler and retailer in Muscat told the Observer.

PACP CLARIFIES ON PRICES OF FACE MASKS

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP) has clarified about a topic circulating on the social media regarding the hike in the prices of face masks.

PACA explained that the prices of face masks have seen a significant increase internationally due to a surge in import prices and a growing demand caused by the Coronavirus outbreak.

PACA affirmed that it is verifying the import prices and checking the customs clearance certificates issued by the Directorate-General of Customs at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) in accordance to the rules.

As per the Ministry of Health's rules, importers are allowed to add up to 15 per cent on the import price. Distributors are also permitted to add 15 per cent, PACA said affirming that any addition on top of



The prices of face masks have risen but maintained the same level since the outset of the pandemic and have not been hiked after the Supreme Committee made wearing them in public mandatory,

masks will be dealt with strictly and urged members of the public to report any instances of hiking over the price seen at the start of, but not prior to, the pandemic and also to compare the prices at the same outlet but not with different outlets.

2 residents succumb to virus; 292 new cases

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Tuesday announced the death of two residents, one aged 34 and another aged 57, due to COVID-19, bringing the total number of victims in the Sultanate to 27.

The ministry extended its condolences to the bereaved families, praying to the Almighty Allah to have mercy on the souls of the deceased.

The ministry also announced 292 new positive cases, 119 of which cases are Omanis and 173 expatriates.

This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 5,671, in addition to 27 deaths.

The Ministry also pointed out that 1,574 cases have recovered.

— ONA

Expats held for illegal tailoring in Samayil

MUSCAT: The Police Command in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with the support of the Police Special Task Force in Nizwa, rounded up a number of expatriates from the Wilayat of Samayil for illegal tailoring which, among other activities, constitutes a violation of regulations and was banned by the Supreme Committee for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The offenders were referred to the judiciary to be sentenced.

Ramadhan kits distributed in Al Amerat and Saham

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Ramadhan baskets have been distributed by Al Yousef Group (AYG) among families of social security and those in the low-income category in the Wilayat of Al Amerat in Muscat Governorate and the Wilayat of Saham in North Al Batinah Governorate.

These donations, which included food baskets with basic necessities, were part of the permanent social responsibility and community service programme of AYG.

Faisal Mohamed al Yousef, a member of the board of directors of AYG, said that the group was distributing



donations during the holy month.

"We focus on strengthening families of social security segments and those in limited-income groups in a number of wilayats of the Sultanate," he added.

OMAN

HOTELS ARE NOT GOING TO BE THE SAME AGAIN



Picture for illustration only

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Even if the hotels open and start operations, they are not going to be the same. The hospitable hotel staff may have to smile behind their masks while dealing with their customers, as several other new protocols may be introduced by the competent authorities.

The new normal, according to a senior hotelier in Muscat, could be seen in most of the areas — from the guest's arrival at the airport, hotel reception, handing over the room keys to even setting of dining tables in the restaurants.

"The tools of communication may be different, as both the guest and host would like to play safe. Technology may come handy for communication like e-mails and WhatsApp; QR code and least use of paper to avoid exchange through hands directly. Either we have to give maximum care on

sanitising the room keys or we may have to work on keys that can open the doors remotely with minimum involvement of surface touch," he said while thinking loudly about the future operations.

THE HOSPITABLE HOTEL STAFF MAY HAVE TO SMILE BEHIND THEIR MASKS WHILE DEALING WITH THEIR CUSTOMERS, AS SEVERAL OTHER NEW PROTOCOLS MAY BE INTRODUCED

The restaurant menus may land directly on the customer's mobile through some app or the other due to the fact that at least for some time the guests have to choose their own meals from the menu instead of going for buffet.

"To ensure social distancing we may have to

stop buffet for some time and dining together will be very limited affair with proper distance between tables and chairs. There may not be more than two people eating on one table. This is going to be the new normal."

Thus this would be the time both for the hoteliers and the guests to plan things in advance or the guests may have to check about their choice of food at the time of booking the hotel.

"In the current scenario when the atmosphere is charged with safety measures, we may not take risk with the buffet dining due to chances of infection by using same serving spoon by too many people... Alacarte is going to be the best suited option for both," he said.

Other changes may be seen in the use of swimming pool, common spaces and a revamp on the information technology to empower both the guests and the host to live in a safe environment.

Star hotel revenue falls 6.3pc

MUSCAT: The total revenue of Omani hotels in the three-to-five-star category fell by 6.3 per cent to R043.9 million till the end of February 2020 compared to R046.9 million for the same period of 2019.

Hotel occupancy rates fell by 7.8 per cent to reach 62.5 per cent at the end of February 2020 against 67.8 per cent for the same period of 2019, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Meanwhile, the total number of guests in Omani hotels rose by 0.8 per cent in the 2-month period of 2020.

Among the nationalities, Europeans constituted the maximum number of visitors, reaching 127,331. This was followed by 84,379 Omani guests and 31,171 Asian tourists till the end of February 2020, the data released by NCSI revealed.

There was a rise in the number of American, Oceanian, and GCC guests by 5 per cent, 10.2 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively until the end of February 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

However, there was a drop in the number of European, African and other Arab guests by 7 per cent, 0.4 per cent and 5.6 per cent, respectively.

Omani hotels received 1.77 million guests and the hotels generated a total revenue of R0229.5 million in 2019. — **ONA**



PREPARING FOR ZAKAT

Lakshmi Kothaneth

The last week of Ramadhan sees everyone getting ready to perform one of the important pillars of Islam – Zakat.

Understanding the principles of fasting and the completion of fasting with Zakat provides an insight on the reasons for these two acts and that is to bring in an understanding between the haves and have nots.

Through fasting one understands hunger and through Zakat one learns to care about the needy in the society. But there is more.

Hatim al Abdulsalam, member of the Islamic Information Centre of Oman explained that there are two types of Zakat that has to be performed – one is for the purification of one's wealth and the other is to purify the body.

“Let us clarify the terminologies as when it comes to Zakat there are two types one is Zakat al Maal –that is the Zakat on wealth and Zakat al Abdan, which is Zakat on purifying our bodies. Now Zakat al Maal can be paid any time of the year, which is 2.5 per cent of your annual savings while Zakat al Abdan is only paid in Ramadhan on the last day before the prayers where rice is given out to the needy. It can be rice or wheat depending on the country and the staple diet there. This type of Zakat is not paid as money but it is paid out as food. Normally there are Zakat

committees in each area where they take the collection from people and bulk amount of rice is purchased and distributed to the needy families,” Al Abdulsalam explained.

According to him this year the rate of rice to perform Zakat for each individual is RO 1.5.

“For example the head of the family including each member of the family he is responsible for is added to the Zakat. He has to contribute RO 1.5 on behalf of each member of the family,” he added.

“First of all it is abiding by the wish of the Almighty and it is also the purification of our body. We have fasted for 30 days and this is a way of purifying ourselves after the long dedication of worship. The third reason is for the joy of the day (Eid) so nobody should go hungry on that day,” he noted.

“Can you imagine if there is the needy and the poor who have to see everyone enjoying Eid and the feasting while they do not have anything to feed their children? Islam is a complete way of life and it teaches that even in terms of joy and happiness it has to be in a group and not just at individual level. So I cannot be happy and enjoy the feast while my neighbor who is needy cannot get something to celebrate. They do not just receive Zakat al Abdan most people in Oman pay Zakat of their wealth during Ramadhan as well,” said Al Abdulsalam.

What is also important is knowing who is the member of the society who requires a helping hand.

FATWA

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

Question

Does having a tooth pulled invalidate fasting?

Answer

No, it does not if he did not swallow the blood. Allah knows best.





Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

WORLD



A medical worker takes a swab sample from a man to test for the coronavirus in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province on Tuesday. Authorities in the pandemic ground zero city of Wuhan have ordered mass COVID-19 testing for all 11 million residents after a new cluster of cases emerged. — AFP

WHO members agree on COVID-19 strategy as Trump threatens UN agency

GENEVA: Any future vaccine and medication for the novel coronavirus must be made available cheaply to the world “as a global priority”, World Health Organization members (WHO) agreed on Tuesday in a meeting that was overshadowed by US threats to leave the agency.

In an annual meeting that was held online, WHO member countries adopted a resolution that “calls for the universal, timely and equitable access to and fair distribution” of medical products to fight the coronavirus disease COVID-19.

The WHO members also called on the pharmaceutical industry and others involved in research and development to share and pool their patents.

Hours before the resolution was passed, US President Donald Trump threatened to permanently pull funding from the WHO, and to consider a US exit from the UN health agency if it does not commit to “major substantive improvements” within 30 days.

In a four-page letter to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Trump set out what he

WASHINGTON PROVIDES BETWEEN \$400 MILLION AND 500 MILLION A YEAR TO THE WHO BUDGET OF NEARLY \$3 BILLION

called “repeated missteps” by the organisation.

Trump claimed that the WHO shares responsibility for the large number of deaths in the COVID-19 crisis. He charged that mismanagement on the part of the WHO and reliance on information from China had dramatically worsened the epidemic and spread it globally.

Washington provides between \$400 million and 500 million a year to the WHO budget of nearly \$3 billion.

Leading medical journal The Lancet rejected Trump's assertion that the WHO had ignored its reports from late 2019.

“This statement is factually incorrect”, the Lancet said in a message, noting that its first reports were published on January 24. — dpa

Cash for farmers to give up wildlife trade

BEIJING: Farmers in China are being offered cash to quit breeding exotic animals as pressure grows to crack down on the illegal wildlife trade that has been blamed for the coronavirus outbreak.

Authorities have for the first time pledged to buy out breeders in an attempt to curb the practice, animal rights activists say.

China has in recent months banned the sale of wild animals for food, citing the risk of diseases spreading to humans, but the trade remains legal for other purposes — including research and traditional medicine.

The deadly coronavirus — first reported in the central Chinese city of Wuhan — is widely believed to have passed from bats to people before spreading worldwide. — AFP

Evacuation as cyclone nears India

NEW DELHI: Indian authorities evacuated hundreds of thousands of people on Tuesday as a powerful cyclone over the Bay of Bengal moved towards the country's eastern coast.

Cyclone Amphan is forecast to make landfall between West Bengal and Bangladesh on Wednesday afternoon.

Meteorologists are warning of large-scale damage from strong winds, tidal waves, heavy rains and flooding, including in the densely populated city of Kolkata.

On landfall, the “very severe” cyclone could reach speeds of between 155 and 160 kilometres per hour (km/h) with gusts of up to 185 km/h, according to Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) head Mrutyunjay Mohapatra. — dpa

ANALYSIS

Together we survive



Samuel Kutty

samkuttyobserver@gmail.com

A physician in the US treating COVID-19 developed sleeplessness not because she was a witness to so many people succumbing to the virus. Perhaps, the trauma of the bereaved families could have led her to into insomnia. Also, it could have been fuelled by worries about own safety. Or maybe it was the possibility of the thoughts that she could bring the virus home to her children, aged 8 and 9. She was reportedly taking medication that could suppress her immune system, putting her at higher risk from the coronavirus. With no letup in the coronavirus pandemic, it is not surprising that people especially health care workers like this US doctor are fatigued, anxious and stressed. Adapting to lifestyle changes like working from home, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues coupled with the fear of contracting the virus and worry about people close to us who are particularly vulnerable, are challenging for all of us.

We are struggling with loss of the joy of gatherings, hugs, handshakes, and eating together. Adding to the worries are the likely unemployment and financial crunch. Measures like stay at home and quarantine and its effects on usual activities, routines or livelihoods are expected to take a toll on the mental health. As the World Health Organisation suggests, "Fear is a normal reaction in situations of uncertainty. But sometimes fear is expressed in ways which are hurtful to other people". So do not forget to remember to be kind to others. Don't ill-treat doctors, nurses and other medical staff as they deserve our respect and gratitude. Recovered coronavirus patients also need your support and love. If your movements are restricted, keep in regular contact with people close to you by telephone and online channels. We are all in the midst of various problems, but we need to let that sink in. We must support each other. The only way to get out of this labyrinth is extending support to others. We all must be willing to brave through this pandemic together!



A woman with face mask cycles in the afternoon sunshine in Hyde Park, London, on Tuesday following the relaxing of lockdown restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

Coronavirus pushes science centre stage

STÉPHANE ORJOLLET

Hydroxychloroquine, double-blind studies, convalescent plasma, herd immunity — the coronavirus pandemic has thrust the language of science into public view as never before. Having escaped the confines of the laboratory, these and other once-obscure terms are fast becoming part of household parlance. But familiarity with the terminology does not necessarily lead to a better understanding, especially when there is an avalanche of new findings, experts caution. When researchers disagree or change their mind on the efficacy of a treatment or policy,

the normal back-and-forth of the scientific process can breed confusion, they say. This is only amplified by a 24-hour news cycle and social networks, they add. The number of studies about the new coronavirus and the disease it causes has skyrocketed into the thousands, with hundreds more in the pipeline at any given time. This is as it should be, said Serge Horbach, an expert on academic publishing at Radboud University in The Netherlands and author of a new study about the explosion in research sparked by the coronavirus pandemic. Publishers have also made relevant studies freely available, and suspended the usual practice of releasing them under embargo which delays access even further. — AFP

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this page are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.

FEATURES

A taste of Indonesian Iftar

KABEER YOUSUF

Just as the holy month of Ramadhan advocates upholding relations and cementing human bonds with each other, Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-populated country celebrates the month with a lot of piety, bonhomie and of course, some exclusive Ramadhan dishes. This year, although coronavirus has stolen the gatherings and people are deprived of the festive events like they normally would, Indonesians are making the most of their iftars within the four walls of their homes in the company of their immediate family members. "Usually Indonesians hold iftar gathering with their peers which can happen almost every day with different groups. However, we are celebrating the holy month with our immediate family members, probably the first of its kind as I can remember", says Pilar Ayu, an Indonesian official who was stranded back home during her holidays. The opening of fast at sunset in Indonesia is called "Buka Puasa" or Iftar. Usually, people first take a hot or cold

drink and eat sweet snacks to allow the tummy to slowly get adjusted to food again after abstinence of overlong 13 hours, and take sweet drinks to supply energy. "In Muscat, we also hold such iftar event every year to uphold the tradition, followed by prayers and networking. But we don't do any of those this year due to the social distancing instruction." Obviously no gathering at all this year. Especially outside the house because all restaurants in Indonesia only cater for takeout orders or even closed. So people only do iftar at home with their family alone. For iftar, no specific dishes are important and it can be anything and is not limited to a particular dish alone. Although for the takjil (fast-breaking snacks), people tend to eat traditional snacks, like fritters (banana, tofu, tempeh), serabi (rice cakes taken with palm sugar syrup and coconut milk), and the like depending on each family's tradition and what's currently trending. Kolak (chunks of banana and sweet potato, boiled with coconut milk and palm sugar and pandan leaves) served warm or cold is another inevitable dish from Indonesian iftars.



MUST TRY DISH

Sop Buah

Literally translated as 'fruit soup', Sop Buah is a dessert consisting of tropical fruits in a bowl of condensed milk and its taste is a unique combination of the freshness, the sweetness, and the natural sourness of fruits. This dessert is sold in almost every street of Indonesia, especially in big cities or warmer regions. Sop Buah is traditionally eaten to break the fast during the holy month of Ramadhan, but you can make it at home and have it anytime you want because the ingredients are easily available at your nearest store. Plus, it's so versatile that you can make your own variations.

- FRUIT INGREDIENTS (you can adjust with any fruits):**
- Avocado, as desired
 - Watermelon, diced
 - Strawberry, cut it into 4
 - Pineapple, cut into small triangles
 - Melons, make a circle like a marble
 - Longan, remove the seeds
 - Papaya, diced
 - Mango, diced
 - Grape, halve

- SOUP INGREDIENTS:**
- 1 glass of boiled water
 - 5 tablespoons of coco pandan syrup
 - 1 sachet of white sweetened condensed milk
 - Shaved ice

HOW TO MAKE:
Put all the fruit ingredients in a medium-sized bowl. Blend a glass of boiled water with condensed milk; then stir well and pour it into the bowl of fruits. Add some shaved ice and pour the coco pandan syrup over it. Sop Buah is ready to be served.



Locked out of galleries, Londoners find Caravaggio street art

LONDON: LONDONERS LOCKED out of galleries can find an alternative art fix on a wall under some railway arches after street artist Lionel Stanhope painted a Caravaggio classic, updated for the coronavirus age.

The Italian baroque master's "Supper at Emmaus" is usually available to view at the National Gallery in London, but with that shut, Stanhope's giant interpretation is now on show in Ladywell, southeast London.

Lockdown has given the artist the time and the quieter streets to replicate a painting he said he has always admired and wanted to do on a large scale.

"I thought I wanted something that was going to take me some time, you know, quite a long time to do, just to get through the days of not doing anything else, so that's why I took it on," Stanhope told Reuters.

The artist is best known for his giant green and gold place-name murals near railway stations, a trend which in recent years has fostered local pride and provided a backdrop for outdoor food markets.

But since the virus shut down normal life in March, the 52-year-old artist has been

unable to carry on with his commissions, and has instead turned his attention to the pandemic.

Caravaggio's 1601 painting depicts a resurrected Jesus appearing to two of his disciples at a table spread with a meal. In Stanhope's spray-painted version, Jesus is wearing surgical gloves.

"Christ is wearing a pair of blue gloves, just to make it relevant for today of what we're all going through," Stanhope said.

He also recently completed a mural tribute to healthcare workers under a bridge near London's busiest rail station, Waterloo, and close to St Thomas's hospital, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson was treated for COVID-19.

Stanhope asked Network Rail, owner of the bridge, if they had a wall he could use to say thank you to the National Health Service. In the mural, the NHS acronym is given the superman treatment and seen bursting from a blue chest in red and yellow.

"There's a lot of street artists doing a lot of NHS work at the moment which is really nice to see," Stanhope said by phone, adding that the pandemic was giving more meaning to street art.

"I think a lot more street art-

ists that I know of, who would normally paint their own kind of work, are just putting a twist on it to make it relevant, and to maybe thank the NHS or key workers, or message about the coronavirus," he said.

His Caravaggio is hidden away in a cul de sac but he said people were heading down on their daily lockdown exercise to have a look, and he had enjoyed the positive response on social media.

But now, after using up all his spare paint, he is keen to get back to real life.

"I need some paid work now ... I'm hoping that on Sunday when we hear about the government's proposals that I might be able to start doing some other work," he said.

The government will review the lockdown this week and the Prime Minister is expected to set out a roadmap for easing restrictions on Sunday.—

Reuters



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LIQUIDITY CRUNCH HITS POWER, WATER FIRMS IN OMAN

FISCAL CONSTRAINTS: MOVE WILL NOT IMPACT SMOOTH OPERATION OF UTILITIES, SAY EXPERTS

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Publicly traded power and water companies in the Sultanate say they are weighing the implications of a decision by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) – the monopoly state-run offtaker of electricity and related water output – to temporarily curtail payments in light of the constrained fiscal environment.

Three listed power producers – SMN Power (which owns and operates the Barka and Rusayl utilities), Al Suwadi Power, and Al Batinah Power – said in separate filings to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Tuesday that OPWP – part of Nama Group (formerly The Electricity Holding Company) – will begin a “hold back” of the Power Capacity Investment Charge payable to utilities under their respective Power Purchase Agreements.

SMN Power, which also operates a co-located water desalination plant, has been notified that the ‘hold back’ includes a Water Capacity Investment Charge as well.

Industry experts contacted by the Observer stressed that OPWP’s action will have no impact on the continuing operation of power and water projects in the short term, noting that the move is designed to enable the state-run offtaker to manage current liquidity challenges attributable to recent budgetary pressures.

It comes against a slew of measures announced by the Ministry of Finance aimed at reducing budgetary spending by ministries and government enterprises, which includes OPWP, by at least 10 per cent during 2020.

That follows a dramatic decline in



international oil prices, a sizable cut in oil exports, and a general downturn in the economy – developments that have impacted state revenues.

Announcing the move by OPWP, SMN Power’s Chief Financial Officer stated in the filing: “Oman Power and Water Company SAOC (OPWP) notified the affiliates of SMN Power (SMN Barka Power Company SAOC and Al Rusail Power Company SAOC) in its letters dated May 17, 2020 that starting from April 2020 invoices, it will hold back the Power Capacity Investment Charge and Water Capacity Investment Charge, over and above holding back of the fuel charge payment.

OPWP has committed, as far as the liquidity situation allows, to pay at least the Power Capacity Fixed Operation and Maintenance Charge, Electricity Energy Charge, Water Capacity Fixed Operation and Maintenance Charge, and Water Output Charge under the Power and

Water Purchase Agreement.”

According to a power industry executive, the “hold back” will not result in significant cash-flow problems for the affected power and water companies – at least not in the short term. This is because of OPWP’s commitment to continuing payments that cover, among other things, operating costs, plant maintenance, and staff salaries.

However, should the “hold back” of the Fixed Investment Charge – which typically includes the capital cost, return on capital, loan instalment, return on loan, and interests thereof – continue for an indefinite period, then the likelihood of a default in debt payments arises, the executive noted. It is understood that Oman’s power and water companies were given a heads-up by authorities of the “hold back” move in light of budgetary pressures and the government’s increasing challenging fiscal situation.

11pc jump in motor insurance claims in Q1

MUSCAT: Unaudited quarterly statements of insurance sector companies for Q1 2020 show that as many as 23,800 traffic accidents were recorded during the quarter. It included 4,100 'major' accidents and about 19,700 'minor' accidents, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) said.

Claims for minor accidents grew by 9 per cent during the quarter to more than 20,400 minor accidents, while claims against major accidents were up 11 per cent to 4,224 incidents.

The number of traffic accidents claims resulting in damage in addition to treatment expenses for bodily injuries climbed 12 per cent in the first quarter compared to the corresponding quarter of 2019. Claims for deaths increased 6 per cent to 145 traffic accidents.

Compensation paid out by insurance companies for financial damage resulting from minor traffic mishaps declined 26 per cent to RO 4.7 million during the quarter.

However, payment towards major traffic accident claims rose more than 300 per cent to RO 2.45 million.

Claims involving major accidents which recorded both financial damage and treatment expenses increased 6 per cent to RO 1.3 million. Blood money payments (diya) fell 19 per cent to RO 285,000.



Oman-owned chemicals giant eyes new capacity growth in 2021

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Wholly Omani owned OQ Chemicals (formerly Oxea) – a global manufacturer of oxo intermediates and oxo derivatives – says it plans to boost its output of carboxylic acids, which are a key ingredient in the international animal feeds industry as well in the manufacture of synthetic lubricants.

Germany-headquartered OQ Chemicals – which is wholly owned by OQ (until recently Oman Oil and Orpic Group) – the refining and petrochemicals powerhouse of the Sultanate – also announced moves to ramp up its production of other key intermediate chemical products.

The announcements came as the erstwhile Oxea formally rebranded as 'OQ Chemicals' as part of its integration into OQ – the Sultanate's consolidated energy conglomerate.

The integration with OQ will open up new synergies for international

clients of the newly rebranded OQ Chemicals, said Dr Oliver Borgmeier, who oversees Downstream International Assets at Muscat-headquartered OQ.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES:
'INTEGRATION WITH OQ WILL OPEN UP NEW SYNERGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS OF NEWLY REBRANDED OQ CHEMICALS'

"Long-term, our customers will benefit from synergies at OQ: We will continue to invest in innovation. In 2021, we aim to add 30 per cent to our company's total production capacity for carboxylic acids with a sixth world-scale production plant.

For the same year, we plan to bring on-stream additional production capacity for TCD Alcohol that will cover the anticipated global demand for years to come," he added.

Oxea, which became part of OQ's predecessor Oman Oil Company (OOC) in 2013, is a global producer of oxo intermediates and oxo derivatives, such as alcohols, polyols, carboxylic acids, specialty esters, and amines.

These products are used for the production of high-quality coatings, lubricants, cosmetics and pharmaceutical products, flavours and fragrances, printing inks and plastics.

OQ Chemicals, with plants in the United States, Germany, China and the Netherlands, produces more than 70 different types of oxo intermediates and derivatives currently totaling over 1.3 million tonnes per annum and generating revenues of around about €1.2 billion annually.

Early last year, OQ Chemicals affirmed plans to bolster capacity at its five existing carboxylic acid production units during 2020 in preparation for the goal of bringing a sixth world-scale production plant on stream in 2021.

BUSINESS

OMANTEL SCALES UP ONLINE SERVICES

MUSCAT: Omantel is building up on its primary role to ensure the people and the businesses remain connected to each other even more during these critical times. The company has put its shoulders to the wheel in order to ensure seamless connectivity even as COVID-19 weighs on industries globally.

"At Omantel, we understand the absolute need to serve customers and partners remotely and to deliver services at their doorstep during these exceptional circumstances. We also believe that COVID-19 has been a real test to Omantel's core values, and by working hand in hand with our customers and partners and utilising our resources, the company has been able to deliver a number of essential services remotely, either through its online channels or to the customer's doorstep.

Moreover, the exceptional circumstances have been a good opportunity to assess Omantel's agility and solidify its position as a customer-centric company that can adapt to the



market dynamics," said the telecom services firm in a statement.

This approach toward service delivery during COVID-19 has enabled Omantel's customers to receive New Baqati Post-paid SIM, Home Internet Services, New Hayyak and SIM Replacement among other essential services at their doorstep.

Additionally, Omantel has recently launched its official WhatsApp account that is fully integrated with its digital assistant "Noor", an artificial intelligence that caters for various customers' requests.

Likewise, Omantel has

fully integrated its services to deliver a seamless end to end digital experience for the enterprise customers, and it is looking at multiple smart solutions to help organisations digitize and optimize their operations. Significantly, Omantel extends "Webex" service free of charge for three months in cooperation with Cisco, "Teams" Free trial for six months along with its partnership with Microsoft as well as a four months free trial of IGTIMAATI, an Omani startup with an in country hosted collaboration and conferencing platform.

The various solutions

are catered to address various needs of various applications and sectors. All of these offerings along with many others like audio conference, mobile IVR, Contact Center as services (CCaS) were deployed and extended to enable the public and private organisations to work seamlessly from home and build on their operational excellence.

Omantel has supported multiple public organisations in enabling their e-services, and has recently helped the Ministry of Health in developing their artificial intelligence chatbot.



MUSCAT: A strategic collaboration between Thomson Reuters, a global leader in tax technology solutions delivered through its ONESOURCE portfolio, and Path Solutions, a provider of intelligent software solutions to Islamic banks and financial institutions, has resulted in a GCC-specific centralized VAT solution that stands to transform efficiencies

First centralised VAT solution for Islamic banking

for the region's fast-developing financial sector. The innovative system is a first, and will enable institutions and corporations to streamline data, automate processes and ensure accuracy in tax flows, as the region's VAT and tax regulatory landscape evolves.

By combining the power of Thomson Reuters' ONESOURCE best-in-class indirect tax solution certified by the UAE Federal Tax Authority, and Path Solutions' Sharia-compliant iMAL Islamic Core Banking Platform, this

strategic partnership—pioneering in the GCC market—offers banks and financial institutions the tools to deliver innovative and frictionless financial services and achieve seamless VAT management and compliance supported by globally-trusted tax content.

iMAL gives its clients the technology to meet the soundest Sharia and regulatory requirements, and to scale their businesses while also delivering personalised customer experience.

SOHAR PORT SIGNS PACT TO ESTABLISH SERO

MUSCAT: Despite the current unprecedented situation due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the management team at Sohar Port and Freezone affirms that business continues to operate as usual, while implementing the highest preventive measures at Sohar facilities in line with directives of the Supreme Committee.

Sohar entered into an agreement with Unity Fire & Safety Services LLC, an Omani company, for the management of the Sohar Emergency Response Organisation (SERO).

The signing took place on Tuesday between Mark Geilenkirchen CEO of Sohar Port, representing Sohar and Kevan Whitehead, Managing Director of Unity Fire and Safety Services LLC.



Commenting on the new partnership, Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of Sohar Port said, “At Sohar, we believe that ensuring high standards of safety, which also includes the presence of a well-prepared Emergency Response is vital for our business continuity.

The agreement will help to minimise the financial, reputational, environmental and human safety impacts of any incidents that might occur. We have identified the need to

strengthen the Emergency Response system and align it better with the area risk profile.

Therefore, for several years we have been preparing the establishment of a specialised Sohar Emergency Response Organisation (SERO), which will become the collective first responder for all incidents within the Port area, while simultaneously working in a formal, well-trained Mutual-Aid system with OQ and PACDA in the case of very large incidents.”

From his side, Kevan Whitehead, Managing Director of Unity Fire and Safety Services LLC stated, “As a local Omani company, Unity Fire & Safety Services LLC is extremely proud and delighted to have been chosen to be a part of the management of the Sohar Emergency Response Organisation.

We believe through various developments Sohar will become the best practice model for all Sea Ports within Oman.

We envision that SERO will be responsible for the creation of local employment opportunities with a target of around 90 per cent Omanisation, furthermore creating a cost-effective and efficient emergency response organisation for all the tenants and customers at Sohar Port and Freezone.”

Oman Arab Bank appoints new Deputy CEO

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced the appointment of Sulaiman bin Hamad al Harthy (**pictured**) as the Deputy Chief Executive Officer - Chief Business Officer, as of May 17, 2020.

Commenting on the appointment, Rashad al Musafir, the CEO of OAB, said, “Sulaiman al Harthy has extensive experience in the banking industry in general, and Sharia-compliant banking in particular, holding several senior positions over the past three decades. This has provided him with insight and thorough knowledge about market needs, competition and marketing mechanisms.

I am confident that upon taking up his new role and joining the Oman Arab Bank family, he will be a valuable addition to our efforts in enhancing the Bank's market share and enriching our reach to the broader

segments of society.”

Commenting on his appointment, Sulaiman al Harthy said, “I believe that this is truly an important step in my career in the banking sector, which comprises of more than three decades now. Joining Oman Arab Bank during the current phase is a challenge that I am fully prepared for.

The Bank has a clear strategic vision for the future, with specific goals in place that it will strive to achieve during the upcoming period. I am delighted to be a part of this wonderful team that will work tirelessly to achieve these great ambitions and look forward to the future with optimism.

I look forward to working with the team, I look forward to working with the team towards taking the Bank to the forefront of the banking industry.”



Sulaiman al Harthy has over 32 years of experience, and held several leadership positions at major local banks and financial institutions.

Most recently, he was the Group Chief Personal Banking Officer at Bank Muscat and had been appointed as Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Meethaq Islamic Banking.

Al Harthy is a graduate of Oman Institute of Bankers, as well as a graduate from the Executive Management Programme at Harvard Business School.

He also holds an MBA in Finance from Leicester University, UK.

BUSINESS

Oil gains on signs of output cuts, improved demand



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed Opec logo in this illustration picture. — Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices rose slightly on Tuesday amid signs that producers are cutting output as promised just as demand picks up, stoked by more countries easing out of curbs imposed to counter the coronavirus pandemic.

Benchmark Brent crude climbed 7 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$34.88 a barrel by 0907 GMT, after earlier touching its highest since April 9.

US West Texas Intermediate crude was up 70 cents, or 2.2 per cent, at \$32.52 a barrel.

"The market sees both forces aligning: the cuts Opec+ promised are materialising and other non-member production shut-downs are also really helping to limit the oversupply," said Paola Rodriguez Masiu, senior oil markets analyst at Rystad Energy.

"Meanwhile, lockdown measures are removed globally and the economy needs fuel to restart."

The June WTI contract expires on Tuesday, but there was little sign of a repeat of the historic plunge below zero seen last month ago on the eve of the May contract's expiry amid signs of

rising demand for crude and fuels.

The July WTI contract was up 12 cents per barrel at \$31.77.

The market was boosted earlier by signs that output cuts agreed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and others including Russia, a group known as Opec+, are being implemented.

Opec+ cut its oil exports sharply in the first half of May, companies that track shipments said, suggesting a strong start in complying with their latest pact to curb output.

US production is also falling, with crude output from seven major shale formations expected to fall to 7.822 million barrels per day in June, the lowest since August 2018, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

A recovery in fuel demand in India also gathered momentum in the first half of May. Still, global demand recovery is expected to be slow as some restrictions remain and there is a significant risk of repeat outbreaks and lockdowns. — Reuters



People work in the client experience space at the Nasdaq Market site in New York. — Reuters

NASDAQ TO TIGHTEN LISTING RULES, RESTRICTING CHINESE IPOs

NEW YORK: Nasdaq Inc is set to unveil new restrictions on initial public offerings (IPOs), a move that will make it harder for some Chinese companies to debut on its stock exchange, people familiar with the matter said.

While Nasdaq will not cite Chinese companies specifically in the changes, the move is being driven largely by concerns about some of the Chinese IPO hopefuls' lack of accounting transparency and close ties to powerful insiders, the sources said.

At a time of escalating tensions between the United States and China over trade, technology and the spread of the novel coronavirus, Nasdaq's new curbs on Chinese IPOs represent the latest flashpoint in the financial relationship between the world's two largest economies.

Nasdaq also unveiled some restrictions on listings last year, seeking to curb IPOs by small Chinese companies. Their shares often trade thinly because most stay in the hands of a few insiders. Their low liquidity makes them unattractive to many large institutional investors, to whom Nasdaq is seeking to cater to.

The new tightening of the listing standards reflects the bourse operator's concerns about some Chinese companies seeking US IPOs.

Last month, Luckin Coffee, which had a US IPO in early 2019, announced that an internal investigation had shown its chief operating officer and other employees fabricated sales deals. — Reuters

SPORTS

AHMED SHAPES UP AL NASR FUTURE PADDLERS



ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: Egyptian table tennis coach Ahmed Mahmoud said TT game in the Sultanate is moving in the right direction with a clear vision by Oman Table Tennis Committee (OTTC). The head coach of Al Nasr club told Oman Daily Observer that the Sultanate has many potential paddlers who can perform very well at top regional and international table tennis events in the coming few years.

“Hosting high class events of table tennis in Muscat with presence of the top seeding paddlers will definitely add a technical value to the domestic players. Many of the national team players had very tough and challenging matches with ranking paddlers from different countries. I believe having more of these kind matches will gain the required experience for local players and this will support them to shine in the near future”, he added.

The former SCP Sporting club player for four seasons, pointed out that Al Nasr are working on a future plan to assist the vision of OTTC by providing talented players to the national team. “We are working

closely with the OTTC in their current project at junior centres. The OTTC supported us in providing with all the necessary tools including the tables, rackets, balls, the ground floors etc. Besides, head coach of the national team, Mohammed Atoum, attended some of the monthly camps and competitions among the junior centres from different parts of the Sultanate.

All the mentioned factors supported us to ease our assignment in preparing the future paddlers for the national team”, he said.

The former player of Al Ahli (Egypt) team appreciated the cooperation of the player’s parents. “A dedicated thanks to the paddler’s families for their support with us to allocate some time for practising table tennis sport. This helped us as the team managed to win the top place at the Dhofar Governorate level as well as we had claimed the fifth position in the national championship for the first time. Now, my aim and focus is to claim the podium in the next edition of the top domestic competition”, the Egyptian coach added.

Real, Bayern and Inter to launch European Solidarity Cup

MADRID: Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and Inter Milan will stage a new competition called the ‘European Solidarity Cup’ in 2021 to raise money for medical facilities in Italy and Spain.

The three clubs will play each other in a round-robin group, with Inter against Bayern held in Milan, Real facing Inter in Madrid and Bayern hosting Real in Munich.

Proceeds from the fixtures will be donated to medical facilities in Italy and Spain, two of the world’s worst-hit countries by the coronavirus pandemic. The aim is “to send out a message of solidarity and fraternity to the people of Europe”, said a statement from Real Madrid.

Dates for the tournament have not been decided. The timing will “depend on the match calendar and when football can be played in front of fans again”, the clubs said.

Bayern will invite 5,000 nurses, carers and doctors to the Allianz Arena for their match against Real Madrid.

“Nurses, carers and doctors in particular are doing an outstanding job for society at the moment”, said Bayern Chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. “We, the three clubs, want to show these heroes our appreciation, respect and gratitude”.

“The great commitment of all healthcare workers has been essential to allow us to look to the future”, said Inter President Steven Zhang.

“With this initiative we want to thank them and celebrate their work and at the same time send a message of unity and solidarity between nations”. — AFP



SPORTS



RONALDO BACK TO JUVENTUS TRAINING AFTER 2 MONTHS

TURIN, ITALY: Cristiano Ronaldo returned to training with Juventus in Turin on Tuesday after an absence of over two months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 35-year-old arrived at the Juventus Training Centre in a Jeep with tinted windows around 09:20 (0720 GMT), leaving three hours later with a smile and thumbs up for waiting photographers.

Ronaldo underwent medical and physical tests before joining up with his teammates for the first time in 72 days for individual training, according to media reports.



**THE ITALIAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION
ANNOUNCED THAT ALL ITS
COMPETITIONS,
INCLUDING SERIE A, WILL
REMAIN SUSPENDED
UNTIL JUNE 14**

Coach Maurizio Sarri has been conducting training in small groups since Monday, pending the final health protocol to be agreed with the Italian government.

Juventus players got back to individual training on May 4, the day Ronaldo returned to Italy after spending lockdown in his native Portugal.

For the past two weeks, he has been in quarantine in his villa in Turin.

Ronaldo played in Juventus' last Serie A game before the season was suspended, a 2-0 win over Inter Milan behind closed doors at the Allianz Stadium on March 8.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner is the first Juventus foreign player, among those who left Italy during the lockdown, to return to the team's Continassa training centre.

Italy has been one of the countries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic with more than 32,000 deaths.

League leaders Juventus are leading Lazio by one point as they target a ninth consecutive 'Scudetto'.

The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) announced on Monday that all its competitions, including Serie A, will remain suspended until June 14. — **AFP**

SPORTS



Agut eyes elusive ATP Finals spot

MUMBAI: Qualifying for the season-ending men's ATP Finals, which features the world's top eight singles players and doubles teams, is one of the goals for Roberto Bautista Agut before he retires, the Spaniard has said. The 32-year-old came close to ticking that off his wish list when he rose to a career-high world ranking of ninth last year and served as a reserve player for the 2019 edition of the event in London. "It is one of the goals I would

like to achieve before retiring," Bautista Agut told ATPTour.com. "I know how difficult it is, I know that I have been very close some seasons. It's not something I'm obsessed about, but it remains a goal I'd like to achieve some day." Bautista Agut was ranked 12th when the tennis season was suspended in early March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The tennis shutdown will continue at least until the end

of July and the fate of the 50th edition of the ATP Finals, scheduled for November 15-22 in London, is expected to be decided later. The Spaniard made a strong start to the season by winning all six of his singles matches for Spain in the ATP Cup before reaching the third round of the Australian Open, where he fell to Croatia's Marin Cilic after a gruelling five-setter. In November, Bautista Agut, who has 11 career wins

against top 10 opponents, returned to Spain's Davis Cup squad a day after his father's funeral and delivered an emotional win over Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime to help his country to a sixth title. "What keeps me motivated is my competitiveness. I'm very competitive both as an athlete and person," he said. "I'm always trying to improve and win, adding minor details to my game, because it's a feeling I love." — Reuters

British GP 'impossible' with UK quarantine

LONDON: A British Grand Prix would be "impossible" this year if elite sport is not exempt from 14-day quarantine restrictions when entering the United Kingdom, Formula One said on Tuesday. Silverstone is planning to host two races behind closed doors this summer, subject to government approval, to make up for some of the lost time in the 2020 F1 season with 10 races either cancelled or postponed. However, the UK government's coronavirus recovery strategy document set out an intention to introduce a 14-day quarantine rule for international arrivals. "A 14-day quarantine would



make it impossible to have a British Grand Prix this year," an F1 spokesperson said. "Additionally it has a major impact on literally tens of thousands of jobs linked to F1 and supply chains. "We would be travelling back

to the UK on F1-only occupied aircraft and all staff would be tested making a quarantine totally unnecessary. "If all elite sport is to return to TV then exemptions must be provided." Seven of the 10 teams on the

Formula One grid have bases in the UK. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told parliament last week that the return of sport on TV would "provide a much-needed boost to national morale". F1 organisers are hoping to start the season with the Austrian Grand Prix on July 5 behind closed doors, followed by a second race at the Red Bull Ring a week later. It was hoped Silverstone could then host two races in the final two weekends in July. Should quarantine measures not be lifted for elite sport then they could also have a major impact on the participation of British sides in European football competition. — AFP

SPORTS

A full-page background image of Virat Kohli in his Indian cricket uniform, wearing a blue jersey with 'BYJU'S INDIA' and 'MRF' logos, blue trousers, and a blue helmet. He is in a batting stance, holding a bat, with a white cricket ball visible near his feet. The background is a blurred stadium.

Kohli credits change in stance for versatility

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli's wide range of shots makes him one of the most versatile batsmen of his era and the India captain says it was a tweak to his stance that brought him a deluge of runs in recent years.

Kohli made his India in 2008 as a flashy batsman but has since combined compact technique with elegant shot-making.

In a Facebook live chat with Bangladesh one-day captain Tamim Iqbal, he said ditching his earlier stance opened up scoring options for him.

"I changed because I wanted to score all over the ground. The static position was limiting my shot-making options," said the 31-year-old, who goes back-and-across in his current stance.

"It works for many, Sachin Tendulkar for instance. He had no issues because of his superior technique and hand-eye coordination.

"I had to tweak it to suit my game. When someone first told me it could open up my options, I thought of giving it a try.

"Luckily, it clicked and I immediately started executing shots which I never thought I could."

Kohli averages 50-plus in all three formats, has smashed 70 international centuries and boasts an exquisite cover drive.

Among his contemporaries, Australian Steve Smith has an unorthodox but effective stance, standing open to the bowler and shuffling across the off-stump line, and Kohli said batsmen had to find out what worked for them.

"I always feel you should be open to changes... You can't stagnate, you have to keep learning," he said.

"If you keep playing in the same manner, opposition will figure out your game. You have to be ahead of the game.

"So try it and drop it if it doesn't work, but any batsman should be open to positive changes," added Kohli.

— Reuters