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### His Majesty sends cables of greetings to leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands on the occasion of his birthday.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to King Willem-Alexander and the friendly people of his country further progress and prosperity .

His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of greetings to President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Ramaphosa and his country's friendly people.

His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Faure Gnassingbe of the Republic of Togo on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Gnassingbe and his country's friendly people.

His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Julius Maada Bio of the Republic of Sierra Leone on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Maada Bio and the friendly people of Sierra Leone. — ONA

## CALL TO RESUME SOME BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

### SULTANATE REPORTS 93 NEW COVID-19 CASES AS 333 RECOVER

**VINOD NAIR**  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

The Ministry of Health announced on Sunday the registration of 93 new positive cases with coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Sultanate. Around 33 of the new cases are Omanis and 60 cases expatriates.

This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 1,998, in addition to 10 death cases.

The ministry also pointed out that 333 cases have recovered.

The ministry also advises citizens and residents to keep on washing hands with water and soap, as well as avoiding touching the face, nose, mouth, eyes and following healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

**COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES**

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has urged the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 to develop a plan to resume some of the commercial activities in the country. In a statement issued on Sunday, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, OCCI Chairman, said that suspending the commercial activities

for longer periods will deepen the economic crisis and affect the economy in general.

At the same time, he added,

“The private sector institutions must follow the occupational and health safety guidelines issued by the authorities concerned”.

The chairman said that the supply chain activities in the same economic sector, especially those related to the already permitted activities and ones that touch the daily lives of people, shall be allowed.

He said, “If some economic activities are resumed, interactions with the consumer shall be done either through home delivery service and online programmes that have been successful in the past”.

He added, “There is a need for providing emergency loans to help companies with a sharp decline in their revenues as a result of the pandemic.

At the same time, these companies have to meet certain obligations and monthly fixed expenses. They should be allowed to borrow loans to the value of their fixed expenses, which include the wages of their employees and rents for the next three months”.

The OCCI chairman appreciated the role played by the Supreme Committee and praised the efforts of the Ministry of Health, workers in the public and private health sector, the security apparatus that include the military services and the Royal Oman Police

## Oman-Kuwait relations exemplary and deep-rooted

MUSCAT: Salman al Harbi, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Sultanate, described relations between the Sultanate and Kuwait as deep-rooted and exemplary under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait. In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), the ambassador also hailed cordial ties between the Emir of Kuwait and the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and the centuries-old ties between the two countries.

Dr Salman pointed out that the Sultanate and Kuwait are bound by ancient ties of amity, one destiny and common goals. These values became evident during times of crises, he said, adding that the two countries work together towards the realisation of a two-pronged approach to development — with similar goals — based on “Kuwait Plan 2035” and “Oman Vision 2040”.

He explained that the two long-term programmes target investment in the sectors of fisheries, mining, petroleum, logistics and transport.

The Kuwaiti envoy prayed to the Almighty Allah to grant the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council states, the Arab world and the Islamic nation stability, peace and security and to spare the whole world all calamities and evils. — ONA

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# PLANS FOR ‘LABOUR CITY’ TO GATHER STEAM

**CLOSER TO WORKSITE:** Need for having labour camps outside the residential areas has become more important now than ever

VINOD NAIR  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Expatriate bachelor accommodations and camps have brought in concern of further community spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, especially in maintaining isolation and quarantine.

For the moment, authorities from the Ministry of Health and Muscat Municipality have tried to address the issue by intensifying the COVID-19 tests among this section of the society.

A Muscat Municipality official said at the press conference on Thursday that the need for having labour camps outside the residential areas has become more important now than ever.

“There is a discussion by the concerned authorities at all levels



about the expatriate workers’ accommodation and we seek to reach the stage of establishing worker’s cities outside the residential areas”, said Dr Shawqi bin Abdulrahman al Zadjali, Deputy General of Health Affairs, Muscat Municipality.

For creating a city for workers close to their worksites, Muscat Municipality has been coordinating with the Ministry of Housing to allocate a land plot to build a Labour City in an area of 250,000 sqm for which the private sector will be invited to bid for the construction and management.

The local order 23/92 of Muscat Municipality states that it is not permitted to establish complexes or buildings for single expatriate workers in residential or commercial residential areas.

## Sultanate among top Arab countries in food security



**CAIRO:** A study released by the Union of Arab Chambers (UAC) showed that the Sultanate is among countries with high food security indicators alongside other GCC states according to data obtained from the Economist newspaper.

The study, published in the April issue of the UAC’s Arab Urbanism magazine, said the data extracted from the Economist Intelligence Unit (The EIU) found that 6 out of 14 Arab countries (Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain) are classified among the top 50 countries in the Global

Food Security Index based on affordability and availability indicators.

The study titled ‘Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Global Food Supply Chains and its Risk on Food Security in the Arab World’, said that food security in general relies on four major factors of affordability, availability, and quality and safety of food. Based on those factors, it won’t be easy for the Arab countries to escape the current COVID-19 related food security crisis.

The study concluded that the current situation requires the declaration

of an emergency state to concert efforts at the highest levels to support the social security networks as well as facilitate inter-trade through Arab countries for food products and commodities within the Greater Arab Free Trade Area” (GAFTA).

### MORE LIVESTOCK TO ARRIVE

The Sultanate has since the beginning of April imported a total 169,000 heads of livestock to meet local demand during the month of Ramadhan, said the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Sulaiman bin Mohammed al Salmi, Director-General of Livestock at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries affirmed that a further 15,000 goats will arrive from Australia on Tuesday. He stated that sufficient quantities of both live animals and cold meat will be available in the markets in the coming period.

Al Salmi noted that the ministry has issued import licences to a number of livestock importers thereby opening the door for additional live animal shipments to arrive in the Sultanate.

— ONA

### IN BRIEF

## SQU department obtains ISO 9001 certification



**MUSCAT:** The Deanship of Admission and Registration at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has received ISO (9001/2015) for Admission and Registration Services for quality in the administration of Admission and Registration Services.

The certificate was received by Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, SQU Vice Chancellor, in the presence of a number of invitees, a representative of the consulting company and a representative of the external audit company (the company granting the certificate). — ONA

## Breathing apparatus for low-income patients

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Health (MoH) signed an agreement for supplying breathing apparatus for low-income and social security patients worth (RO 50,000) funded by Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO).

The agreement was signed by Dr Kadhim Jafar Suleiman, MoH’s Director General of Specialized Medical Care and Khalid al Fana al Araimi, Company’s External Affairs Manager. — ONA

## Real estate transactions now available online

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Housing in Oman announced the resumption of real estate transactions from Sunday, April 26, through a section allocated for e-services on its website <http://housing.gov.om>.

The transactions such as property sale, exchange, donation, inheritance, mortgage and ownership receipts can be completed on the website.

## These unsung heroes reach the needy with food kits

KABEER YOUSUF  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

It’s true that the coronavirus threat has taken away the beauty of iftar gatherings and social get-togethers during the holy month.

But some volunteers from across spectrum of the society are putting all efforts to fetch the essence of iftar despite maintaining the social distancing parameters.

They are active by 5 pm. To be precise, they rush to the restaurants and other joints individually, get the already packed iftar kits, an assortment of foods for iftar, and move to different parts of the city.

“The act of giving is something that gives mental containment especially during the difficult times of coronavirus spread”, said Natasha Winn, representative of Muscat Caribbean Community.

A large number of volunteers be-



longing to various NGOs or otherwise are on the streets by the dusk rushing iftar kits to those needy people who are fasting. These are men of various ethnic backgrounds, diverse cultural origins, wearing different attires, preparing to bring foods comprising dates, water, laban and other delicacies for breaking fast to the needy.

“We supply iftar kits to nearly 500 people, mostly bachelors, everyday in view of the lockdown. They are left

nowhere without iftar tents, said PTK Shameer, Ameer Kavanur and Mohammed Vanimel, who spearhead the charity drive near the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Ruwi.

The Sultanate of Oman has been witnessing such scenes since the beginning of the holy month on Saturday and at various locations across the city sending out messages of togetherness.

“We have been catering to hundreds of people everyday with dates, water,



juice, laban and the like for more than a decade now. This year, the iftars are taking a totally different dimension and we have been sending these foods to their doorsteps since one week, thanks to our supporters like Lulu Exchange, Malabar Gold and other kind-hearted people who don’t want to be named”, Jayakumar Vallickav, a volunteer added. These men and women are real unsung heroes for they feel the hunger pangs of one another, they drive for kil-

ometres braving the corona proliferation, but strictly obeying the protective measures, in a bid to reach the needy out there.

Ramdass Chandaka, head of an active social service organisation, Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), said that hundreds of packets containing food materials have been distributed by more than 50 volunteers among the blue collar workers and other community members since last few weeks.

“We have been distributing food and food materials among the low income groups in and around Ruwi, Athaiba and Muttrah, thanks to the kind-hearted people who entrust us to do so,” Ramdas told the *Observer* after distributing the Iftar kits on the second day of Ramadhan

Ramdass Chandaka, head of an active social service organisation, Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), said that hundreds of packets containing food materials have been distributed by more than 50 volunteers among the blue collar workers and other community members since last few weeks. “We have been distributing food and food materials among the low income groups in and around Ruwi, Athaiba and Muttrah, thanks to the kind-hearted people who entrust us to do so,” Ramdas told the *Observer* after distributing the Iftar kits on the second day of Ramadhan.

# FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

RAY PETERSEN

My friends in New Zealand and the United Kingdom are curious about Ramadhan, knowing a little of it, and if I'm asked how it 'looks', I would have to respond like this...

For me, little changes apart from one key element. No! I'm not required to 'be a Muslim' for a month, and if I choose to not observe Ramadhan it would be a choice that I have the freedom to make. However, if I was to break the Ramadhan fast, that could be offensive to others. Many expats, not used to the demands of Ramadhan in a hot climate, will take water surreptitiously, or behind closed doors, to get them through the daylight hours, so as not to offend anyone.

You don't have to be living as a European, in the Middle East, as a non-Muslim, in a Muslim society, to understand that while there will be no 'bowing and scraping before you', you are accorded a level of personal respect that is quite endearing, and is yours to lose. One certain way to do so, is to dismiss it as an irrelevance to your own lifestyle and culture. You would do so at your peril, because that would mean that you are forgetting you are a guest in their home country and be incredibly antagonistic and disrespectful. Although the level of offence cannot invite a comparison, it would be akin to visiting a friend, and lighting up a cigarette in their no-smoking home environment. It would be a dumb move!

In any case, a wise man would choose a totally different, empathetic attitude to Ramadhan, as most do. Rather than relying on their ability to be discreet, and inoffensive, it is almost easier, and certainly less antagonistic



Suhoor, simple and healthy food before dawn.



A typical family iftar.



Ramadhan, a holy month in the Islamic Calendar.



Typical Ramadhan lights/lamps

to comply with Ramadhan by not eating from daylight till dusk. And certainly, one of the non-Muslim faculty at the University of Nizwa have commented on the "almost child-like delight", of her students when she 'let slip', that she was doing so. "It was a great moment as the

news spread around the room like the ripples from a pebble on the pond, and I'm certain that my doing so was what got us through some really challenging times, knowing we were 'doing it' together.

Another big thing you notice about Ramadhan is how regimented

each day becomes. However, this is not peculiar in some respects, as prayer times are always published in all forms of the media, and everyone has phone apps telling them the prayer times, and which way to face Mecca. With Ramadhan's significant disciplinary intrusions into Muslim

life, of which there are as many practical aspects as there are of their faith (more on that another time), the day does get 'portioned up'.

Muslims take a small meal, suhoor, before their first prayer in the morning, the Fajr before sunrise. Then they will go about their daily tasks until the Dhuhr prayer, at midday, when the Sun is at its highest. Work finishes early during Ramadhan, so there is then something of a rush hour on the roads prior to the Asr afternoon prayer. Then, well I think most take a nap (I know I do!), because the streets will be deserted. The Maghrib prayer is when everything comes to life again, and after that they will take their evening meal, iftar and spend time with family and friends until the night prayer, Isha.

Iftar meals are not small, as every matriarch seems intent upon proving she can provide more and better food than anyone else. It's like having Christmas Dinner everyday for a month, and you know if you don't workout, you will 'pile on the pounds!' Many restaurants will offer free food to the less affluent of their communities. And kids with lights and lamps, celebrating an Egyptian Caliph lighting the way in the search for his son who had been kidnapped by an ogre. In days gone by would play in the streets, but today play in the yard with their fancily decorated lanterns.

So, I will tell my friends, "That's what it looks like". And there is always one who will say, "Yes Ray, but what's it all about?" That's when I will say, "I'm all talked out mate, but I'll tell you later". So that's me, I will tell you later, what Ramadhan is 'all about', from the other side of the fence, next week.

## WHAT WE MISS THIS RAMADHAN?

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

In the light of the implementation of precautionary measures to limit the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19), some of the Ramadhan traditions that people were accustomed to for decades, have changed this year. Family visits, food exchange with neighbours and relatives, as well as mass Ramadhan dining have almost disappeared, creating a totally different atmosphere of the holy month.

But for the sake of everyone's safety, all are keen to implement social and physical distancing, keeping in mind the necessity to sense the spirituality of the holy month within the family environment, celebrate it and create Ramadhan atmosphere inside the home.

Ahmed al Abri says, "Not going out during the month of Ramadhan, should be an opportunity to focus on acts of worship and establish rituals with Allah, which will contribute to creating a family spirituality that brings family members closer together".

Suad al Jahwari says, "We must use the time to pray at home, which, by God's willing, will be a reason to respond, and end the epidemic".

In the Sultanate, one of the customs that will be missed this time is mass iftar gatherings in mosques, besides, relatives gathering in the house of the oldest at one dining.

Asad Muhammad says, "In Ramadhan, we used to exchange dishes with neighbours before breaking the fast. This habit has been preserved by the Omani society for long, embodying the concepts of tolerance, brotherhood, equality and affection that the old and young Omanis grew up on. However, this year we abandoned this habit out of fear of spread of COVID-19".

Moreover, some wilayats of the Sultanate are accustomed to celebrate children's day in the blessed month of Ramadhan, as children roam the neighbourhoods, which is called (Qarnaqasho). Yet it seems to be missed this time.

In the last days of the holy month of Ramadhan, 'habta' (weekly market) are held, which are open markets that has a specific and fixed date and is known to the people in every wilayat all over the Sultanate, where all the requirements for Eid al Fitr are available. It is still too early to determine whether these 'habtas' will take place or not, as it depends on the vision of the Supreme Committee and its decisions for the interest of society as a whole.

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# Ramadhan Mubarak

2020 / 1441 AH

**1**  
Ramadhan  
Saturday  
25/4/2020

FAJR: 04:18  
DHUHR: 12:10  
ASR: 03:36  
MAGHRIB: 06:37  
ISHA: 07:52

**2**  
Ramadhan  
Sunday  
26/4/2020

FAJR: 04:17  
DHUHR: 12:10  
ASR: 03:36  
MAGHRIB: 06:38  
ISHA: 07:52

**3**  
Ramadhan  
Monday  
27/4/2020

FAJR: 04:16  
DHUHR: 12:10  
ASR: 03:36  
MAGHRIB: 06:38  
ISHA: 07:53

**4**  
Ramadhan  
Tuesday  
28/4/2020

FAJR: 04:15  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:35  
MAGHRIB: 06:39  
ISHA: 07:54

**5**  
Ramadhan  
Wednesday  
29/4/2020

FAJR: 04:14  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:35  
MAGHRIB: 06:39  
ISHA: 07:54

**6**  
Ramadhan  
Thursday  
30/4/2020

FAJR: 04:13  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:35  
MAGHRIB: 06:39  
ISHA: 07:55

**7**  
Ramadhan  
Friday  
1/5/2020

FAJR: 04:12  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:34  
MAGHRIB: 06:40  
ISHA: 07:55

**8**  
Ramadhan  
Saturday  
2/5/2020

FAJR: 04:12  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:34  
MAGHRIB: 06:40  
ISHA: 07:56

**9**  
Ramadhan  
Sunday  
3/5/2020

FAJR: 04:11  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:34  
MAGHRIB: 06:41  
ISHA: 07:57

**10**  
Ramadhan  
Monday  
4/5/2020

FAJR: 04:10  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:34  
MAGHRIB: 06:41  
ISHA: 07:57

**11**  
Ramadhan  
Tuesday  
5/5/2020

FAJR: 04:09  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:33  
MAGHRIB: 06:42  
ISHA: 07:58

**12**  
Ramadhan  
Wednesday  
6/5/2020

FAJR: 04:08  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:33  
MAGHRIB: 06:42  
ISHA: 07:59

**13**  
Ramadhan  
Thursday  
7/5/2020

FAJR: 04:07  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:33  
MAGHRIB: 06:43  
ISHA: 07:59

**14**  
Ramadhan  
Friday  
8/5/2020

FAJR: 04:07  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:33  
MAGHRIB: 06:43  
ISHA: 08:00

**15**  
Ramadhan  
Saturday  
9/5/2020

FAJR: 04:06  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:32  
MAGHRIB: 06:44  
ISHA: 08:01

**16**  
Ramadhan  
Sunday  
10/5/2020

FAJR: 04:05  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:32  
MAGHRIB: 06:44  
ISHA: 08:01

**17**  
Ramadhan  
Monday  
11/5/2020

FAJR: 04:04  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:32  
MAGHRIB: 06:45  
ISHA: 08:02

**18**  
Ramadhan  
Tuesday  
12/5/2020

FAJR: 04:04  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:32  
MAGHRIB: 06:45  
ISHA: 08:03

**19**  
Ramadhan  
Wednesday  
13/5/2020

FAJR: 04:03  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:31  
MAGHRIB: 06:46  
ISHA: 08:04

**20**  
Ramadhan  
Thursday  
14/5/2020

FAJR: 04:02  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:31  
MAGHRIB: 06:46  
ISHA: 08:04

**21**  
Ramadhan  
Friday  
15/5/2020

FAJR: 04:02  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:31  
MAGHRIB: 06:47  
ISHA: 08:05

**22**  
Ramadhan  
Saturday  
16/5/2020

FAJR: 04:01  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:31  
MAGHRIB: 06:47  
ISHA: 08:06

**23**  
Ramadhan  
Sunday  
17/5/2020

FAJR: 04:00  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:31  
MAGHRIB: 06:48  
ISHA: 08:06

**24**  
Ramadhan  
Monday  
18/5/2020

FAJR: 04:00  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:30  
MAGHRIB: 06:48  
ISHA: 08:07

**25**  
Ramadhan  
Tuesday  
19/5/2020

FAJR: 03:59  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:30  
MAGHRIB: 06:48  
ISHA: 08:08

**26**  
Ramadhan  
Wednesday  
20/5/2020

FAJR: 03:59  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:30  
MAGHRIB: 06:49  
ISHA: 08:08

**27**  
Ramadhan  
Thursday  
21/5/2020

FAJR: 03:58  
DHUHR: 12:08  
ASR: 03:30  
MAGHRIB: 06:49  
ISHA: 08:09

**28**  
Ramadhan  
Friday  
22/5/2020

FAJR: 03:58  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:30  
MAGHRIB: 06:50  
ISHA: 08:10

**29**  
Ramadhan  
Saturday  
23/5/2020

FAJR: 03:57  
DHUHR: 12:09  
ASR: 03:30  
MAGHRIB: 06:50  
ISHA: 08:10

\* Prayer timing in Muscat Governorate  
Residents of other governorate should  
consider time difference

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# Bye bye tutus, hello masks!

FRENCH OPERA HOUSES MAKE MASKS TO SUPPORT FIGHT AGAINST COROANVIRUS



The world's chicest coroanvirus masks? French opera and ballet costume makers are helping boost supplies. — AFP

**PARIS:** Normally they make tutus and elaborate costumes for some of the greatest opera and ballet stars in the world. But the costume makers from opera houses across France are now turning their considerable talents to making masks.

Since the beginning of April, Christine Neumeister, the costume director of the Paris Opera, has been driving around collecting masks 30 of her couturiers have made while locked down at home.

The first week they made 1,000 for the Red Cross and a Paris maternity hospital, and the following week they made a similar number for the Salvation Army.

Packed into "tutu bags" marked "Opera de Paris", they have to be among the chicest personal protection

accessories around -- although staff from the French couture houses Dior and Louis Vuitton have also been volunteering to turn their hands to mask making.

#### USEFUL IN A CRISIS

"We have the material and the know-how", said German-born Neumeister.

"It's also rewarding for us too to know that our work, which is an art in itself, can be useful in this moment of crisis", she added.

"My German grandmother used to say that during the war people who could make something with their hands were the heroes".

With chronic shortages of masks for the general public and even medical and nursing home staff in

France, there is no shortage of takers.

The country is likely to make wearing mask obligatory in some public spaces when its strict lockdown begins to be relaxed from May 11.

Mask-making in the costume departments of opera houses across France only began in earnest after the official norms were posted online at the end of March.

Neumeister "opted for a mask with three folds which resembles a surgical one and which allows you to breath better than the duck-beak model".

She said it was made with lightweight poplin with a cotton fleece in the middle. "It has to be washable to 60 degrees Celsius (140F)".

Neumeister said it takes about 20 minutes to make, slower than if her staff were working in their studio.

#### FABRIC SHORTAGES

Isabelle Daumas and 20 of her colleagues from the Toulouse Opera in southwest France will also start turning out masks to the same high standards from Monday.

And like several staff and artists from the Capitole de Toulouse, which houses the opera, a ballet and orchestra, everyday she has been helping to disinfect centres set up to receive people who may have COVID-19.

At the Marseille Opera, they have gone even further, asking for their masks to get the official imprimatur of the local authorities for use by their staff.

Rather than working from home, "five or six people work each day in

the studio", sticking rigidly to social distancing rules, said Aude Eisinger, who set up the drive for the local council.

With 1,000 masks a week to turn out, "we are drawing on the opera's stock of fabrics because getting fresh supplies is difficult", she added.

It's a similar situation at the Bordeaux Opera where technical director Yves Jouen said "our usual suppliers of fabric are pretty much out of stock".

There a small group of costume makers cut the fabric in the opera's workshops before delivering them to the homes of their colleagues who do the sewing.

"We even have musicians from the orchestra who are sewers lending a hand", Jouen said. — AFP

## Germany eyes home office for all

**BERLIN:** With so many Germans working from home due to restrictions from the coronavirus, Labour Minister Hubertus Heil says he is pushing legislation that would codify a right to a home office. But business groups say they are not interested.

Heil told the newspaper Bild am Sonntag that he hoped to present the legislation towards the end of the year and that it would continue applying even after the coronavirus restrictions - which require people to maintain distance from one another to prevent the disease's spread - are lifted.

"Anyone who wants to work from home - and in cases where the company allows it - should be able to work in a home office, even after the corona pandemic is finished", he said.

He said the law, as he envisioned it, would allow people to completely shift to a home office or to split their time between home and a central office. Initial data suggests that the number of people who work from home has jumped from 12 per cent before the health crisis to around 25 per cent now.

But the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) said on Sunday it sees little to like in Heil's proposal, arguing that what German companies need is flexibility, not more government rules.

"We need a moratorium on limitations, not further regulations that limit growth and flexibility", said Steffen Kampeter, the BDA's Chief Executive.

That would mean a focus on mobile work, but only when it is possible and sensible.

"Business interests and customer wishes need to play a central role", he said. "You can't keep the economy running just with home offices".

But the proposal did win some praise from Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, who also belongs to Heil's centre-left Social Democrats, the minority party in the governing coalition.

Katrin Goering-Eckardt, head of the Greens delegation in the Bundestag also praised the idea, saying all workers deserve what has until now been a "privilege" for some.

But she added that, for the proposal to work, Germany would also have to ensure a right to high-speed Internet, which is not always the case in Germany. — **dpa**

**Ramadan Iftar Program**

RAMADAN MUHAKKAK

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

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

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## Why you need to use ACs with caution

Rumours spread on the Internet suggest that use of air-conditioners during this summer may not pose some risk. The truth, as per the fact check done by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), is not that straightforward.

Based on inputs from doctors, the official handle of PIB Fact Check tweeted that running windows AC in a room where there is no coronavirus patient poses no risk to people.

"As the mercury soars, here's one more #PIBFactcheck. "Claim: ACs should not be used to cool off in the heat, as they spread #Covid\_19. "Fact: It's a little complicated. Window ACs are OK, but not central air-conditioning. Let's listen to this segment from @DDNewsLive", said the tweet.

In the video clip accompanying the tweet, doctors are heard saying that in healthcare establishments



where there could be coronavirus positive patients, central ACs may pose some risk.

A guidance document by the Indian Society of Heating, Refrigerating -- Air-Conditioning Engineers (ISHRAE) also suggested that people should use air-conditioners with caution during the pandemic, especially in healthcare establishments.

"The most important factor in this scenario is to ensure that the virus-laden airborne particles do not leak out of the rooms occupied

by COVID-19 patients and also to maintain the concentration of virus-laden particles inside the patient room at a minimum", said the document titled, "COVID-19 Guidance Document for Air-Conditioning and Ventilation".

This is required to control the spread of infections and also to protect the healthcare workers, it added.

"As is the normal practice, most of these patient rooms would be served by a HVAC (heating, ventilation and air-conditioning) system that would be of a recirculatory type, wherein the air from the room is taken back to the AHU (air handling unit) for thermal conditioning and brought back", ISHRAE said.

"The same HVAC system could also be connected to a few other areas of the hospital. In some cases, there might be no dedicated return air duct and it could be a ceiling return system.

"If a COVID-19 patient had to be admitted to such a room, it would present a significant risk of the virus-laden particles

spreading out from the designated COVID-19 patient rooms", the document added.

The engineers suggested how air-conditioners should be used in different settings such as homes, commercial establishments and in healthcare facilities.

The document suggests that recirculation of cool air by room air-conditioners must be accompanied by outdoor air intake through slightly open windows and exhaust by natural exfiltration.

"Set room temperature between 24 degrees Celsius and 30 degrees C. Maintain relative humidity between 40 per cent and 70 per cent", ISHRAE said, adding that in humid climates, one should set temperature closer to 24 degrees for de-humidification and in dry climates closer to or at 30 degrees and use fans to increase air movement.

"In dry climates, do not allow relative humidity to fall below 40 per cent. Water evaporating from a pan kept in the room will increase humidity if it falls below 40 per cent", it added. — **IANIS**

IN BRIEF

UK PM to return to work on Monday

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will return to work on Monday after recovering from the novel coronavirus, a government spokesperson confirmed.

He has been recuperating at Chequers, the prime minister's residence outside London, after being released from hospital on April 12.

Johnson spent a week being treated for Covid-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel virus, at St Thomas' Hospital in London, including three nights in intensive care after his condition dramatically deteriorated.

Johnson is understood to have held a three-hour meeting on Friday ahead of his return with senior cabinet members including Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who has been deputising for him, Britain's Press Association news agency reported.

Sky News on Saturday quoted a government source as saying Johnson was "raring to go" ahead of his return to Downing Street on Monday.

Johnson's return to work comes at a crucial time, as pressure mounts on the government to ease coronavirus lockdown measures.

Although experts believe that the worst of this infection wave has passed, the death rate could still rise for a while, as the great number of people already infected either convalesce or die. — **dpa**



Saudi eases lockdown, except in Mecca

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia on Sunday began to loosen its nationwide curfew imposed last month to limit an outbreak of the new coronavirus.

Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz ordered the curfew partially lifted starting from Sunday until May 13, allowing people to go out from 9 am (0600 GMT) until 5 pm, the state Saudi news agency SPA reported.

A 24-hour curfew will, however, remain in place in the holy city of Mecca, the agency added.

In his decree, the monarch also allowed some businesses, including shopping centres, retail and wholesale stores, and factories to reopen for two weeks, beginning next Wednesday.

The agency said the latest steps were taken on a recommendation from the health bodies and out of the monarch's interest to ease restrictions on the public. — **dpa**

Trump and Putin issue rare statement

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin issued a rare joint statement on Saturday commemorating a 1945 World War Two link-up of US and Soviet troops on their way to defeat Nazi regime as an example of how their countries can cooperate.

The statement by Trump and Putin comes amid deep strains in US-Russian ties over a raft of issues, from arms control and Russia's intervention in Ukraine and Syria to US charges that Russia has spread disinformation about the novel coronavirus pandemic and interfered in US election campaigns.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the decision to issue the statement sparked debate within the Trump administration, with some officials worried it could undercut stern US messages to Moscow.

The joint statement marked the anniversary of the April 25, 1945 meeting on a bridge over the Elbe River in Germany of Soviet soldiers advancing from the east and American troops moving from the West.

Trump had hoped to travel to Moscow to mark the anniversary. He has been complimentary of Putin, promoted cooperation with Moscow, and said he believed the Russian leader's denials of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election. — **Reuters**

Italy schools to reopen in September

**ROME:** Schools in Italy will remain closed through the summer holidays and reopen in September, the prime minister said in an interview published on Sunday. Italy has been under lockdown for longer than any other Western nation, with the epidemic hitting its industrialised north hard. There have been more than 26,000 deaths and nearly 200,000 cases.

"The schools are very important to us and will reopen in September," Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte told the La Repubblica newspaper.

The government closed schools, universities and daycare centres across the country on March 5 as it worked to contain the fast-moving virus.

Conte has promised to begin outlining Italy's exit from the lockdown once the current virus containment measures expire on May 3. — **dpa**

17 policemen die of COVID-19 in Peru

**LIMA:** Seventeen police officers in Peru have died after contracting novel coronavirus while enforcing the nation's pandemic lockdown, officials and state media said. Authorities admitted earlier this week that at least 1,300 officers had been infected by COVID-19.

On Saturday new interior minister Gaston Rodriguez, who was sworn in a day earlier after the sudden resignation of his predecessor when the infections tally emerged, said: "We have 17 deceased police officers nationwide, 11 of them in Lima."

The high number is linked to "the exposure that police officers have when intervening with people who violate the measures issued to contain the spread of the coronavirus," state news agency Andina said on Saturday.

Peru has been on lockdown since March 16. Peru has recorded more than 25,000 infections and 700 deaths so far, according to a count by Johns Hopkins University in the United States. — **dpa**

Pet adoptions, fosters skyrocket in US

**WASHINGTON:** Animals shelters across the United States are emptying out thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, as people confined to their homes are adopting or fostering animals in droves.

"We've never seen anything like this," said Kitty Block, president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, which partners with some 400 shelters nationwide.

"The fostering and adoptions have just been through the roof," she said. "Every shelter is reporting out the same thing. It's amazing to see how many lives have been saved."

Block said as the COVID-19 outbreak took hold, shelters — many of which were forced to close because of stay-at-home orders — launched adoption appeals, and the response has been overwhelming.

Dogs, cats, rabbits and even hens have found homes, as people all over the country look for pets to help them cope with confinement. — **AFP**



# YEMEN SEPARATISTS ANNOUNCE SELF-GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH

## DEEPENING CRISIS: STC

accuses government of 'conspiring' against South as peace deal crumbles

**DUBAI:** Yemeni separatists on Sunday declared self-rule of the country's south as a peace deal with the government crumbled, complicating a long and separate conflict with Ansar Allah who control much of the north.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) accused the government of failing to perform its duties and of "conspiring" against the southern cause, and said self-governance had begun at midnight.

The government condemned the move and said the separatists — who have long agitated for independence in the south — would be responsible for the "catastrophic and dangerous" outcome.

The breakdown between the one-time allies comes as a coalition, which backs the internationally recognised government in a battle against the rebels, has extended a unilateral ceasefire aimed at fending off the coronavirus pandemic — a move rejected by the Ansar Allah.

Yemen's separatists signed a power-sharing deal in Riyadh last November that quelled a battle — dubbed a "civil war within a civil war" — for the south that had in August seen them seize control of the second



Fighters with Yemen's separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) deploy in the southern city of Aden on Sunday, after the council declared self-rule in the south. — **AFP**

city of Aden.

The Riyadh pact quickly became defunct, failing to meet deadlines for key measures including the formation of a new cabinet with equal representation for southerners, and the reorganisation of military forces.

The STC announced in its statement that it was declaring "self-governance in the south starting midnight on Saturday April 25, 2020.

"A self-governing committee will start its work according to a list of tasks assigned by the council's presidency," it said.

Aden residents reported heavy deployments of STC forces in the city and a separatist source said they had set up checkpoints "at all government

facilities, including the central bank and port of Aden".

Military vehicles drove through the city with STC flags flying aloft.

The political landscape in the south is complex, and despite the STC's declaration some southern cities said they did not recognise the call to self-rule and would remain aligned with the central government.

Yemen's Foreign Minister Mohammad al Hadhrami said the STC move was "a continuation of the armed rebellion last August and a declaration of rejection" of the Riyadh agreement.

### DEEP DIVISIONS

Tens of thousands of civilians have

been killed over the past five years in the war between the government and the rebels.

Earlier this month, Yemen reported its first case of coronavirus in Hadramawt, a southern government-controlled province, raising fears of an outbreak.

Compounding the country's troubles, at least 21 people were killed in flash flooding this month, with Aden's streets submerged and homes destroyed.

The STC has a zero tolerance policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood and Yemen's Brotherhood-influenced Al Islah party, which has representatives in the internationally recognised government. — **AFP**

## Fresh air at last! Spanish children allowed out for first time in six weeks

**MADRID:** On foot, on skateboards and on scooters, Spanish children emerged from their homes on Sunday for the first time after six long weeks of living under one of Europe's strictest coronavirus lockdowns.

The relaxation came as Spain, one of the worst hit by the global COVID-19 epidemic, registered its lowest daily increase in the coronavirus death toll in more than a month.

Children wearing protective masks were out in Madrid, with under 14s allowed outside for the first time since the government

declared a state of emergency on March 14 and shut down most activity.

Lucia Ibanez, 9, out for a walk with her mother, said she had missed the streets and the park and "feeling the air on your face" during lockdown.

"I never thought I would miss school but I really miss it," she said.

Children will be allowed one hour of supervised outdoor activity per day between 9 am and 9 pm, staying within one kilometre of their home.

Adults can accompany up to three children, who will not be allowed



A girl plays in a fountain at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, after restrictions were partially lifted for children for the first time in six weeks. — **Reuters**

to use playparks and must adhere to social distancing guidelines, remaining at least two metres from other people. Schools remain closed.

"To tell you the truth, for me the time flew, it didn't feel long at all. We played a lot, we aren't missing anything thank God so we can't complain," said Tamara Romero,

who took her two sons out on their scooters on Sunday morning.

Spain's Health Ministry said on Sunday that 288 more people had died after being diagnosed with the coronavirus, the lowest daily rise in the past month and down on Saturday's 378 and Friday's 367.

— **Reuters**

## Kim's private train spotted at resort town

**SEOUL:** A train likely belonging to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been spotted at a resort town in the country's east, satellite photos reviewed by a US-based think-tank showed, as speculation persists over his health.

The train was parked at a station reserved for the Kim family in Wonsan on April 21 and April 23, the 38North website said in a report.

38North cautioned that the train's presence "could not prove the whereabouts of the North Korean leader or indicate anything about his health".

"But it does lend weight to reports that Kim is staying at an elite area on the country's eastern coast," it said.

There has been growing conjecture about Kim's health since his conspicuous absence from the April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather Kim Il Sung, the regime's



The train was parked at a station reserved for the Kim family in Wonsan on April 21 and April 23. — **Reuters**

founder — the most important day on the North Korean political calendar.

Kim has not made a public appearance since presiding over a meeting of the Workers' Party

politburo on April 11 and inspecting drills by fighter jets at an air defence unit, which was reported by state media on April 12.

Daily NK, an online media outlet

run mostly by North Korean defectors, has reported Kim underwent a cardiovascular procedure earlier this month and was recovering at a villa in North Pyongan province.

Citing an unidentified source inside the country, it said Kim, who is in his mid-30s, had needed urgent treatment.

South Korea, which is still technically at war with the North, has played down the report.

CNN, quoting what it said was an anonymous US official, reported that Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in "grave danger" after undergoing surgery.

But on Thursday, US President Donald Trump rejected reports that Kim was ailing.

"I think the report was incorrect," Trump told reporters, but declined to state when he was last in touch with him. — **AFP**



# UK at ‘dangerous’ stage, no lockdown exit strategy

ESTELLE SHIRBON

**B**ritain’s stand-in leader resisted pressure on Sunday to explain how the government plans to ease a coronavirus lockdown that has been in place for a month, warning that hasty action could result in a second peak of infections.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has been deputising for Prime Minister Boris Johnson for three weeks, since he was taken to hospital with a serious case of COVID-19. Johnson, who has been recovering in the countryside since April 12, will resume full-time work on Monday and is “raring to go”, Raab said.

Appearing on political TV shows in his last day at the helm, Raab said the government was working privately on how to move out of the lockdown, but that speculating in public might dilute the current guidance to stay at home.

“We are at a delicate and dangerous stage and we need to make sure that the

next steps are sure-footed,” Raab told Sky News.

“We are proceeding very cautiously and we are sticking to the medical advice, the scientific advice, with the social distancing measures, at this time, while doing all the homework to make sure that we’re prepared in due course for the next phase.”

The official number of deaths related to COVID-19 in hospitals across the United Kingdom rose above 20,000 on Saturday, with the overall figure likely to be significantly higher once deaths in care homes and hospices are tallied.

The economic news has been equally dire. Businesses have reported an historic collapse in demand, retail sales have plunged by the most on record and government debt is surging.

With a Bank of England interest rate-setter warning that the economic contraction could be the worst in

**The official number of deaths related to COVID-19 in hospitals across the United Kingdom rose above 20,000 on Saturday, with the overall figure likely to be significantly higher**

centuries, the data added to pressure on the government to give some indication of when and how people and businesses would be able to get to work.

Pressed on this in a BBC interview, Raab would say only that there would not be a “binary easing of measures” but rather a gradual progression to a “new normal”.

Opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer argued in an open letter to Johnson that the British government was falling behind the rest of the world by refusing to say more.

“Simply acting as if this discussion is not happening is not credible,” Starmer wrote in the letter, which he tweeted on Sunday. He said the government had been too slow to impose the lockdown, to increase the uptake of testing and to get personal protective equipment (PPE) to hospital and care home staff.

“We need to see a significant step-change in the government’s response to this pandemic. Decisions need to be taken quicker and communication with the public needs to be clearer,” he said.

The government has set itself a target of 100,000 tests per day by the end of April, though fewer than 29,000 tests were carried out last Friday.

Raab said capacity now stood at 51,000

a day and he expected a surge in tests being carried out in the coming week.

On PPE, he said: “We’re doing everything we can in an international supply shortage to get them (health and care workers) the PPE, the equipment that they need, but it hasn’t been easy, we hold our hands up. It hasn’t been easy for any country.”

Doctors, nurses and care home workers have complained of shortages of gowns and, in some cases, of inadequate equipment and unclear guidance on when and how to use it.

The British Medical Association (BMA), which represents doctors, said PPE supply problems “continue to place healthcare workers at risk”.

It said health and care staff should be given priority to receive any PPE available, but also urged the government to ask the public to wear masks when leaving their homes. — Reuters



A sign on a restaurant window reads ‘we are closed for coronavirus but we will be back soon!!!’ in New York City. – AFP

## New Yorkers once again put to the test!

CATHERINE TRIOMPHE

**N**early two decades after Manhattan’s Twin Towers fell in history’s deadliest attack on US soil, the coronavirus pandemic is once again testing the storied mettle of New Yorkers.

The September 11, 2001 terror attack on the World Trade Center left nearly 3,000 people dead and shocked the city with its devastation. In comparison, New Yorkers say the deadly coronavirus pandemic, which has likely killed some 16,000 in the city, is more of a “slow cancer.”

“9-11 was supposed to be the darkest day in New York for a generation,” said New York state’s Governor Andrew Cuomo during one of his recent press briefings.

But with the virus’s spread the governor said “there was no explosion, but it was a silent explosion that just ripples through society.”

“With the same randomness, the same evil.”

Like Cuomo, many New Yorkers have been evoking 9-11 in comparison to the rapid spread of coronavirus, which has ravaged the densely populated city home to some 8 million people.

Maggie Dubris, a paramedic who was dispatched as part of an ambulance crew to the World Trade Center site on 9-11, thought she already had lived through “the biggest disaster of my lifetime.”

But the pandemic frightens her even more.

“After the Trade Center, you knew you’d survive,” the lower Manhattan resident said.

“I would see people down there, there was a reunion, we’d see each other, we’d hug,” Dubris said.

With the coronavirus pandemic “you

**The September 11 terror attack left nearly 3,000 people dead and shocked the city. In comparison, the deadly coronavirus, which killed some 16,000 in the city, is more of a “slow cancer”**

can’t touch anyone, and you don’t know who really will survive this, we have no idea what is to come here.”

Susan Barnett, a New Yorker who covered the 2001 attacks as a producer at the ABC network, agrees. “9-11 was shocking, this I find so much more frightening because of the global consequences,” she said.

“I am more scared now, I think the consequences are global and they could be absolutely dire, in terms of human health and survival,” said Barnett, who now works for a non-profit helping hospitals in developing countries.

Dubris and Barnett both live in neighbourhoods that were ensconced in clouds of smoke and closed to non-residents for weeks following the 9-11 attacks.

Both women see parallels between that era-defining tragedy and the current coronavirus crisis.

When crowds clap and cheer to honor essential workers at 7 pm each evening, they recall the cheers for rescue

workers heading to the WTC site, and those who offered them meals.

During a rare outing in deserted Manhattan, Dubris recently happened upon refrigerated trucks used as a temporary morgue.

“I remembered the morgue being set up at the WTC,” she said. “There is that same sense that something terrible, with a lot of deaths, has happened.”

But the differences between the two catastrophes are equally pronounced.

Ken Paprocki, a photographer who before 9-11 worked as an international flight attendant, dubbed the attack “a lightning strike, where the human mind could not keep up with the pace in which events were unfolding.”

But the coronavirus spread is more of a “slow cancer,” he said, calling it a “steamroller” where “you see it coming slowly but still can’t get out of the way.”

Originally from the state of Nebraska, Paprocki said he was moved by the solidarity of New Yorkers after the 9-11 attack. This time however he’s less impressed.

Paprocki said he has seen lie about their age and claim to be old to avoid supermarket lines, and toss used gloves and masks on the sidewalks. “Humans are acting accordingly for self-preservation,” he said.

The most populous US city is no stranger to tragedy, and for Barnett, who also lived through the devastating Hurricane Sandy in 2012, New Yorkers “are good at crises.”

“I think what draws people to New York and scares them about New York is you have to be tough,” said Barnett.

“There is a certain person that is attracted to this amazing, diverse, vibrant city,” she said. — AFP

## Why has Spain been hit so hard by coronavirus?

DANIEL BOSQUE

**I**n Spain, one of the hardest-hit countries in the pandemic, the coronavirus spread quickly and widely without being detected, especially among the elderly, experts said. While they stressed it was too early to carry out a detailed analysis, the experts pointed to the country’s sociable lifestyle and close ties between young and older family members as significant factors in the virus’s spread.

While Spain has the world’s highest coronavirus death toll per capita after Belgium, its mortality rate -- the percentage of infected patients who die -- stands at 10.4 per cent, below other hard-hit nations like Italy, France and Britain.

“The problem here is the size of the epidemic, the great quantity of infections which we had at the epidemic peak,” said Fernando Rodriguez, a public health professor at Madrid’s Autonomous University.

Only the United States has more confirmed COVID-19 cases than Spain, although national variations depend greatly on the number of tests that are carried out. A study carried out by the Polytechnic University of Catalonia estimated that more than two million of Spain’s 47 million people are infected.

The virus “circulated under the radar a lot” before the government ordered a near total nationwide lockdown on March 14, said the head of epidemiology at Barcelona’s Hospital Clinic, Antoni Trilla.

Unusually warm weather helped spread the virus.

“The weather was fantastic during the last weeks of February and the first week of March and people were out on the streets, very close to one another,” said Rodriguez.

This sped up the spread of the virus and “in very little time there was community transmission,” he added.

Lifestyle could also have played a role in a country where people spend a lot of time outside in groups eating out, attending religious processions, protesting or just going for a walk.

In Spain, as in Italy, “people hug and touch each other a lot, here people are constantly kissing, even at work,” said Ildefonso Hernandez, a professor of public health at the Miguel Hernandez University in Alicante.

In addition, Spain has the most people living in flats of any European Union country, according to EU statistics agency Eurostat.

“Our cities are built vertically, there is a lot of density and this can also facilitate the transmission of the epidemic,” Rodriguez said.

While Spaniards have a long average lifespan and the country has a high number of seniors who are more vulnerable to the virus, its share of the population over 65 is lower than other nations that have suffered fewer COVID-19 deaths, such as Germany. — AFP

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# business



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## Experts laud GCC's policy responses to COVID-19

DUAL SHOCK: THE GCC IS FACED WITH A 'GROWTH DOWNGRADE' THAT, IN FISCAL TERMS, IS ESTIMATED AT ABOUT \$41 BILLION IN 2020 ALONE.

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

An article by economists of the World Bank has commended the policy responses of the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), but underlines the potential for additional measures to help cushion the effects of the pandemic and low oil prices on national economies and their local populations.

Titled 'Coping with COVID-19 and Oil Price Collapse in the Gulf Cooperation Council', the article underscores the importance of, among other things, tailored policy measures, sops for the private sector, economic assistance to vulnerable households, and continued support for global efforts to contain the pandemic.

Importantly, the 'blog', jointly authored by World Bank economists Rabah Arezki, Rachel Yuting Fan, and

Ha Nguyen, urges GCC governments to defer any austerity measures to the post recovery phase.

"Countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) face a dual shock — from both the COVID-19 pandemic and the collapse in oil prices. Authorities should focus first on responding to the health emergency and the associated risk of economic depression and postpone fiscal consolidation linked to the persistent drop in oil prices until recovery from the pandemic is well underway," the economists wrote.

Citing projections by international agencies, the experts warn that the GCC region is faced with a "growth downgrade" that, in fiscal terms, is estimated at about \$41 billion in 2020 alone. But to the credit of the Gulf states, their well-established and modern public health systems, coupled with their policy responses to the virus, will hold them in good stead



through the post-pandemic recovery phase, they noted.

While lauding the "unprecedented policy responses" of the Gulf states, which have helped soften the effect of the dual shock, national authorities should consider "tailoring their responses" according to the severity of

the shock, the economists wrote.

"They should focus first on responding to the health emergency and the associated risk of economic depression. Authorities should postpone fiscal consolidation associated with the persistent drop in oil price and its spillovers until the

recovery from the pandemic is well underway. Instead, current emphases should be on budget reallocation and more efficient spending. In responding to COVID-19, authorities should boost spending on health — including producing or acquiring test kits, contact tracing technology, mobilizing and paying health workers, adding health infrastructure, and preparing for vaccination campaigns. Scaling up of testing and contact tracing for COVID-19 are especially important to determine the scale of the infection, detect and isolate cases which will be a factor in deciding whether and how to reopen the economy without causing a second wave of infections," the article stressed.

Furthermore, the economists mooted a "combination of bailouts, eased credit condition and monitoring" to support the private sector, including SMEs. Priority should

be given to strategic sectors, notably network industries and services such as transport, logistics, distribution and finance.

The World Bank experts also stressed the need for support to be extended to vulnerable households including expatriate workers. "Cash transfers to vulnerable households would help protect them and support consumption. This is relevant for the large expatriate labor force in the GCC countries. Making expatriate workers eligible for government cash transfers is not only an act of solidarity with the workers but also would enhance the reputation of the GCC as a good place to work," they stated.

Oman's policy responses, encompassing public health and safety measures, fiscal stimulus, and macro-financial and monetary initiatives, have received wide praise from a number of international institutions.

## When oil became waste

The magnitude of how damaged the energy industry is came into full view on April 20 when the benchmark price of US oil futures, which had never dropped below \$10 a barrel in its nearly 40-year history, plunged to a previously unthinkable minus \$38 a barrel.

In just a few months, the coronavirus pandemic has destroyed so much fuel demand as billions of people curtail travel that it has done what financial crashes, recessions and wars had failed to ever do — leave the United States with so much oil there was nowhere to put it.

While the unusual circumstance of negative oil prices may not be repeated, many in the industry say it is a harbinger for more bleak days ahead, and that years of overinvestment will not correct in a period of weeks or even months.

"What happened in the futures contract the other day indicated things are starting to get bad earlier than expected," said Frederick Lawrence, vice president of economics and international affairs at the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

"People are getting notices from pipeline companies that say they can't take their crude anymore. That means you're shutting down the well yesterday."

Evidence of the erosion of value for a product that has been a mainstay of global society since the late 19th century abounded across the world last week.

In Russia, one of the world's top producers, the industry is considering resorting to burning its oil to take it off the market, sources said.

Oil giant Equinor slashed its quarterly dividend by two-thirds. Next week will bring earnings reports from the world's largest oil companies including Exxon Mobil Corp, BP PLC and Royal Dutch Shell PLC. They are all expected to



Opec and its allies had already committed to record cuts of 10 million barrels of daily supply that have yet to take full effect. That commitment was not enough to prevent oil's fall below zero.

detail additional spending cuts, and investors will be watching closely for how those companies plan to manage dividends.

US billionaire Harold Hamm's Continental Resources Inc sent servicers out into fields in Oklahoma and North Dakota in the middle of the week to abruptly shut wells, and the company declared it could not make crude deliveries to customers due to poor economics.

Continental's decision to declare force majeure — usually reserved for wars, accidents or natural disasters — came as a shock, bringing a sharp response from the leading refinery industry group. But some say there is a logic behind it, even if it may not pass muster in court.

"You sign contracts based on the average norms that a society has experienced over the last 100 years. If we have a new event that is not covered by those norms, it goes into force majeure. That's what Harold Hamm and others are saying — that these are circumstances outside the norm," said Anas Alhajji, an energy market expert based in Dallas.

Even the long-rumored decision by the White House to tell Chevron Corp last week it could no longer operate in Venezuela, where it has

had a presence for nearly 100 years, met with a shrug.

"The global climate is terrible," said one person close to a Western oil company in Venezuela. "The license almost didn't matter anymore."

The market is forcing the hands of all producers. Across the world, governments and companies are preparing to shut down output, and many have already begun.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies had already committed to record cuts of 10 million barrels of daily supply that have yet to take full effect. That commitment was not enough to prevent oil's fall below zero.

Saudi Arabia has said it and other Opec members are prepared to take further measures, but made no new commitments. It is a measure of the depth of demand destruction that even if Opec stopped producing altogether, supply may still exceed demand.

More than 600,000 barrels per day in production cuts have already been announced in the United States, along with another 300,000 bpd of shut-ins in Canada. Brazil's state-run Petrobras has reduced output by 200,000 bpd. — Reuters

### Tender Notice

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tenders for 2020

| Tender Number | Tender Name                                                               | Deadline for Specifications Request | Deadline for tender bids | Tender Price |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 2/2020        | Supply of Computer Equipment                                              | 10-May-2020                         | 24-May-2020              | 25 OMR       |
| 3/2020        | Purchase and installation of internal network equipment Huawei            | 10-May-2020                         | 24-May-2020              | 25 OMR       |
| 4/2020        | Diversion of Existing Electric Services and Modifications to MEDC Network | 10-May-2020                         | 24-May-2020              | 48 OMR       |

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E.Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scanned copy of bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value validity for (120) days from the deadline for the tender bids and addressed to Public Authority for Social Insurance. In view of these exceptional circumstances, a copy of the bank guarantee is submit by email at [salehmb@pasi.gov.om](mailto:salehmb@pasi.gov.om) or [FatmaS@pasi.gov.om](mailto:FatmaS@pasi.gov.om) . And hard copy of the same should be submitted later manually to the Administration Department - Purchase and General Services Section / Third Floor, PASI Head Office in Baushar.

**CORRESPONDANCE:**

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system ( <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
1. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : +968 24166670 , E-mail : [etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)

**PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any tender that may be received**

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الهيئة العامة للتأمينات الاجتماعية



## MTC launches campaign in support of donate.om

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

With the beginning of the holy month of Ramadhan, the Ministry of Technology and Communications is conducting a promotional campaign for the donation portal of the Charitable Organizations: [www.donate.om](http://www.donate.om) through its official social media channels.

The campaign, titled ‘700 Times’, seeks to encourage online donation through the portal, which is managed by MTC.

It includes 31 charitable organizations that serve a number of charity areas including: motherhood and childhood, environment, zakat and charity, building masjids and Quran schools in addition to social care for people with special needs, orphans, the sick and families with low incomes.

This year, the portal features a number of accounts for some

charitable organizations that collect donations to help those affected by the coronavirus pandemic, especially employees and small business owners, whose activities have been suspended temporarily as part of the measures to address the spread of the virus.

The Ministry also reached an agreement with the commercial banks operating in the Sultanate to cancel bank transfer fees on all donations within the portal, as donors can donate to any type of charity starting from RO 1 to 999, and the entire amount will be transferred to the organization without deducting any transfer fees.

Donations collected during this year totaled RO 442K, with the aggregate since the launch of the portal in 2013 rising to over RO 4.871 million. Oman Charitable Organization received the highest amount of donations amounted to RO 1.100 million.

# International deliveries within 3 days via Oman Post’s new IPEX service

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Oman Post, an Asyad Group member company, recently announced the launch of International Premium Express Mail (IPEX), its new premium international document and parcel shipping service. With this new offering, Oman Post customers can ship internationally to over 220 destinations.

While continuously reviewing its procedures to adapt to the current coronavirus (COVID-19) situation, Oman Post encourages customers to avail of the new service and others by utilizing its appointments system to visit branches via the link <http://omanpost.om/booknow/> or call the customer service number 24170444, in order to ensure social distancing is enforced.

Abdulmalik al Balushi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Post said, “Our top priority is to ensure postal and logistical services are uninterrupted. Every day, our team is looking into enhancing current service offerings or introducing new ones that meet the requirements of our customer base across Oman.

We are responding to our customers’ feedback in order to always provide them with a convenient and user-friendly experience specially in the current challenging circumstances for the community at large.

We are now able to offer the same value we do on domestic deliveries but now on the international express delivery front.”

The IPEX service is part of



**WIDE REACH: EXPRESS DELIVERY TO 220 DESTINATIONS WITH THE NEW PREMIUM INTERNATIONAL PREMIUM EXPRESS MAIL (IPEX)**

Oman Post Express Mail Service (EMS) services. The new offering is geared towards fulfilling customer requirements to ship documents and parcels internationally with quality of service and convenience being the top priorities for Oman Post.

Door-to-door deliveries to major GCC cities can be completed within 24-hours, while other GCC locations can be reached within 48-72 hours. The service can deliver customer documents and parcels of up to 25kgs, with tracking features available on the website: <https://omanpost.om/>.

Ahmed al Amri, Express Mail Service Manager at Oman Post said, “Our express services witnessed a considerable shift reaching an average of on-time delivery of 91 per cent in 2019, equivalent to 63 per cent increase compared to 2018. We have also maintained an average of 96 per cent on-time delivery even in 2020 to date. This has been a result of multiple steps and projects successfully implemented in regards to our operations and processes, while also collaborating with the Universal Postal Union (UPU).”

## Ahli Bank holds first ‘Salary for Life’ draw



**MUSCAT:** Ahli Bank recently held its first ‘Salary for Life’ draw under the Wafra Prize Scheme for the year of 2020. Conceptualized with the aim of encouraging a savings culture in the Sultanate, Wafra’s ‘Salary for Life’ includes a total mega prize of RO 1 million – under which an amount of RO 250,000 is won every quarter, by four lucky customers, during the year!

The draw took place at Ahli Bank’s headquarters in Al Wattaya in the presence of senior management. The lucky winner of the March draw is Bader Said Darwish al Riyami from the Barka branch who has won RO 250,000 (RO 1,000 to be paid monthly for 250 months). Customers who maintain a quarterly average balance of RO 1,000 are eligible to participate in the ‘Salary for Life’ prize draw, which will take place again in the months of June, September and December 2020.

Highlighting the importance of the Wafra Prize Scheme, Muneer al Balushi, AGM — Head of Retail Distribution, Ahli Bank, said: “We, at Ahli Bank, are delighted to announce the winner of our recently introduced ‘Salary for Life’ draw under Wafra Prize Scheme 2020. ‘Salary for Life’ not only gives our customers a salary for a lifetime, but also provides them with continued access to our exceptional range of products and services that are designed to make their banking experience simple, secure and convenient.”

# Oil bounces but risk of tank tops still weighs

**OLE S HANSEN**

While the US stock market, led by technology, healthcare and media, continues to send a signal that all is well you only have to look beneath the surface to find that it is not the case. Massive amounts of stimulus have found their way into the stock markets but not to the man on the street with unemployment rising and consumer confidence plummeting. These developments have put many government and health authorities under considerable pressure to reduce lock downs.

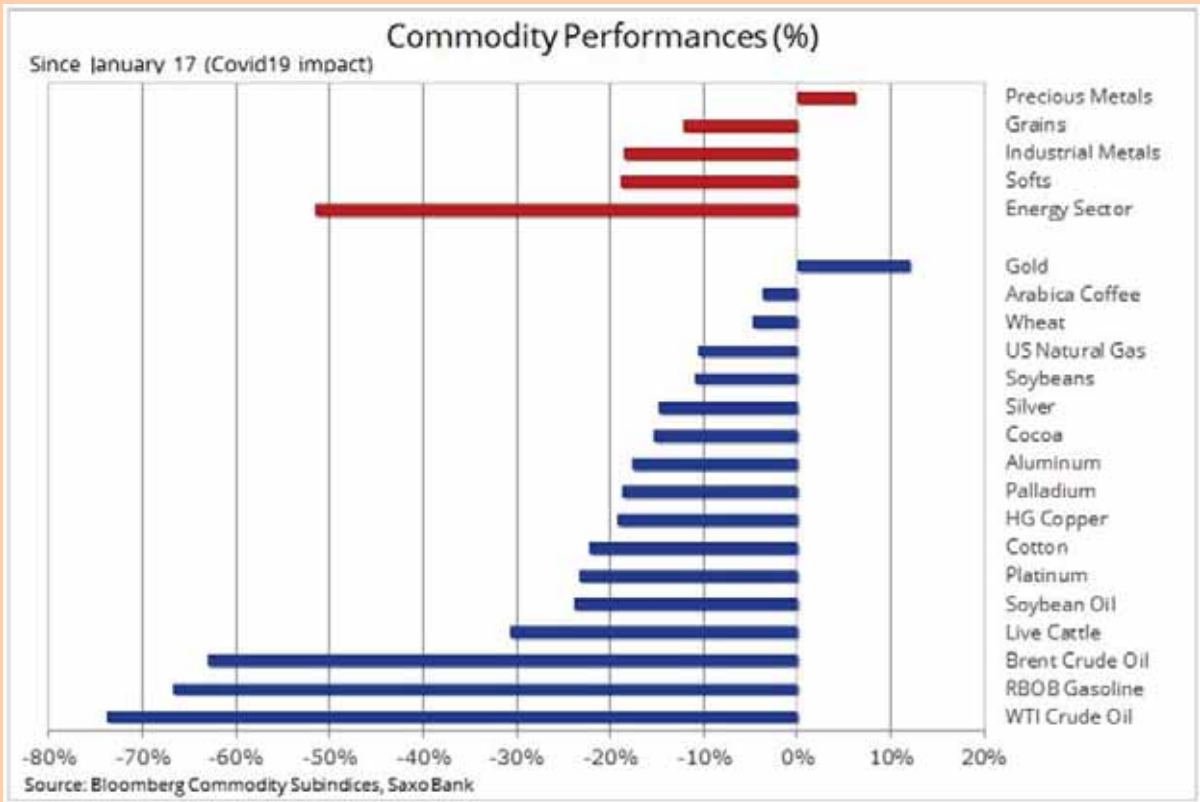
While some may be successful many are not yet ready and the impact on growth and demand will continue to deteriorate.

These developments continue to be most visible across key commodities as they respond to demand more most other sectors. The table shows the impact on key commodities since the COVID-19 pandemic became known outside of China.

Growth and demand dependent commodities have taken a tumble while some key agriculture markets and not least gold have been the few winners.

Crude oil created history last week as hit slumped to uncharted territory while natural gas rose in anticipation of lower oil associated supply as wells get shut down. Gold rose to near a seven-year high as investors continued to diversify investments away from stocks and cash.

China’s purchase of food commodities picked up while industrial metals held steady with virus driven supply disruptions to a certain extent countering the risk of a slowdown in demand as recession



begins to bite.

One story drowned out most other commodity news this past week. The historic drop below zero in the expiring May WTI contract on Monday brought home to everyone the stress that currently reverberates across the global oil market. The COVID-19 related slump in global demand, estimated by the International Energy Agency to reach 29 million barrels/day this month, has sent millions of barrels into storage.

Once produced, crude oil needs to be consumed by refineries or stored in tanks, pipelines or at sea on Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCCs).

In the event of storage facilities hitting tank tops, oil producers can only produce what they can sell. The risk of that happening is now the

biggest challenge facing the industry. Such an event could force the shut-ins of millions of barrels/day and ultimately lead to bankruptcies and a sovereign debt crisis. Oil producers have been caught off-guard and have struggled to respond with corresponding production cuts.

Saudi Arabia’s very ill-timed decision to hike production was reversed within weeks when OPEC+ agreed to cut production during the Easter break by 9.7 million barrels/day, starting from May. Global lockdowns have slowly begun to be get lifted but the process of returning to previous demand levels could take many months.

Weeks not months, however, is the time it will currently take before global storage facilities hit tank tops. One area which has already reached

full capacity are the storage facilities located in and around Cushing, Oklahoma. With its 76 million barrel capacity it is a major trading hub for crude oil and the price settlement/delivery hub for WTI crude oil futures traded in New York.

While the current level of storage has reached 60 million barrels it was very clear from the price action in the expiring May contract that the remaining 16 million was no longer available as they had already been leased to handle May deliveries. Left with nowhere to store the crude oil that would be the result of holding a long May position into expiry traders were instead left scrambling to unwind positions into an increasingly illiquid market.

Adding to the pressure on crude oil was the increased participants

**While the current level of storage has reached 60 million barrels it was very clear from the price action in the expiring May contract that the remaining 16 million was no longer available as they had already been leased to handle May deliveries.**

participation of retail money flowing into oil ETFs. I fully understand the reason why an investor would see the current cheap crude oil as a great investment opportunity. This, on the assumption that the pandemic’s impact on demand, would be temporary and that the eventual recovery would be supported by OPEC+ production cuts and a sharp reduction in investments towards drilling for oil in the future.

While the idea makes sense, the execution of that idea did not. Oil ETFs tend to invest at the front and right now the cheapest part of the oil curve.

The ETF provider holds a long position in that future and as long as the market remains oversupplied, they will incur a loss every month when they sell the expiring contract to buy the next at a higher price.

This phenomenon is called ‘contango’ and it creates a major headwind for investors. At the time of writing the spread between the June contract and September (3 months out) is 60 per cent, that’s how

much oil needs to rally in just three months in order for the ETF to break even. The United States Oil fund (USO:arcx) suddenly became a giant bull in a china store as the fund held a disproportionately high percentage of the whole market. As the market tanked the risk of default rose. That’s why the June futures contract, which doesn’t expire until May 19, suddenly slumped below \$10/b on Tuesday while Brent crude oil was pulled down with it and reached a low of \$16/b.

Since then, however, the market has managed to recover some ground. Of the four reasons, only one could have a longer-term positive impact on the price. They were:

- The CME Exchange, which operates the WTI futures contract, hiked margin on holding a contract (1000 barrels) to \$10,000.

- Several banks and brokers introduced trading restrictions on the June contract meaning that existing positions could be closed but no new positions could be opened.

- The USO ETF faced with a potential risk of collapsing reduced their exposure to June from 80 per cent to just 20 per cent after rolling futures contracts to July, August and even September.

While the latter carries the risk to the potential safe passage of supply through the Strait of Hormuz, the others are mostly of a technical character. On that basis we’ll continue to see limited upside for crude oil until lockdowns are eased leading to a pickup in global demand or unfortunately, more likely that many high-cost producers are forced to cut production, either voluntary or involuntary.

*[Ole Hansen is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank]*

# Embraer hits out after Boeing scraps \$4.2 bn tie-up

**SAO PAULO/PARIS:** Boeing Co on Saturday pulled out of a \$4.2 billion deal to buy Embraer's commercial jets division, sparking a furious response from its jilted partner and leaving plans for a US-Brazil alliance from regional jets to jumbos in tatters.

The collapse came hours after a midnight deadline expired with no agreement on how to implement a deal first aired in 2018, partially in response to a similar Canadian acquisition by Europe's Airbus.

Boeing accused Embraer of failing to meet conditions for closing the transaction, but Embraer said Boeing had torpedoed it because of wider financial problems it faces as a result of the coronavirus crisis and the grounding of its 737 MAX.

"Embraer believes strongly that Boeing has wrongfully terminated the (agreement,)" the Brazilian company said.

Boeing struck a more emollient tone but behind the scenes, both sides were bracing for months of argument over the breakup.

"Over the past several months, we had productive but ultimately unsuccessful negotiations ... We all aimed to resolve those by the initial termination date, but it didn't happen," Boeing senior vice-president Marc Allen said in a statement.

The rift halts the second half of a major reshaping of the global duopoly between Boeing and Airbus as both companies sought to expand into regional jets. Airbus bought the Canadian CSeries in 2018 and



Workers set up at the Embraer booth prior to the opening of the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) exhibition in Las Vegas, Nevada. — Reuters

**BOEING ACCUSED EMBRAER OF FAILING TO MEET CONDITIONS FOR CLOSING THE TRANSACTION, BUT EMBRAER SAID BOEING HAD TORPEDOED IT BECAUSE OF WIDER FINANCIAL PROBLEMS IT FACES AS A RESULT OF THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS AND THE GROUNDING OF ITS 737 MAX.**

renamed it A220, which has sold well.

Industry sources say Boeing was interested in Embraer mainly for access to lower-cost engineers and new manufacturing options, but it is now pondering cutting 10 per cent of its workforce while also seeking US

federal help for the aerospace sector.

The feud also breaks a previously close relationship between two of the world's top three planemakers, who have adopted similar positions on trade battles with Europe and Canada.

"This is not the kind of statement

you see very often in this industry," Teal Group consultant Richard Aboulafia said.

The deal calls for a \$100 million breakup fee but Embraer is poised to sue Boeing for significantly more, alleging that the long period of

uncertainty has hampered sales of its E2 jets.

It said it would pursue "all remedies" against Boeing, without elaborating.

In addition to the deal on commercial aviation, a separate joint-venture to find new markets

for Embraer's KC-390 military cargo plane is also off. But a more simple agreement to "market and support" the KC-390 signed in 2012 will remain.

The prospect of an abrupt collapse was first reported by Reuters on Friday after sources reported slow progress in talks with hours left before a midnight cut-off.

On Saturday, plans for simultaneous announcements were abandoned after Reuters quoted sources as saying Boeing had notified Embraer late on Friday that it would refuse to extend the midnight deadline, effectively blocking the deal.

People familiar with the matter said Boeing had raised objections during talks about funding and legal matters, which Embraer regarded as a deliberate bid to frustrate the deal.

Others said the dispute revolved around how much Embraer had invested in the commercial aerospace unit pending a final deal, as well as the progress of technical and contractual paperwork.

Embraer said it had met its commitments.

The deal had already faced antitrust hiccups but sources close to the talks said these did not ultimately wreck the deal. While the transaction received antitrust approvals from most countries, the European Union delayed a decision until August.

Analysts expect Embraer, which has called the tie-up crucial for its future, to move quickly to reassure investors over its finances. It ended 2019 with \$2.3 billion in cash. — Reuters

## Venezuela imposes price controls to limit inflation

**CARACAS:** Venezuela's government announced new price controls on food products, the first time it has done so in two years, as the coronavirus outbreak and an acute gasoline shortage cause inflation to accelerate.

New figures released on the Venezuelan central bank's website on Friday showed inflation rose 124 per cent during the first quarter of 2020, and 13.3 per cent in March. The opposition-controlled National Assembly earlier this month said its own data showed March inflation was 21.2 per cent.

The socialist government last year relaxed enforcement of price controls, which had been in place for nearly two decades, to allow the private sector to play a greater role in the import and sale of goods in the face of US sanctions.

But Vice President Delcy Rodriguez said the government was now imposing "supervised sales" on 27 products at food producers in order to limit price increases. Rodriguez said food company Polar, Venezuela's largest private firm, would be subject to the controls, along with another local company, Plumrose.

The government would also take control of private firm Coposa for 180 days to guarantee production, Rodriguez said.

Venezuela is in a sixth year of a hyperinflationary economic collapse, which economists attribute to rampant money-printing to cover gaping fiscal deficits and heavy state intervention in the economy.

President Nicolas Maduro frequently blames US sanctions and alleged opposition sabotage for the country's woes. — Reuters



A cashier counts Venezuelan bolivar notes in a state-run supermarket in Caracas. — Reuters

## Showdown looms between Silicon Valley and US states over contact tracing apps

**SAN FRANCISCO:** US states promoting apps that could prove essential to ending the coronavirus lockdown may be headed for a showdown with the two Silicon Valley companies that control key software on 99 per cent of smartphones over the collection of sensitive GPS location data.

Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google plan to release technology jointly in the coming weeks for digital contact tracing through Bluetooth sensors on phones. Public health authorities have determined that the technology is crucial to apps that will alert people when they have been close to people who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

For contact tracing apps to work, however, millions of people must be willing to use them without fear their locations and other personal data is being tracked and stored.

Google and Apple have sought to build public trust by emphasising that the changes they are making to Bluetooth to allow the tracing apps to work will not tap phones' GPS sensors, which privacy activists see as too intrusive.

But the states pioneering the



The Care19 mobile app, which the governors of North Dakota and South Dakota have asked residents to download to assist in contact tracing is seen on a phone in San Francisco, California. — Reuters

apps — North and South Dakota, and Utah — say allowing public health authorities to use GPS in tandem with Bluetooth is key to making the system viable.

The Bluetooth technology will enable users to be notified if they crossed paths with a coronavirus carrier, but will not specify where the encounter happened, information crucial to authorities

who want to identify hotspots for virus transmission and move fast to stop outbreaks.

Apple and Google said on Friday that they still have not decided how to proceed.

"I would encourage them to go for the 'and' and not the 'or' solution," North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum said of Apple and Google in an interview late on

Thursday.

"During this new normal, there is a place for having solutions that protect privacy and enable more efficient contact tracing," said Burgum.

Anonymised GPS location data is already playing a key role in an early version of Care19, an app that about 40,000 people have signed up for in North and South Dakota.

Authorities currently ask Care19 users to give them permission for timestamped GPS location data, which allows officials to manually call places where users could have spread the virus and ask for names and numbers of others who may have been there at the same time.

This laborious process will no longer be necessary with the Bluetooth technology coming from Apple and Google, which will automatically catalog encounters between users and enable carriers to anonymously convey to others potentially infected that they should get tested.

Without the changes the two companies are working on, iPhone users would have to keep their phone unlocked and app open at all times. — Reuters

## UK retail readies for lockdown easing with new guidance

**LONDON:** The British retail industry's lobby group and its main trade union on Sunday issued new guidance to retailers in preparation for an anticipated easing by the government of the country's coronavirus lockdown and the re-opening of more stores.

The social distancing guidance for non-food retail stores from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) and Usdaw union draws on government advice as well as lessons learned by the retailers deemed essential and allowed to stay open during the lockdown, in place since March 23, such as supermarkets and pharmacies.

The guidance includes providing



A deserted Brent Cross shopping centre is seen in London. — Reuters

**British retail sales fell by the most on record in March as a surge in food buying for the lockdown was dwarfed by a plunge in sales of clothing and most other goods, and the slump is likely to be even worse in April.**

hand sanitiser for customers, encouraging shoppers to visit stores alone, limiting numbers in shops at any one time, keeping customers 2 metres apart, installing protective screens at tills, stepping-up cleaning and encouraging cashless payments.

"We need to be ready and we need to make sure that the proper preparations and measures are put in place," said Usdaw general secretary Paddy Lillis.

The government said on Friday it was too early to lift the lockdown, though economic data indicates Britain's economy is crumbling under the strain.

British retail sales fell by the most on record in March as a surge in food buying for the lockdown was dwarfed by a plunge in sales of clothing and most other goods, and the slump is likely to be even worse in April.

"Continued close collaboration with government, including public support for the steps retailers are taking and adequate notice to get supply chains up and running, will mean that retail businesses can start trading again slowly and safely, and customers can feel confident that they are safe to return to shops," said British Retail Consortium chief executive Helen Dickinson. — Reuters

# Ramadhan



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## Reflections of the holy month for new beliefs

KABEER YOUSUF

Can one connect love with the holy month? Does it look absurd to many around the world? Love usually is never paired with the Month of Worship. Let us stop one moment to ponder about what we do during this blessed month. We see that all our actions revolve around the priceless term, 'love.'

For Cecilia Marches, an Italian who fondly embraced the religion after studying the Islamic way of life for quite some time and named herself Hanan aka Nur al Khamar, Ramadhan is the month of love and giving.

"My first Ramadhan gave me a great feeling, a feeling that I belonged to a sheltering ummaa, finally", an emotional Hanan shared.

"As soon as my first Ramadhan started, I felt cleaner after every passing day. I felt the connection with Allah. I could speak to him freely about anything bothering me but also about my new happiness because of Him in my new life. My sense of loneliness eased because I knew I had sisters and brothers I could count on", she added.

Hanan has an eventful past that's worth sharing, according to her. A young Cicile came with her ex-husband to the Arab world in 1977 where he was deputed to work in the outskirts of a desert.

"I can still remember, those members of the caravans praying on the sand just

after the sunset call for prayers were on. It was a marvellous sight that moved my soul," she said.

For little Cicile, hearing to the adhan coming from small mosques in the villages was inspiring and moving.

"Tears usually spilt out of my eyes every time. I couldn't figure out why," she said.

Restless with her overwhelming emotions, she searched for what triggered her emotions. She studied various books authored by intellectuals in different languages and noted down her own observations for many years and started searching for eternal peace only to understand that the peace she was in search of was actually searching for her, according to her.

"Love, sadaka, patience, and sharing

with deep joy etc are the true essence of this month. Sometimes people do not reflect enough about love towards our Lord. The common denominator is sacrifice and fulfilment which are the essential components of love per se, along with cherishing."

She believes that this is why love is the pillar of human worship, love mixed with hope and fear.

"The true meaning of Islam is "total submission" with love and sacrifice for Him. It is undoubtedly clear why love is associated with this holy month. Our love for Allah does not stop here, but it just truly begins. Our actions have to speak louder than our words in order to stand testimony to our love to Allah. Let us plant the right seed of a lasting goodness", Hanan said



## ARCHER REVEALS HE'S LOST HIS WORLD CUP CUP MEDAL

**LONDON:** England fast bowler Jofra Archer said on Saturday he'd "gone mad" looking for his World Cup winner's medal after losing the prized piece of silverware while moving house.

Last year saw the Sussex quick establish himself on the global stage as he helped England win their first men's 50-over global title, with Archer's 20 wickets at 23.05 the most taken by any member of the champions' squad.

The 25-year-old, who only made his international debut in 2019, was also given the daunting responsibility of bowling the Super Over in the final at Lord's.

Archer, however, held his nerve brilliantly as England edged out New Zealand in a thrilling finish decided on boundary countback after the teams' scores were level after both regulation play and cricket's answer to 'extra time'.

But the Barbados-born quick, asked on Saturday about where his medal was now, told BBC Radio: "I had it hanging off a portrait someone did for me and sent to me, I had my medal hanging on that."

"I moved flat and the picture is on the new wall but there's no medal. I turned the house upside down for about a week but I still haven't managed to find it."

"I know it should be in the house so I will keep eyes out for it but I've gone mad looking for it already."

Archer, who returned to the United Kingdom from Barbados last month, said the fact all major cricket worldwide, including the start of the English season, was suspended because of the pandemic at least gave him time to continue searching for the medal.

"There's nothing else to do in isolation. It's all hands on deck."

Although Archer may have seemed the 'go-to' option for England captain Eoin Morgan when it came to picking a bowler for the Super Over, the paceman himself was reluctant to press his own claims given he'd not long been in the side.

Archer, asked when he knew he'd been chosen for the Super Over, replied: "Pretty late. I wasn't sure until I had to go down there and warm up."

"That doesn't mean I didn't want it, I just didn't think I was in a position to volunteer. I was just coming into the team, I'd played the least amount of games in the squad. I didn't think it was my time to volunteer. "It was the only Super Over of the whole tournament, I never actually thought about it or planned for the situation, it just happened." — AFP

# F1 PLANS JULY RETURN

18-RACE SEASON WITH TWO RACES PER VENUE LOOKS INCREASINGLY LIKELY

**MUNICH:** Formula One has long had a habit of trying to cram in as many races as possible but this season may take it to extremes.

This year's calendar was meant to start in Australia on March 15, but with all the teams already in Melbourne, the race was called off with two days' notice after McLaren personnel tested positive for the new coronavirus.

In total, nine Grands Prix have now been postponed or cancelled due to the pandemic, with most in F1 accepting the French race on June 28 will almost certainly have to be called off too.

That leaves the Austrian Grand Prix at Red Bull's own track in Spielberg on July 5 as a possible starting point, if the government gives the go ahead. After initial stringent lockdown measures, the Austrian authorities have begun to ease restrictions.

"Obviously a lot of research has gone on into how a race could be hosted without fans and the minimum amount of people in attendance," Red Bull team boss Christian Horner told Britain's Sun newspaper.

"Procedures would be put in place, including (virus) testing with team numbers reduced to around 80 people."

"The global crisis is bigger than our sport, but if you put a marker in the sand and say, July 5 is the starting point, if things change and get worse,



they can always be changed," Horner added.

"It is all set up and ready to go. It is just a case of flicking the switch. It is a bespoke facility all geared up for F1."

The Red Bull Ring even has an airport very close if authorities wanted to further reduce potential contact.

But F1 bosses, whose original calendar included 22 races from March to November, are targeting

18 races in the season despite only starting in July.

That raises the obvious prospect of some tracks like Spielberg hosting double header races to avoid immediate travel to another destination where lockdown measures may be different and which potentially further exposes F1 personnel to the virus.

Helmut Marko, the motorsport

adviser of the Red Bull team, told Austria's Oe3 radio last week that F1 is planning "two races, on Sundays, July 5 and 12," and that only a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic could change that.

Austrian Sports Minister Werner Kogler has said the government would "at least not stand in the way" of racing behind closed doors, which presumably would extend

to two races.

A double header in Austria would open the door for other tracks to follow suit.

The British Grand Prix is slated for July 19 but Silverstone is also looking at holding two races.

"We have discussed all sorts of permutations including hosting two races over one weekend and two races over consecutive weekends," managing director Stuart Pringle told the Guardian last week.

"I have complete confidence in our ability to put on these events. We have a lot of experience, a lot of knowledge, we can turn that on definitely."

With seven of 10 teams based in England, two races at Silverstone would make sense. But the pandemic has taken real hold in Britain and the government there is cautious about lifting a lockdown too early.

Races at Silverstone would almost certainly have to be without spectators too, while there is speculation it could host a race on a Wednesday as well as a Sunday to quicken the pace of the season or even host three Grands Prix.

Pringle expects F1 bosses to announce a new calendar in early May.

Only Monaco is definitely cancelled, raising the prospect of venues whose races have already been postponed reappearing on the schedule. It is a huge undertaking but F1 always likes to think big. — dpa

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## ROSSI EXPECTS TO DECIDE FUTURE

ITALIAN MOTOGP GREAT WANTS TO CONTINUE RACING NEXT YEAR, WHEN HE WILL BE 42

**MILAN:** Italian MotoGP great Valentino Rossi says he wants to continue racing next year, when he will be 42, but will likely have to commit before he can see how competitive he is this season.

A string of MotoGP races have been postponed until the end of June at the earliest due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with more likely to follow due to bans on large gatherings and sporting events.

Rossi will leave the main Yamaha team at the end of 2020 but has a seat at the satellite Petronas Yamaha outfit if he wants it in a straight swap with 21-year-old French rider Fabio Quartararo.

"I think that I will have to decide before racing because in the most optimistic situation we can race in the second half of the season, so around August or September we hope, if

everything is good," Rossi said in a Yamaha Q&A on YouTube.

"But I have to make my decision before. I want to continue but I have to do this decision without making any races.

"It is not the best way to stop because the situation is maybe we also don't race in 2020. It is more fair to make another championship and maybe stop at the end of the next. I hope to continue in 2021," he added.

Rossi is a motorcycling phenomenon, a nine times world champion across all categories with seven titles in the top class.

He is the only rider to have competed in more than 400 Grands Prix and also boasts the longest winning career, spanning more than 20 years between victories, with 89 wins in the top category.



The Italian said in January he needed some answers from the opening races before committing to another campaign in 2021.

Isolating at home in eastern Italy, he said the pandemic had put him in a difficult situation.

"Like I said, my first option is to try to continue because I have enough motivation and I want to continue.

"But it is very important to understand the level of competitiveness, especially in the second part of last year we suffered very much, and too many times I was too slow and I have to fight not for the first five positions.

"So in my mind I have another year with the factory team and I need time to decide. I need five, six races to understand with the new chief mechanic, and with some modifying in the team I can be stronger." — **Reuters**