

His Majesty sends greetings to three leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has congratulated President Dr Ilham Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his best wishes of good health and happiness to President Aliyev and his country's friendly people further progress and prosperity.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has congratulated President Sahle Work Zewde of Ethiopia on the occasion of her country's National Day. His Majesty wished good health and happiness to President Zewde and her country's friendly people further progress and growth.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has congratulated President Bidhya Devi Bhandari of Nepal on the occasion of her country's National Day. — **ONA**

Muscat opens from tomorrow

Muttrah quarantine continues

16,670 expats exit Oman in April

MUSCAT: An estimated 16,670 expatriates left the Sultanate in April this year – a figure that is set to balloon as the socioeconomic impact of the downturn – unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic as well as low international oil prices – becomes more apparent in the coming months.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total size of the expatriate population (workers and their families) in the Sultanate dwindled to around 1,920K in April 2020, down from 1,937K a month earlier.

While ongoing Omanisation efforts have partly contributed to this outcome, there is little doubt that the economic slowdown that began with falling oil prices and later exacerbated by the pandemic is primarily to blame. It is widely known that shuttering retail, hospitality, leisure and automotive businesses, among other segments of the economy, have had to lay off sizable numbers of expatriate workers over the last two months.

SEE MORE ON P12

7 new COVID-19 cases reported from Duqm

Al Mawaleh central market reopens

255 new cases of which 166 are Omanis and 89 non-Omanis

Two residents died taking the total toll to 39

Safety measures at Sanad centres. The main doors should be closed and the application forms should be deposited in a box outside the centre or submitted through mail.

Wilayat of Muttrah will remain in quarantine. The committee meeting, which was chaired by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Wednesday also decided that not less than 50 per cent of employees can come to their workplace from Sunday.

TURN ON P2



KABEER YOUSUF & ONA

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee on coronavirus said the lockdown in the Muscat Governorate will be lifted on Friday but asked the people to stay vigilant against the infection and not to misuse ease in restrictions. However, the

OMAN

Decisions that keep virus in check

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Since its inception on March 10, the Supreme Committee has issued a set of decisions on how to deal with the situation arising out of COVID-19 pandemic and combat its spread.

The first set of decisions came on March 12 and included stopping tourist visas, sporting events and student activities, and stopping the entry of tourist ships to the Sultanate's ports.

- **On March 15**, the committee issued other decisions including stopping the entry of non-Omanis into the Sultanate, applying quarantine to all arrivals, closing public parks, stopping Friday prayers, and stopping social gatherings such as weddings and funerals.
- **On March 17**, the Committee issued new decisions to close all mosques and places of worship for non-Muslims, suspend all events and conferences, closed all tourist sites, shopping stores in malls and traditional markets, prevented catering in restaurants and cafes, closed sports and cultural clubs, gyms, health clubs, in addition to barber and beauty parlours.
- **On March 22**, it issued measures to reduce the number of employees in government agencies to not more than 30 per cent.
- **On March 24**, a bank account was opened to receive



MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the coronavirus pandemic held a meeting on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior. — ONA

financial donations under the management of the Ministry of Health. Medical response and public health, as well as relief and sheltering sectors were activated. The Committee decided on the same day to suspend all domestic and international flights.

- **On March 31**, it issued another decision exempting employees from attending workplaces in government agencies, except for employees whose work requires their presence to complete the necessary work.
- **On April 8**, the committee issued a decision to close the Governorate of Muscat by activating control points managed by Royal Omani Police.
- **On April 15**, instructions were issued not to terminate the services of the Omani workforce in private sector. The Committee indicated that the affected private

institutions and companies have the right to submit paid annual leave for their workers in the closed sectors and negotiate to reduce the wages for a period of three months in exchange for reducing the hours of work. It also recommended postponing the payment of bank loans, electricity, water and sewage bills, reducing fees for renewing expatriate workforce cards and others.

Before Ramadhan, (April 22), the Committee confirmed the continuation of closure of mosques except for the call to prayer, and stressed on non-conduct of prayers including the 'Tarawih'. It also banned all kinds of Ramadhan gatherings like 'Iftar' feasts in in mosques or other places. On the same date it extended the closure of the Governorate of Muscat through control points until 10am of Friday morning, May, 8 2020.

- **On April 28**, the committee decided to reopen some commercial activities.
- **On May 5**, it issued a decision to extend the closure of the Governorate of Muscat and end the school year for all students in public and private schools.
- **On May 18**, the Committee approved prohibition of gatherings related to Eid al Fitr, such as 'habta' of all kinds, Eid prayers, greeting gatherings, and collective celebrations.

It said in the statement that Royal Oman Police is to monitor the commitment of individuals, establishments, and public and private institutions to the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee, and directly authorise them to impose prescribed fines and detention of all violators of these decisions during the days of Eid.

Muscat opens from tomorrow

FROM PAGE 1

The committee valued His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Eid greetings addressed to citizens and residents in the Sultanate. It also valued His Majesty the Sultan's commendation of efforts undertaken to combat the coronavirus and alleviate its health, social and economic impact, as well as His Majesty the Sultan's appreciation of the people's cooperation and the role various departments in the fight against the pandemic.

The committee reiterated His Majesty the Sultan's call to the public to continue their cooperation to combat the coronavirus. In particular, it underscored His Majesty the

Sultan's emphasis on full compliance with the decisions and instructions issued by the departments concerned on this issue.

The Committee also urged public and private establishments to set policies, regulations and procedures to ensure the protection of their employees and customers from the coronavirus infection.

The decisions of the Supreme Committee were welcomed with cheer and joy by the citizens and expatriates living in the country. "It is indeed a great news that people like me have been longing to hear. It's a good sign that we as a nation are moving in the right path", Muhsin al Balushi, a top aviation official said.

مداين

madayn

Tender Announcement

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

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
4/2020/PEIE/HQ-4	The Security System Project At AL Mazunah Free Zone (Fencing, Adjacent Road, and Control and Guard Rooms)	10-06-2020	06-07-2020	Construction	First and Above	300

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders. And hard copy of the same should be submitted manually to the Tender and procurement department in Rusayl Industrial City.

1. **Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

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

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

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

madayn.om

@madaynoman



of human as well as financial resources, which reflects the WHO's priorities at present.

The Executive Board is composed of 34 members who are technically qualified in the field of health, each designated by a member state that has been elected to serve by the World Health Assembly. Member states are elected for three-year terms. The board meets at least twice a year; the main meeting is normally in January, with a second shorter meeting in May, immediately after the Health Assembly. Efforts and plans made by the Sultanate guided by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik have contributed effectively to the selection of the Sultanate to play leadership roles in the health field.



STAY HOME STAY SAFE

Legal Advisor

Sanad services back on track with safety steps

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Sanad services on Wednesday started operations as usual in two shifts with precautionary measures.

The timings are 7.30 to 2.30 pm and 4 pm to 11 pm.

Sanad Services are required to implement precautionary measures suggested by the Supreme Committee on COVID 19 while receiving the visitors.

The measures include reducing the number of employees in the centre by no more than 20 per cent of the total workforce. The offices can rotate the schedule of the employees.

The employees at the centre should follow the necessary health procedures by putting masks and medical gloves apart from using sanitisers.

The main doors should be closed and the application forms shall be placed on a



(table/box) outside the centre or submitted through e-mail, to avoid physical involvement.

It is not permissible in all cases to have any visitor inside the centre, and in case if the visitor presence

is necessary to complete the transaction (electronic signature / electronic payment), the debit card of the customer can be collected from outside the centre.

It also called for suspending the work of the centres'

owners and employees with chronic conditions and those above 55 years of age.

Centre owners must sterilise their workplaces completely daily using cleaning and disinfection materials.

VISION
INSURANCE

الرؤية
التأمين

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INVITATION TO ATTEND THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING
AND ORDINARY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE COMPANY

The Board of Directors of Vision Insurance SAOG (Company) is pleased to invite the Shareholders of the Company to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) and the Ordinary Annual General Meeting (AGM) scheduled to be at 3.00 PM on Tuesday, June 09, 2020 to be held through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which you can login to through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event the quorum for holding the AGM and/or the EGM was not achieved, the second EGM and/or the second AGM, shall be held at 3.00 PM on Monday, June 15, 2020 at the same electronic platform above to discuss the following agenda items:

First: Extraordinary General Meeting Agenda:

- To approve the Article of Association of the Company amended in accordance with the requirements of the New Commercial Law 18/2019 (Annexure - 1).

Second: Ordinary General Meeting Agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors Report on the business of the Company and its financial position for the Financial Year ended December 31, 2019.
- To consider and approve the Company's Corporate Governance for the Financial Year ended December 31, 2019.
- To consider and approve the Auditor's Report and the Company's audit financial statements for the Financial Year ended December 31, 2019.
- To notify the General Meeting of the Cash Dividends distributed to the Shareholders on March 26, 2020 at the rate of 8 Baisa Per Share.
- To approve the sitting fees for Board of Directors and its Sub-Committee Meetings for the previous Financial Year and to determine the sitting fees for the next Financial Year (Annexure – 2).
- To notify the General Meeting of the Related Party Transactions conducted during the Financial Year ended December 31, 2019 (Annexure – 3).
- To consider and approve Related Party Transactions proposed to be conducted during the Financial Year ending December 31, 2020 (Annexure - 4).
- To notify the General Meeting of the Company's contribution of an amount of OMR 75,000 (Rial Omani Seventy-Five Thousand) made during the current year to the Ministry of Health's Endowment Fund for supporting the efforts for containment the spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19).
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the Financial Year ending December 31, 2020 and fixing their fees.

As per the Company's Articles of Association, the regulations of the convening of the AGMs through electronic platforms, issued by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), we would like to attract your kind attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons may deputize a natural person to attend the AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that the deputized natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on the subject items offered for voting in the agenda starts before a period of not more than 3 days and until the end of the voting process on the Meeting's day. If the investor's balance of shares increased or decreased during, his/her voting will be cancelled and they should vote again on the AGM's date.

For any clarifications in respect of the agenda of the above meeting, please contact Mr. Mujtaba Shaban, Tel. No. (24853904), Fax No. (24852999), E-Mail (investorrelations@insurevic.com).

Chairman

Legal Advisor

Auditor

Wholesale outlets at Mawaleh market reopen



SEEB: Muscat Municipality on Wednesday reopened the wholesale outlets at Al Mawaleh Central Fruits and Vegetables Market which sell imported products that arrive directly from the

countries of origin.

The retail outlets of home-grown products which were shut down 10 days ago will stay close until further notice, the municipality announced.

RAINS HERALD KHAREEF AMID VIRUS CRISIS

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: When it rains anytime between May and June, or to be more specific, before the beginning of the official Khareef season (June 21), people here do not go for any reason. They go only by vision that “it’s raining and very soon it will be Khareef in Salalah”.

It also serves as a major distraction this time from monotonous talks on COVID-19 numbers and its cure. It rained in Mirbat, Sadah, Hasik and even in some parts of Thamrait on Tuesday and Wednesday. These areas received moderate to heavy rains and many more areas like proper Salalah, Dahariz and Sahalnoot have started receiving rains by Wednesday evening.

As usual, people like Hythem linked this phenomenon with Khareef which is not very far to seek. He claimed “the weather in Mirbat and its surrounding areas has become so enticing that I am going to have a tour on the mountain to see its impact and beauty around. Most importantly I like the aroma that comes from the earth after rain.”

The weatherman, however, has a different story to tell. It has nothing to do with the Khareef now. “Because this is almost an annual disturbance that takes place between May and June when there is shift in season from winter to summer.” Similar phenomenon

LOW PRESSURE OFF DHOFAR TO GAIN MOMENTUM

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: The low pressure originating over the coast of Dhofar could enhance in the next 48 hours to a grade of deep depression.

According to the National Multi Hazards Early Warning Center, Public Authority of Civil Aviation, the origin of the weather system is offshore of Dhofar Governorate and the low pressure could gain momentum and see fluctuation in the weather model. The system is being developed over the southwest Arabian Sea near Socotra Island and is currently less than 17 knots.

“What is important is the advection of the cloud towards Dhofar Governorate, which may cause isolated rain, thundershowers and heavy rains. The target area for this cloud formation is Dhofar,”

happens between October and November when season shifts from summer to winter.”

The direction of Khareef is entirely different. It starts approaching Salalah from north-west direction, the current weather disturbance, however, is located in eastern part of Dhofar. The other difference that needs to be understood between Khareef and any other rain is its location. The Khareef doesn’t give rain to areas

said the weather forecaster at the National Multi Hazards Early Warning Center.

“The weather is an integrated system and it may or may not enhance other system that is a regular pattern. So we cannot predict until we see the result of this weather model on factors such as duration and the amount of the rainfall that will be received. These factors will give us an idea on how much it will affect the monsoon,” he added. The impact of the tropical weather event is expected to begin on Wednesday night and last until May 29 and isolated rain and thundershowers are expected across the coastal areas and adjoining mountains of Dhofar Governorate for the next three days.

The sea is expected to be moderate to rough during this period.

like Thamrait and beyond. But now there has been rain in Thamrait and even in some desert areas.

Sources in Met office, hinted at better chances of rain in eastern parts of Dhofar including Taqah, the impact of which can remain till the beginning of next week. Whatever may be the reason, moderate rain is always welcome in summer and it is more than welcome when it is closer to Khareef.

OMAN

GCC explores ‘new normal’ with the easing of lockdown



VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: While the Supreme Committee in Oman decided to ease lockdown in Muscat, some GCC countries have already announced their decisions in this regard.

UAE

UAE has eased restrictions, allowing people to return to the gyms and resume other activities. Gyms and cinemas will open and night restrictions will be between 11 pm and until 6 am. Non-essential trips to the dentist are also among the services that will be allowed. Gyms will operate at 50 per cent of capacity, require the wearing of masks at all times, and must install plastic dividers between machines while changing facilities will remain closed. Entertainment and leisure attractions, such as Dubai Ice Rink, will reopen. Dubai International

Airport will return to full operation after final approval from authorities. Outsourced government service centres, such as those processing visas, will also resume work.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia will begin a three-phase plan on May 28, state-run SPA reported on Tuesday, citing the interior ministry. By the third phase, due to begin by June 21, all restrictions will be lifted to allow a return to normal. Pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, however, as well as international flights will remain suspended as the rest of the country opens up for mass prayers and domestic travel.

KUWAIT

Kuwait will replace the complete lockdown with a partial curfew as of May 31, a top official said on Monday. The government had decided not to extend the 24-hour nationwide curfew

imposed due to coronavirus outbreak after May 30. However, he said it will be replaced with a partial curfew that will be reduced gradually until normal life resumes. Technical teams are working now to put final touches on plans to return to normal life.

BAHRAIN

Bahrain has announced it is going to ease some of the restrictions imposed nationwide to fight the spread of coronavirus. All non-essential medical services are to resume operations, while ensuring the health and social distancing guidelines are thoroughly followed, according to the National Taskforce for Combating the Coronavirus. All employees and customers are required to wear face masks inside the premises. All businesses must limit overcrowding and ensure social distancing guidelines are followed.

2 residents die; 255 new cases reported

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday announced the death of two residents aged 67 and 58 due to COVID-19, bringing the total number of victims to 39. The ministry extended its condolences to the bereaved families, praying to the Almighty Allah to have mercy on the souls of the deceased. The ministry on Wednesday also announced 255 new positive cases, of which 166 are Omanis and 89 expatriates. This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 8,373. The ministry also said that 2,177 cases have recovered. The ministry reported 15 new COVID-19 cases from Al Wusta on Wednesday, including seven in Duqm. — ONA

Rafo carries out medical evacuation



SUR: Royal Air Force Oman (Rafo) helicopter on Wednesday carried out medical evacuation for an Omani woman suffering from a critical health condition. She was transferred from Mashirah Hospital to Sur Hospital in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate to receive medical care. The move is part of the humanitarian services provided to citizens and expats by the Sultan's Armed Forces and the other units of the Ministry of Defence alongside other state departments.



FACT-CHECK TRUMP TWEETS: TWITTER

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter labelled two Donald Trump tweets “unsubstantiated” and accused him of making false claims on Tuesday, a first for the social network which has long resisted calls to censure the US president over truth-defying posts. The move drew a furious response from Trump, who used the platform to accuse Twitter of “interfering in the 2020 Presidential Election”. “Twitter is completely stifling FREE SPEECH, and I, as

President, will not allow it to happen!” he tweeted. The social media giant targeted two tweets the president posted on Tuesday in which he contended without evidence that mail-in voting would lead to fraud and a “Rigged Election”. Under the tweets, Twitter posted a link which read “Get the facts about mail-in ballots” and which took users to a notice calling the claims “unsubstantiated”, citing reporting by CNN, the

Washington Post and other media. “Trump falsely claimed that mail-in ballots would lead to ‘Rigged Election’”, the notice contended. “However, fact-checkers say there is no evidence that mail-in ballots are linked to voter fraud”. Trump aimed the misleading tweets at California, contending falsely that anyone living in the state would be sent ballots when in fact they will only go to regis-

tered voters, according to the notice. The president has long used Twitter as a platform to spread abuse, conspiracy theories, false information and insults to his 80 million followers. For years before being elected in 2016, he built his political brand by supporting the “birther” lie that Barack Obama, America’s first black president, was not born in the United States and therefore was not eligible to be president. — **AFP**

France bans hydroxychloroquine for COVID-19 treatment

PARIS: Doctors in France were on Wednesday banned from treating patients suffering from the respiratory disease COVID-19 with the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, the Health Ministry said. The French government published a decree banning the controversial drug’s use, the ministry said. The move comes after the French Agency for the Safety of Health Products (ANSM)

advised against treatment with the drug and initiated the suspension of clinical trials. Patients with severe COVID-19 have been allowed to be treated with the drug, usually used to treat or prevent malaria, under strict medical supervision. “Whether at the family doctor or in the hospital, this drug must not be prescribed to patients suffering from COVID-19”, the ministry said.

Writing in the medical journal The Lancet, researchers recently reported that following comprehensive data analysis, the drugs hydroxychloroquine and the similar chloroquine likely not suitable for the treatment of COVID-19. US President Donald Trump revealed earlier this month he had been taking hydroxychloroquine to ward against a coronavirus infection. — **dpa**



A general view of the old town of the city of Dubrovnik, on the Adriatic coast of Croatia. — AFP

1 IN 6 YOUTHS LOSES JOB

GENEVA: A sixth of the world's young labour force has stopped working since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said on Wednesday in a report which warned of long-term disadvantages for today's youth.

In a global survey, the Geneva-based UN body also found that the COVID-19 crisis is hurting young people's chances of entering the labour market. Around 10 per cent of students expect

that they will not be able to complete their current education. Half said that their studies would be delayed.

More than 11,000 respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 took part in the survey. The ILO pointed out that global youth unemployment before the current crisis already stood at 13.6 per cent last year, above the level seen before the 2008 global financial crisis.

Data collected after 2008 does not bode well for the current young generation.

Young people who lost their jobs during the financial crisis have not managed to catch up with their peers who kept working, as they still face higher unemployment risks and far lower incomes, according to the ILO.

While the global shock of 2008 mainly reduced demand for labour, the present crisis adds another problem in the form of interrupted education, the UN organisation said, pointing out that schools in poorer

countries may not be able to switch to online teaching.

Similar trends have emerged in the United States, Australia, South Korea, China, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Ireland.

Young workers are paying a heavy price now because many of them are employed in sectors that are hit especially hard by the spread of the COVID-19 disease and the ensuing lockdown measures, such as wholesale companies, retailers and service providers. — dpa

Croatia welcomes tourists

KRILO-JESENICE: A few intrepid European tourists have returned to Croatia's picturesque Adriatic coast, where the owners of yachts and campsites are hoping their relative isolation will bring the numbers up over the next six weeks.

In the Dalmatian port of Krilo-Jesenice, the Black Swan is among dozens of sailing cruisers still tied up. Six weeks of lockdown began to be eased late last month, two weeks after the season should have begun. "Sadly, we're still stuck here waiting for the first guests, said owner Denis Grubisa, whose yacht can accommodate 38. "We hope guests will start pouring in from late June or early July". Even a dozen at a time would make him very happy, he said.

Further up the coast near Split, an



A woman sits next to suitcases reading "Save the travel agencies" and "100,000 Jobs threatened" during a protest of bus operators and travel agencies calling for rescue and state help on Wednesday in Berlin. — AFP

ancient port city packed with visitors throughout a normal summer, two couples from Germany have the run

of the Stobrec camping facility, which can take up to 1,100 people.

Tourism accounts for almost a fifth of Croatia's economic output, which the government expects to shrink by almost 10 per cent this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But it still hopes to earn four billion euros from the sector, a third of last year's income, after containing the spread of the disease. Reported COVID-19 deaths stand at just 101, with case numbers at 2,244.

Croatia has reopened its border with Slovenia and expects a rising number of guests from Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia from early June and from Germany or Poland later in the month, by which time hotels are also set to reopen. — Reuters



Medical staff wearing full PPE treat a patient with COVID-19, on an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) ward at Frimley Park Hospital in Frimley, southwest England. — AFP

MENTAL TOLL ON MEDICS

LONDON: Steve, a paramedic in northeast England, contracted the coronavirus two months ago. Then his wife fell ill. Both recovered but throughout they were concerned about passing it on to their two young sons.

Doctors, nurses and paramedics in full protective clothing have become an enduring image of the pandemic.

But stress and anxiety brought on by dealing with the high levels of serious illness and death have become commonplace on the medical frontline.

Now, professional bodies and experts in Europe's worst-hit countries want more support to tackle the psychological impact on staff — particularly if a second wave strikes.

"We've got all the ingredients for a major risk of post-traumatic stress disorder," said Belgian mental health expert Xavier Noel.

Noel, a clinical psychologist in Brussels, singled out nurses as of most concern, given their proximity to seriously ill patients

and the dying.

"They've faced a totally unusual death rate and way of dying, in a more dehumanised context, without the presence of families to support them," he said. Europe has officially seen nearly 175,000 deaths from more than two million cases, and across the continent the battle to save lives has taken a punishing toll.

In the UK — whose death toll is second only to that of the United States — the country's only charity offering mental health support for first responders is also warning of a looming crisis.

The Laura Hyde Foundation, set up in memory of a nurse who took her own life in 2016, said it had been inundated with calls from nurses, doctors and paramedics.

Last week, it launched a "No Mask for Mental Health" campaign to raise awareness of the psychological impact of the outbreak and provide support.

— AFP

This too shall pass. Be positive



ALI AL MATANI

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Corona virus forced us to stay aloof in a corner. This time it had the colour which we have never experienced before. First casualty of this Eid was that we could not celebrate it even with those with whom we have blood relations. This new style of celebration of Eid made elderly people complain more than the youth. This is because what we did this Eid was against the age-old traditions. The pandemic did not leave any option for us, except to use modern means of communications like WhatsApp and Facebook to reach out to near and dear ones.

The Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with COVID-19 is making all efforts to protect our health by urging us to avoid participation in any such celebrations or events, regardless of their sanctity.

The people also abided by the instructions given to them by the Supreme Committee and celebrated it in a style which was required due to the threat of COVID-19. This shows that everyone was aware of the situation faced by the country and the world at larger scale.

Exchange of Eid greetings online did not look palatable. But there was no alternative. People have celebrated Eid all their life in line with traditions. People appeared humbled but optimistic. They realised that prevention was better than cure.

This time the colour was missing in the Eid celebration. Even children kept on waiting when they would be set free to express their Eid spirit mixed with delight and innocence and when their friends and relatives will visit them.

Everybody remained cooped up inside their homes. Mobile phone was the only means to reach out to relatives, friends and well-wishers inside the country and outside.

It was difficult for everyone to believe that the Eid has come. There was no hustle and bustle on the street. This Eid it was as if the distance has widened.

The pandemic would disappear from the world soon. We should remain positive, optimistic, and patient. This ordeal will give us strength. The sacrifice of certain aspects of Eid would save our health and bring more joy and happiness in coming festivals.

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

FEATURES

Staying productive while in home quarantine

STAFF REPORTER

Without a doubt, Covid19 has put the world to a near standstill. We'd gotten bombarded by now some of the very popular words that define 2020 — pandemic, home quarantine, institutional isolation, and of course coronavirus and Covid19. Public places and many business outlets were closed and because of stringent measures not only in Oman but all over the world, many opportunities died. But some opportunities were also born.

Looking after the welfare of the youth of Oman, the National Youth Committee recently reached out to some Omani youth to study the condition of the youth sector and understand how some of them are coping up with the pandemic.

The youth organization has discovered that many of Oman's young people have a positive outlook despite the grim conditions. So what keeps Oman's young artists, entrepreneurs, designers, craftsmen and jewelers, athletes, technicians, programmers and innovators, students, job seekers, employees, and workers busy?

Mazen al Bassami, an artist who specializes in woodworkingsaid, "Due to the Coronavirus and cessation of [public] activities, I was allowed to delve deeper into producing different and unique artworks like

tables made with local wood mixed with epoxy - a hardening material to cover wood pores."

"I had the opportunity to brainstorm in-depth and started working on new collections. I have several unique set of designs because people nowadays wanted something special. I encourage people to look at the situation positively and consider it as the perfect time to have a change of perspective to be successful. It is the best time to be busy and amp up your productivity," he said.

Morouj Saadia, a consultant in the field of technology and entrepreneur, said: "In light of the current conditions, our lives have turned into a highly digital routine. As a mentor to entrepreneurs in the technical field, I worked with about 17 startups in exploiting the pandemic to seize opportunities and work on challenges."

She added, "While challenged by difficult conditions under this pandemic, a group of those companies has been able to activate their operations and start work to serve their customers while others have focused on exploring the needs of their customers and preparing to meet them as soon as conditions resume to normal."

"I felt that sharing my knowledge has a great positive impact on these startups and it also inspired me to work better in providing a platform that will guide startups transform their technology ideas into effective emerging companies in the local and regional economy. We are working to

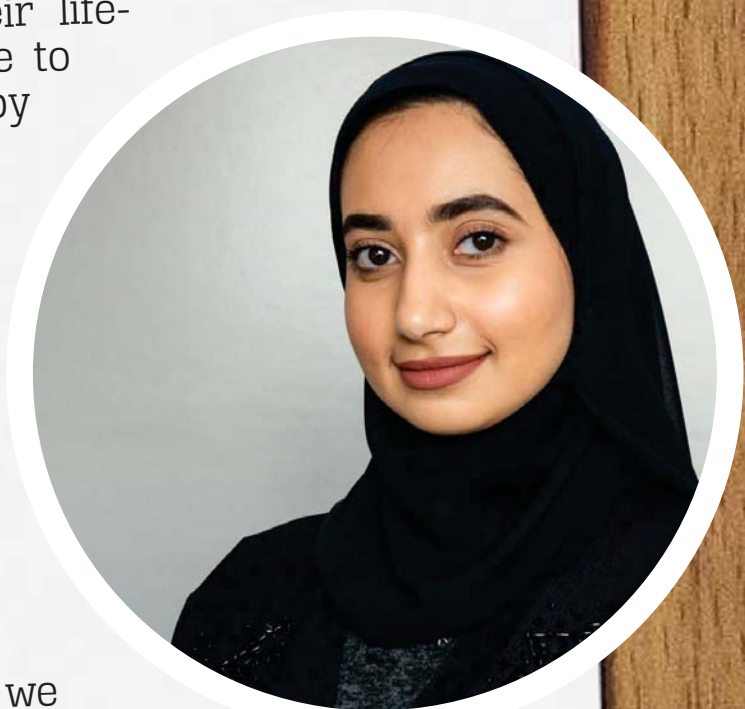
launch it in the coming weeks," she said.

Meanwhile, photographers also met difficult challenges during the pandemic period.

Maher al Hassani said, "The pandemic has forced people to completely change their lifestyle and acclimate to new methods by spending more time at home and learning new skills. Some took online lessons while others have to remotely work. Everyone also has to re-train oneself on personal hygiene."

"In photography, we used to always go out to take photographs of different locations. Because of the social distancing measures put in place, we were reduced to filming in external locations and have to work on private studios at home. We also transacted most of the things online," he added.

"The crisis has given me a great opportunity as a photographer to take full advantage of my time to learn new things in the field of photography and design," he said.



FEATURES

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Thai artist ‘restless hands’ takes coronavirus battle to the streets



BANGKOK: A Thai street artist has been paying tribute to the fight against the coronavirus with murals depicting a winged-character dressed as a health worker looming over a spiky image of the virus restrained by a padlocked red cross.

The 37-year-old street artist who goes by the name ‘Mue Bon’, which translates as restless hands, says his murals also serve as a reminder that efforts against the virus are not over and everyone has a role.

“I want to play my part in reminding people about the situation and recording the history that we helped each other by staying home to stop the spread of the virus,” he told Reuters.

Mue Bon hopes his artwork, which usually contains a social message,

will reach people who otherwise might not have access to galleries or other places to see art.

“There is a huge gap between art and the ordinary people,” he said, taking a break from spray-painting a wall.

“I put the artwork on the streets, at places where people sitting in cars will see it while driving past.”

While not a household name in Thailand, Mue Bon has had international success and his work has been displayed in Japan, the United States, Germany, and, most recently, in the Palestinian Territories.

Thailand has recorded just over 3,000 cases of the novel coronavirus and 56 deaths though the rate of infection has been slowing. — Reuters

History in the making as Czech museum opens face mask exhibition



PRAGUE: In a sign that the coronavirus will one day be history, the Czech National Museum is opening an exhibition of face masks worn to protect against the infection.

The Czech government was one of the first to make it compulsory to wear a mask outside the home. With 8,725 cases and 304 deaths so far, the country has been less badly affected than some in Europe, although opinions differ on what difference masks have made.

When the crisis began, industrially made masks were in short supply, which prompted a nationwide effort to make them at home.

“There is a huge amount of products today, it is tough to say what should be left for future generations. With masks, it is clear cut, they are a symbol of the situation,” said curator Mira Burianova.

The small exhibit in the National Museum in Prague’s Wenceslas Square was selected from hundreds of masks sent in by the public. They include folk motifs, fun designs, and the national flag. There is one made by children with autism.

The exhibition opens on Monday, just as the government relaxes its mask policy. People will no longer have to wear them outdoors but must still do so on public transport and in public buildings - including the museum. — Reuters



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24PC SLUMP IN REVENUES OF OMAN HOTELS DURING Q1



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Luxury hotels in the Sultanate saw revenues plummet a hefty 24 per cent during the first three months (January – March) of this year as the hospitality sector, together with the wider travel industry, became one of the early casualties of the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the country.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total revenue of 3-, 4- and 5-star-rated hotels in the Sultanate plunged to RO 54.238 million during the first quarter of this year, down from RO 71.346 million for the corresponding quarter of 2019.

The steepest decline came in March when a combination of international flight cancellations, airport lockdown and other measures choked the flow of tourists at one of the busiest times during the year.

Occupancy declined 25

per cent during the first quarter following a 19.5 per cent slump in guest check-ins, the Centre said in its newly published monthly bulletin for May 2020.

The total number of guests tumbled to around 389K this year, down from 484K during the first quarter of 2019.

Contributing to the decline were significantly lower numbers of Asian, European and African visitors, including those from around the

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, it said.

During fiscal 2019, Oman's hospitality industry – a key thrust sector for economic diversification and national employment generation – earned around RO 230 million in revenues (3 – 5-star hotels segment) and achieved an average occupancy rate of 54.8 per cent.

An estimated 1.775 million guests – Omani and international – stayed in these hotels last year, according to the NCSI report.

**"Published as required under CBO circular
BM 980 dated 18 December 2004"**
Profit and loss account for the year ended 31-December-2019

	RO in 000's	
	This Year End	Last Year End
Gross interest income	76,788	70,841
Interest expense	(16,247)	(10,781)
Net interest income	60,541	60,060
Other operating income:		
1. Dividend income	19	128
2. Net fee and commission income		
a) Fee and Commission Income	14,870	14,820
Less: b) Fee and Commission Expense	(3,908)	(3,116)
3. Net foreign exchange income		
a) Income	14,498	13,680
Less: b) Expense	-	-
4. Net income from dealing in securities	-	-
5. Net income from investment in securities	-	-
a) Income	-	-
Less: b) Expense	(38)	(296)
6. Other income	618	626
Gross income	86,600	85,902
General administrative expenses	(45,992)	(47,829)
Depreciation	(2,484)	(1,606)
Total operating costs	(48,476)	(49,435)
Net operating profit (Profit on ordinary activities before provisions)	38,124	36,467
Income from		
a) subsidiaries	-	-
b) Associate companies	-	-
c) Investment licensing activity	-	-
d) Profit from sale of non-banking assets	-	-
Bad debts Written off (net of recoveries from written off customers)	3,218	1,666
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances	(4,949)	(1,824)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Investments (FVOCI)	(19)	243
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Placements	(2)	(50)
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Off-balance sheet items	(1,650)	1,924
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Others (if any)	(25)	(449)
Provision for diminution / gain in value of investments	-	-
Profit for the year after loan loss provisions	34,697	37,977
Taxation	(5,413)	(6,611)
Net Profit after Tax	29,284	31,366
Other comprehensive income for the year		
- Movement in fair value of available for sale / FVOCI investment for the year	807	1,325
- Effect of currency translation for the year	-	-
- Remeasurement of defined benefit liability	63	(35)
Total comprehensive income for the year	30,154	32,656

Assets and Liabilities as at 31 December, 2019

Assets (net of total ECL)		RO in 000's		Liabilities		RO in 000's	
		This Year	Last Year			This Year	Last Year
1.	Cash	28,307	31,065	1.	Deposits (incl. Govt.)		
2.	Balances with CBO	252,379	239,009	a)	Demand	981,453	945,106
3.	Capital Deposit with CBO	500	500	b)	Savings	392,825	404,860
4.	Government and other securities	-	-	c)	Time	697,179	576,159
5.	Treasury bills & other bills	164,667	169,233	2.	Certificate of deposits	-	-
6.	Due from HO, branches, principal shareholders and affiliates abroad	47,353	45,850	3.	Due to HO, branches, principal shareholders and affiliates abroad	17,032	21,780
7.	Due from banks:			4.	Due to banks:		
	i) Placements *	158,242	86,942	i)	Placements	-	-
	ii) Loans and advances	-	-	ii)	Borrowings	37,722	15,998
8.	Other money market placements	-	-				
9.	Investments	323,418	331,703	5.	Other money market deposits	-	-
10.	Loans and advances	1,502,734	1,389,559	6.	Borrowings from CBO	-	-
11.	Tangible fixed assets	23,648	25,521	7.	Capital	200,031	200,031
12.	Losses carried forward	-	-	8.	Reserves	46,561	42,826
13.	Other assets	48,749	40,846	9.	Retained Earnings	105,400	97,584
				10.	Capital bonds	-	-
				11.	Other liabilities	71,794	56,274
Total Assets		2,549,997	2,360,618	Total Liabilities		2,549,997	2,360,618

*Due from banks - overseas includes R01.5 M (2018 : R01.3 M) of Nostro balances with correspondence bank



Andrew P Long
Chief Executive Officer

Deloitte & Touche (M.E.) & Co. LLC
Auditing Firm

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CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: An estimated 16,670 expatriates left the Sultanate in April this year – a figure that is set to balloon as the socioeconomic impact of the downturn – unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic as well as low international oil prices – becomes more apparent in the coming months.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total size of the expatriate population (workers and their families) in the Sultanate dwindled to around 1,920K in April 2020, down from 1,937K a month earlier.

While ongoing Omanisation efforts have partly contributed to this outcome, there is little doubt that the economic slowdown that began with falling oil prices and later exacerbated by the pandemic is primarily to

blame.

It is widely known that shuttering retail, hospitality, leisure and automotive businesses, among other segments of the economy, have had to lay off sizable numbers of expatriate workers over the last two months.

PANDEMIC IMPACTS:

THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR, WHICH EMPLOYED AN ESTIMATED 490K EXPATRIATES AT THE END OF 2019, RECORDED A 14 DECLINE IN THE SIZE OF ITS WORKFORCE OVER THE 12 MONTHS TO APRIL 2020.

Since the start of the year, there has been a steady decline in the size of the expatriate workforce in the Sultanate. From a high of 1,712K at the end of 2019, the number dipped to 1,672K in January, slipping further to 1,662K to February before settling at 1,645K in March. Over the 12 months to April 2020, the decline is around

6.9 per cent, according to the Centre's latest bulletin.

Of the total 1,645K expatriates residing in the Sultanate (as of April 2020), the vast majority (1,307K) were employed by the private sector, while around 53,000 were in the service of the government.

Around 284K comprised dependents and family members.

Significantly, Bangladeshis were the largest group by nationality among expatriates in the Sultanate, numbering around 607K in April 2020, down from 630K at the end of last year. Indians totalled around 590K, down from 617K last year.

Other key nationalities include: Pakistanis 200K; Filipinos 48K; Egyptians 34K; Sri Lankans 22K, Ugandans 16K, Nepalese 16K; and Tanzanians 15K.

The construction sector, which employed an estimated 490K expatriates at the end of 2019, recorded a 14 decline in the size of its workforce over the 12 months to April 2020.

The farming and fisheries sector too saw expatriate numbers nearly halve to around 40K in April this year, down from 60K at the end of last year.

Other occupational groups that reported modest reductions in expatriate numbers over the April 2019 – April 2020 period include: Administration / Directors / Managers (-7.6 per cent), Specialists (-9.3 per cent), Technicians (-12.7 per cent), Clerical (-18.9 per cent), Industrial and Food Industries (-7.1 per cent), and Engineering (-10.6 per cent).

BUSINESS

CBO GRANTS LICENCE TO OMANI FINTECH FIRM

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued the first licence to non-bank financial entities (fintech companies) in favour of Thawani Technologies for complying with all regulatory requirements. The licence is a fundamental step towards achieving Oman's vision to nurture and enable fintech companies to offer acceptable, affordable, accessible and available services to the nation.

Majid al Amri, CEO of Thawani, said, "Thawani aims to become a catalyst for innovation by providing better payment solutions to merchants and users alike. This licence is key to our growth trajectory as it will allow us to expand our competitive product portfolio



and create value for our users. CBO's trust in our technological capabilities will further drive our commitment to reach new horizons in-par with global developments and innovations in the field of modern payment systems."

CBO, as the custodian of Oman's payment systems infrastructure, has adopted a strategically systematic approach to taking the country's financial technology capabilities to the next level. In 2017 a mobile payment clearing system was launched enabling benefici-

ary companies to make payments and transfer funds simultaneously through a mobile phone number.

While in 2018 the National Payment Systems Law was issued further strengthening the legal framework for payment systems.

An Omani start-up, Thawani was established in 2016, allowing safer and quicker cashless mobile payment solutions to merchants, individual shoppers and buyers alike.

An internationally certified company in card securities, it has become the leading platform for e-transactions and payments set-up, bringing the next generation of e-payment solutions to the local market in just a few short years.

Bank Muscat rewards customers with more than RO 600,000 in Al Mazyona monthly draw



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the flagship financial services provider in the Sultanate, held its Al Mazyona monthly draw for April 2020 recently.

The bank rewarded its customers with over RO 600,000 in prizes across different segments including Asalah Priority Banking, Al Jawhar Privilege Banking, Zeinah, Shababi and Children's account holders as well as customers in different governorates across Oman.

Notably, Bank Muscat launched the Al Mazyona 2020 savings scheme with financial prizes amounting to over RO 11 million, which is the largest prize money offered by any bank in Oman.

The core focus of Al Mazyona is to encourage customers to sustain a strong savings culture and be rewarded in turn with the biggest prizes in Oman.

In the monthly draw, 10 Asalah Priority Banking customers were rewarded with RO 25,000 each while 25 Al Jawhar customers walked away with RO 5,000 each.

A total of 420 lucky customers from different governorates in Oman won RO 500 each in the monthly draw, while 15 Zeinah customers were rewarded with RO 1,500 each for their savings habit.

NMC launches advanced centre for nephrology and dialysis

MUSCAT: NMC Specialty Hospital Al Ghubra, part of NMC Health Care Group, officially launched its 'Centre for Nephrology & Dialysis'.

In the press note, Dr Deep Makkar, GM NMC Healthcare said, "NMC Healthcare is committed to improving patient care and experience and we are confident that the new NMC Dialysis unit will enable the residents of Sultanate and medical tourists to avail outstanding dialysis services with the latest technology in a pleasant environment, with improved comfort and privacy.

NMC Dialysis unit is one of the largest in private sector in Oman and NMC pledges to continue to support ministry of health in improving the healthcare sector in Oman. All dialysis patients would be provided with a complimentary valet parking, no waiting time for registration and convenient timings for dialysis procedure."

Dr Amitabh Jha (pictured), Sr Consultant and Head of NMC Nephrology Department, said, "Our vision is to create an advanced hemodialysis unit catering to the needs of the dialysis patients with one-on-one detailed care. We offer Services range from basic to critical nephrology care. Our highly qualified staff provide our patients with personalized medical care in an hygienic environment and we are



sure that our patients begin to unwind and relax with the reassurance of knowing that they are in our healing hands." Every day we are getting new patients with kidney diseases who shall be requiring dialysis. End stage kidney failure is also on the rise due to late diagnosis and not following proper treatment as advised by nephrologists. We would create a holistic centre for kidney diseases patients who not only get treated on time but also would lead a healthy life.

The Nephrology Department provides comprehensive kidney care for patients with different types of renal (kidney) diseases. Acute and chronic renal diseases and renal problems due to diabetes mellitus, hypertension, stone disease, infections, hereditary illnesses and poisons are diagnosed and managed.

VIRUS SPARKS RECORD DROP IN ENERGY INVESTMENT



PARIS: The energy industry is set to suffer a record drop in investment due to the coronavirus fallout, the IEA said on Wednesday, and while renewables are likely to fare better than oil, any swift economic recovery could create a global fuel crunch.

In its annual report on energy investments, the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated the plunge will be of the order of one-fifth from 2019 levels, or almost \$400 billion, as firms slash spending amid slumping demand for energy. Shale oil producers that catapulted the United States to the world's top crude nation stand to suffer the worst decline, the IEA said.

"All the energy sectors — oil, gas, renewables — everything is affected but the biggest impact is on shale oil," the agency's director Fatih Birol (**inset**) said.

"Total oil investments we expect to decline one third this year whereas the shale industry will see a decline of about 50 per cent." However, spending in renewable power projects is expected to fall by only around 10 per cent for the year, the report said.

"Even though this 'clean' spending is set to dip in 2020,

its share in total energy investment is set to rise," it noted.

But it noted "these investment levels remain far short of what would be required to put the world on a more sustainable pathway," estimating that spending on renewable power would need to double by the late 2020s.

The IEA has long warned that insufficient investment may leave the industry unable to meet rising demand.

"There is a risk that today's cutbacks lead to future market imbalances, prompting new energy price cycles or volatility," it said.

If oil investment stays at 2020 levels then supply in 2025 would be 9 million barrels per day less than had been expected, the IEA estimated, which could mean tight markets and higher prices if demand resumes its pre-crisis rising trajectory.

While some may see a drop in spending on oil as a positive development, Birol warned of negative consequences.

"We hope to see a clean energy transition, this should be an orderly energy transition, well designed so it doesn't cause any crisis, any shock," he said.

— AFP



An employee works on the assembly line of the Nissan Micra at the Renault SA car factory in Flins, near Paris, France, in this file photo. — AFP

Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi plan to deepen cooperation

PARIS: Struggling automakers Renault, Nissan and Mitsubishi unveiled on Wednesday a plan to deepen cooperation in their alliance that would see them develop nearly half of cars jointly by 2025 to cut costs and boost profitability.

All three firms were struggling even before the coronavirus pandemic, which has caused sales to plunge as governments forced citizens to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus.

They have been tied together by a series of cross shareholdings, but have only integrated their activities to a limited extent.

The plan "is expected to deliver model investment reductions of up to 40 per cent for vehicles fully under the scheme," a joint statement said.

The carmakers will adopt a "leader-follower scheme to enhance efficiency and competitiveness" while also letting one take the lead in each region of the world.

Renault head Jean-Dominique Senard, who also leads their alliance, said the plan will "bring out the most of each company's assets and performing capabilities, while building on their respective cultures and legacies."

It will also increase "their respective competitiveness, sustainable profitability and social and environmental responsibility," he added. The alliance will focus on one model per product segment, which would be developed by the leading company in that particular segment and adapted by the others.

Production could even be grouped together where appropriate, they said.

The carmakers will also focus on their core regions "with the aim to be among the most competitive and to serve as a reference for the others to enhance their competitiveness," said the statement. — AFP

BUSINESS

Japan approves fresh \$1.1 trillion stimulus to combat pandemic pain

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's cabinet approved on Wednesday a new \$1.1 trillion stimulus package that includes significant direct spending, to stop the coronavirus pandemic pushing the world's third-largest economy deeper into recession.

The record stimulus of 117 trillion yen, which will be funded partly by a second extra budget, followed another 117 trillion-yen package rolled out last month.

The new package takes Japan's total spending to combat the virus fallout to 234 trillion yen (\$2.18 trillion), or about 40 per cent of gross domestic product.

The combined spending ranks among the world's largest fiscal packages to deal with the coronavirus, approaching the size of the United States' \$2.3 trillion aid programme.

The latest package includes 33 trillion yen in direct spending, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) said.

"We must protect business and employment by



A man cycles past Bank of Japan building in Tokyo. — Reuters

any means in the face of the tough road ahead," Abe told a meeting of ruling party lawmakers. "We must also take all necessary measures to prepare for another wave of epidemic."

To fund the costs, Japan

will issue an additional 31.9 trillion yen in government bonds under the second supplementary budget for the current fiscal year ending in March 2021.

That will push new bond issuance for this fiscal year to a record 90 trillion yen.

Inclusive of issuance to roll over debt maturing during the year, Japan's total calendar-base annual market issuance would hit a record 212 trillion yen, further straining already tattered finances.

— Reuters

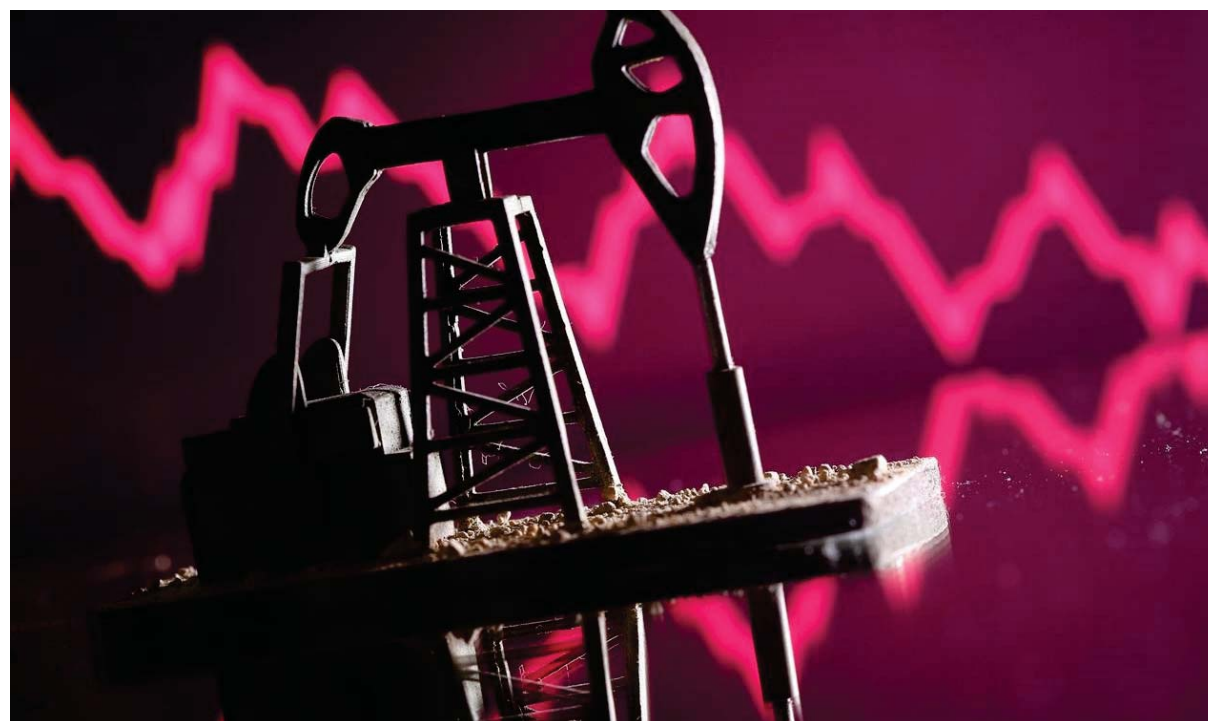
THE NEW PACKAGE TAKES JAPAN'S TOTAL SPENDING TO COMBAT THE VIRUS FALLOUT TO \$2.18 TRILLION, OR ABOUT 40 PER CENT OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT. THE COMBINED SPENDING RANKS AMONG THE WORLD'S LARGEST FISCAL PACKAGES TO DEAL WITH THE CORONAVIRUS, APPROACHING THE SIZE OF THE UNITED STATES' \$2.3 TRILLION AID PROGRAMME

Oil slips on demand worries, Hong Kong tensions

TOKYO: Oil prices fell on Wednesday on revived concerns over how quickly fuel demand will recover even as coronavirus lockdowns begin to ease in many countries, while US-China tensions added to negative sentiment.

Brent crude futures fell 21 cents, or 0.6 per cent, to \$35.96 by 0120 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were down 31 cents, or 0.9 per cent, at \$34.04 a barrel.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and producers including Russia, a grouping referred to as Opec+, are cutting their output by nearly 10 million barrels per day in May-June to buttress prices as measures to rein



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

in the coronavirus pandemic have slashed fuel demand.

In the United States, where some states are opening up after lockdowns, optimism about an increase in demand has supported sen-

timent, but the recovery is fragile, analysts caution. The Memorial Day holiday just passed typically heralds the start of the peak US demand season.

"Early estimates suggest

gasoline demand is down by as much as 30 per cent from last year as people stay close to home," ANZ Research said in a note.

Some analysts and banks are predicting a balanced oil market as soon as June, but that could be too optimistic, according to Eurasia Group.

There is ... a significant risk of repeat outbreaks and lockdowns. Even without them, some restrictions — especially on aviation — will remain in place," it said in a note.

Still as US demand picks up, however slowly, there are signs that inventories are falling. US crude inventories are forecast to have fallen for a third week last week. — Reuters



AUSSIE
MILLER TO
JOIN DUCATI
IN 2021

MELBOURNE: Australian Jack Miller will ride for Ducati in 2021, the Italian MotoGP manufacturer announced on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old has been rewarded for his performances in Ducati's satellite outfit Pramac Racing, finishing eighth last season with five podiums.

He is the third Aussie to ride for Ducati after Troy Bayliss and Casey Stoner, who won the world title for them in 2007.

"Since he arrived in the Pramac Racing Team, Jack has grown steadily, proving himself one of the fastest and most talented riders in the championship", Ducati CEO Claudio Domenicali said.

"We are convinced that Jack has all the right skills to fight continuously for the positions that matter, in every race," he added in an official statement.

Miller made his MotoGP debut aged 20 in 2015, joining Ducati's feeder team Pramac in 2018.

He thanked Ducati for the confidence they had shown in him, adding: "It is an honour for me to be able to continue my MotoGP career with the Borgo Panigale manufacturer.

"I look forward to starting riding again this year, and I am ready to fully commit to the responsibility of being an official Ducati rider in 2021".

Miller has the option to extend his contract into the 2022 season. He will replace either Andrea Dovizioso or Danilo Petrucci.

The first 11 rounds of this year's championship due to have got under way in Qatar on March 15 have been either cancelled or postponed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

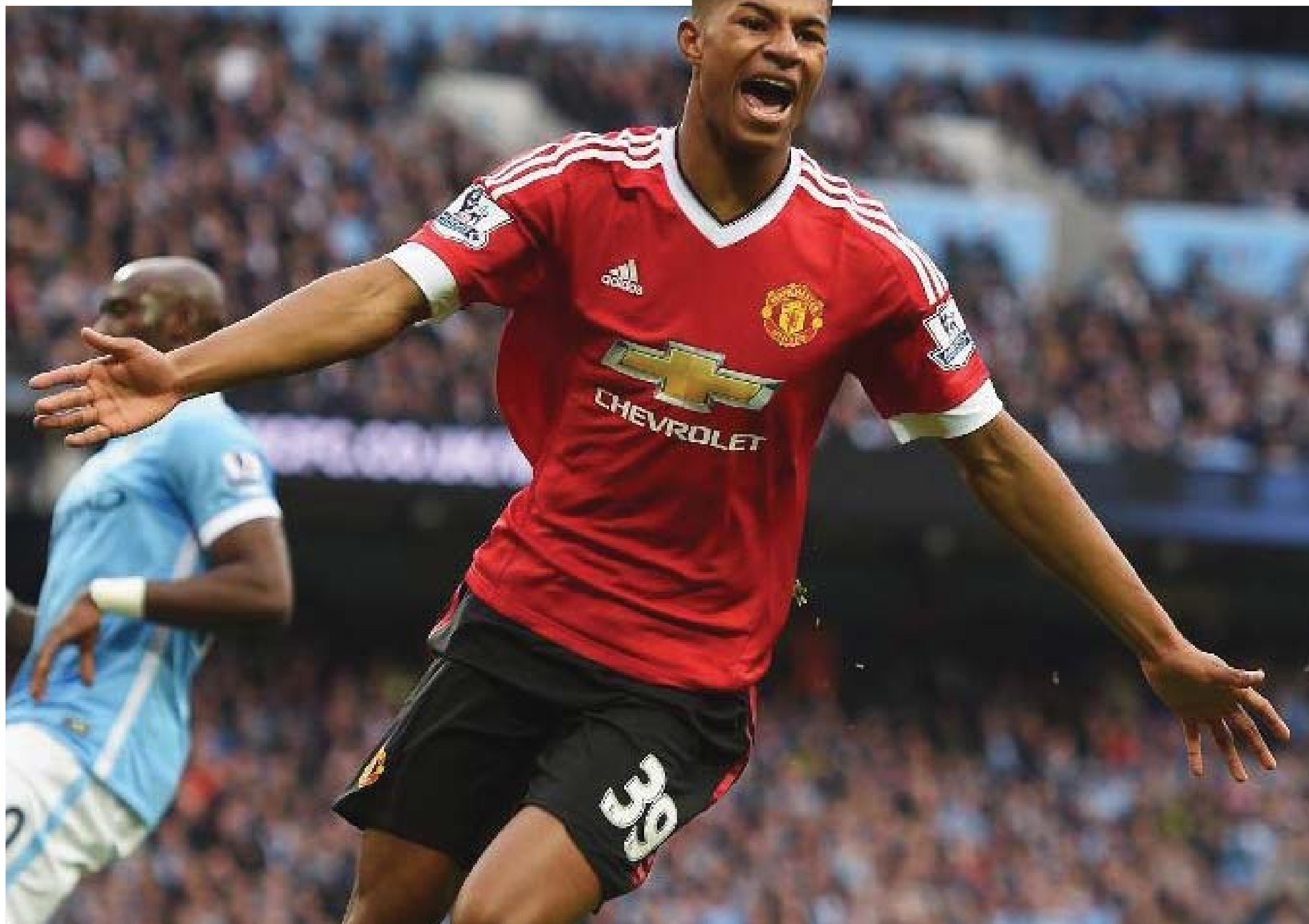
MotoGP promoters Dorna have made a proposal to the Spanish government to stage back-to-back races at Jerez in Spain in July.

The first, on July 19, would be the new season-opener for MotoGP.

Dorna's CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta this month indicated that the opening legs of the championship would most likely be held without spectators.

KTM were the first team to begin testing ahead of an eventual resumption of the season with the first of two days at Austria's Red Bull Ring circuit on Wednesday. — AFP

SPORTS



PREMIER LEAGUE CLUBS VOTE TO RESUME CONTACT TRAINING

LONDON: Premier League clubs voted unanimously on Wednesday to resume contact training as the English top-flight took a significant step towards a possible restart in June.

The Premier League was put on hold in March due to the coronavirus pandemic, with Liverpool agonisingly close to the title.

Clubs returned to training in small and socially distanced groups last week but they have now moved to stage two of the "return to training protocol".

"Premier League shareholders today voted unanimously to resume contact training, marking another step towards restarting the Premier League season, when safe to do so", the league said in a statement.

"Squads are now able to train as a group and engage in tackling while minimising any unnecessary close contact".

It added: "Discussions are ongoing as work continues towards resuming the season, when conditions allow".

The small number of positive tests from the first two rounds of testing at Premier League clubs has raised hopes of a return next month.

Eight cases of coronavirus among players and staff have been detected from 1,744 tests in the Premier League.

In the second-tier Championship, just two positive tests were registered from 1,014 tests.

A targeted return date of June 12 was described by Premier League Chief Executive Richard Masters last week as a "staging post".

Players and coaches have argued they will need until at least the end of June to reduce the risk of injuries after such a long lay-off.

Some players have voiced fears over their safety and that of their families due to the virus. — AFP

“

Premier League shareholders today voted unanimously to resume contact training, marking another step towards restarting the Premier League season, when safe to do so. Squads are now able to train as a group and engage in tackling while minimising any unnecessary close contact.

PREMIER LEAGUE STATEMENT



“IT IS NORMAL YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE A DIFFERENT MARKET. I DON’T SEE THE WORLD, AND ESPECIALLY THE FOOTBALL WORLD, READY FOR SOME CRAZY NUMBERS WE ARE USED TO HAVING AND SOME CRAZY INVESTMENTS THAT SOMETIMES SOME CLUBS AND SOME LEAGUES ARE USED TO DOING.”

**JOSE MOURINHO,
TOTTENHAM
HOTSPUR MANAGER**

Mourinho does not expect to see crazy transfers after virus

LONDON: Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho has warned that the transfer market will look drastically different due to the coronavirus fallout, saying football will not be ready for “crazy numbers”.

Spurs bought Steven Bergwijn for £27 million (\$33 million) from PSV in January, while also breaking their club record to sign Tanguy Ndombele for a reported £54 million last year.

But Mourinho believes the Premier League and other leagues around the world will need a different approach to cope with the financial impact of COVID-19.

“It is normal you are going to have a different market,” the 57-year-old told Sky Sports. “I don’t see the

world, and especially the football world, ready for some crazy numbers we are used to having and some crazy investments that sometimes some clubs and some leagues are used to doing.

“But my first question after that is: ‘When will the transfer window be?’ Because I don’t think it will be July-August any more, it will obviously have to go further than that.

“If you ask me what I want in my club, I would like my club to be what I know it is going to be: sensible, balanced, not going to spend rivers of money, and we are trying to respect the situation, not just of football but of the world and society overall.”

The Premier League is yet to set

a date for a return and players have not resumed full-contact training.

Top-flight clubs are expected to approve phase two of training on Wednesday as they inch closer to a restart after the postponement of the Premier League in March.

The Bundesliga has already resumed and Mourinho is itching to get playing again.

“Honestly, since the moment Bundesliga started, the Portuguese league and Spanish league announced a date to start, I think it is the most difficult moment for us, because we want to play,” he said. “It is hard to see other countries playing football and we don’t do it.” — **AFP**

SPORTS



Bach's aim is to canvas the members for their view on "how to handle the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic".

LONDON: Olympic chief Thomas Bach on Wednesday held a series of talks with International Olympic Committee members on the potential consequences of the coronavirus pandemic that has seen the Tokyo Games pushed back a year to 2021, sources said.

Bach was to address the 100 IOC members in three different sessions decided by language and local time zone.

Bach's aim is to canvas the members for their view on "how to handle the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic", a source said.

The IOC president wants to hear

"thoughts, ideas and experiences of all members across the globe", it added.

While Bach addressed all Olympic actors on March 24 when announcing the postponement of the Tokyo Games, it is the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak that he has specifically consulted IOC members. The IOC's medical and scientific director, Richard Budgett, also took to the floor to discuss "the issue of a vaccine", according to a second source.

Bach was backed up by Olympic Games executive director Christophe Dubi, IOC sports director Kit McConnell, IOC director-general Christophe De Kepper and

chief operating officer Lana Haddad.

The IOC's medical and scientific director, Richard Budgett, also took to the floor to discuss "the issue of a vaccine", according to a second source.

Bach warned last week that 2021 was the "last option" for holding the delayed Tokyo Games, stressing that postponement cannot go on forever.

He said he backed Japan's stance that the Games will have to be cancelled if the coronavirus pandemic isn't under control by next year.

The German wouldn't say, however, whether a vaccine was a prerequisite for going ahead with the Olympics, but

was lukewarm on the idea of holding them without fans.

In March, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were postponed to July 23, 2021 over the coronavirus, which has killed hundreds of thousands around the world and halted international sport and travel. It was the first peacetime postponement of the Olympics.

The IOC has already set aside \$800 million to help organisers and sports federations meet the extra costs of a postponed Olympics.

According to the latest budget, the Games were due to cost \$12.6 billion, shared between the organising committee, the government of Japan and Tokyo city.

— AFP

Olympic chief Bach

consults with IOC members over virus fallout