

ObserverWeekend

On Royal directives, 29 citizens brought home from Kuwait

MUSCAT: Based on the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Foreign Ministry, in co-ordination with the Sultanate’s Embassy in Kuwait, on Friday operated a flight to bring back 29 Omanis from Kuwait on board SalamAir plane.

The move is part of constructive efforts made by the Supreme Committee for dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak and other relevant authorities to facilitate the return of Omani citizens from abroad on account of travel restriction imposed by many countries due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Sultanate’s Embassy in Kuwait communicated with the Kuwait foreign ministry who provided every possible assistance to facilitate the process. — ONA



Embassy issues advisory on travel to India

MUSCAT: The Indian Embassy in Muscat said that at this juncture there are no plans to arrange special flights to India from Oman.

“It is advised that Indian community members may stay indoors, stay safe wherever they are in Oman, and follow the guidelines of the Government of Oman. The embassy will make an official announcement as soon as a decision to resume passenger flights to India is taken by the Government of India.”

However, for the compilation of data, those who wish to travel to India when the flights resume may provide information. It may be noted, the embassy added, a complete lockdown has been imposed throughout India till April 14.

No school, No problem!

The COVID-19 pandemic’s first significant impact on the Sultanate’s society and communities occurred when school pupils were sent home as a precaution, followed a short time later when all other educational and training institutions had their doors closed by the authorities. There can be no complaint either, as both have been proven subsequently to be positive actions in the face of a significant health issue. One can only empathize with pupils in the basic education system who now, not only don’t have schooling, to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding, but also do not have the interactions with others that contribute so much to the individual, inter-personal and inter-relational activities that are such an integral part of growing up. These are the psycho-social interactions that determine much of who and what we are, and what we will become.

DETAILS ON P2



MUSCAT UNDER LOCKDOWN

27 NEW CASES REGISTERED, BRINGING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF COVID-19 CASES TO 484

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Muscat Governorate, also home to the capital of the Sultanate, is under lockdown for the next 12 days.

Adding to the decision, the Wilayat of Muscat will be in complete isolation until further notice as part of the efforts exerted by the authorities, to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Traffic has been closed on the roads leading to the Wilayat of Muscat, except for the entry of trucks, foodstuffs, basic and medical services, such as fuel, sanitation and other essential services. This isolation is part of the precautionary measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 during the current period.

NEW CASES
The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Friday announced the registration of 27 new cases with COVID-19, bringing the total number of cases to 484, including three deaths. 109 cases have recovered.

The places under lockdown include Al Bustan, Al Jissah, Al Khairan, Sifah, Qantab, Haramal, Yiti, Sidab, Riyam, and Kalbuh, among others.

On Friday, the third death related to COVID-19 was reported in Oman – first from the expatriate community

– is also from Muscat.

Before this, two deaths reported in the Sultanate have been from Muscat – first death, a 72-year-old citizen, was recorded on March 31 and the second death, again a 72-year-old citizen who contracted the disease earlier was reported on Saturday, April 4.

STERILISATION PLANS
The Muscat Municipality has started

implementing sterilisation plans at public places in the city.

An Oman Air flight left on Friday morning to bring citizens home from Tanzania, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Meanwhile, Salalah Medical Supplies said that it is working to increase its production of masks and gloves to meet the local market needs.

The factory has a daily produc-

tion capacity of two million medical gloves and 100,000 medical masks.

He added that the company has strengthened its production since the emergence of the emerging coronavirus pandemic, bringing the factory’s production of medical gloves during the past month to 40 million gloves, and added that the products have approved medical specifications.

AS PARENTS YOU

SHOULD RELAX AND

START BY EXPLAINING

CLEARLY TO YOUR

CHILDREN WHY WE ARE

FORCED TO BE INDOORS

THE IMPORTANCE OF

ADHERING TO THIS

RESTRICTION,

AND THE NEED

TO KEEP LEARNING



A student takes online classes. – Reuters

NO SCHOOL, NO PROBLEM!

RAY PETERSEN
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

The COVID-19 pandemic's first significant impact on the Sultanate's society and communities occurred when school pupils were sent home as a precaution, followed a short time later when all other educational and training institutions had their doors closed by the authorities. There can be no complaint either, as both have been proven subsequently to be positive actions in the face of a significant health issue.

One can only empathise with pupils in the basic education system who now, not only don't have schooling, to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding, but also do not have the interactions with others that contribute so much to the individual, inter-personal and inter-relational activities that are such an integral part of growing up. These are the psycho-social interactions that determine much of who and what we are, and what we will become.

So now, parents must assume the teacher's responsibility for their child's education, at least for a time, and expert advice from around the world can make the task easier. Read on, before you climb, blissfully unaware, into the role that you have probably never envisaged yourself playing, that of a teacher, and of making your children understand that their behaviour, etiquette and attention, must be all it is, at school.

Associate Professor Tan Seng Chee, of the National Institute

of Education (NIE) at Nanyang Technological University, says: "The home environment is different from a school environment in terms of resources, expertise and the social environment. So, trying to emulate a school environment may not always work". He touches too on the fact that some parents, quite simply, may not know the subjects, or confuse teaching with lecturing and put themselves under too much pressure.

As parents you should relax and start by explaining clearly to your children why we are forced to be indoors the importance of adhering to this restriction, and the need to keep learning. Parul Ohri, of Momspresso.com says that, "Once they understand the reasoning, you will be surprised at how much more willing they will be to comply". The kids need to understand this is not a vacation, and that there must be set class, meal, nap and bed (sleep) times.

Of course, the realist in me knows that this is not always going to go well! That's both human nature and life at work, but maybe with forethought. June Yong, Editor of Focus on the Family, advocates family 'brainstorm' sessions, to discuss together 'rules' for timings, conduct, behaviour, phones, and even to the extent of creating a 'cool-off' zone, where, if behaviour is inappropriate, kids can be sent to calm down. Just think too, how effective it would be, and what a great lesson for the kids, if you sent yourself to cool off at some time!

This is a golden opportunity to engage the kids in time management,



and the need to embrace the concept gender neutral chores such as bedmaking and room tidying, at a time that is appropriate to house and home management, and also where to fit their homework and assignment responsibilities. Their understanding of routines and effective time

management may, in fact, be their single greatest learning from the situation.

"Don't fight phones, and screen time", says Ohri, "instead, keep to age-appropriate quotas and strategies for integrating digital media into the learning". Benaaz Irani, a senior school

counsellor at Aditya Birla World Academy, agrees, saying it is almost impossible to limit and supervise screen time. Instead, she advises, "Find ways to make screen time more productive such as with virtual classes, reading e-books, virtual museum or zoo tours and watching YouTube videos for easy revision of concepts".

As far as the 'teaching' itself goes, keep it simple. Creativity is the key, so start off with creative activities that involve reading, writing and figures. Maybe cooking a pizza to order? Maybe creating a new pizza? Then serving it and explaining the ingredients. This can be an all-day, family, all-ages, goal-oriented activity that uses academic, soft and communication skills. Just imagine every part of this must be researched, designed, measured, produced, delivered, consumer evaluated, paid for, there is so much in a pizza! You never knew... and so many skills!

Another day can see a recreation of an historic event, with fancy dress. Another day exercising. Another day building something. Another day with music or poetry and another with arts and crafts (so don't throwaway cardboard boxes or toilet rolls). Write, tell and act out stories. Do news reports and interviews, 'on-camera' using your phones. Weave these, and the academic skills together in the way of writing reviews of how you did it, and so on. There is no limit to how creative they can be, given the opportunity.

Two other key elements are important in home-teaching: First, ask

lots of questions and make sure you get answers, while also getting your kids to ask questions, and answer every single one. Never 'fob-off' an answer. If you don't know the answer, tell them you will "find out and get back to them later". Then do so. Second, do you have a room you can identify as the classroom/activity room, with another as an agreed 'Quiet Room' for study, reading and writing? If so... You've got this!

So, you've got the kids sorted, what about you? As I said earlier, this will not always go well, and the 'cool-off' zone for the kids may need to be mirrored with a 'chill-out' zone for you. Whether you sneak to your 'chill-out' zone, or tell the kids you need 10-15 minutes to get your 'balance', 'karma', 'aura' or 'power' back, you are an important part of the home-schooling dynamic, so a 15 minute 'chill-pill' might be a good call!

You need to maintain 'the love' throughout, with both parents sharing the teaching duties and empathetic which may mean that Dads, specially, may have to step into a new role, and a new space, for a while. Don't debate it! These are not normal times, so just do it! "The goal is to raise well-balanced, well-adjusted children with a broad base of knowledge", says Dr Jyoti Suvarna, Head of Paediatrics, at Holy Spirit Hospital in Mumbai. Embrace that philosophy and take lots of photos! This is a time you will all later remember as a never-to-be-forgotten part of their growing up and your parenting. Live, and remember it all, when you pore over those pics, in twenty years time.

POINT OF CONTAGION

Mass gatherings and the spread of coronavirus

Congregations of a secretive South Korean sect, an assembly of French evangelists and major European football matches: As the new coronavirus radiated across the planet it seeded clusters of infections at mass gatherings that helped magnify its spread.

With around half of humanity under lockdowns that have radically altered the contours of daily life, social activities such as sharing a meal with friends and family or standing among a scrum of fans at a sports event have suddenly become prohibited in many places.

But even as China eases restrictions on the outbreak city of Wuhan and some European countries consider lockdown exit routes, experts say plans to celebrate will need to stay on ice.

"The worst scenario would be a VE day type celebration where everyone's on the street, greeting and hugging each other", said David Laloo, Director of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

"That would certainly guarantee that any remaining individuals who did have infection are more likely to spread it", he said, advocating instead for a "much more controlled, gradual return".

Mass gatherings, in celebration and in sorrow, are an intrinsic part of human life. They also give budding pathogens a well-documented opportunity amplify transmission.

The devastating 1918 influenza pandemic - which infected about a third of the world's population and killed an estimated 50 million people - rebounded at the end of World War I as people celebrated Armistice Day and soldiers demobilised, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said.

PATIENT 31

A particular risk at a public event is the potential presence of a so-called super-spreader - a person who sheds the virus on a greater scale than others and can infect large numbers of people.

"If that individual happens to be at a mass gathering and for whatever reason there is very close contact between people, then I think we have seen several examples where a mini outbreak within an epidemic has arisen from a single episode", Laloo said.

In South Korea they call her "Patient 31".

On February 10 - a month after the World Health Organization said a coronavirus could be behind a mysterious pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan - a 61-year-old South Korean woman developed a fever.

The woman, a devotee of the Shincheonji sect, attended at least four church services in the city of Daegu before she was diagnosed with COVID-19.

Within weeks thousands of infections - most

of the country's total - were linked to Shincheonji members.

"The pattern is very common. You go to a family gathering or religious gathering and you catch the thing and then you go off to your locality and then spread it", said KK Cheng, Director of the Institute of Applied Health Research at Birmingham University.

He said that the huge annual exodus of people for holidays and family visits around Lunar New Year likely seeded the international spread of COVID-19.

France reported the first death outside Asia in mid-February.

Later that month, some 2,000 evangelical Christians gathered in the eastern town of Mulhouse, including several people unknowingly carrying the virus.

The meeting has since been linked to cases all over France and the Grand Est region is struggling with one of the country's most severe outbreaks.

On February 19, as infection numbers were beginning to rise in northern Italy, Bergamo's Atalanta football team played a highly anticipated Champions League match against Valencia in Milan.

Tens of thousands of Bergamo residents travelled to the game and others crowded together at home and in clubs to watch.

"It's clear that evening was a situation in which the virus was widely spread", Bergamo Mayor Giorgio Gori said last month as the virus raged across his city.

Spanish club Valencia said 35 per cent of their team and staff tested positive for coronavirus following the trip to Milan.

On March 10, two days after northern Italy

A PARTICULAR RISK AT A PUBLIC EVENT IS THE POTENTIAL PRESENCE OF A SO-CALLED SUPER-SPREADER - A PERSON WHO SHEDS THE VIRUS ON A GREATER SCALE THAN OTHERS AND CAN INFECT LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE

went into lockdown, the Cheltenham Festival horse racing event began in Britain, attracting more than 250,000 people over four days.

The WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, as the Champions League match between Liverpool and Atletico Madrid went ahead in the UK.

Liverpool Council's Director of public health Matthew Ashton has since told the Guardian newspaper that "it was not the right decision" to hold the game.

Even as governments and organisations began announcing sweeping postponements - from music festivals and the Olympic Games to Saudi Arabia's year-round "umrah" pilgrimage - more cases emerged.

India began putting about 15,000 people under quarantine on March 18 after a "super-spreader" Sikh guru who had travelled to European virus hotspots went preaching in villages in northern Punjab, before falling ill and

dying of COVID-19.

The reluctance of officials to stop big events - in Britain the government did not impose restrictions until late March - meant "some people would have died, some would consider, unnecessarily", said KK Cheng. But he said policymakers were faced with a new disease and no easy answers.

A "draconian" response could be so successful that nothing happens and it attracts accusations "that you have damaged people's livelihoods".

"It is easy to criticise", Cheng said. "And those of us who don't have to make decisions like this should feel grateful that we are not in those positions".

'ENDANGER MILLIONS'

The issue of how and when to restrict public events has unleashed debate among experts.

In an article published last month in the Lancet, members of the WHO's Novel Coronavirus-19 Mass Gatherings Expert Group discussed the organisation's guidelines for how to assess the potential risks of holding events.

While the authors conceded that in the past mass gatherings "have been the source of infectious diseases that have spread globally", they said public health measures had reduced the threat in recent years - enabling large events to go ahead despite virus outbreaks.

In response, another group of specialists warned in a letter to the journal against giving "explicit approval" to planned events during an "escalating global pandemic".

"Allowing mass gatherings under these circumstances has the potential to endanger millions of attendees and upon return home also those who

remained in their countries of origin", said the authors.

The original authors responded in turn, saying the WHO guidelines would be helpful as nations "start removing restrictions and rebuild communities and economies".

'MEETING STRANGERS'

In the meantime, event organisers and religious leaders are innovating new ways to reach their audiences.

Pope Francis livestreamed his Palm Sunday mass from a deserted Saint Peter's Basilica, and in some countries the Islamic call to prayer has been tweaked to urge people to stay at home.

With cultural venues closed down, organisations from the Metropolitan Opera in New York to Berlin's Philharmonic are streaming concerts online.

Sports teams are considering hosting fan-free tournaments.

Laloo said policymakers should beware of "perverse consequences" of interventions, such as holding matches in empty stadiums but allowing people to gather in clubs.

He said the speed with which societies return to holding events with large crowds might be affected by the experience of social distancing itself.

"Are you going to be more nervous about hugging strangers or shaking hands? I don't know the answer to that", he said.

"But I don't think ultimately there will be changes in the way we watch sport, or concerts or whatever in the future". — AFP



Even as areas like China's Wuhan ease their lockdowns, there are questions whether social distancing will continue to affect behaviour. — AFP



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**DR SANJAY DALAL**

A couple of weeks back people in their busy life were finding difficulty to manage TIME.

Most people were “SHORT OF TIME”. The scenario has drastically changed since Total/Restricted “lockdown” of countries across the globe due to COVID-19 threat!

Now these BUSY BEES are having a lot of FREE TIME. HOW TO PASS TIME staying locked at home for two weeks and may be more... is the ISSUE?

Most will laze out playing video games, chatting on whatsApp, watching movies lying down, indulge into snacking, sleeping for long duration and the like.

Instead of looking at social media's scary fake posts and getting stressed, worries, anxious -- here are seven ways to KILL /PASS time in a constructive way I call it “Quality Time Pass”

1 COOKING

Food is a necessity. This is the time where you can avoid restaurant/junk/cold storage food. You have time to cook! Even if you are an expert in cooking, homemade fresh food is very healthy and you can try even better ways to prepare those delicious foods you enjoyed making. Good food elevates mood! For overweight people it is also a right time to go on a diet to get back in shape!

2 CLEANING & WASHING

Instead of dumping and collecting dirt in the house, it is very important to keep cleanliness at home on a daily basis. Most will find this work boring and not of their choice but take it as an exercise. It will help you burn some calories and keep you fit.

Try to clean and organise few important places you usually don't do.

Wardrobe/cupboard – Take out all your personal clothes, clean the wardrobe and rearrange them neatly. You can also discard old, unwanted dresses or keep it for donating to poor and needy.

Another area to clean up and reorganise is the showcases where you keep your precious possessions.

The kitchen is also an area which needs a total overhaul – you may not have had time to do!

3 PRAYERS & MEDITATION

It is but natural for human to remember and connect to GOD during difficult periods. Human tries to get solace. Prayers/ meditation are the best way to soothe mental, social and physical stress. All may not follow this.

4 HOBBIES

Undoubtedly, everyone has a hobby and due to busy life most are unable to pursue. This is the best time to go for it. Music, singing, dancing, painting, artwork, writing, reading, stitching etc.

5 EXERCISE

Excess food, no movements and excess relaxation/sleep -- remember, there is a danger of putting on weight and losing shape during this period of lockdown. You can do a lot of physical activity at home to keep you fit.

Yoga, breathing exercises, back and abdomen exercises, stretching, home cycling, treadmill, dumbbells and choose any method of doing exercise that suits you.

6 ENTERTAINMENT

Watch movies, dramas, serials, informative documentaries and listen to music which give you more positive insights.

7 SOCIAL and COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Talk to your wife and kids, play games at home, have a light chat on WhatsApp and postings on Facebook. Join FACEBOOK LIVE with friends.

7 THINGS TO KEEP YOU ACTIVE DURING 'STAY HOME' SEASON

The world after the pandemic

DR SALEH AL FAHDI

The spread of the Corona pandemic “COVID-19” brings to mind deep and legitimate questions, regarding conspiracy, perpetrator, beneficiary and the image of the world prior to the recent catastrophe.

We no longer exclude any thoughts; and as the popular saying goes - “truth is a prey of wars”, and taking this a step further - it is a prey of crisis too.

Hollywood in the last and current decades has produced “fiction” classified cinematic movies whose horrific scenes, match today's scenarios with an uncanny similarity in the details and scenes.

Some of those movies were in fact, based on novels wherein authors worked on plots that were derived from reality. The novel “Eyes of the Darkness” in which the author has predicted the types of scenarios that might happen in the world, stemming

from undercover secret worlds that are controlled by wealthy and/or elites, is a case in point.

As per the authors and film-makers - the elite and wealthy are trying to push the majority of human beings into what British author David Icke named a “Hunger Games Society”. In order for us to understand the meaning of this, we have to go back to a novel called “Hunger Games” written by American writer Suzanne Collings, where the writer pictured Hunger Games as an annual festival in society. In the book, a male and a female aged between 12-18 years, are randomly selected from each of the twelve provinces surrounding the capital, to fight each other till death, within a reality TV show. The show ends with the survival of one winner.

David Icke has explained the intention behind the title on a show called “London Real”, mentioning that the rich in the world, which he

called the “one percent” in proportion, aim to eliminate small and medium enterprises so that the large corporation such as Amazon – according to him -- remain and expand (which is in fact happening, given the pandemic).

Even the news reported recently that Amazon has employed an extra 100,000 employees to manage the increase of online shopping, while another large corporation Walmart has employed 150,000 people to meet the growth in online shopping and demand as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, which has forced the world to stay at home.

Returning to David Icke's talk, we can connect it by another explanation provided by the book “The Shock Doctrine” written by Naomi Klein, in which she talks about causing huge incidents, or using natural disasters to reshape reality based on a pre-planned blueprint.

This is what observers, interpreters

and scholars are predicting, regardless of the intention, conspiracy, or the nature of the crisis; the world will not be the same after COVID- 19.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said: “The world after this epidemic is heading towards a stage where nothing will be as it was before and we will witness an emerging of a new world in political, economic and social levels, and Turkey is entering this new stage with great advantages and strong infrastructure”.

The characteristics of this new world will appear in several images formed by the victors of the epidemic, in a way that is consistent with their interests and aims. By approving their abilities to deal with the epidemic crisis with high efficiency and great responsibility they provide evidence of their willingness to reshape the world. This is what China has demonstrated in dealing with the pandemic, in terms of providing

medical aid and health assistance to the affected countries, including some European countries that seemed shaky in dealing with the crisis. Unlike China, the US closed its borders to its European allies and other countries of the world.

A new world will emerge after this epidemic, one which will witness a change of leadership towards China, and many governments will restore their power back on the account of privatisation, civil society institutions and democracy.

The countries that are unable to understand the upcoming future of the world after coronavirus pandemic will be paralyzed in the pursuit of changing and join the advancement marathon. While countries that are able to see an opportunity in this crisis, will benefit in various aspects such as relationships with other countries, future vision, crises management and technology.



British PM recovering from COVID-19

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson was resting in hospital on Friday as he recovered from COVID-19 while Britons were told to avoid the temptation of spring sunshine during the Easter break with the coronavirus outbreak approaching a peak.

The flamboyant 55-year-old leader's visible decline shook the nation, but he came out of three nights of intensive care at St Thomas' Hospital after going in with a high temperature and cough.

"He must rest up," his father Stanley Johnson told BBC radio, thanking Britons for their outpouring of support and telling them to heed the lesson. "If it can hit the prime minister for heaven's sake, well it does come close to home."

Johnson was the first world leader to be hospitalised with the coronavirus, forcing him to hand control to foreign minister Dominic Raab just as Britain's situation worsened drastically.

The death toll is 7,978 - the fifth highest in the world.

"You cannot walk away from this and go straight back to Downing Street and pick up the reins without a period of readjustment," Stanley Johnson added.

The prime minister's Downing Street office said he was in the "early phase" of recovery and it was unclear how long he would be in hospital. But his improvement cheered Britain and beyond, US President Donald Trump hailing the "great news."

Johnson's pregnant fiancée Carrie Symonds, who has had coronavirus symptoms, tweeted a rainbow picture - in support of healthcare workers - along with hands clapping emojis.

LENGTHY LOCKDOWN

The government is considering when it can end a lockdown, though Raab has said it was too early to make a decision because Britain had not yet reached the peak of the outbreak.

The government says it will have a better idea by next week of knowing if the lockdown has succeeded in bringing down coronavirus infections and hospital admissions.

"We've started already to see plateauing," said epidemiologist Neil Ferguson, a professor at Imperial College in London who has helped shape the official response. —Reuters

Despite high death toll, US optimistic as coronavirus curve appears to flatten

NEW YORK: US health officials made cautiously optimistic noises about coronavirus despite high death tolls, suggesting Americans might be able to take summer holidays, as falling hospitalisation rates hint at a turning point in the battle against COVID-19.

With unemployment skyrocketing and the economy tanking, President Donald Trump is keen to lift social confinement measures and get the United States open for business again as soon as possible.

Trump's top pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci warned America cannot be reopened overnight due to the threat of further waves of infections, but said it could be up and running again by the summer months.

That is, he said, providing citizens adhere to social distancing guidelines and widespread stay-at-home orders, which have the vast majority of Americans on lockdown, throughout April.

The country has suffered more than 16,500 virus-related fatalities — the second-highest number in the world after Italy. And it has emerged as the country with the most coronavirus cases, at more than 460,000.

When asked by "CBS This Morning" whether he could envision a summer of vacations, baseball games, weddings and family get-togethers, infectious disease expert Fauci replied, "It can be in the cards."

His comments came as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo struck a similar tone of cautious optimism despite the state reporting a record single-day death toll for the third time this week Thursday.

New York is bearing the brunt of the United States' deadly coronavirus pandemic, accounting for around



A man crosses the street at a nearly empty Times Square on April 09, 2020 in New York City. — AFP

half the number of deaths across the country.

'NIGHTMARE'

Cuomo said the curve was flattening because of social distancing orders. "We had a 200-net increase in hospitalisations, which you can see is the lowest number we've had since this nightmare started," Cuomo told reporters, adding that intensive care admissions were also at their lowest yet.

Meanwhile unemployment is rising at a jarring rate, with data showing 17 million have lost their jobs since mid-March, when America began shutting down.

Fauci, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director, said the US could be opened by the summer if it is ready to deal with the inevitable spike in infections a relaxing of restrictions will bring.

"And I think that we will progress towards the steps towards normalisation as we get to the end of this thirty days.

"And I think that's going to be a good time to look and see how quickly can we make that move to try and normalise. But hopefully, by the time we get to the summer we will have taken many steps in that direction," he said.

Trump, who veers between

sounding ominous warnings about the crisis to threatening to scrap the mitigation measures, said Wednesday there was "light at the end of the tunnel."

'NEW NORMAL'

In recent days, an Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) model used by the White House has revised down America's projected number of COVID-19 deaths from 93,000 to 82,000 and then 60,000.

The model, which is considered too optimistic by some states, suggested the United States will reach its peak number of confirmed cases this Easter weekend.

However, some experts say inadequate testing means the extent of the pandemic is not yet realized.

America's top doctor, Surgeon General Jerome Adams, told CBS the spread was slowing and the next 30 days were crucial.

But rather than returning to life as it was before, the former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Tom Frieden said the country should be prepared for a "new normal" to "box the virus in."

Cuomo, who this week extended New York's shutdown of schools and non-essential businesses until April 29, said it was too early to say when the city might be reopened again. —AFP

KADHEMI NAMED IRAQ'S THIRD PM-DESIGNATE THIS YEAR

BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Barham Saleh has nominated spy chief Mustafa Kadhemi as the country's third prime minister-designate this year, moments after his predecessor ended his bid to form a government.

Kadhemi, the 53-year-old head of the National Intelligence Service, has ascended to the role as Iraq faces a budget crisis brought on by the collapse in world oil prices and the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"This is a huge responsibility, and a difficult task," Saleh said in his nominating speech, describing Kadhemi as someone with integrity and reason.

His nomination was attended by ministers, political rivals and even the United Nations' representative in Iraq, indicating widespread support for



Iraqi President Barham Saleh, left, swearing in Mustafa Kadhemi as new prime minister-designate in Baghdad. —AFP

Kadhemi that neither of the previous PM-designates had enjoyed.

Moments before the ceremony, his predecessor Adnan Zurfi announced he was withdrawing his candidacy due to "internal and external reasons,"

corruption and return displaced people back home.

Kadhemi was able to secure that support after weeks of lobbying that peaked in a flurry of meetings in Baghdad over the last week, sources close to him said.

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM?

With ties to both Washington and Tehran, Kadhemi may be best equipped to steer Iraq through the brewing political storm, observers say.

"It's a win for Iraq, especially in this difficult economic phase, as he could ensure the renewal of Baghdad's waiver to the US sanctions imposed on Iran," a senior political figure in the Iraqi capital said.

But first, he must submit a cabinet lineup to Iraq's 329-member parliament

for a vote of confidence by May 9.

That will require a long process of consultations with various political parties, as top positions in Iraq's power-sharing system are typically doled out through horsetrading and consensus.

Neither of the previous candidates for prime minister — Zurfi or former communications minister Mohammad Allawi — had been able to reach that step.

If he succeeds, Kadhemi would replace Iraq's caretaker premier Adel Abdel Mahdi, who came into power in 2018 when political blocs opted for him over Kadhemi.

Abdel Mahdi resigned in December following months of anti-government protests, becoming the first prime minister in the country's post-2003 order to step down. — AFP

Virus blow for Japan's sumo as wrestler tests positive

TOKYO: Japan's sumo association on Friday confirmed its first coronavirus case, in a new blow for the ancient sport, which has already been forced to move one tournament behind closed doors and postpone others.

One low-ranking wrestler who had a fever last week has tested positive for the virus, the association said, declining to name the man or give details of his stable.

The association said no other wrestlers or officials had symptoms and those who belong to the infected wrestler's stable will stay home or at the stable and follow advice from health officials.

The outbreak in Japan has been smaller than in many countries, with more than 5,300 cases and 88 deaths confirmed so far, but the government this week declared a state of emergency in seven regions, and the sumo association said it was adapting too.

The association has not called off

daily training but new instructions include requiring wrestlers to take their temperatures twice a day.

The "tokoyama" responsible for styling wrestlers' hair into their signature oiled topknots have been asked to avoid public transportation when coming to stables, a spokesman said.

A young wrestler at a Tokyo stable confirmed daily training was continuing as usual but said activities were limited.

"We wear masks where possible, wash hands, disinfect hands... We have been taking normal prevention measures," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"We don't visit other stables to practice. We have been practicing in our stable only."

"We go out only for (grocery) shopping... Stress is building up in many people," he added.

News of the infected wrestler came a week after the association postponed

two sumo tournaments scheduled for later this year.

The next sumo "basho" or tournament, scheduled to open on May 10 in Tokyo, has been delayed by two weeks. The July basho in Nagoya suffered the same fate.

Tokyo's basho is expected to begin on May 24 but tickets have yet to go on sale over concerns about a further postponement or cancellation.

The spring basho, held last month in Osaka, took place without spectators, with wrestlers surrounded by just a handful of judges in the empty arena.

But it was broadcast live on national TV, where viewers could hear sounds normally drowned out by the crowd, including wrestlers slapping their bellies and scraping their feet on the clay ring.

Some rituals were amended, including the traditional ladle of water that a winning wrestler offers to the next in the ring. — AFP



Sumo stables have cut back training and put in place other restrictions to limit the spread of the coronavirus. — AFP

The new nightingales, lighting the lamp of hope

As thousands of nurses across India light the lamps of hope in the hospitals, several leading ladies play a vital role in India's war room to contain the spread of dreaded pandemic.

From developing India's first test kit for COVID-19, to dispatching lifesaving medicines in remote areas, and from chalking out strategies for the government to tackle the spread of the virus to building treatment protocols, women from various walks of life burn midnight oil to counter the virus which is gradually spreading in world's second most populated country.

Just a day before she delivered a baby, Minal Dakhve Bhosale, a Pune based virologist, managed to deliver the first testing kit for COVID-19 to India. In just a record time of six weeks, Minal and her team including some of the best scientists gifted its first test

kit to conduct COVID-19 tests at a large scale in the country, an exercise required to identify and isolate carriers of the dreaded virus.

A few kilometers away from Minal's laboratory in Pune, another virologist, Dr Priya Abraham, made an important breakthrough by isolating the virus. This breakthrough, by Dr Abraham, Director of the National Viral Institute, helps the scientists and immunologists in developing a vaccine or a drug for the treatment for new coronavirus.

Around 1,500 kms away from Pune, in India's seat of power, New Delhi, several women bureaucrats, policy makers, health strategists, joined hands with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in chalking out strategies and initiating quick steps to prevent the country from slipping into stage 3, where disease is transmitted into communities.

The actual battle against COVID-19 could be won only through a repurposed drug or a vaccine, a field which usually comes under biaootechnology ministry

Preeti Sudan, an alumni of London School of Economics, and presently the Secretary of Union Ministry of Health and Welfare, became the nodal point for the PMO to execute the key medical strategies on ground through health departments of various states.

Preeti is a workaholic. Fortunately she has rich experience of public food distribution, disaster management and PM's mega health Insurance scheme. She seems to be the fittest person to be the nodal point for coordinating the war against a pandemic, " says a 1983 batch IAS and batchmate of Preeti Sudan.

Incidentally, the person in charge of viral diseases in India's premiere medical body, Indian Council of Medical Research(ICMR), happens to be a well known woman scientist, Dr Nivedita Gupta. Her contribution in containment of virus Nipah in India's southernmost state of Kerala is widely acknowledged in the research fraternity.

Dr Gupta, who played a key role in setting up a viral and diagnostic network for ICMR, is presently building

testing and treatment protocols in India. Such protocols, adhered by the medical practitioners are vital in the fight against the virus.

The actual battle against COVID-19 could be won only through a repurposed drug or a vaccine, a field which usually comes under biaootechnology ministry. As several groups of scientists launch the project of developing repurpose drugs or a vaccine to combat the virus, Renu Swaroop, a top class scientist and secretary in the Union Ministry of Biotechnology, looks after all these projects.

She hopes that repurpose drugs could be an answer to quickly deal with the highly infectious virus. Seeing her deep involvement in the going projects, the union government has given Renu Swaroop one-year extension in her service. — IANS



A healthcare worker wearing protective gear makes a bow during a test for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outside a stadium in Bogor, West Java province, Indonesia. – Reuters

Indonesians look to start-ups to fight virus

FANNY POTKIN & STANLEY WIDIANTO

As coronavirus cases surge in Indonesia, doctors are working double-time treating patients both at hospitals and online through healthtech start-ups — an approach that is quickly becoming part of the national health care system.

Doctor Mohammad Risandi Priatama, 26, has treated 10 people with COVID-19 symptoms over the past month at a busy West Java hospital in a designated virus "red zone" — and provided consultation for scores more through the app Alodokter.

"Because there are limited health care facilities especially in my district, our people need more information that is easy to use without the need to go the hospital," he said.

With a lack of medical staff and protective gear, and under 4,000 hospital beds for seriously ill COVID-19 patients in an archipelago of 270 million people, authorities have little capacity to manage what some experts believe is an epidemic that has been hidden so far by limited testing.

To lessen the strain, the government is directing the public to so-called telehealth firms through which they can access verified medical guidance, get free doctor consultations via video, telephone or text, and even have medication prescribed and delivered.

Indonesia's largest telehealth firms, including Alodokter, Halodoc and GrabHealth — a joint venture between Singapore ride-hailer Grab and Ping An Good Doctor from China's Ping An Healthcare and Technology Co Ltd — have seen usage skyrocket over the past month.

"As hospitals are already packed, the government wants to ensure only priority patients are going to

With a lack of medical staff and protective gear, and under 4,000 hospital beds for seriously ill COVID-19 patients in an archipelago of 270 million people, authorities have little capacity to manage what some experts believe is an epidemic that has been hidden so far by limited testing

emergency rooms and that patients who don't urgently need hospitalisation can be helped online," said Alodokter Chief Executive Nathanael Faibis.

Alodokter clocked 32 million website visitors in March and over 500,000 free coronavirus consultations since Indonesia's first confirmed case on March 2, Faibis said. Grabhealth said daily consultations had nearly doubled to 10,000.

Indonesia has recorded 3,293 cases of COVID-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus. Its death toll of 280 is Asia's highest outside China, where the virus was first reported at the end of last year.

The outbreak has prompted a surge in demand for telehealth worldwide. In China, millions flocked to platforms such as those offered by Ping An Good Doctor and Alibaba Health Information Technology Ltd.

US and European firms have reported similar spikes, with US leader Teladoc Health Inc seeing twice the

usual demand, with as many as 100,000 remote consultations weekly.

But Indonesia stands out with the degree to which the government itself is leaning on healthtech firms. Its virus task force on March 27 said it would add links on its website to 20 telehealth services and create a "digital call centre" to direct traffic.

Officials said they want COVID-19 patients with only mild symptoms to be treated through telehealth, with doctors referring those whose condition worsens to hospitals.

"This is really good for patients who are self-isolating, in that they can continue communication and receive direction through these startups," Minister of Health Terawan Agus Putranto told parliament last week.

The task force, healthtech firms and doctors have agreed to share aggregate patient data to aid efforts aimed at slowing the spread of the virus, and are discussing what other information can be shared.

In the province of West Java, where infections have reached 365 with 35 deaths, the local authority has set up its own telehealth service for its 49 million residents through which people can book COVID-19 tests.

"The app asks comprehensive questions to make sure people don't go to hospitals for the smallest symptoms," West Java Governor Ridwan Kamil said. Some people are even afraid to visit hospitals believing they are teeming with the virus, he added.

Overall, health experts said telehealth is a partial solution to cope with the surge in patients though the quality of online consultation and security of medical data must be considered. — Reuters

Ceasefire in Yemen begins, lifting hopes for peace

MOHAMMED GHOBARI & ABDULRAHMAN AL ANSI

Anationwide ceasefire in response to the global coronavirus outbreak went into effect in Yemen on Thursday, raising hope for an end to the five-year-old war that has pushed millions to the brink of famine.

A Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Ansar Allah movement said it would halt military operations from 09:00 GMT for two weeks in support of United Nations efforts to end the conflict that has killed more than 100,000 people.

The movement, which controls the capital Sanaa and most big urban centres, has yet to announce whether it will follow suit in what would be the first major breakthrough in peace efforts since late 2018.

The coalition said its move is intended to facilitate talks sponsored by UN envoy Martin Griffiths for a permanent truce, motivated in part to avoid a potential outbreak of the new coronavirus, though no cases have been reported in Yemen.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a statement said Washington welcomed the ceasefire announcement and urged Ansar Allah to respond in kind to the coalition's initiative. He called on all parties to cooperate with Griffiths' efforts for talks.

In a statement, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged the Saudi-backed government and the Ansar Allah to engage "in good faith and without preconditions" in the talks to agree a nationwide truce mechanism, humanitarian and economic confidence-building steps and a resumption of negotiations on a political settlement.

"We are tired of the war," said 49-year-old Abd al Basset Muhammad, who owns a juice shop in the southern port of Aden, interim seat of the Saudi-backed government. "If the war hasn't already killed you, you are dying of hunger or disease."

Some Saudis and Yemenis residing in the kingdom, where cities have been targeted by Ansar Allah missiles, welcomed the news.

"A lot of money was spent on the war. If there was no war, that money would be spent on education," Saudi national Ammar Khaled said outside a supermarket in the capital Riyadh.

An Ansar Allah official said on Wednesday the group had sent the United Nations a proposal calling for an end to the war and what it describes as a coalition blockade. The coalition, which patrols the coast and controls airspace, denies imposing a blockade and says it aims to halt import of weapons.

In the Yemeni capital, some remained sceptical.

Engineer Abdulrahman al Qadi said he saw no point in only a two-week ceasefire. Ahmed al Nuwaira, a member of Sanaa's parliament, agreed: "Let them (the coalition) open the airports, (humanitarian) corridors and ports," he said. — Reuters

OMAN  DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED 15 NOVEMBER 1981

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
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CHINA FACTORY GATE DEFLATION DEEPENS IN MARCH AS COVID-19 JOLTS ECONOMY P8



VOLKSWAGEN FURLONGS 1,500 WORKERS AT US PLANT P8



FED ROLLS OUT \$2.3 TN TO BACKSTOP 'MAIN STREET,' LOCAL GOVERNMENTS P8

Saudi, Russia outline record oil cut under US pressure



The sun sets behind a crude oil pump jack on a drill pad in the Permian Basin in Loving County, Texas, US. — Reuters

DUBAI/MOSCOW/LONDON: OPEC, Russia and other allies outlined plans to cut their oil output by more than a fifth and said they expected the United States and other producers to join in their effort to prop up prices hammered by the coronavirus crisis. But the group, known as OPEC+, said a final agreement was dependent on Mexico signing up to the pact after it balked at the production cuts it was asked to make. Discussions among top global energy ministers will resume on Friday. The planned output curbs by OPEC+ amount to 10 million barrels per day (bpd) or 10 per cent of global supplies, with another 5 million bpd expected to come from other nations to help deal with the deepest oil crisis in decades. Global fuel demand has plunged by around 30 million bpd, or 30 per cent of global supplies, as steps to fight the virus have grounded planes, cut vehicle usage and curbed economic activity. An unprecedented 15 million bpd cut still won't remove enough crude to stop the world's storage facilities quickly filling up. And far from signalling any readiness to offer support,

US President Donald Trump has threatened Saudi Arabia if it did not fix the oil market's problem of oversupply. Markets were closed for the Good Friday holiday in major centres. But on Thursday, Brent oil prices LCOc1, which hit an 18-year low last month, were trading around \$32 a barrel, half their level at the end of 2019. Trump, who has said US output was already falling due to low prices, warned Riyadh it could face sanctions and tariffs on its oil if it did not cut enough to help the US oil industry, whose higher costs have left it struggling with low prices. A White House aide said Trump held a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and King Salman of Saudi Arabia about the talks, after a US official said the OPEC+ move towards cuts sent an "important signal" to the market. Officials from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and Russia have said the scale of the crisis required involvement of all producers. "We are expecting other producers outside the OPEC+ club to join the measures, which might happen tomorrow during G20," the

head of Russia's wealth fund and one of Moscow's top oil negotiators, Kirill Dmitriev, told Reuters. Thursday's OPEC+ talks will be followed by a call on Friday between energy ministers from the Group of 20 (G20) major economies, hosted by Saudi Arabia. OPEC and Russian sources said they expected other producers to add 5 million bpd to cuts, although an OPEC+ statement on Thursday made no mention of any such condition. Brent oil prices, which hit an 18-year low last month, were trading around \$32 a barrel on Thursday, half their level at the end of 2019. US DILEMMA OPEC+ would cut output by 10 million bpd in May to June, OPEC+ documents showed. All members would reduce output by 23 per cent, with Saudi Arabia and Russia each cutting 2.5 million bpd and Iraq cutting over 1 million bpd. Under the plans, OPEC+ would then ease cuts to 8 million bpd from July to December and relax them further to 6 million bpd from January 2021 to April 2022, the documents showed. — Reuters

10m bpd OPEC+ cut fails to impress market

MUSCAT: (S&P Global Platts) Crude futures fell Thursday as an emergency OPEC+ group meeting resulted in a production cut agreement that was likely too limited in scope to compensate for the drop in global oil demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic. OPEC and its allies on Thursday forged a historic agreement to claw back 10 million b/d of crude production, according to sources involved in the negotiations, under political and financial pressure to try and stem a bruising rout in oil prices caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The deal would see the 23 members of the OPEC+ alliance, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, coordinate the world's largest production cut ever, just a month after the two countries launched a vicious price war that upended the oil industry and exacerbated fears of a global recession. The cuts will cover the months of May and June, before being rolled back to 8 million b/d for the rest of 2020 and then down to 6 million b/d for 2021, sources said.

OPEC has not released a full breakdown of how the cuts will be divvied up, nor the baseline production levels from which the new quotas will be determined. But sources said every member would cut 22% of their output, with Saudi Arabia and Russia both committing to holding their production to 8.5 million b/d for the two months of the deal. The cuts were much more limited in scope than markets had anticipated even earlier in the day. Oil prices spiked as much as 13 per cent in the first minutes of the OPEC+ meeting on speculation that a broader deal might be at hand to take closer to 20 million b/d off the market. Front-month WTI settled down 9% in Thursday's session to the lowest since April 1, the day before the OPEC+ meeting was announced. OPEC+ ministers will meet again on June 10 via videoconference to review market conditions and decide whether any changes are needed, sources said. The OPEC secretariat's analysis of the market now sees a 6.8 million b/d contraction in global oil demand for the whole of 2020, including close to 12 million b/d "and expanding" for the second quarter. S&P Global Platts Analytics expects global oil demand to contract by 4.5 million b/d in 2020, down from a projected growth



of 1.3 million b/d at the start of the year. But demand destruction is expected to peak in the near-term at around 20 million b/d. "At the current rate of stock build, storage will be full at some point in May and crude production will need to be curtailed by 15-20 million b/d," S&P Global Platts Analytics Global Head of Analytics Chris Midgley said. "The current proposed 10 million b/d may be too little too late as it will have limited impact on April production and only if sustained from May for the balance of the year might we avoid hitting tank tops." An emergency meeting of the G20 energy ministers is slated for Friday for other countries to discuss how much they might be willing to scale back crude production, potentially adding another 5 million b/d or so of cuts beyond OPEC+. But the US, the world's largest producer, has continued to resist formally joining in on any deal, arguing that US cuts will come organically from the collapse in oil prices and global demand from the coronavirus pandemic. US crude output fell 600,000 b/d to 12.4 million b/d during the week ended April 3, US Energy Information Administration data showed Wednesday. But US crude inventories still posted their largest-ever one week build that week, climbing 15.18 million barrels to 484.37 million barrels.

Swedish oil firm set to drill well in Oman Block 49

Tethys Oil sets sights on Thameen prospect with plans for drilling to a depth of 4,000 metres to evaluate three potential reservoir targets

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Having just announced modest cutbacks in its planned investments in its Oman operations during 2020 in response to the sharp drop in international oil prices, Swedish energy firm Tethys Oil says it is pressing ahead nonetheless with its ambitions to drill its first exploration well in its wholly-owned Block 49 located in the southwest of the Sultanate. The Stockholm-based company, which is presently the largest player in Oman's upstream Oil & Gas sector by acreage, is preparing to accelerate efforts to unlock the hydrocarbon potential of the 15,439 sq km license. "After two years of seismic work, including reprocessing of older seismic data, and processing and interpretation of seismic data from a new campaign, Tethys Oil is ready to spud an exploration well in

2020," said the company in its newly released Annual Report for 2019. For Tethys Oil, which acquired the concession in 2017 as a 100 per cent operator-owned license, Block 49 represents an opportunity to showcase its capabilities as an independent upstream player with the resources and wherewithal to go it alone in Oil & Gas exploration and development. The company's presence in Oman's hydrocarbon sector goes back nearly a decade. It holds a 30 per cent non-operated interest in Blocks 3&4, where CC Energy Development SAL (Oman branch) is the operator. More recently, it acquired a 20 per cent interest in the Exploration and Production licence covering Block 56 onshore Oman, operated by a subsidiary to Medco Energi. Block 49, as Tethys Oil first wholly operated license in the Sultanate, also holds special significance for Oman's Oil & Gas industry because it is home



to Dauka-1, the first well ever drilled in Oman in 1955. Eight other wells were drilled by subsequent operators within the block, some of which encountered oil shows. In the two years since it acquired the Block, Tethys Oil reprocessed 2D seismic data acquired by previous operators, as well as launched its own 2D and 3D seismic campaigns. It has since zeroed in on an area called Thameen. "After processing and completion of the first phase of the seismic interpretation in second half of 2019, a drillable prospect was identified in the north eastern part of the Block. The prospect, known as Thameen ("Precious") has been further delineated and the drilling of a well is being planned to a depth of close to 4,000 metres to evaluate three potential reservoir targets," the company said, noting that it is actively looking for a suitable rig in this regard.

Volkswagen furloughs 1,500 workers at US plant



The Volkswagen Chattanooga Assembly Plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, US. – Reuters

NEW YORK: Volkswagen AG (VW) said it will furlough 1,500 workers at its US assembly plant in Tennessee starting April 11 as the industry grapples with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The German automaker said the temporary emergency furloughs for its production and maintenance workforce are expected to last no more than four weeks. The automaker said its “primary objective is to protect the financial health of Volkswagen for the benefit of our team as we address the emerging and ongoing impacts of the COVID-19.”

VW said employees and production contractors at the plant have to date received full pay and benefits during the shutdown that began March 21. Automakers are facing a dramatic drop in sales in the United States, the world’s second-largest car market, after some states barred dealers from selling new cars while “stay-at-home” orders are in place. Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV on Monday extended its shutdown of US and Canadian plants until May 4. — Reuters

Sony invests \$400m in Chinese video site Bilibili



The Sony logo is seen on a building in the Manhattan borough of New York City, New York, US. – Reuters

HONG KONG: Chinese video site Bilibili will receive \$400 million equity investment from Sony Corp America, Bilibili said, as the two companies seek to further collaborate in entertainment to attract China’s Gen Z. SCA, wholly owned subsidiary of Sony Corp, will subscribe for 17,310,696 newly issued Class Z ordinary shares of Bilibili at \$23.1071 per share, Bilibili said. Upon closing, SCA will beneficially own approximately 4.98 per cent of Bilibili’s total issued shares, with a lock-up period of six months, it added.

Bilibili and Sony will further collaborate in the entertainment business in China, including in anime and video games, Bilibili said.

“Sony’s investment further aligns us with the world’s leader in entertainment and technology, which will enhance our capability to bring high-quality content and services to our growing community,” the company said. — Reuters

Caterpillar seeks fresh \$3 bn loan to boost liquidity



Caterpillar Inc. equipment is on display for sale at a retail site in San Diego, California, US. – Reuters

NEW YORK: Caterpillar Inc is in talks with banks for a fresh \$3 billion nine-month revolving credit facility, a person familiar with the matter said.

The development comes days after the world’s biggest construction and mining equipment maker raised \$2 billion through the bond market. Caterpillar said last month its financial position was strong. The company ended 2019 with \$8.3 billion in cash and available credit facilities of \$10.5 billion.

The Deerfield, Illinois-headquartered company had also said it would withhold annual salary increases for senior executives, managers and salaried employees to contain costs due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its business. Caterpillar also withdrew its 2020 earnings forecast in late March and suspended some operations, citing uncertainty caused by the pandemic, which has dented equipment sales and hit supply chains. — Reuters

China factory gate deflation deepens in March as COVID-19 jolts economy

BEIJING: China’s factory gate deflation deepened in March, official data showed on Friday, with prices falling the most in five months, underlining broad economic damage wrought by the coronavirus outbreak.

China’s producer price index (PPI) fell 1.5 per cent from a year earlier, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics. It compared with a median forecast of a 1.1 per cent fall tipped by a Reuters poll of analysts and a 0.4 per cent drop in February.

Headline consumer inflation also eased somewhat last month, partly led by government control measures, while core prices remained benign.

The overall decline in the factory gate gauge was exacerbated by a slump in global oil and commodities prices, which filtered through to crude oil, steel and non-ferrous metal industries, the statistics bureau said in a statement accompanying the data.

The world’s second-largest economy is trying to restart its engines after weeks of near-paralysis to curb an outbreak that had shut most businesses and severely restricted the flow of goods and the daily life of people.

The stringent travel and transport curbs have now been lifted across much of the country including Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak where the virus first emerged in late 2019. So far the virus has killed more than 3,300 and infected over 81,000 people in the country.

Analysts expect a deep first-quarter economic contraction in China and have grown increasingly pessimistic about the country’s prospects for 2020 due to the pandemic’s sweeping global impact.

Many economists and policymakers are forecasting a deep global recession this year as numerous countries are forced into lockdowns to contain the spread of the coronavirus, severely curtailing business activity in a major blow to jobs and incomes.



Employees wearing face masks work on a car seat assembly line at Yanfeng Adient factory in Shanghai, China. – Reuters

Worldwide, the virus has killed around 95,000 people and infected more than 1.5 million. Policymakers globally have responded to the crisis by launching an unprecedented package of stimulus measures, injecting trillions of dollars to backstop their economies that have been brought to a virtual standstill.

Beijing has also rolled out a series of fiscal and monetary support in response, including targeted reduction of the reserve requirement ratios for banks and lending rates.

Policymakers are readying more stimulus in the coming months to prevent mass unemployment and stabilise growth, sources have said, including a record budget deficit level

Analysts expect a deep first-quarter economic contraction in China and have grown increasingly pessimistic about the country’s prospects for 2020 due to the pandemic’s sweeping global impact

for 2020 and more rate cuts.

China’s consumer prices rose 4.3 per cent from a year earlier in March,

compared with a 4.8 per cent gain tipped by a Reuters poll and a 5.2 per cent increase in February, as logistics and transport conditions improved and government price control measures kicked in.

But food prices still rose over 18 per cent from a year earlier, led by a 116.4 per cent jump in pork prices, the data showed. The virus outbreak has pushed up prices of some food items, such as pork and vegetables.

Non-food prices rose 0.7 per cent.

Core inflation - which excludes food and energy prices - remained benign last month at 1.2 per cent, but it still edged up from 1 per cent in February.

— Reuters

Fed rolls out \$2.3 tn to backstop ‘Main Street,’ local governments

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve announced a broad, \$2.3 trillion effort to bolster local governments and small and mid-sized businesses, the latest in an expanding suite of programmes meant to keep the US economy intact as the country battles the coronavirus pandemic.

Announcing details of a promised effort to put its financial weight behind “Main Street,” the Fed said it would work through banks to offer four-year loans to companies of up to 10,000 employees, and begin to directly lend to state governments and more populous counties and cities to help them respond to the crisis.

It may prove to be the Fed’s most groundbreaking step yet in the battle against the economic fallout from a health crisis that has seen a record-shattering 16.8 million people file for unemployment benefits in just three weeks and seen untold numbers of businesses forced to shutter under social distancing rules.

As the pandemic advanced, the Fed set aside inhibitions about inflation, political blowback and other risks that arguably slowed its response to the 2007 to 2009 crisis, and in a matter of weeks has sequentially extended safety nets to different parts of the economy. On Thursday it added help for some key remaining constituencies - small firms, mid-sized industries, local governments, and even corporations which might find their credit standing downgraded because of a fast-evolving economic downturn.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said the demands of the crisis have led the central bank to broaden its role beyond



The Federal Reserve Board building on Constitution Avenue is pictured in Washington, US. – Reuters

the usual focus on keeping markets “liquid” and functional, to helping the United States get the economic and financial space it needs to fix a dire health emergency.

Any reopening of the economy should not be rushed said Powell, warning of any “false start,” and the focus of the Fed and elected officials should be on keeping people financially “whole” until the recovery begins.

“People are undertaking sacrifices for the common good,” Powell said in webcast remarks hosted by the Brookings Institution. “We should make them whole. They did not cause

this. This is what the great fiscal power of the United States is for, to protect these people from the hardships they are facing.”

Though many of the programmes are due to lapse in September, Powell said the Fed’s commitment would only be limited by the need to get the pandemic controlled and try to build a robust recovery - once health authorities have declared it safe to reopen for business, however long that takes.

“We are deploying these lending powers to an unprecedented extent... We will continue to use these powers

forcefully, proactively, and aggressively until we are confident that we are solidly on the road to recovery,” Powell said.

The Fed’s latest salvo helped lift US stocks while other global equity benchmarks also gained.

HELPING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS The programme offers to pump up to \$500 billion into local governments, which are both on the front lines of the health battle yet also may see tax revenues collapse as unemployment rises and businesses are shut under social distancing rules aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. — Reuters

Sports Ministry and OOC share interactive posts on social media



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Ministry of Sports Affairs and Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) have started sharing interactive posts on their social media accounts with the community with some sports challenge posts besides the daily messages on how to protect yourself from the COVID-19 coronavirus.

One of the latest posts shared by the Ministry of Sports Affairs was about the “Thursday Challenge” which was posted on Thursday.

The post featured some sporting activities to be done by the people including the distance which can be run by each person and the estimated burned calories.

The followers tweeted their responses below the post and it was a good interaction between the people. Many of the officials in sports associations joined in the competition

including Hisham al Adwani, the Executive Director of Omantel League Union, as he covered 5635 steps and ran for 4.35 Km with burning 232 Kcal.

Jaber al Shabibi took part in the competition as well and he completed run of 1.08 km with a total steps of 1360. Said al Rahbi was one of the participants in the challenge and he continued in his daily programme as he reached 12.5 km within 114 minutes.

Khalid al Rajhi, board member at Oman Fencing Committee, participated in the challenge. He shared his daily exercise records as he reached 42.59 km and he mentioned that he will add five Km as an additional distance for this challenge.

The participants used the mobile applications which are available in most of the smart phones.

This essential initiative came as part of the Ministry of Sports Affairs



encouragement to people to utilize their time in this exceptional period as most of the people are staying home due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The Sports ministry earlier began with many interactive posts with the community including the daily exercise videos from home. The videos have been shared in the account which featured different types of the practices that help the body to be more strong and fit. In addition to that, all the posts contained clear methodology on how to perform the exercises in a proper way.

On the another hand, Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), activated their social media accounts for raising the awareness on sports knowledge and importance of fitness to everyone’s health.

OOC began to share daily series awareness posts including the

following: It is normal to feel bored and annoyed at times during the pandemic, so you must get fresh air through doing some exercises, reduce using social media and listening to repeated news for less negativity and pressure.

Another post from OOC Twitter’s account:

At the 2012 London Olympic Games, there were illnesses in the respiratory system. We advise athletes on how to avoid getting ill with the following advice on prevention: Remember that some don’t know that they are sick, but they are infections.

Keep your distance from others: Always maintain good hygiene. – Good nutrition is an essential component of health.

Get a good night’s sleep: Changes to household routine can lead to a change in sleep patterns, so be mindful of keeping a sleep routine.

Ex-Olympic champion to stage Ironman fundraiser from home



PARIS: Like many people, former Olympic champion Jan Frodeno has a touch of cabin fever in the coronavirus lockdown, but the triathlete has come up with an extreme idea to raise money and banish the blues. Frodeno plans to livestream a complete ironman challenge from his home in Genova, Spain, and raise funds to fight the pandemic.

Starting at 0600 GMT Saturday, the German will use a state of the art counter-current home pool for the 3.8km swim, an exercise bike for the 180km ride and then run a full marathon on a treadmill.

“I want to use this event to support those who are currently doing the competition in the hospitals day in and day out,” he said.

“Everyone knows I’m a bit nuts,” the 38-year-old Beijing Olympic champion explained.

Frodeno has invited the general public to join him from their own homes on social media or whatever way they can.

“It’s not just for fun, I want to show things can be done from home.”

“This is the best way I can aid the medical staff in Spain,” said Frodeno explaining fans can buy triathlon gear on the site he uses and the proceeds would go to charity.

There will also be auctions and prizes including a day of training with the three-time defending Ironman world championships winner.

“The best way to support me is to help the named charities through donations or to participate in our auctions so that we can raise as much money as possible together,” he said. “If you want to accompany me live, you can do so using the stream we will be offering.” — AFP

Magic Johnson hopeful NBA can crown a champion despite coronavirus

NEW YORK: Magic Johnson says if the NBA does resume this season it will be without fans and the players shouldn’t have any trouble adjusting on the fly to playing in empty stadiums.

The former NBA star and part-owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team sees a glimmer of hope and said all it will take is one game for the players to adapt to not having spectators in the building.

“Let’s say the NBA comes back without fans. Once you play one game without fans you will adjust to not having fans there,” Johnson told American broadcaster CNN on Thursday night.

“We’ve all played our whole life on the playgrounds and pickup games without fans being there. So basketball players will adjust, trust me.”

Johnson, who is also the former president of the Los Angeles Lakers, said when professional sports returns it will help the country heal after the virus.

The epidemic has so far killed over 95,000 people worldwide, including at least 16,000 Americans and over 500 in Canada.

“We need sports, especially in a time like this. But only if everybody is safe,” Johnson told CNN. “Sports will come back, probably without the fans first.”

The 60-year-old made sports health news in 1991 when he revealed he has HIV.

He said the NBA is not going to return until the COVID-19 outbreak in the US has stabilized and the players can be properly tested.

“There will be a right time,” he said. “Commissioner Adam Silver has done wonderful job with the NBA.

“He wants to make sure the players are safe before they come back. I think sports will come back. It is just a matter of when will we make sure this virus is level, and not affecting the whole country anymore. When those numbers drop and stabilize sports will come back.”

Johnson says he does not know exactly when that will be, and that Major League Baseball is discussing a May start.

But some health experts have predicted social distancing restrictions might remain in place for much longer over fears of worsening the health crisis.

LeBron James said in early March he cannot ever imagine playing games in empty arenas.

“LeBron is right, it is hard to play without fans,” said Johnson.

“Those guys want to see who is the world champion. Listen, if they have a chance to go back and they are all healthy, and they all get tested, they will go back to crown a champion.

“They want to see who is the best team in NBA. I am looking forward to seeing if the Lakers can win a championship.” — AFP



sport



QATAR DENIES US ALLEGATIONS OF WORLD CUP BRIBES



DOHA: The organisers of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar have strongly denied allegations from the US Department of Justice that bribes were paid to secure votes for the hosting rights to the tournament.

Suspicion and rumours have long surrounded both the 2010 vote by FIFA's executive to hand the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the 2022 tournament to Qatar.

Yet on Monday, for the first time, prosecutors set direct, formal allegations regarding both tournaments down in an indictment.

According to the prosecutors, representatives working for Russia and

Qatar bribed FIFA executive committee officials to swing votes in the crucial hosting decisions of world football's governing body.

Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), rejected the charges.

"They are part of a long-standing case, the subject of which is not the 2018/2022 FIFA World Cup bidding process.

"Despite years of false claims, evidence has never been produced to demonstrate that Qatar won the rights to host the FIFA World Cup 2022 unethically or by means that contravened FIFA's strict bidding rules.

"The SC maintains that it strictly adhered to all rules and regulations for the 2018/2022 FIFA World Cup bidding process and any claim to the contrary is baseless and will be fiercely contested."

FIFA said in a statement it supported all investigations into "alleged acts of criminal wrongdoing" and noted it had been accorded victim status in the US criminal proceedings.

"The FIFA Ethics Committee has already imposed sanctions, including life bans, on football officials mentioned in this process," said a FIFA spokesman.

"So far as FIFA is concerned, should


Ricardo Teixeira, Nicolas Leoz and co-conspirator #1 were offered and received bribe payments in exchange for their votes in favour of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup

US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE STATEMENT

any acts of criminal wrongdoing by football officials be established, the individuals in question should be subject to penal sanctions.

"As the respective criminal cases are ongoing we are not in a position to comment further for the time being."

Although FIFA has reacted to previous media allegations about the Qatar bid process by insisting the tournament will be unaffected, the US allegations will lead to further questions over the hosting of the tournament, which is scheduled for November and December of 2022.

The indictment states that the three South American members of

FIFA's 2010 executive - Brazil's Ricardo Teixeira, the late Nicolas Leoz of Paraguay and an unnamed co-conspirator - took bribes to vote for Qatar to host the 2022 tournament.

"Ricardo Teixeira, Nicolas Leoz and co-conspirator #1 were offered and received bribe payments in exchange for their votes in favour of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup," reads the indictment.

Teixeira, the former son-in-law of long-time FIFA boss Joao Havelange and ex-head of the Brazilian soccer federation (CBF), was not immediately reachable for comment.

— Reuters