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IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ECONOMY DISCUSSED

MUSCAT: The Supreme Council for Planning (SCP) reviewed the expected impact of COVID-19 on the economy and the measures taken by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus pandemic, aimed to minimise the effects of the pandemic on private sector enterprises and entrepreneurship. The meeting was held on Monday under the Chairmanship of Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Minister of Commerce and

Industry, SCP Deputy Chairman. The Council hailed the generous directives to form a committee to handle the economic impact of the pandemic and also addressed the impact of financing the budget as a result of slump in oil prices during the past months, and ways of dealing with them, including rescheduling the implementation of projects according to priority, and putting forward some projects which can be executed in partnership with the private sector. — ONA

HIS MAJESTY GREETINGS TO GRAND DUKE OF LUXEMBOURG

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Duke Henri of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to Duke Henri and his country's friendly people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

WHO hails Oman's pandemic fight

**BIGGEST
SINGLE-DAY JUMP
STANDS AT 1,605,
TOTAL CASES
EXCEED 31,000**

**ZAINAB
AL NASSRI**



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Monday announced 1,605 new cases of COVID-19 in the Sultanate, 684 are Omanis and 921 residents. Monday's spike brought the total number of positive cases in the Sultanate to 31,076. This is also the biggest single-day jump of the coronavirus cases.

The ministry also reported six new deaths, taking the total death toll to 137. This comes at a time when the World Health Organization (WHO) praised the Sultanate's use of technology to control the COVID-19 and reduce its spread. The WHO stated in a report published by the 'WHO EMRO'

on its website that Oman has launched some of the most powerful technological solutions deployed to date in the Middle East to track the movement and spread of COVID-19 and ensure patient compliance with isolation measures, in an effort to contain the disease in the country. **TURN TO P6**

Foreign investors to get clearance for land within 20 days

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Under the new Foreign Capital Investment Law, the decision on the application for land allocation will be taken within 20 days. This was mentioned by Mohammed bin Rashid

al Badi, Acting Director of the Legal Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, while releasing the executive regulations on Sunday. The allocation of lands and real estate required for the investment projects, will be by way

of a long-term lease or by granting the right to use. The application for allocation will be submitted to the competent authority on the prescribed form accompanied by required documents and information". **TURN TO P6**

Nod to set up Centre for 5G and IoT

TRC AWARDS RO 280,000 FOR 28 COVID-19 RESEARCH PROJECTS

MUSCAT: The Scientific Research Council approved the establishment of the Centre for Fifth Generation Networks and the Internet of Things (IoT) which will be funded by the Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership in cooperation with Ericsson and Omantel. The Centre aims to support national efforts in monitoring, developing and localising new technologies in these sectors.

This was discussed during the Council's meeting chaired by His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and Chairman of the Scientific Research Council, in



Muscat on Monday. Top officials and representatives of several academic and private institutions took part in the video conference. The meeting reviewed the

developments on COVID-19 pandemic research programme, which was established by the Council in cooperation with various academic and governmental institutions.

Through this programme, 28 research projects were funded at a total cost of approximately RO 280,000. The research projects are likely to be completed in three to 12 months.

During the meeting, the Council's body approved the tenth five-year plan of the Council, which focused upon preparing the harmony between the scientific research and 2040 development strategy with both the National Innovation Strategy and the Oman Vision 2040. Besides, the draft of the executive plan for the National Strategy of Scientific Research and the 2040 Development strategy was also discussed.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

THE MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY (MZEC) INVITES THE FOLLOWING TENDERS:

TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	LAST DATE OF PURCHESING	LAST DATE FOR SUBMISSION	TENDER BOARD GRADE	TYPE OF PARTICIPATION	TENDER PRICE R.O
14/MZEC/2020	CUSTOMER SELF-SERVICE MOBILE APP PROJECT	25/06/2020	28/07/2020	SPECIALIST	LOCAL	120
TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	LAST DATE OF PURCHESING	LAST DATE FOR SUBMISSION	DCRP GRADE	TYPE OF PARTICIPATION	TENDER PRICE R.O
14/MZEC/2020	CONSTRUCTION OF 2X20 MVA PSS (NIZWA ACADEMY ROP) WITH 33KV FEEDERS FROM JIBREEN GRID AT NIZWA IN AL DHAKHILIYAH GOVERNORATE	25/06/2020	28/07/2020	SPECIALIST	LOCAL	120
	THE SITE VISIT WILL BE ON 29/06/2020 AT 9:00 AM IN NIZWA OFFICE					

- Interested companies registered with DCRP and Tender Board and having a valid Registrations may obtain tenders documents through scm.tenders@mzec.co.om.
- Value of each tender document copy is non-refundable.
- The offers and related documents should be submitted in a sealed with red wax envelope addressed to the chairman of the (Internal Tender Committee).
- On the top of the envelopes bidder should write the tender number and the subject only and no other marks or any reference thereto should be written outside the envelopes.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.
- The completed tenders should be deposited in the tender box at main head office building in Al Saih Al Hmer - BidBid before 10:00 am on the assigned closing date for submission of the tender.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products.
- The related parties only are invited to attend the tender opining meeting based on the assigned date.
- All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om. and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications 15/07/2020.
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.

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Shura refers personal info protection law to Council



MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura has referred the draft law on protection of personal information to the State Council following elaborate discussion on some articles that have been amended by the Shura Legislative and Legal Committee to ensure that the law does not contravene related legislations and regulations.

The session on Monday was presided over by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura amid COVID-19 preventive measures.

During the session, Yaqoub bin Mohammed al Harthi, rapporteur of the Legislative and Legal Committee, reviewed the articles of the law and replied to questions raised by the council members regarding the rights of the owner of personal



information and the penalties stated by law.

The protection of personal information law comes in complementation of the electronic legislative system which includes the Electronic Transactions Law and the Cyber Crimes Law. These laws constitute a legal framework governing the protection of electronic private data during the processes of collection, storage and processing and provide protection of such data under the government's digital transformation strategy. — **ONA**

MANY MUNICIPAL SERVICES GO ONLINE



SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has said many of its services are now available online. “Concerned about leases, technical or municipal services? Don’t hassle! Visit at www.mm.gov.om to conduct the service online!,”tweeted the municipality outlining a number

of services. Although the shift to the electronic mode is one of the key objectives of the government, the current switch is mainly aimed at providing a safe alternative to consumers in the COVID-19 situation. “A new package of online services has been launched to offer e-solutions to ensure business continui-

ty. Three basic lists of a web-based service request are contracts, licences and technical services,” the municipality said. In the beginning of this month, the civic body informed all government and private sector institutions to correspond with its officials through emails to the documentation department following the precautionary measures issued by the Supreme Committee dealing with Covid-19 pandemic. Speaking to the *Observer*, an official at the municipality said that the pandemic is forcing governments to be more creative in how they respond to their citizens’ needs. “The civic body has already been investing in innovative digital technologies and implementing many online services. The present situation arising out of the pandemic has further expedited the transformation,” he said. All the ministries and other government entities in the Sultanate have been embracing digital transactions to reduce the time taken to process mounting requests from investors, citizens and residents.

Over 4,000 expat work permits cancelled in May

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Several requests were submitted online to the Ministry of Manpower for the cancellation of work permits of expatriates in May 2020 across all governorates. A total of 4,467 requests were made during this period, of which 3,544 were from the Muscat Governorate.

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National Real Estate Development and Investments Co. (SAOG)
P.O. Box 84, Muscat-100, Sultanate of Oman - Tel: 24702133/24701454, Fax: 24703826

NOTICE TO ATTEND THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of National Real Estate Development & Investments Co. S.A.O.G (the "Company") invites shareholders to attend the extraordinary general meeting (EGM) which is to be held on Monday, 29th of June 2020 at 3:00 pm, via the electronic platform for convening general meetings which can be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company website (www.mcd.gov.om), if quorum is not met, the second meeting is to be held on Tuesday, 30th of June 2020, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the amendments to the Company's Articles of Association to comply with the new Commercial Companies Law (RD18/2019) (as per attachment);

In accordance with the Company's Articles of Association and the rules for convening general meetings via electronic means issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- a. A legal (juristic) person, exclusively, shall have the right to appoint a natural person, as proxy, to attend the general meeting, and vote on decisions taken on his behalf using electronic means. Such natural person must have an investor number registered with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company SAOC;
- b. Shareholders will be able to vote for the items set out in the agenda starting from 3 days prior to the meeting date up until the end of the voting process for that particular item presented in the agenda on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's shareholding is increased or decreased, then such shareholders' votes will be void, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the general meeting.

All invitees are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the stated time.

For any queries relating to the above agenda, please contact Mr. Hilal Mohammed Al Hasni (+968 99020539).

Chairman	External Auditor	Legal Advisor
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OMAN

Expats down by nearly 40,000 in 2 months

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The expatriate population in Oman has seen a steady decline over the past few months, as per the data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information. As of May 22 the percentage of the expatriate population was 41.20, which declined further to 40.80 in June.

The number of expatriates fell from 1,662,113 in March 2020 to 1,645,041 in April and 1,622,241 in May. There has been a drop of 39,872 in the expatriate population since March 2020.

The number of Bangladeshis dropped from 630,681 in December 2019 to 599,713 in May 2020, Pakistanis from 207,288 to 197,155, Filipinos from 49,456 to 48,020 during the same period. The number of Indians dropped from 617,730 to 582,076 in May 2020.

The expatriate population was 1,974,598 in December 2019. It dropped to 1,942,632 in January 2020, increased marginally to 1,944,168 in February



The number of expatriates fell from 1,662,113 in March 2020 to 1,645,041 in April and 1,622,241 in May. There has been a drop of 39,872 in the expatriate population since March 2020

and continued fall in March (1,941,369), April

(1,925,316), May (1,903,045) and June (1,873,173).

The expatriates were 2,036,986 (43.5 per cent of the total population) in May 2019 compared to 2,097,594 (44.9 per cent of the total population) in the same month of 2018.

Muscat has the highest number of expatriates at 698,675, followed by Dhofar 182,606 and North Batinah 224,902. There are around 52,768 expatriates working in the government, compared to 1,288,401 in the private sector.

Pesticide residue checks on farm produce

MUSCAT: Results of analyses of specimens of vegetables and fruits sold at Al Mawaleh Central Market in April showed that 185 samples out of 203 tested negative and compatible with standards and specifications set in international and European food safety laws.

The checks showed that 5.4 per cent of the tested items had proportions of pesticide residues beyond safe levels as well as other chemically hazardous products due to high levels of pesticide residues. Accordingly, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries took legal action and rejected entry to the consignments.

The checks indicated that no residues of heavy chemical elements were found in fruit and vegetable samples taken from Central Market. The ministry pursues a programme of regular checks of fruits and vegetables, acting in cooperation with other departments concerned, to ensure the safety of farm products that enter Omani markets.

— ONA

Dates harvest begins in Sultanate

MUSCAT: The dates harvest in the Sultanate begins in the summer or Al Qaidh, which starts at the end of May and continues until September. Sometimes it continues until November, according to the type of palm.

It begins with the ripening of Al Naghal dates in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah.

Al Qaidh season is divided into three stages. The ripened dates are first plucked. Whenever the palm ripens earlier, the yield is greater. The second stage is known as Tabseel, which involves

boiling of dates in large containers from palms like Al Mabsali, Al Madlouki, and Abu Naranja. The dates are then dried for 7-10 days, cleaned and then sold in markets. The last stage is known as Hammad during which dates are collected in open fields called Masateeh to get dried, cleaned and then it is sold.

Ali bin Nasser al Jabri, Head of the Agricultural Development Centre in the Wilayat of Seeb, affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, said, "There are more than 250 varieties of palm trees in the Sultanate. The most famous

of which are Al Fardh, in addition to Al Khalas, Al Naghal, Al Barni, and Al Khenezi. Omani dates are famous for their high quality and distinctive taste, which made it an important export to various parts of the world."

Al Jabri said, "The agricultural development centres in the wilayats provide farmers seeds, pesticides, subsidies for irrigation systems, as well as greenhouses. They also conduct training sessions and workshops for farmers, and offer consultations."

Hamoud bin Mansour al Hinai, a farmer from Al

Khoudh in Seeb, said, "Al Naghal is the first palm tree to ripen, along with Al Qadami, Al Manumah and Battash. The price of Al Naghal dates ranges between RO5 and RO7 per kg at the beginning of the season in various wilayats of the Sultanate. The prices go down till it reaches 500 baisa per kg."

Said bin Ahmed al Qalhati from Tiwi said, "The season is a time for gathering for people in Wadi Tiwi, which includes a group of villages and towns, the most important of which are Al Hisn, Harat Badah, Sima Mibam, and Al Jahal. — ONA

GCC officials discuss coronavirus

MUSCAT: The Under-Secretaries of the Ministries of Health in the GCC states on Monday held their eighth video-conference meeting to discuss the coronavirus situation in the region.

The Sultanate was represented at the meeting by Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary for Health Affairs at the Ministry of Health.

The under-secretaries reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting, imple-



mentation of the decisions taken at the GCC ministers of health meeting which include updating evidence related to preparedness and response to pandem-

ics and the mechanisms for updating treatment and diagnostic protocols as well as the health requirements at outlets.

The GCC under-

secretaries of health urged citizens and expats of the GCC countries to avoid crowded places, abide by the preventive measures and follow information

from the official sources.

The meeting was attended by Dr Saif bin Salim al Abri, Director-General of Disease Surveillance and Control (DGDSC); Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Director-General of Primary Health Care and member of the Executive Body of the Health Council of the GCC countries; and Dr Kadhim bin Jaffer bin Sulaiman, Director-General of Specialised Medical Care at the Ministry of Health. — **ONA**

Yoga Day spreads message of health, wellness



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: COVID-19 could not stop fitness enthusiasts from gathering online on the occasion of International Yoga Day (June 21) and raising awareness for health and wellness, which are issues of humankind since time immemorial.

Through virtual platforms, we were successful in making the practitioners understand the value of Yoga, which ensures wellness of mind and body.

The Yoga session organised by the Yoga Forum of the Indian Social Club Salalah in associa-

tion with the Indian Embassy and Art of Living Oman, saw inter-community participation from Oman and many other countries.

“Since the programme was available online, it was easy for the people to join and learn valuable tips from Girin Govind, Director of Art of Living International Centre, Bangalore and Deeba Menon, Yoga Coordinator, Art of Living Oman,” said PR S r e e k u m a r , Convener ISC Yoga Forum.

Ajay Khimji, Art of Living Middle East Chairman, took part in the event, which was inaugurated by ISCSalahChairman Manpreet Singh.

MONSOON BEGINS IN DHOFAR



SALALAH: The plains and mountains are getting covered with green grass after the monsoon season started in the Governorate of Dhofar on Sunday. Most of the coastal wilayats and surrounding mountains of Dhofar are affected by the monsoon phenomenon specially on the stretch from the Wilayat of Dhalkout in the west to Mirbat in the east. This time of the year is marked by an increased rainfall on the mountainous areas facing the wind direction with less effect on Dhofar plains. — **ONA**

India to fly more citizens home

MUSCAT: The Indian government has added more flights from Oman in the Vande Bharat Mission (Phase 3).

The flights are from Muscat to Delhi (June 27), Mumbai (June 28), Chennai (June 29) and Mangalore (June 30).

Passenger lists for all the above-mentioned flights will be finalised by the embassy. Priority will be given to medical emergency cases,

pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as to other Indian nationals who are stranded in difficult situations.

The embassy will be contacting the short-listed people for each flight directly through email/telephone. The embassy will then share the list of short-listed people with Air India and all such people will be contacted by Air India for

booking of tickets.

The cost of tickets will have to be borne by the passengers themselves and air tickets will be issued by the airline only to shortlisted persons.

All passengers are required to confirm acceptance of all conditions of travel, including quarantine requirements in India as well as health requirements in order to board the flight.

Aquaculture project launched in Musandam



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Blue Water, a subsidiary of Oman Aquaculture Development Company, in cooperation with the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), on Sunday launched a project for breeding and reproduction of finfish in floating cages in Musandam Governorate.

Fish seeds of European sea bream fish species (kofar) were transferred and placed in Musandam which boasts a natural fish sanctuary and is considered an ideal location for cage aquaculture.

The work at the project com-

menced several months ago with the assembling and installation of the floating cages and fishing nets at a bay in Musandam.

A suitable place for storing aquafeeds and production equipment will be set up at a location adjoining the project. Fish seeds were placed in the floating cages and provided with aquafeeds on a regular basis until the marketing phase.

The Finfish aquaculture project in floating cages in Musandam Governorate is billed as a solution for continued food production either for location consumption or export. — **ONA**

WHO hails OMAN's COVID-19 fight

FROM PAGE 1

"Named Tarassud Plus, the system is a combination of a mobile application using artificial intelligence, with enhanced features that include up-to-date COVID-19 statistics, guidelines and best practices to prevent the spread of infection", it added.

"The application also enables access to medical hotlines and support staff so that patients can discuss their symptoms and be directed to facilities where they can access care. Once patients are diagnosed, a medical tracking bracelet connected to the application ensures that they stay at home for the duration of their quarantine or isolation", it said.

Dr Jaffar Hussain, acting WHO representative to Oman, commented: "As nations around the world emerge from lockdowns, we must remain vigilant only through widespread testing, contact tracing and surveillance of the virus, so that we can ensure that infection curves stay flat and lives are saved". The WHO also praised that the application is available in many languages to address different communities living in Oman. It says, "the application is available in Arabic, English, Hindi, Bengali and Urdu, in an effort to cater to both citizens and residents in Oman. It has been downloaded tens of thousands of times".

Dr Adil al Wahaibi, Director of Surveillance in the ministry, pointed, "Information is crucial if we are to effectively fight the coronavirus, and this kind of epidemiological data will help us better understand how it spreads while limiting new infections".

Investors to get clearance for land within 20 days

FROM PAGE 1

The application must indicate the purpose of using the land or real estate, required space, proposed location. The applicant will not have any legal rights and the competent authority would lease or grant the right to use after studying the application, Al Badi said.

The competent authority will make a decision on the application in a period not exceeding 20 working days from the date of its submission. "In case, no response comes and the time lapses, it would mean that the appli-

cation has been rejected. In all cases, the refusal of the application must be justified by the competent authority", the official said.

In the case of approval of the application, the period of the lease or use of land or real estate designated for the investment project will be 50 years which will be renewable with the approval of the authority concerned related to leasing or granting the right to use, and according to the agreed terms, provided the foreign investor continues his activity. In all cases, the

competent authority may increase the rental value or the right of usufruct when renewing the lease period or usufruct".

The foreign investor is prohibited from using the land or real estate designated for the investment project for the purpose other than that for which it was given.

He may change the purpose stipulated in the lease or usufruct contracts if the nature of the land or property and its location allows it, provided that there is the approval of both the com-

petent authority and the authority concerned with leasing or granting the right to usufruct obtained.

The contract of the lease or use of the land or real estate designated for the investment project cannot be terminated except after the approval of the competent authority.

In all cases, the termination decision must be justified, and the foreign investor must be given notice in a period of not more than 15 days before the announcement of the decision, said Al Badi.

US, RUSSIA ARMS TALKS START WITH LITTLE HOPE OF ACCORD



Marshall Billingslea, US Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control, arrives for a meeting at the Palais Niederoesterreich, Vienna, on Monday. — Agencies

VIENNA: The United States and Russia met on Monday in Vienna for talks on their last major nuclear weapons agreement against a backdrop of growing tensions and differences over whether they see any value in arms control at all.

US President Donald Trump insists that China should be involved in the talks on New START, the treaty that caps US and Russian nuclear warheads, because he says up until now Beijing has had a free pass to do as it likes in developing weapon systems.

China has shown no sign of being interested, giving Washington fresh cause for complaint, although critics say the US finds that a useful stick with which to beat its growing rival.

The delegations made no statement when they arrived at 8:30 am (06:30 GMT) at the Niederoesterreich Palace in the Austrian capital where the talks are taking place.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Washington-based Arms

Control Association, said the insistence on including China showed the Trump administration was not serious about an accord.

“The only conclusion I can come to is that... the Trump administration (does) not intend to extend New START and is seeking to display China’s disinterest in trilateral arms control talks as a cynical excuse to allow New START to expire,” Kimball said.

Trump has already scrapped several treaties with Russia — on overflights and on intermediate-range nuclear forces.

US Ambassador Marshall Billingslea and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov are nonetheless to discuss the future of the New START treaty, which was agreed in 2010 and expires in February 2021.

That leaves very little time to renew a complex deal, let alone negotiate a new treaty involving China, especially with a November presidential election looming.

— AFP

CHINA HAS SHOWN NO SIGN OF BEING INTERESTED, GIVING WASHINGTON FRESH CAUSE FOR COMPLAINT, ALTHOUGH CRITICS SAY THE US FINDS THAT A USEFUL STICK WITH WHICH TO BEAT ITS GROWING RIVAL.

IN BRIEF

Bolton says North Korea’s Kim laughing at US president

WASHINGTON: Former US national security adviser John Bolton said he thinks North Korean leader Kim Jong Un “gets a huge laugh” over US counterpart Donald Trump’s perception of their relationship. Bolton spoke to ABC News for his first interview ahead of the Tuesday release of his tell-all book, which contains many damning allegations against Trump. When journalist Martha Raddatz asked if Trump “really believes Kim Jong Un loves him,” Bolton replied he could see no other explanation. “I think Kim Jong Un gets a huge laugh out of this,” Bolton said.

Britain mourns victims of terrorism-linked stabbing

READING, England: Mourners held a minute’s silence in the English town of Reading on Monday for the victims of a stabbing that killed three people in the latest attack authorities attributed to terrorism. Three people were also injured when a man wielding a five-inch knife went on the rampage on Saturday in a park in the southern town, stabbing people at random who were enjoying a sunny, summer evening. Describing the incident as an atrocity and terrorism, police say they have detained one man and are not hunting others.

Jordan seeks \$6.6 bn from world donors for Syria crisis

AMMAN: Jordan announced on Monday it was seeking \$6.6 billion from international donors to face the ongoing challenge of hosting hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. “We are launching a \$6.6 billion intervention plan for the Syria crisis for 2020-2022,” Planning and International Cooperation Minister Wissam Rabadi said at a press conference on Monday. He requested the international community’s continued support, saying the Hashemite kingdom “is hosting more than 1.3 million Syrians”. “This has had serious repercussions on the economy, infrastructure and budget of the Jordanian state,” Rabadi said.

— Agencies

WORLD

Fearing second wave, Europe aims to train ‘army’ of medics

PERTH: Thousands of protesters rallied for racial equality in cities across Australia on Saturday despite official warnings the demonstrations could undermine the country's success in suppressing the coronavirus.

BRUSSELS: Europeans are enjoying the gradual easing of coronavirus lockdown measures, but in hospitals they are already preparing for the next wave of infections.

Some intensive care specialists are trying to hire more permanent staff. Others want to create a reservist “army” of medical professionals ready to be deployed wherever needed to work in wards with seriously ill patients.

European countries have been giving medics crash courses in how to deal with COVID-19 patients, and are now looking at ways to retrain staff to avoid shortages of key workers if there is a second wave of the novel coronavirus. “We need a healthcare army”, said Maurizio Cecconi, President-elect of the European Society of Intensive Care Medicine (ESICM), which brings together medics from around the world who work in wards with extremely ill patients.



Fearing second COVID-19 wave, Europe aims to train 'army' of medics. — Agencies

Cecconi, who heads the intensive care department at the Humanitas Hospital in Milan, says medical staff need to be more flexible in the work they do, and more mobile.

“If there is another big wave, we should be prepared to deploy doctors and nurses from nearby regions within Italy. This did not happen a lot in the first wave”, he said.

Many countries were caught unprepared by the COVID-19 pandemic in

March and April, and hastily retrained medics to work with patients with severe cases of the disease, to ramp up numbers and replace those who fell sick.

Some sent medical students and retired doctors to help out in intensive care wards as hospital staff were overwhelmed. Those worst-hit by the pandemic had to provide more beds and essential equipment for acute care units and some built new hospitals.

But problems and short-

ages persist. Italy, for example, may need to boost by 50 per cent the number of anaesthetists, resuscitation experts and other medics it has working in intensive care, according to the Italian society of intensive care SIAARTI.

Across Europe, hospitals have been re-training surgeons, cardiologists, internal medicine physicians and nurses from other departments, and have moved them to intensive care units when needed. — Reuters

Beijing coronavirus cases to see ‘cliff-like’ drop

BEIJING: Beijing will see a “cliff-like” drop in new cases in the current coronavirus outbreak by the end of this week with efforts to control the spread of infections in the Chinese capital under way, said an expert at the national health authority. The city of over 20 million people reported its first case linked to a wholesale food centre in the southwest of Beijing in the latest wave on June 11. So far, 236 people have been infected in the worst outbreak in Beijing since COVID-19 was identified at a seafood market in the central city of Wuhan late last year. Beijing reported on Monday nine new cases for June 21, sharply down from 22 a day earlier.

Thailand marks 28 days without local transmission

BANGKOK: Thailand hopes to ease some coronavirus restrictions on foreigners entering the country after going for 28 days without recording any domestic transmissions, a senior official said on Monday. Those who will benefit from the easing of restrictions will include business executives, skilled workers and foreigners who live in Thailand. “The first three groups will be able to return to Thailand and stay in 14-day state quarantine”, said the spokesman for the government’s Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration, Taweessin Wisanuyothin. Medical tourists will also be allowed back for treatment in hospital, he said.

South Korea says it is battling ‘second wave’

SEOUL: Health authorities in South Korea said for the first time on Monday it is in the midst of a “second wave” of novel coronavirus infections stemming from a holiday in May, as new cases hovered in the low double digits. The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) had previously said South Korea’s first wave had never really ended. But on Monday, KCDC director Jeong Eun-Kyeong said it had become clear that a holiday weekend in early May marked the beginning of a new wave of infections that have been focused largely in the greater Seoul area, which had previously seen few cases.

— Agencies



Demonstrators at Camp Schwab, a US military base on the island of Okinawa, Japan, want the world superpower to back off their land.

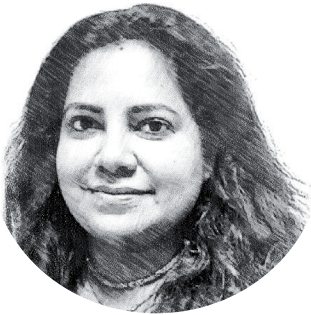
Okinawa remembers ‘typhoon of steel’ battle 75 years ago

Takehiko Kambayashi

The Japanese island of Okinawa conjures up images of a subtropical idyll far away from the bustle of the main islands, surrounded by emerald-green seas. However, it still bears the scars of one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. Survivors of the Battle of Okinawa recall the intensity of the conflict. About 200,000 people were killed in the US invasion, including 94,000 civilians and 12,500 American soldiers. On Tuesday, Okinawa marks the 75th anniversary of the battle, also called the “typhoon of steel” because of the massive bombardment. But this chapter of the war is often overshadowed by the two US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some say, however, the grueling ground battle and the huge death toll may have affected the US decision to drop the bomb one and a half months later. Japan’s surrender and the final end of World War II followed just weeks later. The Battle of Okinawa lasted

for three months — far longer than both the US and Japan had expected. And both sides lost their top commanders — Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner Junior and General Mitsuru Ushijima, respectively. “For the US Army, it was an unexpectedly uphill battle. After Okinawa, they were supposed to wage a ground assault on the southern island of Kyushu,” says Nobuyoshi Takashima, historian and professor emeritus at the University of the Ryukyus on Okinawa. “However, the US was concerned they would be caught in a pincer attack in the event of its invasion into Kyushu since 1.5 million Japanese soldiers were still in China,” Takashima says. In post-war Japan, while conservative political leaders had continued to beef up its military capabilities, Okinawa’s tragedy has been downplayed. The battle involved many stories of loss. More than 2,100 Okinawan students were mobilised for the Imperial Japanese Army. About half of them perished. — dpa

COVID-19 is not just a number



Lakshmi Kothaneth

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In March of 2020 for everyone in Oman, COVID-19 was a novel coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Soon COVID-19 became a source of statistics. Now we are learning to cope with the reality that is around us, and we must manage by practicing social and physical distancing in addition to maintaining healthy lifestyle while building our own immunity. Whether in the media or not, all of us have been engrossed in the numbers of COVID-19 cases. Some days we let a sigh as we see a dip in the number as a sign of relief hoping that it is coming down and on the other days as in the case of June 22 we hold our breath as we read the numbers crossing the 1,500 mark. There is another factor too that has been developing through these months and that is — if the COVID-19 statistics has been just about numbers in the past now it is getting entangled with emotions — no, not just fear, but the virus has been taking lives. If that is not enough, the COVID-19 has begun to have its impact on people because now someone they know is suffering the symptoms. It is in the inner circle. When people be-

gin to lose friends and they cannot say a proper goodbye the situation is sorrowful, but when spouses turn COVID-19 positive and one gives succumbs to the virus the world shatters. It is emotionally draining for the society and it is not just lifestyle changes. Just a few months ago no one would have thought of the impact a virus could have on a family, societies, communities, nations and the world. Is this part of the evolution the dynamic world goes through? The fear of the unseen has a new dimension. Children adapted to the new way of schooling and living. But businesses are struggling and taking steps at times baby steps towards a new direction. But the state of mind is also what we need to address especially for the people who are losing loved ones in a way that has never been imagined before. Yet another group who are silently suffering is the ones who are going through the isolation and quarantine. Walking through the lanes of Muttrah an individual who is waiting to go back to work said, “Cannot sleep at night, thoughts are endless and future looks bleak. Cannot wait to go back to work and meet people.”

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BUSINESS

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Oman’s power sector subsidy soars to RO 625m in 2019

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Government subsidy to Oman’s electricity sector rose 10.9 per cent to reach a record RO 624.69 million (approximately \$1.6 billion) in 2019, notwithstanding far-reaching measures adopted in recent years to reduce state assistance to this key industry.

A top official of Nama Group (formerly The Electricity Holding Company) attributed the uptick to new investments in power generation capacity as well as the construction of high-voltage transmission infrastructure.

The announcement came at the annual briefing of Nama Group, the holding company of state-owned electricity network companies, on Monday. Presenting the financial performance of the group for 2019, Eng Omar al Wahaibi, CEO, said Nama Group achieved an operating revenue of RO 1.251 billion last year, down from RO 1.290 billion in 2018, a decline attributable to the implementation of a new International Accounting Standard (IFRS 16). Net profit after tax dipped 15.4 per cent to RO 60.4 million in 2019, compared to RO 71.4 million in 2018.

On the other hand, the impact of IFRS 16 resulted in an increase in the Group’s total assets by 56.3 per cent to RO 6.9 billion in 2019, up from RO 4.4 billion in 2018. The increase in the total assets



“

The Group pressed ahead with the implementation of its integrated strategy to increase operating efficiency and provide safe and sustainable electricity services to all customers in the Sultanate.

ENG OMAR AL WAHAIBI,
CEO, Nama Group

is primarily driven by an increase in the ‘Right of Use’ of assets of its wholly-owned subsidiary Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), he stated.

“The Group pressed ahead with the implemen-

tation of its integrated strategy to increase operating efficiency and provide safe and sustainable electricity services to all customers in the Sultanate,” said the CEO.

Capital expenditure however slumped around 25 per cent to RO 285 million last year, down from RO 378 million in 2018 – a decline attributed to the “maturity of the electricity network and a slowdown in economic growth”.

A key highlight of 2019, Al Wahaibi said, was the successful completion of the partial privatisation of Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), which owns and operates the country’s main transmission grids. Chinese state-owned State Grid International Development Ltd (SGID) picked up a 49 per cent stake company at a cost of around \$1 billion.

Nama Group intends to finalise the sale of 70 per

cent of its shares in Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC) in line with its strategy for the privatisation of electricity distribution companies. “It is planned to receive the bids and complete the privatisation transaction in 2020,” said the CEO.

Also making headway is the implementation of the ambitious North-South Interconnection Project, which will link the Main Interconnected System (MIS) with the PDO network and the Dhofar Power System (DPS). Total investment in Phase 1 of the landmark project, which will add 660 kilometres of overhead lines, is estimated at RO 240 million. The project, due for completion in 2023, will enhance the efficiency of the electricity networks and enable the implementation of several key renewable energy initiatives as well.

Barka Waste-to-Energy project on hold

CONRAD PRABHU

ON TRACK:
Data collection and analysis ongoing for proposed large-scale wind and solar thermal projects

MUSCAT: Plans for the procurement of Oman's first utility-scale Waste-to-Energy (WTE) project have been "suspended", a top official said, citing flagging electricity demand and the wider economic downturn.

Yaqoob Saif al Kiyumi (**pictured**), CEO — Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the sole procurer of new power and water capacity, stated: "With the slowdown in demand and other economic challenges, the Waste to Energy project has been put on hold — it has been suspended — and will be reviewed annually from the economic and demand points of view."

The official made the announcement during the annual press conference organised by Nama Group on Monday.

The landmark project was proposed to be implemented at Barka in partnership with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), the provider of proc-

essed municipal waste as feedstock.

Plans drawn up by OPWP envisaged a plant of capacity ranging from 120 — 160 MW.

Officials had earlier confirmed that a final green-light for the procurement of Oman's maiden waste-to-energy plant had been received from the Ministry of Finance, as well as the Authority for Electricity Regulation (AER) Oman.

At the media briefing, Al Kiyumi acknowledged that the pandemic and the economic downturn were having an impact on electricity demand in the Sultanate, as has also been the case



globally.

Describing 2020 as an "exceptional year", he said that power demand has fallen significantly in January this year, the weather being among the factors.

However, in February, the demand was up almost five per cent versus corresponding figures for last year.

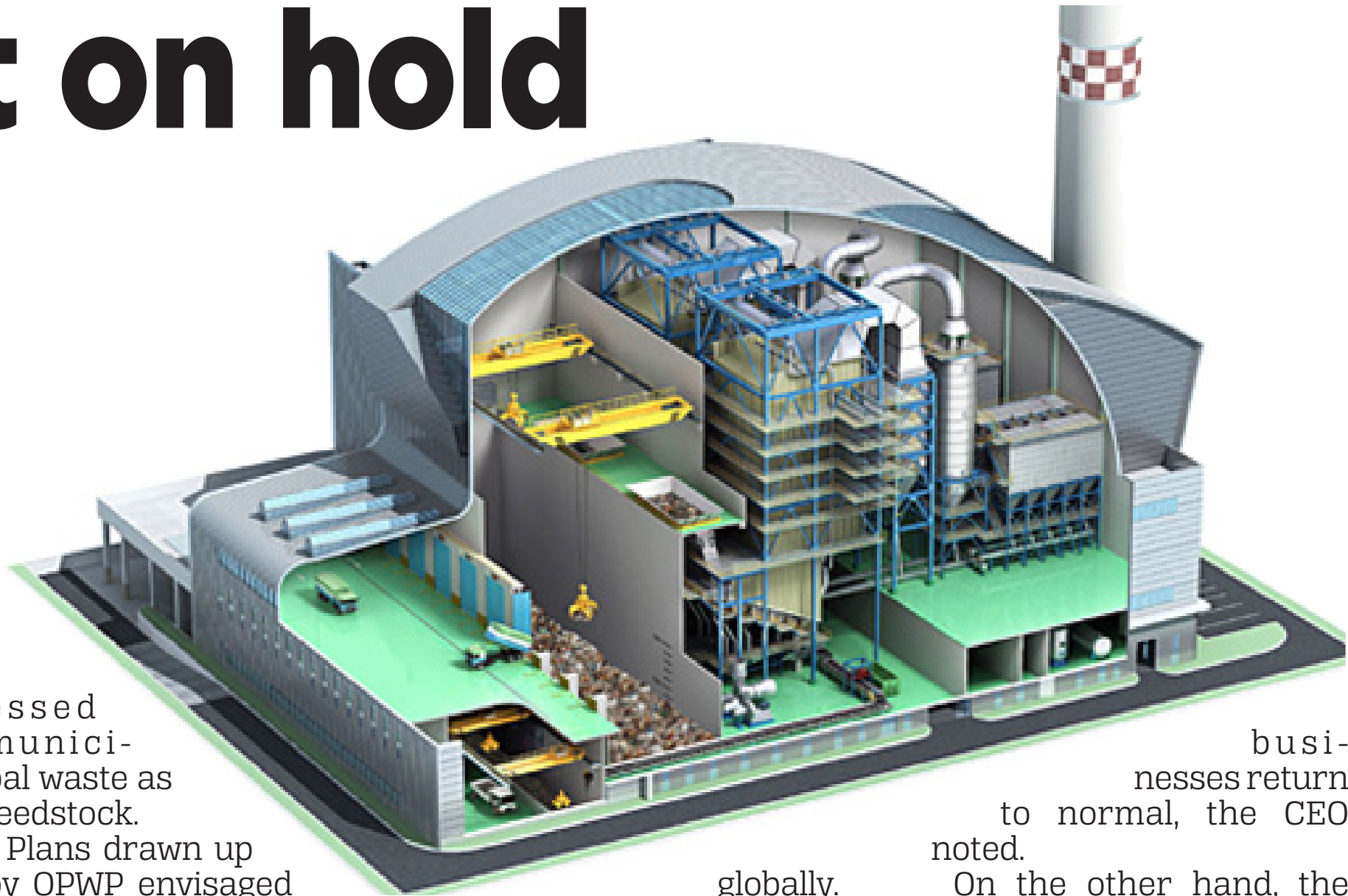
But as the pandemic began to spread, consumption fell around five per cent in March and April.

It picked up slightly (0.5 per cent) in May and is expected to remain in positive territory as people return to work, commercial activities reopen and

businesses return to normal, the CEO noted.

On the other hand, the outlook for solar and wind-based renewable energy projects remains positive, according to the official. Efforts are ongoing to gather data on wind resources necessary for the procurement of wind-based projects proposed in the southwest of the Sultanate.

"We will continue to analyse data for wind resources in Jaalan (South Al Sharqiyah Governorate) and for a CSP (Concentrated Solar Thermal Power scheme) in Duqm. Of course, at the moment, we are also gathering the necessary data, and not promising a project as such. But if the demand is supported by data and good economics, then (we will progress these plans)."



RfP for Manah mega solar PV project soon

MUSCAT: A Request for Proposals (RfP) linked to the procurement of Oman's biggest solar photovoltaic based Independent Power Project (IPP), planned in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, is likely to be issued in the coming period, according to OPWP's CEO.

The announcement effectively puts to rest speculation that a slump in electricity demand, attributable to the pandemic as well as subdued economic growth, is prompting a slowdown in the implementation of large-scale renewable projects in the Sultanate.

"We are going ahead with the solar project in Al Dakhilyah; In the coming few weeks or months, an RfP will be going out to the qualified bidders," said Yaqoob Saif al Kiyumi.

Plans unveiled by OPWP last July envisage the development of a pair of co-located solar PV based IPPs each with a capacity of 500 — 600 megawatts (MW) in Manah. The capacity of the combined project will range from 1000 — 1200 MW.

Last December, OPWP — a member of Nama Group — named nine consortiums that were "either conditionally or unconditionally prequalified" to participate in the next stage of the tendering process for the Manah solar scheme.

'Manah I Sohar IPP' and 'Manah II Sohar IPP' — as the two Independent Power Projects are referred to — will be developed side by side on a 1200 hectare site in the Wilayat of Manah. Investments in the combined project are estimated at \$800 million.

BUSINESS

EY
webinar
to focus
on post-
pandemic
response



MUSCAT: EY has opened the registration for its Business Continuity and Resilience online training course and coaching session, taking place on June 29, 2020. The full-day webinar, managed by Omanexpo, will focus on preparing organisations for the phases beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The online course and coaching will advise participants on how to design their own end-to-end COVID-19 program, define key aspects of their pandemic response and recovery plan, develop appropriate 'return to work' guidelines, increase the readiness and response capacity within their organisation, and go over roll-back planning. Participants will also be able to leverage for their organisations the EY COVID-19 Enterprise Resilience Assessment Tool, an easy and pragmatic way to understand the resilience of an enterprise and enable a clear prioritisation of actions. In addition, participants will benefit from the EY Resilience Framework and preparedness checklist, a holistic COVID-19 pandemic resilience management approach, as well as EY thought leadership material on resuming work after the pandemic.

OLC'S SAWAED PROGRAMME
BENEFITS 5,000 TRAINEES

MUSCAT: Oman Logistics Center (OLC) at ASYAD Group has successfully conducted training sessions for 5,203 students and career guidance professionals from various governorates of the Sultanate. Participants learn practical skills in the logistics sector and are acquainted with career prospects in logistics companies. Sawaed Programme implemented by the Human Capital Team at the Oman Logistics Center, aims to keep pace with the potential growth of job opportunities in the logistics sector through vocational training developed based on international quality and standards. Amina bint Khamis al Siyabi, Human Capital Strategist at Oman Logistics Center, said: "Sawaed Programme was launched in 2016 to attract local talent and raise awareness about career opportunities in the logistics sector. In



the last two years, the programme has trained more than 315 students, organised visits for 708 trainees to logistics companies, provided lectures to more than 3000 students, and contributed to qualify more than 680 career guidance professionals affiliated to the Ministry of Education." "Training is one of Sawaed initiatives to provide students of both the logistics industry and its supporting

specialisations, such as finance, marketing and otherwise, with the necessary skills for future employment. The programme offers students with practical experience in logistics companies, where they get an opportunity to learn about the work environment and build relationships with the professional cadres in various logistics entities," she added.

MAZOOON
ELECTRICITY
URGES USE OF
SELF-METER
READING SERVICE

MUSCAT: Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, has urged its customers to use its self-meter reading service. Simple and convenient, the service allows customers to read their own electricity meter and submit the reading for billing through the company's website. The self-meter reading service is convenient for those whose meters are installed inside their residences but are not at home when the meter-readers come by. The service particularly meets the needs of customers who prefer submitting their own readings. Among the benefits of this service is that it ensures customers get actual bills as against an estimated reading. As a self-read customer, it is important for the users to understand how to read the meter.



Entering the correct information, when providing Mazoon Electricity with their meter reading, will ensure that customers are billed accurately. Opting for this service will enable customers to monitor and manage their own monthly consumption. To avail the service, a customer needs to go to self-meter reading page on the website and enter the required details and a meter photo. Mazoon Electricity informs that the best time to read the meter is from 12th to 30th of each month, which is the billing period.

BUSINESS**BoE boosts stimulus, holds rates**

The Bank of England (BoE) will expand its bond-buying programme by £100 bn to help steer the UK economy through the unprecedented crisis caused by coronavirus while it holds the interest rates at a record low.

At its June meeting, the BoE's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted unanimously to keep the main interest rate at a record low of 0.1 per cent, and voted 8-1 to increase its stimulus package.

The £100 bn boost will take the Bank's total stock of asset purchases to £745 bn. The central bank said it would spend all the extra £100 bn on government bonds but would slow the pace of its purchases, saying it expected to complete the programme by the end of the year.

Announcing the measures, the MPC said that recent data suggests that the fall in global and UK

**ANDY JALIL**

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GDP in the second quarter "will be less severe" than predicted at its May meeting.

"Although stronger than expected, it is difficult to make a clear inference from that about the recovery thereafter. There is a risk of higher and more persistent unemployment in the United Kingdom," the committee said in its report.

"Even with the relaxation of some COVID-related restrictions on economic activity, a degree of precautionary behaviour by households and businesses is likely to persist. The economy, and especially the labour market, will therefore take some time to recover towards its previous path," the MPC added.

According to the report from the meeting, the down-

side risks to the global outlook remain, including "from the spread of COVID-19 within emerging market economies and from a return to a higher rate of infection in advanced economies".

There was no mention of negative rates in the minutes from the June MPC meeting — a policy option governor Andrew Bailey recently said the Bank was considering for the first time.

Vicky Pryce, chief economic adviser at CEBR, said that the BoE resorting to negative rates "would probably have made very little difference and although possibly justified by falling inflation way below target would have unduly unsettled the markets and also sterling."

Economists had almost

unanimously predicted that the Bank would keep the main interest rate steady and focus on expanding quantitative easing (QE) to shore up the British economy and stabilise financial markets.

The BoE slashed its base rate to 0.1 per cent and launched a £200 bn asset purchase programme in March as the coronavirus pandemic ravaged the British economy. But the central bank has already spent much of this additional firepower as it soaks up much of the government's COVID-19 borrowing.

Governor Bailey recently said that the Bank is considering cutting interest rates below zero for the first time in the BoE's 325-year history, but said a review of the policy would take time.

This leaves bond buying as the Bank of England's most powerful option to help steer the British economy through the coronavirus crisis.

Oil prices edge up on tighter supply

SINGAPORE: Oil prices nudged higher on Monday on tighter supplies from major producers, but concerns that a record rise in global coronavirus cases could curb a recovery in fuel demand checked gains.

Brent crude rose 9 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$42.28 a barrel by 0009 GMT, while US crude was at \$39.76 a barrel, up 1 cent.

Both contracts rose about 9 per cent last week and Brent crude futures flipped into backwardation, where oil for immediate delivery costs more than supply later, usually an indication of tightening supply.

In the United States and Canada, the number of operating oil and natural gas rigs fell to a record low even as higher oil prices prompt some producers to start drilling again.

Iraq and Kazakhstan pledged to comply better



A worker adjusts the valve of an oil pipe at West Qurna oilfield in Iraq's southern province of Basra. — Reuters

with oil production cuts during an Opec+ panel on Thursday.

However, the Opec+ group, consisting of Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies including Russia, has yet to

decide whether to extend a record supply cut of 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) for a fourth month in August.

Oil prices have also been supported by a recovery in fuel demand globally

following a collapse in April-May during coronavirus shutdowns as countries across the world resume economic activities.

Still, the World Health Organisation reported a record jump in global coronavirus cases on Sunday, with the biggest increase seen in north and south America.

Spikes in coronavirus infections in parts of the world such as Beijing and Australia's second-most populous state Victoria have prompted authorities to reimpose movement restrictions to curb the spread.

"The potential economic damage of a new round of COVID-19 countermeasures will likely contain any investor enthusiasm," said Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at CMC Markets. — Reuters

BUSINESS

A US dollar note is seen in this illustration photo. — Reuters



GLOBAL DOLLAR CRUNCH OVER

as central banks rely less on Fed backstop

WASHINGTON: A global crunch for US dollars that was a hallmark of the early moments of the coronavirus crisis appears to have passed, the latest milestone in a remarkable turnaround in financial conditions engineered by the Federal Reserve and other top central banks.

Data from the Fed on Thursday showed its peer banks around the world this week tapped it for the fewest dollars in nearly three months, and it was the main factor driving a surprise reduction in the Fed's \$7 trillion balance sheet — the first since February and the largest since the waning days of the financial crisis more than a decade ago.

The balance of the Fed's foreign exchange swaps with other central banks dropped by \$92 billion as of Wednesday to \$352.5 billion from \$444.5 billion a week earlier. The total amount outstanding in the

The balance of the Fed's foreign exchange swaps with other central banks dropped by \$92 billion as of Wednesday to \$352.5 billion from \$444.5 billion a week earlier.

swap lines, designed to ease a surge in demand for US currency in the participating banks' jurisdictions during the early weeks of the crisis, was the lowest since early April.

Coupled with other indications of slackening demand for the Fed's bevy of emergency liquidity facilities, the reduction in currency swap line usage is for many analysts a sign that global financial markets are returning to near-normal after being upended by the coronavirus outbreak in February and March.

In that period, stocks plunged into bear markets

at record speed, risk premiums in credit markets mushroomed and demand for greenbacks overseas well outstripped supply, making the dollar unbearably pricey for foreign governments and companies with dollar-denominated liabilities. The Fed acted swiftly to try to restore order, and along with facilities aimed at US markets, expanded currency swap line agreements to nine central banks in addition to the five with which it has had standing agreements.

"Given the restored health of (dollar) funding markets, and the fact that

the swap lines will still be there serving as a backstop, we expect this hand-off from central bank liquidity to the market to be relatively uneventful," said John Roberts, US rates strategy analyst at NatWest Markets.

But the drop-off from here may be swift.

"We expect a more rapid decline over the coming months as the majority of the swaps will roll off," Citigroup economists wrote in a note to clients on Friday.

In addition to the decline in swap line usage, several of the Fed's emergency facilities have seen falling demand in the past several weeks. Outstanding balances in programmes offering credit to primary dealers, commercial paper issuers, money market mutual funds and direct loans to banks to meet reserve requirements have all plateaued or fallen sharply since May. — Reuters



AUSTRALIA STRIKER JURIC TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

SOFIA: CSKA Sofia's Australian striker Tomi Juric has tested positive for COVID-19, the 31-times Bulgarian champions said in a statement late on Sunday.

The 28-year-old forward, who has played 41 times for his country, has been isolated. Other CSKA players and staff members have given negative results in testing for the coronavirus.

Juric, who joined CSKA in August after his contract with Swiss club Luzern expired, was in Australia's squad at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Two other players from Bulgaria's top division were quarantined last month with suspected coronavirus infections. [L8N2CW6TQ] Bulgaria Under-21 coach Aleksandar Dimitrov tested positive for the virus last week.

JURIC, WHO JOINED CSKA IN AUGUST AFTER HIS CONTRACT WITH SWISS CLUB LUZERN EXPIRED, WAS IN AUSTRALIA'S SQUAD AT THE 2018 WORLD CUP IN RUSSIA.

— Reuters

SPORTS



JAPAN WITHDRAWING 2023 WOMEN’S WORLD CUP BID

TOKYO: Japan is withdrawing its bid to host the 2023 Women's World Cup, Kyodo news agency quoted a source as saying on Monday, just days before football's world governing body holds a vote to determine the successful candidate.

The Japanese bid is one of three, along with Colombia and a joint bid from Australia and New Zealand. Earlier this month, Fifa rated the joint Australia/New Zealand bid as the best to host the tournament, with Japan in second place.

The Japanese Football Association (JFA) was not

THE JAPANESE BID IS ONE OF THREE, ALONG WITH COLOMBIA AND A JOINT BID FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND. EARLIER THIS MONTH, FIFA RATED THE JOINT AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND BID AS THE BEST TO HOST THE TOURNAMENT, WITH JAPAN IN SECOND PLACE.



immediately able to comment. Australia's FA said it was aware of the report but would not comment on another nation's bid.

Japan has never staged the Women's World Cup but co-hosted the men's event in 2002 with neighbours South Korea.

The Japanese women's team won the World Cup in 2011, shocking favourites the United States in the final.

The 2019 tournament in France broke records in terms of television audiences and was seen as the most high-profile edition so far. — **Reuters**

CORIC

TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, POSES QUESTION FOR SPORT'S RETURN

LONDON: Croatia's Borna Coric became the second player from Novak Djokovic's Adria Tour exhibition tournament to test positive for COVID-19, raising serious concerns for tennis governing bodies in their bid to restart the sport after a lengthy shutdown.

The professional circuit was halted in early March as nations closed borders and imposed lockdowns to contain the spread of the virus.

Last week the men's ATP and the WTA, which runs women's events, issued revised calendars for the resumption of the circuit from August while organisers of the US Open said the Grand Slam will be staged without fans as scheduled from August 31 to September 13 in New York.

Those plans, however, could need to be redrawn with Coric's positive test following that of Grigor Dimitrov, who said on Sunday he had

contracted the novel coronavirus, highlighting the risks of athletes from different countries mixing without adhering to social distancing norms.

The ATP and the WTA did not respond to request for comments. Organisers of the Adria Tour could not be reached for comment.

Bulgarian Dimitrov flew in to play in Djokovic's event in Belgrade and the second leg in the Croatian coastal resort of Zadar as did other top names like Dominic Thiem of Austria and Germany's Alexander Zverev.

Organisers of other sports looking to resume from the coronavirus shutdown will be watching developments with some trepidation as they try to find the safest way of getting competition back under way.

Coric, ranked No.33 in the world, revealed on Twitter that he had tested positive for COVID-19. — **Reuters**



I want to make sure anyone who has been in contact with me during the last few days get tested. I am really sorry for any harm I might have caused. I'm feeling well and don't have any symptoms.

BORNA CORIC,
CROATIA

SPORT



SIMPSON WINS RBC HERITAGE SPOILS

SOUTH CAROLINA, US: Webb Simpson birdied three of his final four holes to emerge with victory at the PGA Tour's tightly-contested RBC Heritage in South Carolina on Sunday.

The 34-year-old father of five made sure it was an extra special Father's Day by recording his seventh career win on the tour after his bogey-free 64 saw him finish on a combined 22-under-par 262, a stroke clear of Mexico's Abraham Ancer (65).

At one point early on it looked like play might have to be completed on Monday after thunderstorms forced a two-hour



It was a crazy day. Honestly, I'm speechless right now. It looked like we weren't going to finish but we went back out

WEBB SIMPSON

and 45-minute delay but rain and lightning then gave way to sunshine at the Harbour Town course on Hilton Head Island.

"It was a crazy day. Honestly, I'm speechless right now", said Simpson, who started the day in a four-way tie for first.

"It looked like we weren't going to finish but we went back out.

"It was a really long day on the golf course. I didn't really get going until (noon) and then the putts started going in and I was getting confident.

"It's amazing to be standing here right now", added Simpson, who won the 2012 US Open on Father's Day, and the 2018 Players Championship on Mother's Day.

Ancer pushed him close, the Mexican's long putt on

18 to force extra holes coming up short as the sun set.

Daniel Berger (65), last week's winner at Colonial, and Englishman Tyrrell Hatton (66) finished tied for third a shot further back on 20-under 264.

American Nick Watney withdrew after testing positive for COVID-19 prior to the second round on Friday.

Next up on the schedule is the Travelers Championship from June 24-27 at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut, another event where fans are not allowed to attend.

— Reuters

FEATURES



PLASTIC FREE: LIVING WITH ‘ZERO WASTE’ IN OMAN

The ‘zero plastic waste’ movement is yet to fully rise in Oman but there are already people who are dedicated to the cause. Their goal is not only to limit their dependence on plastic but to totally eliminate it from their life to help protect the environment for the future generation... [page 20](#)

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Plastic free: Living with 'zero waste' in Oman

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

Is living a plastic-free life doable in Oman?

For 22-year old Samahram al Rahbi, it is quite a challenge but definitely doable and she is proof that if one is conscious of his/her actions, then nothing is impossible.

Samahram is on a mission to replace the largest possible amount of plastic with alternative environmental products in order to reduce the damage this pestilence is causing the environment.

"I decided to start with myself. I believe that postponement and indifference will destroy the earth and the coming generations will live in destruction because of the results of our actions in the present," she said.

In the past, Samahram is a prolific user of plastic like everyone else. She changed her ways after watching a documentary that tackles one the greatest problems of our generation. This was cemented when she came across different blogs of environmental activist warning about the damages they cause to the environment.

"I closely followed and watched some videos of people living a zero plastic wastelifestyle. They inspired me so much. From there, I started with the simplest things. I stopped using plastic straws first, then moved to shopping bags, to plastic cups among others," she said.

"From the simple choices I made, I started to notice that there was a personal change in my lifestyle until I get to a point that what I have now are the most basic and friendly to the environment. I am currently at 85% in living a plastic-free lifestyle but I continue to change," she said.

Samahram believes that everyone has a social responsibility to protect and preserve the environment.

People, as she noted, can follow these simple steps to reach zero waste and to preserve the environment.

Replace plastic toothbrushes with wooden ones. Use a wooden comb instead of plastic. For men, replace plastic razor blades with reusable ones. Use fabric bags for shopping. Also, use glass containers when buying natural oils and shift to reusable glass bottles instead of plastic glasses.

While the zero plastic waste movement is yet to catch in the country, there is already a growing number of people who takes the matter seriously. For these people, their yearly plastic trash output is very little. Embracing a modern-minimalist lifestyle, the change not only saves them money and but enriches their lives as well.

Arfad Student Company that participated in the Injaz Oman Competition 2020, creates high-quality and environmentally friendly products (pollution-free). The company centres many of their products on Agar as an alter-

native raw material for industrial plastic. Agar is extracted from red algae and seaweed and totally eco friendly.

"The product is 99% natural and healthy for human use because it does not contain harmful components. It can turn into organic fertilizer, as it contains the essential elements to promote plant growth, and it is self-degradable (Decomposes within a year)," said Mattar Al Muqbali, the CEO of the company.

With its innovative raw material, Arfad is targeting manufacturers of plastic products, such as cups, containers, bags, and other products, to allure them to turn into environmentally friendly and biodegradable products, or by introducing the raw material into plastic products to accelerate the decomposition process.

Plamore is another student company involved in the achievement of Oman 2020 that seeks to find environmental solutions to reduce the use of plastic by producing vital strings extracted from natural marine algae as a substitute for the plastic strands used as ink in printers that print 3D models.

"We seek to expand the fields in which we use our raw product to include the manufacture of environmentally friendly bags in solidarity with the Ministerial Decision that prevents the consumption of single-use plastic bags from the beginning of next year," said Manar Al Jahwari, the CEO of the company.

FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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‘Astonishing’ giant circle of pits found near Stonehenge

LONDON: Archaeologists have discovered a wide circle of deep pits surrounding an ancient settlement near Stonehenge, opening up new lines of investigation into the origins and meaning of the mysterious, prehistoric monument.

Among Britain's most rec-

ognisable landmarks, the standingstonesatStonehenge draw tourists from around the world as well as people searching for spiritual connections with the past. Their exact purpose remains unknown to scientists.

The new discovery, by a team of archaeologists from

several universities, shows a 2-km (1.2-mile) wide circle of shafts surrounding a settlement at Durrington Walls, which also included a henge, or circular structure, made of timber posts.

The site is located about 3.2 km northeast of Stonehenge and evidence suggests the pits date back to the same period, some 4,500 years ago.

“As the place where the builders of Stonehenge lived and feasted, Durrington Walls is key to unlocking the story of the wider Stonehenge landscape,” said archaeologist Nick Snashall of the National Trust, the body that runs the Stonehenge site.

“This astonishing discovery offers us new insights into the lives and beliefs of our Neolithic ancestors,” he said.

The circle of pits is significantly larger than any comparable prehistoric monumentinBritain.Researchers have found 20 shafts, but estimate there may have been more than 30 origi-

nally. Each one is about 5 metres deep and 10 metres across.

The discovery was made without the need for excavations, using remote sensing technology and sampling.

The archaeologists said the precise and sophisticated way in which the pits were positioned suggests that the early inhabitants of Britain used a tally or counting system to track pacing across long distances.

“The size of the shafts and circuit surrounding Durrington Walls is without precedent in the UK,” said Vince Gaffney, a professor of archaeology at the University of Bradford and one of the lead researchers on the project.

He said the discovery demonstrated “the capacity and desire of Neolithic communities to record their cosmological belief systems in ways, and at a scale, that we had never previously anticipated.” — **Reuters**

FEATURES

Plants can camouflage odours to avoid being eaten



Their research — published Thursday in the journal *Science* — sheds light on how individual members of “complex plant communities” evolve to emit similar odours, a pack mentality that keeps them alive and confuses hungry herbivores

PLANTS IN DENSE tropical forests are able to mask their chemical scents in order to avoid being detected and eaten by insects — a key advantage in the “information arms race” between themselves and plant-eating herbivores, according to a new study.

International researchers from Europe and North America examined 28 species of insects and 20 plant species in Chamela-Cuixmala, a tropical forest reserve on the western coast of Mexico.

Their research — published Thursday in the journal *Science* — sheds light on how individual members of “complex plant communities” evolve to emit similar odours, a pack mentality that keeps them alive and confuses hungry herbivores.

“Easily distinguished odours are to the herbivores’ advantage and plants’ disadvantage,” said Professor Phil Stevenson, a researcher at Britain’s Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

“So, we have an information arms race. Plants want to avoid being located and eaten so do their best to smell like other plants.”

Thursday’s study was the first time scientists were able to analyse the interactions between such a wide variety of plants and insects, lead author Pengjuan Zu at Massachusetts Institute of Technology said.

Previous attempts to understand the cat-and-mouse evolution game between plants and insects relied on the study of only individual plant species in controlled environments.

This is a far cry from the ensemble of plant and insect species that coexist in real-life forests, the authors wrote.

To do this, Zu collected chemical odours emitted by nearly two-dozen plant species in silicon tubes, which were then brought back to Kew to be analysed.

Through a combination of “information theory” — a technique for under-

standing communication patterns in humans — and existing understandings of evolutionary biology, scientists were able to construct models of these plant-herbivore communication networks.

“We now know that all the chemicals produced by plants carry information which has an important role in chemically camouflaging plants in a complex plant community,” Zu said.

The study could also help scientists better understand how information is passed between different species in the food chain, such as carnivores and insect-eating herbivores — potentially paving the way for future research.

“Herbivores, consequently, have to evolve to be finer tuned with the information for locating specific plant hosts,” Zu said. “The information can be further shared by carnivores that hunt insect herbivores, resulting in an information chain along the food chain.”— AFP