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25 Ramadhan Tuesday 19/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	03:59	04:05	04:32
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:30	03:33	03:41
MAGHRIB:	06:48	06:51	06:54
ISHA:	08:08	08:10	08:08



Over 600 townships to have satellite Internet by 2022

MUSCAT: The Sultanate marked the World Telecommunication Day/World Telecommunication and Information Society Day through a virtual event organised by the Ministry of Technology and Communications, on Monday.

Speaking at the event, Eng Azza bint Sulaiman al Ismailiya, Minister of Technology and Communications, said the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has chosen the theme “Connect 2030: ICTs for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” for this year’s celebrations of the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2020. The theme constitutes joint international vision aimed at bridging the digital gap and utilising information technology to support sustainable development plans of the member states.

In her speech, the minister reviewed a number of national initiatives which include the Sultanate’s endeavours to commit to the directives of the ITU by implementing a host of projects and initiatives including supplying Satellite Internet access to more than 600 villages in the Sultanate by 2022 in coordinated efforts between the Ministry of Technology and Communications and telecom providers. — ONA

TOUGH STEPS TO CONTAIN COVID-19

NO EID CELEBRATIONS AND FACE MASKS MUST IN PUBLIC



MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on Monday held a meeting at the Interior Ministry during which it took a set of new decisions to curb the spread of the virus and alleviate its impact in the Sultanate.

The meeting was chaired by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

The Supreme Committee commended citizens’ and residents’ compliance with decisions aimed to

3 deaths in a single day

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Oman for the first time recorded three COVID-19 deaths in a day as the Ministry of Health on Monday announced the death of two residents - aged 54 and 67 years old.

It also took the number of deaths registered in the Sultanate to 25.

combat COVID-19 and it urged all to maintain adherence to these decisions to safeguard individuals and society.

In its meeting, the committee stressed the need to stick to the following new decisions: The committee bans gatherings related to Eid al Fitr, like habta (pre-Eid souqs), Eid al Fitr prayers, all types of Eid celebrations and group gatherings to offer greetings. This is due to the great risks involved in such ceremonies and their role in transmitting the disease among members of society.

TURN ON P2

Some commercial activities allowed to open

MUSCAT: In implementation of the decision taken by the Supreme Committee for tackling COVID-19, the Ministry of

Regional Municipalities and Water Resources has announced the list of the activities that have been exempted from the

shutdown measures. The ministry said that the reopened activities are required to follow health standards.

DETAILS ON P5



TOUGH STEPS TO
CONTAIN COVID-19

FROM PAGE 1

The committee entrusts the Royal Oman Police (ROP) with the task of monitoring/checking the commitment of individuals, public and private institutions and establishments to the decisions. The committee authorises the ROP to impose prescribed cash penalties against offenders and violators of these decisions and to submit the offenders to precautionary lockup.

Due to the committee’s keenness on the performance of the private sector, the committee decided to re-open a number of new commercial and industrial activities, with full emphasis on necessary preventive measures. The departments concerned will unveil the list of permitted activities later.

The committee compels all people to wear face masks in public places, including at all outlets of permitted commercial and industrial activities, as well as workplaces in public and private sectors and on board means of public transport.

On the advent of the blessed Eid al Fitr, the Supreme Committee expressed its heartfelt wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The committee also expressed its best wishes to the Omani people, the Arab world and the Islamic nations. — ONA

37 OMANIS RETURN
HOME FROM INDIA

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: As part of the directives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to evacuate the Omani citizens, the Sultanate’s Embassy in India, in coordination with the Indian authorities, facilitated the return of 28 citizens from Hyderabad and nine citizens from Mumbai on Monday.

The embassy is working to complete the return of the rest of the citizens from New Delhi before the end of this month.

Meanwhile, the fourth flight under India’s repatriation mission left for Hyderabad with 177 passengers.

The flight IX 818 included stranded passengers who were on visit visas to Oman and had medical emergencies.

To facilitate the return of stranded nationals in Oman, India is operating eight special flights between May 17 and 23. The flights to follow are Muscat – Bangalore (May 20), Salalah – Kozhikode (May 20), Muscat – Delhi (May 21), Muscat – Kannur (May 22), Muscat – Kochi (May 23), and Muscat – Trivandrum, and Muscat - Gaya (May 23).

FLIGHT FOR LONDON

A special Oman Air left for London on Monday with passengers who were seen off at the Muscat International Airport by UKs’ Ambassador to Oman, Hamish Cowell. Oman Air will operate the return flight from Heathrow to Muscat, which is expected to arrive early on Tuesday.

“The flight to Muscat is open to Omani Nationals only, precautions have been followed for both passen-



gers and the crew members,” the airline said.

According to sources, the Omani citizens stranded in London had problems paying rents with colleges closed and no income due to lockdown. The government has said that while authorities are working on a plan to resume air services, limited flights will be operated to bring Omani citizens home.

Following the directives of Heathrow Airport, Oman Air operated from Terminal 2, the airline said.

“Social distancing regulations apply and wearing of face mask is mandatory at Heathrow Airport. Only passengers will be allowed to enter the building. We recommend that passengers arrive at the airport at least 4 hours before departure,” the airline said.

Over the last two days, the budget airline, SalamAir has been operating flights to Riyadh, Dammam, and Bahrain to bring Omani citizens home.



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ONLY OMANIS ALLOWED TO DRIVE VEHICLES WITH AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MoAF) has reiterated that only Omani drivers will be allowed for transporting agricultural products and livestock.

The ministry said it was responding to the requests made by some citizens regarding Omanisation of the profession of driving cars and transporting agricultural products and animals to Omanis inside the Sultanate or through the land checkpoints.

MoAF has coordinated with the Ministry of Manpower, which confirmed that Ministerial Resolution (324/984), which prohibits expatriates from driving vehicles to transport agricultural products from vegetables, fruits, dates, fodder, (dry palm fronds) and animals out of the Sultanate, is still valid and in place.

This decision must be implemented in line with the ministerial decision



(218/2018) regarding the regulation of means of transporting agricultural products through land ports.

It added that coordination has been made with the Royal Oman Police (ROP) to not allow the exit of means of transport of agricultural products and animals of various tonnage unless the driver is Omani. The ministry requests all business owners to abide by what is stated in the public interest.



SAI's TV programme Nazaha receives commendation

MUSCAT: Throughout the holy month of Ramadhan, the State Audit Institution (SAI) has been broadcasting "Nazaha" programme to those interested in using different media platforms.

The programme, which was produced in its 4th season this year, covered a number of awareness raising messages that aim to boost integrity within society.

The name of the programme "Nazaha", which means integrity in English, is an actual demonstration of SAI's belief in the importance of fostering integrity values among individuals when dealing with public money and public service.

In fact, the term integrity means the avoidance of bad and suspicious deeds, and lifting oneself off sins and disobedience. Hence, integrity is seen as a humane phenomenon ruled by individuals and communities' values and guides the individual through physical and moral action.

It leads to reform and righteousness as it is an internal drive and value, as well as an apparent behaviour realised by integration and moral balance and linked to several life aspects, individual, social, national and regulatory fields.

Therefore, the programme's episodes focused on general integrity values, particularly at the work environment.

Values are the primary directive for the individual's behaviour and righteousness. It enables people to coexist in an environment that is based on credible individual and social conduct.

OMA'S COVID-19 HOSPITAL BECOMES OPERATIONAL

AKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: The health unit run by Oman Medical Association started offering services on Monday by taking in patients at the temporary hospital for Coronavirus management.

The 24/7 hospital has 24-hour ambulance service but there is criteria for admission.

"The admission is approved by the hospital board of directors, who are also OMA board members.

The appointment is meant for those referral patients who have mild to moderate symptoms of COVID-19 as well as suspected cases who are waiting for the results", said Dr Waleed al Zedjali, Chairman of Oman Medical Association.

The hospital was inaugurated by the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi on Sunday. The first group of admitted patients is from Al Nahdha Hospital.

"We have had training process for the staff - doctors, nursing staff, paramedics, the cleaners and logistic staff - to avoid any cross infection.

The medical committee takes care of the admission patients and day to day management of the hospital in maintaining the quality and care of the hospital, there is also infection control team, the nursing committee already has experience in COVID-19 management", explained Dr Waleed.

More than 96 per cent of the



volunteering medical professionals are Omanis, while some of them will be working part-time, there is a core team that will work full-time by taking two weeks leave from their workplace to relieve the pressure on Al Nahdha Hospital that admits COVID-19 patients in addition to the Royal Hospital that takes care of complicated COVID-19 cases.

"We follow international protocol in every aspect of management at this COVID-19 hospital.

But for the first three weeks we will be transferring the critical cases to Royal Hospital and Al Nahdha Hospital. After this period we will be taking care of the cases. We have already made an agreement with the Ministry of Health that we will only take referral patients, which right now is from Al Nahdha", explained Dr Waleed.

The chairman thanked the various organisations that helped this venture reach the operational stage.

Ramadan Iftar Program

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

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

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

National Bank of Oman
1049332798001

Ooredoo users cost 1 RO
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O C O Headquarters : Muscat Governorate , Al Khuwair 33 , Street No. 47, next to Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque, or one of its branches :

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Rafo rescues critically ill female expat

MUSCAT: Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) helicopter carried out a medical evacuation for an Indian female expatriate suffering from a critical medical condition from Kamzar village. She was transported to Khasab Hospital in Musandam Governorate to receive medical care. The drive is part of the humanitarian services rendered to citizens and expats by the Sultan's Armed Forces and the other units of the Ministry of Defence alongside other state departments. – **ONA**

BUSINESS ACTIVITIES ALLOWED TO REOPEN

MUSCAT: In implementation of the decision taken by the Supreme Committee for tackling COVID-19, the Ministry of Regional

Municipalities and Water Resources has announced the list of the activities that have been exempted from the shut-

down measures. The ministry said that the reopened activities are required to follow health standards.

THE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE ALLOWED TO REOPEN ARE:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 01 Sale of foodstuff | 27 Sale of fishing tools and equipment | (order and delivery) |
| 02 Food stores | 28 Vehicle and fishing boat repair workshops | 46 Car wash |
| 03 Mobile restaurants and coffee shops (only delivery and takeaway) | 29 Vehicle and fishing boats spare parts stores | 47 Vehicle care stores (two customers at a time are allowed inside) |
| 04 Clinics and vet clinics | 30 Motor electrical, vehicle oil, vehicle brake repair, tyre repair | 48 New car dealers (two customers at a time are allowed inside) |
| 05 Pharmacies | 31 Electrical appliances and satellite shops (order and delivery only) | 49 Water filters sale and repair shops |
| 06 Optical shops | 32 Computer sale and maintenance | 50 Water pumps sale and repair (orders and delivery) |
| 07 Petrol filling stations | 33 Stationary stores | 51 Modern irrigation systems sale and maintenance (two customers at a time are allowed inside) |
| 08 Cooking gas cylinder stores and vehicles | 34 Printers (order and delivery only) | 52 Pets (birds, fish and their feed) (two customers are allowed inside) |
| 09 Bakeries and bread shops | 35 Quarries crushers (order and delivery only) | 53 Nurseries and agricultural supplies (two customers are allowed inside) |
| 10 Water factories and water stores | 36 Sanad offices | 54 Carpentries (orders and delivery) |
| 11 Halwa and confectionary stores | 37 Rent of vehicles and equipment | 55 Blacksmith workshops (orders and delivery) |
| 12 Food industries | 38 Money exchange | 56- Turning workshop (order and delivery) |
| 13 Animal feed, grain stores, agricultural products and pesticides | 39 Steam laundries and machine laundries (two customers are allowed at a time) | 57 Aluminium workshops (order and delivery) |
| 14 Meat and poultry shops | 40 Honey-bee supplies stores (order and delivery only) | 58 Consultancy officers, lawyers offices, account auditing (remote services only) |
| 15 Fish stores | 41 Construction materials and cement stores | 59 Sale and maintenance of watches |
| 16 Ice-cream and corn shops | 42 Bricks and cement blocks factories (orders the delivery) | 60 Mobile phones sales and maintenance (order and delivery) |
| 17 Fruits and vegetable stores | 43 Ready-made concrete (orders the delivery only) | 61 Yacht marina |
| 18 Juice shops | 44 Ceramic, tiles, marble and granite shops (two customers are allowed inside the shop) | 62 Car driving learning |
| 19 Mashakik and barbecues | 45 Ceramic, tiles, marble and granite cutting workshops | |
| 20 Grinders | | |
| 21 Honey shops | | |
| 22 Dates shops | | |
| 23 Livestock and poultry sheds | | |
| 24 Shipping, customs clearance offices and insurance offices | | |
| 25 Sanitary and electrical materials | | |
| 26 Non-food materials shops (for storage only) | | |



Hotline for obstetrics, gynaecology counselling

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Department of Woman and Child Health, has launched obstetrics and gynaecology counselling service in cooperation with the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Omani Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (OSOG).

The department will receive queries from women of childbearing age, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women via a dedicated hotline. The aim is to provide clinical counselling for women about health conditions, may not require them to visit hospital amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The counselling service also includes providing precautionary and preventive measures for women to protect them from the virus.

Omani and expat women in all governorates of the Sultanate may seek the service by contacting the hotline 24441999 and they will get answers by a midwife, or a gynaecologist if necessary. The service will be available from 10 am to 4 pm on weekdays except for Fridays and Saturdays and official holidays.

The ministry warned that pregnant women who suffer risk factors for severe headache, hazy vision, cramps, swelling face and hands and legs, vaginal bleeding, should visit hospital. — **ONA**

Land and real estate deals rise 24% to hit RO 629.2 million



MUSCAT: The total value of property transactions in the Sultanate till the end of February 2020 surged 24 per cent to reach RO 629.2 million from RO 507.5 million for the same period of 2019, as indicated by the preliminary statistics issued by National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

Of the total traded value till the end of February 2020, RO 165.6 million worth transactions were sales contracts, while RO 458 million transactions were mortgage deals.

As many as 9,706 sales contracts were executed in the month of February 2020 against 10,496 contracts during the same period of 2019. However, the total number of mortgage contracts fell by 3.1 per cent to reach 2,435 con-

tracts against 2,514 contracts in 2019.

The Sultanate's government collected RO 13.6 million as real estate transaction fees till the end of February 2020, which is a drop of 12 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.

NCSI data revealed a significant rise in traded value of exchange (barter) contracts by 9.2 per cent during the February 2020 period to RO 5.5 million, as against RO 5.1 million posted in the comparable period of 2019.

The number of barter contracts witnessed a fall of 6 per cent to a total of 300, compared to 319 contracts

in 2019. The number of plots allocated to GCC citizens fell by 15.9 per cent to reach 138 plots compared to 164 plots during the same period of 2019, the data showed. — **ONA**

Data revealed a significant rise in traded value of exchange (barter) contracts by 9.2 per cent during the February 2020 to RO 5.5 million

GDB issue evokes good response

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the auction results of the 64th government development bonds (GDB) issue worth RO 200 million.

According to a media release issued by CBO's Monetary Operations Department, the 64th GDB issue, has received applica-



tions worth RO 266,917,200.

The average yield was 5.36 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 98.440 while the highest yield was 5.66 per cent at an equivalent price of RO

97.160 and the lowest was at 4.75 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 101.100. — **ONA**



Zakat purifies one’s wealth

KABEER YOUSUF

Did we know that we are not the ultimate owner of what all savings we make during our life time?

Did we know that we are just custodians of the wealth that we earn, and the poor people, struggling family members, and all destitute people around us have a claim of at least 2.5 per cent of it?

Islam says that one ought to give out what the poor deserves, and purify our wealth every year in the form of ‘Zakat’ which is the right of the poor, a religious obligation or tax, and is next after five times prayer, according to Quranic ranking, in importance.

“As one of the Five Pillars of Islam, giving a fixed percentage as Zakat is a religious duty of all Muslims who meet necessary criteria of wealth and is a compulsory charitable contribution”, says Shaikh Mutavalli Mohammed Ahmed al Saeed, an Islamic scholar.

Zakat is calculated on the value of all of one’s possessions and is 2.5 per cent (or 1/40) of a Muslim’s total savings and wealth above a minimum amount known as nisab. However, Islamic scholars

differ on how much nisab is and other aspects of Zakat.

Those who are eligible to receive Zakat should be poor and/or needy. Islam defines a poor person as someone whose property, in excess of his basic requirements, does not reach the nisab threshold. However, Islamic idea says that the recipient must not belong to the giver’s immediate family or spouse, or children, or parents and or grandparents whom one is supposed to protect.

Holy Quran says: “Indeed, charitable offerings are only to be given to the poor and the indigent, and to those who work on administering it, and to those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to [free] those in bondage, and to the debt-ridden, and for the cause of God, and to the wayfarer. This is an obligation from God. And God is all-knowing, all-wise. (Sura Al-Tawbah, 9:60)

Sadaqah means charity or benevolence and is the voluntary donation that a Muslim should make as part of his life. According to the Holy Quran, the word Sadaqah means voluntary offering, and the amount can be decided by the giver based on the need of the beneficiary.

FATWA

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

Question

Should Zakat Alfitr be paid on behalf of an unborn baby?

Answer

It is not obligatory to pay Zakat Alfitr on behalf of a fetus that is still in his mother’s womb.





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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020/1441 AH

WORLD

More easing in Europe but virus hits hard in South America, Africa



ROME: Restaurants and churches reopened in Italy on Monday as part of a fresh wave of lockdown easing in Europe, but rising coronavirus death tolls in Brazil, South Africa and other parts of the world showed the worst is still to come in many countries.

The relaxation of curbs in some places comes as governments around the world struggle to repair the vast economic damage unleashed by the pandemic, with Japan the latest to slump into a recession and the Fed warning

of a severe US downturn as the global infection count topped 4.7 million.

But the World Health Organization has warned that reopening too quickly without a vaccine could trigger a second devastating wave of infections, and the body will host a virtual global health assembly this week to help chart a course out of the crisis.

Once the worst-hit country in the world, Italy on Monday took its latest step in a cautious, gradual return to normality, allowing businesses and

churches to reopen after a two-month lockdown.

"I share the joy of those communities who can finally reunite as liturgical assemblies, a sign of hope for all society", Pope Francis said on Sunday during his live-streamed prayer, with Saint Peter's Basilica also throwing its door open to visitors.

The Vatican, an independent enclave in the heart of Rome, has applied the same anti-virus measures as Italy, which imposed strict lockdowns after a dizzying rise in

COVID-19 deaths and infections that overwhelmed hospitals.

Businesses including restaurants, cafes, hairdressers and stores will be allowed to re-open. Gyms, pools, cinemas and theatres are allowed to open on May 25.

Spain is also set to further ease its lockdown measures, while Germany has already taken several steps towards a reopening, including the resumption of its top football league — but with empty stadiums. — **AFP**

YEMEN COULD FACE 'CATASTROPHIC' FOOD SITUATION AS PANDEMIC WORSENS

SANAA: Yemen, already pushed to the brink of famine by a five-year war, could see a "catastrophic" food security situation due to the coronavirus pandemic and lower remittances from the Gulf, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said on Monday.

The conflict between a coalition and the Ansar Allah movement has caused what the United Nations describes as the world's largest humanitarian crisis. Some 80 per cent of Yemen's population are reliant on aid and millions face hunger.

"The health system was already

under heavy stress and will now be overwhelmed if COVID-19 continues to spread and in addition it will affect the movement of people and the movement of goods", Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, the FAO's Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa, said.

"That situation could be really catastrophic if all the elements of worst case scenarios come to be but let's hope not and the UN are working on avoiding that".

Yemen, alongside Syria and Sudan, is one of the most vulnerable states

in the Middle East in terms of food security.

Lockdowns to prevent the spread of the virus are likely to impact humanitarian supply chains keeping a large part of the population fed, the UN agency said in a report.

Yemen has been mired in violence since the coalition intervened in 2015 against the Ansar Allah group that ousted the government in the capital, Sanaa, forcing it to rebase in the south. The internationally recognised government has reported 128 COVID-19 infections with 20 deaths in areas under its control. — **Reuters**



India’s ‘superfood’ jackfruit goes global

ABHAYA SRIVASTAVA

Green, spiky and with a strong, sweet smell, the bulky jackfruit has morphed from a backyard nuisance in India's south coast into the meat-substitute darling of vegans and vegetarians in the West.

Part of South Asia's diet for centuries, jackfruit was so abundant that tonnes of it went to waste every year.

But now India, the world's biggest producer of jackfruit, is capitalising on its growing popularity as a “superfood” meat alternative — touted by chefs from San Francisco to London and Delhi for its pork-like texture when unripe.

“There are a lot of enquiries from abroad... At the international level, the interest in jackfruit has grown manifold,” Varghese Tharakkan said from his orchard in Kerala's Thrissur district.

The fruit, which weighs five kilogrammes on average, has a waxy yellow flesh when ripe and

is eaten fresh, or used to make cakes, juices, ice creams and crisps.

When unripe, it is added to curries or fried, minced and sauted. In the West, shredded jackfruit has become a popular alternative to pulled pork and is even used as a pizza topping.

“People love it,” Anu Bhambri, who owns a chain of restaurants in the US and India, explains.

“The jackfruit tacos have been a hit at each and every location. The jackfruit cutlet — every table orders it, it's one of my favourites!”

James Joseph quit his job as a director at Microsoft after spotting Western interest in jackfruit “gaining momentum as a vegan alternative to meat”.

The COVID-19 crisis, Joseph says, has created two spikes in consumer interest.

“Coronavirus caused a fear for chicken and people switched to tender jackfruit. In Kerala, lockdown caused a surge in demand for mature green jackfruit and seeds due to shortage of vegetables due to border restrictions,” he explains. — **AFP**

Fast in, first out: Denmark leads lockdown exit

JACOB GRONHOLT-PEDERSEN & NIKOLAJ SKYDSGAARD

Four weeks after Denmark began easing its lockdown, Danes on Monday returned to cafes and restaurants, confident that the coronavirus outbreak is under control.

Denmark last month became the first country in Europe to reopen schools, day-care centres and smaller businesses. It did not see a subsequent rise in COVID-19 cases.

“The quick shutdown and the fact that Danes actually listened to messages from authorities about good hygiene and social distancing are the main reasons we've come this far,” said Hans Jorn Kolmos, a professor in clinical microbiology at the University of Southern Denmark.

Contrary to the French and Italians, Danes are less likely to hug and kiss as a form of greeting, which has also been a factor in limiting the spread, Kolmos said.

Coronavirus-related deaths and the ‘R’ reproduction rate — a measure of transmission — are falling. Health authorities on Friday reported no deaths for the first time since March 13.

Health experts now say Denmark is “very

unlikely” to be hit by a second wave of the COVID-19 infection that has so far killed 548 people.

With a population of only 5.8 million, the death rate in Denmark is on par with that of Germany with around

“

The quick shutdown and the fact that Danes actually listened to messages from authorities about good hygiene and social distancing are the main reasons we’ve come this far

HANS JORN KOLMOS

nine per 100,000 - less than most other European countries, including 36 in neighbouring Sweden, 33 in the Netherlands and 52 in both Britain and Italy.

The results have been achieved without mass testing and contact tracing. Denmark has not recommended the use of face-coverings, as many other countries have. — **Reuters**

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

FEATURES

Using art to escape world in lock down

RUQAYA AL KINDI

Hana al Ismaili believes in the strength of women. As a woman herself, she knows that no two women are alike and that because of their diversity, their layered characters, their personalities, and background, the world has become an exciting place as they blessed the earth with their mystery, their grace, their complexities, and wisdom.

While the current world situation is a challenge for her too, she has found a way on how to channel her energy. To improve her skills in drawing as well as traditional animation — something that is yet to fully catch on as a career in the Sultanate.

A student of Sultan Qaboos University, she spends her days at home surrounded by her weapons — coloured pencils, watercolours, papers of different kinds among others.

She isn't worried that her characters look cartoonish because she is at a stage where her mind tends to imagine cartoon characters.

"They are easier to make and they are simpler to use to convey an idea. I like how they can be used to send across a

message that felt like no connection to reality," she said.

"I'd been pursuing this passion because in animation, in creating animated characters, there are no strict laws or procedures that govern the art. There are no set of instructions that restrict me on what I can and cannot do," she shared.

While she had developed the passion for drawing in her younger years, it was in 2018 that she begins creating artworks with layers and hidden meanings.

"For some reason, my mind has always been drawn to female characters. I have a body of work that is comprised of women with different dimensions and backgrounds," she said.

"I have an early painting, this girl who thinks about the universe and the things around her. When you look at it, it seems so simple with her back on you and her, staring into the universe. Behind this painting are troubled feelings. They had been influenced by conflicts, real-life experiences, and pressures whether it's work or study or family problems. It is who we are and that part of us that wanted to escape," she said.

"I have an anime art called 'The Girl Under the Rain' which is an exploration of oil colours. I have an orange-

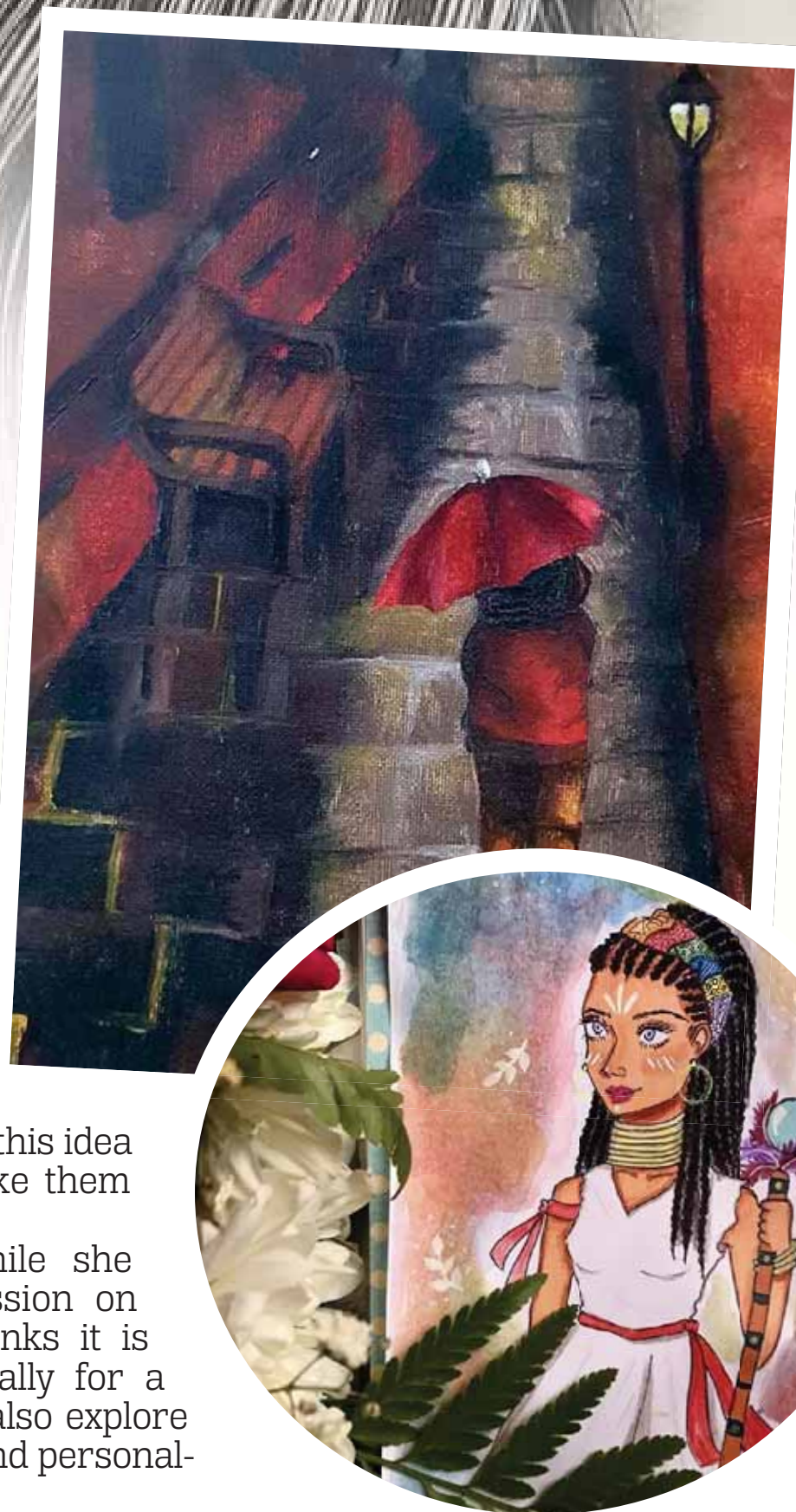
haired girl that explores the secrets of a woman and most recently, I have 'The African Girl' where I tried to capture the exoticness of her origin and a celebration of sort of her culture and her tradition," she said.

Bayan said that she enjoys giving her character's history and background and as an artist, she thrives in this idea that she can make them anyone she likes.

For Bayan, while she pursues her passion on her own, she thinks it is important especially for a time like now to also explore your character and personality as a woman.

She encourages other young girls to tap into their creativity and to appreciate their womanhood and use that unique perspective to create a story that will connect to other women and even men and create a world where they can be powerful.

"The fun part is that like women, a lot of us are attract-



ed by vibrant colours. That can be seen in many of my work. Right now, I'm still developing my style, of who I wanted to become an artist. To reach where and who I want to be, I am using this time and my imagination to create a world that is truly mine," she said.

Ramadhan in South Africa: Charity to the fore

RAY PETERSEN



South Africa is a country with an abundance of mineral wealth yet many of its citizens live in poverty. Some are unemployed and receive a meagre state allowance, while others rely on getting work on a casual basis. They either knock on doors or wait for menial labour. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of many, and with many unpaid, are in dire circumstances.

“During Ramadhan Muslims tend to be more charitable,” said Zida Khan, a teacher in the Republic who taught in Oman for some years, “and they will need to be this year as many are in need. South Africa has been witnessing charity on a scale not seen before, and what was normal for Ramadhan was happening on a large scale before the holy month even started.”

“South Africa traditionally follows the practice of sighting the moon with the naked eye to indicate the start of the month of Ramadhan. This takes place in Sea Point where hundreds of Muslims gather with the Imam to sight the crescent, however this year there was no crowd.” Said Khan, “Last

year, for example, the Grassy Park community ran a scheme during Ramadhan where many needy people were fed. Another tradition that has grown over the years is what is known as the Skotcheskloof Mass Boeka or mass Iftar. This cannot happen this year because of social distancing. No doubt the poor will be fed, but COVID-19 restrictions will affect their experience in some way.”

In previous years, organisations would provide cooked food for the poor. With the new social distancing laws, this is not possible under social distancing. “Another organisation, Nakhlistan,” said Khan, “annually cooks hundreds of pots of food the day before Eid, last year cooking 22,000 litres of a Biryani type meal called Akhni, which was then distributed to 85,000 needy people on Eid, but this cannot happen either.”

Cape Town has had a long tradition of young children delivering treats to other Muslim neighbours just before



Iftar, but Khan thinks it is unlikely that this will happen this year. “Young children look forward to this tradition, they love their surprises. As we are still under lockdown however there is no rush to work in the morning, and Moms more time to prepare meals at night.”

While the pandemic has affected Ramadhan in a big way in that Masjids have been shut and people cannot pray in congregation, Cape Town still has its traditional koesister (spicy doughnut), falooda (a

cardamom flavoured milkshake), dhaltjies (what you may know as bhajias or chilly bites) and many other traditional Ramadhan treats.

While ‘things do tend to work out in the end,’ the onus will be very much on the Islamic community across the republic to respond as never before, as the plummeting Rand and COVID-19 make their mark on an already under pressure nation. Inshallah, the response will be appropriate to the magnitude of the task.

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PACT TO SUPPORT OMANI TECH ENTREPRENEURSHIP



EXPANDING ECOSYSTEM: ITHRAA INKS MOU WITH OMAN TECHNOLOGY FUND

MUSCAT: Oman Technology Fund (OTF) and Ithraa, the Sultanate's inward investment and export development agency, signed a forward looking Memorandum of Understanding on Monday. Capitalising on Ithraa's commercial expertise and leveraging OTF's peer-to-peer mentoring networks and generous financial support for tech entrepreneurs with ambitions to go global, the agreement is designed to enhance the competitiveness of Oman's business ecosystem.

Speaking at the signing, OTF CEO Eng Yousuf al Harthy remarked: "OTF is firmly focused on establishing Oman as a regional tech location, connecting local talent and providing finance required to take fast-growing businesses to the next level.

The fund is keen on enhancing the principle of partnership with the marketing authorities in the Sultanate to attract more investments in these technical companies, which aim to support economic diversification in terms of logis-

tics, agriculture, food, industrial and other vital sectors in which the fund invests."

He added: "Ithraa's extensive experience in attracting investment to the sultanate as well as promoting Oman made goods and services internationally and OTF's tech expertise will be a potent combination, helping Oman's hi-tech start-ups stand out at home and in overseas markets. We're excited about putting today's agreement into action."

Commenting on the agreement, Azzan al Busaidi, Ithraa's CEO said: "OTF's work is directly contributing to Oman's growing reputation as a tech cluster one that will help nurture as well attract talent and investment. By developing a strong tech sector we can generate employment opportunities, jobs that offer good salaries and long-term, sustainable career prospects. And together we can nurture innovative in-demand tech services to add to our export offer."

Ithraa's CEO continued:

"The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique set of problems but new opportunities are emerging and they're inspiring Omani tech entrepreneurs to think more freely, generating ideas that are already being put into action. They are focusing on areas large and small that we have either ignored or simply been unaware of.

They are looking at and experimenting with how existing products, services and systems work.

This is a process that will allow our businesses community to learn, move forward, expand and capture new market share. Of course, this more innovative business community will also lure further investment.

OCTAL

BOLSTERS OMAN'S

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY AS IT

EXPANDS PET RESIN BUSINESS

Muscat, 18 May 2020 – Continuing on its remarkable growth trajectory, OCTAL, the world's leading supplier of clear rigid packaging materials, is enjoying impressive success in its PET resin business, reporting an increase of 500 new customers globally in the last three years. Now a major supplier to most international brands, and with the highest market share in the Middle East / GCC Region, the Salalah-based manufacturer has quickly become a formidable force, continuing to position the Sultanate as a hub for the global PET industry.

"We are committed to creating long-term value for Oman that extends beyond diversification," said Prashant Bloor, Senior Sales Director - PET Resin at OCTAL. "The quality and reliability of our products have earned us a solid reputation and increased our position with the biggest brands in the world, which we now count amongst our customers. This is a remarkable achievement towards serving the growing global demand for high-performing PET resin and establishing OCTAL's footprint, which now covers more than 75 countries. This has helped us position the Sultanate at the forefront of the manufacturing industry, and as a hub of excellence for knowledge transfer and innovative technology in sustainable and environmentally-responsible rigid packaging solutions."

With a total annual capacity of almost one million metric tons of bottle grade PET resin, OCTAL is the only company in the world with a fully-integrated packaging system from raw material to finished product. Suitable for a variety of applications including water, carbonated soft drinks, edible oil and pharmaceutical containers, the resin is designed and engineered to provide high-dimensional strength and excellent mechanical properties, including lightness, strength, transparency and recyclability. Focused on environmental sustainability, the company's unique manufacturing process eliminates an entire step from the recognized standard, reducing



electricity requirements and giving it a significantly lower carbon footprint compared to other PET sheet and resin products.

Bloor continued, "We place a lot of importance in designing value-added solutions for our customers, and our resin is preferred by most converters and brands because it provides excellent visual and mechanical properties along with long-term savings to operational costs. Our products have a lower carbon footprint and lower energy demands in downstream conversion compared to competing resins, and we provide reliable and flexible supply, which sets us apart from other manufacturers. This customer-centric focus has helped us retain business and build a bigger base, and we're looking forward to evolving those partnerships for future growth."

The PET manufacturer credits its own global supply chain with keeping customer commitments and raw material sourcing while maintaining a competitive advantage. Situated close to the Port of Salalah, OCTAL has the ability to deliver by sea and other multimodal options, including trucks in the region and door-delivery in US markets. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to place a substantial burden on international supply chains, OCTAL's short 'Order Booking to Shipment' cycle, and ability to move large volumes of resin to major global ports with reliable transit times, has supported customers in managing inventories at lower levels.

From a single PET resin and sheet production plant in Salalah in 2006, OCTAL has emerged as a globally recognized industry leader with a reach that extends to over 75 countries worldwide. Aside from its main plant, which is located close to the Port of Salalah, one of the busiest transshipment ports in the world, the company operates plants in Saudi Arabia and Ohio, US. With a workforce of more than 700 people, OCTAL produces close to one million tons of PET resin, DPET, APET and RPET sheet, and PET packages per year.



OMANI FIRM TO SET UP MEGA LIVESTOCK HUB IN SUWAIQ

ONE-STOP DESTINATION:

NASEER & SULEIMAN GROUP OF COMPANIES WINS MANDATE TO DEVELOP, FINANCE, OPERATE, AND MANAGE CENTRAL LIVESTOCK AND SLAUGHTERHOUSE COMPLEX IN SOUTH AL BATINAH GOVERNORATE.

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT:The Sultanate's government has roped in the private sector to establish a first of its kind complex for livestock marketing, complete with a world-scale abattoir and an array of associated facilities. The hub – conceived as a one-stop destination for wholesale and retail fresh meat sales – is coming up in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq in South Al Batinah Governorate.

Naseer & Suleiman (N&S) Group of Companies, a well-diversified Omani business house, has won the mandate from the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources to develop and manage the complex on a Build – Own – Operate – Transfer (BOOT) basis. It is the latest in a string of initiatives by the Omani government to tap private sector funding and expertise in the development and operation of public infrastructure projects and services.

The project is set to be a singular addition to Oman's rapidly expanding food supply industry, according to a key representative of N&S.

"This is an exciting project designed to serve the people of Oman with quality products, as well as facilities to support trade and commerce related to livestock and meat products," said Wiam Bekker, Project Manager. "Furthermore, the project will position the Sultanate as a regional and international player in the market, thereby securing foreign revenue for the country. N&S is privileged to be associated with this initiative and is committed



Owning, operating, and building the Central Livestock Market and slaughterhouse gives us the opportunity to support and grow Oman's initiatives in economy, trade and employment.

NASEER AL HABSI
CHAIRMAN

to delivering a functional, cost-effective, high standard complex."

When operational in 2022, the proposed Central Livestock and Slaughterhouse Complex will dwarf in scope and capacity any comparable

facility currently in operation in the Sultanate. In Phase 1 alone, the abattoir will be designed to process 2,500 small animals and up to 300 large animals, according to the Project Manager. At this capacity, 'bone-in' sheep and goat carcass production is projected at between 8,000 – 10,000 tonnes per annum, while beef cuts production is estimated at over 9,000 tonnes per year.

The livestock holding facility and market – another centerpiece of the project – is planned to have a capacity to hold and feed more than 25,000 animals of different breeds, said Bekker, noting that additional storage and processing will evolve in line with market trends.

Importantly, virtually every aspect of the Central Livestock and Slaughterhouse Project will be world-class, says Bekker. "The uniqueness of the project is that it will be a one-stop-shop for the public and commercial buyers,

having access to an accredited hygienic slaughter and meat handling/processing facility, incorporated within a livestock market. The livestock market gives the customer options to buy an animal of choice and make use of the slaughter facility, if needed. An auction pavilion will be available where people can auction their animals."

"Owning, operating, and building the Central Livestock Market and slaughterhouse gives us the opportunity to support and grow Oman's initiatives in economy, trade and employment. We look to provide Oman with the highest standards of excellence in the Meat & Livestock industry and to offer meat products worthy of gaining a household name. It is our goal and ambition to build food security in Oman and create healthy trade among SMEs, farmers as well as job opportunities for locals," commented Chairman Naseer al Habsi (pictured).

BUSINESS



Prof Ghassan al Kindi

INTAJ SUHAR EXPLORES ALLIANCE TO SUSTAIN COVID-19 SAFETY GEAR OUTPUT

SUPPORTING THE INITIATIVE IS OQ, WHICH IS A LOCAL PRODUCER OF POLYMER – A KEY INGREDIENT FOR THE FACE VISOR

MUSCAT: Having pioneered the mass production of low-cost, high-quality face visors through the use of injection moulding technology, Intaj Suhar – the industrial innovation hub based at Sohar University – is forging an alliance with key Omani players to support the sustainable production of critical personal protection gear for local consumption and export over the long term.

The move comes as Intaj Suhar ramps up production of an initial order of 12,000 face visors earmarked for distribution to healthcare workers and first responders on the frontline of the Sultanate's drive to contain the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

According to Prof Ghassan al Kindi, Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation at Sohar University and Director of Intaj-Suhar, an Omani SME has been roped in to handle the assembly, packaging and marketing of the face visors – an arrangement that will help speed up the distribution of the desperately needed protective items.

"We have signed an agreement with Almasafah Trading following which the assembly of the face visor, as well as associated marketing and logistics, is now being undertaken by them.

This division of labour not only brings down overall production costs, but dramatically speeds up delivery of face visors to clinics and hospitals around the country. Besides, it allows us to focus on other higher-tech 'Made in Oman' products that are crucial in the nation's fight against the pandemic."

Further, with a view to



THE GOAL, SAYS THE SCIENTIST, IS TO TAP THE FREE ZONE COMPANY'S INJECTION MOULDING CAPABILITIES IN MASS PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY FACE VISORS AND OTHER PROTECTIVE ITEMS.

streamlining and optimising the mass production of face visors for both national and overseas markets over the long term, Intaj Suhar is exploring a partnership with a leading polymer production export unit based in Salalah Free Zone, said Prof Al Kindi.

The goal, says the scientist, is to tap the free zone company's injection moulding capabilities in mass producing high-quality face visors and other protective items. Also supporting the

initiative is OQ (formerly Oman Oil and Orpic Group), which is a local producer of polymer – a key ingredient for the face visor.

"Matters are still under discussion at this stage, but once we have an agreement, we will approach the Ministry of Health for guidance on quality specifications and quantities required to help us with planning the long-term requirements of the country.

We also see the potential

to supply foreign markets through this partnership," he added.

Significantly, Intaj Suhar is adding new products to its portfolio of COVID-19 innovations:

Oxygen connecting valve:

In collaboration with Makers Oman – an R&D lab located within Innovation Park Muscat (IPM) at Rusayl – Intaj Suhar has fabricated a prototype of an oxygen connector valve, described as a critical device in hospitals and Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

According to Prof Ghassan, the Sultanate has long been dependent on imports for this small, but indispensable item, which helps channel oxygen gas into life support systems in hospitals.

"We have now produced the first functional prototype of an oxygen connector valve using tool grade steel. Makers Oman, as part of our collaboration, will have it tested in a hospital before we commence mass production of this high-precision item. They are putting together a proposal to secure funding support. Oman's annual requirement is estimated at around 1,000 such devices."

Foot-press sanitiser pump:

A simple, low-tech innovation, this device does away with the need for someone to use their hands to operate a sanitiser dispenser and thus avoid any risk of exposure to coronavirus infection. Instead, a foot-press can be operated to depress the dispenser knob every time.

"Intaj Suhar is willing to share the technique of fabricating these foot-operated devices, which can be made for less than RO 5 apiece," he added.

Omantel launches Sustainability Report

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading integrated communication services provider issued its annual "Sustainability Report" 2019 under the theme "Amazing Happens Together".

The report, which comes within the company efforts to enhance transparency with different stakeholders, is issued inline with the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).

Commenting on the launch of this report, Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "In Omantel, we pay great attention to governance and sustainability in our endeavour to ensure the sustainability of

our business and adhere to local and international frameworks and standards related to governance and sustainability.

Besides being an important channel for communication with various stakeholders, sustainability reports also enable us to measure our performance in the economic, social and environmental fields, which in turn will help us in addressing any challenges facing the improvement of our performance indicators."

Al Mamari pointed out that the Omantel Sustainability Strategy took into consideration the sustainable

Development Goals announced by the United Nations and the strategic direction of Oman Vision 2040.

In 2014, Omantel developed its own Sustainability Framework that included a number of goals for digital inclusion and social responsibility to be achieved by 2020.

Among these goals were investing RO 10 million in social responsibility programs and covering 95 per cent of the populated areas in the Sultanate with broadband services at speeds of not less than 10 Mbps.

Within the people theme, we also targeted enhancing the capabilities of



employees and empowering them to become future leaders at various levels of the company. Today, we are proud

to announce that we have reached the social responsibility objective a year ahead of schedule," he added.

Bank Nizwa takes part in AAOIFI virtual forum

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa recently participated in the online Islamic Finance Virtual Forum 2020 that discussed 'COVID-19 Economic Implications, Islamic Finance and the Way Forward'.

Bank Nizwa's CEO, Khaled al Kayed (pictured), played an active role as a panelist for the first discussion titled 'Reassessing the potential of Islamic finance to provide economic panaceas in and post COVID-19'.

The online forum was organised by the Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) and witnessed the support of key individuals and organisations in the sector.

The first discussion of the forum was centred around rebranding the



potency of Islamic finance by focusing on its risk-sharing principles for enhanced financial inclusions in time of COVID-19.

It also highlighted the renewed responsibility, expectations of Islamic banks and Sukuk, the need for liquidity management solutions, and the role of governance and standard-setting bodies in this period.

Speaking on the subject, Al Kayed said, "At a time like this, the practice of societal and country-wise risk sharing should be more pronounced. We should turn our focus on the need for financial inclusions and look at using technology for our mutual benefits. Above all, we should adopt a more philanthropic mode of operation."

DME Oman crude up 100 per cent



MUSCAT: Oman crude oil benchmark trading on Dubai Mercantile Exchange has doubled in price since the record cuts agreed by the Opec+ group and other major producers were implemented in time for May loading schedules.

Front-month July DME Oman Marker Price on Friday was \$34.95/b, up \$18.13/b from the record low of \$16.82/b on April 28 – an increase of 108 per cent.

The Marker Price is used by Middle East producers, which include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Dubai in calculating the Official Selling Price (OSP). Middle East prices have also risen faster than those in Europe, with DME Oman trading at nearly \$3/b over the Brent North Sea benchmark on Friday.

BUSINESS



A 3D printed oil pump jack is placed on dollar banknotes in this illustration picture. — Reuters

BRENT AT ONE-MONTH HIGH, US OIL TOPS \$30 AS RESTRICTIONS EASE

LONDON: Oil prices climbed by more than \$1 a barrel on Monday, with benchmark Brent hitting a one-month high and US crude topping \$30 supported by optimism about the re-opening of economies and output cuts by major producers.

Brent crude was up \$1.21, or 3.7 per cent, at \$33.71 a barrel by 0912 GMT, its highest level since mid-April.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up \$1.59 or 5.4 per cent at \$31.02 per barrel, its highest since mid-March.

"Optimism on the demand side of the oil equation has helped prices climb further, with gasoline demand coming back as governments ease confinement measures," said Rystad Energy's senior oil markets analyst Paola Rodriguez Masiu.

Summer weather is enticing much of the world to emerge from coronavirus lockdowns. Shops and



Optimism on the demand side of the oil equation has helped prices climb further, with gasoline demand coming back as governments ease confinement measures.

PAOLA RODRIGUEZ MASIU,
RYSTAD ENERGY'S
SENIOR OIL MARKETS
ANALYST

restaurants prepared to reopen in Italy on Monday, while other centres of the outbreak such as New York and Spain gradually lifted restrictions.

The positive sentiment in the market was reinforced as US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell issued an optimistic outlook for

economic recovery later this year.

"Assuming there is not a second wave of the coronavirus, I think you will see the economy recover steadily through the second half of this year," Powell said Sunday night in broadcast remarks.

The June WTI contract expires on Tuesday, but there was little indication of it repeating a historic plunge below zero last month on the eve of the May contract's expiry.

However, analysts cautioned that demand was not expected to recover to pre-coronavirus levels any time soon.

"Clearly the fundamentals in the market are improving, but we continue to believe that the market is rallying too much too soon, with the risk that further strength will only prolong the supply and demand imbalance," ING analyst Warren Patterson said. — Reuters

SoftBank's Vision Fund tumbles to \$18 bn loss

TOKYO: Japan's SoftBank Group Corp reported a stunning \$18 billion loss at its giant Vision Fund, pushing Masayoshi Son's conglomerate to a record loss and highlighting the deepening crisis at its portfolio companies from the global downturn.

The disastrous 1.9 trillion yen (\$18 billion) operating shortfall at the Saudi-backed Vision Fund, including losses of almost \$10 billion at office-sharing firm WeWork and ride-hailing app Uber Technologies Inc alone, left SoftBank with its worst annual loss of 1.4 trillion yen.

Son, who is under pressure from U.S. activist hedge fund Elliott Management to increase share buybacks and bolster governance, said SoftBank would raise 1.25 trillion yen for buybacks against its stake in China's Alibaba Group.

"The coronavirus is an unprecedented crisis," a notably downbeat Son told an earnings presentation, comparing it to the Great Depression.

Appearing far more subdued than usual, Son said some of his tech unicorns had fallen "into the valley of the coronavirus".

SoftBank to raise over \$11 billion for buybacks using Alibaba shares

"I believe some of them will fly over the valley," he added, standing beside a slide depicting cartoon unicorns dropping into a hole as a lone winged unicorn escaped to the other side.

The crisis has pushed the Vision Fund's portfolio underwater, with its \$75 billion investment in 88 startups worth \$69.6 billion at the end of March. The \$100 billion fund had already delivered two consecutive quarters of losses before being upended by the outbreak. — Reuters



Japan's SoftBank Group Corp Chief Executive Masayoshi Son attends a news conference in Tokyo, in this file photo. — Reuters

SPORTS

FORMER JUNIOR COACH LISTS STEPS TO DEVELOP STRONG TEAMS



ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: Senior national teams are the ambassadors of the country in any top sports events. Formation of strong sports teams comes after selecting the qualified, experienced and right members either for technical or administration staff.

Waleed al Kiyumi, former manager of national U-16 football team, said establishing a strong team involves several steps that choose the best players who can perform at the top level.

Coach Waleed told Oman Daily Observer that each sports association or committee should have proper communication channel between the board, general secretary and the national teams section. "The main role is for the national teams departments as they have to define a clear strategy on the mechanism work of the teams. However, the association can also estab-



lish a technical committee that comprised of academic, technical and qualified financial staff members. This committee can revise and support the work of the national teams department in selecting the qualified players, coaches and administration members for the teams based on certain written and practical examinations and evaluations. Then, the committee can raise the

best recommendations for the national teams to the board", he added.

Commenting on the role of financial experts, Al Kiyumi said the financial expert should prepare the suitable budget for the teams based on the approved financial fund from the board. "Technical and administration staff should work closely with the financial staff to define the requirements of teams for domestic camps, preparatory tournaments, overseas camps and participations at the events abroad", he explained.

PARIS: Novak Djokovic said he is confident he will end his career as the greatest Grand Slam title winner of all time and break the record for weeks in the world number one spot. The Serb has 17 majors, three back from the record of Roger Federer's 20 and two behind the 19 of Rafael Nadal.

Before the coronavirus brought the 2020 season to a halt, Djokovic had captured an eighth Australian Open and was on an 18-0 winning streak for the year.

"I think that I still have things to do in this sport. I believe that I can win the

Djokovic confident of ending career with top records



most Slams and break the record for most weeks at No 1. Those are definitely my clear goals", Djokovic told the 'In Depth with Graham Bensinger' TV show.

Djokovic has been on top of the rankings for a combined total of 282 weeks.

Federer leads the way on 310 with the long-retired Pete Sampras on 286.

However, time is comfortably on the side of Djokovic who will celebrate his 33rd birthday on May 22.

Federer will be 39 in August while Nadal turns 34 in June.

Djokovic even sees himself still playing at 40. — AFP



MCILROY, JOHNSON TRIUMPH IN TIE-BREAK

NEW YORK: A tie-break win for world number one Rory McIlroy and team-mate Dustin Johnson at the Driving Relief two-on-two charity skins match on Sunday injected suspense to a course absent of fans and applause in the COVID-19 era.

Wearing microphones that captured their smack talk and frustrations, caddy-less competitors McIlroy and Johnson faced off against Rickie Fowler and Matthew Wolff, carrying their own clubs and

CHARITY MATCH OFFERS ‘NORMALCY’ AS GOLF MAKES RETURN IN US

adhering to social distancing procedures after undergoing a battery of tests and screenings.

Eager golf fans tuned in for one of the rare few live televised events, and were treated to a bit of mild trash talk early on, as McIlroy

teased his 21-year-old opponent Wolff after sinking a putt for par four on the second hole. “I think you forget I’ve won two FedEx Cups that totalled at \$25 million” said McIlroy. “Doesn’t faze me, youngster”.

That bravado was eventually tempered, however, as Fowler’s seven birdies put pressure on the world number one and Johnson, the heavily favoured pair who boast five majors titles between them.

The competition came

down to a closest-to-the-hole tie-break, in which McIlroy clinched the victory despite an admirable 120-yard wedge shot from Wolff, letting out a whoop and offering his team-mate an “air-five”.

“These Seminole greens, the ball can do funny things when you think it’s in a good place”, said McIlroy, who basked in the “normalcy” of being back in competition.

“It’s been awesome and it’s nice to get back on the golf course”. — **Reuters**

SPORTS

Coronavirus will change way bowlers operate: Ishant



NEW DELHI: The world's top bowlers will likely have to change the way they go about getting swing and seam as a result of the coronavirus, Indian paceman Ishant Sharma said on Monday.

Bowlers traditionally get the ball to move in the air by applying shine to one side via sweat or saliva, but new regulations being considered to outlaw the practice will change the game, he told an online discussion.

There will be “no option” but to play by new rules when the sport resumes, said Ishant, who plays for Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League.

“I feel cricketers will have to get used to the new normal, whatever that is,” he said.

Last week the Australian Institute of Sport issued new guidelines expressly forbidding rubbing spit or sweat into the ball's surface as a condition for competitive cricket to resume.

That prompted former Australia captain Ian Chappell to suggest some form of ball-tampering be allowed.

“With cricket on hold, this is the ideal time to conduct the exercise,” Chappell said.

“Using saliva and perspiration are now seen as a health hazard, so bowlers require something to replace the traditional methods of shining the ball.”

All international cricket -- including cash-rich tournaments such as the IPL -- has been halted by the coronavirus, with no clear timetable for a resumption.

India has extended a nationwide coronavirus lockdown until May 31, but new rules starting on Monday allow stadiums to host events without spectators. — AFP

Markram stakes claim for SA Test captaincy

CAPE TOWN: Opening batsman Aiden Markram has said he would give an “arm and a leg” to captain South Africa in Tests but admits doubting his own ability during a difficult 12 months in the longer format.

Markram, 25, is considered one of the front-runners to take over the Test captaincy from Faf du Plessis when South Africa return to five-day action, and would likely have been a shoe-in if his form had not dipped so dramatically in the last year.

“It is just nice to be considered and I'd give an absolute arm and a leg to be able to do it, but in the same breath I don't want to become desperate about it,”

Markram said in an interview released by Cricket South Africa (CSA) on Monday.

“It's one of those things where if it were to happen it would be amazing. But if not, there are plenty of good leaders within the environment that will definitely take the team.”

Markram led South Africa to victory at the 2014 Cricket Under-19 World Cup, and had been tipped by current CSA director of cricket Graeme Smith as a future captain for the senior side.

“I really enjoy captaincy,” Markram said. “I enjoy the responsibilities that come with it. I have been able to watch from franchise captains to a guy like



Faf and it is just something that I would love to do.”

But Markram must first regain his starting place in the side. The opener averaged above 45 in his first 15 Tests, but in the next five managed only 183 runs at an average of 18.30.

He had a spell on the sidelines after injuring his hand when he struck a wall following a pair of ducks in India last year.

“I have certainly doubted myself and doubted my abilities,” Markram said. “At the top level, you're just a few bad knocks away from people wanting you out of the team. I doubted myself quite a bit this last year.”

— Reuters

SPORTS



Members of Kevin Harvick's team celebrate after winning the Nascar Cup Series auto race after winning the Real Heroes 400. — USA Today Sports

Harvick
collects
50th win

Nascar Cup
back on
Wednesday

Dead silent,
says
Harvick



Nascar returns to sound of silence

TORONTO: Kevin Harvick and Nascar both celebrated victories on Sunday as the stock car series returned to live racing from a two-month novel coronavirus forced hiatus at an empty Darlington Raceway.

While the day unfolded with none of the bells and whistles that have made Nascar North America's most popular motor sport, on the track the race delivered as promised with plenty of bumper-to-bumper action.

Harvick, winner of the 2007 Daytona 500, produced a masterful drive to pull away after a late restart to cross 2.15 seconds clear of Alex Bowman and Kurt Busch to collect his 50th career Cup win.

The 44-year-old driver celebrated his victory in what

has become typical Nascar fashion with some tire burning donuts that would normally spark a massive roar of approval from the stands but in this race there was no one to witness the show.

Not even the growl from 40 V8 stock car engines could make up for the silence as drivers exited the track to muffled applause from pit crews and officials.

"I didn't think it was going to be that much different and then we won the race and it is dead silent out here, so we miss the fans," said a bewildered Harvick, standing alone on the track. "It is weird just because there is nobody up there."

"Usually you get out of the car and the crowd is screaming and yelling... today it was like, well, I

don't know really what to do here. "We got done, everybody left."

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

For US sports fans the Real Heroes 400 was the highlight of a weekend that saw sport slowly come back to life after most events were shuttered mid-March by the COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed over 88,000 American lives.

As the NBA, NHL and MLB work through scenarios that could get them playing again, Nascar is ready to go -- Sunday's race the first of 20 taking place across seven Southern states over 36 days.

Nascar will be back at Darlington Raceway on Wednesday for the second Cup race in four days.

While the action on the track was familiar, everything else was uncharted.

Teams, each allowed 16 members, arrived in the morning at designated times and temperatures were screened before entering the infield. Only 900 essential personnel were approved to be inside the gates.

With limited crew members drivers were left to do some of the more mundane chores, such as filling water bottles and making lunch, that might have otherwise fallen to staff.

When called to the track, drivers, crews and officials wore face masks.

With no practice or qualifying places on the starting grid were set by a random draw with Brad Keselowski on pole. — Reuters