

SULTANATE-BAHRAIN ENJOY
HISTORICAL RELATIONS

Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Ka'abi, Bahrain's Ambassador to the Sultanate, has said that fraternal ties between the Sultanate and his country are deeply-rooted and date back to hundreds of years in history, since the ancient civilizations of Majan (Oman) and Dalmon (Bahrain). Dr Juma said that the wise leaderships of the two countries have enhanced cordial ties between the two peoples. **DETAILS ON P2**



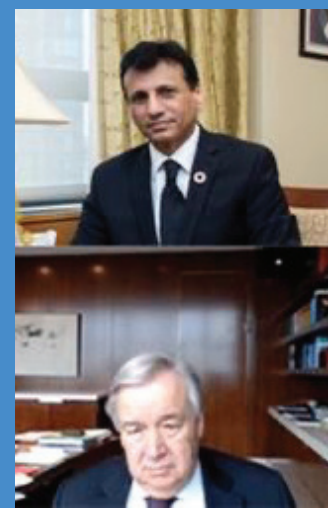
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ARAB TROIKA DISCUSSES PALESTINIAN
ISSUE WITH UN CHIEF



NEW YORK: The Sultanate's Representative to the United Nations, Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, in his capacity as Head of Arab Troika Group, on Wednesday headed a meeting between Arab Troika and the UN Secretary General António Guterres. The meeting discussed necessary measures and procedures to be taken to address the Israeli plans to annex parts of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967. The meeting comes within the context of efforts to resolve the issue under the leadership of the Sultanate, which also heads the current Arab League's Ministerial Council. — ONA

SCHOOLS TOLD TO ABIDE BY SUPREME
COMMITTEE'S DECISION

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education said that it has been noticed that some private schools have addressed parents regarding the continuation of online classes in violation of the Supreme Committee's decision on school year. This comes in view of the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic on Tuesday (May 5) on the end of the academic year 2019-2020 and setting May 7 as the last date of school year in public and private schools, pre-school education, bilingual schools, monolingual schools and international schools with the exception of community schools.

S P I K E I N C O V I D - 1 9 C A S E S

168 CASES ON A SINGLE DAY

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Oman had reported one of the largest single-day rise in COVID-19 as it registered 168 cases on Wednesday, taking the total to 2,903. While Wednesday's figures included 41 Omanis and 127 expatriates, it also saw 72 recoveries. With the death of a 67-year-old woman on Tuesday, for the first time, a COVID-19 death was reported outside Muscat Governorate. The deceased was from Suwaiq in North Al Batinah. In Muscat Governorate, Muttrah has 1,556 cases, including eight deaths and 380 recoveries, followed by Seeb with 260 cases and four deaths, Bausher with 215 cases and Amerat with 54 cases. Outside Muscat, South Al Batinah has 285 cases, South Al Sharqiyah 134 cases, North Al Batinah 135 cases, including one death, Al Dakhiliyah 127 cases, Al Dhahirah 51 cases and North Al Sharqiyah 36.



Meanwhile, the embassies of the United Kingdom and Germany have urged their nationals to take advantage of the special Oman Air flight on May 18. "If you are a British national and wish to take advantage of this flight, take action by May 13" said the UK Embassy in Oman. "Contact Tawfeeq of Oman Air at 95951000 (between 9 am to 2 pm daily). The cut-off date to register interest with Oman Air is May 13. If there is no sufficient interest, Oman Air will not operate the flight", the German Embassy said.

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OMAN

Dhofar sees only 17 COVID-19 cases, 10 recoveries



SALALAH: The Governorate of Dhofar has reported 17 confirmed cases of COVID-19 so far including 10 recoveries and 7 active cases currently under medical treatment.

The Directorate-General of Social Development in the governorate, represented by the Relief and Sheltering Sector, continue to impose preventive measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and oversee the quarantine facilities in Dhofar with 28 cases currently under health isolation.

Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, commended the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic to resume some commercial and industrial activities and to gradually restore normal life in the governorate, calling on companies and commercial stores in Dhofar to abide by preventive and safety measures.

Al Busaidy expressed his thanks and appreciation to the health workers, public and private establishments and to the citizens and residents of Dhofar Governorate for the efforts they are making to stem the spread of COVID-19.

The preliminary screening centres at the Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah is dealing with the suspected coronavirus cases by conducting tests and classifying the cases.

The centre also receives cases transferred from different

healthcare institutions.

The Molecular Pathology Laboratory at the Sultan Qaboos Hospital, Salalah, has recently initiated testing for viral and contagious diseases including COVID-19 without the need for sending samples to the central lab in Muscat.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Police Command in Dhofar Governorate, carries out continued efforts to enforce the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic through running police patrols all across the governorate to prevent public gathering and ensure compliance with the restrictive measures aimed to curb the spread of the virus.

The Directorate of Consumer Protection in coordination with relevant authorities is monitoring the markets to ensure the availability of sentential commodities. Besides, the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources has ramped up inspection campaigns on the markets to check for the safety of food commodities in line with the precautionary measures imposed by the relevant authorities to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Dhofar Municipality has intensified disinfection and spray campaigns at the markets, roads, public places, public facilities, government departments and health centres in Dhofar Governorate. — **ONA**

Oman, Bahrain ties date back to ancient civilisations

MUSCAT: Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Ka'abi, Kingdom of Bahrain's Ambassador to the Sultanate, has said that fraternal ties between the Sultanate and his country are deeply-rooted and date back to hundreds of years in history, since the ancient civilisations of Majan (Oman) and Dalmon (Bahrain).

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Juma added that the wise leaderships of the two countries have enhanced cordial ties between the two peoples.

Al Ka'abi pointed out that the two countries have identical visions and views about issues in the GCC, regional and international arenas. He explained that the two countries share a common policy based on principles of tolerance and dialogue between nations.

Speaking about commercial exchange, the Bahraini ambassador said that the two sides have upgraded their business ties and that a joint Omani-Bahraini firm is under foundation and that it will flag off investment activity, putting bilateral relations on track to scale new heights.

Al Ka'abi referred to a memorandum of understanding signed by Omani-Bahraini Committee during its meeting in September 2018, noting that the MoU covers cooperation between the two countries in many spheres, including environment, heritage and tourism. The joint committee was entrusted with devising a vision to upgrade cooperation in economic, social, political and developmental fields. — **ONA**



Initiative to provide medicines for needy in Muttrah

MUSCAT: Dar Al Atta'a Association, in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Private Health Establishments and pharmaceutical firms, has launched the Shifaa campaign aimed to provide life-saving medicines in the Wilayat of Muttrah, on Wednesday.

The campaign targets to provide medicines for citizens and residents infected with chronic diseases who have no medical insurance as well as those affected by the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

The initiative which comes as a humanitarian gesture aimed to mitigate the impact of lockdown imposed on Muttrah particularly targets to provide medicines for patients who have diabetes, hypertension heart disease.

Fleet of new boats to boost jobs, output in fisheries sector

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries signed two memoranda of cooperation with the Omani Fish Company and Sea Pride Company for Import and Export in order to create job opportunity for the Omani youths in fisheries sector and allow them to use advanced fishing boats up to their aspirations.

Through these agreements, three to six Omani fishermen will be employed on each of the boats owned by the companies, provided these fishermen have a permit to practice the fishing profession and have already passed the training programme for the same.

This comes as a part of the ministry's initiative launched in 2017, which was planned to see as many as 783 new artisanal, coastal and commercial fishing vessels being added to the nation's fishing fleet over the next four years. The objective is not only to help Omani job-seekers pursue rewarding livelihoods as fishermen, but also to build



the capability of the fisheries sector to achieve an aggregate output 1.3 million tonnes of fish products per annum by the year 2023.

Onboard accommodation, refrigerated storage rooms, and modern fish harvesting gear will be allowed for the vessels to remain out at sea for more than three days. Also envisaged is a plan to introduce 480 coastal fishing vessels designed to remain at sea for several

weeks at a time.

Having storage capacity of about 300 tonnes, these medium-sized vessels can discharge their harvests at any of the 23 harbours located along the coastline of the Sultanate.

The boats will be designed and built to specs spelt out by the ministry, notably in terms of their length, fishing and navigational capabilities, capacity, and on board fishing gear. Around

110 coastal vessels are currently in operation in the Sultanate.

Satellite communications will allow these vessels to stay connected with land or sea-based communications networks.

High-tech resource location hardware will enable the ship to pinpoint high-value fish species. Long-line fishing gear will also enable the targeting of tuna and other surface species.

Water levels rising in Wadi Dayqah dam after rains

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Wadi Dayqah dam in Qurayat witnessed an increase in the water level following rains in the Sultanate last week.

The water level at the dam rose from 32 million cubic metres to 90 million cubic metres, which meant that the dam needs only three metres to reach the level of the flood, equivalent to 13 million cubic metres of water.

As a result, the dam water gates have been opened to provide water to the neighbouring areas.

The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources has been regularly monitoring the level of



the dam water.

Wadi Dayqah is also one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country, especially at the time of the holidays and during rains.

Wadi Dayqah Dam is an

extension of the wadis of the North Sharqiyah Governorate, with a storage capacity of 100 million cubic metres and a height of 75 metres and a length of over 40 metres.

OMAN

Vimto safe to drink

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources (MRMWR) said in the statement that laboratory tests for a sample of Vimto beverage proved that it is safe for consumption.

The ministry was responding to reports that two types of Vimto beverages are available in the market (original and counterfeit ones.)

The ministry took some samples for laboratory tests, which proved that the drink meets quality standards approved in the Sultanate”, a statement said.

There were reports that some fake or counterfeit bottles contain additional colours that can adversely affect children, their concentration levels.

“Vimto food additives are not allowed to be used in food products unless evaluated by the



Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives, whose main task is to ensure that the quantities consumed of the substance do not exceed the acceptable levels and that it can be consumed daily without any risk to health”, the ministry said and denied any fake bottles were in circulation.

The ministry emphasised that the food companies are obligated to put a warning on the label when adding any of the following colours – E-numbers tartrazine (E102), quinoline yellow (E104), sunset yellow (E110), carmoisine (E122), ponceau 4R (E124) and Allura red (E129).

The warning should read, “It may have a negative impact on the activity and focus of children”. Such warning labels will help the consumer to make a decision on whether the product has to be bought or not.

Don't dump masks, gloves



AFP file picture for illustrative purpose only.

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Throwing masks and gloves, if contaminated, could spread coronavirus and have environmental hazards as well. Studies show that coronavirus can live on surfaces for days.

As more people across Oman wear personal protective equipment (PPE) in their daily lives, they're also littering it all over streets, sidewalks, parking lots, parks and premises of shops.

Many people have taken to the social media to voice their anger over tossing masks and gloves on the pavement and leaving it on shopping trolleys.

“Don't be thoughtless,” reads one tweet. “Don't leave your face masks and gloves in the shopping carts or parking slots,” says another.

Despite repeated appeals through different media platforms not to toss masks and gloves in the open, people do not bother to dispose them responsibly.

“Very often I find trolleys with used gloves left behind by shoppers. Till the parking area they wear the gloves and masks. After taking the shopping items from the trolleys, they leave the gloves in in them or throw them in the parking area,” said an employee at a leading hyper market in Muscat.

“Every day, I collect several discarded masks. Instead of safely putting them inside the trash bin, people throw them from the vehicles along with other waste.

Some simply drops used masks on the roads,” said sanitation worker in Ruwi.

Muscat Municipality has repeatedly urged citizens and residents to safely dispose PPE that include gloves, apron, face masks and eye protection materials.

According to an official at the sanitation department at the civic body, littering is an irresponsible behavior, which not only poses a risk to public safety but also harms the environment.

“Throwing used masks and gloves, if contaminated, could spread COVID-19. Of course, it is not a fine that should discourage people from doing so. They should understand that throwing used masks and gloves, especially if contaminated, is among the worst things you can do during this pandemic,” he said.

He said that carrying out preventive measures to curb the coronavirus is a shared responsibility of every member of the society.

“Don't leave them outside the garbage bin or any other place where people tread. You're are putting every one's health at risk,” he said.

However, he said that punitive measures including fines, applicable to littering, will be slapped on the violators. He explained that the correct way to safely discard a face mask is to place it in a plastic bag and then put it in a garbage bin.

“Don't forget to wash your hands after handling the used mask or any other PPE,” he said

Ramadan Iftar Program



RAMADAN MUBARAK



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 year1441 AH: AD 2020 through the following accounts :

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

National Bank of Oman
1 0 4 9 3 3 7 7 9 8 0 0 1

Ooredoo users cost 1 RO
Send **Donate** to **90909**

Bank Dhofar
0 1 0 4 0 6 0 9 0 9 0 0 1

Or donate via devices automated payment of a company " ONEIC "



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www.oco.org.om
charity@oco.org.om
24297961 24297960
OCOOM

OCO Headquarters : Muscat Governorate , Al Khuwair 33 , Street No. 47, next to Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque, or one of its branches :

South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate
28541087
Sur / Al-murda

North Al-Batinah Governorate
28884241
Sohar/Al-Hambar

Musandam Governorate
26731588
Khasab /Al-Shaebah

Dhofar Governorate
23234735
Salalah /Al-saada

Spammers now target repatriates



Reuters file picture for illustrative purpose only

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: With countries opening their airspace and airports to bring back their citizens from abroad, spammers are seemingly making the maximum out of the situation. These fraudsters are known to have calling the innocuous passengers posing either as embassy officials or airline representatives of their respective countries, asking them to part with vital information, like their passport number, resident card details and bank account number and finally the OTP (one time password) sent by the bank. When enquired, embassies of major communi-

ties here in Oman said they call their citizens to reconfirm their willingness to travel and to assess their fitness to travel. “We call people on the basis of their registration with us to confirm if they are okay to travel and to know if they are fit to travel. From the airlines’ side, they will be calling the potential passengers to sell the tickets and in any case no OTP is involved,” said Munu Mahawer, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. “We are yet to process documentation of sending back the citizens but things are getting ready. We will not be calling people to ask for their account number or OTP

in any case,” said MN Ameen, General Secretary of Bangladesh Social Club. Airline officials too declined of having asked the passengers of any OTP as they wouldn’t need them. “We call the passengers who are travelling on our May 9 flight or May 12 flight to book their tickets for the respective flight. In any case, we don’t need any other information including the OTP,” said an official of Air India Express. Social workers have embarked upon a campaign to educate and alert their people not to fall prey to such callers when they are preparing for their travel home.

Ticket issue begins for first flight to India

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: With the final list of applicants getting ready, Air India has started issuing tickets to enable Indian expats to travel in the first flight to Kochi on Saturday, May 9. “The first flight with 170 passengers aboard will take off from Muscat International Airport for Kochi on Saturday”, said a senior official at the Indian Embassy here on Wednesday. The first flight on May 9 will leave from Kochi at 1 pm and will arrive in Muscat at 3:15pm. The flight will fly back to Kochi with the selected passengers at 4:15 pm. The second flight will take off for Chennai at 12:25 pm on May 12. “Air India has already started distributing tickets to the passengers who have been allowed to travel on a priority basis”, he said. The prices of the tickets for both the destinations have been fixed at RO 71, it is learnt. The official said, “only passengers with confirmed tickets must proceed to the airport on Saturday for boarding the flight.” Meanwhile, a health protocol issued by the government of India to facilitate the travel, said that those who have been finalised for the repatriation will have to undergo mandatory medical screening and IGM/IGG tests before boarding the flight. “While tests for coronavirus will be conducted only after a compulsory 14-day institutional quarantine upon landing in India”, states the protocol.

At the same time all passengers will be required to sign an undertaking to undergo compulsory quarantine at the point of arrival and bear the cost for the same. On Tuesday evening, the embassy in a statement said that priority to travel is for people with medical emergency, pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as to other people who are stranded in difficult situations. Meanwhile, reports from the South Indian state of Kerala, where the first flight from the neighbouring UAE will land tomorrow at the Kochi airport, said that all arrangements have been put in place to receive the expatriates.

Special flight to bring back Omanis from Egypt

MUSCAT: The Sultanate’s Embassy in Cairo announced that it will run a special flight to fly home Omani citizens from Egypt via terminal 1 of Cairo International Airport. The Air Cairo flight will take off at 12 noon and check-in will start on 9 am on Thursday May 7, the embassy announced.

FLIGHT TO LONDON

Meanwhile, the embassies of the United Kingdom and Germany have urged their nationals to take advantage of the special Oman Air flight on May 18. “If you are a British national who wishes to take advantage of this flight, take action by May 13,” said the UK Embassy in Oman. “Contact: tawfeeq.ali@omanair.com +968 9595 1000 (between 9 am to 2 pm daily). The cut-off date to register interest with Oman Air is May 13. If there is not sufficient interest, Oman Air will not operate the flight,” the German Embassy in Oman said.

OMAN

Eligible donors urged to help replenish blood supply

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Can I donate blood during fasting is the most common question asked by the believers who wish to donate blood during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Yes, a believer can donate blood even if he is fasting during the day or after breaking the fast in the evening. Donating blood will not nullify his fast. However, he is at liberty to stop fasting when he is confronted with a situation where donating blood is necessitated to save a life, according to the Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman.

It is advisable, however, that he donates blood after breaking fast at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher and help support the national cause of blood donation.

"One can donate blood during his fast or after iftar and either of this will not nullify his fast. However, he is advised to donate



after iftar as the process would require him drink water. Nonetheless, he can either break his fast or continue and donate blood to a needy person if the situation warrants him so", said Shaikh Dr Kahlan al Kharusi, Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman.

He said this rule is equally applicable to people undergoing 'hijama' for some ailments.

"Those who are undergoing hijama can do so and it doesn't break their fast. Having said, it's strongly recommended that the treatment be taken

after iftar", adds Shaikh Dr Kahlan.

Blood transfusion, on the other hand, can invalidate the fast as an alien thing is entering the body revitalising himself and hence, the patient has to compensate for the day's fast later on.

Quoting the fatwa issued by various religious pundits, he said donating blood has been a great matter of confusion among many believers who were weary of donating blood in the holy month of Ramadhan.

"Actually, donating blood is a great deed as far as a believer is concerned. He or she

is taking part in a noble cause in the auspicious month".

With the COVID-19 standstill and subsequent arrival of the holy month, the blood reserve at the Bausher Blood Bank, the central blood bank of the country, has been shrinking and it is encouraged both for citizens and residents to come forward to donate blood.

"We would like to intensify our call for blood donation to reinforce the existing stock of blood to meet emergencies and needs from various healthcare facilities in the country. This is especially important

in the present circumstances where the number of donors has gone substantially low", a source at the Blood Services Department said.

One can visit the Centre between 7.30 pm and 11.30 pm to donate blood and be a part of the national campaign of blood donation.

"On the other hand, a non-Muslim, who doesn't apparently fast can visit the Blood Bank in the morning to donate blood", the official added.

The Central Blood Bank is encouraging those who don't fast to visit the Centre during the working hours which is, from 8 am till 1 pm and from 7.30 pm to 11.30 pm with an exception on Friday when the Bank is open in the evenings.

Last year, in order to encourage the habit of blood donation, the Central Blood Bank had organised two vehicles to visit residential areas near prominent mosques and collect blood from the potential donors after iftar.

RAFO CONDUCTS MEDICAL AIRLIFTS

MUSCAT: Royal Oman Air Force (Rafo) on Tuesday transported two sick citizens with their families to Dhofar Governorate after they finished the necessary treatment in the Governorate of Muscat, within the framework of the cooperation between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Health.

The patients were transferred from the



Musannah Airbase to the Salalah Air Force Base. A second Rafo aircraft

transported a sick citizen with his accompanying relatives from Sultan

Qaboos Hospital in Salalah to the Musannah Airbase and then transferred to the Royal Hospital.

One of the Rafo helicopters in Masirah also transported an Indian patient suffering from a critical health condition from Masarah Hospital in the South Sharqiyah to the Armed Forces Hospital in Muscat Governorate to receive the necessary treatment.



RESET, MOVE FORWARD



KABEER YOUSUF

In a world being fine-tuned with humans having the whole time for introspection, understanding the need to live in harmony with nature, to remember the Creator more often, what we need to do is to reset and move forward, according to Mufti Menk, a religious scholar from Zimbabwe.

He advises us to take this lockdown period positively as a period for ground study before we move to success both professionally and personally.

"A lot of people are upset that they are not able to go to mosques and complain that their morality and spirituality are down at a time when all mosques are closed for prayers", Mufti told Hatim Abdulsalam, a renowned orator in Oman.

But do we know that this unique month is different from all other months we lived on earth?

"All countries are facing the lockdown with entry into mosques being restricted. However, prayers are not restricted and one can pray at any clean place, preferably at homes".

He reminds us that Almighty Allah is testing our Iman if we would continue our prayers and taqwa even if we cannot go to the mosque because of restrictions. Are we fulfilling it in the best possible way given the circumstances?

"So, there are restrictions for mosques, but no restrictions for prayers, and do you fulfil your prayers in the house with your family? If you do fulfil, it fetches glad news for you; and if you don't, you are at loss".

"There are no restrictions for

tilawa (reciting Holy Quran), supplications, gaining knowledge, giving charity online, there's no restrictions to zikr, learning, no restrictions to worshipping Allah. And there are much more avenues to do all these nowadays. No matter what the circumstances over a mumin of Allah are He is always there for us".

A true believer will always praise Allah, more so in the holy month, he is thankful to Him and he will try to be closer to Him and fulfil his duties.

"During this difficulty, it is more important for us to get closer to Almighty Allah and reassure that we trust Him and we repose our hopes in Him. He is the only one who can take us out from these restrictions. Let's not waste the month for who knows if these are the last few days of our life on earth? We don't know, the virus that took the lives of people in few seconds gave no warnings. But let's remain thankful to Him and remain compassionate and dutiful to Him in this beautiful month of Ramadhan", Mufti urged.

He always believes that there is still room for improvement and we can do better.

"The best possible way to make use of the holy month during corona lockdown period is to learn more from the Holy Quran, and lead your family in the prayers at homes and take this time as an opportunity as this month is the most blessed and most benevolent month".

Sawm is the same Sawm, virtues of Ramadhan are the same and the Laylat-ul- qadr (the most powerful night) is the same and remember Allah is giving us another chance to prove our taqwa (piety).

13

Ramadhan

Thursday

7/5/2020

Prayer times

	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:07	04:13	04:38
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:33	03:35	03:34
MAGHRIB:	06:43	06:46	06:50
ISHA:	07:59	08:02	08:02

Ramadhan Mubarak

2020/1441 AH

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WORLD

Students in virus centre Wuhan return to school



Senior school students returned to class in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus that has now swept the globe first emerged late last year. — AFP

BEIJING: Chinese youngsters in the global virus epicentre of Wuhan filed back to class on Wednesday, wearing masks and walking in single file past thermal scanners. Senior school students in 121 institutions were back in front of chalk boards and digital displays for the first time since their city — the ground zero of the coronavirus pandemic — shut down in January. “School is finally reopening!” posted one user of Weibo, China’s Twitter-like short messaging platform. “This is the first time

that I’m so happy to go back to school, although I have to sit a monthly examination on the 8th”. Teenagers sat at individual desks spaced a metre (3.3 feet) apart, seeing their teachers in the flesh after months of distance learning. Wednesday’s back-to-school was the latest step in a gradual normalising of life in Wuhan and surrounding Hubei province. The city, where the coronavirus appeared late last year before spreading around the world, was locked down for 76 days and only reo-

pened last month. Only the province’s oldest students were present on Wednesday — vocational students and seniors who are due to take the make-or-break university entrance exams. Return dates have generally not been confirmed for junior and middle school students, although some localities have allowed their return as well. Officials in Wuhan say students and staff must all have had virus tests before going back to school, and campuses have been disinfected and cleaned. — AFP

India to supply Europe with 1,000 tonnes of paracetamol API

NEW DELHI: India will supply Europe with about 1,000 tonnes of the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) for common pain reliever paracetamol, a top exports body said, easing export controls on over-the counter medicines used to cope with COVID-19 symptoms. The Indian government in March put a hold on exports of several drugs including paracetamol to secure supplies for its people after the coronavirus outbreak disrupted the industry’s supply chain globally. COVID-19 is the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Europe has sought up to 800 tonnes of paracetamol APIs every month, said Dinesh Dua, Chairman of the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil). “We have been under immense pressure from the European Union for the last 10 days”, Dua said. The European Union delegation in India did not immediately reply to an email from Reuters requesting comment on the planned shipment. Indian authorities have asked drugmakers to ensure the country is adequately stocked for up to four months of domestic requirements, Dua said. — Reuters

From Mission Impossible to Mission Control

HOUSTON: The “Top Gun” star will fly through the stratosphere to shoot an as-yet-unknown film aboard the International Space Station (ISS), Nasa said. The American space agency’s Director Jim Bridenstine confirmed the news on Twitter, saying he was excited that the move

would “inspire a new generation of engineers and scientists” to work on space travel. Cruise, 56, famously still does his own cliff-hanging, car-rolling stunts. He gained his commercial piloting licence after his role in Top Gun as Pete “Maverick” Mitchell, a hot-shot US Navy pilot who has



Tom Cruise will shoot the film aboard the International Space Station.

a dangerous and reckless flying style and reportedly flew some aircraft in the long-awaited sequel to the 1986 classic due later this year. But if his latest daring project goes ahead, Cruise will be the first Hollywood A-lister to appear onscreen from outside the planet’s atmosphere. — AFP

ANALYSIS

CAN CONTACT TRACING DELIVER ON ITS PROMISE IN BATTLE?



UMBERTO BACCHI

As countries around the world ease the lockdowns that have been crippling their economies, the race is on to develop smartphone apps to help contain the spread of the novel coronavirus when people are no longer confined to their homes. Scientists say contact tracing is key to prevent a resurgence of the virus, by tracking down infected people and finding everyone who has been near them, so they can get tested or quarantined. On Tuesday, Britain started testing its own COVID-19 tracing app on the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England. It joins Australia, Israel, Singapore and other nations in rolling out such tools. But the tech race has raised privacy and accuracy concerns among rights groups and technology experts. And the question of whether

the apps can deliver on their promise is a matter of debate, with researchers warning that mobile phones are no silver bullet against COVID-19. "A mobile app alone is not enough," said Thomas Hardjono, chief technology officer for the Connection Science programme at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which has built its own app. Further research to better understand the virus and consistent testing efforts would be needed to complement any contact tracing app, he said. "It needs to be part of a bigger effort." Worldwide, about 3.6 million people have been infected by the respiratory disease and more than 250,000 have died, according to a Reuters tally. Contact tracing has been used for decades to control the spread of infectious diseases and is normally carried out by public health investigators who interview patients to find out who they have met and where they have been in the previous days. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

Protecting the interests of the employer and the employees



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There is a widespread debate going on regarding the proposed amendment in Article 11 of the Residence Law. This indicates that government is seriously thinking about abrogation of the no-objection certificate rule. This is part of the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to develop the employment sector and take it to world level to meet the requirements of international laws, treaties and agreements which guarantee the rights and dignity of human being. The government may likely introduce contract system as an alternative, to protect the rights of both the employers and the employees under certain terms and conditions which will regulate their relations and protect their rights. This is also expected to have a clause that if an employee wants to move to another employer without any need of a no-objection certificate, he or she would not be harming the interests of the existing employers, companies and institutions. This would mean that several international and humanitarian factors and reasons will be considered while doing this. It will protect the Sultanate's reputation at the human rights forums and its record in other organisations concerned. It is extremely important for us to find an alternative which addresses the apprehensions and concerns of both the sides — employers and employees.

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FEATURES



No stage, no problem

Russian ballet dancers perform in kitchens for online fans

GABRIELLE TÉTRAULT-FARBER

Russian ballet dancers on partial lock-down have begun giving performances at home to keep fans engaged online after theatres across the country closed their doors due to the coronavirus.

Seven dancers from the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St Petersburg, one of Russia's most prominent troupes, have been filming spins in their kitchens, lifts in their living rooms and plies as they sweep the floor.

They have compiled their moves into a short but entertaining video.

Set to music by composer Ludwig Minkus, the three-minute video, shared on the theatre's social media pages on Sunday, has garnered nearly 30,000 views on Instagram and more than 550 comments on Facebook.

"Artists remain true to themselves even in the current unusual conditions," the Mikhailovsky Theatre said. "While they do not have the opportunity to interact with spectators at the theatre, the interior of their homes serves as a stage

and creative platform for them."

The theatre said the initiative had come from principal dancer Ivan Vasilyev, who in the video is seen lifting ballerina Maria Vinogradova across a living room as she carries a casserole.

The final seconds of the performance include bows, applause and bouquets, like a live show.

Other Russian theatres have undertaken similar initiatives as they remain closed to the public.

Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, whose director told the Kommersant newspaper last Thursday

he feared for its survival if it didn't restart performances in September, has begun streaming some of its most notable past performances online.

And an opera and ballet theatre in Perm, an industrial city east of the capital, is allowing only one spectator to physically watch its performances, which it broadcasts to everyone else on the Internet.

Russia on Thursday reported a record daily rise of 1,459 new cases of coronavirus, pushing its national total to 10,131. Seventy-six people have died from the virus, authorities said. — **Reuters**

A summer's super fruit

RUQAYA AL KINDI

Everyone seems to love juicy watermelon during summer. It is a kind of food that is high in antioxidants and amino acids and allows our body to function optimally. Watermelon is mostly water — about 92 per cent — but refreshing and soaked with nutrients.

The countries famous for cultivating watermelon are China, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, the United States of America, Tunisia, India, Romania, Spain, Egypt, Algeria and Yemen. Oman has humble yet successful attempts at growing watermelon and the product is abundant for local consumption.

“Farmers should provide seeds, sandy soil, water and organic fertilizer when planting it,” said Mohammed bin Hamoud al Jabri from Al Mudhaibi, who has enough experience at farming. Mohammed has been practicing the seasonal cultivation as a profession for about 40 years, and now he uses state-of-art methods and tools for farming.

Farmers who want to have abundant and high quality production should pay attention to many things. “It is preferable to plant it in yellow sandy soil, because it is suitable for drainage and ventilation, and it is preferable to cultivate the watermelon in an open area for easy growth and extension,” he explained.

“The cultivation of watermelon begins by choosing the right place in terms of climate as well as soil’s type that should be devoid of pests,” he said. Farmers, then, choose suitable seeds. “I pick the right seeds to use based on my accumulated experience over the years of work,” he shared.

“Workers help me to prepare the soil for planting 3-4 weeks before planting the seeds. They



take care of plowing the land to provoke the natural elements naturally,” he added.

“We prepare suitable holes for planting the seeds. We feel joyful while digging the pits with a certain depth, and with a certain distance between them in order to give each seed a space when it grows and extends in a smooth manner,” he said. “And this is also very important during the harvesting season, where workers find it easy to harvest,” he added.

It is regular, as

Mohammad indicated, to cover the production lines with white cover for 40 days of cultivation during the cold season and 30 days during the hot season. This is to protect from wind, pests and sunlight.

The farmers remove the cover when the flowers grow because they must be pollinated for the growth of the fruit, “So bees and butterflies should be left without disturbing them in order to pollinate the plant,” he said.

During this period, the farmer must visit the fields regularly and closely

follow-up to reassure that the growth is proceeding. The farmer should ensure that there are no obstacles that could hinder the growth like shortage of water or other elements. This is because a slight negligence or a small mistake may lead to unforeseen effects.

When harvesting watermelon, Mohammed makes sure that it is ripe by several steps. He hits the watermelon with tips of his fingers, and if the sound is hollow then it is ripe. He also checks the colour of the base, which is the side on which the watermelon grew, where the ripe watermelon is yellowish, and the immature fruit’s colour is white.

Watermelon is grown in the winter and summer. “Planting in the summer is better because the duration of its cultivation until its harvest lasts for 75 days, while in the winter 90 days”. There is, as well, a great demand in summer because it contains a large percentage of water to compensate for the shortage of water the body loses.

After the journey of harvesting, collection and shipping begin to the Al Mawelah Central Market. “Many things determine the price of watermelon, the most important of which is the quality of the product, including the size, appearance, and delicious sugary taste,” he said.

Mohammed is satisfied with supplying the local market with watermelon, but he is also working on exporting it to markets outside Oman.

He is looking for expanding exports to neighboring Gulf countries in the coming years alongside our local market.

America, Tunisia, India, Romania, Spain, Egypt, Algeria and Yemen. Oman has humble yet successful attempts at growing watermelon and the product is abundant for the local consumption.

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Pandemic impacts Q1 net earnings of Oman's fuel marketing firms



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's three principal fuel marketing companies reported a dramatic decline in their net earnings for the first quarter of this year, attributable largely to the effects of a burgeoning economic downturn slump as well as to a general lockdown ordered by authorities with the aim of curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Shell Oman Marketing Company's (SOMC) net profit after tax for the quarter ended March 31, 2020, dived 93 per cent to RO 0.122 million, down from RO 1.775 million for the corresponding period in 2019, the company said in initial unaudited financial results published

LOWER PROFITS:
Burgeoning economic downturn, coupled with pandemic mitigation restrictions, dent revenues

last month.

Revenues dipped 2.2 per cent to RO 117.9 million this year, down from RO 120.5 million for Q1 2019.

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO), the biggest of the trio by market share, reported a 46.7 per cent decrease in net profit after tax to RO 602K this past quarter, down from RO 1.130 million for the corresponding quarter of 2019.

Total revenue of the group was lower by 6.8 per cent at RO 131.752 million in Q1 this year versus, RO 141.390 million for Q1 2019.

Rounding off the list, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co announced a steep 86 per cent fall in net profit after tax for the first quarter at RO 137K, down from RO

980K in Q1 2019.

Revenue for the quarter also declined 10 per cent to RO 100.459 million, down from RO 111.938 million for the corresponding quarter of 2019.

According to experts, the impacts are expected to be much more pronounced in the current second quarter following the adoption of full-blown pandemic mitigation measures, which have resulted in the curtailment of most local and international flights, while vehicular traffic has been reduced to a minimum.

Motor and aviation fuels are mainstay revenue sources for fuel marketing firms in the Sultanate.

Caring for Communities

The outbreak of COVID-19 is a global concern with effects filtering down to local communities. The Board Of Directors of Ad Dhahirah Generating Company SAOG reiterated its commitment in helping the wider local community to deal with the current unprecedented medical and economic crisis caused by COVID-19 and has approved to contribute its budgeted Corporate Social Responsibility amount and support the steps taken by Supreme Committee of the Sultanate in dealing with Covid-19 developments.

Ad Dhahirah Generating Company SAOG is the project company for 1509MW Ibri Independent Power Plant located in Ibri and the plant operations continue to meet the energy requirements of the country.

BUSINESS

‘Keeping oil in the ground is the best form of storage’: Tethys Oil



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT:With global crude storage capacity overwhelmed by an unprecedented glut in supply, the wisdom of leaving crude oil in the ground for now – as part of a global production cut by Oman and fellow signatories of the Opec+ alliance of producers -- has been lauded by upstream energy firm Tethys Oil.

The Swedish-based Oil & Gas company, which has a sizable portfolio of operated and non-operated assets in Oman's upstream sector, has welcomed efforts by non-Opec member Oman and its alliance partners peers to cut output in an effort to shore up flagging international oil prices.

Tethys Oil has a 30 per cent interest in non-operated Blocks 3&4 onshore Oman, output from which has been reduced with effect from May 1, 2020 in line with curtailments agreed by the Sultanate last month

as part of the landmark global production cut. Other oil producers in the Sultanate too are adhering to a roughly 23 per cent cut in their respective outputs.

Putting a positive spin on the development, Tethys Oil's Managing Director Magnus Nordin (pictured) said the production cut was



CHEAPEST STORAGE: Swedish upstream energy firm lauds wisdom of global production cut amid a severe shortage of crude storage capacity

an opportunity for producers to address a major challenge faced by the global energy industry: a world awash with surplus crude amid a severe dearth of available storage capacity. Leaving it in the ground affords the cheapest form of storage, he noted.

"Our host country, the Sultanate of Oman, has

joined up with a number of oil producing countries, Opec+, to help stabilise prices by limiting production.

The operator of Blocks 3&4 has informed us that we should expect production to be capped at a level equivalent to 30 percent below the first quarter 2020 average, for the remainder of the year.

Despite these cuts and the drop in oil prices we remain confident that thanks to our strong result in the first quarter and ongoing cost savings, operations from Blocks 3&4 will be cash flow neutral on a full year basis in 2020.

And of course, no oil is lost through the production limitations. We are simply keeping it in the ground, the cheapest form of storage, in order to produce and sell it at higher prices in a, hopefully, not too distant future," Nordin remarked in a letter to shareholders on Tuesday.

OTC supports remote learning



MUSCAT: Due to the current health situation and the suspension of educational institutions, Oman Tourism College (OTC) recently organised training sessions for its faculty members.

This initiative is also part of the college's efforts to introduce a curriculum more focused on remote-learning. Commenting on the importance of the training sessions, Dr Abdulkarim Sultan al Mughairi, Dean of OTC, said, "At OTC, the health of all our staff and students is the highest priority. We believe that the decisions by the Supreme Committee was necessary to mitigate the spread of the pandemic.

However, despite this, the education of our students' should not be delayed. Therefore, we have decided to adapt a new method of teaching, which involves the use of technology, to be able to provide our students with the opportunity to gain requisite knowledge from the comfort of their home."

HSBC Bank Oman appoints new CEO

MUSCAT:HSBC Bank Oman SAOG has announced the appointment of Melika Betley (pictured) as Chief Executive Officer with effect from July 1, 2020, subject to regulatory approvals, succeeding Andrew Long.



Melika has been with HSBC for 20 years, and brings to the role substantial international banking experience from the Middle East and the United Kingdom.

"I am delighted to be joining HSBC Bank Oman as CEO. HSBC has supported the economic and social development of the Sultanate for more than 70 years, and I look forward to building on that heritage and to helping our customers achieve their ambitions for the future," Melika said.

Melika joins HSBC Bank Oman from HSBC Bahrain, where she has served as CEO since April 2017. Before Bahrain, Melika held a number of senior positions with HSBC in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey (MENAT) region, including Regional Head of Legal and Compliance, in a career that has covered all lines of business, as well as operations and technology.



Wattayah Motors reopens service centres

MUSCAT: In line with the decisions of the Supreme Committee for dealing with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Wattayah Motors, the official distributor of Volkswagen and Audi vehicles in the Sultanate, announced the reopening of all its service centres in order to meet service requests from its customer base throughout the Sultanate.

Commenting on the facilities implemented for the reopening, David Ryan, General Manager of Wattayah Motors, said, "Our service centres have been closed during the last few weeks to reduce the spread of the virus.

With the decision of the Supreme Committee to reopen, we are now ready to receive and execute all service requests, while simultaneously maintaining high standards of safety. Our team is well-trained to deal with the current situation and the implementation of our new procedures will enhance health levels at all of our facilities." Audi and Volkswagen customers can now pre-book for vehicle service online through the new digital platform or via the Zubair Automotive application.

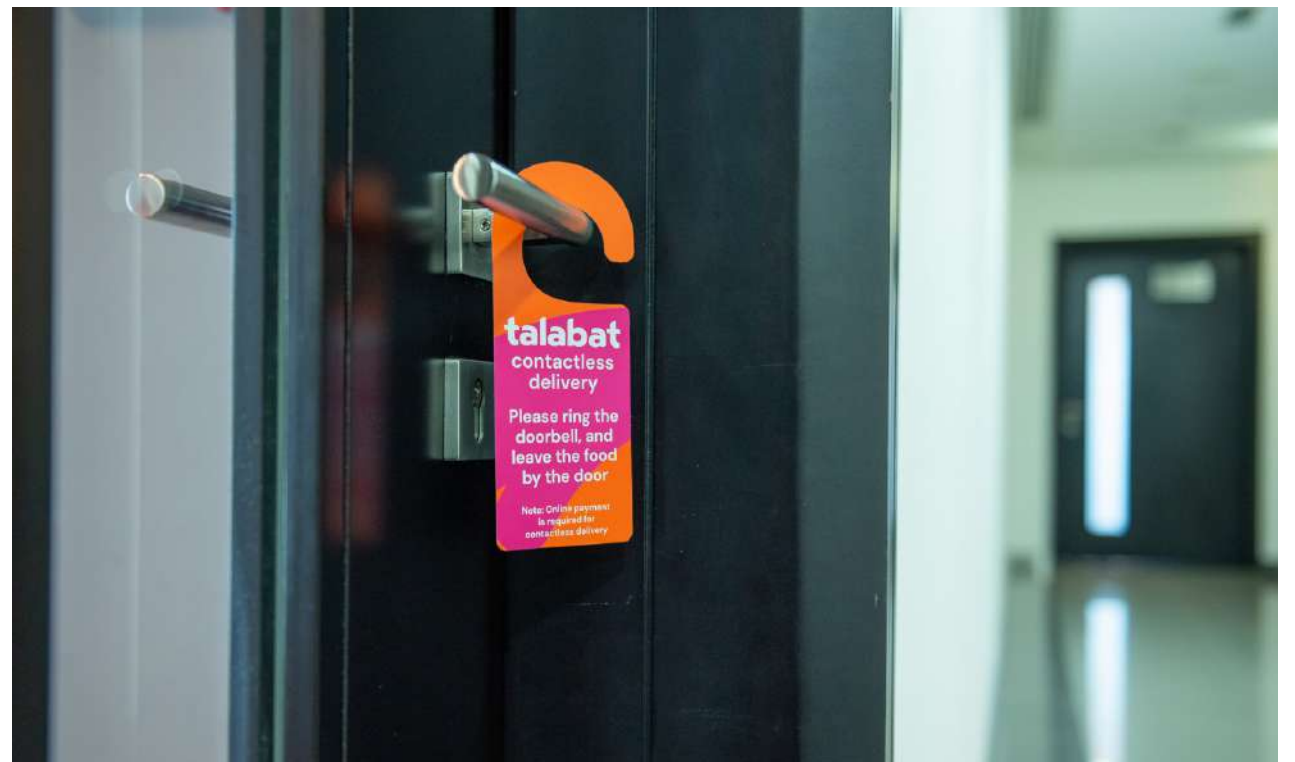
Moreover, customers can select the external service, which will allow the Wattayah team members to pick up and drop off the vehicle at the customer's destination of choice, post-service, at no extra charge.

Leading platform embraces contactless delivery measures

MUSCAT: Talabat, the region's leading food delivery platform, announced on Wednesday that it is adopting contactless delivery measures to protect the residents and citizens of the Sultanate of Oman. These initiatives have been developed to ensure the safety of our customers, riders and restaurant partners, the company said in a press statement.

These steps include location-based free delivery, to make sure that people are staying safely at home, as well as contactless delivery, which Talabat has implemented since the initial COVID-19 outbreak, for anyone placing and paying for orders online.

Tatiana Rahal, Managing Director Talabat Oman, said the safety measures underpin Talabat's commitment to the safety of customers, riders and restaurant partners. "At Talabat, safety is our top priority, which is why we have taken these important measures, while continuing to align with Ministry of Health



guidelines, to protect our ecosystem. At the same time, ensuring business continuity for our restaurant partners business is important too. By leveraging our technology, we're encouraging our customers to order from nearby restaurant partners who have seen dine-in rates dry up."

Using Talabat's in-app location-based technology, customers are able to choose free delivery from a multitude of different restaurants and cuisines nearby. This facilitates customers order-

ing from nearby restaurants, supporting their local communities during these challenging times.

When the rider arrives, the rider will ring the doorbell or contact the customer, place the order by the customer's front door on top of the delivery bag, and move a safe distance. The rider will then wait for the customer to pick up the food, before departing for their next delivery.

Consumers can download the Talabat app for Android from Google Play or IOS on the Apple App Store.

Lulu Group donates RO 100,000 to MoH

MUSCAT: To support the Ministry of Health (MoH) in its efforts to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Lulu Group International has announced a donation of RO 100,000 to the Ministry's dedicated account.

Highlighting the importance of this contribution, a spokesperson for Lulu Hypermarkets said, "This step is in line with our comprehensive plan to support the government's endeavors and to enhance the participation of the private sector.

Ever since the onset of the pandemic, Lulu Group has taken several steps to contribute

to mitigating the impact of the virus on the economy and society.

"We would also like to reiterate our appreciation to all government entities and healthcare workers, for their relentless pursuit in keeping the citizens and residents of Oman, safe and healthy.

We also ensure to follow the measures and guidelines set by the Supreme Committee for Dealing with COVID-19 and the Ministry, to maintain the highest safety standards for Lulu hypermarket customers and employees," the spokesperson added.



BUSINESS

Oil rises above \$31/barrel as lockdown easings counter supply glut

LONDON: Oil rose above \$31 a barrel on Wednesday as hopes for a recovery in demand as some countries ease coronavirus lockdowns offset a report showing a higher-than-expected rise in US inventories.

Brent crude has almost doubled since hitting a 21-year low reached on April 22, supported by expectations demand will recover and by a record supply cut led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Brent was up 79 cents, or 2.6 per cent, at \$31.76 a barrel at 0930 GMT, having risen in the past six sessions. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude added 88 cents, or 3.6 per cent, to \$25.44.

"Clearly, the optimism of the re-opening of the global economy has supported the oil rally," said Naeem Aslam, analyst at Avatrade.

But in a reminder that a supply glut persists, the American Petroleum Institute said on Tuesday that US crude inventories



Crude oil storage tanks are seen in an aerial photograph at the Cushing oil hub in Cushing, Oklahoma. — Reuters

rose by 8.4 million barrels last week, more than analysts expected.

"We're talking about normalisation of supply and demand but we've got a long way to go," said Lachlan Shaw, National Australia Bank's head of commodity strategy.

Italy, Spain, Nigeria and India, as well as some US states began allowing some people to go back to work and opened up construction sites, parks and libraries.

Germany's federal government and 16 states have agreed on ways to ease the lockdown.

The easing of lockdowns should lead to a recovery in global oil demand, which in April was expected to collapse by at least 20 per cent, an unprecedented drop, as governments told people to stay at home.

To tackle the resulting glut, Opec and its allies agreed to a record oil output cut of 9.7 million barrels per day, about 10 per cent of pre-coronavirus demand. That reduction began on May 1.

For now though, soaring inventories are a reminder of excess supply lingering in the market.

Traders will be looking for confirmation of the API's inventory report when the official US government figures from the Energy Information Administration come out later on Wednesday. "We would tend to agree that the market has bottomed out, but would caution against getting overly excited about this," said analysts at JBC Energy. "The data trundling in for April really is shockingly bad." — Reuters

Al Mouj Muscat's Marsa Plaza honours frontline workers

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's leading Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) and a public-private venture between the UAE-based Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Omran and Tanmia, took part in the global #LightItBlue campaign, a tribute in which landmarks are lit to honour the efforts of frontline caregivers, first responders and essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marsa Plaza, the first public square in Muscat and the cultural and entertainment destination at Al Mouj



Muscat, displayed blue lights for a period of 10 days. This initiative acted as a token of appreciation to individuals including the healthcare staff, government workers and the Royal Oman Police departments who have been integral in tackling the COVID-19 situation.

NBO offers relief packages to retail customers

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) and its Islamic Banking Window, Muzn are offering several options for deferments on financing facilities as part of their efforts to help customers who are impacted by the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Committed to stand by the people of Oman, the bank is providing customers who are navigating the current circumstances, whether they have been directly or indirectly affected by the pandemic with a financial aid package covering all retail loans / Islamic housing finance that includes a 3-month deferment or a 3-month waiver. The bank also gave those who opted for the Eid deferment an early deferral in order to ease the added financial pressure in April.



BUSINESS

US trade deficit widens, services sector contracts amid coronavirus

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit increased by the most in more than a year in March as a record drop in exports offset a shrinking import bill, suggesting the novel coronavirus outbreak was upending the global flow of goods and services.

Other data on Tuesday showed the tough measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus, pushed the nation's vast services sector into contraction in April for the first time in nearly 10-1/2-years.

The reports were the latest indication that the economy was sinking deeper into recession and that a sharp rebound was unlikely even as parts of the United States started to reopen.

"Trade between locked-down countries all over the globe will continue to falter in what looks like a second Great Depression and it could be years before the globalization trend reasserts itself as the world grows more cautious during this unprecedented health crisis," said Chris



Sea gulls sit on a lamppost beside shipping containers stacked at the Paul W Conley Container Terminal in Boston, Massachusetts. — Reuters

Rupkey, chief economist at MUFG in New York.

The Commerce Department said the trade deficit jumped 11.6 per cent, the largest rise since December 2018, to \$44.4 billion. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the trade gap increasing to \$44.0 billion in March.

Global lockdowns have severely disrupted supply chains and also weighed on demand for goods and ser-

vices, shrinking economic output.

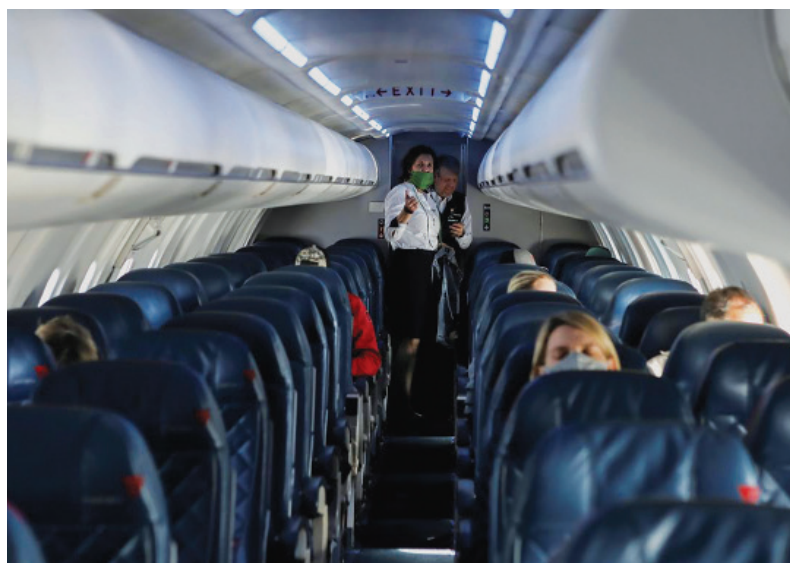
In the United States gross domestic product declined at a 4.8 per cent annualized rate in the first quarter, the steepest pace of contraction in output since the fourth quarter of 2008. Economists believe the economy entered recession in the second half of March when the social distancing measures took effect.

The National Bureau of Economic Research, the private research institute regarded as the arbiter of US recessions, does not define a recession as two consecutive quarters of decline in real GDP, as is the rule of thumb in many countries.

Instead, it looks for a drop in activity, spread across the economy and lasting more than a few months.

— Reuters

US airlines burn through \$10 bn a month as traffic plummets



Flight attendants talk in a nearly empty cabin on a Delta Airlines flight during a flight departing from Salt Lake City, Utah. — Reuters

NEW YORK: US airlines are collectively burning more than \$10 billion in cash a month and averaging fewer

than two dozen passengers per domestic flight because of the coronavirus pandemic, industry trade group Airlines for America said in prepared testimony seen by Reuters ahead of a US Senate hearing on Wednesday.

Even after grounding more than 3,000 aircraft, or nearly 50 per cent of the active US fleet, the group said its member carriers, which include the four largest US airlines, were averaging just 17 passengers per domestic flight and 29 passengers per international flight.

"The US airline industry will emerge from this crisis a mere shadow of what it was just three short months ago," the group's chief executive, Nicholas Calio, will say, according to

his prepared testimony.

Net booked passengers have fallen by nearly 100 per cent year-on-year, according to the testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee.

The group warned that if air carriers were to refund all tickets, including those purchased as nonrefundable or those canceled by a passenger instead of the carrier, "this will result in negative cash balances that will lead to bankruptcy."

Separately, Eric Fanning, who heads the Aerospace Industries Association, will ask Congress to consider providing "temporary and targeted assistance for the ailing aviation manufacturing sector," in testimony made public by the group. — Reuters

SPORTS



OMAN VOLLEYBALL STRATEGY NEEDS MODIFICATION

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: Volleyball in Oman moved into different stages of development since establishment of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) in the Sultanate on September 14, 1985 based on the ministerial decision of 59/85. Before the formation of the association, volleyball was part of Ministry of Sports and had become member of associations in the International volleyball Federation in 1978, Asian Volleyball Federation in 1975 and the Arab Volleyball Federation in 1980.

National volleyball teams took part in different regional and continental events. Oman national volleyball team won the bronze medal with a third place at the Arab Volleyball Championship in Egypt in 2018 besides to some creditable achievements of the beach volleyball teams.

Experienced national volleyball coach Shihab Aldin Ahmed al Riyami recently released a book titled 'An Investigation into the Challenges of Volleyball in Oman'. The book includes

chapters that describe the main challenges for the development of volleyball in Oman.

Coach Shihab Aldin al Riyami said the book featured detailed study with many questionnaires and interviews with volleyball specialists in an effort to trace their athletic, coaching and administration background in the development of volleyball.

"The book has eight chapters namely: An overview of Oman's government in sports, An overview of Oman's strategy in volleyball, The coach education programme in Oman, The media's role in sport, sponsorship and publicity for volleyball in Oman, The level of the volleyball game in Oman and comparison between volleyball in Oman and other countries," he added.

Commenting to Oman



Daily Observer about the main issues faced by the Oman volleyball, Shihab al Riyami said: "In the book, I have listed the significant points including sports policies, the Coach Education Programme, media in sport, the level and quality of referees and officials. I have explored the experience of 14 participants in the questionnaire and interviews. The participants have explained the challenges a good plan is proposed for the future of the game."

After the analysis of the statistics from all the questionnaires and interviews, Al Riyami came to the main conclusions.

"Oman's geographic location has supported young people in performing beach sports games such as football and volleyball. Oman's strategy in volleyball needs modification and development such as volleyball in Oman require fundamental restructuring in schools,

sports training and clubs. Also, the plan is ambiguous because of the qualifications of OVA members and officials. Currently, Oman's volleyball coaches are unqualified. They require a suitable Volleyball Coaching Programme. Providing a good budget is an essential factor to improve the standard of volleyball in the country."

Shihab says the output of this research has led to a greater understanding of the challenges facing the development of volleyball in Oman. Furthermore, suggestions to improve this sport, nationally and internationally, have been proposed.

Shihab Aldin, who is studying for PhD degree, has wide sports experience in volleyball which covers more than 15 years of training from the Sultan Qaboos University. He has 10 years' experience in the field as he was the head of coaching and administration staff for the University team, the clubs first division, the military team and for international teams was a great advantage.

SPORTS

ATP merger won't be 'acquisition': WTA

MUMBAI: Women's Tennis Association (WTA) chief Steve Simon has said a merger with the men's ATP "makes all the sense in the world" but that it would not take the form of "an acquisition".

The tennis season was suspended in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the hiatus will continue at least until mid-July, depriving lower-level players who depend solely on tournament winnings of the chance to earn a living.

Roger Federer called for a merger between the two governing bodies last month, with both Simon and ATP Tour Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi welcoming the suggestion.

But some top WTA players have said they want an equal standing for the women players in a combined body.

"It's not an acquisition", WTA Chief Executive Simon told the New York Times. "This isn't about either tour taking territory."

"Right now we compete against ourselves as well as all the other leagues and entertainment properties. We compete for fans, partners, sponsorships as well as broadcast and data, so the alignment allows you to aggregate assets".

As many as seven associations run different parts of the sport in the world. Besides the ATP and the WTA Tours, tennis is also controlled by the International

Tennis Federation and the boards of the four Grand Slam tournaments. Currently viewers need different pay-TV platforms to watch tennis matches and a merger of the Tours could simplify television contracts and sponsorship deals. The men's and women's players have a separate ranking system while some rules, including on-court coaching, are also different.

"I'm not afraid of the full merger; I never have been", Simon said. "I would certainly be the first to support it, because I think then you truly have the business and the strategic principles all aligned, which is what you need to do. — Reuters



Steve Simon, CEO of WTA.



Tennis sets up virus player fund, raises \$6m

PARIS: A fund for tennis players hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic has been created, the sport's governing bodies announced on Tuesday, adding that they had contributed more than \$6 million (5.3 million euros).

In a joint statement, the ATP



Dominic Thiem

and WTA tours, the International Tennis Federation and the four Grand Slam tournaments — the Australian Open, Roland-Garros, Wimbledon and the US Open — said the Player Relief Programme will support those "who are facing unprecedented challenges due to the global impact of COVID-19". With the tennis season suspended until at least July 13, some "800 ATP/WTA singles and doubles players" are in need of financial support, the statement continued, with eligibility for the fund determined by a player's ranking and previous prize money earnings.

The fund can also be donated to via initiatives including auctions, player donations and

virtual tennis games, added the governing bodies, who last month announced talks about creating the programme.

The virus has caused havoc to the calendar, with Wimbledon cancelled for the first time since World War II and the French Open postponed until the end of September. The United States Tennis Association will decide in mid-June whether or not the US Open will take place in New York.

However despite the financial difficulties facing hundreds of players, the idea of a relief fund was dismissed by world number three Dominic Thiem, who said last month he would not give lower-ranked players his money. — AFP

KALOU HANDSHAKE VIDEO ‘SHOCKED’ GERMAN POLITICIANS

BERLIN: A video of Hertha Berlin forward Salomon Kalou shaking hands with his team-mates “shocked” key German politicians, who are set to decide on Wednesday whether the Bundesliga can resume later this month.

“The video has done the German league (DFL) and professional football a disservice,” Anja Stahmann, chairwoman of Germany’s regional sports ministers, told radio station RBB on Wednesday.

“I have heard from colleagues that they are shocked and shaken.

“We were struck by great doubts when we watched the video,” admitted the sports senator for the state of Bremen. “I got the impression that good rules were being written down on paper, but that they were not actually being lived out.”

The Bundesliga is set to be given the green light by

the government on Wednesday to resume later this month behind closed doors and with strict hygiene measures in place. Germany’s regional sports ministers have already approved the Bundesliga’s plans to resume, but Stahmann said Ivory Coast international Kalou’s video left a bad impression.

“Some people think the Bundesliga has lost its grip in times of a pandemic,” Stahmann added.

On Monday, the former Chelsea forward was suspended by Hertha after posting a video to Facebook showing him greeting team-mates and club employees with handshakes, flaunting hygiene guidelines laid out by the league. Kalou apologised for disregarding the social distancing rules, saying: “it was a big mistake”. — **AFP**



Hertha Berlin’s Ivorian forward Salomon Kalou.



Turkey ‘will host’ Champions League final in August

ANKARA: Turkey plans to host the Champions League final in August, the head of its football federation said on Wednesday, after it was postponed by the global coronavirus pandemic.

Two months ago European soccer’s governing body Uefa indefinitely postponed the final, which had been scheduled to be played in Istanbul in May.

Turkish Football Federation chairman Nihat Ozdemir also said Turkey’s domestic soc-



Nihat Ozdemir

cer league would resume from June 12 and aims to complete the season on July 26.

The schedule would involve 7 weekend games and 1 weekday match. Teams will play

their matches in their own cities and own stadiums, he said, adding that no consideration had been given to playing matches in a single city.

“God willing, we will complete our own leagues at the end of July. We will hand over our cups on the pitch and then we will cap the season off by hosting the Uefa Champions League final in August,” Ozdemir told a televised news conference.

— **Reuters**

SPORTS

S KOREA REBOOTS VIRUS-HIT FOOTBALL

NO TALKING OR GOAL CELEBRATIONS AS SEASON KICKS OFF TOMORROW AFTER TWO-MONTH DELAY

SEOUL: South Korea's football season kicks off on Friday after a two-month coronavirus delay, leading the way for the global game as other leagues strive to return to action.

Goal celebrations, handshakes and even talking are out under stringent new safety guidelines designed to prevent any contagion during games, which will be played behind closed doors.

While countries such as Belarus, Turkmenistan and Taiwan defied the virus to keep playing football, South Korea — the 2002 World Cup co-hosts and semifinalists — are the first

prominent nation in the sport to allow matches.

South Korea endured one of the worst early outbreaks of COVID-19 outside China, prompting professional sports to suspend or delay their seasons, a pattern that was repeated worldwide.

But the country appears to have flattened the curve thanks to an extensive "trace, test and treat" programme, and football's return comes after baseball started without fans on Tuesday.

The K-League is Asia's first major competition to return to action, while Europe's giants remain

sidelined with only Germany's Bundesliga so far making concrete plans to resume.

Friday's opening game will be between defending champions Jeonbuk Motors — who are managed by Jose Mourinho's former assistant Jose Morais — and Cup-holders Suwon Bluewings.

Jeonbuk have been the dominant team for the past decade, winning five of the last six league titles, and are again one of the favourites.

Another top contender among the K-League's 12 teams are Ulsan, who have finished in the top four in

each of the past four years.

But it will be football with a difference from Friday, with strict health checks and hygiene measures enforced on the field.

Players and coaching staff are subject to temperature checks ahead of each game and if anyone gets infected during the season, the affected team and those who played against them will have to take a two-week break. Instead of the traditional pre-game handshakes, players have been asked to bow their heads from a distance, while also avoiding celebrating goals with team-mates — and talking. — **AFP**