

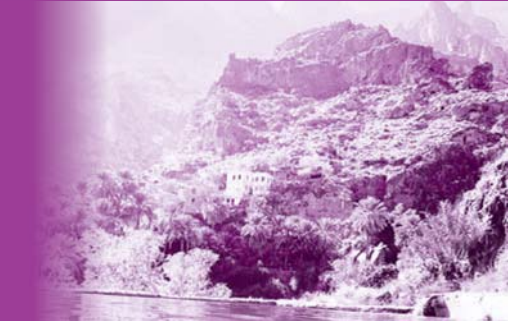
P7

CHINA FACTORY
ACTIVITY
UNEXPECTEDLY
EXPANDS IN MARCH



P10

AL FARRAA
VILLAGE
A MIRACLE ON
EARTH



P12

DAUNTING
TASK AHEAD



OMAN

Registration for
higher studies

MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) announced on Tuesday that registration will open from today for admission to higher education institutions for the academic year 2020/2021 for students of General Education Diploma or its equivalent of the academic year 2019/2020. Omani students of the age group (16-25 years) can register through the electronic admission system starting from Wednesday until June 1. They can apply to the academic programmes offered by government higher education institutions and internal scholarships, as well as grants in private higher education institutions, and external scholarships and grants. In view of the exceptional situation, coordination has been made between HEAC and the National Career Guidance Centre to intensify awareness through social networks.

INSIDE



STAY HOME, STAY FIT DURING
RESTRICTION PERIOD

P3



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE
OF FIGHTING COVID-19

P4

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 21°C

SALALAH
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 26°C

NIZWA
MAX: 33°C
MIN: 18°C

SUNRISE 05.59 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:43

DHUHR: 12:16

ASR: 15:43

MAGHRIB: 18:28

ISHA: 19:39



HM ISSUES THREE ROYAL DECREES



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday issued three Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 41/2020 amends some provisions of the Cultural Heritage Law.

Article (1) replaces Article (6) of the Cultural Heritage Law, promulgated under Royal Decree No 35/2019, by the text below:

“Article (6): The ministry shall undertake the management and development of all archaeological, historical and cultural sites and projects.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall take effect from the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No 42/2020 promulgates the Tax Institution System (law) and approves its organisational structure.

Article (1) enacts provisions of the Tax Institution System (law) attached

to this decree.

Article (2) approves the organisational structure of the Tax Institution in accordance with the Annex attached to this decree.

Article (3) states that the Chairman of the Tax Institution shall assume the powers and prerogatives dedicated to the Minister Responsible for Financial Affairs wherever cited in the Income Tax Law (promulgated under Royal Decree No 28/2009) and the Selective Tax Law (promulgated under Royal Decree No 23/2019) and any specialisations related to determining exemption from Income Tax wherever this recurs in laws, systems and royal decrees.

Article (4) states that the Chairman of the Tax Institution shall issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the enforcement of provisions of this decree and its attached Annex. Till then, the existing regulations and decisions shall continue to be implemented without prejudice to the provisions of above-mentioned Tax Institution regulations and decisions.

Article (5) cancels all that contradicts this decree and its attached system (law) or contravenes their provisions.

Article (6) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall take effect from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 43/2020 ratifies the multilateral convention, signed by the Sultanate on November 26, 2019, to implement tax treaty measures to prevent base erosion and profit shifting after the convention was presented before Majlis Ashshura.

Article (1) ratifies the above-mentioned multilateral convention in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the Document of Ratification of the above-mentioned multilateral convention in accordance with its provisions.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall take effect from its date of issue.

— ONA

No movement between governorates

VINOD NAIR & SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, MARCH 31

The movement between various governorates will be restricted from today (Wednesday) jointly by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

Introduced as part of the measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, the checkpoints will control the movement of citizens and residents at the entry and exit points in all the governorates.

Those exempted from these restrictions are public and private sector employees whose job requires their presence at their office to undertake necessary work as determined by the heads of departments, ambulance and emergency vehicles, military and security vehicles, vehicles transporting foodstuffs and other essentials, vehicles transporting commercial and construction materials, petroleum derivatives and other materials used by the public and private sectors.

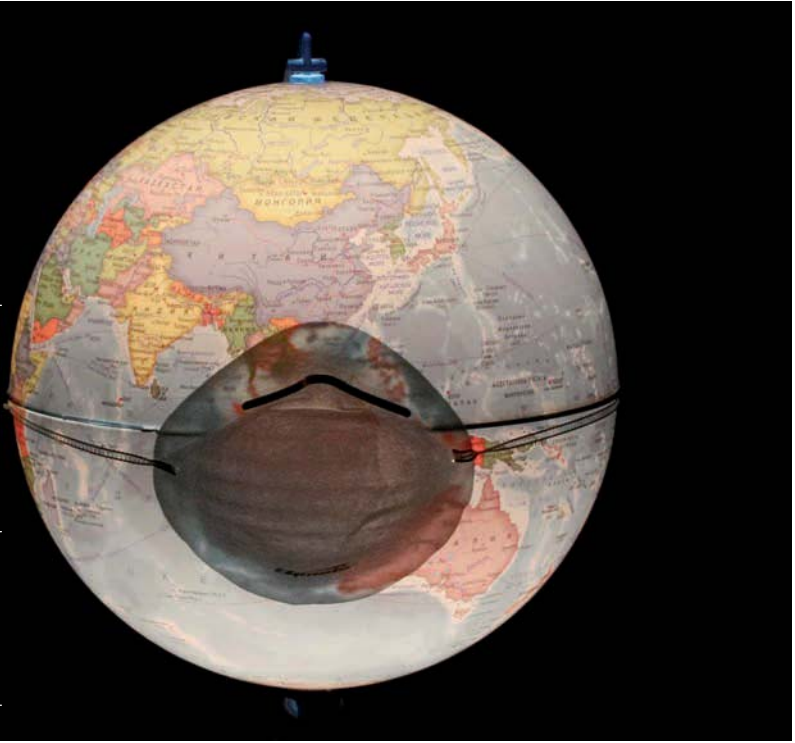
Exceptions will be made for the movement of citizens and residents according to the assessment of the checkpoints personnel.

Earlier, the Supreme Committee

CALL FOR
EXEMPTING
EMPLOYEES FROM
ATTENDING
OFFICES

13 NEW CASES
TODAY,
TOTAL 192,
34 RECOVERED

INSURANCE FOR
EXPIRED DRIVING
LICENCES



on COVID-19 called for exemption of employees from attending workplace in government agencies except for the staff whose nature requires their presence to complete the necessary work, provided that the rest of the employees start their work remotely as determined by the authority in which

the employee works.

Any of the employees can be called to do any work that the public interest requires them to do in the workplace.

Private sector establishments must take necessary measures to reduce the number of employees to the minimum necessary for this sector to continue

to perform and ensure that its basic business.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday announced registration of 13 new confirmed cases, bringing the total cases registered in the Sultanate to 192. The ministry said 34 cases have recovered.

Region-wise, Muscat has 137 confirmed cases, followed by Al Dakhiliyah (17), North Al Batinah (17), South Al Batinah (9), Dhofar (8), Al Dhahirah (2)), South Al Sharqiyah (1) and Buraimi (1).

Meanwhile, a total 1,189 tonnes of onions were imported during the 48 hours of which the Port of Sohar received 988 tonnes from India, the Netherlands, and Spain. Onions are sold at around 500 baizas per kg in the market.

Insurance companies have been allowed to provide insurance coverage for owners of vehicles whose driving licenses expired after Royal Oman Police (ROP) suspended renewal services. The Public Authority for Water ‘DIAM’ said it will provide facilities to subscribers to install the amounts accumulated by them over an extended period over more than 120 days.

DIAM said that it will work to reduce the percentage of the amount paid to restore the service from 75 per cent of total dues to 20 per cent, adding that there is flexibility in the payment, by extending the installment periods to pay the remaining dues up to 12 months.

IN BRIEF

PRIVATE SECTOR TOLD NOT TO
TERMINATE NATIONALS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Manpower announced on Tuesday that the private sector establishments will not be allowed to terminate Omani nationals en masse from their jobs.

“Even if the company is facing closure due to bankruptcy or any other reason, termination of nationals or forcibly ending services from their jobs will no longer will be allowed,” states one of the decisions by the ministry.

The ministry took a number of decisions on Tuesday aimed at securing guarantee job continuity for nationals in the private sector. According to the decisions, a committee tasked to deal with and find appropriate solutions matters relating to the end of service benefits for the nationals.

MORE THAN 2,000 UNDER
INSTITUTIONAL QUARANTINE

MUSCAT: Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and the Head of the Relief and Sheltering Sector, stated that the Supreme Committee tasked with devising mechanism to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, in coordination with the Relief and Sheltering Sector, began to lay down and agree upon mechanisms for dealing with the current situation following a decision issued by the Supreme Committee to activate the relief and sheltering sector. The relief and sheltering sector is responsible for 2,000 youth currently under the institutional quarantine, Al Maawali said calling on those under institutional quarantine to follows the instructions and the requirements of institutional quarantine.

ADEQUATE STOCKS OF MEDICAL
SUPPLIES IN MARKET

MUSCAT: Within the ongoing national efforts exerted by the Ministry of Health to combat the spread of coronavirus, the Directorate General of Medical Supplies affirmed that the ministry is maintaining a good stock of life-saving medications, medical equipment, and the required lap screening tests to cover the needs of the health institutions. Among the items are those essential for the therapeutic and preventive protocols issued by the ministry and the World Health Organization, which include antibiotics and anti-virals, as well as personal protective items, such as masks and hand sanitizers, etc. The Director General of Medical Supplies Nussaiba Habib emphasised that the ministry's continuing work to ensure providing and reinforcing available stock, in addition to the requirements of combating the pandemic are met continuously in sufficient quantities.



HOW COVID-19 MEDICAL WASTE PROCESSED?

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, MARCH 31

Health care waste treatment has been centre of attention of all the governments around the world, as throwing this kind of waste in garbage is just the beginning. With Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak over the globe, medical waste is being treated with more care to prevent any potential infection among the workers in the field.

The Oman Environmental Services Holding, Be'ah, the entity responsible for solid waste management in Sultanate, explained that it deals with health care waste of infected or suspected cases of the coronavirus in the Sultanate as per set norms.

After WHO declaration of Corona disease COVID-19, Be'ah communicated with all health care institutions across the country through Ministry of Health to fully adhere with Be'ah guideline in segregating waste expected to be generated from COVID-19 confirmed and suspected cases within the health care institutions.

“As the responsible entity in managing solid waste in Oman, Be'ah is proactively engaging with Ministry of Health to ensure taking the utmost precautionary measures in dealing with (COVID-19) pandemic and ensuring safe management of waste generated from quarantined cases, which are confirmed to be infected with COVID-19,” said Jassim Mohammed al Wahaibi, Head of Healthcare Waste Department at Be'ah.

He mentioned that Be'ah had activated its contingency plan in dealing with the outbreak of the virus



Following the COVID-19 outbreak, Be'ah has increased health care waste collection frequency for all health care institutions across the Sultanate. (AFP picture for illustrative purpose only)

in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, which includes increased health care waste collection frequency for all health care institutions across the country.

The medical waste management process has professional procedures as the waste is placed in double bags tightly, while strictly applying the preventive measures for the workers,

such as wearing masks, protective goggles, and vests.

The bags are then put in separate special containers, and transferred to the waste treatment facilities,

designed specifically to address the harmful and infectious aspect of the waste. Then, the waste is treated immediately either by incinerations or autoclave devices. Incinerations

are used to dispose of the waste completely by burning it and the autoclaves are machines that sterilise the waste to render it harmless.

Al Wahaibi added, “The three state-of-the-art health care waste treatment facilities were established as per the latest international standards recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure the safe management and proper disposal of such waste using the latest scientific methods and technologies whereby, Be'ah had three treatment facilities in Muscat, Al Batinah North, and Dhofar Governorates.”

The company confirmed that it cleans and sterilises the trucks and containers as soon as the containers are unloaded and the waste is discharged into the treatment devices.

An environmental study recently revealed the annual production rate of health care waste throughout the Sultanate that amounts to about 4,500 tonnes produced from different institutions providing health care; most of them are in the Muscat Governorate (55 per cent) because it has the majority of private, government, and regional health care institutions. Governorates of Dhofar, Northern al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah come second in terms of production. Hazardous types make up between 15-25 per cent of total health care waste. Health care waste is waste generated at health care facilities, such as hospitals, clinics, dental practices, blood banks and veterinary premises, as well as medical research facilities and laboratories. These include potentially infectious materials posing a significant risk of transmitting infection.



OMAN DATES PRODUCTION & PACKAGING CO. (S.A.O.C)

Tender Extension Announcement

Oman Dates Production & Packaging Company is pleased to invite Excellent Grade Contractors to participate at the tender about the realization of the six (6) Collecting Centers dedicated to dates post-harvesting operations (collecting and sorting) and other related manufacturing activities in accordance with the highest industry standards.

The project locations of the Collecting Centers are distributed in six (six) Oman Regions as per following positions:

	Tender Code	Location	Tender Fee	Last day to Purchase the Tender
1	ODPP-T2020-2	North Batinah – Saham	OMR 500/-	14\4\2020
2	ODPP-T2020-3	South Batinah - Rustaq	OMR 500/-	14\4\2020
3	ODPP-T2020-4	North Sharqyiah - Ibra	OMR 500/-	14\4\2020
4	ODPP-T2020-5	South Sharqiah - Jalan	OMR 500/-	14\4\2020
5	ODPP-T2020-6	Al Dakhiliyah - Nizwa	OMR 500/-	14\4\2020
6	ODPP-T2020-7	Al Dhahirah - Ibri	OMR 500/-	14\4\2020

The tender documents are available for collection by sending an official email to: tenders@tumoor.om, with copy of payment transfer receipt of the tender fee (OMR 500/-) for each Collecting Center to OMAN DATES PRODUCTION & PACKAGING COMPANY S.A.O.C (ODPP) Bank Account below:

Account Name	Oman Dates Production & Packing Company
Account Number	0010035196001001
Bank	Bank Al-Izz Islamic
Currency	OMR (Omani Riyal)
SWIFT Code	IZZBOMRU XXX

Tender Collection at ODPP offices (Offices hours 8:00 am to 5:00 pm):

The return date for this tender is 4 \ May 2020, to be returned to ODPP office (address as above).

Note:

- The Client reserve the right to award the works for each location separately or collectively.
- Only Excellent Grade Contractors are allowed to participate in the tender

Oman Dates Production & Packaging Co. S.A.O.C

Mobile Number : +968 93277782

tenders@tumoor.om

Office No. 6, 8th Floor, Al Nahdah Tower 2, Ghala.P.O Box: 830, Azaiba, P.C. 130, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Employees exempted from going to workplace

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, MARCH 31

Except for employees whose nature of jobs requires their presence at the workplaces to complete necessary work, all others are advised to work from home.

This is one of the many decisions taken on Tuesday by the Supreme Committee tasked with devising mechanisms to combat the spread of novel coronavirus COVID-19.

The decisions are part of the efforts to reduce the mass presence of people at work places. “Any employee can be called to do any work that requires them to do in the public interest at the workplace. This can be decided by the heads of the departments”, the

committee said in a statement referring to the decisions. At the same time, the heads of government units should take necessary measures to ensure that the core business is not affected by reducing the number of employees.

“They should take precautionary and preventive measures necessary to avoid the spread of the pandemic,” it said. In the private sector establishments, said the committee, necessary measures should be taken “to reduce the number of employees to the minimum to continue to perform and ensure that the business is not affected”.

Earlier last week, the Supreme Committee had issued a decision to reduce the workforce to 30 per cent in all government offices while it asked the

70% employees to work from home

On Monday, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a number of guidelines to all the industrial areas and free zones to provide accommodation to the workers in the factory premises.

The advisory note from the ministry said that the administrative staff including accountants and others can work from home and convert the office space as accommodation for the workers. “Each industrial area or free zone shall prepare a list showing the names of those authorized to work in each factory/facility, with the staff who will stay. Their contact numbers will be provided so that they can be contacted when needed”, it said.

Nearly 1,200 tonnes of imported onion reach local markets



MUSCAT: Al Mawaleh Central Market for Fruits and Vegetables has seen the availability of most products including onions. As many as 1,189 tonnes of onions received by the market during the past 48 hours.

The port of Sohar has received 22 shipments from India, the Netherlands and Spain, with a total weight of 988 tonnes, in addition to 85 tonnes of Yemeni onions. The port of Salalah has received 116 tonnes, and other quantities will be received in the upcoming days.

In order to further follow

up agricultural imports and in coordination with the traders of onions wholesale market, the ministry’s specialists have designed a form to count the quantities of onions and how they are distributed to traders in various governorates.

This aims to track their marketing in local markets, in coordination with the Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP), in addition to emphasising to traders to rationalise and regulate local distribution in all governorates to ensure that the commodities are available at fixed prices. — ONA

Contest to develop app to monitor people infected with COVID-19

MUSCAT: The Research Council’s (TRC) Smart City Platform, a collaborative initiative between TRC, the Supreme Council of Planning (SCP), Muscat Municipality (MM) and Information Technology Authority (ITA), has launched a local competition to design and develop an app that helps the entities that represent the government to control the spread of COVID-19 among the Omani community by monitoring those people infected with the virus.

The competition aims for the app to assist in the process of awareness, interaction and behaviour change of all target groups used for the application; for example, the app can report on cases of violation of quarantine or innovative ways to communicate with those in quarantine or those suspected of having contact with those infected with the virus.

Interested applicants can submit their ideas through Smart City Platform’s website by Sunday, April 5. The evaluation will be done virtually either by WebEx, Zoom, GoToMeeting or others. The results will be announced on Tuesday April 7, and the winning apps will be supported by the relevant institutions.

— ONA

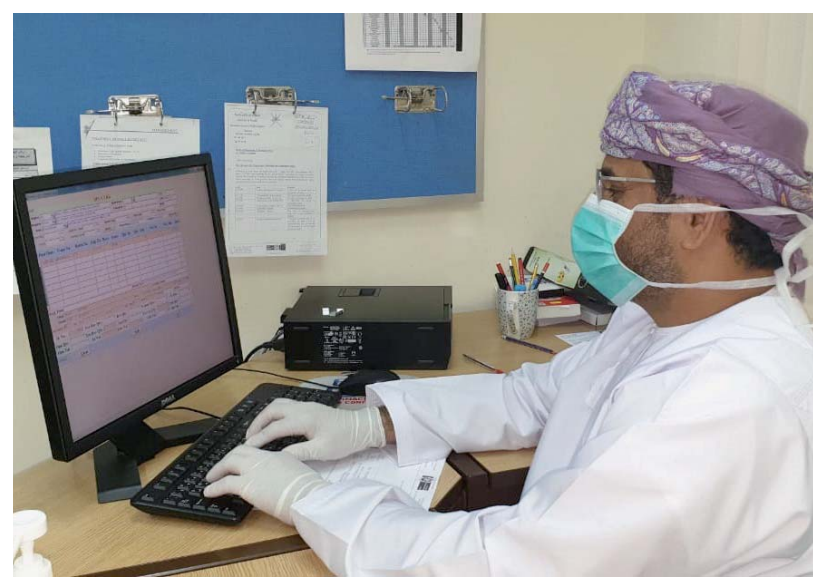
ENSURING MEDICAL SUPPLIES, EQUIPMENT



MUSCAT: Within the ongoing national efforts exerted by the Ministry of Health (MoH) to combat the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the Directorate General of Medical Supplies (DGMS) affirmed that the ministry is maintaining a good stock of life-saving medications, medical equipment, and the required lab screening tests to cover the needs of the MoH health institutions.

Among the items are those essential for the therapeutic and preventive protocols issued by the MoH and the World Health Organization (WHO), which include antibiotics and antivirals, as well as personal protective items, such as masks and hand sanitisers, etc.

The Director-General of Medical Supplies Pharmacist, Nussaiba Habib emphasised the ministry's continuing work to ensure providing and reinforcing available stock, in addition to the requirements of combating the pandemic are met continuously in sufficient quantities, including medicines, medical supplies and medical textiles for medical staff. Moreover, additional medical gas cylinders have been provided and more companies were contracted to provide Liquid Oxygen (LOX) tanks in referral hospitals. — ONA



Stay home, stay fit during restriction period

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAR 31

Staying indoors for longer period with no or less physical activity may cause lifestyle problems, warn physical fitness experts.

Both citizens and residents in the Sultanate, who are following the national call to stay indoors and follow social distancing in letter and spirit, are urged to involve in some kind of physical activity on a regular basis to keep fit and safeguard against any lifestyle diseases.

"Of all physical issues, sedentary lifestyle is the most dangerous thing that makes a man mentally as well as physically ill over a period of time", said Rabyab Siddique, a certified physical trainer.

"If no other physical exercise is possible, at least regular walking, running or cycling is a great way to stay active. Having said, don't forget to keep a distance of at least two metres from other people", adds Rabyab.

Fitness experts opine that both our physical and mental health get seriously affected by being sedentary. Hence, staying active during this difficult time is important and this can only be achieved by being physically active and this will help in blood pressure and cholesterol levels while reducing the risk of heart and other lifestyle diseases.

"Sets of exercise that help one keep fit are available for both men and women of various ages. They include exercises on a daily basis to reduce chances of falling sick and living healthy," said Mohammed al Balushi, a trainer associated with a five star hotel

The body's natural defence

The immune system is a complex network of structures and processes that protect the body

Function

- Keep bad things out
- Identify threats such as viruses, bacteria, parasites
- Destroy, neutralise and expell threats

Innate immunity

The body's **barriers** are the first line of defence

Including: Skin, linings of the lung and gut

Defence mechanisms

Including: Mucus, oils, tears, cough reflex

General immune response

Including: Inflammation, cellular responses

Adaptive immunity

Processes threats from specific agents

Creates **antibodies** to destroy those threats

Remembers, recognises and acts against the same threat in the future

Key elements

Lymphatic system

Drains excess water from tissues and also links up major components of the immune system

Thymus

Organ where T-cells mature

Lymph nodes

Play a central role in filtering microorganisms and other undesirable substances from the blood

Bone marrow

Produces stem cells that can become red and white blood cells

White blood cells

Also known as leukocytes, they identify and eliminate pathogens

Basophils	Sound the alarm when an invader appears
Eosinophils	Attack and kill parasites and cancer cells
Neutrophils	The first white blood cells recruited to sites of acute inflammation
Lymphocytes	B-cells -- create antibodies to fight specific threats T-cells -- destroy infected cells

Spleen

Helps filter blood. Recycles old red blood cells, stores and produces white blood cells

Macrophages

Roaming 'eating cells' that move around the body on the hunt for pathogens

in town.

"As far as our immune system is concerned, physical activity also helps to keep our immune system working effectively as it flushes bacteria from

the lungs and airways. Additionally, it helps increase white blood cell circulation along with raising body temperature. These functions will help the body fight infection," Al Balushi

added.

If owning an exercise bike or treadmill is far from happening, one can simply walk rigorously inside the house, around the compound



People exercise on their balconies. One can simply walk rigorously inside the house, around the compound, or up and down the stairs. — Reuters



or walking up and down the stairs many times. At least, he or she can walk inside the house while talking to someone on phone", said Mohammed, yet another physical fitness expert.

Doing squats, skipping, yoga and if one is not familiar with all these, it's high time to turn to various apps and social media videos to get in track with fitness.



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE OF FIGHTING COVID-19

RAY PETERSEN
NIZWA, MARCH 31

How do we make people understand that COVID-19 really is an indiscriminate, invisible, killer!

Professor Alison Leary, the chair of Healthcare and Workforce Modelling at London South Bank University made a very good point recently when she warned that dealing with the COVID-19 issue will force healthcare agencies to “employ the principle of a slow-moving major incident.” So, what does this entail for the millions of healthcare workers around the world, and the tens of thousands in the health sector in Oman?

The first thought is that we know our jobs. How to do it, what to do, when to do it, and if we have pride in ourselves and our work, how to do that job better than anyone else. So, when we leave at the end of the day, we will all look around us, whether it is an office, a classroom, a workshop, or construction site, and give ourselves a mental pat on the back, a little self-congratulatory smile, and leave for home knowing all is well with us and our part of the world.

But no amount of education, training, professional development, or worldly wisdom can prepare the health sector for what has descended upon them. It dominates their every thought, word, and deed 24/7/365. No matter how resilient, how strong, and how effective they are, by the time the foolishness and lack of urgency of the common, man-on-the-street citizen or resident here has visited us in full with its certain consequences a picture will emerge that will not be pleasant.

That picture will be of ordinary people doing an extra-ordinary job, maybe up to 12 hours a day as the pressure goes on resources in restrictive clothing, incredibly demanding conditions, and with no light at the end of the tunnel. The end of their day will not be about having finished or completed anything, but of feeling they are emptying a swimming pool with a teaspoon, never-ending. No pats on the back, just anxiety, distress, fatigue, and yes, anger, at the situation they have found themselves in the middle of.

My daughter is a nurse, so I know that the motivation to enter nursing was incredibly noble, of wanting to save lives, and see people leave their care better in health than when they arrived. For them, cleaning soiled clothing and bedding, cleaning and bandaging suppurating wounds, and caring for all manner of patients is made bearable because at the end of it all they can wheel out a new mother and baby, a healing road accident victim, or an elderly person to finish their days in dignity, surrounded by their loving family.

With COVID-19, that just simply is not going to happen!
Many will be experienced

Epidemic treatment and protection through the ages



Bubonic plague
*XVII century**

- Stick to touch (or repel) the sick
- Glasses, perfume-filled beaked mask to counter noxious vapours
- Long waxed and perfumed coat, leather gloves

*First appeared in Europe in 1347



Spanish flu
1918-1920

- Mobcap
- Gauze mask
- Long gown



COVID-19
Ongoing

- Medical mask or respirator (N95 or FFP2)
- Protective goggles, face shield
- Gloves
- Apron, gown

© AFP

with, and working normally in administrative, therapeutic, operating theatre and outpatient environments, and will end up working in the very different environments of intensive care. They will be working with patients who, when they are conscious and lucid, will want their loved ones with them, but who can't have them bedside. They will be nursing people frantic, probably not about themselves, but their partners, family and friends. Just imagine the strain of being in the middle of that all day!

And it's sad that not only will these admirable individuals and teams have the cross of an unfinished job to bear at the end of every day, but they will almost certainly be doing so alone. The reality of course is that working with the C-monster every day means it will be too great a risk to go home to their families, so young or old, married or single, they will spend half their days treading water, and the other half looking at four walls, because of what the British Medical Journal's Professor Neil Greenberg called “psychological distress,” due to interpreting their lack of success in caring for COVID-19 patients as a violation of their moral and ethical code.

The global experiences of other countries are that when the third phase, of ‘community transmission’ takes effect, the demands upon the health sector will be immeasurable. So, as a society and a community, we need to keep their lives as simple as we can, and we can, but we must stop. Playing football, going shopping as a family, visiting other families, having birthday parties, or having meetings.

Oman has been fortunate so far, the Supreme Committee has acted with wisdom and foresight, and to some extent, left us with the dignity of taking and making social distancing decisions for ourselves. But, really, we have not proven up to it so far. We are not doing a good job of things, and that's not good enough. As someone said a few days ago, we're not asking you to shoot anyone, stand in front of an invading army, or get yourself hurt. No, we need you to go home, put your feet up and watch telly!

And as a believe it or not post-script today, reluctantly, masked and gloved, I went to get Long-life milk (no, not panic buying, just four boxes) and was so disappointed to see shoppers handling fruit and vegetables, then returning them to the shelf, groups of young men congregated around the trolley park with no disinfectant in sight.

How do we make people understand that COVID-19 will not announce itself? That you will have no more warning than you have already had, no sirens, and no flashing lights. Emily Dickinson wrote, “I could not stop for death, so he kindly stopped for me,” and unfortunately, the less good advice this society and community takes, the more stops he will make. Wake up, before it's too late.



No amount of education, training, professional development, or worldly wisdom can prepare the health sector for what has descended upon them. – Reuters

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
MARKET

3448.29

CRUDE
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$ 26.55

Brent Crude \$ 26.39

Light Crude \$ 20.67

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Private hospitals ill-equipped for COVID-19 told to temporarily close in Oman

STRINGENT PRECAUTIONS: A circular sent out by the Health Ministry includes a “checklist” of protocols, facilities and measures that private hospitals must have in place to help prevent, control and manage suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infections

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAR 31

A number of small private clinics began shuttering across the Sultanate on Tuesday in response to guidelines from the Ministry of Health advising them to suspend operations until they meet a strict set of criteria for managing suspected or confirmed coronavirus infections on their premises.

The measure has hit, in particular, a sizable number of clinics run by Family Physicians and General Practitioners (GPs) which fall short of the standards set by the ministry to remain open amid intensifying government-driven measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19.

A circular sent out by the Ministry’s Directorate General of Private Health Establishments on March 29 includes a “checklist” of protocols, facilities and measures that private hospitals must have in place to help prevent, control and manage suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infections on their premises.

“Private health establishments that are unable to follow the attached coronavirus COVID-19 checklist



are required to close their clinics temporarily till they comply with the recommendations,” Dr Mazin bin Jawad al Khabouri, DG — Private Health Establishments, stated in the circular.

A number of small clinics contacted by the *Observer* lamented they were in no position to meet the prescribed

guidelines anytime soon and said they were preparing to cease services with immediate effect.

The checklist includes measures encompassing all aspects of a hospital’s functioning with a bearing on COVID-19 infection prevention and control. Among other things, it calls for all personnel — healthcare staff,

security attendants, and housekeeping staff — to be suitably acquainted with COVID-19 safety and prevention information.

Staff allocated for COVID-19 screening must wear face masks, gloves and disposable aprons, while hospitals are also required to have full personal protection equipment (PPE) available

on the premises. Triage staff should be suitably versed in COVID-19 safety protocol as well.

Additionally, hospitals are also required to have in place thermo-scan devices for measuring body temperatures of visitors, an electronic vital signs machine or device, and a system for segregating patients with flu-like symptoms from other patients. An isolation room is prescribed for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients, with attending healthcare workers wearing full personal protection equipment (PPE).

The prescribed guidelines for staff engaged in triaging functions, the triaging area, the handling of healthcare waste, the transportation of suspected or confirmed cases by ambulance, the handling of linen and laundry, and the collection and handling of lab specimens, are equally stringent.

The latest measure is a further blow to small clinics run by General Practitioners and Family Physicians who have seen their numbers dwindle in recent years as large hospital chains increasingly dominate the private healthcare space in the Sultanate.

CMA instructs insurers to extend coverage to motorists with expired driving licenses

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 31

The Capital Market Authority has instructed the insurance companies to provide insurance coverage for owners of vehicles whose driving licenses expired after Royal Oman Police suspended renewal services in line with the measures taken by the Supreme Committee tasked with dealing with the new coronavirus (COVID-19) to curb its spread.

In a letter, the Authority urged insurance companies to provide the coverage even if the driving licence of the insured is expired until the end of the epidemic and to provide indemnity in traffic accidents even if the licence is expired.

Last week, the CMA announced a number of precautionary measures related to the insurance sectors to curb the spread of the coronavirus in line with guidelines adopted by the Supreme Committee. The Authority issued a circular to all insurers to suspend manual transactions in insurance services including closure of counters and provide the service electronically to render the service remotely to the customers.

Tax Authority relaxes deadline for filing of tax returns

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAR 31

In a last-minute respite for Omani firms scrambling to file their tax return for 2019, the Tax Authority of the Sultanate announced a series of concessions as part of wider measures adopted by the government to contain the spread of COVID-19.

As reported by the *Observer* on Tuesday, businesses and commercial establishments that completed the financial year on December 31, 2019, are required to file their tax return by March 31, 2020 as stipulated by the Income Tax Law.

However, the deadline has been relaxed in a gesture that takes into account the current challenges posed by the pandemic, the Tax Authority said. It also announced a relaxation of compliance obligations and a waiver on penalties for late filings.

The new guidelines announced by the Tax Authority are as follows:

First: In the event that the tax

THE DEADLINE HAS BEEN RELAXED IN A GESTURE THAT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE CURRENT CHALLENGES POSED BY THE PANDEMIC

returns are not submitted by the prescribed dates, they may be filed, and the tax amount paid, within a maximum period of three months from the deadline (March 31). Any fines and penalties for late submissions are waived.

Second: It is permissible to pay the tax in installments. Companies are exempt from paying the penalty set at 1 per month of the amount of the unpaid amount) in accordance with the conditions agreed upon by the Tax Authority, provided the delay is attributable to conditions linked to the pandemic.



Third: The taxable entity may object to the assessment of the tax, its correction or amendment, or the

conduct of the additional assessment, within (45) days from the date of its notification of the assessment.

However, in order to facilitate taxpayers who are unable to file an objection — due to the COVID-19

measures — during the aforementioned period, the objection will be accepted after the date if it is proven that the date of its submission coincides with the period of applying the precautionary measures, considering that period falls under emergency circumstances.

Fourth: In order to achieve the principle of tax justice and to give the opportunity for taxpayers to present their documents and clarifications that support their objections to the tax assessment, the taxable entity may request an additional period to submit the clarifications and documents required to consider the objections submitted by them.

However, in the event of approval of the required deadline, the time limit granted shall be considered a suspension period for the period set for the settlement of the objection.

Fifth: Donations (proven to be paid for the purposes of contributing to the COVID-19 campaign) are tax exempt for the fiscal 2020.

Euro zone inflation slows sharply in March as virus lockdowns weigh

BRUSSELS/FRANKFURT: Euro zone inflation plunged this month on crashing oil prices, signalling the start of a possible deflationary spiral as government lockdowns in response to the coronavirus trigger a dramatic slowdown in economic activity.

Inflation in the 19 countries sharing the euro fell to 0.7 per cent from 1.2 per cent in February, Eurostat said on Tuesday, undershooting already modest expectations of 0.8 per cent.

But the headline figure, which many economists expect to slip into negative territory before mid-year as the epidemic continues to spread, is also masking opposing trends that may worry households: sharply higher food prices and plunging energy costs.

With Brent crude LCOc1 down by two-thirds since the start of the year on a price war between Russia and Saudi



A woman looks at fruits and vegetables at a market stall in Madrid, Spain. – Reuters

Arabia, energy costs, fell more than 4 per cent compared to a year earlier.

But food price inflation accelerated to 3.5 per cent from 2.6 per cent, extending a rise that may be aggravated by lockdown measures that could make it difficult for food products to reach the

consumer.

The United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization has warned that restrictions could make it difficult for seasonal workers to move around and for finished products to be shipped, putting upward pressure on food prices.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Broadband hereby announces following tender:

Sr. No.	Tender No	Description	Tender Fee (R.O) Non refundable	Last Date for Collection	Bids Submission Date
1	T/004/2020	Provision of Housekeeping Services and Building Maintenance Services	100	9/April/2020	26/April/2020 (2:00 pm)

The Tender documents can be obtained from Oman Broadband Office 6th Floor, KOM 5 (Facility Building), Knowledge Oasis Muscat from the date of publication of this announcement. (Office Hours: 8:30 am to 3:30 pm, Sunday to Thursday).

Eligibility Criteria and Brief Scope of Work can be obtained from our website (www.omanbroadband.om) or by sending email to tenders@Omanbroadband.om

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تمكين الفرص
Unlocking the Potential



Bank Nizwa pledges RO 600,000 for COVID-19 campaign

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa has introduced a number of initiatives to help mitigate the social and economic effects of the current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The bank pledged RO 600,000 where RO 300,000 will be donated to support the efforts exerted by the Ministry of Health to combat the impact of outbreak and RO 300,000 will be allocated to directly support affected customers.

The bank is offering financial relief solutions, mainly to affected retail and SME customers. Evaluation is conducted on a case-to-case basis to provide them with tailored solutions to their circumstance. Additionally, in light of the current social distancing protocols, the bank has introduced new features to its digital banking platforms to make it easier than ever to bank from home.

Shaikh Khalid Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa, said, "This initiative comes as part of our commitment as the leading Islamic bank in Oman towards supporting our society as the health and safety of our community is our top priority, and that's why it was important to lend our support where possible to the health services that are striving every day to keep us all safe. But more than that, we want to ensure that our customers remain financially secure during these unprecedented circumstances. Whether its deferments, financial grants, banking services, or advice, we want them to know that we are the bank they can trust."

Retail customers who are directly affected by the outbreak can apply for a deferment for a period of three months, starting from April 2020. This includes those who have suffered pay loss, job loss, salary reduction, or those who are applying on medical grounds for themselves or a family member. Customers with a Diminishing Musharaka or Ijara Home Financing may also apply for a deferral for a period of two months, subject to the applicant drawing a net salary up to OMR 1,000 per month.

SME owners experiencing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19, can contact their dedicated relationship manager to discuss their options for the bank's review, and depending on the merit of the case, the bank may offer financial relief.



Oman projects account for 25pc of Petrofac's global revenues in 2019

GROWTH MARKET: The Sultanate, Kuwait and the UAE were the top three markets in 2019, generating 50 per cent of the Group's revenue

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAR 31

The Sultanate of Oman has emerged as the biggest revenue earner for international oilfield services giant Petrofac, accounting for around a quarter of the UK-headquartered global firm's total revenue of US\$5.5 billion in 2019.

The contractor is currently undertaking a sizable portfolio of prestigious upstream, midstream, refining and petrochemical projects totalling several billions of dollars in government and public sector investments in the Sultanate.

The biggest of these is Duqm Refinery with Petrofac's contract share totalling around \$1.1 billion. Other key projects being executed by Petrofac include BP Oman's Khazzan Phase 2 project (contract value of \$800 million), the Salalah LPG project of OQ (formerly Oman Oil & Orpic Group) with a contract value of \$600 million, and a number of projects awarded by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

"Oman, Kuwait and the UAE were the top three markets in 2019, generating 50 per cent of Group revenue (2018: the top three markets – Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia – generated 58 per cent of revenue)," said Alistair Cochrane, Chief Financial Officer, in the group's newly released Annual Report.

Significantly, the Sultanate was one of the group's "success stories" of the year. "As well as progressing several major projects, such as Phase 2 of the Khazzan Central Processing Facility, and the Duqm refinery, we continued to see the value of our 10-year Framework Agreement with Petroleum



Development Oman, which enables Petrofac to provide EPCm support services for major oil and gas projects. New awards included the Mabrouk North East Line Pipe Procurement Project, the Mabrouk North East Development Project, and additional work on the Yibal Khuff project, which have a combined value of more than US\$130 million," said Petrofac.

Among the major contracts secured by the group in 2019 was the Mabrouk North East Line Pipe Procurement Project under a 10-year Framework Agreement with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). Valued at approximately \$75 million, the 19-month

project scope includes management of line pipe material from sourcing, technical and commercial evaluation, planning and control services with management and coordination of interfaces with all parties involved.

Later in December, Petrofac received an additional award under PDO's 10-year framework for an Engineering, Procurement and Construction Management (EPCm) services contract for the Mabrouk North East Development Project. The 34-month project scope involves the development of 16 gas producing wells and export of the production to the Saih Rawl Central Processing Plant. The project will be integrated with the

Mabrouk North East Line Pipe Procurement Project.

Also in December, the company was awarded a 20-month contract to provide further services for PDO's Yibal Khuff Project, including detailed Engineering, Procurement, and support for Construction and Commissioning of nine additional wells to improve overall plant production, and laying of gas pipeline from Yibal "A" to the main processing facility. The additional Yibal Khuff scope of work and the Mabrouk North East Line Pipe Procurement Project contract are worth a combined value of approximately \$130 million, said Petrofac.

POINT of VIEW

DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

Five national transformation programmes for realisation of Oman 2040

Oman Vision 2040 (Part 9)



Our vision is for Oman to be one of the world's developed countries. However, Oman cannot be a developed country by universal standards without a society of creative individuals proud of both their identity and culture, a leading healthcare system by international standards, a decent and sustainable quality of life for all, and last but not least, inclusive education and lifelong learning.

Becoming a developed country also needs a competitive economy. An empowered private sector will not only drive a competitive economy, but it will also lead to comprehensive geographical development, a dynamic and attractive labour market, a diversified and sustainable economy and dynamic economic leadership. An environment with sustainable elements, flexible and effective ecological systems. Last but not least, we must have a state with responsible institutions.

Let's agree that success and transformation do not occur by accident. For them to occur, a clear plan with purpose must exist. The realisation of Oman's 2040 Vision can be accomplished through five national transformation programmes:

First: Management or Behavioural



Change

The behaviour and skills of manpower have the biggest impact on increasing production and creating the planned shift and progress. Individuals are at the core of this process since a productive community with a production base is comprised of productive individuals. The opposite also applies where consumers make up a community that relies on consumerism, with the inability to create new capital for itself. Successful nations have a culture

of values and qualities connected to work ethic, production, savings, rationalisation, responsibility, and more. To become a creative and productive individual, financial inputs are needed in education, health and accommodation. The individual's community should have the basis and foundation of security, justice, rule of law, corruption combat, accountability, and a high level of responsibility, as well as a clear view of the future, free of any form of ambiguity.

Second: Government Transformation addressing Structure and Efficiency

This programme will address the size and role of then government, as well as ensure a high degree of coordination among state, business and society relationships.

Third: Digital Transformation
Moving towards a digital state, digital business enterprises and a digital society, will enhance transformation in the community as a whole in both the public and private

sectors. Through efficient and safe electronic platforms for transactions, labour-oriented practices will decrease and local Omani businesses will embrace a more technological approach, as well as better connect/network/market their businesses.

Fourth: Fiscal Sustainability

This programme will be approached by understanding the nature of Oman's public budget, its composition, and the difficulty of a continued yearly expenditure trend. The programme aims to achieve balanced financial sustainability in both the mid and long terms through the smart management of budget items. This will ensure a guided expenditure, apply more initiatives to increase non-oil revenues, and as a result, strengthen investors' trust and Oman's credit rating.

Fifth: The Business Cycle

This programme aims to fix the business cycle which currently operates in one direction: the selling of hydrocarbon and importing the majority of goods and services. To rebalance the business cycle in Oman, the programme will focus on restructuring national economy to strengthen the connections between sectors through economic diversification, increasing non-oil exports and decreasing import numbers. Furthermore, the programme will look into supporting national production, encouraging the private sector to expand its production base, increasing local export rates and attracting foreign investments.

[Dr Yousuf Hamed al Balushi is an economist at Smart Investment Gateway; email: yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com]

The realisation of Oman's 2040 Vision can be accomplished through five national transformation programmes

China factory activity unexpectedly expands in March

BEIJING: Factory activity in China unexpectedly expanded in March from a collapse the month before, but analysts caution that a durable near-term recovery is far from assured as the global coronavirus crisis knocks foreign demand and threatens a steep economic slump.

China's official Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 52 in March from a plunge to a record low of 35.7 in February, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Tuesday, above the 50-point mark that separates monthly growth from contraction.

Analysts polled by Reuters had expected the March PMI to come in at 45.0.

The NBS attributed the surprise rebound in PMI to its record low base in February and cautioned that the readings do not signal a stabilisation in economic activity.

That view was echoed by many analysts, who warn of a further period of struggle for China's businesses and the broader economy due to the rapid spread of the virus across the world, the unprecedented lockdowns in several countries and the almost near certainty of a global recession.

"This does not mean that output is now back to its pre-virus trend. Instead, it simply suggests that economic activity improved modestly relative to February's dismal showing, but remains well below pre-virus levels," said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital

Economists are already forecasting a steep contraction in China's first quarter gross domestic product, with some expecting a year-on-year slump of 9 per cent or more — the first such contraction in three decades

Economics, in a note to clients.

The pandemic's sweeping impact on production was underlined in two of Asia's main export engines, Japan and South Korea. In Japan, industrial out rose at a slower pace in February and factories expect a plunge this month, while production in South Korea contracted the most in 11 years.

Economists are already forecasting a steep contraction in China's first quarter gross domestic product, with some expecting a year-on-year slump of 9 per cent or more — the first such contraction in three decades.

Nie Wen, economist at Shanghai-based Hwabao Trust, said given weak export orders, rising stockpile and soft prices, the underlying issue facing Chinese manufacturers has shifted to a lack of market demand, from production shutdowns forced by



An employee wearing a face mask works on a production line manufacturing elastic fabric products, in Nantong, Jiangsu province, China. — Reuters

Chinese authorities.

The survey's sub-index of manufacturing production picked up to 54.1 in March from February's 27.8, but new export orders received by Chinese manufacturers were still mired in contraction, after ticking up to 46.4 from 28.7 in February.

Manufacturers are still facing big operational pressures, the

survey showed, with over half of the respondents reporting a lack of market demand and 42 per cent reporting financing issues, both up from the previous month.

"The biggest problem facing China's economy in the second quarter is the slumping foreign demand," said Nie, adding that authorities may roll out more policies on top of the billions

of dollars pumped into the financial system since February to boost domestic consumption and tide over the shrinking overseas demand.

Markets reacted positively to the PMI survey, with Asian stock rising as investors seemed relieved by the rare good news as the pandemic showed few signs of abating.

China's yuan, however, barely

budged, reflecting analysts' views that a sustainable bounce in manufacturing looked some way off despite a slowdown in China's coronavirus infections from its peak in February.

GRIM OUTLOOK

Beijing, at great costs to the economy, had imposed draconian quarantine rules and travel restrictions to curb the pandemic that has killed more than 3,000 in the country.

While life for millions of people has started to slowly return to normal, the pace of business resumptons has been constrained by China's efforts to guard against a second wave of infections from abroad. The coronavirus, which originated late last year in China, has wreaked havoc along global supply chains and severely hurt foreign demand amid tight lockdowns in Europe, the United States and a number of other key economies where daily life has ground to a halt.

Already, Chinese exporters are seeing overseas orders being scrapped as the worldwide spike in coronavirus infections and deaths has forced many of the nation's trading partners to slow or suspend production. Globally the outbreak has claimed the lives of over 37,000 people with more than 770,000 infections.

China should not set an economic growth target this year given the heightened uncertainty and avoid having to resort to "flood-like stimulus" to meet the goal, a central bank adviser said. — Reuters

Macy's, Kohl's, Gap turn to mass furloughs as virus crisis deepens

NEW YORK: Major US retailers Macy's Inc, Kohl's Corp and Gap Inc said they would furlough tens of thousands of employees, as they prepare to keep stores shut for longer to curb the spread of the coronavirus outbreak.

Kohl's also said it would suspend its share repurchase programme, evaluate its dividend plan and draw down \$1 billion from an existing credit line, joining a growing list of companies seeking to shore up their cash reserves to weather the financial hit from the health crisis.

Macy's and Gap have suspended their dividends and have also tapped into their credit facilities.

Gap said the furloughs will affect its store employees in the United States and Canada. The company had about 129,000 employees at the end of last year.

The action will impact a majority of its about 130,000 employees, Macy's said, while all workers at store and store distribution centres, as well as some corporate office associates will be affected, according



to Kohl's.

Shares of Kohl's, which had about 122,000 employees in 2019, closed down nearly 9 per cent. Macy's stock ended nearly 3 per cent lower.

"Given these extraordinary circumstances, we are taking difficult and decisive actions to strengthen our financial liquidity," Kohl's Chief Executive Officer Michelle Gass said in a statement. Gass said she will not take a salary.

Widespread lockdowns to arrest the spread of the outbreak in the

United States have hammered sales for brick-and-mortar retailers as most stores remain closed, despite their online business staying up and running.

President Donald Trump on Sunday extended his stay-at-home guidelines until the end of April, dropping a hotly criticised plan to get the economy up and running by mid-April after a top medical adviser said more than 100,000 Americans could die from the outbreak. — Reuters

Alibaba plans to buy stakes in Yunda

HONG KONG: Alibaba Group Holding Ltd plans to buy at least 10 per cent of Yunda Holding Co Ltd, marking the e-commerce giant's fifth investment in a large courier, two people with knowledge of the matter said. Alibaba is looking to buy the stake from Yunda's controlling shareholders — founding couple Nie Tengyun and Chen Liying — who own 52.19 per cent of Yunda through their wholly owned firm Shanghai LuoJieSi Investment Management, said one of the people. At the current market price, the stake would be worth at least \$790 million.

The other person said China's dominant e-commerce firm could go beyond 10 per cent and buy up to 15 per cent of Shenzhen-listed Yunda. The people declined to be identified as they were not authorised to speak with media. Under Chinese regulations, a stake of over 5 per cent in a domestically listed company can be sold at a discount of as much as 10 per cent to the firm's share price on the last trading day prior to a deal. Based on Monday's closing price, the deal could fetch at least \$790 million, as Yunda has a market capitalisation of about \$8.78 billion.



The logo of Alibaba Group is seen at the company's headquarters in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, China. — Reuters

Alibaba has already bought a small stake in Yunda which is below threshold for disclosure, said two other people with knowledge of the matter. Alibaba declined to comment. Yunda did not respond to a request for comment. The move would mark another step forward in Alibaba's efforts to gain a bigger say in China's fragmented but fast-growing express delivery industry. Domestic delivery firms dispatched 63 billion parcels last year, up 24 per cent from 2018, while revenue grew 23 per cent year-on-year to 745 billion yuan (\$104.95 billion), data from the State Post Bureau showed in January. — Reuters

Yum Brands breaks junk debt market's 4-week fast



Delivery motorbikes line up in front of a Pizza Hut restaurant in Nice, France. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Yum Brands Inc, owner of Pizza Hut, KFC and Taco Bell restaurant chains, sold \$600 million in bonds on Monday, reopening the US market for junk-rated debt issues after its longest lull since the 2008 financial crisis.

Yum's bond offering represented a glimmer of investor demand in one of the riskiest corners of the corporate credit market, which seized up for much of March after the coronavirus outbreak morphed into an economically devastating pandemic.

While US companies last week issued new investment-grade debt at a record clip, there had been no new issuance in the so-called high-yield market for junk-rated debt issuers since March 4.

Yum boosted its debt offering by 20 per cent, after planning to raise \$500 million. The deal was more than 10 times oversubscribed, according to a person familiar with the matter.

However, Yum was forced to accept a considerably higher borrowing cost than in its prior debt deals. The company sold bonds maturing in 2025 at a 7.75 per cent yield. By comparison, Yum raised \$800 million in September through 10-year debt with a yield of 4.75 per cent.

The higher the yield, the more expensive the bond is for the company. The debt proceeds will go towards "general corporate purposes," Yum said in a statement.

The Federal Reserve said last week it will backstop the investment-grade market but has made no such pledge for high-yield debt. — Reuters

Coronavirus drives US March auto sales off a cliff

DETROIT: US new vehicle sales likely drove off a cliff in March as the coronavirus pandemic pounded consumer confidence and shuttered dealerships across much of the country, and sales are likely to take a further beating in April as social distancing guidelines remain in place.

"When you look at March, we basically lost half the month," said Eric Lyman, chief industry analyst at car-shopping website TrueCar.com.

TrueCar has forecast a sales drop for March of 37 per cent and Lyman said sales in April could also be off between 50 per cent to 60 per cent.

A rebound for the sector will likely depend on how long the crisis lasts and what level of support the US government provides for consumers in the meantime.

Most major automakers, including General Motors Co and Toyota Motor Corp, are due to report quarterly US

sales on April 1. Ford Motor Co and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV will report sales on April 2.

Tesla Inc also typically reports first quarter deliveries during the week after the quarter ends. Analysts had expected the company to deliver about 93,000 vehicles during the quarter, according to Refinitiv. Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk on March 19 suspended production at the company's Fremont, California, assembly plant under pressure from local authorities.

Just how bad March was is an open question. Cox Automotive did not release a monthly forecast, but said its data showed that on March 27, new vehicle sales to consumers fell 55 per cent versus the same day in 2019.

In US states under "stay-at-home" orders, sales fell as much as 80 per cent to 90 per cent, Cox estimated. Those include states like California and New



Automobiles are shown for sale at a car dealership in Carlsbad, California, US.

— Reuters

York, home to a large portion of the American car-buying population.

"April will be just as dismal," said

Cox analyst Michelle Krebs.

IHS Markit estimates the coronavirus pandemic will cut full-

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For Rent

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OPEN space prime offices for rent at Qurum, adjacent to Muscat Private School on the main road, ground floor, 550 sq meters, every meter is RO 6.500 with general services. ☎95308724.

For Rent

APARTMENT for rent in Maabela 8 in Muscat. It's the highest one of the other two. 3 rooms with 3 toilets one family room, small store and air-condition. ☎71136222.

SHOP in Seeb market. ☎95250300/ 99110600/ 24182000.

For Rent

FLAT for family for rent, Alaom Al Akhtar shop, behind Irani Bank, Abu Abdullah ☎99627724, Abu Abdulrahman ☎99315490.

For Rent

NEW building in Maabela Industrial Area available for rent. Corner location for showroom, hypermarket or bank. Ground floor, 1st and 2nd floors are open. ☎99323030

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INDUSTRIAL land 5,500 sqm in Jufnin ☎95490842, 97928817.

For Rent

3 BHK Flat & studio flat in central Ruwi & 2 BHK in Medinat Al Ilam. Call ☎99238012/ 24704994.

For Rent

A VILLA in the old Al Filaj, Al Tayibeen District, 5 bedrooms, 6 toilets, a living room, a majlis, two kitchens & a store, building area 333 sqm, land area 637 sqm, the villa is 1 km far from Al Maabelah RO 300.000. Call ☎92111892.

For Rent

NEW Flats For Rent at Darsait near to Ministry of Sports Affairs, Mumtaz area The flats include: 1 Living Room, 2 Bedroom, Kitchen, 3 Toilets, Every room with split A/C, High quality finishing. Rent per flat is RO 320/- Interested persons, please contact. ☎00968-92225523.

For Rent

WE have a farm for rent. The fee is RO 1/metre. The farm is located on Muscat-Yeti road. It is suitable for labour residency or for storage purposes. Contact ☎99639269.

For Rent

ONE bedroom flat at Darsait near Medical RO 170/-. Two BHK Al Khuwair RO 300/-. Athaiba behind Zubair RO 300/-. (24790449, Fax: 24790559.

For Rent

1BHK & 2 BHK flats for rent at Ruwi and Al Khoudh. ☎93994402, 93994403, 24834644.

For Rent

FLATS in Al Wadi Al Kabir near to the Al Kuwaiti Mosque. ☎99425958.

For Rent

NEW apartment for rent, one room, 2 toilets, kitchen and dinning. Location, Al Khoudh Market, Red Taj building, 7th floor. Per month rent RO 190/-. ☎92838118.

For Rent

TWO new apartment for rent in Al Qurum near Mina al Fahal. ☎94664635, 95850345.

We buy used and broken cars which have instalments in cash. ☎90202090.

For Sale

RESIDENTIAL-commercial land in Nizwa, Hail Farq beside LuLu and Grand Mall is offered for sale. The plot is open from three directions and a corner. It is 750 sqm and RO 70,000 is requested. To check the plot's map and inquiries, communicate with ☎97722292.

For Sale

FOR sale: Extravagant and furnished residences for female students in Al Khuwair, Al Mawaleh and Al Khoudh along with all assets. ☎99001332.

For Sale

PROFESSIONAL movers company number ☎94551284.

For Sale

PAINTING, Plumbing, Building maintenance, Excavation, Stone Pitching, Gabion. ☎99057348.

For Sale

MAINTENANCE: 1. AC Maintenance & Servicing; 2. Fridge, Washing Machine & Dish washer repairing; 3. Painting & cleaning services; 4. Electrical & Plumbing Carpentry work. Contact: ☎99447257, 97014234, 24504281.

For Sale

PAINTING/ plumbing/ building maintenance. Excavation/ stone pitching/ gabion. ☎99057348.

For Sale

PROVIDES all kinds of legal works, LLC registration, agreements, contracts. Takes all kinds of cases of companies. ☎97351649.

For Sale

INDUSTRIAL land for sale. Area of 20,500 square metres in the Rusayl area, Price RO 70/- per square metre. ☎99369192.

CLASSIFIED SECTION

RUWI

95919344/ 24649594/ 9984 1230/ 99639264/ Behind Royal Oman Police, Adjacent to Dhofar Building, Ruwi.

For Sale

RESIDENTIAL-commercial land in Nizwa, Hail Farq beside LuLu and Grand Mall is offered for sale. The plot is open from three directions and a corner. It is 750 sqm and RO 70,000 is requested. To check the plot's map and inquiries, communicate with ☎97722292.

For Sale

DIESEL Tanker, 1,600 gallon Volvo, 1987. ☎92836774.

For Sale

JEWELLERY workshop attached with showroom for sale at Walja, Way Number 4301, Al Fursan Street, shop Number 25. ☎24835276, 93035380.

For Sale

1) A LAND IN HALBAN behind GUtech is offered for sale. The land enjoys a permit for twin-villa.

2) A LAND is for sale in Mabaila 8 owner: ☎95959166.

For Sale

HOUSE for sale in Wadi Uдай for RO 27,000 (neg). ☎99462401/ 99243291.

For Sale

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) ☎99242445, 99327939.

For Sale

A SHOWROOM in Al Qurum in strategic location with extravagant interior design on 280 sqm is offered for sale at RO 25,000. ☎92470024.

For Sale

PICK-UPS, Double Cabin, Buses, Cranes, Primover & Trailers. ☎99465358 & 99454660.

For Sale/Rent

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact ☎94272979, 96252664.

(NEW 3 STOREY VILLAS for sale/ rents WADI KABIR/ AL KHUWAIR), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir). ☎96596348.

Situation Vacant

JOB vacancies for staff nurse Al Yamama Medical Center and Al Amal Al-Bassam Polyclinic. ☎98504226/ 94094262.

.....

MODERN Explorer Company LLC request job of **Accountant**. Indian nationality. He holds an Omani driver's licence. Send CV by e-mail: info@ees-oman.com ☎91240404

.....

HIGH Pressure Trading LLC, Hydroflow, looking for **Accounts Clerk** and **PRO** with one or two years experience in Suhar. Kindly send your CV with expected salary at: alzulfi@eim.ae

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MODERN Explorer Company LLC request jobs of **Conditioning Technicians**. ☎91240404. E mail: info@ees-oman.com

.....

URGENTLY required **Electrician with electrical licence (DCRP)**. Omani or expatriate (3 years experience). Contact ☎99337587, 99043127, 99348493.

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LOOKING for **Saleswoman** to work in printing press. Contact: ☎92673716.

.....

WE are looking for **Sales Executive**, candidates have minimum bachelor degree qualification and relevant experience can send CVs to Email: accounts@alsaroojss.com

.....

Announcement

ANNOUNCEMENT OF APPOINTMENT OF DISTRIBUTORES

THE Arab Convertible Industries Company LLC, which specialises in the manufacture of household and industrial detergents of all kinds and based in the manufacture of the Sultanate of Oman (Barka), announces its desire to conclude product distribution contacts in each of the governorates of the Sultanate (Muscat, Al Batinah North and South, Al Sharqiyah North and South, Al Wusta, Al Dakhiliyah, Salalah) and outside the Sultanate as well. For those wishing to enter the competition, please call the following numbers during working hours: (00968 - 99380182 or 00968 - 99322446). And send a brief summary of the company's business activities to the email: altabarak14@gmail.com

.....

URGENTLY required **Beautician**. Visa will be provided. Contact ☎94939252.

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REQUIRED **Counter Sales Staff** for building and carpentry material shop with two to three years experience at Wadi Kabir, contact ☎97914594.

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SIT WANTED

INDIAN male, MEP civil engineer graduate from Muscat and Master in sustainable architecore with 2 years experience, seek immediate placement, Oman D/L and employment visa available up to 2022 . Contact ☎92529664.

.....

INDIAN male, MEP engineer highly experienced in Oman, seeks immediate suitable placement. Contact ☎92056639.

.....

9 YEARS Oman experienced light duty driver looking for a job. MD Shafi ☎78058700

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INDIAN, MBA in Finance, completed schooling in Muscat, looking for accounts related jobs. Contact ☎97054007

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Services

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. ☎94301888.

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Announcement

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company (**Gabal Bat International LLC**), which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1356212**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO **100,000.000** to RO **10,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry within 30 days from the date hereof.

.....

Situation Wanted

LADY Indian English teacher with over 25 year experience, currently seeks full time position in colleges or training institutions. Responsibilities in English language teaching or soft skills trainer with preference for aviation sector. Possess valid Omani driving license. Contact GSM ☎92541510

.....

INDIAN female with Oman experience — Admin/Accounts, seeks job ☎91719246.

.....

CIVIL engineer/QS engineer, 11 years in UAE, freelance & Oman driving licence available, looking for full-time or part-time job☎97299165.

.....

SALES/Marketing/ retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact ☎93920174. Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

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SUDANESE, 3 years experience in KSA, firefighting and fire alarm field, Nebosh (IGC) holder, driving licence: ☎79318246

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CIVIL diploma, 2+ years experience, Oman-DL, NOC available, seeking job. ☎99488438, e-mail: abdulrahman 9035239249 @gmail.com

.....

SINGLE, 27-year-old Tunisian national, Oman experience+driving license, looking for a job in admin, customer service, marketing, stock receiving/ management and any other related field. ☎96286678

.....

INDIAN, 33, male, already have 2.5 years of experience in Oman. In the field of Oil and Gas, maintenance, service of instrument air compressor and rotary equipment and have 6 years of automobile sales in India. Looking for suitable position. Currently on visit visa for 30 days. Contact ☎78207968, 92762001. E-mail: somuk1486@gmail.com

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INDIAN male 30 with NEBOSH Igc 7 years GCC experience on visit looking for suitable position. Call ☎+96878262237.

.....

MECHANICAL engineer. 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact ☎96511338. Email: rkdhanush11@gmail.com

.....

INDIAN male 25, MBA with 2.6 years of experience, having valid Omani driving licence, available for immediate joining for suitable post. Contact ☎00968 95960211. E-mail: dedwin130@gmail.com

.....

ACCOUNTANT male Seeking good position. Experience more than 10 years with 4 years experience of Oman. Now on visit visa. ☎96090127

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SEEKING suitable placement. Qualified travel, aviation, hospitality personnel experienced in customer care and sales seeking placement. Immediate availability. Contact: ☎90485199, 79588741

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FINANCE Manager/ CFO. Indian Chartered Accountant and Cost Accountant with 25 years of experience in Trade Finance, MIS, Budget, Planning, Strategy, Projects, Procurement, Admin, seeks suitable placement. Contact: ☎99884291/99741875 Email: vipul70@gmail.com

.....

INDIAN male, Civil Engineer, 35 years in Oman with consultants and ministries, seek suitable position. Employment visa upto Sept 2021. Can work on present visa. Contact ☎99315714.

.....

MECHANICAL engineer specialized in quality inspection with cswip 3.1 & ASNT LEVEL II certifications looking for an opening in oil & gas industry. Currently in Muscat,kindly contact in ☎96206400 or (arunedathil@gmail.com)

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A YOUNG, Indian national, experienced in men's apparel sales, is looking for a suitable placement Contact: ☎78052285

.....

INDIAN male MBA graduate with over 12 year experience in sales, business development, marketing, accounts management and presales. Presently on visit visa in Muscat seeks suitable openings. Willing to join immediately. GSM ☎97733081 Email: sadiqbashawjs@gmail.com

.....

Situation Wanted

PAKISTANI male driver, 8 years experience in Oman, knows Arabic, seeks job. ☎96551602.

.....

MECHANICAL Engineer, 38-year-old Tunisian with 12-year Experience in administration, marketing, sales and customer service, looking for a job in these or other fields. ☎95643359.

.....

INDIAN male civil engineer graduate from Muscat and Master in sustainable architecture from Europe with 2 years experience seeks suitable position. Oman D/L and NOC available. ☎99315714.

.....

SRI LANKAN Male (24), HNDE-QS/Civil Engineer With AutoCad-MEP qualified, +2 years experienced, looking for a suitable placement. GSM:☎92187572, Email: sifathhasan1995@gmail.com

.....

DRIVER have 8 years experience need a job. Contact ☎94954431/ 91788569.

.....

INDIAN male, 23, B Com, with 2 years experience in Accounts and Finance on a family visit, available for immediate joining. Suitable post of accountant, looking for a job. E-mail: aaronfernandes033@gmail.com. Contact ☎79869563.

.....

I NEED a driver job, urgent, with NOC paper. My name: Masum Billah. ☎968 94991705.

.....

INDIAN male 26, BBM & MBA with UAE 2 years experience presently on visit visa in Oman seeks suitable opening willing to join immediately contact ☎78119897 Email: mohammedraivan25@gmail.com

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PART-TIME accounting up to finalisation with free software. Contact ☎91720465.

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INDIAN, male, Age 26, B.Tech Mechanical Engineer, with 1+year Experience of India as site Engineer, HVAC, Autocad, fire fighting Equipment Maintenance and Technical works, seeking suitable job. Contact ☎91921038, E-mail: muqtarkhan80@gmail.com

.....

INDIAN male, BE+ MBA, 15 years experience in electrical products in projects and retail segment at senior position with valid D/L and NOC, seeks placement. Contact ☎95954779

.....

ARCHITECT, 9 years experience in maintenance projects, finishing, interior design and project management. ☎94481780.

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SEEKING a job. Bangladeshi, 5 years experience in driving. ☎95291202

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A MECHANICAL engineer with 1 year experience as operations manager looking for a job. Available in Muscat till 5th October on visit visa. ☎96041682. Email: abdulhamid13P@gmail.com

.....

INDIAN male, MBA in marketing, 21 years experience in India as trainer customer service, sales and retail service available on visit visa. Contact ☎95355193

.....

INDIAN, female (22), ACCA finalist looking for a suitable position. Contact: ☎+968 96448041 Email id: ashlindavis28@gmail.com

.....

A FEMALE driver from home to work place— from Amerat to work place in Qurayat — Mizara' 5 days a week. ☎94005648.

.....

ACCA-UK passed Pakistani in Muscat on visit visa, needs suitable jobs. Qualified as Financial Accountant with about 4 years' experience. Please ☎ 91449085, E: mailmrmasoodshah911@gmail.com

.....

LOOKING for light driving job, 8 years experience in Oman. MD.Shafi ☎95272937.

.....

MECHANICAL Engineer, 21, Indian Male, Currently in Oman Looking to work on any Engineering field. Contact ☎91217663, Email: adolmisba@gmail.com

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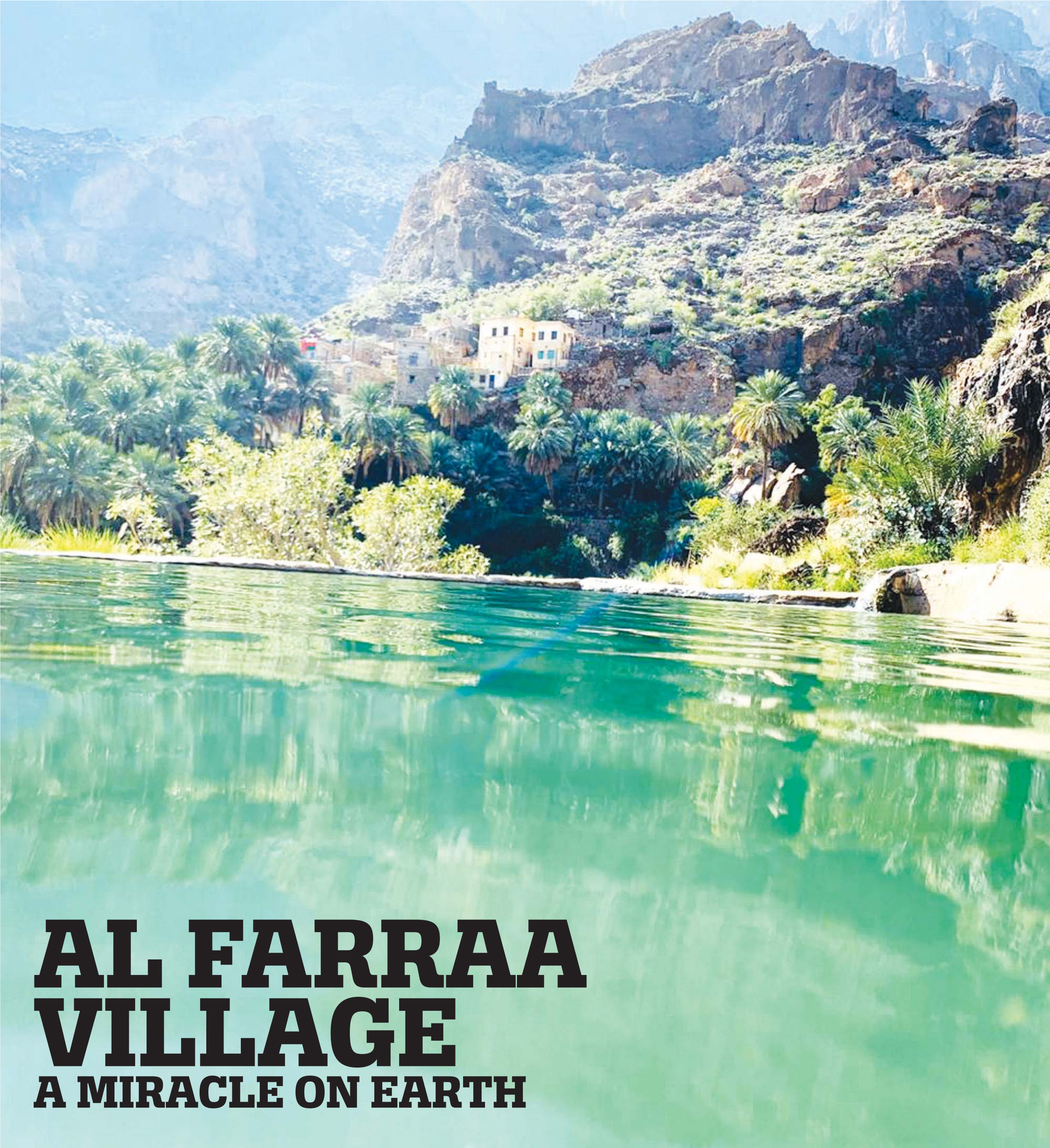
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AL FARRAA VILLAGE A MIRACLE ON EARTH

RUQAYA AL KINDI

If you have an opportunity to visit Al Rustaq, don't miss going around Wadi Al Sahtan where you can escape to the small village of Al Farraa. Spending a full day in Al Farraa village and enjoying its green agricultural areas and its trickling waters will stay in your memory for a long time.

This village is an ideal destination for hiking enthusiasts. "There is a mountainous road in the village that connects it to the village of Misfat al Abriyeen, in the Wilayat of Al Hamra where the roads are covered with trees, and extends for about 25 km up and down," said Jumaa al Thuhli, a resident.

"The road is currently used as the mountainous path for hikers and adventurers, as it is one of the most famous and beautiful paths for hiking in Wadi Al Sahtan. In the past, this road is the only link Wadi al Sahtan had with the Wilayat of Al Hamra, and people were using don-

keys as means of transportation for goods as the road was used mainly for trade purpose," he added.

Al Farraa is one of the beautiful villages that preserved its heritage character. Located on the edge of Jebel Shams, it has a mild climate in summer. It is in turn affected by monsoons and fresh air and its elevation is 2,997 metres," said Abdulla Al Abri, a resident.

The abundance of water springs in the village which are flowing throughout the year is another reason to visit this place, Abdulla explains, "the water has a great effect in cooling the weather and this is known scientifically. Due to large number of trees in the village, including tall ones, the sun's heat and brightness is blocked," he said.

During winter, the village is increasingly cold due to several factors, including abundance of water and presence of farms of various types which surround village's houses. "When the trees block



the sunlight, the water makes the soil moist, which is reflected in chill weather," Abdullah noted. He referred that the village, in general, is characterised by a late sunrise due to the presence of surrounding mountain ranges.

The village is divided into two neighbourhoods, each with many houses. The houses on the upper part of the village are located along the mountains and at an altitude which give them a distinct view. Reaching these houses require climbing up 120 cement steps and when you reach there, you will see another miracle on earth.

"While the tourists love this village and enjoy awesome views, for residents, it is hard to climb these stairs up and down the village, and it gets harder when carrying luggage or other belongings," Jumaa said. Most of the houses in the village are abandoned now, with only two houses inhabited. Old people come to their homes during the weekend.

The villagers mainly practice agricultural as a profession. The crops are varied and the most important are palm trees, lemon, oranges, other citrus trees, grapes, figs, pomegranates, mangoes, garlic, onions and papaya.

Likewise, banana trees grow fast and frequently in valleys due to uninterrupted flow of water throughout the year. "The village is distinguished by the flow of water springs throughout the year and because of that the residents call it "the town of springs," Jumaa said.

It is also characterised with many waterfalls during rainy season, as it is surrounded by mountains on three sides. The village, as well, is located at the middle of two wadis that come down from the peaks of Jebel Shams.

Al Farraa village is a unique tourist destination, where walking among palm trees, ripe trees and grassy vegetation area, and flowing aflaj add another pleasure to tourists.

OMAN

footballers appeal people to stay home



Oman team, the champions of 19th edition of Gulf Cup.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 31

Oman's former national football team players produced an awareness video for the public in football terminology on the importance of staying at home during these days. The former stars appealed to each person to fulfil their role to keep the country safe from spreading the COVID-19 coronavirus.

Many top social media accounts shared the video which reached to a larger targeted community. The Sultanate team players who won the Gulf Cup for the first time in 2009 were the stars of the video including Imad al Hosni, Ahmed Mubarak 'Kanu', Ismail al Ajmi, Hassan Mudhafar, Hassan

Rabee, Said al Shoon, Talal Khalfan, Hashim Saleh, Sultan al Touqi, Fawzi Basheer, Faye al Rushaidi, Mohammed al Shiba, Badar al Maimani, Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Hamdi Hobeas.

Imad al Hosni, former striker of the national team, begins the video and he said: "Attack the rumours by not sharing these wrong information and make sure to stay at home".

Oman's current captain of the team, Ahmed Mubarak 'Kanu', affirmed that: "You are the one who can stop spreading the virus, so please be responsible for your family's safety as well as the nation and community".

Oman's Ismail al Ajmi stated in the video: "Our result in the match against

COVID-19 coronavirus team is to win and snatch three crucial points. Responsibility and commitment are top priorities now and please stay at home."

Star goalkeeper Faye al Rushaidi, said: "You are trustworthy guard through your awareness. So please be more responsible to your nation and make sure to stay safe at your residence."

Former striker Badar al Maimani says that the current situation did not accept any middle solutions.

"Kindly assure your presence at your home with your family members," he added.

Hassan Mudhafar, who was one of



factors behind the Sultanate lifting the Gulf Cup title in 2009, said that your nation is requesting you to attend in an essential camp. "The warm-up camp will be at your place and make sure to be there safe," he ended.

Central defender Mohammed al Shiba said, "remember you are positioned at the beginning of the defensive line for your family and the country. Please keep yourself at home."

Sultan al Touqi stated in the video: "We learned in football that individuality of the player is important sometimes to score. Therefore, support the country to be away from any gathering or a group."

Oman's and Dhofar's striker

Abdulaziz al Maqbali affirmed that your team is Oman and the souls which live inside are the fans. "Please be the first player in your country and stay at home."

Former player Hamdi Hobeas, commented: "Winning on the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic should be in the regulation time, not in the extra time. Please stay at home".

Hashim Saleh, who scored crucial goals for the national team in different top matches, said: "Our target is common. Please support us to score the goal though an organised scoring attempt. Kindly stay at home."

Hassan Rabee, top scorer of the 19th Gulf Cup, stated in the video: "Any

goal we scored against COVID-19 coronavirus team will survive a soul. Please make sure to be safe in your residence."

Talal Khalfan also participated in the awareness video and he said: "It is correct that the best defending way is to attack. However, please attack from your own place without gathering with others. Please stay at home."

Oman midfield maestro Fawzi Basheer said: "You do not require to have a coach for any technical decision. Please make sure to be in your home."

Said al Shoon delivered the last message and he said the only best tactical plan for the match is to be at your home.

WTA working on better pay, considers extending Tour

MUMBAI: With lower-level players reeling financially from the tennis shutdown over the coronavirus, the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) said on Tuesday it was working to boost players' earnings when the sport resumes and may extend the 2020 season.

The season screeched to a halt in early March due to the virus, leaving players in the lowest tiers without any opportunity to earn their livelihoods.

"The WTA is diligently working with our tournaments to maximise earning possibilities when the professional tennis circuit is able to resume and is considering an extension to the current 44-week season to enable more tournaments to take place," the association said in a statement.

"It is our sincere hope to return to the court as soon as possible — when the health and safety of our players, fans and staff can be guaranteed, we will be back competing."

The men's ATP Tour and the WTA, which runs the women's circuit, suspended all tournaments until June 7 after countries started locking down borders to contain the coronavirus.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF), the sport's governing body, also postponed its lower-tier World Tennis Tour until June 8.

The November 1-8 WTA Finals



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka is presented with a cheque after winning the Qatar Open 2020 final against Czech Republic's Petra Kvitova. — Reuters

is the season-ending tournament on the women's Tour calendar before the season heads into a break of eight to 10 weeks.

In recent weeks professional players, who solely depend on match

earnings, have spoken about their financial concerns.

"We wish there was a way everyone, especially those in need the most, could be compensated at the level they were expecting, but the needs are so

great and the WTA unfortunately is not in a financial position to do that," the WTA said.

"Professional tennis players are independent contractors and not employees of the WTA. As a result, a player's compensation is based on on-court competition and when tournaments are not held this puts a pause on their principal revenue flow.

"The WTA fully recognises the challenges these athletes are facing as well as those similar challenges being dealt with from millions of people around the world during this unprecedented situation."

The ATP Finals, scheduled to start on November 15 in London, is the final event on the men's Tour before the ITF's flagship team-event Davis Cup in Spain.

The men's Tour is also working behind the scenes and looking at ways to support the players.

"The current situation raises many questions which we empathise with greatly, and we are working hard on evaluating all options," ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said.

"Our ability to address any supportive measures will be best guided once we know the duration of the crisis and when the Tour will resume, which remains unknown at this time."

— Reuters

Federer wows fans on Twitter with video of trick shots



Switzerland's Roger Federer

MUMBAI: Roger Federer delighted fans by posting a video on Twitter on Tuesday, which shows him executing some trademark trick shots against a wall in the snow.

The 20-times Grand Slam champion last played at the semi-finals of the Australian Open, where he lost to eventual champion Novak Djokovic, before undergoing keyhole surgery on his knee in February.

He is supposed to return to playing in time for the grasscourt season in June.

"Making sure I still remember how to hit trick shots #TennisAtHome,"

Federer tweeted along with the video, which showed the Swiss moving around seamlessly amid snowfall.

The video has already garnered over 3.85 million views and shows Federer hitting between-the-legs "tweeners" and behind-the-back shots.

The tennis circuit is currently halted with the men's ATP Tour and the WTA, which runs the women's circuit, suspending all tournaments until June 7 after countries started locking down borders to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

— Reuters



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A countdown clock shows the adjusted time remaining for the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games outside Tokyo station, on Monday. — AFP

DAUNTING TASK AHEAD

IOC AND JAPAN ANNOUNCE NEW DATES AS 17-DAY GAMES TO START ON JULY 23, 2021

TOKYO: Amid uncertainty about when the global coronavirus pandemic will end, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Japanese organisers could at least decide on the new dates for the postponed Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics.

The 17-day Games will start on July 23, 2021, the fourth Friday of the month like the initial plan, the IOC and Tokyo organisers said on Monday.

The Paralympics will start August 24 and run until September 5, also keeping the same slot.

A longer delay was needed as the world has been plagued with the coronavirus with apparently no light at the end of the tunnel.

A summertime Games will give athletes more time to prepare for the Games than a springtime slot as the pandemic has already disrupted Olympic qualification procedures, Tokyo Olympic organising committee president Yoshiro Mori told a news conference on Monday.

Holding the events during the summer vacation will also cause less disruption and fewer adjustments as the same season of the year will enable more ticket holders to watch the sports at venues and more volunteers to be involved, Mori said.

Organising committee chief executive Toshiro Muto said there is not much change in the competition



The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games mascots Miraitowa (L) and Someity (R) and logos are displayed at the Tokyo 2020 headquarters in Tokyo on Monday. — AFP

schedule. The swift decision on the new dates “will enable us to accelerate our preparations,” Mori said.

However, one day after the IOC and Japan agreed last week on the postponement until 2021, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike admitted the Olympic host city was in a “grave situation” with the number of coronavirus infections rising sharply. Koike even hinted at a possible lockdown in the capital.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also warned on Saturday that Japan

needs to brace itself for a “prolonged battle” against the coronavirus.

Yohei Oyama, a public official in the northern city of Higashine, said he wondered the coronavirus crisis would end by winter.

Earlier this month, the outbreak forced Germany’s men’s goal ball team to cancel a training camp in the city scheduled in April ahead of the Paralympics.

As the new dates of the Games have been set, Oyama said the city would like to discuss with the German team about new schedules

of their training camp.

“But we cannot do that unless the current coronavirus crisis ends,” Oyama said.

Meanwhile, the construction of 21 luxury apartment buildings on an artificial island of Tokyo’s Harumi district will be completed in April. They will serve as the Olympic Village during the Games next year and about 18,000 people, including athletes, are expected to stay in the 3,850 units.

Since the apartments will be renovated after the Olympics, the

one-year postponement might make it difficult for some people to move into the rooms in March 2023, former Tokyo governor Yoichi Masuzoe told weekly magazine *Playboy*.

Masuzoe also said the Tokyo organisers underestimated the costs incurred by the postponement.

“Though the organisers estimated the postponement could cost 300 billion yen (2.8 billion dollars), I believe the costs could reach more than 1 trillion yen,” Masuzoe said.

The expected sum will include manpower expenses and security costs until 2021. “I wonder who in the world would pay all those costs,” he told the magazine.

Olympic Minister Seiko Hashimoto said that having decided on the new dates will make it easier for the organisers and Tokyo to make an estimate on the postponement.

Koike said she will ask the IOC to share the costs and that she will also discuss the issue with the central government, Kyodo News reported.

Tokyo, the central government and the organisers have been criticised for the already costly Olympics.

Officials estimated Japan could end up spending more than 3 trillion yen, much larger than the 734 billion yen estimated when Tokyo was bidding for the 2020 Games in 2013, calling for a “compact Olympics.”

Muto said he will ask all sponsors to extend their contract for a year.

Muto also said he had already talked to those responsible for all the venues, asked for cooperation on the new dates and gained a “certain understanding” from them.

With the Tokyo Olympics rescheduled, “we are going to get ready for the Games with an unwavering resolve,” Mori said.