

19  
Ramadhan  
Wednesday  
13/5/2020

Prayer times

|          | Muscat | Nizwa | Salalah |
|----------|--------|-------|---------|
| FAJR:    | 04:03  | 04:08 | 04:35   |
| DHUHR:   | 12:08  | 12:12 | 12:25   |
| ASR:     | 03:31  | 03:34 | 03:37   |
| MAGHRIB: | 06:46  | 06:49 | 06:52   |
| ISHA:    | 08:04  | 08:06 | 08:05   |

Ramadhan  
Mubarak  
2020/1441 AH

OMAN  
OBSERVER



VINOD NAIR

**MUSCAT:** Oman has been one of the countries in the world to quickly respond and activate an emergency plan since the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, a top official of the WHO told the Observer during a virtual press conference on Tuesday. While admitting that the measures aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19 have been costly, he said it has been effective as the death rates are lower than what was initially thought. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health announced 148 new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, taking the total to 3,721, including 17 deaths and 1,250 recoveries. Today's figures include 33 Omanis and 115 expatriates, apart from 39 new recoveries. Speaking to the Observer, Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Director for the East Mediterranean Region, said Oman has

COVID-19 SCREENING BUSES IN MUSCAT

In support of the national efforts in mitigating the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat) launched bus service to transport people to the free screening centres in addition to buses operated by Sinyar Oman which are designed for conducting free medical examinations for COVID-19 detection. The service is the first-of-its-kind in the Sultanate and is currently available in the Governorate of Muscat.

DETAILS ON P2

good surveillance and investigation systems, which were established in collaboration with the WHO. "Adequate measures were taken by Oman at all ports of arrival, tracing the contacts of the infected cases, distribution of PPE kits, laboratory tests, outreach campaigns and staffing in the healthcare". On the opening of the airports, he told the Observer: "It has been five months since the outbreak of virus in China. It has affected many countries across different sectors, apart from creating a health crisis. Many countries are now considering easing restrictions by reevaluating the risks. But they have to consider key measures suggested by the WHO". According to other WHO officials, "We recognise the serious socio-economic impact of the lockdowns which have a detrimental effect on many people's lives.

EUROPE, ASIA RISK RELAPSE IF LOCKDOWNS EASED TOO SOON

WASHINGTON: Asia and Europe risk a coronavirus relapse if they reopen their economies too early and before wide-reaching measures are in place to quickly identify and contain new infections, IMF senior economists said in a blog published on Tuesday. The lockdowns and other

restrictions have imposed a significant economic and psychological cost on citizens, and it was understandable that countries wanted to move swiftly to roll back these measures, the authors wrote. But moving too quickly could put the gains made in halting the spread of

COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus, at stake and trigger new human and economic costs, wrote Chang Yong Rhee, Director of the International Monetary Fund's Asia and Pacific department, and Poul Thomsen, Director of the European department. — AFP

# COVID-19 screening buses launched

**MUSCAT:** In support of the national efforts in mitigating the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Ministry of Health (MoH), in collaboration with the Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat), launched the bus service to transport people to the free screening centres in addition to buses operated by Sinyar Oman that are designed for administering free medical examinations for COVID-19 detection. The service is the first-of-its-kind in the Sultanate and is currently available in

the Governorate of Muscat. Three buses will facilitate people's access to the screening centres at areas with high-prevalence of the disease. Transportation service will cover currently three areas in Muscat, operating from 9 am till 1 pm as follows:

- Al Hamria (isolation area) to the Visa Medical Examination Centre in Darsait.
- Ghala Industrial area (Khimji-Warehouses).
- Al Maabela (Ministry of Heritage & Culture

Compound) Another two buses that are equipped for performing medical tests will offer a mobile service for screening. The targeted areas will be selected according to the epidemiological map, as cases will be triaged and tested inside these buses. The buses have been redesigned by Mwasalat to deliver the utmost performance. Moreover, drivers are undertaking all precautionary measures by adhering to the preventive actions, and sterilising the buses daily since the pandemic outbreak.



## Ministries review infection control, prevention guidance

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Health held a joint meeting at the Higher College of Technology on Tuesday to explain the Guidance for Infection Control and Prevention of Coronavirus Guiding, a manual outlining the preventive measures that should be followed by the private sector companies to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic among the workforce. The Ministry of Manpower had previously formed a joint work team with the Ministry of Health to identify protective measures for preventing coronavirus infections among workers. Additionally, an epidemiological surveillance team has been formed to follow up on the transmission of coronavirus and take adequate measures in accordance to the guiding manual. The guiding manual outlines a set of preventive and protective measures for private sector companies to avoid coronavirus infections among workers.



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| Mohd Al Rashdi : Head Office      | 99841230 | m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com      |
| Ali Al Maashari : Head Office     | 99639264 | wadialmeeh@yahoo.com       |
| Bakhit Al Shihri : Salalah Office | 92998577 | bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com |
| Abdullah Al Abri : Nizwa Office   | 99429094 | nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om  |
| Musalam Al Saidi : Suhar Office   | 99429192 | sohardaily@outlook.com     |

# Order to withdraw sterilisers without specified standards

SAMUEL KUTTY

**MUSCAT:** The Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP) has prohibited sale of sterilisers that fail to have standard contents to protect people in accordance with Oman’s Infectious Diseases Control Law. Dr Saeed bin Khamis al Kaabi, Chairman of PACP, has ordered immediate withdrawal of all the steriliser brands that has misleading information from the market. While issuing the order, he said, “the manufacturers and distributors are obliged to ensure the health safety of the people. Before sending their products to the market, they should obtain approvals from the

competent authorities”. According to the order, a minimum fine of RO 50 and not exceeding RO 1,000 will be imposed on the offenders. “If the violation continues, a fine of RO 50 will be imposed for each day on the offenders with the total not exceeding RO 2,000”, the order said. PACP said that since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the supply of hand sanitiser and steriliser brands have increased due to their increasing demand by consumers. “In the process, many new brands have entered the market and some of them are found to be not complying with the standards specified in the law”, the Authority said.



## Owners of stray animals warned

STAFF REPORTER

**MUSCAT:** Bader al Saeedi, Director of the Legal Department at the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources (MRMWR), said that it has initiated legal procedures against the owners of stray animals, by referring

violators to the public prosecutor, because of the risks they pose to individuals, and the public and private properties. It may be noted that there have been reports of run-over accidents due to the presence of stray animals, especially camels, on the streets of the Sultanate.



P.O. Box: 147, Jawharat A' Shatti, PC 134, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24400600, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.soharpower.com

### Invitation to Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) & Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AOGM)

The Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company SAOG. (hereinafter referred to as the “Company”) is pleased to invite the Shareholders of the Company to the Extraordinary General Meeting & the Annual General Meeting (AOGM) to be held at [3:00] pm on Tuesday 2 June 2020 through the electronic platform of the General Meetings , which you can access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.gov.om), and in the event the quorum requirement for holding the EGM or AOGM has not been met, a second EGM or AOGM shall be held on Monday 8 June 2020, to consider the following agendas:

**First: Extraordinary General Meeting agenda:**

- To amend the Company’s Article of Association (as attached).

**Second: Annual Ordinary General Meeting agenda:**

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report and Financial Position for the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- To consider the Board of Directors’ Report on the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- To consider the Auditors’ Report and approve the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2019.
- To consider and ratify the Board and Committees’ sitting fees paid during the preceding year and specify the Board and Committees sitting fees for the coming year (as in Annexure).
- To consider and approve the proposal to allocate up to OMR 40,000 for Corporate Social Responsibility activities for the financial year ending 31 December 2020.
- To notify the meeting with the donation made by the Company on account of corporate social responsibility during the financial year ended 31 December 2019 (as in annexure).
- To Notify the General meeting of the company’s contribution during the year to control the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) of OMR 10,000 (as in annexure)
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2020 and approve their remuneration.

In accordance of the Company’s article of association and Rules for Convening General Meetings of Public Joint Stock Companies via Modern Electronic means issued by the Capital Authority Market, we would like to inform you to the following:

Every shareholder has the right to appoint any other person as his proxy to attend the meeting and vote on his behalf through the Electronic means, Provided that the person has an investor number in the MCDC.

(a) Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall begin no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. In case that the shareholder balance changes by increase or decrease, the voting process will be cancelled again on the day of the General Meeting.

For more information, please contact Mr Salah Issa al Farsi, the Company’s Admin Manager, telephone number (+968) 99219419.



OMAN OIL MARKETING COMPANY SAOG Post Box: 92, Mina Al Fahal, Postal Code 116, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24574100, Fax: 24574101

### NOTICE OF ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Oman Oil Marketing Company SAOG (the “Company”) is pleased to invite all shareholders of the Company to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) and Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company (“AGM”) scheduled to be held at 3 pm on Sunday, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020, And that is through the electronic platform for holding general meetings, which you can access via the Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.gov.om). If the legal quorum is not completed, an extraordinary general meeting will be held again and / or a second annual ordinary general meeting at 3:00 pm on Thursday, 4 June 2020, to discuss the following agenda:

**Agenda for Extraordinary General Meeting**

To call for an EGM meeting: Approval for changes in the Company’s Article of Association in accordance to the New Commercial Companies Law SD 18/19 introduced on 19 April 2019. The Company has to adopt the changes by April 2020

**Agenda for Annual Ordinary General Meeting**

- To consider and approve the Director’s Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- To consider the Auditors’ Report and approve the Financial Statement (Statement of Financial Position and Statement of Comprehensive Income) for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- Informing the general Meeting about the cash dividends that were distributed to the shareholders on 30 March 2020 and by 60 baisas per share for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2019 and approving it.
- To approve the sitting fees of RO 36,700 to the Board of Directors for attending the Board meetings and the related committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2019 and to indicate the sitting fees for the financial year ending 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve distributing a total sum of RO 163,300 as the Board of Directors remuneration for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- To disclose the transactions and contracts which the Company has entered into with Related Parties in the course of the Company’s normal and ongoing business during the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- To study and approve the company transactions which the Company will enter into with Related Parties in the course of the company’s normal and ongoing business during the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- To disclose details on donations and Social Corporate Activities that company has entered into during the financial year ended 31 December 2019.
- To study and approve the donation and social corporate activities sum of RO 250,000 to be used during the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
- Informing the General Meeting of donations spent during this year to contribute to efforts to combat the outbreak of the Corona Virus (Covid 19), in the amount of RO 100,000.
- Election of four members of the Board of Directors to fill the vacant seats:
  - Any person who wishes to nominate himself / herself to the Board of Directors needs to fill in the nomination form which can be found at the following web link (<http://www.cma.gov.om/template/?c=8&s=592>)
  - The completed form should be delivered to the company’s head office marked to Mr. Mohammed Humaid Al Yahyai 5 working days prior to the Annual General Meeting. The deadline for submitting nomination forms will be no later than Monday 25 May 2020 and any forms submitted past this date will not be accepted.

In accordance with the company’s articles of association nominees who are shareholders must have at least 10,000 shares at the time of the Annual General Meeting.

  - By all means the new elected members will continue their membership till the end of membership of all other board members.
- To appoint auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2020 and fix their remuneration.
- To appoint consultants for the directors evaluation and fix their remuneration

According to the articles of association of the company and the regulations for holding public meetings using the modern technology issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

A) A legal person, exclusively, has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the general assembly meeting and vote on his behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the MCDC.

B) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the assembly is convened until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting, and if the shareholder’s balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled again on the day of the General meeting.

For further information, please contact Mr. Jaber Al Busidi on phone numbers 24574285 for Arabic and Mr. Mohammed Humaid Al Yahyai on phone number 24574108 for English respectively. The material relevant to the meeting is being mailed to all shareholders along with the notice at their registered address with Muscat Depository.

Chairman

Deloitte Auditors

Dr. Ahmed Al Mufarji Advocates & Legal Consultants  
For Advocacy & Legal Consultancy



# Nursing the world to health: Nurses, midwives play vital role

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

**MUSCAT:** International Nurses Day (May 12) is a great reminder of contributions made by the nurses in the Sultanate, who are making pace with the global nursing standards. Their fearless fight against COVID-19 has evoked appreciation from all quarters. These front-liners have no time for celebration this year as they are busy tackling the novel coronavirus.

“This day is dedicated to appreciate the sacrifices and commitment that the nurses reflect while providing care for patients, families and the people in general”, said Dr Jamal al Khadhuri, Director General for Nursing Affairs at the Ministry of Health.

“I would like to take this



opportunity to congratulate all the nurses on this special day and thank them for all that they do to sustain the provision of care and well-being of the patients within healthcare settings and outside”, he added.

There are more than 20,000 nurses in Oman, out of which 14,480 work within the Ministry of Health institutions. Those nurses

have a variety of educational degrees and qualifications, which prepared them to work within their area of specialisation.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has been very challenging to all healthcare systems and professionals.

“It would have been great if we were celebrating the International Nurses Day on a different situation, however,

nurses in Oman and worldwide have risen to the occasion from the beginning and were committed to provide professional care and continue to do so”, the Director General noted.

When asked what about the challenge nurses were facing today, Dr Jamal said, “Some of the challenges that the healthcare providers face in general and nurses in particular are ways to avoiding the infection and staying physically and mentally healthy”.

Leading in the time of crisis and putting their patients’ lives first.

Most countries are struggling with the non-availability of specialised nurses such as critical care nurses in this pandemic”, he pointed out.

## Post-pandemic future for Arab culture sector

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture participated in the extraordinary meeting of the Arab Culture Ministers via videoconferencing.

The meeting was held to discuss impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the heritage and culture sectors and the procedures that have been taken to face the repercussions on the two sectors, in addition to the mechanisms for setting a unified post-pandemic Arab strategy.



During the meeting, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Culture, said “There is no doubt that Coronavirus’ impact on the Sultanate is not very different

from the rest of the countries, in terms of cancelling many cultural activities, programmes and events, in addition to grounding the publishing industry to a halt and closing many castles, forts, museums and archaeological sites, as well as the postponement or cancellation of some seasonal projects and festivals, in addition to the financial losses”.

He pointed out that several measures have been taken to schedule events and projects.

— ONA

# Move to ensure food security through smart farming



ZAINAB AL NASSRI

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries announced the bidding for a Smart Agriculture project for vegetable production in Al Kamil W'al Wafi in Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

Smart Agriculture is a system that relies on advanced technology to grow food in a sustainable and clean way. The system involves rational use of natural resources, especially water. Its most prominent feature is reliance on low cost information management and analysis systems to make the best possible production decisions as well as automating agricultural processes such as irrigation, pest control, soil monitoring and crop control.

Thus, smart farms have a real potential of sustainable and good production based on a resource-efficient approach.

This comes as a part of the Sultanate's intention to invest in smart agriculture, which is the future of sustainable food security at a time when the world witnesses significant increase in population.

The smart farming can emerge as a right solution to address the concerns of food security as well as the

challenges of preserving arable land, especially with the aggravation of climate change problems, depletion of oil resources, and pollution of water and soil.

To keep pace with this steady increase, farmers must increase food production while preserving the environment, and use rational resources naturally, but they cannot do it alone, and traditional farming methods do not enable them to do so.

Dr Hamdan al Wahaibi, Director of Soil and

Water Research Center at the ministry, indicated that the ministry seeks to spread the culture of smart agriculture and its applications in the Sultanate.

SMART FARMING CAN EMERGE AS A RIGHT SOLUTION TO ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF FOOD SECURITY AS WELL AS THE CHALLENGES OF PRESERVING ARABLE LAND

## Inflation drops 0.97% in April

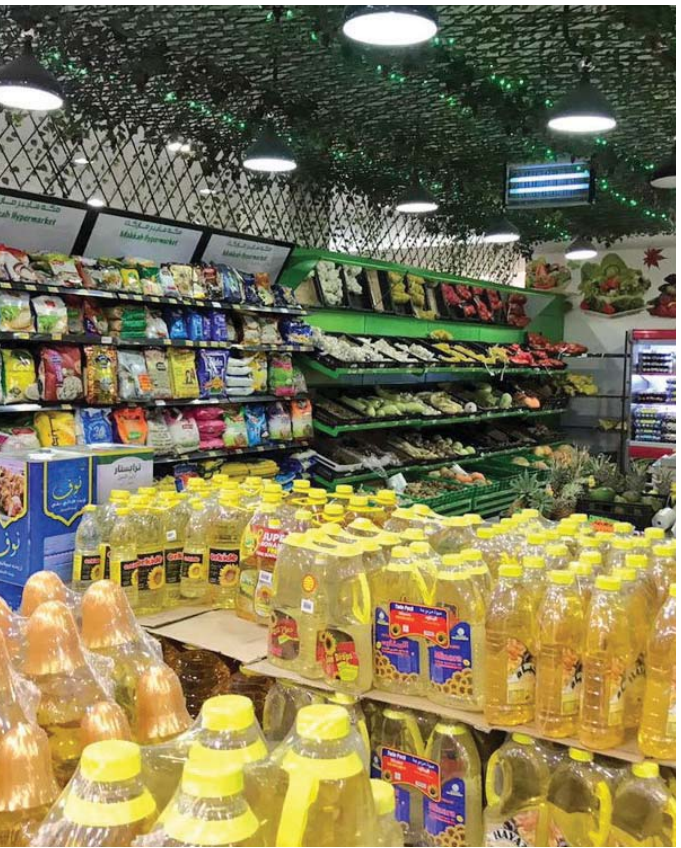
**MUSCAT:** The inflation rate, measured by movement in the average Consumer Price Index (CPI), fell by 0.97 per cent in April 2020 in the Sultanate compared to the same month of 2019, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI) on CPI. The inflation rate in April fell by 0.48 per cent compared to March 2020.

The food and non-alcoholic beverages group witnessed a price rise by 2.09 per cent; health by 1 per cent; education by 2.21 per cent and restaurants and hotels by 0.92 per cent.

However, the prices of furnishings, household equipment, and routine household maintenance fell by 0.19 per cent and those of housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels fell by 0.52 per cent. Also, the price of transport; communication; and recreation and culture fell by 6.54 per cent; 0.13 per cent; and 0.56 per cent, respectively in April 2020 compared to the same month of 2019.

The prices of miscellaneous goods and services also fell by 1.68 per cent.

Among foods and non-alcoholic beverages group, a marked rise was witnessed in the price of fruit, vegetables and meat by 13.67 per cent, 5.07 per cent and 0.79 per cent, respectively.





Eight more flights

As many as 8 evacuation flights will be operated by India to help the passengers stuck in Oman to get back to their homes.

The 2nd phase of the Vande Bharat mission will begin with a flight from Muscat to Trivandrum, another one from Salalah to Calicut followed by 6 flights from the capital city to different destinations in India.

While Kerala, from where the majority of expatriates are from, will get four flights, Delhi, Hyderabad and Bengaluru will get one each.

2nd flight carrying Indian expats leaves Muscat

KABEER YOUSUF

**MUSCAT:** Second flight from the Sultanate to India carrying 183 passengers, including three infants, flew from the Muscat International Airport on Tuesday. They boarded an Air India Express commercial service instituted to aid the Indian nationals who wanted to get home on emergency grounds.

The IX350 flight is carry-

ing people who need immediate medical attention back home, those whose visa validity was crossed, pregnant women and elderly, were flown back to India at 4.15 pm reaching Chennai at 9.15 pm.

This is the second time an Indian commercial flight is taking its citizens back home, the first one being IX 442 that flew to Kochi with 181 on board on May 9. It had four infants, 48 pregnant women, elderly and 77 others who required medi-

cal care for various conditions.

“We are working out on adding more services to help our citizens who are stranded on compelling grounds to get home immediately. The details of which will be intimated later”, Munu Mahawer, the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, said.

“We are immensely thankful to the Oman authorities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Oman

Airports Authority, the Muscat Airports, and all those who made the repatriation of these people possible on compelling grounds”, Mahawer said.

“I am going to see my ailing father who is on his death bed with none to look after. My mum passed away years ago and my wife is a nurse who is currently quarantined after a month's service in a government hospital”, Jagan an employee of BEC, told the Observer.

22 Omanis return home from India

**MUSCAT:** Acting on instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Sultanate's Embassy in New Delhi, in cooperation with the Indian authorities, on Tuesday facilitated the return of 22 Omanis from the city of Chennai.

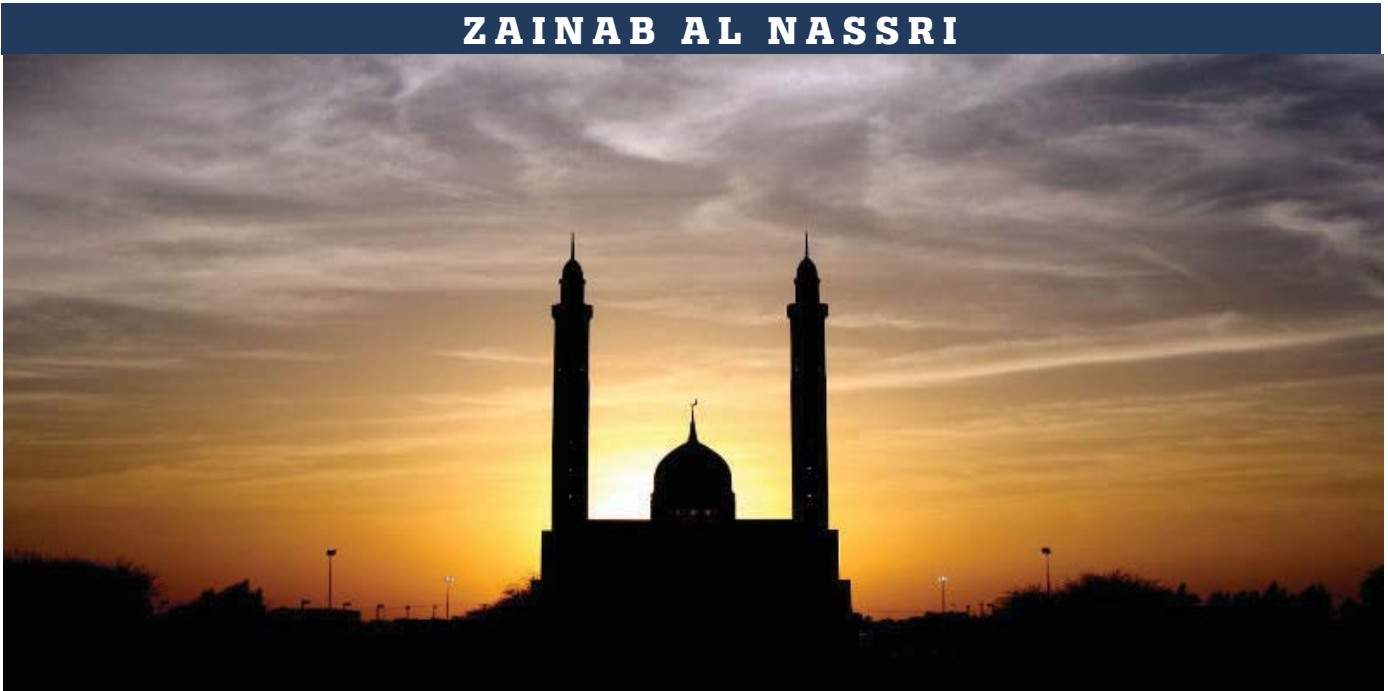
In a similar move, 11 citizens were brought back from the city of Kochi few days ago, the Sultanate's Embassy in New Delhi said on Twitter affirming that it is working to coordinate citizens' return from Hyderabad, New Delhi and Mumbai before the end of this month.





# THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY TO DO GOOD IN RAMADHAN

ZAINAB AL NASSRI



Doors of goodness in Ramadhan are multiple and most people strive to do good, but this year Ramadhan came at a time when the world is fighting against COVID-19. The virus spreads quickly, forcing countries to take strict measures to combat it and limit the number of people infected with the virus.

Ramadhan this year wears a faded look as social habits changed with the policy of social distancing; methods of communication changed and gatherings decreased if not disappeared. This also applies to some mechanism of charity that was forced to change according to the current situation imposed by COVID-19.

During this pandemic, many people have lost their jobs due to closure of shops or stopping their activities. Most of them have simple professions such as bus drivers, taxi drivers, accountants in stores, and daily-wage jobs such as street vendors and others. Therefore, there are many people in need, but it is important also for people to protect themselves while doing good deeds.

Iman Salem, a volunteer from a charitable team, says: "The doors of goodness vary between financial and in-kind sadaqa or even visiting relatives. What is important in all of this is to make sure to be committed to distancing regulations".

She adds: "Zakat and other charities may be concentrated in Ramadhan and it is a priority

to distribute it to the needy, orphans, the poor, widows and unemployed people who we know. There are many now as a result of this pandemic and its economic and financial effects on everyone. These zakat and sadaqa may also go to the needy through reliable associations by electronic donations without the need for direct interaction, and these associations in turn will deliver this aid to those who need it".

One of the missing habits this year is iftar gatherings in Ramadhan tents and mosques. But, it is still possible to deliver these meals to the people in need at their homes and accommodations of workers who used to benefit from these gatherings in previous years.

She affirms: "Checking on relatives even by phone as a result of the restrictions - is a blessing of prolonging life. We can spend Ramadhan evenings within the same family without gatherings, through digital platforms. For this, all these activities will be done remotely as well as sensitising worries and problems and bringing happiness to our loved ones".

Iman says: "Not food or drink, but the sweet word is the basis of people's love for each other. This can be done through social media and remote contact since people are in their homes these days as a result of the virus. There is always a way".

## FATWA

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

**Question**

If a person bleeds while shaving or brushing his teeth, does it break the fast?

**Answer**

Bleeding does not break the fast. Allah knows best.





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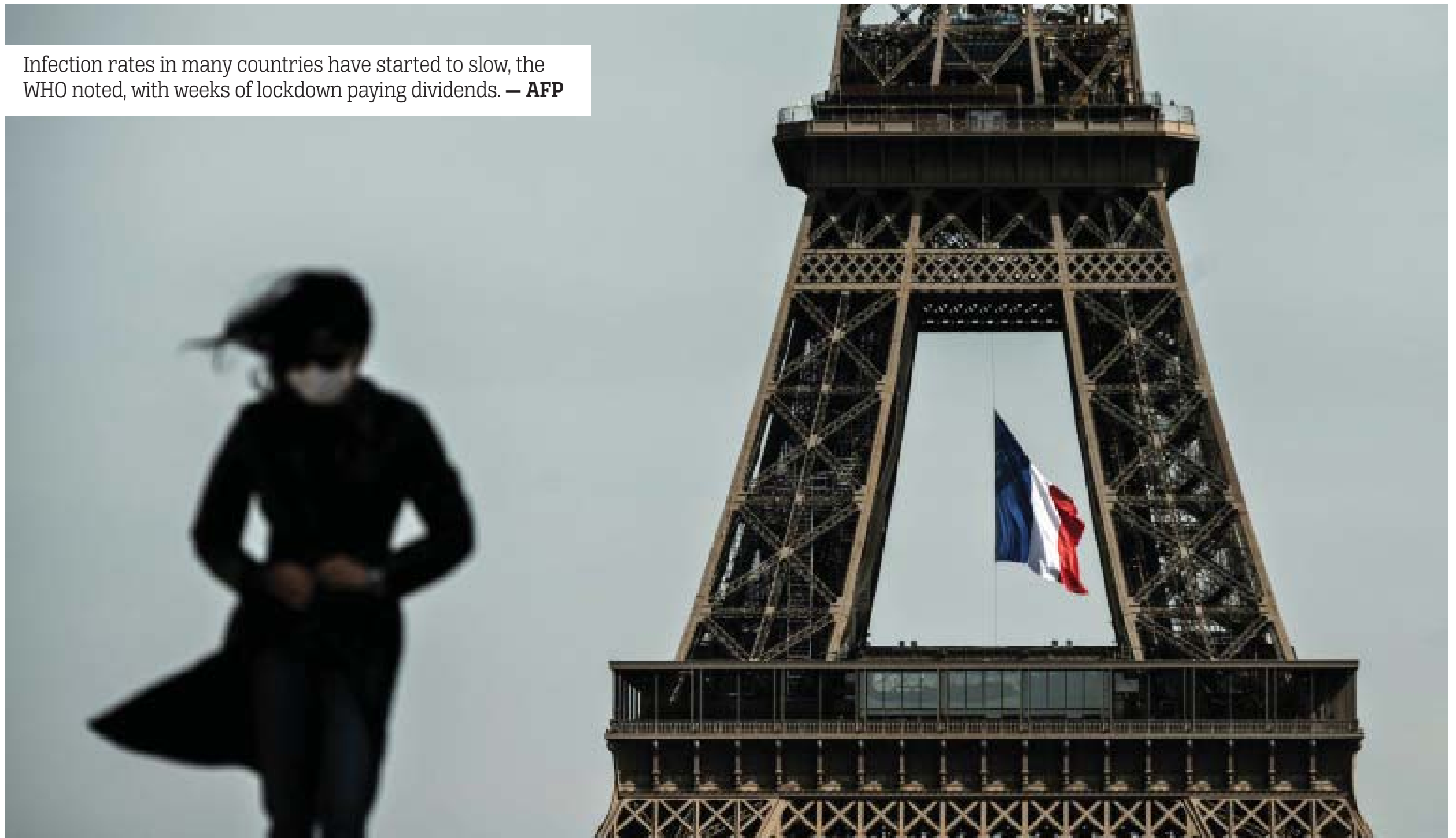


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Ramadhan Mubarak  
2020 / 1441 AH

## WORLD

Infection rates in many countries have started to slow, the WHO noted, with weeks of lockdown paying dividends. — AFP



# Virus hope in US as WHO hails global progress

**NEW YORK:** The United States logged a second consecutive day of fewer than 900 coronavirus deaths, as the World Health Organization (WHO) hailed global progress but warned of the need for “extreme vigilance” against a second wave.

Optimism was tempered by the increasingly dire economic situation, with Boeing’s chief executive warning a major US airline would likely go under because of the pandemic, as jobs vanish and businesses go to the wall.

The virus has now killed more than 285,000 people, according to a tally compiled by AFP. The number of infections has surpassed 4.1 million.

Infection rates in many countries have started to slow, the WHO noted, with weeks of lockdown paying dividends.

“The good news is that there has been a great deal of success in slowing the virus and ultimately saving lives”, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual briefing.

But the global health body warned of a second wave of transmission, with emergencies chief Michael Ryan lamenting that some governments were choosing to “drive through this blind” by not ramping up capacity to test and trace.

Swathes of the US have opened up in recent days, despite warnings that the virus is not fully under control in the world’s worst-hit country.

There was some qualified good news for Americans on Monday, with a tally showing 830 deaths in 24 hours -- a second consecutive day of fewer than 900. — AFP

## Indian trains start rolling despite virus surge

**NEW DELHI:** India’s enormous railway network tentatively ground back to life on Tuesday as a gradual lifting of the world’s biggest coronavirus lockdown gathered pace even as new cases surged.

The country of 1.3 billion imposed a strict shutdown in late March, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government has credited with keeping cases to a modest 70,000, with

around 2,300 deaths.

But the lockdown, which enters its 50th day on Wednesday, has torpedoed the economy, snatching the livelihoods of tens of millions of people and hitting the poor the hardest.

Whole industries have been devastated from tea plantations to diamond-polishing and there are fears of food shortages, while a ban on flights has

left hundreds of thousands of Indians stranded abroad.

Restrictions have been steadily eased, however, particularly in rural areas, and some Indian trains — on a network which normally carries over 20 million passengers a day — resumed on Tuesday.

More than 54,000 tickets for an initial 30 services sold out online within three hours on Monday, reports

said.

Two trains left New Delhi on Tuesday afternoon with 2,300 people on board. Others left different cities including Mumbai.

The government has not set out a programme for a timetable beyond May 20, but Modi was due to address to the nation later in the day when he might announce a further relaxation of lockdown restrictions. — AFP

# Follow rules, fight against COVID-19



**SAMUEL KUTTY**

18samkutty@gmail.com

Rules make people aware of the behaviour they need to follow at the places where they are. But many of us do not comply with the rules despite the fact that life cannot be in order without them as they imply some restrictions.

To live in a community, we must follow rules not just for the fear that breaking them will land us in jail or will lead to a fine. On the contrary they will guarantee discipline and some kind of control on misdemeanours.

Rules are a set of guidelines issued by the authorities to facilitate and ensure a healthy and safe community. If we do not follow them, then there will be chaos all around.

This is what we are experiencing today. Immediately after the coronavirus emerged in the Sultanate, the authorities introduced strict measures to prevent the spread of pandemic. They asked us not to leave our homes except for purposes like shopping essentials, medical urgencies etc.

Even the government introduced emergency laws to make breaking the lockdown a crime punishable by fine or jail. With a Royal Decree Oman's Infectious Diseases Control Laws are amended to curtail the pandemic spread.

Are we following it, especially with stay at home rules? Alas! People are roaming around freely on the streets despite repeated requests that adhering to social distancing is the most effective way to diffuse the novel coronavirus.

True, it is a strange experience to live through a pandemic. Most of us have never been asked to make sacrifices including gatherings for prayer especially months like Ramadhan. All these disruptions can make us anxious. And it is difficult to make the changes we are being asked to do.

Since social distancing and stay-at-home orders were mandated to limit the spread of COVID-19 as best as we can, it's important to focus, in times like this, on what we can do to contribute in the battle against the deadly virus.



A resident is seen with a walking stick at the Emile Gerard retirement home in Livry-Gargan

## In France's race for virus masks, old people lost out

CAROLINE PAILLIEZ, MATTHIAS BLAMONT

In late February, as the COVID-19 pandemic was about to hit, French President Emmanuel Macron faced a critical decision. Like most countries, France did not have enough protective face masks.

His response was to intervene. By decree, his government put the state in control of all stocks of masks on French territory. Officials were to distribute them to frontline healthcare workers.

Macron's far-reaching step was unique among major European states. The decree eventually helped channel protective equipment to those most at risk, such as the elderly and people with underlying chronic health conditions, people in the sector said.

But for some, including hundreds of France's retirement homes, it meant that mask deliveries from private suppliers failed to arrive as expected. As

a result, homes with low stocks operated for around 10 days without supplies, a Reuters examination found.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, has triggered a global shortage of protective equipment; some world leaders now face criticism for not doing enough in the face of the epidemic.

The experience in France underscores how, confronted with the deadly new virus and sparse resources with which to tackle it, even governments that have acted forcefully can face limits and unintended consequences to their interventions.

Thirty minutes' drive from the centre of Paris, the state-owned Emile Gerard retirement home had placed orders with its usual suppliers for 1,700 protective masks in late February and early March for the 240-bed facility, said interim manager Elsa Nicoise.

– Reuters

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

# FEATURES



PHOTO BY AHMED AL SAIDI

## Teaching an integral part of Ramadhan to young people

RUQAYA AL KINDI

**R**amadhan is the holiest month for Muslims when everyone aspires to do as much good as they possibly can. The reward during this month is maximised and Muslims are keen to use every minute to be close to Allah.

With religious gatherings being an important part of any day, holy Quran memorization and reading sessions also take centerstage in different places like mosques, majlis, or even at homes. But with strict physical distancing directives enforced to limit the spread of the highly contagious COVID-19 disease, many of Ramadhan's rituals and traditions were temporarily skipped this year.

"It is usual in Ramadhan that the number of people who

attend the reading and memorizing sessions of the Qur'an are increasing," Jokha al Shiryani said, a teacher of the Holy Quran for years.

"In our neighbourhood, like the rest of the neighborhoods in the Sultanate, in the women prayer rooms, I teach the elderly women in the period after dawn prayer and then children around ten o'clock in the morning," she shared.

"Girls can join the sessions from the age of seven, and boys from the age seven to ten. Beyond these ages, they can join the mosques with the rest of their peers," she said.

During the sessions, students and teacher sit in a circle so they can see each other and listen to each other well.

"I dedicate the beginning of the session only for reading Qur'an. I let students read one by one, and I correct them along the way. I teach them how to

read correctly as well as how to pronounce the words correctly. This is because reading Qur'an is not like reading any other book as it has special rules," she explained.

Jokha said that in most sessions, she has to pause the reading so that she can explain the meaning of the words.

"This is very important because Quran is not just words to read, but it is an integrated approach of life for Muslims," she said.

After the reading session, Jokha then proceeds the day's session to Qur'an memorization.

"As there are thirty parts in the Qur'an, I start teaching children the easiest parts and I make sure to divide them in groups according to their ages," she explained.

She mentioned that some children usually can memorize one part in Ramadhan (the part include about 20 pages) and others are less than a part; because there are children who can memorize a page per day and others reach two pages.

Many other teachers help Jokha in the memorization sessions because of the many steps one has to go through, and the children are also divided based on their ages.

Because of its importance, she has to sit one by one with each children making sure that they memorize the pages properly. "Then we sit again in a circle according to their ages and move to the next pages where I read first and then they copy how I pronounce and read them correctly," she shared.

"Children, then, complete their memorization at home and then come to recite it in our next meeting," she added.

Other than the reading and memorization, the getting together also are avenues for other events.

"We spend a time for many other things like teaching the correct way to perform prayer and its value and importance, teaching good behaviors and ethics in dealing with people," she said.

"We also do visual presentations (cartoons) or oral stories about the prophets' stories. We explain to the children the lessons that can be learned from these anecdotes," she said.

Sometimes, she adds entertaining things so that children do not get bored, such as the art of paper formation "Origami".

"This time can also be spent in teaching Islamic ethics like etiquette of drinking, sleeping and eating. Teaching some Islamic morals such as honouring and respecting parents, relatives and neighbors," she added.

Teaching Qur'an to the children is an integral part of growing up allowing them to have the proper education and understanding in how it is to live a good Muslim life.

Since the beginning of Islam, people are keen to teach and learn Qur'an. The first model was the Prophet Muhammad, BPUH. Then he taught Muslims in a systematic and wonderful way. Then he ordered his companions to hold sessions to memorize the Qur'an.

His Companions used to read the Qur'an and strive to read it during Ramadhan. Their relationship with Qur'an was very strong, and they were keen to finish reading the whole book more than once especially during this month.

# FEATURES

## Clawing back normality: Bangkok cat cafe reopens after virus shutdown



**BANGKOK:** AS THAILAND'S CAPITAL cautiously re-opens many restaurants shuttered over coronavirus fears, the feline “employees” of the Caturday Cafe are back at work.

The few dozen friendly cats typically lounge around the cafe, breaking up nap-time to saunter over to human customers for snuggles and belly rubs.

The friendly furballs give some much-needed outside contact for Thais who have mostly been confined to home during weeks of semi-lockdown with most non-essential businesses closed.

Like other businesses across Thailand, the cafe has new rules aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. Before entering, customers must have their temperature checked and wash their hands, and once inside must wear a mask at all times.

Arisa has a total of 50 cats, of several different breeds, and around 35 of them rotate between her home and the cafe every now and then. As an extra precaution, the cats have dry baths, their fur brushed and eyes cleaned every day. — **Reuters**



## Bus-stop art gallery lifts spirits in lockdown London

**A LONDON BUS** stop has been transformed into a children's art gallery by a local resident who wanted to brighten the drudgery of lockdown life, creating a colourful community hub amid the anxiety and isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A hand-written sign with an Instagram handle encourages kids and adults alike to contribute submissions, with the wall of the bus stop covered in drawings depicting things such as a unicorn, flowers and rainbows, which have come to symbolise positivity and solidarity with Britain's health workers during the outbreak.

Sarah Lamarr, a part time teacher and mother of 4-year-old Rosie, started the gallery when she woke up the day after Britain's coronavirus lockdown began and realised she would be stuck inside indefinitely with only a bland bus stop to look at.

“I just wanted to do something to brighten it up so I didn't have to look at a grey bus stop for the next however-long,” she said.

Lamarr said she felt like the protagonist of Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 thriller Rear Window, which stars James Stewart as an injured photog-

rapher who watches his neighbours after he is confined to his flat with a broken leg.

“If you have a bus stop near you I would really encourage anyone to do the same because it's just a really lovely thing to have in your community,” she said.

“If you are stuck in a first floor, second floor flat with no garden with kids, it's just a great thing to watch out the window.”

One picture of flowers was accompanied with a message saying “Let's focus on the positive” while another drawing of a Superman costume said “Thank You Heroes” and listed roles which frontline workers are continuing to carry out.

Several locals who saw the artworks on the bus stop in west London, near Turnham Green, said it had improved their mood.

“People definitely need to see these messages and it just adds colour and a bit of fun and a bit of brightness to what otherwise could be a tough day for somebody,” said Vicky Leviten, a child minder and local resident.

“I think it just lifts the spirits, it's fabulous.” — **Reuters**

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# 11 per cent rise in insurance claims paid in Q1 2020



**MUSCAT:** Unaudited financial statements for the first quarter show a 2.2 per cent dip in direct insurance premiums in the first quarter of 2020, according to the Capital Market Authority (CMA), the insurance sector regulator.

INSURANCE COMPANIES PAID RO 48.8 MILLION IN NET CLAIMS THIS YEAR.

Gross direct premiums totaled RO 149.2 million during Q1 2020 compared with RO 152 million for the corresponding period of 2019. Insurance companies paid RO 48.8 million in net claims this year, an 11 per cent increase over RO 43.8 million in claims made in Q1 2019. Earned premiums climbed to RO 76 million, up from RO 75 million in Q1 2019. Net commissions declined more than 100 per cent to RO 909,000.

The performance of insurance products in the first three months of the current year was mixed. The uptake of motor insurance products was up 35 per cent, while property insurance was up 20 per cent. Gross premium collected against liability insurance rose 9 per cent. This product covers claims by third parties for compensation and damage towards loss incurred in property accidents or bodily injuries or death related to a third party.

شركة عمان للاستثمارات والتمويل ش.م.ع

OMAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE Co. SAOG

Khedmah

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Report of the Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have the pleasure to present the unaudited financial results for the three months period ended 31st March 2020.

Operating & Financial Performance

The Group made a net profit after tax of RO. 0.358 million for the three months period ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, compared to RO. 1.165 million during the corresponding period of the previous year. The net profit after tax of the Parent Company was RO. 0.687 million for the three months period ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, compared to RO. 1.246 million during the corresponding period of the previous year.

The Group made a profit from operations for the three months period ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 of RO 0.243 million compared to loss of RO 0.052 million in the corresponding period of the previous year. This profit was mainly due to new debt recovery and connection an disconnection for utilities operation.

Investments

The Parent company holds the following Investments in associates:

| S | Company Name                                       | Holding %  |            |
|---|----------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
|   |                                                    | March 2020 | March 2019 |
| 1 | Sohar International Bank SAOG                      | 15.37%     | 15.37%     |
| 2 | The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG (FINCORP)       | 21.82%     | 21.82%     |
| 3 | National Bureau Commercial Information SAOC (NBCI) | 7.35%      | 7.35%      |

The shares in profits or losses from associates are accounted as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

The Parent Company holds the following Investment in subsidiaries

| S | Company Name        | Holding %  |            |
|---|---------------------|------------|------------|
|   |                     | March 2020 | March 2019 |
| 1 | Wasel Exchange SAOC | 100%       | 100%       |
| 2 | Afaq Al Musanah LLC | 92%        | 92%        |

The Financial statement of the subsidiary companies have been consolidated as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

Business Outlook

The Parent company has entered into a new collection agreement with Mazoon Electricity Company, it has also started a collection of PASI fee contributions and has been awarded new debt recovery contracts. Further, the parent company is engaged with multiple principles to explore hew business opportunities. Unfortunately, the current COVID-19 situation had a major impact on the operation of both parent and subsidiary companies.

Acknowledgement

The Board of Directors wishes to express its sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman. The Company appreciates the support received from Public Authority for Water, Oman Telecommunications Co. SAOG, Muscat Electricity Distribution Co. SAOC, Majan Electricity Company SAOC, Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC, Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (RAECO), Dhofar Power Company SAOC, Oman Wastewater Services Company SAOC (Haya Water), Ooredoo, Awasr, Muscat Municipality, Public Authority for Social insurance, Capital Market Authority, Central Bank of Oman, the Company's bankers, Muscat Securities Market and Muscat Clearing & Depository Co. SAOC, Business partners, shareholders and employees of the company for their continued support to our company.

Nasser Mohamed Al Harthy  
Chairman – Board of Directors

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Income for the period ended 31st March 2020

|                                              | Group<br>31-Mar-20<br>RO'000 | Group<br>31-Mar-19<br>RO'000 | Parent<br>31-Mar-20<br>RO'000 | Parent<br>31-Mar-19<br>RO'000 |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Operating income                             | 3,725                        | 4,086                        | 2,818                         | 2,519                         |
| Operating expenses                           | (3,210)                      | (3,816)                      | (2,236)                       | (2,403)                       |
| Doubtful debts                               | 1                            | 6                            | 1                             | 8                             |
| Depreciation                                 | (274)                        | (328)                        | (171)                         | (175)                         |
| Operating profit                             | 242                          | (52)                         | 412                           | (51)                          |
| Finance charges                              | (604)                        | (522)                        | (534)                         | (448)                         |
| Investment income                            | 107                          | 153                          | 107                           | 153                           |
| Other Income                                 | 26                           | 29                           | 30                            | 5                             |
| Other expenses                               | (152)                        | (120)                        | (76)                          | (99)                          |
| Impairment of associates and subsidiary      | -                            | -                            | -                             | -                             |
| Directors remuneration                       | -                            | -                            | -                             | -                             |
| Share of profit in associates                | 718                          | 1,610                        | 722                           | 1,610                         |
| Profit before taxation                       | 336                          | 1,098                        | 661                           | 1,170                         |
| Taxation                                     | 22                           | 68                           | 25                            | 75                            |
| Net profit attributable to OIFC shareholders | 358                          | 1,166                        | 686                           | 1,245                         |
| Attributable to:                             |                              |                              |                               |                               |
| Equity holders of the Parent company         | 386                          | 1,175                        | 686                           | 1,245                         |
| Non-controlling interests                    | (28)                         | (10)                         | -                             | -                             |
| Profit for the period / year                 | 358                          | 1,165                        | 686                           | 1,245                         |
| Basic Earnings per share (RO)                | 0.002                        | 0.006                        | 0.003                         | 0.006                         |

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Comprehensive Income for the period ended 31st March 2020

|                                                                                | Group<br>31-Mar-20<br>RO'000 | Group<br>31-Mar-19<br>RO'000 | Parent<br>31-Mar-20<br>RO'000 | Parent<br>31-Mar-19<br>RO'000 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Profit/(Loss) for the period                                                   | 358                          | 1,166                        | 686                           | 1,245                         |
| Other Comprehensive Income                                                     |                              |                              |                               |                               |
| Net release to income statement on sale of available for sale financial assets | (62)                         | 16                           | (62)                          | 16                            |
| Share of reserves movement of associates                                       | -                            | (79)                         | -                             | (79)                          |
| Release of deferred tax liability on depreciation of revalued building         | -                            | -                            | -                             | -                             |
| Total Comprehensive Income for the period                                      | (62)                         | (63)                         | (62)                          | (63)                          |
| Profit/(Loss) for the period after Comprehensive Income                        | 296                          | 1,103                        | 624                           | 1,182                         |
| Attributable to:                                                               |                              |                              |                               |                               |
| Equity holders of the Parent company                                           | 324                          | 1,113                        | 624                           | 1,182                         |
| Non-controlling interests                                                      | (28)                         | (10)                         | -                             | -                             |
| Profit for the period / year                                                   | 296                          | 1,103                        | 624                           | 1,182                         |

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Financial Position at 31st March 2020

|                                                 | Group<br>As on<br>31-Mar-20<br>RO'000 | Group<br>As on<br>31-Mar-19<br>RO'000 | Group<br>As on<br>31-Dec-19<br>RO'000 | Parent<br>As on<br>31-Mar-20<br>RO'000 | Parent<br>As on<br>31-Mar-19<br>RO'000 | Parent<br>As on<br>31-Dec-19<br>RO'000 |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| ASSETS                                          |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                        |                                        |                                        |
| Non-Current Assets                              |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                        |                                        |                                        |
| Property and equipment and intangible           | 3,921                                 | 4,753                                 | 4,132                                 | 1,958                                  | 2,423                                  | 2,071                                  |
| Investment properties                           | 944                                   | 944                                   | 944                                   | 944                                    | 944                                    | 944                                    |
| Deferred Tax asset                              | 2,583                                 | 2,424                                 | 2,561                                 | 2,501                                  | 2,312                                  | 2,476                                  |
| Investment in associates and subsidiary         | 65,032                                | 55,419                                | 65,400                                | 71,488                                 | 60,401                                 | 71,855                                 |
| Financial Asset at FVOCI                        | 1,631                                 | 1,579                                 | 1,694                                 | 1,631                                  | 1,579                                  | 1,694                                  |
| Financial assets at amortised costs             | 750                                   | -                                     | 750                                   | 750                                    | -                                      | 750                                    |
| Deposits                                        | 100                                   | 700                                   | 100                                   | -                                      | -                                      | -                                      |
|                                                 | 74,961                                | 65,820                                | 75,581                                | 79,272                                 | 67,660                                 | 79,790                                 |
| Current Assets                                  |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                        |                                        |                                        |
| Inventories                                     | 648                                   | 678                                   | 627                                   | 91                                     | 89                                     | 71                                     |
| Trade and other receivables                     | 24,983                                | 25,122                                | 27,675                                | 23,033                                 | 23,636                                 | 25,690                                 |
| Investments at fair value through profit & loss | 63                                    | 120                                   | 85                                    | 63                                     | 120                                    | 85                                     |
| Cash and bank balances                          | 3,158                                 | 4,273                                 | 5,102                                 | 597                                    | 2,115                                  | 2,192                                  |
|                                                 | 28,853                                | 30,193                                | 33,489                                | 23,784                                 | 25,960                                 | 28,038                                 |
| Total Assets                                    | 103,814                               | 96,012                                | 109,071                               | 103,056                                | 93,620                                 | 107,828                                |
| EQUITY AND LIABILITIES                          |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                        |                                        |                                        |
| Shareholders Funds                              |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                        |                                        |                                        |
| Share Capital                                   | 20,000                                | 20,000                                | 20,000                                | 20,000                                 | 20,000                                 | 20,000                                 |
| Legal Reserve                                   | 6,693                                 | 6,675                                 | 6,693                                 | 6,667                                  | 6,667                                  | 6,667                                  |
| Other reserves                                  | -                                     | -                                     | -                                     | -                                      | -                                      | -                                      |
| Change in fair value through OCI                | 61                                    | 9                                     | 123                                   | 61                                     | 9                                      | 123                                    |
| Associate reserves                              | (256)                                 | (220)                                 | (256)                                 | (256)                                  | (220)                                  | (256)                                  |
| Properties revaluation reserve                  | 569                                   | 602                                   | 569                                   | 569                                    | 602                                    | 569                                    |
| Retained earnings                               | 2,530                                 | 1,759                                 | 3,744                                 | 7,607                                  | 6,620                                  | 8,521                                  |
| Shareholder's equity                            | 29,597                                | 28,825                                | 30,873                                | 34,648                                 | 33,678                                 | 35,624                                 |
| Non-controlling interest                        | (225)                                 | (285)                                 | (197)                                 | -                                      | -                                      | -                                      |
| Total equity                                    | 29,372                                | 28,540                                | 30,676                                | 34,648                                 | 33,678                                 | 35,624                                 |
| Non-current liabilities                         |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                        |                                        |                                        |
| Non-current portion of term loan                | 5,204                                 | 6,345                                 | 6,701                                 | 3,000                                  | 3,249                                  | 4,625                                  |
| Other non current liabilities                   | 172                                   | 360                                   | 196                                   | 151                                    | 360                                    | 151                                    |
| End of service benefits                         | 430                                   | 457                                   | 417                                   | 246                                    | 296                                    | 240                                    |
| Deferred tax liability                          | 60                                    | 66                                    | 60                                    | 60                                     | 66                                     | 60                                     |
|                                                 | 5,866                                 | 7,228                                 | 7,374                                 | 3,457                                  | 3,971                                  | 5,076                                  |
| Current liabilities                             |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                        |                                        |                                        |
| Bank borrowings                                 | 38,023                                | 32,608                                | 37,206                                | 37,234                                 | 31,761                                 | 36,452                                 |
| Trade and other payables                        | 25,842                                | 23,151                                | 30,495                                | 23,593                                 | 20,190                                 | 28,177                                 |
| Current portion of term loan                    | 4,712                                 | 4,484                                 | 3,321                                 | 4,125                                  | 4,019                                  | 2,500                                  |
| Taxation                                        | -                                     | -                                     | -                                     | -                                      | -                                      | -                                      |
|                                                 | 68,577                                | 60,243                                | 71,022                                | 64,952                                 | 55,971                                 | 67,129                                 |
| Total Liabilities                               | 74,442                                | 67,471                                | 78,396                                | 68,409                                 | 59,942                                 | 72,205                                 |
| Total Equity and Liabilities                    | 103,814                               | 96,012                                | 109,071                               | 103,056                                | 93,620                                 | 107,828                                |
| Net Assets                                      | 29,371                                | 28,540                                | 30,675                                | 34,647                                 | 33,678                                 | 35,623                                 |
| Net assets per share (RO)                       | 0.147                                 | 0.143                                 | 0.154                                 | 0.173                                  | 0.168                                  | 0.178                                  |

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# Outreach efforts ramped up to help Filipino expats hit by pandemic



CONRAD PRABHU

**MUSCAT:** Several thousand Filipino expatriate workers either furloughed or let go by their employers since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in late March are being offered “relief supplies” courtesy of a string of charity and volunteer organisations led by Filipino Community Social Club (FILCOSOC), the official representative organisation of the Philippine community in the Sultanate.

According to Eng Roland Leaño (pictured), FILCOSOC Chairman, more than 1,000 Filipinos in Muscat Governorate – all casualties of a ‘No Work No Pay’ system employed by numerous establishments left shuttered in the wake of the pandemic – have received foodstuff packages as relief aid in recent weeks.

“We are now scrambling to cover a backlog that keeps growing by the day as more and more Filipinos affected by the crisis reach out to us for assistance,” said Leaño.

“Our outreach efforts are being extended to cover Filipinos residing in other parts of the country, and of late, we have been getting some support from other local charities to help with the distribution of relief supplies.”

Speaking to the Observer, Leaño said the Social Club has been inundated with appeals for assistance since the crisis began in March. The impact has been particularly bad for Filipinos working in the foodservice, hotel, retail, and cleaning service sectors, all of which have been severely affected by the crisis. Every day, we receive on average between 300 – 400 appeals for assistance, mainly from those working in restaurants, coffee shops, school nannies, cleaning staff and in other service sectors.

Many of them have been told to stay at home with no pay or have to adjust this period against their annual leave, payment for which may only happen once their establishments reopen and business resumes.”



“We are now scrambling to cover a backlog that keeps growing by the day as more and more Filipinos affected by the crisis reach out to us for assistance.”

**ENG ROLAND LEAÑO,**  
FILCOSOC CHAIRMAN

Helping support FILCOSOC with the funding of its outreach is the Philippine Overseas Labour Office – Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (POLO-OWWA), represented by the Philippines Embassy

Dozens of volunteers have been offering their time and other resources with the packaging of the food supplies, as well as dropping off and delivering them to grateful recipients.

**WIDENING CRISIS:** MORE THAN 1,000 FILIPINOS IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE – ALL CASUALTIES OF A ‘NO WORK NO PAY’ POLICY EMPLOYED BY NUMEROUS ESTABLISHMENTS LEFT SHUTTERED IN THE WAKE OF THE PANDEMIC – HAVE RECEIVED FOODSTUFF PACKAGES AS RELIEF AID.

“We have a great team of people coordinating this relief effort. Coverage outside Muscat is being handled by a team headed by FILCOSOC Vice Chairperson Dr Annie Bantegan, while the outreach effort in Dhofar Governorate is being coordinated by FILCOSOC Secretary Rosalie Regalado. Also supporting the wider campaign are OWWA Welfare Officer Aurea Rivero and POLO Labour Attache Gregorio Abalos Jr.”

According to Leaño, the Philippine government itself has now stepped in to support its expatriate nationals impacted by the pandemic. “Around 3,000 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Oman will receive payouts of \$200 each as assistance under the COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Programme announced by the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE).

They are among an estimated 150,000 OFWs from around the world who will receive this one-time payment from the Philippine government. Since the cut-off was announced for applications for this assistance, we have received a further 3,000 more requests from OFWs in Oman, and we’re hopeful that that Manila will support them as well,” he added.

BUSINESS

# Bank Muscat supports Fak Kurba initiative

**MUSCAT:** In line with its pioneering role in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Bank Muscat has extended its support to the 'Fak Kurba' project of the Omani Lawyers Association (OLA) for the third consecutive year. This initiative will help secure the release of citizens who were imprisoned for failing to meet financial obligations. None of these cases relate to payments involving banks or financing firms. The Bank's contribution will reunite 166 citizens and their families on the joyous occasion of Eid al Fitr.

Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar, CEO, Bank Muscat, appreciated the opportunity to partner with the OLA for the third consecutive year and said: "Bank Muscat is privileged to support the unique 'Fak Kurba' initiative by the OLA as part of its CSR. We thank the OLA for this great humanitarian initiative, which has been organised annually since 2012. The Bank has always led by example in various social development programmes and encourages all corporates to support



such initiatives which can spread happiness among those facing hardship". Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar thanked the Board of Directors of the OLA and the members affiliated with the Association for their role and efforts in supporting the project and added: "This has been one of the most successful social responsibility initiatives in the Sultanate and has brought joy to many Omani families in their hour of need. Bank Muscat's participation this year as well is due to the success noted in the past. The Bank is keen to contribute and participate in supporting such initiatives and projects, which serve the Omani community. We appreciate its noble humanitarian

goals and wish this project all the success." Dr Mohammed Ibrahim al Zadjali, Chairman, OLA, explained that the OLA has been able to resolve 2388 cases since the project was first launched and said: "The Fak Kurba project is being implemented through the volunteer efforts of lawyers. This time, the efforts have been affected by the fact that we are all working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, we have managed to help many families. The names of beneficiaries were received from the courts, and after paying the value of the claims into the bank accounts of the courts, payment receipts are being sent to the courts to secure their release."

## OAB announces winners of Hasaad Savings Scheme draw

**MUSCAT:** Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced the names of the 133 winners of its March monthly Hasaad Savings Scheme draw. These winners included 95 winners of the monthly branch draws of RO 1,000 each, RO 100 for ten winners from the Bank's Children's draw for those under the age of 18 and 20 from the Bank's Youth Holders who are between the age of 18 and 27 of RO 100 each, RO 500 for 5 winners from the Bank's Salary draw. This month also included the first quarterly 'Big Prize' draw, which saw one of the bank's customers win RO 25,000 and two winners of the monthly Elite Draw of R 10,000 each.



Commenting on the recent draw results, Rashad al Shaikh, Acting Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB said, "In light of the current challenges and market closure since mid-March, we have noticed an increase in the amount of savings of our valued customers, which in turn, has led to a rise in their chances of winning prizes of Hasaad Savings scheme draw. This reaffirms the need to enhance finances and focus more on savings to ensure a better future for all their family members, as well as enhancing their financial ability to deal with emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, currently impacting not only the Sultanate but the world as well."

# The Business Year Oman hosts first digital roundtable



**MUSCAT:** The Business Year Oman inaugurated the first of three digital roundtables on the Sultanate's economy in the COVID-19 era.

On Tuesday, *The Business Year* launched its first digital roundtable on the Omani economy post-COVID-19. Named "Economic impact of COVID-19 outbreak: a private-sector perspective," the roundtable featured well-known guests of the Omani ecosystem, including Shaikh Khalil al Harthy, CEO of Credit Oman, Loai Baitineh, CEO of Ubhar Capital, and Dr Ashraf Mushrif, Chair of Economics at Sultan Qaboos University

Thanks to work done behind the scenes by Elena Barreiro, Country Director of *The Business Year: Oman 2020*, and moderation by Gabriele de Leva, Senior Country Editor, the panel offered an insightful viewpoint on a number of insightful topics. The discussion started off by offering a macroeconomic analysis of the business and trade environment in the Sultanate. The speakers then moved on to touch on the

hedging and growth strategies businesses should adopt, with a particular focus on credit issuance and investment opportunities. Cooperation avenues between the public and private sectors were also discussed, as capital injections from both the government and private investors are necessary to navigate the crisis. Finally, the panel looked at the role technology could play in the economic growth of the Omani business environment.

# US auto industry workers return to jobs amid concerns of second virus wave

**DETROIT:** Factory workers began returning to assembly lines in Michigan on Monday, paving the way to reopen the US auto sector but stoking fears of a second wave of coronavirus infections as strict lockdowns are eased across the country.

With millions of Americans out of work and much of the economy at a virtual standstill, a growing number of states are relaxing tough restrictions on commerce and social life put in place to slow the outbreak.

Some auto suppliers in Michigan, a Midwest industrial powerhouse hard hit by the pandemic and its economic fallout, reopened plants on Monday with skeleton crews to get ready for a resumption of vehicle production next week.

Skilled-trades workers and salaried employees also began returning to auto assembly plants to prepare for the wider restart.

"We're starting up our foundry this week in anticipation of the orders coming in next week," Joe Perkins, chief executive of Busche



A worker checks a 2020 Ford Explorer car at Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant in Chicago, Illinois. —Reuters

A GROWING NUMBER OF STATES ARE RELAXING TOUGH RESTRICTIONS ON COMMERCE AND SOCIAL LIFE PUT IN PLACE TO SLOW THE OUTBREAK.

Performance Group, an engineering, casting and machining firm, said in a

telephone interview.

Factory workers will be issued face masks, checked for fever and required to submit health-screening questionnaires.

"All of that's ready to go," Perkins said. "The big question is, are people going to be buying cars and trucks."

The manufacturing reopening approved last week by Governor Gretchen Whitmer was crucial not only to auto plants in Michigan but to vehicle production elsewhere because so many key parts suppliers are based in and around the automaking hub of Detroit.

Detroit's Big Three automakers — General Motors Co, Ford Motor Co and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV — said last week they planned to restart production at North American plants on May 18.

— Reuters

## Oil prices up after Saudi pledge on cuts eases

**LONDON:** Oil prices rose on Tuesday, boosted by an unexpected commitment from Saudi Arabia to deepen production cuts in June to help drain a supply glut built up during the coronavirus crisis.

Brent crude advanced 38 cents, or 1.3 per cent, to \$30.01 at 0830 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up 70 cents, or 2.9 per cent, at \$24.84. Saudi Arabia said on Monday it would cut output by a further 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in June, slashing total production to 7.5 million bpd.

The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait also committed to cut an extra 180,000 bpd in total, adding to reductions the producers agreed under a deal between Opec, Russia and other nations, a group known as Opec+.

But both benchmark crudes still fell on Monday, despite those announcements, amid fears output cuts are still not enough to balance a market where demand has been hammered by the coronavirus and where consumption could be hit again by a second wave of infections. — Reuters



A gas station worker wearing a protective face mask sits next to a petrol station in Qatif, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

BUSINESS



Coal barges are pictured as they queue to be pull along Mahakam river in Samarinda, East Kalimantan province, Indonesia. — Reuters

Asia’s pandemic stimulus may slow the demise of coal

**SINGAPORE** Coal power plant construction will push ahead in Asia despite falling electricity demand and environmental concerns as policymakers prioritise boosting economies crippled by the coronavirus pandemic, analysts say.

Fossil fuel demand will plummet this year as lockdowns sap electricity use, the International Energy Agency said in a report last month.

The European Union, International Monetary Fund and the United Nations have said that marks a once-in-a-generation opportunity to launch a ‘green recovery’, which includes Asia joining the global trend of ending support for coal power.

But there are already signs that China and other Asian giants like South Korea and Japan will steer recovery

funds into struggling coal-focused state financiers, equipment suppliers and construction firms. That could create a short-term jolt at the cost of efficiency

CHINA, WHICH PRODUCES AND CONSUMES ABOUT HALF OF THE WORLD’S COAL, HAS IN RECENT WEEKS SAID IT WOULD ALLOW MORE PROVINCES TO START BUILDING COAL POWER PLANTS STARTING IN 2023.

and environmental damage, analysts say.

“China and other governments may be tempted to invest in coal power to help their economies recover after the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Matt Gray, co-head of power and

utilities at Carbon Tracker, a climate think tank. “This risks locking in high-cost coal power that will undermine global climate targets.”

China, which produces and consumes about half of the world’s coal, has in recent weeks said it would allow more provinces to start building coal power plants starting in 2023. It also accelerated the construction of five plants and committed billions of dollars to cross-country electricity transmission lines.

China’s coal imports in April surged 22 per cent from a year earlier, as traders jumped on low prices to build stockpiles and prepare for a recovery in domestic demand.

Coal power infrastructure in Asia relies heavily on state-backed financing from China, South Korea and Japan.

— Reuters

China announces new tariff waivers for some US imports

**BEIJING:** China announced on Tuesday a new list of 79 US products eligible for waivers from retaliatory tariffs imposed at the height of the bilateral trade war, amid continued pressure on Beijing to boost imports from the United States.

China’s finance ministry said in a statement the new waivers will take effect on May 19 and expire on May 18, 2021. The latest list waives tariffs on products including ores of rare earth metals, gold ores, silver ores and concentrates.

The ministry did not disclose the imports value of the products.

Beijing in February said it would grant exemptions for 696 US goods including key products such as soybeans and pork based on applications from companies.

Beijing and Washington’s top trade negotiators held a call last week and discussed implementation of the Phase 1 deal signed in January.

Under the deal, China agreed to increase its purchases of US goods from a 2017 baseline by \$200 billion over two years, with about \$77 billion in increased purchases in the first year and \$123 billion in the second year. — Reuters



Samples of rare earth minerals from left: Cerium oxide, Bastnaesite, Neodymium oxide and Lanthanum carbonate are seen at Molycorp’s Mountain Pass Rare Earth facility in Mountain Pass, California. — Reuters

SPORTS



# IPL cancellation to cost \$530m

**NEW DELHI:** Scrapping the money-spinning Indian Premier League this year because of the coronavirus pandemic would cost more than half a billion dollars, but cutting players' pay was not yet being considered, a top official said.

The world's richest Twenty20 tournament is staring at a first wipe-out in its 12-year history after the original March 29 start date was postponed repeatedly.

Cancellation of the IPL for 2020 would mean a huge financial hit.

"The BCCI is looking at a big revenue loss. In case the IPL does not take place, the loss would be close to 40 billion rupees (\$530 million), or even more", said Board of Control for Cricket in India treasurer Arun Dhumal.

India, like other cricket nations, is anxious to see a return to competitive international sport,



but has to follow government orders and advice.

"We are not sure whether we will be able to have it this year", he admitted.

A one-day international series against South Africa in March has already been cancelled but it is the IPL, which began in 2008, that generates the bulk of BCCI revenue and is thought to be worth more than \$11 billion a year to the Indian economy.

"We will only be able to figure out the exact revenue loss once we are sure of how many games we have lost", said Dhumal.

The IPL brand value was estimated at \$6.7

billion last year by the Duff and Phelps financial consultancy.

Indian broadcaster Star Sports paid more than \$220 million for five years of TV rights up to 2022. But it was reportedly targeting \$400 million of revenue in 2020 alone.

Dhumal, who joined the BCCI leadership last year alongside President Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah, said that it was hoped to avoid pay cuts for players.

"That would be the last thing that we would want to do at our end", said Dhumal.

"That is why we are working (on) how much is the loss finally we have to pay.

"So once we are able to assess that then we might consider it, but it will be the last thing on our agenda".

Dhumal said India's tour of Sri Lanka, scheduled to begin in June, would only go ahead if the pandemic eases. — AFP

# OCC to hold online training

ADIL AL BALUSHI

**MUSCAT:** A series of online chess training sessions for referees, tournaments organisers and other administration members will be organised next week by the Oman Chess Committee (OCC).

International lecturer Mahdi Abdul Rahim from the UAE will be the trainer for the first online training programme which will include topics related to the International body Fide requirements for international events.

The online programme on May 18 through 'Zoom' application will also include: The general aspects on posting and approving the chess events in the annual calendar, the main policies and regulations for special competitions and championships, the annual awards of the Fide, methodology on submitting the bids to host international championships, the inspection process at the venue of the championships by the Fide committee, the evaluation and submitting process of the bids and invitation, technical instructions of Fide for hosting international championships, guidelines for the disabled, the rules of international classifications and rankings.

As many as 64 participants from Oman, Egypt, Morocco and other GCC countries have confirmed their participation at the online workshop. The workshop will be significant for the domestic participants to implement the international standards and rules at the local competitions.

International lecturer Mahdi Abdul Rahim from the UAE will be the trainer for the first online training programme which will include topics related to the International body Fide requirements for international events



SPORTS



# Young Algerian player validates tennis fund

Ibbou contradicts Thiem, says life is tough for an African tennis player

**ALGIERS:** Ines Ibbou, a young Algerian tennis player who hit back at Dominic Thiem for saying he did not want to give money to lowly-ranked players, has drawn support from Venus Williams as well as her country's government.

"Dear Dominic," Ibbou, who is 620th in the WTA singles rankings, said in an emotional nine-minute video posted on social media, "what would have been my career if I was in your shoes?"

In April, Thiem, an Austrian ranked third in the men's game, said he was not happy with a plan supported by Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal for top players to help those lower down the rankings who had lost their tourna-



ment income because of the coronavirus shutdown of tennis.

"None of them are going to starve," Thiem told an Austrian newspaper, explaining that "many, many" of those players had not made it to the top because they "don't put the sport above everything else".

"I wouldn't really see why I should give such players money," he went on. "I would rather give money to people or organisations that really need it."

In her response, the 21-year-old Ibbou said life was tough for an African tennis player.

"You know that in a country like mine it's not easy for a woman to be a high-level athlete."

She said that Thiem grew

up in a "magical world" and while both his parents were tennis coaches, "I grew up in a very modest family with parents who had nothing to do with tennis."

"We don't choose where we are born," she said, adding that she loved her parents and regretted that her endless travelling to tournaments meant she saw them so little.

"I cherish the day when I'll be able to afford a gift for my parents," said Ibbou, who has made \$27,825 (25,754 euros) on the WTA Tour and had earned \$3,135 this season before play was halted.

She said that, unlike Thiem, she could not afford a coach or entourage and always had to worry about her budget and, as an Algerian, a visa. — **AFP**

\* FERRARI SAY DECISION TAKEN JOINTLY WITH DRIVER

\* FOUR-TIME F1 CHAMPION TO TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER NEXT MOVE

\* LECLERC SAYS HUGE HONOUR TO HAVE BEEN HIS TEAM-MATE

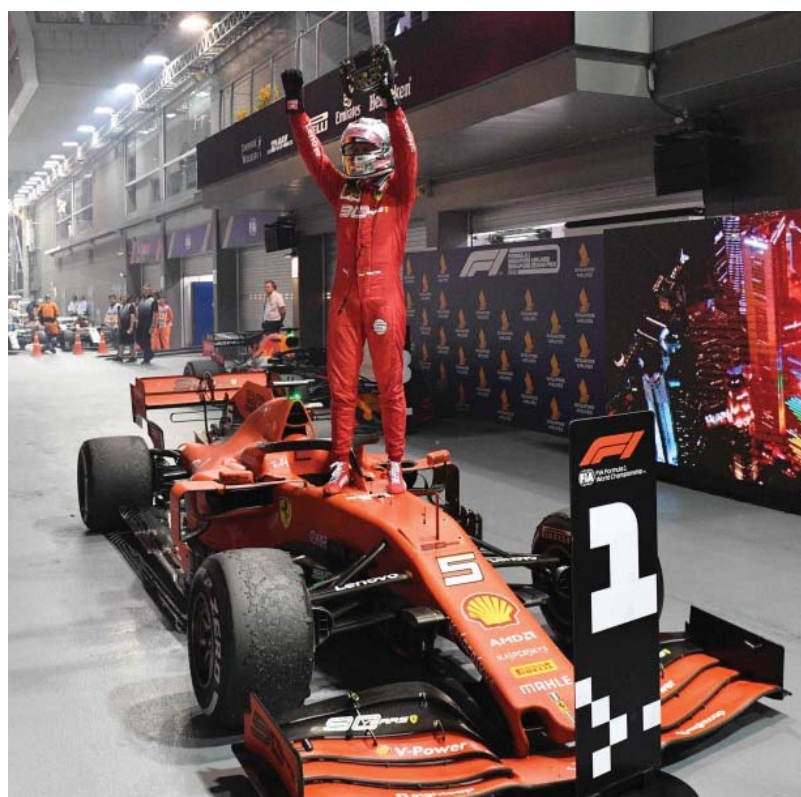
# VETTEL TO EXIT FERRARI AT END OF SEASON

**LONDON:** Four-time Formula One world champion Sebastian Vettel will leave Ferrari at the end of the 2020 season, with the German facing an uncertain future in racing. The sport's oldest, most glamorous and successful team announced the move in a statement on Tuesday after talks on a new contract ended without a deal.

"This is a decision taken jointly by ourselves and Sebastian, one which both parties feel is for the best", said Ferrari principal Mattia Binotto.

"It was not an easy decision to reach, given Sebastian's worth as a driver and as a person". Vettel joined in 2015 with the dream of emulating boyhood hero and seven times champion Michael Schumacher in winning titles in the famous red cars.

Where the 32-year-old will go, whether he will remain in a sport whose delayed season has yet to start, and who might replace him are the big questions now.



"In order to get the best possible results in this sport, it's vital for all parties to work in perfect harmony", said Vettel. "The team and I have realised that there is no longer a common desire to stay together beyond the end of this season. "Financial matters have played no part in this

joint decision. That's not the way I think when it comes to making certain choices and it never will be".

"What's been happening in these past few months has led many of us to reflect on what are our real priorities in life", added the father of three, referring to the COVID-19 pandemic that has sent countries around the world into lockdown.

Vettel said he would now take time "to reflect on what really matters when it comes to my future".

German media, who flagged up the departure on Monday night, reported that he had rejected the terms being offered. They suggested Vettel, who won 14 races with the team and is their third-most successful driver, had been offered only a one-year extension with a salary reduction.

Ferrari had said the German, who won his titles with Red Bull from 2010-13, was their first choice to partner Charles Leclerc in 2021. — **Reuters**

# SPORTS

LONDON, ZURICH AND RABAT CHAMPIONSHIPS CANCELLED \* SEASON TO START IN MONACO ON AUGUST 14

## DIAMOND LEAGUE RELEASES NEW CALENDAR

**PARIS:** The Diamond League season has been pushed into an August start by the coronavirus pandemic under a new calendar for track and field's showpiece meetings released on Tuesday.

### REVISED DIAMOND LEAGUE CALENDAR

|                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| June 11           | Oslo                            |
| August 14         | Monaco                          |
| August 16         | Gateshead                       |
| August 23         | Stockholm                       |
| September 2       | Lausanne                        |
| September 4       | Brussels                        |
| September 6       | Paris                           |
| (to be confirmed) |                                 |
| September 17      | Rome/<br>Naples                 |
| September 19      | Shanghai                        |
| October 4         | Eugene                          |
| October 9         | Doha                            |
| October 17        | Chinese<br>venue to be arranged |

With the exception of a June 11 meeting in Oslo that will feature modified events in line with social distancing rules, the season proper is now scheduled to start in Monaco on August 14.

Twelve meetings will feature, culminating in China on October 17 at a venue yet to be arranged.

The London Diamond League meeting scheduled for July 4-5 has been cancelled.

Announcing that decision, UK Athletics chief Joanna Coates said: "We must place the safety of the entire athletics family at the forefront of every decision we make during these unprecedented times and ensure we are following government advice."

The Zurich Weltklasse meeting, which had been due to form the three-day finals of the Diamond League on September 9-11, has also been scrapped.

"Despite the fact that the Swiss Federal Council has banned large events only until the end of August, staging the finals in their intended form is unrealistic," the Zurich organisers said.

The meeting in Rabat is the third to have been removed.

The Diamond League season had originally been due to start in Doha on April 17.

Athletes have been forced to recalibrate their entire season after the 2020 Tokyo Olympics were postponed by a year.

The European Athletics Championships, due to have taken place in Paris in the second half of August, have been cancelled. — **AFP**

