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18 Ramadhan Tuesday 12/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:04	04:09	04:35
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:32	03:34	03:37
MAGHRIB:	06:45	06:48	06:52
ISHA:	08:03	08:05	08:05

Ramadhan
Mubarak
2020/1441 AH
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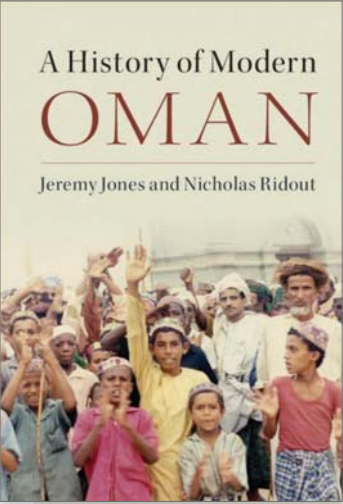
ESTABLISHED IN 1981

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUEILI

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Lecture on late HM held in London

LONDON: The British researcher Jeremy Jones delivered a lecture at the venue of the Omani-British Friendship Association (OBFA) entitled 'the good neighbour, the life of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said'. The researcher, a specialist in Omani affairs and co-author of A History of Modern Oman, called for conducting further in-depth researches on the Omani foreign policy in order to comprehend the successes the Sultanate's prudent diplomacy has achieved in helping Oman's friends and allies to deal with several regional



and international issues. The nature of the consecutive regional crises was one of the reasons that led Oman's diplomacy to do something to mitigate the effect of these crises. The policy of keeping open communication channels with all parties has transformed into an outright recognition of the Sultanate's exceptional ability to enter into larger diplomatic actions, said Jones. — **ONA**

Hire a plane to go home

Travel agents offer chartered flights to India



SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Travel agents in association with a few airlines are planning to operate chartered flights from Muscat to different destinations in India. Companies are expected to be the biggest beneficiaries as they can send their employees home at regular ticket rates. Although the schedule will be finalised

only after clearance from the authorities, the travel agents claim they have started receiving bulk and individual booking orders. "Initially, we will operate flights to India as there is increasing demand from the Indian community to travel home. If requests from peoples from other countries in the sub-continent come, we will consider

that too," a spokesman for Travel Point, a Muscat-based travel agency, told *Observer*. Applications for obtaining the regulatory and slot approvals have already been submitted to the competent authorities, he said, adding, Oman Air and Indian budget airline GoAir have already agreed to operate the flights.

TURN TO P3

Part of Barka-Nakhl dual-carriageway opens



Nakhl: The Ministry of Transport opened 13 km stretch and its service roads of Barka-Nakhl dual-carriageway for traffic on Monday. The newly opened stretch starts from A'Sa'adia village in the Wilayat of Nakhl to the area near Wadi Mastal.

— **ONA**

GRAND MUFTI CALLS ON ALL TO STAY INDOORS

THE GRAND MUFTI HAS URGED ALL TO ADHERE TO THE INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE AUTHORITIES IN VIEW OF THE CLUSTER SPREAD OF COVID-19

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, has called upon both citizens and residents of the country to adhere to the instructions issued by the authorities in view of the cluster spread of COVID-19 and to stay indoors. "I urge all my brothers and sisters to join the country in this testing time and to remain indoors until such time the Supreme Committee announces newer measures in order to safeguard individuals, society and the country," he said in a letter posted online. "I call on all believers, men and women to safeguard themselves, their families, their communities, and their nation, by refraining from getting together to ward off



the effects of the pandemic by committing yourself to the norms of safety." He further urged people to comply with safety regulations to avoid putting their relatives and society at risk. "Everyone is responsible in front of Allah for all their actions and they harm themselves or others, they are accountable too. It's our responsibility as per our religious beliefs too, to stay away from each other, maintain physical

distancing, staying indoors and staying safe." He further said that this is a testing time and we need to be through it successfully. To achieve this, one needs to increase prayers and be optimistic. "For sure, it (COVID-19) has created all-round damage to humanity worldwide and we need to be patient to the core in order to succeed in the testing time," the Grand Mufti said.



المنطقة الحرة بصلالة
SALALAH FREE ZONE

INVITATION FOR REFLOATING TENDER No.: (SFZ-SUA-2020-001)

Developing, Operating, & Managing of Raysut Truck Plaza Including Custom Yard at Salalah Free Zone Area

Salalah Free Zone Company (SFZCo.) invites reputed and specialized companies and offices qualified in the field of **Truck Plaza Development Including Custom Yard** registered in Sultanate of Oman to participate in tender of "Developing, Operating, & Managing of Raysut Truck Plaza Including Custom Yard at Salalah Free Zone Area" shall submit their sealed offer consisting of one sealed envelope for following works mentioned below:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Document Price (R.O)	Last Day to Purchasing Document	Last Day to Submitting Offer
SFZ-SUA-2020-001	Developing, Operating, & Managing of Raysut Truck Plaza Including Custom Yard at Salalah Free Zone Area	100	31/05/2020	30/06/2020

Tender Document should obtained from the offices of Salalah Free Zone Company's Finance Directorate, Supply Chain Department, or SFZ Muscat office in Al Qurm area during office hours, from 8:00 AM to 3:00PM (Sunday to Thursday) after payment of Tender Document price for a nonrefundable amount of Omani Rial 100, (Omani Rial Hundred only).

SFZCo is not bound to accept a higher or any other offer.

Submission should be on or before **30th of June 2020 at SFZCo Main Office in Salalah opposite Hilton Hotel, Finance Directorate-Supply Chain 3rd Floor or Muscat Office.**

Completed Tender Documents (Original + additional copy+ CD) shall be submitted in sealed package without revealing the identity of the Tenderer on the exterior, addressed to SFZCo Chief Executive Officer, with all supporting documents.

Over 17,800 online applications for labour licence renewal

MUSCAT: The number of online applications for renewal of labour licences for expatriate manpower stood at 17,812 in all governorates of the Sultanate, in April this year. These include 16,470 commercial licences and 1,342 private licences. The Muscat Governorate accounted for the largest number of renewal applications with 9,353 while Musandam Governorate saw a meagre 60 applications coming at the bottom of the list. The Ministry of Manpower's online labour licence renewal service allows employers to extend labour licences that have already expired or are nearing expiry with the latter being the most-sought-after in April. Second to Muscat in labour licence renewal application number came North Al Batinah with 2,626 including 2,340 commercial licences and 286 private licences followed by Dhofar Governorate with 1,545 (1,453 commercial licences and 92 private licences) while Al Dakhiliyah and South Al Batinah governorates registered 971 and 940 applications, respectively. The number of labour licence renewal applications registered in the rest of the governorates is as follows: North Al Sharqiyah (779), South Al Sharqiyah (720), Al Dhahirah (448), Al Buraimi (258) and Al Wusta (112). — **ONA**

MASK, GLOVES MUST FOR SHOPPERS

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: All shoppers must wear masks and gloves at stores and super-markets. Those without them should not be allowed to enter the premises, the Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP) told retailers. Besides, customers should be scanned for high temperature to curb the spread of coronavirus.

Speaking to the Observer, Omar bin Faisal al Jahdhami, Deputy Chairman for Consumer Services and Market Monitoring of PACP, said that this step is now mandatory after it was found that some customers were not strictly adhering to the anti-COVID-19 measures.

“All people who visit a retail outlet, departmental store or a hypermarket should protect themselves with a face mask and a pair of gloves to protect themselves as well as fel-



low shoppers”, he said. “Retail outlets where people gather are one of the high risk areas for community spreading of the coronavirus and precaution must be taken by customers and retailers”.

Earlier, the civic authorities had made masks and gloves mandatory for those who shop at the Central Fruits and Vegetables market in Mawaleh.

HIRE A PLANE TO GO HOME

FROM PAGE 1

Amid expectations of a positive response, he said, “in case such approvals are not received well in advance before the scheduled dates, we will not be in a position to operate the flights.”

An official at Al Hind Travels in Ruwi confirmed that a large number of people including individuals and corporates have booked tickets. “We have tied up with GoAir to operate charter flights to different destinations.”

Upon arrival at the Indian destinations, quarantine and other medical examinations will be applicable to the passengers, he said. Jose Chacko, a finance expert, said: “The

move will be a solace to a number of people who cannot find their names in the priority list being prepared by the embassy.”

“Since the start of the lockdown, hundreds of employees have either been given termination or long leave notices by their companies. With the charter flights the companies will be able to send them home.”

Since the flights are going to be operated on quid pro quo basis, it will benefit the COVID-19 stricken aviation industry and its auxiliary units as well, he said. According to Arun Mehta, a human resource specialist with a construction firm, the plan will help a number of companies who want to send their employees home.

INVEST
IN OMAN'S FUTURE

SECURITY

STEADY AND
ATTRACTIVE RETURNS

LIQUIDITY

Auction of R.O. 200-250 million
5 years, @ 5% p.a.

Sultanate of Oman Government Development Bonds

The Central Bank of Oman announces an issue of Sultanate of Oman Government Development Bonds to be sold by auction. The 64th Issue of Government Development Bonds will be issued on Tuesday, 19/05/2020, carrying a coupon rate of 5% per annum for a maturity period of 5 years (maturing on Monday, 19/05/2025). These Bonds will be auctioned on Sunday, 17/05/2020. Investors may apply for these Bonds through competitive bidding only.

Security of Capital

Total security is offered as the Bonds are registered and transferable only by means of a document evidencing the transaction between a buyer and a seller through Muscat Securities Market. The Bonds are direct and unconditional obligations of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

Steady and Attractive Returns

Interest of 5% per annum is payable half-yearly during the life of the Bond, commencing from the date of issue (i.e. Tuesday, 19/05/2020). The interest will be paid semi-annually on 19th November and 19th May, every year till maturity of the Bond on Monday, 19/05/2025. The first interest payment will be on 19/11/2020.

Liquidity

The Bonds can be liquidated before maturity by trading in Muscat Securities Market at the prevailing market price.

Collateral Advantage

The Bonds can be used as a collateral security to obtain loans from any commercial licensed bank.

64th
ISSUE

OPENS ON THURSDAY, May 7th, 2020.
CLOSES ON THURSDAY, May 14th, 2020.

Who Can Invest?

Resident and Non-resident Investors, such as Banks, Financial Institutions, Companies, Individuals and any other entity of any nationality.

How to Apply?

Prospectus and Application Forms can be obtained from any commercial licensed bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman. Completed applications can be submitted through any commercial licensed bank.

MSM Investor Code

The investor must provide the MSM Investor Code in his/her application.

Anyone who does not have MSM Investor Code, can obtain it from Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. (MCD) through their website at least one day prior to submitting the application to the commercial bank (www.mcd.gov.om) or can contact the following numbers:

Tel: +968 24822222 / 24822280,
Fax: +968 24817491 / 24810555

Bank Account Details

An investor must provide the same Bank Account details registered with MCD.

THE MINIMUM SUBSCRIPTION AMOUNT IS R.O. 500 AND IN MULTIPLES OF R.O. 100 THEREOF



Central Bank of Oman

P.O. Box 1161, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24777426 / 24777635 / 24777837, Fax: +968 24777772, E-mail: mod@cbo.gov.om

CONTACT THE CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN (MONETARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT) OR ANY COMMERCIAL LICENSED BANK FOR DETAILS.



المنطقة الحرة بصلالة SALALAH FREE ZONE

INVITATION FOR REFLOATING TENDER No.: (SFZ-SUA-2020-002)

Developing, Operating, & Managing of International Lab Centre at SFZ Area

Salalah Free Zone Company (SFZCo.) invites reputed and specialized companies and offices qualified in the field of **International Lab Management** registered in Sultanate of Oman to participate in tender of “**Developing, Operating, & Managing of International Lab Centre at SFZ Area**” shall submit their sealed offer consisting of one sealed envelope for following works mentioned below:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Document Price (R.O)	Last Day to Purchasing Document	Last Day to Submitting Offer
SFZ-SUA-2020-002	Developing, Operating, & Managing of International Lab Centre at SFZ Area	100	31/05/2020	30/06/2020

Tender Document should obtained from the offices of Salalah Free Zone Company's Finance Directorate, Supply Chain Department, or SFZ Muscat office in Al Qurm area during office hours, from 8:00 AM to 3:00PM (Sunday to Thursday) after payment of Tender Document price for a nonrefundable amount of Omani Rial 100, (Omani Rial Hundred only).

SFZCo is not bound to accept a higher or any other offer.

Submission should be on or before **30th of June 2020** at **SFZCo Main Office in Salalah opposite Hilton Hotel, Finance Directorate-Supply Chain 3rd Floor or Muscat Office.**

Completed Tender Documents (Original + additional copy+ CD) shall be submitted in sealed package without revealing the identity of the Tenderer on the exterior, addressed to SFZCo Chief Executive Officer, with all supporting documents.

Nurses playing crucial role in COVID-19 fight

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: Oman saw development in the field of nursing in the early 1970s. Today the nurses of Oman are crucial part of the team combating COVID-19 in Oman.

The nurses in Oman are celebrating the International Nurses Day with focus on the 'true value of nurses to the people of the world'.

Across the world, people have been touched by the care given by the nurses.

Whether they are screening the community at Muttrah to control community transmission, educating public on COVID-19 or handling novel coronavirus patients at the hospitals, their role is crucial.

"We have come a long way from having nothing to having almost everything in healthcare system.

This year is a very special year for nurses. Even before the pandemic, the officials concerned had

already decided this year is going to be for nurses. So the ICN theme for this year is, 'Nurses a voice to lead - nursing the world to heal'. Then the WHO theme came this year which stated, support nurses and midwives. And everything coincided with the celebration of 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale, the founder of the modern nursing", explained Dr Manal AbdulMajid al Zedjali, Dean of Higher Institute of Health Sciences.

The year 2020 is being considered as a very special year for the nurses throughout the world and they are all facing one major common problem - handling COVID-19. They are the front-liners along with the doctors in the fight against the pandemic.

As a profession nursing grew very quickly in Oman. "When we started it was the American Missionary

INTERNATIONAL NURSES DAY ON MAY 12



that trained nurses in Oman and then it became a short training programme of six months.

Later professional programme was developed which went up to three years and six months of training again.

This programme slowly began to be developed all around the Sultanate from just being located in Muscat so that it went closer to the people who were serving their region.

With the development of

Health Institutes throughout the country and the Royal Decree issued in 2018, we became the nursing institutes as they were known as Oman College of Health Sciences and Higher Institute of Health Specialties, which is producing nurses specialised in different fields", noted Dr Manal.

The future is looking bright for nurses in Oman and they have already taken the first steps toward achieving the goal.

Ramadan Iftar Program

RAMADAN MUBARAK

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

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

Omantel users cost **1 RO**

Send **Donate** to **90022**

National Bank of Oman

1049337798001

Ooredoo users cost **1 RO**

Send **Donate** to **90909**

Bank Dhofar

01040609090001

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

Donations Portal for Charitable Organization

www.donate.om

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

South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate 25541087 Sur / Al-murtafa	North Al-Batinah Governorate 26864241 Sohar/Al-Hambar	Musandam Governorate 26731588 Khasab/Al-Shaibih	Dhofar Governorate 23234735 Salalah /Al-saada
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www.oco.org.om

charity@oco.org.om

24297961 24297960

OCOOMAN

174 new coronavirus cases; total 3,573

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday announced 174 new COVID-19 positive cases in the Sultanate, taking the total to 3,573, including 17 deaths and 1,211 recoveries.

Monday's cases include 36 Omanis and 138 expatriates, apart from 94 new recoveries.

The ministry calls upon all to adhere to the health isolation procedures (in a room with own toilet), as the isolated person is served from outside the room as per the guidelines.

The ministry also advises citizens and residents to wash hands with water and soap frequently and avoid touching the face, nose, mouth, eyes and follow the healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

Full adherence to social distancing instructions issued by the Supreme Committee and the MoH is also required.

— ONA

Zakat panel plans venture to help the needy people

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: The Zakat Committee in Salalah is working on the possibility of investing in commercial or residential land to make its efforts of supporting the needy people and families sustainable. The idea is to make the investment a tributary to support the good cause.

Dr Ali bin Ahmed Baaween, Chairman of the Zakat Committee in Salalah, confirmed that the committee has defined its programmes and set an integrated plan to achieve its future goals.

"The committee's priorities are field research through visits to identify the needy families, especially those who suffer from the pain of life requirements and living with certain health conditions. Such people and families get priority, as our team works hard to reach to the



THE ZAKAT COMMITTEE IN SALALAH HAS OPENED DOORS FOR DONATIONS IN COORDINATION WITH COMPETENT AUTHORITIES

deserved cases."

Meanwhile, the Zakat Committee in Salalah has opened doors for donations in coordination with the competent authorities and a dedicated team that has been entrusted with identifying needy families as beneficiaries.

As such the committee has already approved some

beneficiaries as per set standards for the same.

Dr Ali Baaween pointed out that the committee values support from some companies, businessmen and other individuals to take up the humanitarian cause of the people who are registered with the committee.

"We hope that we will be

able to achieve our goal of bringing back smile on the faces of many families with due support from public and private sector companies."

"A media team has also been formed to raise continuous campaign and raise awareness among people to understand the value of Zakat," he said.

Fish landing up by 19.4pc in March

MUSCAT: The total quantity of fish landed in the Sultanate reached 202,099 tonnes by the end of March 2020 compared to 169,196 tonnes during the same period of 2019, which is an increase of 19.4 per cent, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Traditional fishing practices in the Sultanate contributed to 192,913 tonnes of fish till the end of March 2020, constituting a rise of 16.2 per cent over 166,078 tonnes in 2019.

The total value of the fish stock was RO90.261 million in 2020, representing a growth of 13.1 per cent over RO79.77 million in 2019.

The Governorate of Al Wusta had the highest fish landing with 81,810 tonnes, followed by the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah at 60,411 tonnes, and Dhofar at 18,464 tonnes.

The quantity of fish landed in the governorates of North and South Al Batinah was 17,304 tonnes, and the quantity in Musandam was 9,651 tonnes. The landed quantity in Governorate of Muscat stood at 5,272 tonnes.

According to fish landing by species, the largest quantity of fish landed by the end of March 2020 comprised small pelagic fish at 118,804 tonnes, compared to 118,526 tonnes at the end of March 2019, a rise of 0.2 per cent.

— ONA



OMAN

Donate blood when it is needed most

Oman Post offers discounts on services

MUSCAT: Oman Post Company (Oman Post), a subsidiary of Asyad Group, offers discounts reaching 40 per cent on postal box services covering different parts of the Sultanate during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Majid al Maamari, Supervisor of Post Boxes Unit at Oman Post, made the following statement: "The company is seeking new ways of reaching out to clients. Our services are the most ideal solution for sending and receiving parcels during current conditions of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

"The service covers all types of parcels and correspondences.

It is a safe, secure and smooth around-the-clock service over the seven days of the week. We assure our clients of receiving their parcels on time. Oman Post places the safety and health of its employees and customers on top of its priorities through the implementation of all precautionary measures amid the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic". — **ONA**



MUSCAT: Blood donation saves the life of many patients who are badly in need of blood transfusion. The need of this noble gesture has doubled in the current extraordinary circumstances due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Dr Zainab bint Salim al Fanna al Araiimi, Director of Blood Banks Services at the Ministry of Health (**pictured**), said a large number of patients are required to undergo blood transfusion who include those with genetic blood diseases such as sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia, besides tumour patients, accident victims and patients undergoing surgeries.

As a fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and due to the inconveniences for donation during Ramadhan, there has been a 40 per cent drop in the number of blood donors at the Central Blood Bank.

Al Araiimi said in the past years, especially during Ramadhan, blood dona-



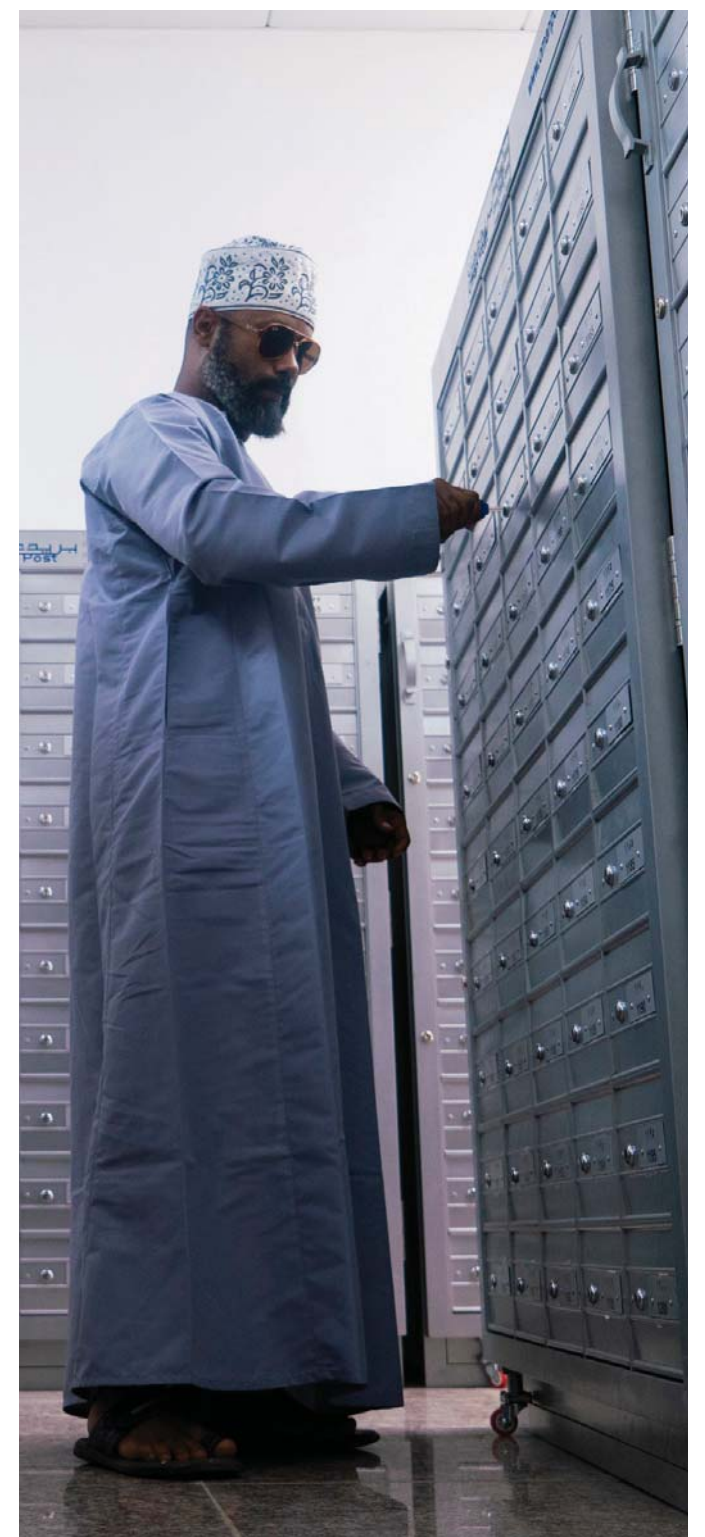
The need of this noble gesture has doubled in the current extraordinary circumstances due to the COVID-19 outbreak

tion campaigns used to be conducted in mosques and markets. Muslims can donate blood only after breaking the fast till 12 midnight. Certainly, this period of time is not enough to collect the amount of blood required daily.

Muscat Governorate needs 70-100 blood units daily to be supplied to the governorate's health institutions. Therefore, if there is any shortage in the blood stock, we will immediately contact the donors to cover the shortfall, she said.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Dr Zainab promised that the department has taken all the necessary measures to protect donors at the Central Blood Bank. Moreover, the appointment system has been activated through WhatsApp (94555648).

Dr Al Araiimi indicated that resident blood donors will be received during Ramadhan from 8 am till 1 pm and from 7 pm till 12 midnight for whoever wants to donate.





A chance to change eating

Vinod Nair

While temperatures have been hitting 40 and 45 degrees Celsius in some parts of the Sultanate, Ramadhan this year is expected to pass through a comparatively milder summer.

“For the latter part of the last decade, Ramadhan has been during the peak summer months of June and July with longer fasting hours. It used to be very difficult, especially for children, elderly and those with diabetes. This year, we do not have dehydration related issues”, said Ahmed Mustafa, a Pakistani expatriate who has been marking Ramadhan in Oman for over 30 years.

“This year, we are eating less because of the restrictions on social gatherings for iftar due to COVID-19. We are preparing food in far less quantity due to ‘stay at home’ and consequently also eating less. I think it also takes care of some health issues such as acidity, sugar and cholesterol levels, which are directly related to food consumption”.

Safia, an Indian homemaker said, “During iftar we cannot do away from preparing food that has very high oil, salt and sugar contents. We are

disappointed with the iftar in lockdown, but it is also an opportunity for a healthy Ramadhan, which can be also followed in the coming years”.

According to health and nutrition experts, overeating can have adverse and minor health problems.

Despite the mild summer, it is important to stay hydrated by managing the diet and water intake after fasting levels.

“Balancing the salt intake is important because it will regulate the thirst during the fasting hours”, said Norah, a dietician with a public healthcare clinic.

She also said to avoid coffee, tea, packed juices and instead, focus on fruits and fresh juices.

Mohammed Balushi, a taxi operator from Qurayat, said this Ramadhan is truly different.

“All these years, I used to work in the government sector, take a break in the afternoon and operate a taxi after prayers till midnight. This year, taxis are not allowed to operate and my department wants me to attend office only every alternative days. So always at home which can be also frustrating sometimes. I have been consulting a doctor because as a diabetic I also want to manage diet”.



FATWA

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

Question

Does swallowing saliva break one's fast?

Answer

No, it does not since there is no blood comes along with it.





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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

WORLD

COVID-19 RETURNS IN WUHAN

BEIJING: Wuhan, the epicentre of the novel coronavirus outbreak in China, reported on Monday its first cluster of infections since a lockdown on the city was lifted a month ago, stoking concerns of a wider resurgence of the disease.

The new infections sounded a note of caution amid efforts to ease coronavirus-related restrictions across China as businesses restart and individuals get back to work. Wuhan reported five new confirmed cases, all from the same residential compound. One was the wife of an 89-year-old patient reported a day earlier in the first confirmed case in the central city in more than a month. All of the latest cases were previously classified as asymptomatic, people who test positive for the virus and are capable of infecting others but do not show clinical signs such as a fever.

The number of asymptomatic cases in China is not known, as they only appear on the radar of health officials when they show up positive during tests conducted as part of contact tracing and health checks. China does not include asymptomatic cases in its overall tally of confirmed cases, now at 82,918, until they exhibit signs of infection. Mainland China has reported 4,633 deaths.



Hundreds of asymptomatic cases in Wuhan, which was released on April 8 from a months-long lockdown, are being monitored.

The numbers of new cases reported in China since April have been small compared with the thousands confirmed every day in February, thanks to a nationwide regime of screening, testing and quarantine.

The government said on Friday cinemas, museums and other venues would gradually be reopened, though restrictions including mandatory reservations and a limit on numbers of visitors would be in place.

The financial hub of Shanghai has reopened some night spots and Walt

Disney Co reopened its Shanghai Disneyland park on Monday to a reduced number of visitors. New outbreaks in China in the past two months have mainly developed in residential compounds or at hospitals.

— Reuters

SAUDI TRIPLES VAT, SUSPENDS HANDOUTS

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia’s finance minister on Monday said the kingdom will triple its Value Added Tax (VAT) and halt monthly handout payments to citizens in new austerity measures amid record low oil prices and a coronavirus-led economic slump. The measures, which could stir public resentment with the cost of living rising, come as the petro-state steps up emergency plans to slash government spending to deal with the twin economic blow. “It has been decided the cost of living allowance will be halted from June 2020 and VAT will be raised from 5 per cent to 15 per cent from July 1”, Finance Minister Mohammed al Jadaan said in a statement released by the official Saudi Press Agency. Jadaan insisted the measures were necessary to shore up state finances amid a “sharp decline” in oil revenue as the coronavirus pandemic saps global demand for crude. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA SEES SPIKE IN COVID-19 CASES

SEOUL: South Korea announced its biggest spike in coronavirus infections in more than a month on Monday, driven by a cluster at Seoul nightclubs and forcing authorities to delay this week’s planned re-opening of schools. The country has been held up as a global model in how to curb the virus, but over the weekend its capital — as well as neighbouring Gyeonggi province and the nearby city of Incheon -- ordered the closure of all clubs and bars after a burst of new cases sparked fears of a second wave. Authorities are scrambling to track down thousands of people who visited venues in the Itaewon entertainment district — including several gay clubs. Many visitors are believed to be reluctant to come forward because of the stigma surrounding homosexuality. The spike comes as parts of Europe begin a cautious re-opening, with health experts warning that moving too quickly will result in a surge in infection numbers. — AFP

MAKHLouF'S FALL FROM GRACE

ROUBA EL HUSSEINI

Syria's top tycoon publicly airing his grievances has revealed a power struggle within the ruling family as it tries to cement its power after nine years of war, analysts say.

After years of staying out of the lime-light, business magnate Rami Makhlouf this month in two videos on Facebook laid bare his struggles with the regime headed by his first cousin President Bashar al Assad, in what analysts say is a desperate last stand.

"He can feel the pressure accumulating to marginalise him," said Jihad Yazigi, editor of the economic publication The Syria Report. "He long tried to resist before throwing down his last card and exposing family dissensions," he said.

The 51-year-old Makhlouf, who is under both US and EU sanctions, has been considered to be a pillar of Assad's regime ever since the president took over from his father in 2000.

He presided over an empire of businesses including as head of Syria's largest mobile operator Syriatel. But trouble has been brewing since last summer, when the authorities seized control of his charity, Al-Bustan, and dissolved militias affiliated to him.

When the finance ministry in December froze the assets of several businessmen over tax evasion and illicit enrichment, the Syrian press said Makhlouf, his wife and companies were included.

Assad in October said he had "called on everyone in the private sector who has squandered state funds to return the money" in a bid to shore up state finances. — AFP

THE 51-YEAR-OLD MAKHLOUF, WHO IS UNDER BOTH US AND EU SANCTIONS, HAS BEEN CONSIDERED TO BE A PILLAR OF ASSAD'S REGIME EVER SINCE THE PRESIDENT TOOK OVER FROM HIS FATHER IN 2000



A cleaning woman disinfects toys at Rotschild school, in the French Riviera city of Nice, southern France, on Monday. — AFP

Cheers and tears as Europe's kids go back to school

DANNY KEMP

Excited children greeted their friends and weary parents got used to early starts again as schools in several European countries reopened after a nearly two-month coronavirus break.

Pupils toted their backpacks for the first time since March in France and the Netherlands as primary schools partially reopened, with strict measures in place to prevent a second wave of the pandemic.

As wider lockdown measures eased across the continent, schools also reopened their doors in Switzerland and the Balkans, while secondary schools in Greece were coming back to life. "The children were really looking forward to coming back to school. They were jumping with joy when they saw their friends again, they were very happy," 43-year-old Manon said as she dropped off her three children at Willemspark primary school in The Hague.

To prevent any resurgence of the virus, Dutch schools were allowing only half the normal number of children in at one time, with children either attending morning or afternoon sessions, or coming in on alternate days.

Measures to disinfect schools were also being taken but Manon said "luckily the children can go near each other without having to respect the 1.5-metre (social distancing) rule. They really appreciate that, they can touch and play games without worrying."

Scandinavian countries and Austria led the way with school reopenings earlier this month, partly on the grounds that children appear less susceptible to the disease.

But there are still worries that Monday's wave of reopenings has come too soon.

French President Emmanuel Macron's decision to reopen schools has sparked criticism, even in regions where the number of cases is especially low, over fears it will cause a new spike in infections. — AFP

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

The legacy of “The Lady with the Lamp” continues to be relevant even today

MARY OOMMEN

May 12, 2020, marks 200 years since the birth of Florence Nightingale, lovingly called “The Lady with the Lamp.” As one of the most famous figures in medical history, she is acknowledged as the pioneer of modern nursing. She was the first healthcare professional to use data to show that infection control improves health outcomes and her ground-breaking instructions on hygiene, sanitation and handwashing has helped revolutionise medicine. Today, as the Coronavirus pandemic continues to spread, her legacy has never been more relevant.

Born into a wealthy family, she felt her calling was to serve God and humankind and she saw nursing as the means to reduce human suffering. Her greatest achievement was to transform nursing into a respectable profession for women and in 1860, she established the first professional training institute for nurses. Nightingale also introduced new approaches to the emotional and psychological side of patient care, with her nurses helping soldiers write letters home during the Crimean Wars. She walked the ward at night with a lantern to check on her patients and gained her famous nickname

‘The Lady with the Lamp.’ During her active career, she published over 200 books, reports and pamphlets on hospital planning and organisation which are widely read and respected even today, including her most famous work “Notes on Nursing: What It Is and What It Is Not.”

A lot of the information given in the book is as relevant today as it was during her time though the context may have changed. The book was more of a public health instruction book than a nursing manual. It advised people on how to maintain healthy homes, strongly counselling that people open windows to maximise light and ventilation and displace “stagnant, musty and corrupt” air. In her view, all domestic interiors needed to be kept spotlessly clean to avoid sickness. Dirty carpets and unclean furniture, she wrote with characteristic bluntness, “pollute the air just as much as if there were a dung heap in the basement.” Her book which included key nursing values focused on maintaining good hygiene and regularly washing hands – practices that have been widely echoed over the past months. Through her work, Florence Nightingale was able to identify and prove the impact of health workers’ hygiene on patients’ mortality rates.

Although life as we know it may have changed, the core character of nurses has not. As the pan-

demie continues to affect more people across the globe, the world has begun to realize just how dependent we are on the resilience of nurses tasked with caring and supporting people through their illness to good health. Nurses, along with other health workers, are on the front line, battling the deadly Coronavirus every day, providing life-saving treatment and care. In doing so, they are putting not just themselves, but also their families and loved ones at risk. In spite of the dangers however, they bravely continue to work tirelessly for long hours, often without a break and still return the next day, to do it all over again. Given the legacy that Florence Nightingale established, we are able to safely trust and believe that no matter what the circumstances, nurses and health care workers will be able to treat us, not only with their clinical knowledge but also to deliver that care with kindness.

Acknowledging the contribution of nurses and health care workers, Howard Catton, head of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) said, “We have seen unprecedented levels of overwork by nurses, particularly those specialised in intensive care units, those in management or those most directly involved in

the response to the Coronavirus pandemic, often-times without adequate time for rest and recuperation, without support and assistance, with limited considerations for their mental health and wellbeing. We welcome the huge outpouring of positive recognition shown to health workers (such as the nightly handclapping show of solidarity in many countries) which suggests that we may be seeing some changes in attitude towards nurses.”

On International Nurses Day, let us acknowledge once again the selfless work being done by nurses the world over. You can show support and appreciation for nurses and other health professionals by helping to slow the spread of the Coronavirus by staying home as much as you can, keeping a safe distance, washing your hands often, wearing a mask in public places and observing other good hygiene habits.



FEATURES



Hanoi chef spreads joy with ‘Coronaburger’

YOU’VE GOT TO eat it, to beat it: That’s the philosophy of one Hanoi chef who is attempting to boost morale in the Vietnamese capital by selling green, coronavirus-themed burgers.

Laughing in the face of the global pandemic, Chef Hoang Tung and his team now spend their days moulding dozens of green-tea stained burger buns complete with little “crowns” made of dough to resemble microscopic images of the virus.

“We have this joke that if you are scared of something, you should eat it,” said Tung, at the Pizza Home takeaway shop in downtown Hanoi.

“That’s why the coronavirus isn’t scary anymore after you eat a burger in the shape of the virus itself. That way of thinking spreads joy to others during this pandemic,” said Tung.

The shop has sold around 50 burgers a day, despite the growing numbers of businesses in Vietnam which have been forced to close because of the virus.

In mid-February, Vietnam said all known 16 COVID-19 cases at the time had recovered, but that changed after an influx of overseas visitors and returning Vietnamese citizens brought an uptick in cases.

There are now 148 recorded cases of



the virus in Vietnam, but no reported deaths, according to the health ministry.

Authorities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have ordered that all non-essential businesses should close although some food outlets, including Tung’s takeaway shop, are still open.

Taking his grandson out for a Coronaburger, Dang Dinh Quy, 66, viewed the luminous green burger as a morale-boosting treat.

“This coronavirus is very dangerous. But if we eat a burger in its shape, in our minds it’s like we are already victorious,” said Quy.

“If you want to beat it, you’ve got to eat it first. — Reuters

Kurt Cobain’s ‘Unplugged’ guitar has \$1 million auction estimate



KURT COBAIN’S CARDIGAN sold for a record \$334,000 last year. Now the acoustic guitar the punk rocker played for Nirvana’s “MTV Unplugged” session, just five months before his death, is expected to fetch around \$1 million at auction in June.

Julien’s Auctions said on Monday the 1959 Martin D-18E guitar that Cobain played for the 1993 live taping is going up for sale. The guitar comes with battered case, whose storage compartment contains a small suede bag where the musician is said to have stashed the heroin he was addicted to in his final years.

The Nirvana frontman recorded the “Unplugged” session in November 1993. He was found dead, aged 27, of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in his Seattle home in April 1994.

Julien’s Chief Executive Darren Julien said the guitar “has earned its rightful place in history as the instrument played by one of rock’s most influential musicians and icons in one of the greatest and most memorable live performances of all time.” — Reuters

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CBO: Oman's nominal GDP contracts 4 per cent in 2019



since helped shore up international prices. DME Oman, the Sultanate's crude benchmark, gained \$0.43 per barrel to settle at \$31.16 per barrel in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange on Monday for July 2020 delivery. Prices have rallied since April 1,

when the global production cuts agreed by the Opec+ alliance came into effect. Oman's daily crude production averaged 998,300 barrels during the first quarter of 2020, up 2.9 per cent from the corresponding average of Q1 2019.

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined four per cent in 2019, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) revealed here on Monday, citing preliminary national accounts data. This compares with a nominal GDP growth of 12.3 per cent in 2018

The nominal contraction in 2019 was driven by shrinkages in the contributions of the petroleum and non-petroleum sectors, which had contracted by 8.4 per cent and 0.9 per cent respectively, the apex bank said.

“The contraction in the petroleum sector was contributed by both crude oil and natural gas, which declined by 9.6 per cent and 1.5 per cent respectively. The decline in non-petroleum industrial activities and services activities by 0.6 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively, led to a contraction in the

PRELIMINARY DATA:
PETROLEUM AND NON-
PETROLEUM SECTORS HAD
CONTRACTED 8.4 PER
CENT AND 0.9 PER CENT
RESPECTIVELY LAST YEAR

non-petroleum sector," the Central Bank noted in a review of banking and monetary developments during March 2020.

Agriculture and fishing activities, on the other hand, registered “impressive” nominal growth of 7.4 per cent in 2019, according to the CBO report.

Significantly, the price of Omani crude averaged \$64.4 per barrel during the first quarter of 2020, which was higher by 5.6 per cent over the corresponding average of Q1 2019. The average has since plummeted in the wake an unprecedented slump in global demand amid a glut in supply.

Globalefforts to cut output by the Opec+ alliance of oil producers, which includes the Sultanate of Oman, have



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Group's Unaudited Financial Results for the nine months ended 31 March 2020

Chairman's Report

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the report on the activities and unaudited financial results of the company for the 3rd quarter ended 31 March 2020.

1. Operating Results

The Group's total revenue for the nine month period ended 31 March 2020 was RO 13.556 million as against previous year revenue of RO. 16.178.

The Parent Company made RO 0.238 Million profit after taxation compared to RO 0.562 million for the same period in the last financial year.

The Group recorded a consolidated profit after taxation of RO 0.168 million for the nine months period ended 31 March 2020 against the profit after taxation of RO 1.861 million achieved in the same period in the previous year. The reduction in profitability is mainly on account of lesser turnover during the nine month period of current financial year.

2. Operations

The operations under all activities of the Group were carried out safely and with optimum efficiency.

Compared to the previous year, the Group revenue reduced by 16% due to completion of major projects and delay in start of projects anticipated. We were also under severe pressure from the delayed projects and long overdue that restricted us from taking up projects in order not to increase exposure in the Market. We hope that your company will achieve better revenue in the coming period considering current and new projects in hand but subject to improvement in COVID-19 pandemic impact and collection of receivables.

The drilling and blasting industry in Fujairah (UAE) is in better position that will help the Group to support downfall in business.

3. Health, Safety and the Environment

Your Company is operated in a safe and efficient manner in strict compliance with the highest safety standards and in accordance with the prevailing Royal Oman Police Explosives Rules and Regulations.

No accidents or environmental incidents were reported during the period ended 31 March 2020.

4. Other Information

Your Company was in compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and other applicable rules and regulations during the 9 months ended 31 March 2020.

5. Future Outlook

We would like to update the esteemed shareholders that all the approvals are in place for start of UAE explosives commercial operations. We will start the movement of explosives from Oman as soon as border opens and receipt of transport permit from UAE authorities. We are confident that start of commercial operations of UAE Explosives would enhance the overall profitability of the Group.

We would like to inform our esteemed shareholders that new gypsum quarry will start the operations near future, subject to COVID-19 pandemic impact, that will add value to Group.

In addition to the above, your company has plans to venture into mining other materials such as limestone, Chromite, etc as part of diversification plan and is planning to expand its footprint in the African continent, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. We are in advanced stage of registration of JV company in Kenya for Drilling and Blasting business.

6. Acknowledgements

The Members of the Board wish to record their gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haithem bin Tariq bin Taimur and the Government of Oman for the successful efforts made to improve development and prosperity within the Country.

The Directors also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police, other Government bodies, our valued customers and Banker for their cooperation and support.

Saleem bin Qassim bin Ahmed Al Zawawi
Chairman

Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income

	GROUP		PARENT	
	31.03.2020 RO.	31.03.2019 RO.	31.03.2020 RO.	31.03.2019 RO.
Revenue	13,555,778	16,178,045	4,081,776	4,578,136
Cost of Sales	(11,277,987)	(12,194,534)	(2,795,427)	(2,820,634)
Gross Profit	2,277,791	3,983,511	1,286,349	1,757,502
Other Income	399,817	137,084	49,735	69,473
Administration & General expenses	(1,335,174)	(1,137,479)	(396,395)	(369,291)
Sales & Distribution expenses	(263,420)	(373,131)	(253,103)	(364,184)
Operating Profit	1,079,014	2,609,985	686,586	1,093,500
Finance charges	(995,349)	(774,633)	(404,361)	(382,803)
Profit before taxation	83,665	1,835,352	282,225	710,697
Taxation	84,158	(208,944)	(43,770)	(148,422)
Net Profit for the period	167,823	1,626,408	238,455	562,275
Other Comprehensive Income				
Profit on transfer of a subsidiary	-	234,405	-	-
Profit and total comprehensive income	167,823	1,860,813	238,455	562,275

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

	GROUP		PARENT	
	As at 31.03.2020 RO.	As at 31.03.2019 RO.	As at 31.03.2020 RO.	As at 31.03.2019 RO.
Fixed Assets	8,019,311	5,355,705	824,496	717,680
Intangible Assets	3,609,253	40,177	3,494,164	3,333
Goodwill	22,228,249	22,228,249	579,717	579,717
Investment in Subsidiary	-	-	33,549,257	32,955,563
Investment in Associates	890,634	-	890,634	-
Deferred Tax	287,938	299,648	19,382	33,089
Current Assets	21,207,814	18,375,651	2,845,594	3,447,664
Total Assets	56,243,199	46,299,430	42,203,244	37,737,046
Non-current Liabilities	10,097,344	4,209,087	7,467,729	2,298,401
Current Liabilities	19,914,722	15,721,275	8,969,753	9,435,183
Total Liabilities	30,012,066	19,930,362	16,437,482	11,733,584
Net Assets	26,231,133	26,369,068	25,765,762	26,003,462
Shareholders' Fund				
Share Capital	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025
Legal Reserve	1,389,825	1,376,134	1,293,669	1,292,774
Special Reserve	579,717	579,717	579,717	579,717
Share premium account	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576
Retained earnings	5,777,990	5,929,616	5,408,775	5,647,370
Total Shareholders' equity	26,231,133	26,369,068	25,765,762	26,003,462

Note

The complete accounts shall be delivered to any shareholder or beneficiary upon request, in Arabic or English, within 7 days from receiving the application.

BUSINESS



3.2pc
rise in
banking
credit to
private
sector
in Q1

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT: The total outstanding credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks (Other Depository Corporations or ODCs) grew by 3.7 per cent to RO 26.4 billion as of March 31, 2020, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Credit to the private sector rose by 3.2 per cent to RO 23.1 billion during this period, the apex bank said. Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 46.7 per cent and 44.6 per cent respectively, while financial corporations received 5.4 per cent and other sectors the remaining 3.3 per cent.

Total deposits held with ODCs registered a growth of 4.8 per cent and stood at RO 24.1 billion at the end of March 2020. Private sector deposits increased by 9.1 per cent to RO 15.9 billion. Sector-wise,

the share of households was largest at 48.8 per cent in the total private sector deposit, followed by non-financial corporations at 32 per cent, financial corporations at 16.9 per cent and the other sectors at 2.3 per cent.

“The combined balance sheet of conventional banks denotes an annual growth of 2.7 per cent in total outstanding credit as on end-March 2020. Conventional banks’ credit to the private sector increased by 1.6 per cent to RO 19.2 billion,” the Central Bank said in its review of banking and monetary developments in the first quarter of this year.

Conventional banks’ overall investments in securities amounted to RO 3.7 billion, according to the report. Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 23.4 per cent over the year to RO 1.8 billion. Banks also invested RO 263.2 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO

1.1 billion at the end of March 2020.

Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased to RO 20.6 billion in March 2020, registering a growth of 4.1 per cent over the level a year ago. Government deposits with conventional banks decreased by 10.9 per cent to RO 4.9 billion, while deposits of public enterprises increased by 30.2 per cent to RO 1.6 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 66.5 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 7.8 per cent to RO 13.7 billion.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.1 billion at the end of March 2020, recording a growth of 9.6 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 9 per cent to RO 3.5 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows stood at RO 4.8 billion and constituted about 14 per cent of the banking system’s assets as on end-March 2020.

Omantel GA Meeting approves the amendments of the company Articles of Association and financial statements for 2019



Muscat, May 10, 2020: Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) held its first two e- extraordinary and ordinary general assembly meetings in line with the decisions of the Supreme Committee Tasked With Handling the Developments Of Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic and the directives of the Capital Market Authority. As per these instructions, public joint stock companies were asked to hold their annual general assemblies remotely as per the guidelines set by CMA.

The extraordinary general assembly of the company, which was held on May 10, 2020, was chaired by His Excellency Abdul Salam Al Murshidi, Chairman of the Board of Directors in the presence of board members, external auditors of the company, the legal advisor, the observer of the Capital Market Authority and the Shareholders. The meeting approved the amendments made to the company’s articles of association (MoA) to ensure compliance with the Commercial Companies Law issued by Royal Decree No. 18/2019. According to the new amendments, all members of the Board of Directors are elected by the general assembly of the company.

The extraordinary meeting was followed by the annual ordinary general assembly meeting which took note of the Company’s decision to distribute cash dividends to registered shareholders as of March 26, 2020 (55 Baisas per share),

- *Al Murshidi Elected as Chairman*
- *Omantel net profit increases by 20% to RO77.7 million*

based on the Capital Market Authority’s circular No. 4/202 dated March 18, 2020.

The ordinary general assembly also approved the company’s financial results for 2019 and approved the amount allocated for the community support for 2020.

The general assembly also elected by secret ballot 9 members (from the shareholders and others) for the new term namely His Excellency Abdul Salam Al Murshidi, Saud Al Nahari, Khaled Al Khalili, Ayman Al Hosni, Sayyid Zaki Al Busaidi, Matar Al Mamari, Mulham Al-Jarf, Atef Al Siyabi, and Muslim Al-Barami. The new board held its first meeting and elected His Excellency Abdul Salam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi as Chairman and Mr. Saud Bin Ahmed Al Nahari , as the Vice Chairman. The BoD sub committees were also formed and their members were elected.

Commenting on the meeting , His Excellency Abdul Salam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi , Chairman of Omantel Board of Directors, said, “The Group continued its good financial performance during 2019 despite the challenges that faced the sector, especially in the local market.”

“Zain operations continued to contribute to the growth of Omantel Group business and to make off the weak growth in the local market. Zain Group operations grew by 25% on an annual basis. This remarkable growth is attributed to the full consolidation of Zain KSA results in the Group in 2019 (the results of Zain KSA were consolidated for only 6 months during 2018)”, His Excellency added.

“Omantel’s acquisition of a strategic stake in the Zain Mobile Group contributed to raising the revenues and profits of Omantel Group and as a result of this acquisition, the third largest mobile operator in the MENA region was created. The acquisition provided opportunities for synergies between the two companies, enhanced the ability to compete more effectively in the market and helped in addressing the risks of operating in a single market”, His Excellency concluded.

On his part, Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said, “Omantel continued its growth trajectory despite the challenges that the sector witnessed in general. Omantel Group total revenues (including Zain Group’s operations) grew by 18.6% reaching RO 2592 million compared to RO 2186 million last year. Earnings before interest, tax and depreciation and amortization grew by 28% from R.O 855 million to R.O 1098 million. Omantel Group net profit (before non-controlling interests) grew by 43.5% to RO 299.7 million

compared to RO 208.8 million during 2018. The net profit (after non-controlling interests) increased by 19.9% to RO 77.7 million, compared to RO 64.8 million in 2018.

“During 2019, we implemented several initiatives to overcome the challenges that faced the sector and take advantage of available opportunities to ensure sustainability of Omantel business. We further capitalized on available synergy opportunities between Omantel and Zain, especially in areas such as wholesale, enterprise and digital services as well as enhancement of customer experience, he added.

Commenting on the networks, Al Mamari pointed out that Omantel launched the first 5G network in the Sultanate in December 2019 to keep pace with the latest global technology advancements. The move is expected to pave the way for the introduction of many technologies related to the fourth industrial revolution such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and Fintech solutions. Omantel continued its local network expansion plan and strengthening its international connectivity benefitting from the unique geographical location of the Sultanate and the significant investments made by the company during the past period in building a robust submarine cables network linking the whole globe through the Sultanate”.

As for the company’s social responsibility, Talal Al Mamari said: “Omantel CSR strategy focuses on building partnerships and launching initiatives aimed at improving the standards of living of the targeted groups. Omantel CSR initiatives also facilitates digital transformation by supporting important sectors such as education and health in addition to supporting entrepreneurship, SMEs and promoting positive attitude towards environment and HSE”.

“Omantel has launched several initiatives in cooperation with partners from government and civil society institutions to maximize the impact of its CSR initiatives on the targeted groups and society in general. The number of beneficiaries

from Omantel social initiatives during 2019 stood at about 122,613, he continued.

“In 2019, Omantel managed to achieve the sustainability goals that were set as part of Omantel Sustainability Framework in 2014 to be achieved in 2020. Omantel has invested more than RO 10 million in sustainability-related initiatives in addition to reaching 95% broadband coverage at speeds of not less than 10 Mbps - a year before the target date, he concluded.

Financial performance

Omantel Group revenue includes revenues for the parent company’s local operations, revenue for Zain Group and other local and international subsidiaries.

Consolidated financial statements

RO Million

	2018	2019	Change %
Revenues	2,186.0	2,592.2	18.6%
Net profit for the year	208.8	299.7	43.5%
Non-controlling interests	(144.0)	(222.0)	-54.1%
Profit after amending the non-controlling interests	64.8	77.7	19.9%

In million R.O

Omantel performance (excluding Zain Group)

Omantel’s domestic operations include fixed services, mobile services and Omantel International, Omantel’s wholesale business arm, which is active in voice hubbing services in addition to Omantel subsidiaries (Oman Data Park and the Internet of Things Company “Momkin”).

Omantel domestic operations revenues grew by 1.5% in 2019. The revenues increased from RO 544.0 million in 2018 to RO 554.3 million in 2019.

The annual general assembly of Omantel has also approved the remaining items on the agenda, including allocating RO 500,000 for community support initiatives in 2020, appointing the auditor for the fiscal year that ends 12/31/2020, determining their fees and approving the remuneration of the Board of Directors for the fiscal year ended on 12/31/2019.



Gulf Islamic Investments receives approval for 2 Lucan Place Project

MUSCAT: Gulf Islamic Investments LLC (GII), a UAE based Islamic financial services company, received Planning Permission on the revised scheme for 2 Lucan Place property from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). This important milestone was achieved by working in close collaboration with the planners, stakeholder groups and local community.

GII is leading the development and has put in a team of Consultants including award-winning architects, KPF, Savills (Planning and Viability), Waterman's (Structure) Rive Gauche (Interior Design), Core 5 (Cost Consultants) amongst others.

The property will deliver 31 new homes, alongside social and community uses designed with nursery provider, Kido (formerly Safari Kids) and specialist education and care provider, Mom's Belief, both of whom will occupy the property at a subsidized rent.

Mohammed al Hassan, Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer for the GCC at Gulf Islamic Investments, commented: "We are very pleased with the outcome of the planning committee. This deal is a part of our overall commitment of advising investments of \$1 billion in real estate globally. This is a landmark decision for us and represents the first step in our ambitions for London as part of our growing property portfolio."

BA owner IAG says burning cash, quarantine plan will make it worse

LONDON: British Airways owner IAG has exhausted every avenue to shore up its finances and is burning through cash, its CEO said on Monday, as the aviation industry warned of the fresh damage it would suffer if Britain quarantines international arrivals.

Willie Walsh told parliament's transport committee IAG would have to review plans to resume flying in July if the government pressed ahead with plans to introduce a quarantine on most people coming into the country by air as part of measures to prevent a second peak of the coronavirus pandemic.

While Walsh said IAG was not in a position where it had to ask for a specific bailout from the government, he added the quarantine plan would add to the pressure on the group.

"We've probably exhaust-



We've probably exhausted every avenue that I can think of at this stage to shore up our liquidity. The cash has been reducing significantly and that will be the case as we go through May, June and July.

WILLIE WALSH,
IAG CEO

ed every avenue that I can think of at this stage to shore up our liquidity. The cash has been reducing significantly and that will be the case as we go through May, June and July," he said.

"The announcements yesterday of a 14-day period (of quarantine) for coming into the UK, it's definitely going to make it worse," he said, forecasting demand for "minimal" capacity under such rules.

Questioned by UK lawmakers over a British Airways plan to lay off up to 12,000 people, or 30 per cent of its workforce, Walsh told lawmakers that aviation was facing the deepest crisis in its history. "The industry has changed and anybody who believes that we're going back to the way things were in 2019 misunderstands the scale of the challenge that is being faced," he said. — **Reuters**

OOMCO continues coronavirus protection measures



MUSCAT: In its efforts to safeguard the community's health and limit the spread

of the coronavirus (COVID-19), Oman Oil Marketing Company has introduced a

number of measures throughout its Service Stations and retail venues. Among them, and in line with the regulations and advice set by the Supreme Committee for Dealing with COVID-19 and the Ministry of Health, rigorous sterilisation procedures are being implemented at all touchpoints.

In addition, Oman Oil Marketing Company recently launched its OOMCO World App as well

other digital payment options all designed to eliminate the need to handle cash, offering customers safer and smarter ways to shop and re-fuel.

A responsible company that champions best practices to lead better and healthier lives, OOMCO has been also utilising the digital screens across all its Service Stations to display important precautionary measures and videos from the Ministry of Health.

Saudi triples VAT rate in austerity drive against oil slump and virus

RIYADH/DUBAI:

Saudi Arabia will triple its value added tax rate and suspend a cost of living allowance for state workers, it said on Monday, seeking to shield finances hit by low oil prices and a slump in demand for its lifeline export worsened by the new coronavirus.

Historic oil output cuts agreed by Riyadh and other major producers have given only limited support to prices after they sank on oversupply caused by a war for petroleum market share between the kingdom and its fellow oil titan

Russia.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is also being hit hard by measures to fight the new coronavirus, which are likely to curb the pace and scale of economic reforms launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"The cost of living allowance will be suspended as of June 1, and the value added tax will be increased to 15 per cent from 5 per cent as of July 1," Finance Minister Mohammed al Jadaan said in a statement reported by the state news agency.

“These measures are painful but necessary to maintain financial and economic stability over the medium to long term...and to overcome the unprecedented coronavirus crisis with the least damage possible.”

The austerity measures come after the kingdom posted a \$9 billion budget deficit in the first quarter.

The minister said non-oil revenues were affected by the suspension and decline in economic activity, while spending had risen due to unplanned



Saudi Minister of Finance Mohammed al Jadaan speaks during a media conference in Riyadh. — **Reuters**

strains on the healthcare sector and the initiatives taken to support the economy.

“All these challenges have cut state revenues, pressured public finances to a level that is hard to deal with going forward without affecting the overall economy in the medium to long term, which requires more spending cuts

and measures to support non-oil revenues stability," he added.

The government has cancelled and put on hold some operating and capital expenditures for some government agencies, and cut allocations for some reform initiatives and projects worth a total 100 billion riyals, the statement said. — **Reuters**

GLOBAL COMMERCIAL INSURANCE PRICING RISES BY 14 PER CENT IN FIRST QUARTER

NEW YORK: Global average commercial insurance prices increased 14 per cent in the first quarter, driven in part by rises in property insurance rates, insurance broker Marsh said in a report released Monday.

The change marks the highest year-over-year increase since 2012, when Marsh launched its Global Insurance Market Index for rates.

Pricing was trending higher in the first quarter prior to any meaningful impact from losses associated with COVID-19,



Real estate signs advertise new homes for sale in multiple new developments in York County, South Carolina. — **Reuters**

said Dean Klisura,
president, global
placement and advisory

services at Marsh, adding that the pandemic will likely have an impact on

pricing for the rest of 2020.

Globally, on average, pricing for property risks increased 15 per cent while financial and professional lines rose nearly 26 per cent and casualty increased 5 per cent, Marsh said.

The increases, particularly for property and financial lines coverages, continue a repricing trend that has been shaking out in the industry, said Christopher Lang, Marsh global placement leader for the United States and Canada, in an interview. — **Reuters**

BUSINESS



Employees work on a production line inside a Dongfeng Honda factory after lockdown measures in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province and China's epicentre of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, were further eased. — Reuters

Wuhan weighs policies to help local automaker Dongfeng

SHANGHAI: China's Wuhan city is considering steps to support its biggest local automaker Dongfeng Motor Corp, according to a draft policy document reviewed by Reuters, as the epicentre of China's novel coronavirus outbreak tries to revive its economy.

The potential measures include subsidies for new car buyers, new government orders for Dongfeng vehicles and a plan to make use of idled plants from Dongfeng's venture with Renault, according to the policy draft by the Wuhan Economic and Technological Development Zone, a part of the city government.

The proposal, dated April 28, underlines how far Wuhan is willing to go to help support Dongfeng, China's

third-biggest state-owned car maker, a major employer and a banner name crucial to the city's reputation as one a major auto town.

THE PROPOSAL, DATED APRIL 28, UNDERLINES HOW FAR WUHAN IS WILLING TO GO TO HELP SUPPORT DONGFENG, CHINA'S THIRD-BIGGEST STATE-OWNED CAR MAKER.

It also illustrates the extent of the challenge facing Dongfeng, whose main listed company Dongfeng Motor Group Co Ltd's posted a 33 per cent slump in sales in the first four months of this year from the same period last year.

The document did not put a cost on the policies, and noted they were subject to change after further government discussions.

The push comes as China works to shore up its economy after country-wide lockdowns due to the pandemic, and as local authorities in other cities that rely heavily on vehicle manufacturing, such as Guangzhou and Changsha, have started to offer incentives to car buyers.

The city of 11 million where the virus first emerged late last year endured a 76-day lockdown, accounted for over 80 per cent of China's more than 4,600 deaths from the epidemic, and suffered a 40.5 per cent slump in Q1 gross domestic product from a year earlier. — Reuters

Chinese investment in US drops, pandemic to weigh on bilateral flows

BEIJING: Chinese direct investment in the United States dropped to the lowest level since 2009 last year amid bilateral tensions, and the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to weigh on investment flows between the world's two biggest economies, according to a report.

By stymieing dealmaking and hitting economic growth, the pandemic could dissolve the positive effects of the Phase 1 trade deal signed in January, said the report from research firm Rhodium Group and the National Committee on US-China Relations.

Initial data indicates a "significant decline" in Chinese investment into the United States in the first months of 2020, said the report, with \$200 million in newly announced direct investments compared with \$2 billion on average per quarter last year.

But US companies announced \$2.3 billion new direct investment projects in China in the first quarter, only slightly down from last year's quarterly average, said the report.

US companies do not seem to be considering significantly reducing their China footprint, said the report.

By exposing fragile global supply chains, the pandemic could push US companies to move manufacturing out of China but might also spur more investment as companies try to localise their operations, it said. — Reuters



Chinese and US flags flutter near The Bund, before US trade delegation meet their Chinese counterparts for talks in Shanghai, China.

— Reuters

SPORTS



MAN CITY PARENT COMPANY ADDS NINTH CLUB WITH LOMMEL SK DEAL

We are excited to welcome Lommel SK to City Football Group and to work together with the fans and the city to develop the club. Belgium is one of Europe’s best football countries as demonstrated by the success of the national team and the development of world-class players, some of whom we know very well, like Kevin De Bruyne and Vincent Kompany

FERRAN SORIANO,
CFG CHIEF
EXECUTIVE

MANCHESTER: Manchester City’s parent company has added a ninth club to its global portfolio with the purchase of Belgian second-tier side Lommel SK. It has been reported that Lommel’s debts of £1.75 million (\$2.1 million) will be wiped out by the City Football Group (CFG) as part of the deal. CFG has full or part-ownership of clubs in three European countries, and in four other continents. In addition to Lommel and Premier League champions Manchester City, they have stakes in New York City FC,

Melbourne City, Yokohama F Marinos, Montevideo City Torque, Girona, Sichuan Jiuniu and Mumbai City. CFG Chief Executive Ferran Soriano said the deal would improve the chances of unearthing Belgian talent such as current and former Manchester City stars Kevin De Bruyne and Vincent Kompany. “We are excited to welcome Lommel SK to City Football Group and to work together with the fans and the city to develop the club”, Soriano said in a statement on Monday. “Belgium is one of

Europe’s best football countries as demonstrated by the success of the national team and the development of world-class players, some of whom we know very well, like Kevin De Bruyne and Vincent Kompany. “This investment is part of our long-term strategy to be present in key football countries, play beautiful football and develop talent”. City’s owners, Abu Dhabi United Group, have the majority stake in CFG, while American and Chinese organisations have also invested in the company. — AFP

Allow bowlers to ball-tamper, says ex-Australia captain Chappell

MELBOURNE: Former Australia captain Ian Chappell says some form of ball-tampering could be allowed in cricket, with saliva and sweat considered health risks due to the coronavirus crisis. Bowlers regularly shine one side of the leather-clad ball to make the ball

swing sideways in mid-flight and deceive the batsman. But rubbing spit or sweat into the ball’s surface is expressly forbidden under new Australian Institute of Sport guidelines that set out the conditions for the game to resume. Chappell has previous-

ly suggested that international captains be asked to come up with a list of natural substances bowlers feel would help them swing the ball. And, writing on the Cricinfo website, he said fans craved a genuine contest between bat and ball. — AFP



SPORTS

OMAN VOLLEYBALL TEAM RANKED 76TH IN FIVB RANKINGS



ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: Oman's volleyball team registered a good ranking in the men's senior world ranking category – as they reached the 76th spot based on the latest announcement by International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) for May. FIVB implemented the latest Senior men's world ranking, the new assessment criteria for this including dedicated points for team's participants in the qualifications for regional, continental and global volleyball events. The new rule was effective since February 2020.

Oman's international ranking was at 130 before three years. The new updated ranking is a good movement for the Sultanate team and it is a positive indication to register better positions in the upcoming FIVB's Senior men's world ranking list. Oman's team had participated in the previous year at many top events including the Asian qualification for the finals in Tehran city, Iran in September and took part at the Arabian Championship in Egypt as the team was positioned in the third place.



Oman had gained 83 points from these events.

► **Shaikh Badar Ali al Rawas**, Chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) commented that the new registered international ranking for national team reflected the hard work from all technical and administrative members during the last period.

“One of the main priorities for OVA board is to keep developing volleyball in the Sultanate. This perfect movement came as

result of cooperation with our government and private sector partners. We would like to thank all our stakeholders and partners from government and private sector including: Ministry of Sports Affairs, Oman Olympic Committee and private sector companies. Achievement of this international ranking will encourage us to keep doing better in the upcoming events”, he added.

Brazil remained at the top seeding of the rankings as they have 427 points and it is followed by Poland with 383 points. America positioned in third position with 365 points.

Crisis club once home to Cannavaro quits Chinese Super League

BEIJING: Chinese Super League (CSL) side Tianjin Tianhai, once home to Brazilian star Alexandre Pato and formerly coached by Fabio Cannavaro, have effectively folded after teetering on the brink for months.

At least a dozen clubs in China's top three tiers of professional football have gone under in the last six months, but Tianjin are the first from the CSL.

The team from China's northeast, who were reportedly saddled with heavy debts, are set to be replaced in the top division by Roberto Donadoni's Shenzhen FC.

Tianjin on Monday sub-



mitted an application to withdraw from the CSL for the forthcoming season, Beijing News and other state media said.

“Tianhai drama ends!” said the newspaper.

The new CSL campaign was supposed to begin on February 22 but was indefinitely postponed by the coronavirus pandemic. The league could now start in late June.

It has been a swift fall from grace for Tianjin.

Then called Tianjin Quanjian, they qualified for the AFC Champions League in coming third in the CSL in 2017 under Italian World Cup-winning captain Cannavaro. — **AFP**



Andretti rolls out IndyCar welcome mat for Ferrari

"Having Ferrari would be incredible. Not only as an engine supplier, but also as a chassis builder."

**Mario Andretti,
Motor racing great**

NEW YORK: Motor racing great Mario Andretti would love to see Italian carmaker Ferrari join the North American Indycar series as a chassis and engine supplier.

Andretti, one of four drivers to claim both the Formula One and IndyCar drivers championships, said in an interview with Gazzetta dello Sport on Sunday that IndyCar series owner Roger Penske and Ferrari team principal Mattia Binotto should get together to discuss a collaboration.

"Having Ferrari would be incredible," Andretti told the Italian sports newspaper. "Not only as an engine supplier, but also as a chassis builder."

"It is clear that the rules should be changed, but I would like an all-Italian Dallara v Ferrari battle. The Cavallino (Ferrari's Prancing Horse symbol) would increase interest in the championship, but there is an obstacle in the rules."

"I suggest Binotto comes and proposes an idea to Roger Penske."

Andretti's role in IndyCar is now mostly ambassadorial but he remains a fixture on the circuit working with son Michael, also a former F1 and IndyCar driver who now operates numerous racing teams including IndyCar, Indy Lights and Formula E.

Currently IndyCar has two engine suppliers, Chevrolet and Honda, while Dallara makes the chassis for all teams.

Bringing Formula One's glamour team into the IndyCar picture could be more than just fanciful pondering from Andretti with Ferrari resisting new FIA budget caps that could result in the loss of hundreds of jobs at the Maranello based operation.

Formula One teams have agreed verbally to lower the 2021 budget cap from the \$175 million set in the regulations to

\$145 million but some are pushing for further cuts to reflect the global financial crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

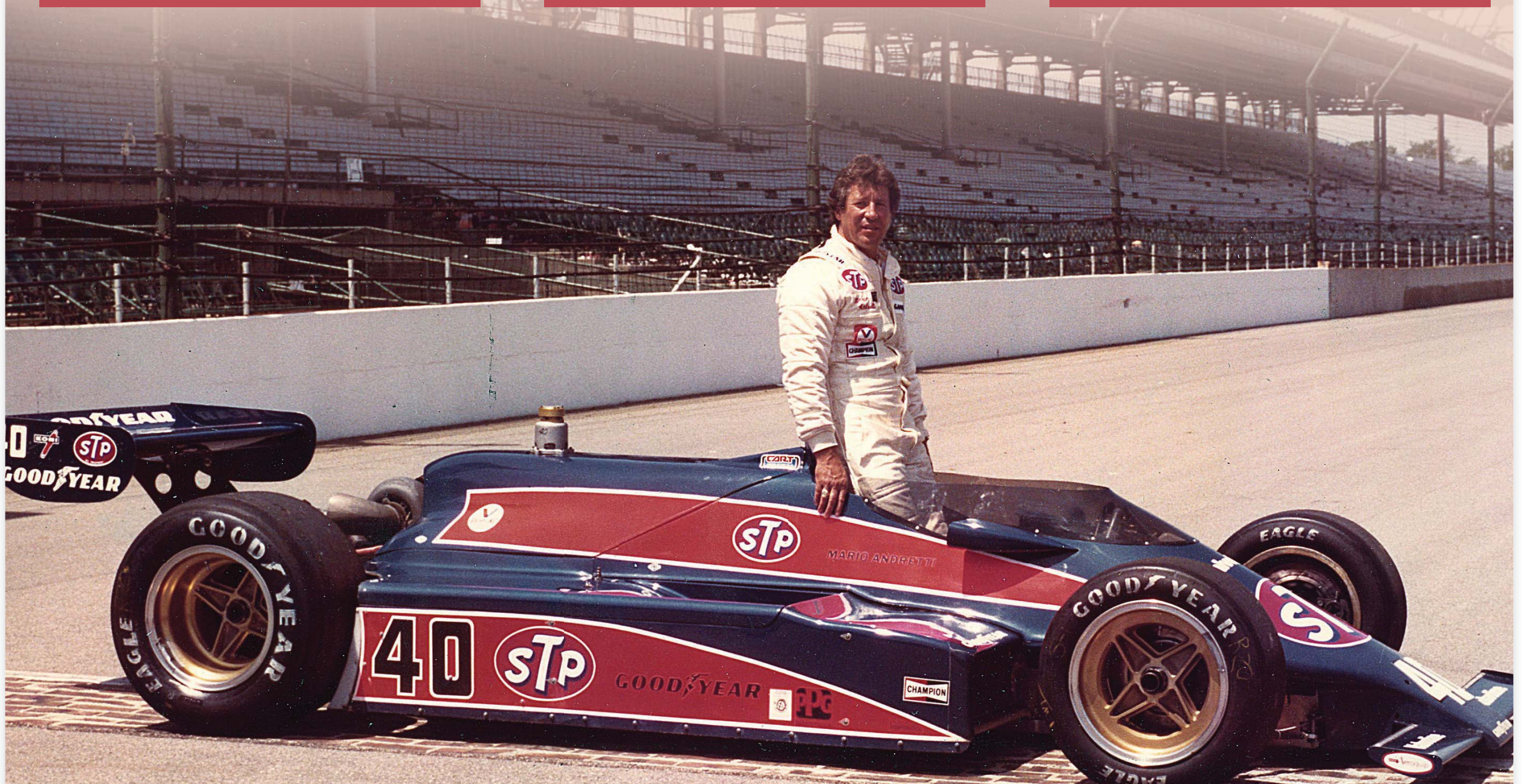
Some other teams are keen on a figure closer to \$100 million but Ferrari, the sport's oldest and most successful team, oppose further reductions.

Ferrari, which makes its own car and engines, has said hundreds of jobs would be at risk under a lower cap.

One possible solution could see Ferrari expanding its motor racing footprint by deploying staff elsewhere into other series such as IndyCar, Le Mans or sports cars.

Ferrari has long flirted with the idea of getting involved in IndyCar. In 1985 Ferrari struck a deal with Truesports Racing and Indy 500 winner Bobby Rahal to develop an IndyCar.

Although a car was developed it never made it onto the starting grid. — **Reuters**



SPORTS



Adrian Wojnarowski, ESPN

"Kevin Durant's not coming back to the Nets this year. That's not happening. ... They're not playing him."

DURANT WON'T PLAY IF NBA RESUMES

NEW YORK: Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant will not play if the NBA restarts the season, ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski reported on Sunday.

The Nets are determined to let the four-time scoring champion rest until next season rather than risk reinjuring his right Achilles tendon.

"Kevin Durant's not

coming back to the Nets this year," Wojnarowski said during "The Woj Pod" podcast. "That's not happening. ... They're not playing him."

Earlier this month, Brooklyn general manager Sean Marks said he wouldn't rule out Durant returning to the court if the league resumes the 2019-20 campaign. Play has

been suspended since March 11 due to the coronavirus crisis.

"He knows his body better than anybody," Marks told Newshub of New Zealand. "Our performance team and training staff have done a tremendous job getting him to this point, but I just don't know how coming out of this pandemic will affect anybody, let alone Kevin."

Durant, 31, was injured during Game 5 of the 2019 NBA Finals as a member of the Golden State Warriors. He signed a four-year, \$164 million deal with the Nets as a free agent in July.

The 10-time All-Star forward was the league's Most Valuable Player in 2013-14 as a member of the Oklahoma City Thunder. He was a two-time NBA Finals MVP with the Warriors. — **Reuters**

