

HIS MAJESTY SETS UP OMAN INVESTMENT AUTHORITY

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Thursday issued a Royal Decree, No 61/2020, on the establishment of Oman Investment Authority.

Article (1) stipulates that a state department to be named "Oman Investment Authority " shall be established and that it shall have a legal identity, enjoy financial and administrative autonomy and report to the Council of Ministers.

Article (2) states that Oman Investment Authority shall have a board of directors to be formed under a Royal order of His Majesty the Sultan.

Article (3) states that a Royal decree shall promulgate the system (law) of Oman Investment Authority.

Article (4) states that all specialisations, allocations, rights, obligations,



ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS RELATED TO THE STATE'S
GENERAL RESERVE FUND SHALL BE TRANSFERRED
TO OMAN INVESTMENT AUTHORITY

OWNERSHIP OF ALL GOVERNMENT COMPANIES AND
INVESTMENTS SHALL BE TRANSFERRED FROM THE MINISTRY
OF FINANCE TO OMAN INVESTMENT AUTHORITY,
WITH THE EXCEPTION OF PDO

registers, assets and investments related to the State's General Reserve Fund shall be transferred to Oman Investment Authority , and so shall Oman Investment Fund and the Directorate General of Investments at the Ministry of Finance. Also, all employees of the State's General Reserve Fund and Oman Investment Fund shall be transferred to Oman Investment Authority , along with their current job status and financial dues.

It also states that the transfer of employees of the Directorate General of Investments at the Ministry of Finance, to Oman Investment Authority shall be in accordance with terms to be agreed between the Ministry of Finance and Oman Investment Authority. **TURN TO P2**

MUTTRAH SOUQ, OLD MUTTRAH AND HAMRIYAH CLOSED FOR TWO WEEKS

COMMITTEE SET UP TO
STUDY REOPENING OF
AIRPORTS

THIRD PHASE OF
LOCKDOWN LIFTING
SOON

MEDICAL BRACELETS FOR
COVID-19 PATIENTS

50 PER CENT OF OMANI
VICTIMS AGED OVER 50

DIABETIC PATIENTS
ACCOUNTED 30 PER CENT
OF COVID-19 DEATHS

MUTTRAH TO
BE UNLOCKED

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Lockdown in the Wilayat of Muttrah will be lifted partially on Saturday following sharp fall in coronavirus cases, but the quarantine will remain in place in Muttrah Souq, old Muttrah and Hamriyah for two weeks. This was announced by Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, at the Supreme Committee's e-press conference, who said lockdown helped in flattening the epidemic infection curve. The minister praised the people in adhering to the decisions of the Supreme Committee, which led to the fall in the number of cases in the wilayat.

Dr Al Saeedi said a committee has been set up to study the reopening of airports. "A committee has been assigned to draw up procedures and measures and plans to allow travel will be considered soon. There are ongoing meetings with airport operators in Oman to discuss safety measures. In the event of reopening airports, passengers to and from the Sultanate will be subjected to rapid tests.

Dr Saif al Abri, DG of Diseases Surveillance and Control, said that industrial activities will not be allowed to open in Wadi Kabir. "It is difficult to define the nature of the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate. The challenge was the gradual reopening of activities during Ramadhan and Eid Al Fitr." Dr Al Abri said the next two weeks are decisive in light of the spike in the number of COVID-19 cases. He said that most of the deaths are from the Governorate of Muscat, and 50 per cent of them are Omanis aged over 50. He announced that a third phase of reopening will be announced soon. **TURN TO P2**

HIS MAJESTY SETS UP OMAN INVESTMENT AUTHORITY

FROM PAGE 1

Article (5) stipulates that the ownership of all government companies and investments shall be transferred from the Ministry of Finance to Oman Investment Authority , with the exception of Petroleum Development Oman Company, Government contributions in international establishments and companies to be specified in a Royal order.

Article (6) states that the two phrases “State’s General Reserve Fund” and “Oman Investment Fund”, wherever they might recur in laws and Royal decrees, shall be replaced with “Oman Investment Authority ”.

Article (7) cancels the two Royal Decrees No 1/80 and 14/2006, and so shall all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (8) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue. — **ONA**

HM CONGRATULATES QUEEN OF DENMARK

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent congratulations to Queen Margrethe II of the Kingdom of Denmark on the occasion of her country's National Day. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere congratulations along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to Queen Margrethe II and the friendly people of Denmark further progress and prosperity. — **ONA**



MUTTRAH TO BE UNLOCKED

FROM PAGE 1

The director-general said most governorates started to use the medical bracelet. “The ministry will expand this procedure during the next stage and coronavirus suspects have to wear bracelets mandatory.” Al Abri said the government expected to see 1,600 cases daily. But thanks to early precautions, the government was able to limit the case load. “The infections are under control but the increase in cases among Omanis in the past days was due to family gatherings in wilayats during Eid and Ramadhan. The cases increased among expats due to gatherings in labour camps.”

The Minister of Health said the Sultanate is transparent in declaring coronavirus statistics. “Oman provides treatment and examination for residents for free of cost,” he said referring to concerns of international organisations.

On Thursday, 787 new cases were registered of which 265 Omanis and 513 for non-Omanis, taking the total to 14,316. The virus claimed 67 lives. Recoveries rose to 3,451. Total number of hospitalised patients are

226, while 58 are in intensive care. There are now 120 patients in intensive care, representing 1 per cent of the total cases. He explained that 186 health workers are infected with COVID-19.

Dr Al Saeedi said decision on resuming printing of newspapers will be taken next week as there is fear of infection through newspapers and other publications.

On the recovery time of coronavirus patients, the minister said that many countries have changed the definition, but the Sultanate has set a 14-day period to ensure the patient's full recuperation. “There are countries that have reduced the period to 8 days. However, recovery rate in the Sultanate is not less than the international level and our mortality rate did not exceed 0.5 per cent.”

Dr Feryal al Lawati, Head of Infectious Diseases Unit at the Royal Hospital, said that patients with diabetes accounted 30 per cent of COVID-19 deaths in the Sultanate. “A large number of deaths among expatriates took place at homes as patients did not seek treatment, noting that chronic diseases play a major role in the deaths of those with coronavirus”.



نهضة الدقم القابضة ش.م.ع.م.
Renaissance Duqm Holding SAOC

NOTICE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING (EGM) & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

The Board of Directors of Renaissance Duqm Holding SAOC (the “Company”) invites the shareholders to attend the EGM & AGM of the Company to be held on 21st June 2020 (Sunday) at 1 P.M via the online platform for general meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum for holding the EGM or/and the AGM is not met, a second EGM or AGM shall be held on Thursday, 25th June 2020 at 1 P.M to discuss the following agenda:

First : EGM Agenda

1. To amend Article 13 of the Company's Articles of Association to increase the number of Board membership by one member to seven.

Second: AGM Agenda

- 1) To consider and approve the Chairman's Report for the financial year ended 31st December 2019.
- 2) To consider and approve the Auditors Report, the Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account for the financial year ended 31st December 2019.
- 3) To approve the sitting fees being availed by the members of the Board of Directors and the members of the Board's sub-committees for the financial year ended 31st December 2019 and to specify the sitting fees for the next financial year.
- 4 To consider and approve of the Director's Remuneration of Rials 23,750/- for the financial year ended 31st December 2019.
- 5) To fill a vacancy to the Board of Directors.
- 6) To approve the appointment of the Auditors for the year 2020 and fix their remuneration.

Any person wishing to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors may fill out the Nomination Form that can be obtained from the Company. The completed form should be delivered to the Company at least 5 working days prior to the Annual General Meeting, i.e., not later than Monday, 15th June 2020. Any Nomination Form delivered after the aforesaid deadline will not be accepted.

In accordance with the Articles of Association of the Company and the rules for convening general meetings using modern technology issued by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- a) A juristic person shall, exclusively, have the right to authorize a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on his behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD).
- b) Voting on any of the agenda items 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 a shareholder's share balance has increased or decreased after voting, his voting will be cancelled, and this shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

We request our shareholders to kindly update their Contact Details in the records of Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD).

For further information, please contact **Mr. Hatim Hilal Al Hilali** – Company Secretary, on phone No (24796636 Ext: 346) GSM Number 93220564 or email address: hatim@tawoos.com.

India announces 14 repatriation flights



FLIGHT SCHEDULE

- June 9 – Muscat -Vijayawada
- June 10 – Muscat -Kozhikode
- June 10- Salalah -Kochi
- June 11 – Muscat -Delhi
- June 12 – Muscat -Trivandrum
- June 13 – Muscat -Coimbatore
- June 14 – Muscat -Kannur
- June 15- Muscat -Lucknow
- June 16- Muscat -Mumbai
- June 17- Muscat -Bengaluru / Mangalore
- June 18 – Muscat – Trivandrum
- June 19 – Muscat- Kochi
- June 21 -Muscat – Kochi
- June 23 Muscat -Kozhikode

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Indian expatriates can heave a sigh of relief as 14 flights have been announced as part of the third phase of repatriation with one flight from Salalah from June 9 to 23.

Out of the 14 services, eight are scheduled to four international airports of Kerala where the majority Indian expatriates are from. This is followed by services to Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh), Delhi, Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu), Lucknow (UP), Mumbai (Maharashtra), and

Bengaluru / Mangalore (Karnataka).

Nearly 360 passengers flew to Trivandrum and Kochi from Muscat International Airport on two flights as part of the Phase 2Plus which got over on Thursday, making the total number of Indians repatriated to nearly 5,000 since May 9.

IX 1442 flew from Muscat to Kochi while IX 1538 carried passengers from Muscat to Trivandrum and the passengers comprised stranded visitors who arrived on express or visit visas, pregnant and elderly people, and people needing

urgent medical care in India.

“We, at the Indian Embassy, had to take a special permission for passengers from Maharashtra who travelled from Muscat to Kochi on emergency grounds”, an embassy spokesperson told the Observer, adding that the aged parents of a heart patient who came for visit, were also sent back to India on Thursday.

“Also, some people engaged in a contract labour in Musandam too boarded the flight as there was no work”, he added.

The passenger lists for all

the flights will be finalised by the Indian Embassy on the basis of information received by the mission.

Priority will be given to medical emergency cases, pregnant women, workers in distress, senior citizens as well as to other Indian nationals who are stranded in difficult situations.

The Embassy will be contacting the short-listed people for each flight directly through email or telephone. The Embassy will then share the list of short-listed people with Air India and all such people will be contacted by Air India for booking of tickets.

OMAN DAILY

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Get ready to see lunar eclipse today



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: Oman will experience the lunar eclipse on Friday. The full moon, which is also known as the strawberry moon or the Rose Moon will begin at 9.46 pm. This year is exciting as three lunar eclipses and one solar eclipse lined up this year.

"The Lunar Eclipse is expected to begin by 9.46 pm and a slight reduction in the brightness of the moon. We might barely see that something is happening there and that is why in Arabic it is called as "the false eclipse." This is because only 10 per cent of reduction is taking place, whereas we need 60 per cent to 70 per cent of coverage to realise that something is happening up there," said AbdulWahab al Busaidy from Oman Astronomical Society.

The penumbral lunar eclipse of the moon is expected to be between 9:46 pm and 1.04 am (June 6), with the peak to be around 11:24 am on Friday.

It is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy any activity in the night sky, pointed out Al Busaidy. During the pandemic the OAS will not go into the action mode as a group.

"It will be a wonderful experience for the family to be in the garden or on the terrace of the house to watch the sky. It is often called a Strawberry Moon. Last time we experienced the Lunar Eclipse the bright full moon turned into a reddish moon but this year it may not be so drastic but there still could be change in shade," he explained.

Yet another date that is clearly marked in the diaries of astronomy enthusiasts is June 21. But they have an important message, "We have to be very cautious, do not try to look at the Solar Eclipse with your naked eye as the damage can be permanent. Please do not look through your ordinary sunglasses," he urged.

The annular eclipse on Sunday, June 21, is an event

that can be seen again only after 83 years in Oman.

Last year the Oman Astronomical Society had distributed freely the solar glasses but this year the distribution of the glasses is a challenge as they do not want people to crowd anywhere.

"In Oman the Solar Eclipse on June 21 is expected to begin at 8.14 am and end at 9.38 am. For people who live in the Qurayat area will get 98 per cent totality. They are the ones who will have a striking view. But Muscat is 96 per cent, which is equally interesting. And it will go westwards so as we go to Dakhiliyah, Nizwa, Bahla and Manah and the places all the way till the border of Saudi Arabia will get to experience 98 per cent of totality," he explained.

He said even if we do not have the solar glasses you will sense the slight darkness in the morning. "But be cautious, do not look at the sun with naked eyes or your sun glasses," he cautioned.

SQU RANKED AMONG BEST UNIVERSITIES IN ASIA

LONDON: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) ranked among the best universities in Asia in 2020 in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2020. THE said that the university has seven core values. These are professionalism, excellence, commitment, integrity, loyalty, collaboration and equity.

The ranking, released on Wednesday, said that SQU, opened in 1986, ranked among the best 251 Asian universities.

It added that SQU started with 500 students; now it hosts more than 7,000 male and female students. It also said, "The institution originally had five colleges, but there are now nine in total. These include Medicine and Health Sciences, Engineering, Agriculture and Marine Sciences, Education, Science, Arts and Social Sciences, Commerce and Political Sciences, Law and Nursing."

THE pointed out, "The university recruited students from 38 countries while academics hailed from 69 nations. The institution also collaborates with universities across the world; it has agreements with universities in Asia, Europe, Australasia, North America and South America."

It added that the international students at SQU constitute 4 per cent of the total number of students.

THE Ranking includes five weighted criteria: Teaching (25 per cent),



Research (30 per cent), Citations (30 per cent), Industry Income (7.5 per cent) and the International Outlook (7.5 per cent) and is calculated through 13 performance indicators that professionally assessed all academic and research aspects of universities.

These indicators are: Reputation survey: Teaching (10 per cent), Staff-to-student ratio: (4.5 per cent), Doctorate-to-bachelor's ratio (2.25 per cent), Doctorates-awarded-to-

academic-staff ratio (6 per cent), Institutional income (2.25 per cent) Reputation survey – research (15 per cent), Research Income (7.5 per cent), Research productivity (7.5 per cent) Citations impact (30 per cent), Proportion of international students (2.5 per cent), Proportion of international staff (2.5 per cent), International collaboration (2.5 per cent) and Industry income (7.5 per cent). — **ONA**

ABALONE STOCKS DECLINE, SAYS SURVEY

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Agriculture and Fisheries in the Governorate of Dhofar has surveyed abalone stocks (Abalone Survey 2020) during the period from March 15 to April 15 this year.

The survey, which took place in Mirbat, Sadah, Hadbien and Hasik, was aimed at defining biological indicators — including density, accumulation and sizes of abalone — and comparing these with the outcome of previous surveys.

As many as 32 sites were scrutinised in the four areas by using a 100m-long transect rope.

The survey showed that the density of abalone dropped seriously by 41 per cent, compared to the 2019 survey, in all areas under study, with Hadbein accounting for the biggest decline in stocks by about 58 per cent.

Abalone density's decline in the 2020 Survey caps the findings of a 15-year



span from 2006 to 2020. It is clear that continuous decline has been the norm at least in the last 10 years. The study shows that abalone stock in the Sultanate has been unable to recover to normal rates registered since 2011 (0.39 amassment). This clearly indicates that the natural stock has reached a critical stage and that it is difficult to predict its ability to recover in the near future. — **ONA**

THE DENSITY OF ABALONE DROPPED
DRASTICALLY BY 41 PER CENT IN
MIRBAT, SADAH, HADBIEN AND HASIK,
COMPARED TO THE 2019 SURVEY

The logo for Super International SAOC, featuring a stylized 'S' inside a circle with the word 'SUPER' below it.

Super International SAOC

Call for Ordinary Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The Board of Directors of Super International S.A.O.C. inviting Its Shareholders to attend the AGM Meeting at the given date time and venue.

The Agenda and terms of the meeting are attached to the Shareholder reports. The shareholder has the right to appoint any other person on his behalf to attend the meeting and vote on his behalf on the decisions taken by the Board.

You are requested to be at least half an hour ahead of time in the meeting.

Any enquiry on the agenda can be answered by Mr. Younis Al Namani GSM # 92949673

Meeting Date: 17th June 2020.
Time: 12:00 Noon.
Venue: Super Plaza – 2nd Floor.
Way No. 4805 – Al Azaeba
Muscat – Sultanate of Oman

WORLD

Record virus deaths in Brazil, Mexico

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil and Mexico reported record daily coronavirus death tolls as governments in Latin America battled to fortify defenses against the accelerating pandemic with fresh lockdown orders and curfews.

European nations are emerging from months of devastation with some borders re-opening, but South and Central America have become the new hotspots in a crisis that has claimed at least 385,000 lives worldwide.

Mexico on Wednesday announced more than 1,000 coronavirus deaths in a day for the first time, while Brazil reported a record 1,349 daily deaths.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has staunchly opposed lockdowns but many local authorities have defied him and, with the crisis deepening, a vast section of Bahia state was on Wednesday placed under curfew.

There was more cause for concern in Chile, where the government said it was extending a three-week shutdown of the capital Santiago after a new record for daily deaths.



A member of Doctors Without Borders looks at a boy of the Warao tribe, Venezuela's second-largest indigenous group, suffering from symptoms of the novel coronavirus in Manaus, Amazonas state, Brazil, on Wednesday. — AFP

And in more evidence of the scale of the crisis in Latin America, the journalists' union in Peru said at least 20 reporters had died from the coronavirus.

The outbreak in Peru has been so intense that oxygen tanks needed in hospitals have become scarce, with many lining up to buy them

for their loved ones.

Experts have warned that travel restrictions will be needed around the world in some form until a vaccine is found — and efforts to develop one are gathering pace.

The United States remains the hardest-hit nation in the world, with 1.85 million infections and more than 107,000

deaths, and there are fears that the ongoing wave of protests in the country over racism and police brutality could fuel the spread of the virus. Many have said that while they were aware of the danger of infection at the big rallies, the cause was important enough to take the risk.

— AFP

Breakthrough hopes in case of missing British girl

LONDON: The family of missing British girl Madeleine McCann on Thursday called an international appeal about a new suspect in the case "significant", raising hopes of a potential breakthrough in the long-running saga that has captured public attention for more than a decade.

Madeleine, aged three, vanished from the family's

holiday apartment in southern Portugal in 2007, sparking a huge investigation, global interest — and a slew of theories about what might have happened to her.

Detectives in Britain and Germany announced on Wednesday night that a 43-year-old German man with a history of child sex abuse was now a prime suspect.

Clarence Mitchell, a spokesman for Madeleine's parents Kate and Gerry, said the couple — both doctors — were "grateful and welcome" the new appeal for information.

Portuguese police closed their case in 2008 but London's Metropolitan Police, opened a separate missing persons inquiry in 2013, Operation Grange.

On Wednesday, detectives told reporters the new suspect was identified in May 2017, after an appeal for information on the 10th anniversary of the little girl's disappearance.

He was among more than 600 people previously identified as "potentially significant" but was not a suspect in the case then, the force said. — AFP



A man yells in the face of a soldier at sunrise outside the White House to protest the death in Minneapolis police custody of George Floyd in Washington on Thursday. — Reuters

Police face new charges in Floyd killing

MINNEAPOLIS: US protests over the death of a black man in custody dwindled overnight into early Thursday after prosecutors leveled new charges against four Minneapolis policemen implicated in the killing.

Huge crowds have defied curfews and taken to the streets of cities across the country for nine nights in sometimes violent protests that prompted President Donald Trump to threaten to send in the military.

George Floyd, 46, died after a white policeman pinned his neck under the officer's knee for nearly nine minutes in Minneapolis on May 25, propelling the issue of racial justice to the top of the political agenda five months before the presidential election on November 3.

Former defence secretary Jim Mattis, after long refusing to explicitly criticise a sitting president, denounced a militarisation of the response to civil unrest. Current Defence Secretary Mark Esper also said he did not back the use of troops to patrol the country.

“Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people — does not even pretend to try,” Mattis, who resigned as defence secretary in 2018, wrote in a statement published by The Atlantic.

“Instead he tries to divide us. We are witnessing the consequences of three years of this deliberate effort.”

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Mark Milley, issued a message reminding the armed forces of their oath to uphold the Constitution, which gives Americans the right to “freedom of speech and peaceful assembly.” Similar messages were delivered by other military leaders.

Thousands of demonstrators massed near the White House lit up their cellphone flashlights and sang along to the 1970s soul tune “Lean on Me,” before resuming a chorus of anti-police chants.

Two Seattle police officers talk to the line of protesters in the front of the barricade as protesters continue to rally

early into the morning following the death in Minneapolis police custody of George Floyd, near the department's East Precinct in Seattle.

Several major cities scaled back or lifted curfews imposed for the past few days. In New York City's Brooklyn borough, police in riot gear charged into a crowd of about 1,000 protesters defying a local curfew, albeit peacefully, near an outdoor plaza, and clubbed demonstrators and journalists as they scurried for cover in heavy rain.

A man armed with a knife stabbed and wounded a Brooklyn policeman in the neck and two officers who ran to his rescue were wounded before they shot the attacker multiple times, police said. All four were taken to the hospital.

The confrontations in Brooklyn appeared to be the biggest exception to a calmer night.

Derek Chauvin, 44, arrested on charges of third-degree murder and manslaughter, was also charged with second-degree murder.

— Reuters

Floyd had COVID-19

MINNEAPOLIS: George Floyd, whose fatal encounter with Minneapolis police stirred a global outcry over racial bias by US law enforcement, tested positive for the coronavirus, his autopsy showed, but the infection was not listed as a factor in his death.

The official cause of death, according to the full 20-page report made public on Wednesday by the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office, was cardiopulmonary arrest while Floyd was being restrained by police taking him into custody on May 25.

The coroner ruled the manner of death to be a homicide. Four police officers since fired from their jobs for their role in the incident, which was captured on a bystander's cellphone video, are being held on criminal charges, one of them accused of murder. — Reuters

Russia struggles to clean up Arctic river fuel spill

MOSCOW: Russia on Thursday intensified efforts to clean up a major fuel spill that environmentalists say is the worst such accident in the Arctic, as investigators made their first arrest.

A diesel reservoir collapsed at a power station outside the northern Siberian city of Norilsk on Friday, releasing 15,000 tonnes of fuel into a river and 6,000 tonnes into the soil, according to Russia's state environmental watchdog.

President Vladimir Putin has ordered a state of emergency to deal with the disaster.

On Wednesday, he furiously criticised the delay in the cleanup response, while Norilsk Nickel, the metals giant that owns the collapsed fuel reservoir through a subsidiary, insists it notified the proper agencies immediately.

ANALYSIS



Diego Villafuerte, medical intern at the Hospital de Jesus rides on a bicycle given by The Bicitekas Foundation in Mexico City. — AFP

‘RECYCLES’ SHIELD FOR VIRUS STIGMA

NATALIA CANO

Daniela Chavez, a doctor, took up cycling to work after she felt discriminated against by a taxi driver. Her bicycle was a gift from activists who have been rounding up bicycles — dubbed by one organisation as “recycles” — to donate to health care workers in Mexico City, in a bid to protect them from being stigmatized for looking after patients with COVID-19. Chavez said that as soon as she climbed inside the cab after a hard day in a public hospital, the driver asked if she was a doctor and where she worked. Fearful she would suffer an aggressive response if she told him, as some colleagues have, the 26-year-old decided to get out instead. As coronavirus spread in Mexico, health care workers

faced physical aggression on top of suspicion by people who viewed them as sources of infection. But in April, two cycling organisations came to their help, launching an initiative on social media inviting people to donate unused bicycles or spare parts to be given to health care workers. Simultaneously, Bicitekas and Alcadia de la Bicicleta invited health care workers to apply online to receive a bicycle. For Diana Garduno, a 30-year-old nurse, it was a welcome boon as her bike was stolen in a burglary. She says she’s been afraid since one of her colleagues was doused with a hot drink while walking in the street. Loic Jaeger, the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) director for Mexico and Central America, said that these attacks were taking place in a context of “the normalisation of violence” that spills over from organised crime. — AFP

Coronavirus nature’s warning



DR SUDHEER KUMAR SHUKLA

sudheershukla@nu.edu.om

As the whole world is sick due to COVID-19, it is high time to rethink our actions. On this world environment day, we must hear the alarm from nature, introspect our actions, and correct them before its too late. Don’t mess with Nature: COVID-19 was caused by interactions between humans and wildlife. We have been exploiting natural resources like wild-life, forests, rivers, oceans injudiciously. Nature is giving continuous signals by earthquakes, tsunamis, or epidemics from time to time, but either we failed to recognise it or ignored it. Nature can heal itself: As reported in several studies that the world’s most polluted cities, including Delhi, Seoul, Los Angeles, New York, and Wuhan, recorded reduction in the air pollution during the lockdown. The snow-capped Himalayas can be seen from 200 km away for the first time in 30 years. Around 17 per cent of greenhouse emissions got reduced globally during the lockdown period. Two of the world’s most polluted rivers, Ganges and Yamuna, have become pristine clear in just two months. Beaches around the world have become cleaner. These are the indications that nature can clean itself; we only need to stop interfering with it. Environment should be the priority: It has also been reported that the areas with high levels of air pollution, the proportion of residents suffering from respiratory illnesses, is high. Individuals infected with COVID-19 are thus likely to be at higher risk for severe illness. Instead of uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and deforestation its high time to conserve nature. Sustainable development is the only way forward: Ecosystems are changing dramatically due to climate change caused by unsustainable industrial practices. It is plausible that climate change can contribute to the rise in the frequency of infectious diseases like COVID-19. To protect the humankind from the COVID-19 like situation in the future. We need to protect our environment on the one hand and ensuring the economic wellbeing of our people on the other hand. Sustainable development is the only way. While the governments around the world are coming with the new economic stimulus to keep economies afloat, this is the right time to make sure that these measures pave the way to a more sustainable economy.

The author is assistant professor at National University of Science and Technology, Muscat.

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

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Oman kicks off strategy to procure first national satellite

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: A landmark initiative to procure Oman's first national satellite programme has formally commenced with the government inviting qualified international consultancy firms to bid for a contract to provide financial and technical advisory services linked to the implementation of this strategic project.

The initiative is being spearheaded by Space Communications Technology LLC (SCT), a wholly government-owned entity established with the mandate to develop and implement the Sultanate's maiden satellite communications project.

A key part of its remit is to build national satellite communications infrastructure and develop the required capabilities to serve the immediate to long-term telecommunications needs of the public and private sectors.

Muscat-headquartered SCT's foremost mission is to launch Oman's first satellite by 2023/2024. The proposed orbital slot enjoys a vantage location offering good visibility with high elevation angles for the desired footprint. The satellite itself will incorporate the latest technologies and will be built by leading players in the satellite construction industry.

"This project is considered as one of the strategic projects that Oman is planning, namely, to launch the first national satellite system with national, regional and global coverage, however with the primary TT&C (telemetry, tracking, and



control subsystem) to be located in Oman," the agency said.

STC's "operational plan is based on the rental of a large capacity that meets all the requirements of the Sultanate with high technical features through coverage of the Sultanate's entire territory and its economic waters with faster high throughput data," it noted.

It aims to provide state-of-the-art products based on the latest technologies of satellite frequency bands on High Throughput Satellites (HTS), with the latest reliable, scalable and flexible base-band platforms.

All types of satellite servic-



STRATEGIC VENTURE:

Omansat's mission is to launch the Sultanate's first satellite by 2023 – 2024

es are proposed to be provided to all vertical markets via the 9m Ka band antenna, collocated in Al Amerat Teleport, with access to one of the biggest terrestrial networks in Oman. This encompasses the range from consumer broadband all the way to High Throughput IP trunking services.

Interested consultants have until June 24, 2020 to submit their technical and commercial bids. Bidders must have proven experience in the delivery of at least two projects in orbital slots and three projects of satellite tender process support, among other qualifications.

BUSINESS



SUPPLY LIKELY TO SPRING BACK IN JULY

MUSCAT: Oil markets are now settled with Dated Brent trading around \$35/bbl thanks to increased commitment to production cuts (14.4 million b/d) by OPEC+ and large non-OPEC producers for May and June along with a more pronounced spring back in demand (4 million b/d per month) as lockdown has started to be lifted, according to Chris Midgley, Global Director of Analytics, S&P Global Platts.

Supply is likely to spring back in July as producers relax May/June cuts, with OPEC's June 10 meeting critical around maintaining cuts into the second half of the year. S&P Global Platts Analytics expects quotas will be maintained, but the additional 1.2 million b/d cuts by Saudi, Kuwait and UAE in early May will likely come back onto the market.

"There is a risk that production from North American shale creeps higher responding to a partial recovery in crude prices, while the oil demand recovery is expected to slow down by September to 1 million b/d, in the seasonal weaker period. There is also the

S&P GLOBAL PLATTS ANALYTICS EXPECTS OPEC+ QUOTAS WILL BE MAINTAINED, BUT THE ADDITIONAL 1.2 MILLION B/D CUTS BY SAUDI, KUWAIT AND UAE IN EARLY MAY WILL LIKELY COME BACK ONTO THE MARKET

risk of secondary waves of infection posing a significant risk to oil demand," said Midgley.

Outlook for global oil supply

Global oil supply is having steepest drops in May and June, just as demand starts to recover, but supply will start to return in July. Global oil supply is set to decline by over 14 million b/d from April to June, on strong compliance with the OPEC+ deal, other non-OPEC responses, and follow on losses in NGLs, refinery gains, and biofuels, according to Shin Kim, Head of Supply and Production Analytics, S&P Global Platts.

"These declines are coming just as global oil demand recovers from April lows, but shut in barrels will start to return heavily in July, although a full recovery will take time. We now see global oil supply contracting by 7 million b/d year on year in

2020.

The key question for oil markets is what price does OPEC+ (Saudi Arabia and Russia) want to support, to draw on bloated global inventories, maximize revenue, but not over-stimulate non-OPEC (US shale) production. All eyes are on the June 10 OPEC+ meeting. We expect an agreement to rollover current quotas (no reduction in cuts) through 3Q," Kim commented.

Outlook for global oil demand

Gasoline demand shows signs of a V shape recovery since it reached the bottom in April on the back of gradual reopening of the economies in the US, Western Europe, Asia and elsewhere, says Kang Wu, Head of Global Demand, Risk and Asia Analytics, S&P Global Platts.

Demand in May is estimated to have gone up by nearly 4 MMB/D over April though remained

some 17 million b/d below May 2019 levels. Further month on month improvements in demand each month is expected for the Jun-August period.

However, risks of second-wave hits of Covid-19 globally have also increased. It is particularly challenging for Latin America, the Middle East and Africa, and to a lesser extent South Asia. Barring the global hit of second wave Covid-19 during the latter half of this year, S&P Global Platts sees an annual demand decline of 8.4 million b/d for 2020 as a whole.

"Asia has also been hit hard by the economic slump despite the opportunity to be first in line to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic among all major regions around the world. India in particular saw the worst year on year demand destruction in history last month, bringing Asia's April demand down by 5 million b/d year on year together with demand destruction in Southeast Asia, before it improved in May. Demand for the whole year is likely to be 1.9 million b/d below that of 2019," added Wu.

Oil prices fall on doubts over output cuts

MELBOURNE: Oil prices dropped on Thursday, reversing gains in the previous session, on concern over whether major crude producers will be able to agree to extend record output cuts, heightened by worries over a huge build in US distillate inventories.

Brent crude futures fell 1.18%, or 47 cents, to \$39.32 a barrel as of 0652 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures slid 1.80%, or 67 cents, to \$36.62 a barrel.

Saudi Arabia and Russia, two of the world's biggest oil producers, have agreed to support extending into July the 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in supply cuts backed in April by the OPEC+ group, comprised of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other major producers. But they failed to agree on holding an OPEC+ meeting on Thursday to discuss the cuts, with OPEC sources saying it would be conditional on countries that have not



A pump attendant wears a mask as he refuels a car at a Sinopec gas station in China. — Reuters

complied with their targets so far deepening their cuts.

"The market has taken a look at that and said it's getting more complicated to

get that deal over the line," said Lachlan Shaw, head of commodity research at National Australia Bank.

That would imply OPEC+

would go back to what they agreed in April, which was to ease their supply cuts to 7.7 million bpd from July, he said. — Reuters

Amazon in talks to buy \$2 bn stake in Indian telco Bharti Airtel

NEW DELHI: Amazon.com is in early-stage talks to buy a stake worth at least \$2 billion in Indian mobile operator Bharti Airtel, three sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters, underscoring the growing attraction of India's digital economy for US tech giants.

The planned investment, if completed, would mean Amazon acquiring a roughly 5% stake based on the current market value of Bharti, which is India's third-largest telecoms company with more than 300 million subscribers.

The discussions between Amazon and Bharti come



A man cleans the signage of Indian telco Bharti Airtel in New Delhi. — Reuters

at a time when global players are placing major bets on the digital arm of Reliance Industries, which owns Bharti's telecom rival Jio.

Reliance's digital unit has raised \$10 billion in recent weeks from Facebook, KKR and others.

The talks between Bharti

and Amazon are at an early stage and the deal terms could change, or an agreement may not be reached, said two of the three sources, all of whom declined to be identified because the discussions are confidential. An Amazon spokeswoman said the company does "not offer comments on speculation of what we may or may not do in future."

Bharti said they routinely work with all digital players to bring their products, content and services to customers. "Beyond that there is no other activity to report," it said in a statement.

— Reuters



A China Eastern Airlines passenger plane flies in the sky with the moon seen in the background, in Beijing, China. — Reuters

China de-escalates airline spat with US

BEIJING: China said on Thursday foreign airlines blocked from operating in the country over virus fears would be allowed to resume limited flights, apparently de-escalating a row with Washington following US plans to ban Chinese carriers.

Beijing's announcement comes as tensions between the world's two superpowers are sent soaring by a series of issues including Donald Trump's accusations over China's handling of the pandemic, Hong Kong and Huawei.

The latest spat was rooted in the Civil Aviation Authority of China (CAAC) deciding to impose a limit on foreign airlines based on their activity as of March 12. Because US carriers had suspended all flights by that date their cap was set at zero, while Chinese carriers' flights to the US continued.

On Wednesday the US said it would block Chinese passenger flights from June 16, raising concerns of another front being opened up in the economic titans' standoff.

But the CAAC on Thursday said all foreign airlines not listed in the March 12 schedule would now be able to operate one international route into China each week. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian expressed regret over the US decision, adding that the CAAC is making "solemn representations" over the matter.

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Asked if the latest CAAC notice means the US will be able to file applications for flight resumption, Zhao said the Chinese aviation authority and US Department of Transportation have maintained close communication over flight arrangements between the two countries.

"Originally, both sides had made some progress," he said at a regular briefing, adding that China hopes the US will not "create obstacles" for both parties' work to solve the problem.

Relations between Washington and Beijing have become increasingly strained in recent months after Trump accused China of causing the virus intentionally, while a plan to impose a

strict security law on Hong Kong has increased tensions substantially.

The US has also imposed restrictions on Chinese telecom giant Huawei and ordered a probe into the actions of Chinese companies listed on American financial markets.

For its part, Beijing has mocked the US stance on Hong Kong in light of civil rights protests across the US following the police killing in Minneapolis of George Floyd, an unarmed African-American man. At the same time, China has gradually relaxed strict air travel caps on some foreign firms as the coronavirus outbreak in the country appears to be under control. China has set up fast-track entry procedures for business travellers from several other countries, including Singapore and South Korea. Hundreds of Germans have also been able to return.

Beijing said last week it would almost triple the number of permitted flights to and from China in June following an outcry from Chinese stranded abroad.

Passengers must be tested for COVID-19 upon arrival in the country.

The CAAC said on Thursday that routes whose passengers all test negative for three consecutive weeks will be allowed to operate an additional flight each week.

Routes with five or more passengers testing positive will be suspended for at least one week, CAAC said. — AFP



Ecclestone on the hunt for buyer for Williams team

LONDON: Former Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone is trying to find a buyer for the once-mighty Williams team, saying it would be "a terrible thing to lose" the name from the grid.

Williams' golden age in the 1980s and 1990s under founder Frank is a distant memory. In those years Nelson Piquet, Nigel Mansell and Alain Prost were among a clutch of world champions.

But the last of both their nine constructors' titles and seven drivers' crowns came in 1997.

Frank Williams remains team principal but his daughter, Claire, is responsible for the day-to-day running of the team.

The nadir of a steady decline came last year, when they registered just one point in the constructors' championship.

Last week the Williams Grand Prix Holdings group reported an adjusted loss of £13 million (\$16 million) for the year ending 2019 and responded to the blow by seeking new investment.

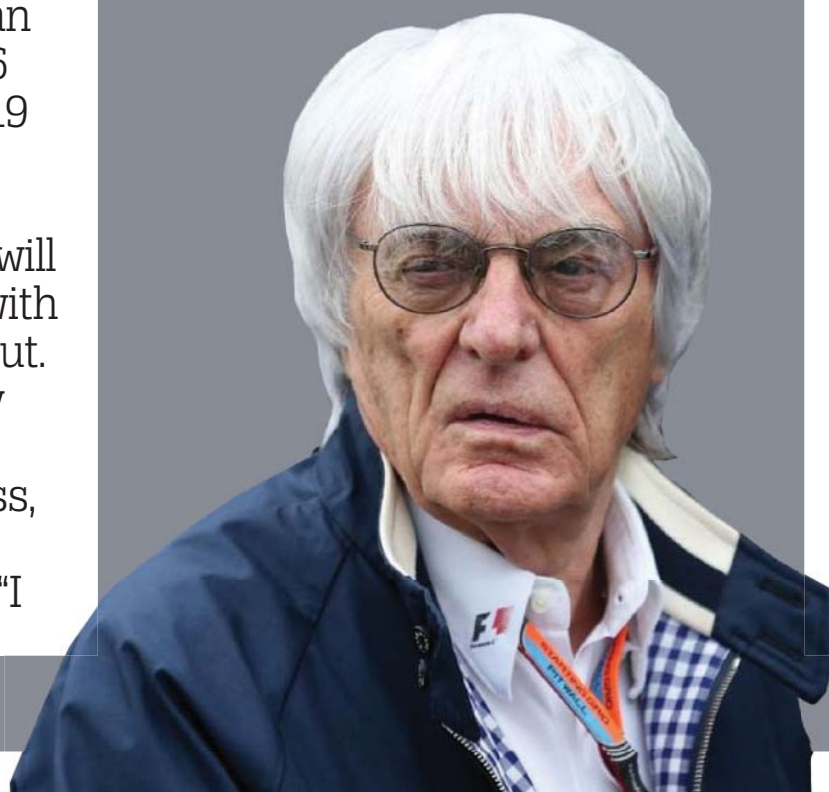
A minority or majority stake will be offered to investors, along with the option for an outright buyout.

Ecclestone says he is actively seeking a potential buyer.

"Williams would be a great loss, 100 percent," he said by phone from his home in Switzerland. "I

"Williams would be a great loss, 100 per cent. I am looking around to find people who could and might be involved"

BERNIE ECCLESTONE,
FORMER FORMULA ONE BOSS



am looking around to find people who could and might be involved."

Ecclestone admits the challenge could be even greater, with the financial fall-out from COVID-19 likely to be severe.

'EXPENSIVE HOBBY'

"Owning a team is a very expensive hobby," said the former F1 boss, who is expecting his fourth child in the coming weeks.

The 89-year-old Englishman and Frank Williams, who is 78, are old friends, having been among the co-founders of the Formula One Constructors' Association in 1974.

Ecclestone, who transformed the sport into a commercial giant over several decades, said the team desperately needed new owners.

"I hope it is not the end of the Williams team," he said.

"It would be the end of an era but I hope that someone who can afford to run the team properly can be found as it is a terrible thing to lose a team like that.

"It is not thinkable. Dear old Frank had to work so hard to make sure the team competed and that happened and now to see it disappear like that, it's not good. "It is a historic team."

— AFP



MADRID: Gareth Bale's agent says the Real Madrid forward is unlikely to return to the Premier League because he wants to finish his career at the Bernabeu.

Bale is believed to have a difficult relationship with Real manager Zinedine Zidane and was almost sold to Chinese Super League club Jiangsu Suning last year.

The former Tottenham star has been linked with a move back to the Premier League on several occasions, with Newcastle the latest club to be mentioned as suitors for the Wales international.

But Bale's agent Jonathan Barnett said the 30-year-old would happily remain in Spain.

"He has a very nice lifestyle. I don't see why he doesn't see his career out at Madrid, probably," Barnett told the BBC on Thursday.

"As I've always said, he's quite happy in Madrid. It's his life that he wants to lead. Financially, he will want for nothing the rest of his life, and his children and grandchildren."

Bale has won a host of medals, including four Champions League titles, since joining Real for a then world record £85 million (\$107 million) in 2013.

But he has rarely been a regular under Zidane and has been criticised by fans and media in Spain for putting more passion into his golf hobby than his Real career.

Despite that discord, Bale has no plans to demand a move, according to Barnett.

"I have no idea what his value is," he said. "His salary is quite high and also where he wants to go is very important in his life. I can't put a figure on it."

"He's won nearly everything in the world, except the World Cup, but unfortunately he plays for Wales so some things are beyond him."

— AFP



**Jonathan Barnett,
Bale's agent**

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**Bale unlikely to
make Premier
League return**



‘2022 WC JOINT QUALIFICATION MATCHES TO RESUME IN OCTOBER’

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: Hisham al Adwani, the Executive Director of the Professional League Union at Oman Football Association (OFA), said that OFA took part recently in a video conference meeting with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in the presence of other GCC and Arabian associations.

Al Adwani explained to Oman Daily Observer that during the online meeting they discussed many recommendations which were raised by AFC executive competition committee with regards to resuming the AFC Champions League, AFC Cup matches, the joint qualification matches for World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Championships, AFC U-16 Championship and AFC Asian Futsal Championship.

The executive director of the Professional League Union pointed out that many of the regional and



continental activities were impacted with the COVID-19 pandemic including AFC competitions and agenda which required some changes in the schedules.

“During the meeting, there was a detailed presentation by the competitions committee at AFC which featured the previous set dates and new proposals.

Accordingly, the members from different countries voted. The proposed dates to resume with rest of the matches for joint qualification matches for World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Championships are scheduled to be played on 8, 13 October and on 12, 17 November.”

The AFC U-16 Championship maybe postponed further and to be played during November 25 to December 12 in Bahrain instead of the previous period which was from September 16 until October 3.

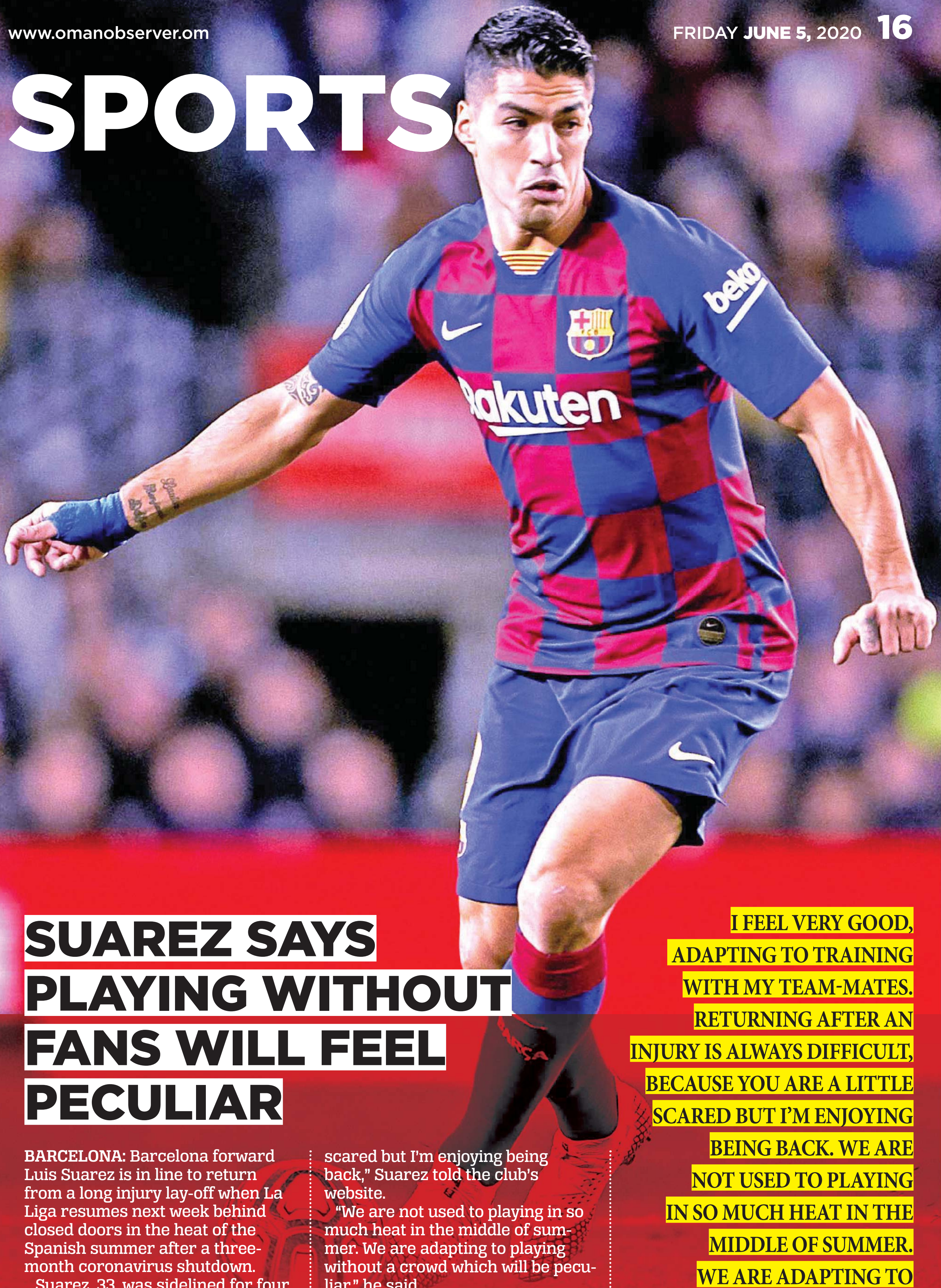
AFC Asian Futsal Championship may also be postponed to new pro-

posed dates and will be held from December 5 to 15 in Turkmenistan. The remaining matches of the AFC Cup are proposed to be played from October 27 until November 4 and the country which will host the matches will be revealed soon by AFC.

“All the suggested dates of the championships and matches will be approved next week through an official announcement by AFC,” he added.

Commenting on the remaining domestic agenda for current season 2019/2020, Al Adwani said: “We are working on different plans currently and will announce soon on the new dates for the remaining domestic matches of Omantel league, HM Cup and the first division league for season of 2019/2020. We hope that COVID-19 outbreak will get over and we receive the instructions from the Supreme Committee and Ministry of Sports Affairs to resume sporting activities.”

SPORTS



SUAREZ SAYS PLAYING WITHOUT FANS WILL FEEL PECULIAR

BARCELONA: Barcelona forward Luis Suarez is in line to return from a long injury lay-off when La Liga resumes next week behind closed doors in the heat of the Spanish summer after a three-month coronavirus shutdown.

Suarez, 33, was sidelined for four months in January after undergoing surgery on his right knee but could make his comeback on June 13 when leaders Barcelona travel to Mallorca, for their first game since early March.

"I feel very good, adapting to training with my team-mates. Returning after an injury is always difficult, because you are a little

scared but I'm enjoying being back," Suarez told the club's website.

"We are not used to playing in so much heat in the middle of summer. We are adapting to playing without a crowd which will be peculiar," he said.

"We will continue to focus on winning games to win the league title, which is what we all want."

"As time goes on, everything is getting back to normal, despite the death of so many people," he added.

Defending champions Barca hold a two-point lead over Real Madrid at the top with 11 rounds of matches still to be played. — AFP

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