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11 Ramadhan Tuesday 5/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:09	04:15	04:39
DHUHR:	12:09	12:13	12:25
ASR:	03:33	03:36	03:35
MAGHRIB:	06:42	06:45	06:50
ISHA:	07:58	08:01	08:01

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUEILI

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Inform in advance about terminations, private firms told

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Companies in the private sector must inform the Ministry of Manpower, three months in advance, in case of termination or redundancy of Omani nationals from their jobs.

“This advice is issued to make appropriate arrangements to facilitate suitable jobs for the nationals who are made redundant or laid off”, said an official at the ministry.

Referring to the recent guidelines issued by the ministry following the break-out of COVID-19, the official said that a new committee has been formed to deal with employment issues arising out of the current situation.

“All private sector companies should refrain from mass termination of national employees, even where projects have been cancelled or if there is an impending closure or bankruptcy due to the coronavirus pandemic”, he said.

TURN TO P2

Wadi Kabir Industrial Area closed

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Wadi Kabir Industrial Area, the hub of major industrial, mechanical and automotive activities, and the nucleus of carpentry and other allied trades, has been closed down from Monday until further notice as per an instruction from the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

The Muscat Municipality has immediately served notice to all the companies and industrial entities in and around this vast area in the Muscat Governorate to abide by the rules and regulations of the lockdown.



Oman welcomes world efforts on COVID-19

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, as representing His Majesty, on Monday took part in the Coronavirus Global Response Summit. The minister presented the Sultanate’s speech via videoconferencing.

In a video recorded speech, the minister praised the proposed Global Collaboration to Accelerate the Development, Production and Equitable Access to New COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines that were launched last on May 1.

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LOCAL

India to facilitate return of stranded nationals from May 7

Vinod Nair

MUSCAT: The process of the much-awaited return of Indians stranded abroad, including in Oman and the GCC, will begin from May 7, the Indian government has said.

The return of Indians abroad will be facilitated on compelling grounds in a phased manner.

The Indian Embassy in Muscat has been collecting details through its website of the consulate of the wanting to travel back home for various reasons.

According to sources, the details of the process will be prepared in coordination with the competent authorities both in Oman and India.

Meanwhile, over 400,000 people from the Gulf have also registered through the Kerala government's NORKA (Non Resident Keralites Affairs) website for similar purposes. As per NORKA estimates, the registration included those of 61,000 job losses and 10,000 pregnant women.

"The travel will be arranged by aircraft and naval ships. Indian embassies will be preparing a list of Indian citizens choosing to return home. This facility would be made available on payment

basis. Non-scheduled commercial flights would be arranged for air travel. The travel would begin in a phased manner from May 7, a circular issued by the Indian government said."

"The medical screening of passengers will be done before taking the flight. Only asymptomatic passengers would be allowed to travel. During the journey, all these passengers would have to follow the protocols, such as the 'Health Protocols', issued by the country's Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Civil Aviation," the Indian circular said.

"On reaching the destination, everyone would have to register on the Arogya Setu app. Everyone would be medically screened. After scrutiny, they would be quarantined for 14 days, either in a hospital or in an institutional quarantine on payment-basis, by the State government concerned. COVID test would be done after 14 days and further action would be taken according to health protocols."

State governments are being advised to make arrangements, including testing, quarantine, and onward movement of the returning Indians in their respective states.

Inform in advance about terminations

FROM PAGE 1

According to the official, the companies must inform the committee about their decision three months in advance to enable the ministry to take measures to relocate the national employees to alternative employers.

The ministry in a recent advice to the private sector companies urged them to confirm that during these unprecedented times, employers are required to pay its staff their wages in full.

However, no new guidelines have been issued by the ministry about the expatriate workforce, except that "the companies are responsible for their repatriation back to their home countries".

Private sector companies affect-

ed due to the pandemic may require their foreign employees to take paid annual leave where they operate in a sector that has been shut down.

In a statement on Monday, the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFOW) said it has so far received 166 complaints from Omani and expat workers since the break-out of the pandemic.

"There were 36 complaints just in five days", it said in a statement adding, "most of the complaints related to salary deduction and forcing workers to go on unpaid leave".

The Federation said that it has been continuously monitoring complaints and violations decisions of the Supreme Committee.

Wadi Kabir Industrial Area closed



FROM PAGE 1

In a statement issued online on Monday, the municipality outlined that the decision for the closure comes in line with the Supreme Committee's directives to ensure the implementation of health and preventive measures to combat COVID-19 in Oman.

The municipality also urged the public to cooperate and follow the orders of the closure in the interest and benefit of public health. Check and control points at the entry points of Wadi Kabir will be activated with limited people entry and exit from this area.

As part of combating the coronavirus spread, the Muscat Governorate has been put under lockdown from April 10 to 22 which was later extended till May 8. People's movement has been restricted in and out of Muscat Governorate and intra-wilayat travel has been controlled. However, vehicles and individuals who possess a letter from the company where they worked have been allowed to pass through the checkpoints. Also, essential service vehicles, vehicles carrying food and other commodities are allowed to cross the check points.

Ramadan Iftar Program

RAMADAN MUHURAK

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
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26864241
Sohar / Al-Hambar

Musandam Governorate
26731588
Khasab / Al-Shaibah

Dhofar Governorate
23234735
Salalah / Al-saada

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

COVID-19 Research Programme: TRC receives 442 pre-proposals

MUSCAT: After the initial screening and clearing of ineligible, incomplete and duplicate applications, The Research Council (TRC) has announced that it received 442 research pre-proposals within TRC's COVID-19 Research Programme, which is a new commissioned programme launched in March 2020.

The total 442 research pre-proposals include 103 pre-proposals within the clinical category and 339 received within the non-clinical category.



For each category, a panel of five to seven reviewers evaluated the submitted pre-proposals.

These two sub-committees have members with multidisciplinary background, and they represent

various research and academic institutes in Oman.

Over this week, TRC is going to finalise the list of projects that are going to be approved for funding.

The money will be transferred to research organisations within a maximum of two weeks from now, so that these projects can start immediately.

It is worth mentioning that all the funded projects are planned to be executed over three to twelve months and hopefully they will come up with applied and practical results. — ONA

Spare some thoughts for stray cats

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: The prevailing corona crisis has led to restrictions on all sorts of public gatherings even at coffee shops and restaurants. Many shops have been closed and people are hardly going out, but for necessary grocery shopping.

The situation has its impact on all walks of life, even on stray cats, which roam freely and fearlessly in most of the Omani streets.

Their food chain has largely been affected because they depend completely on the excess food thrown in the waste bins. The bins near the coffee shops and restaurants are mostly empty due to “only parcel” policy to avoid public gathering and ensure social distancing.

Dr Peter Nolosco, senior veterinarian at Capital Veterinary Centre, admitted that the situation is challenging for them and praised the role of animal welfare groups like Tiger by the Tail (TBTT) and Omani Paws, for



arranging food for these poor souls.

“Animal food chain is badly affected because of the current situation. I really want to focus on the poor stray animals on the streets. Generally there are lots of stray animals, especially in Oman there are cats, who roam freely and depend on food generated out of restaurants' plate cleaning and unconsumed prepared food, which the restaurants have no option but to throw.”

“Now because of the restrictions these poor souls are in hunger. Thanks to many good people and animal welfare groups like TBTT, Omani Paws, the Wave Dog and Cat Rescue, which are feeding these animals. Also there are quite a lot of fishing birds, and other birds which are also affected by this situation,” he said.

He called upon people to spare some thought for these little creatures who play vital role in maintaining the ecosystem and maintaining balance in the environment.

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Directors' Report		UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE	
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take pleasure in placing before you the results of the Company for the three month period ended March 31, 2020.		Three months ended 31 March 2020 RO '000	Three months ended 31 March 2019 RO '000
Economic environment and outlook We started the year with a good revenue performance and the economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were not felt until late in the quarter. However, the deteriorating economic outlook on account of global lockdowns and the continuing low oil prices due to poor global demand points to a very challenging year ahead. COVID-19 is a public health crisis with severe economic ramifications. In this period of uncertainty, our primary focus has been to take care of our staff, to maintain communication channels with our customers and to assist them wherever possible. We have implemented the Central Bank of Oman's regulations on assisting affected customers by deferring instalments. We have also strengthened our digital channels to enable our customers to transact with us remotely. The focus going forward is to continue to streamline and improve our processes, control expenses, maintain close communication with our customers and the regulator and be flexible to deal with a fast changing environment. Your Company has a well-diversified geographical presence across Oman, coupled with a diversified product profile and we are well positioned to meet the financing requirements of both the Retail and SME segments. We anticipate a tight credit offtake in the medium term and expect normalcy only after the resolution of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Our strength derived through our years of leadership and experience combined with strong capital, gearing and liquidity places us in a good position to deal with the situation.		Income	
		Income from financing activities	10,430
		Finance costs	(4,447)
		Net finance income	5,983
		Other operating income	672
			6,655
		Expenses	
		Operating expenses	(2,448)
		Depreciation	(152)
		Amortization	(64)
		Net impairment loss on lease receivables	(1,644)
		Bad debts written back	14
		Total expenses	(4,294)
		Profit before tax	2,361
		Income tax expense	(354)
		Profit after tax	2,007
		Other comprehensive income	
		Items that will be classified to profit or loss	
		Movement in revaluation reserve – net of tax	7
		Total comprehensive income	2,014
		Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO) - restated	0.003
			0.003
		UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT	
		31 March 2020 Rials '000 Unaudited	31 March 2019 Rials '000 Unaudited
		31 December 2019 Rials '000 Audited	
		ASSETS	
		Cash and cash equivalents	20,968
		Net investment in finance leases	389,319
		Working capital and factoring receivables	47,097
		Advances, prepayments and other receivables	3,859
		Assets held for sale	1,500
		Deferred tax asset	-
		Goodwill	5,950
		Intangible assets	1,216
		Property and equipment	6,342
		Statutory deposit	250
		Total assets	476,501
		LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	
		LIABILITIES	
		Creditors and accruals	4,584
		Tax liabilities	902
		Bank borrowings	346,292
		Fixed deposits	20,397
		Deferred tax liabilities	294
		End of service benefits	636
		Total liabilities	373,105
		EQUITY	
		Capital and reserves	
		Share capital	54,123
		Share premium	5,786
		Revaluation reserve	776
		Foreign currency reserve	4,321
		Special reserve on restructured accounts	-
		Voluntary reserve	3,000
		Legal reserve	7,699
		Retained earnings	9,622
		Total shareholders' equity attributable to the equity holders of the company	85,327
		Perpetual bonds	18,069
		Total equity	103,396
		Total liabilities and equity	476,501
		Net assets per share (RO)	0.158
			0.153
			0.166
		Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests the company in either Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt of the request. The full set of financials are available in the website of Muscat Securities Market.	
		Taya Jandal Ali Chairman	

LOCAL

Sultanate welcomes world efforts on COVID-19

FROM PAGE 1

Dr Al Saeedi also stressed that the Sultanate fully supports the considerable efforts exerted by the governments and peoples to manage this unprecedented challenge.

The minister emphasised

that collective and cooperative action between states is a key foundation in dealing effectively with the threat against health, life and livelihoods posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing grave social and economic challenges.



THE PANDEMIC WILL EVENTUALLY PASS AND SPRING IS SURE TO COME

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is a major public health emergency that has spread the fastest, caused the most extensive infections and been the hardest to contain since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Under the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, China has taken the most comprehensive, the strictest and the most thorough prevention and control measures to battle the pandemic. In their tenacious fight against the coronavirus, 1.4 billion Chinese people have pulled together in tough times and paid a tremendous price and sacrificed a lot.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the people across the country, the pandemic situation has continued to improve. 77,610 of the 82,862 people diagnosed nationwide have been discharged

from hospital, leaving only 619 cases under medical care. The traffic control in the pandemic center -- Wuhan has been lifted on 8th April. China has now come out of the most difficult period.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Oman, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and the overall deployment of the COVID-19 Supreme Committee, the Omani government has adopted a series of strict and efficient pandemic prevention and control measures, with the close coordination and cooperation of different organisations including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police. His Majesty has even made the donation himself. Currently Oman's cure rate and other indicators rank among the top in region, thanks to the great efforts made by His Majesty and the Omani gov-

ernment for the safety and health of all the citizens and residents. Those efforts and Oman's long-standing tradition of peace, stability and tolerance it has reflected is highly appreciated by China.

China and Oman enjoy a very long term friendship, and are close strategic partners. We feel the same for all the sacrifice made by the Omani people fighting the virus, and highly value the effective measures taken by the Omani government.

The Embassy of China in Oman has established close connection with the MoH and MoFA in fighting the pandemic, and is sharing all the information and data. We provided assistance to the MoH and MoD for the purchase and transportation of medical supplies from China.

Meanwhile, the Chinese community and companies are making contribution actively by donating infrared thermograph thermometer to Muscat Airport, donating testing kits to the MoH and providing cash

support. The Chinese companies in Duqm are also donating medical supplies to the SEZAD. On April 10, I have turned over the donation of 100,000 masks to the MoH on behalf of the Government of China. All of these actions are the best reflection of the partnership and friendship between our two countries and our people.

In the future, we will continuously make full use of the existing cooperation mechanism, maintain close communication and cooperation with various ministries, and provide more support and assistance to contribute to the fight against the virus.

Winter will eventually pass, and spring is sure to come. The fight against the pandemic once again shows that no one is an isolated island, all humankind is a community with a shared future.

As long as we stay united and help each other, the dawn of victory will eventually come.

Home solution to get rid of ‘burden on your head’



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: No one took this aspect of life seriously when Covid-19 was declared pandemic and subsequent restrictions came into force to break its chain through social distancing. It was last on their ‘to do’ list when the restrictions were announced, but it has come on their heads so prominently that it is no more possible to ignore or hide in any other situation but look for some option. Haircut thus has become everyone’s problem since the barber shops are closed and they are rightly closed to maintain the principle of social distancing. “I can have many more haircuts if I am alive and it is in the interest of the community and the country to keep the barber shops closed. We have instances from around the world where such service facilitators have become grounds for the spread of Covid-19. We should not take chance,” said Rashid

indicating towards his long hairs peeping through his headgear. But everyone is not as sportive as Rashid. Most of the people are fed up with the burden of carrying long hairs, particularly those who do not have option of hiding them behind a headgear. Most of the men are finding a solution in their wives, who in turn are taking help from YouTube realising the fact that among many other home necessities established by the Covid-19 situation, hair-cutting has also become a home necessity. Barring some fiasco, most of the men who tried this adventure were successful in getting rid of ‘literal burden on their heads’. “The situation has left people only with two hairstyles – either to be clean shaved or to have long hairs. In between are those successful people who have their wives to manage household chorus including giving a smart haircut,” said a Salalah resident

RP Singh. Singh is missing his wife because she left for India some days before the suspension of international flights and by the time she was about to come the full restrictions were in place. Young students who are fond of keeping long hairs are facing their dads who do not have patience to learn haircut skills. They are ‘attacking’ them with their personal trimmers in an effort to give their hair a decent shape. “In most of the cases it turned out to be the ‘practical and easy, the ‘men’s buzz’ cut which is the most low-maintenance haircut, meaning thereby there is hardly any hair left on your head,” said Faisal, a school going student. While many interesting jokes are being circulated on social media, the Internet is flooded with ‘tips to cope with your hair during Covid-19.’ This is a situation people will remember for several generations!

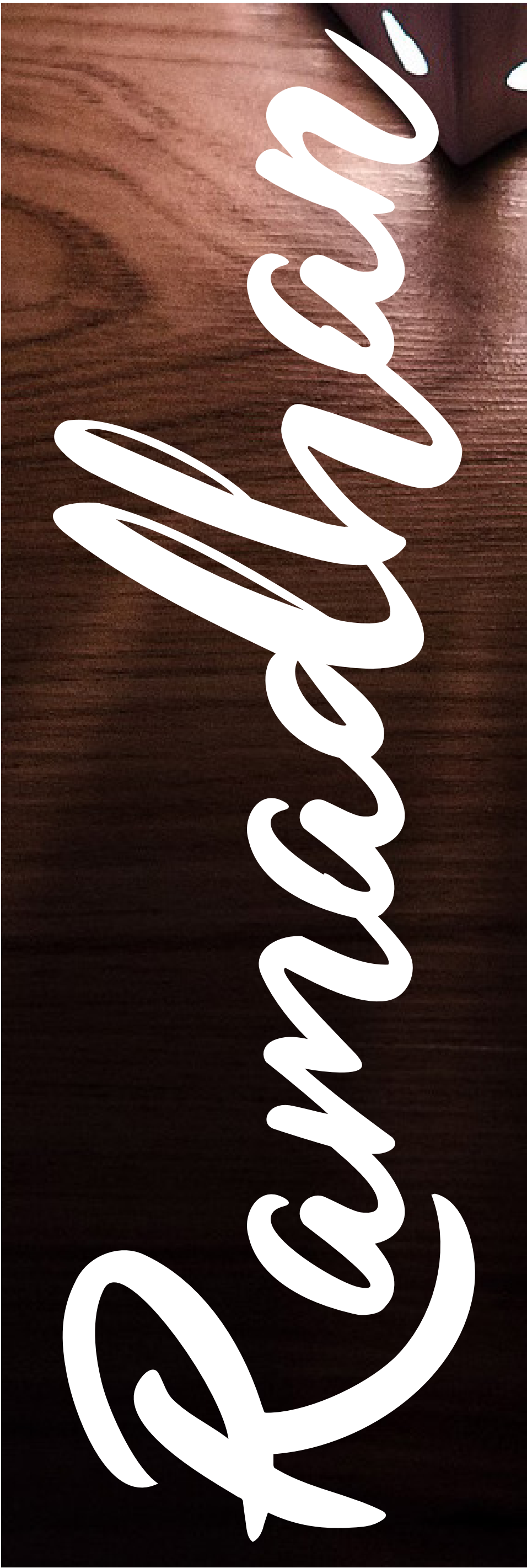
69 new coronavirus cases

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced today the registration of 69 new positive cases with Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Sultanate. Thirty-seven of the new cases are Omanis and 32 cases are non-Omanis. This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 2,637, in addition to 12 death cases. The ministry also pointed out that 816 cases have recovered. MoH 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 keep on washing hands with water and soap, as well as avoiding touching the face, nose, mouth and eyes, and following the healthy habits when coughing and sneezing. Full adherence to social distancing instructions issued by the Supreme Committee and the MoH is further required. — **ONA**

Man dies as car hits stray camel



MUSCAT: An Omani was killed when his vehicle rammed into a stray camel on the main highway in Al Sinaina late on Sunday night. Royal Oman Police urges motorists to abide by the speed limit, be cautious and avoid using smartphone while driving. Stray animals continue to pose a threat to the lives of motorists on the main roads in several places in Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi governorates. Al Sinaina Municipality earlier proposed sticking reflective tapes on the bodies of stray camels. Luminous tapes are made of phosphorus material that can be seen by drivers from a 300-metre distance thus alerting them to the danger ahead.



Good time to build good habits



ZAINAB AL NASSRI

Sports play an important role in daily life of many people. In Ramadhan the usual routine changes drastically and here it becomes important for the people to maintain a balanced nutritious pattern.

Ramadhan is an opportunity to get rid of bad habits categorically and not just for 30 days. Exercise experts advise to start new habits during the holy month, and accustom your body to avoid fatty food and sugar and increase water intake as much as possible.

Fasting during Ramadhan has practical benefits of diet management. By not eating anything for more than 10 hours daily for a month, you develop tolerance with three quarters of the way to stop eating unhealthy food forever. So, use Ramadhan as an opportunity to get rid of fast and fried food, caffeine and soft drinks. It's a great time to change your negative eating habits and stay fit.

Budoor Ahmed, a fitness trainer says, "My exercise programme changes completely in Ramadhan. What I do is a routine change away from practising cardio or exercises that require intense effort".

Having all gyms and sports

yards closed because of the COVID-19 outbreak should not be an excuse for those who want to stay fit during this period.

She adds: "It is recommended that you reduce the intensity of your exercises during your fasting period. For example, if you were running for half an hour a day before Ramadhan, during this month you can limit the sports days to five days a week, and replace running with fast walking. And if you were used to lifting five kilograms of weight, there is nothing wrong in reducing it to three while fasting".

About exercise timing in Ramadhan, she says, "It is preferable to exercise two or three hours after breaking the fast, as your body will be able to carry weight because it is full of energy. However, you need to get appropriate amount of carbohydrates, minerals and proteins for your body to recover fast. It is also preferable to exercise about half an hour before 'suhoor' (meal consumed early in the morning during Ramadhan), because by that time you already have consumed a good amount of water, have received your daily need of calories, and your stomach is not full at that time, so blood goes to your muscles. Choose from these two timing that suits you, so that you do not feel sick, rather feel energetic".

FATWA

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

Question

Is it permissible to use siwak, a natural tooth brush made from the twigs of the Salvadore Persica tree, during the day of Ramadhan?

Answer

Yes, it is.



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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

WORLD

A mix of joy and fear as Italians emerge from longest lockdown



ROME: Stir-crazy Italians were free to stroll and visit relatives for the first time in nine weeks on Monday as Europe's hardest-hit country eases back the world's longest nationwide coronavirus lockdown.

Four million people -- an estimated 72 per cent of them men -- will return to their construction sites and factories as the economically and emotionally shattered country tries to get back to work.

Restaurants that have managed to survive Italy's most disastrous crisis in generations will reopen for takeaway service.

But clubs and even ice cream parlours will remain shut. The use of public transport will be discouraged and everyone will have to wear masks in indoor public spaces.

"We are feeling a mix of joy and fear," 40-year-old Stefano Milano said in Rome.

"There will be great happiness in being able to go running again carefree, my son being allowed to

have his little cousin over to blow out his birthday candles, to see our parents," the father-of-three said.

"But we are also apprehensive because they are old and my father-in-law has cancer so is high risk".

'MOMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY'

Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus emerged in December, led the world with an unprecedented lockdown on January 23 that lasted 76 days.

Weeks later Italy followed suit, becoming the first Western democracy to shut down virtually everything in the face of an illness that has now officially killed 28,884 -- the most in Europe -- and some fear thousands more.

The lives of Italians began closing in around them as it became increasingly apparent that the first batch of infections in provinces around Milan were spiraling out of control. — AFP

Australia, NZ look to form trans-Tasman virus 'bubble'



A travel advisory message is seen as New Zealand eases strict regulations implemented to curb the spread of the COVID-19 in Auckland. — Reuters

AUCKLAND: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern will join an Australian leaders' meeting on Tuesday to discuss establishing a "trans-Tasman bubble" that allows the neighbours to lift bilateral coronavirus travel bans.

With both nations seeing significant drops in new infections, Ardern accepted Australian counterpart Scott Morrison's invitation to join a virtual meeting of the National Cabinet, which brings together Australia's regional and federal leaders.

"The meeting will discuss a number of matters relating to the COVID response on both sides of the Tasman (Sea), including the creation of a trans-Tasman travel bubble," she told reporters, describing her presence at the meeting as unprecedented.

"Both our countries' strong record on fighting the virus has placed us in the enviable position of being able to plan the next stage in our economic rebuild."

Ardern said the two-week quarantine periods both Australia and New Zealand currently impose on international arrivals would be mutually waived under the proposal.

She was reluctant to speculate on when it could take effect but warned: "Don't expect this to happen in a couple of weeks time."

"We need to ensure that we're locking in the gains that all New Zealanders have helped us achieve and make sure we have health precautions in place to make sure we do this safely," she said.

Ardern confirmed the meeting will discuss the countries' respective approaches to battling the novel coronavirus, including contact tracing apps such as Australia's COVIDSafe.

"We continue to do work in this space, but we are not relying on it because there is simply no silver bullet here," she said. — AFP

ANALYSIS

Ancient Turkish trade hit by virus hopes for revival



For quarantine kitchens spices are essential because cooking is one of the best things we can do.

ANINDITA RAMASWAMY

An Ottoman-era spice business hit by the novel coronavirus has lost three-quarters of its revenue, but the fifth-generation owner hopes to navigate a new route into the world's kitchens. After all, "spices have been and will be around forever," said Ahmet Kadioglu, 33, who runs the Istanbul-based business named Hayfene after an ancient Turkish potluck game. "For quarantine kitchens they are essential because cooking is one of the best things you can do." Spices aren't just colourful condiments. They were once believed to have magical powers and launched a myriad quixotic expeditions and trade routes. In the modern age companies like Hayfene still, more humbly, connect people, traditions and countries in a more globalised food culture. The plight of Kadioglu's spice business is particularly poignant during the fasting month of Ramadan. The usual lively communal meals at the end of the day are prohibited in Turkey

during the holiest month to contain the virus' spread. Kadioglu serendipitously came up with the name Hayfene in conversation with his grandmother. She narrated tales of a game played in Malatya, in eastern Turkey, where the family is from. Children would go house to house, asking for specific food items, all the while reciting a limerick, and then feast together outdoors. "I call it Turkish Halloween. I had never heard of this word," Kadioglu said. It was once common in the east and south-east, but now mainly linked to Malatya, which "was the last place to lose this culture." It fit in perfectly with his idea of changing the company's focus to "connect people around food" especially since Turks love eating but "funnily enough food is a taboo in Turkey." Why taboo? "Your mother will tell you to eat at home before visiting someone, so you don't eat everything there, otherwise it will convey the message that we are not feeding you," he laughed, recalling warnings "not to attack the food at a guest's home." — dpa

Some changes might be forever and others for innovation



Lakshmi Kothaneth lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

Changes we are overcoming are many as we go through COVID-19. Being a broadcast journalist student had meant going through training to gain interviewing and reporting skills. But during none of those learning years in the university did we ever think of interviewing people wearing masks. Technically speaking it is a different experience. As an interviewer we learn to observe facial expressions and body languages. But this time, the eyes have to be the focal point. There is a reason why the facial expressions and body language are crucial and this is to know when to ask the next question

because in the case of live interviews whether in radio or television we do not want 'dead air'. For the interviewee too, they need to feel the trust and the warmth to open up. So here they are opening up to someone who is also behind a mask. The identity has had to take a back seat. The natural pauses are cues to step in with the next question or comment. In the current situations interviews might even come across muffled as we try to project voice through the facial masks during field reporting. It is not just in broadcasting field, but in all sectors of work we have had to learn to adjust and accept new ways of functioning.

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FEATURES



Iraqis turn to sketches and songs to contain virus

Bushy moustaches, thick Syrian accents, fist-fights in 1930s Damascus and medical masks? A parody of a popular Syrian television show is raising awareness on curbing the coronavirus outbreak in neighbouring Iraq.

Artists in Iraq's southern port city of Basra have adapted the beloved characters of "Bab al Hara" ("The Neighbourhood Gate") – a 10-season period drama watched across the Arab world – to convince their compatriots to take the pandemic seriously.

In one skit, the show's main character Abu Issam returns to the Syrian capital Damascus unan-

nounced after a long absence, just in time to keep his son from getting into a street fight.

"Put on your mask!" Abu Issam, played by Iraqi artist Mohammad Qassem, scolds his son.

When his wife – also played by Qassem – later draws close to welcome him home, Abu Issam slaps her.

"Don't you know that hugging and kissing are forbidden? We're in the time of corona(virus)! Disinfect the house!"

The scenes are meant to be lighthearted, but the messages behind them are no laughing matter, Qassem said.

"We created these skits to raise the public's awareness of what measures the health ministry has asked them to commit to, how to

disinfect and clean your hands, and how to abide by the lockdown", he said.

Iraq imposed a nationwide lockdown in mid-March to combat the spread of the virus, but relaxed measures to an evening and weekend curfew last week.

People quickly flooded the streets as stores opened across the country, with very few practising social distancing or wearing masks and gloves.

The language of comedy may convince people to take preventative action against the virus in ways government orders could not, said Youssef al Hajjaj, who plays Abu Issam's son in the "Bab al Hara" parody.

"These sketches use com-

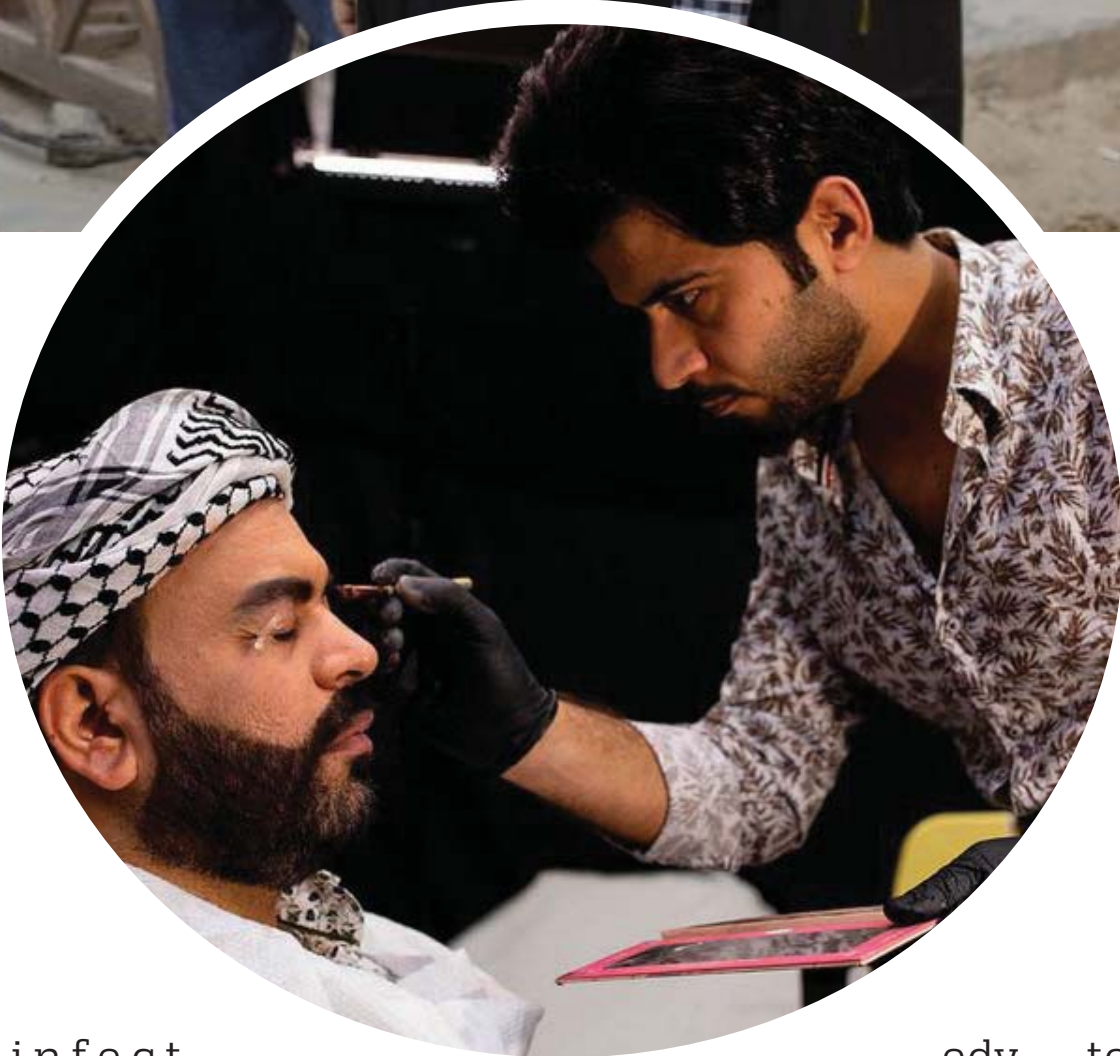
edy to spread information about staying protected when leaving your homes," Hajjaj said.

Pop hits have also been used to persuade Iraqis to stay home, including a remixed music video of a beloved Egyptian hit featuring a police officer at a checkpoint.

"Corona's got us under curfew here, the world is crazy and full of fear", he croons.

Iraqi singers Wissam Daoud and Thaer Hazem were quick to put out their own tune, a ballad set to the jumpy percussion typical of Iraqi music.

"Be careful and don't go out, it'll get easier day by day. That's how you'll stay well and this crisis will go away", they advise. — **AFP**





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Oman's cement industry welcomes anti-dumping measures

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Cement dumping from across the border – long the bane of Oman's two main cement producers – has considerably eased in recent weeks in the wake of intensive screening measures adopted by the Sultanate's authorities.

The action, spearheaded by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has been warmly welcomed by Raysut Cement Company (RCC), the Sultanate's biggest cement manufacturer.

"We are delighted by the action initiated by the government to limit dumping of cement," said a source at Salalah-based Raysut Cement.

"These measures will enable Raysut Cement, as well as our peers Oman Cement, to operate at full capacity and service the needs of the domestic market."

Anti-dumping measures came into force in earnest in the first of March this year, but have since been ramped up in conjunction with restrictions on the cross-border movement of goods as part of measures adopted by Oman's authorities to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

"We hope the authorities will continue to strictly enforce this measure not only in the interest of fair market competition, but also to prevent the influx of cement that does not comply with Omani quality specifications. Use of substandard cement can have dangerous consequences for builders using such products," said the source.

In comments to the Observer, he acknowledged that cement demand has dramatically declined in the wake of restrictions imposed by the government to curb the spread of the pandemic.

"Demand has dropped by at least 20 – 25 per cent over the past month or so, largely because of the slowdown in



DOMESTIC BOOST: ANTI-DUMPING MEASURES CAME INTO FORCE IN EARNEST IN THE FIRST OF MARCH THIS YEAR, BUT HAVE SINCE BEEN RAMPED UP IN CONJUNCTION WITH COVID-19 MITIGATION EFFORTS

construction activity, coupled with the pandemic restrictions. But we are hopeful that the demand will pick up once the restrictions are eased and once the economy recovers.

"The company, he said, is hopeful of government support to offset part of the losses anticipated during the lockdown and the ensuing downturn.

"Given that the next 6 – 12 months will be a difficult time for the local cement industry, we will be approaching the government for some form of subsidy, be it in the form of gas or electricity, to enable us to recovery the losses during this period."

TURN TO PAGE 12



Tender Notice

The Internal Tender Committee of the Ministry of Manpower announces the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Entities Eligible for Subscription and Registered with the Tender Board	Last Date for E-Purchase	Date of Bid Submission	Copy Fee
Re-tender (8/2020)	Provision of Maintenance Services at the Ibri Vocational College	2 nd grade	Tuesday 12/5/2020 2:30 pm	Monday 18/5/2020 10:00 am	RO 25
25/2020	Provision of Cleaning Team at the Shinas College of Technology	---	Thursday 28/5/2020 2:30 pm	Sunday 14/6/2020 10:00 am	RO 25

- Specialized facilities can obtain the tender-related documents electronically through the following [web link /https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om) as of Monday 4/5/2020 at 7:30 am
- Each bid shall be enclosed with a banking bond from an operating bank in the Sultanate at a sum of 1% of the bid's value addressed to the Ministry of Manpower and is valid for 90 days from the submission date.
- The Tender's envelops are to be opened at 11:00 am on the same day.



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BUSINESS

Khazaen unveils new incentives package for investors



M U S C A T : K h a z e a n Economic City, the newest economic city in the Sultanate, which is being developed on an area of 51

million sqm in the Wilayat of Barka in South Al Batinah Governorate, has announced a set of promotional incentives for local and foreign investors. This offer comes in parallel with the progress achieved to deliver the first infrastructure package which is planned to be completed before the end of this year.

The incentive package comes in addition to the recent milestone achieved by Khazaen in attracting several local and foreign investors.

Khazaen has recently signed a number of key agreements for infrastructure services with Oman Broadband Company and Oman Towers Company to provide a robust telecommunications and fiber optic infrastructure for the city.

The incentives package announced by Khazaen includes exemption from annual lease for the first year, 50 per cent waiver on annual lease for the second and third years, 50 per cent discount on service charges for a period of two years, and an exemption from registration and the land Krokki fees. Investors and companies interested in investing in Khazaen have the opportunity to avail these benefits until the end of 2020.

"We are proud of the continuous progress being made in implementing the infrastructure works for the city. The advancements made reflect our commit-

ment to build a modern and integrated economic city that meets the needs of various investors. It also reflects our efforts towards supporting economic diversification initiatives in the Sultanate," said Khalid al Balushi (pictured), CEO, Khazaen Economic City.

"Today, we are pleased to launch our first promotional package for the City, which includes a bundle of incentives for domestic and foreign investors. These incentives are in line with the government's efforts to stimulate the national economy and boost the inward investments," he added.

"Infrastructure and services are the key important factors taken into consideration by investors while making their investment decisions. A result of the rapid progress in construction work for the first package and the initiation of key national projects in the city such as the Dry Port, Khazaen will soon be ready to welcome investors to setup their businesses. The incentives we announce today are the first part of our marketing efforts to introduce the City to a wider group of local and foreign investors," he emphasized.

Apart from playing a vital role in attracting more investments to the City, these incentives and exemption will contribute to reduce the initial costs for investors and their operating costs.

Investors in Khazaen will benefit from multiple advantages provided by the new city such as the strategic location, direct connection to Oman's superior road network and proximity to sea and air ports in the Sultanate and especially the close proximity to the new Al Suwaiq port in North Al Batinah.

KEY MEASURES:
INCENTIVES INCLUDE DISCOUNTED LEASE, RENT-FREE PERIOD, DISCOUNTED SERVICE FEES, EXEMPTION FROM REGISTRATION AND KROOKIE FEES UNTIL THE END OF THIS YEAR

Omantel provides medical equipment using 3D printers



MUSCAT: As part of its 'With You, For You and For Oman' campaign in support of the government's COVID-19 mitigation efforts, Omantel launched a '3D Ambulance' initiative using already available 3D printing capabilities to produce part of the required medical equipment for the Ministry of Health.

Omantel has earlier launched "Omantel Innovation Corner" at Children Public Library and "Think & Innovate" bus in cooperation with Ministry of Education (Directorate General of Education in North Al Sharqiya) in 2019.

Both initiatives had 3D printing capabilities in order to educate kids and students about the new emerging technologies and their future importance.

Due to the suspension of schools and closure of public places, Omantel coordinated with its partners to utilize the existing 3D printing capabilities to produce medical equipment needed by the Ministry of Health such as medical masks and surgical mask clips according to the approved specifications in coordination with Ministry of Health and the team at "Omantel Innovation Corner" represented by Sultan al Subhi and Idrees al Ismaili.

Commenting on this initiative, Laila Mohammed al Wahaibi, Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility at Omantel said: "Ministry of Health was in need for many medical equipment and tools and the sourcing opportunities were limited due to the increased global demand from different countries in addition to the suspension of air travel."

BUSINESS

UK watchdog probes audit of NMC Health

LONDON: Britain's accounting regulator said it has opened an investigation into EY's audit of NMC Health, the troubled hospital operator that was placed into administration in April. "On 15 April 2020 the Financial Reporting Council opened an investigation into the audit by Ernst and Young LLP of the financial statements of NMC Health for the year ended 31 December 2018," the FRC said in a statement.

NMC, the largest private healthcare provider in the UAE, was placed into administration earlier in April after months of turmoil which followed questions about its financial reporting from short-seller Muddy Waters.

NMC's shares were sus-



General view of NMC specialty hospital is pictured in Abu Dhabi. — Reuters

pended two months ago and recently the company requested the delisting of its shares from the London Stock Exchange.

Banks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with expo-

sure to troubled hospital operator NMC Health risk having to make provisions for between 25 per cent to 50 per cent on more than \$2 billion of outstanding debt to the company, three

banking sources said.

NMC, which has borrowed from a total of 80 local and international banks, disclosed \$6.6 billion in debt last month, above \$2.1 billion disclosed in June last year.

UAE banks said in stock exchange filings in the past few weeks they had more than 10 billion dirhams (\$2.72 billion) in exposure to NMC. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank said it had an exposure to NMC of \$981 million.

ADCB had said the credit it extended included syndicated loans alongside major global banks via senior unsecured facilities.

The bank is chairing a steering committee of creditors that held an initial meeting last week, the sources said. — Reuters

Lulu Group waives rental obligations of retailers

MUSCAT: As part of its efforts to combat the impact of the pandemic COVID-19, Lulu Group International has reaffirmed that it will be waiving the rental obligations for its retailers across its hypermarket properties during the period of the closure.

A spokesperson for Lulu Hypermarkets confirmed that the tenants have been informed about this announcement several weeks ago. "The Sultanate, together with the rest of the world, is going through a challenging time that requires everyone's participation to overcome this unprecedented situation. As we are one of the largest hypermarket properties in the Sultanate and host a variety of retail-



ers, we understand that their businesses have also been affected by the imposed closure. Since a majority of these tenants also fall within the SMEs category, they are unable to withstand situations like these for a long period of time. Therefore, we decided to support them by waiving the rental costs for tenancies, during the impacted period," the spokesperson said.

"We are pleased to acknowledge and

respond to the call from governmental authorities, including the Supreme Committee for Dealing with COVID-19 and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, especially with regard to rendering support towards small and medium business enterprises. This is in accordance with our commitment to implement necessary measures in line with their decisions," the statement added.

Oman's cement industry welcomes anti-dumping measures

FROM PAGE 10

Raysut Cement's wholly-owned Sohar Cement plant, together its terminal within Sohar Port, have been operating at full capacity to support demand in the northern half of the country. "We have not been impacted very much in the north, but cement demand has declined significantly in Dhofar and Wusta governorates. Nevertheless, both Raysut Cement and Oman Cement are well-positioned to service any requirement of cement nationally. There is no shortage as such at present," he said.

Notwithstanding the subdued economic environment, Raysut Cement is pressing ahead with its investment in Duqm Special Economic Zone, said the source. The company is investing around \$30 million in a new grinding unit at the Port of Duqm with a capacity of around 1 million tons per annum.

"We are aggressively pushing ahead with our Duqm project. It is a good time for countries like Oman to become self-sufficient in the domestic availability of a strategic commodity like cement, and there is a major shortage anticipated in Duqm. Hence the need for us to invest rapidly in Duqm! We are also getting better pricing for the equipment, so we are going ahead full steam with our Duqm project," he said, adding that the plant is slated to be commissioned in March 2021.

BUSINESS

Pandemic slams Asia's factory activities

SYDNEY: Asia's factory activity was ravaged in April, business surveys showed on Monday, and the outlook dimmed further as government restrictions on movement to contain the coronavirus outbreak froze global production and slashed demand.

A series of Purchasing Managers' Indexes (PMIs) from IHS Markit fell deeper into contraction from March, with some diving to all-time lows and others hitting levels last seen during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.

Similar gauges out of Europe's largest economies due on Monday and later in the week are also expected to show dire global industry conditions.

The PMI for South Korea, Asia's fourth-largest economy and a global manufacturing powerhouse, skidded to 41.6 in April, the lowest reading since January 2009. Japan's PMI released



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

last week similarly fell to an 11-year low.

"The bad news is that the hit to industry in many places is unlikely to be passed the worst," Alex Holmes, Asia Economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a note.

"Global demand has slumped and we don't think it has bottomed out yet. The

latest incoming data for the US and Western Europe point to an unprecedented slump in demand. And while China's economy has started to recover, demand there remains very weak."

Last week, China's official PMI showed factory activity still growing in April, albeit more slowly than March,

while the private-sector Caixin PMI showed a dip into contraction, although at a much gentler pace than the rest of the world. Significantly, exporters in both surveys were jolted by steep falls in orders.

While China appears to be ahead of others in emerging from the economic paralysis inflicted by the pandemic, any recovery is expected to be gradual and unlikely to fire up an immediate resurgence in global demand.

The PMI for Taiwan, a major producer of high-end technology components, fell to 42.2, its lowest since 2009 and down from an expansionary 50.4 in March.

The declines in South Korea's and Taiwan's PMIs showed contractions that were less severe than those seen in other economies in the region, with indicators in Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam all reporting plunges to record lows. — Reuters



Oil prices fall on demand concerns

MELBOURNE: Oil prices fell on Monday, paring last week's gains, on worries a global oil glut may persist amid slumping demand and US-China trade tensions that could restrict an economic recovery even as coronavirus pandemic lockdowns start to ease.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell as low as \$18.10 a barrel earlier in the session and were down \$1.01, or 5.1 per cent, at \$18.77 at 0658 GMT. The benchmark contract rose 17 per cent last week. — Reuters

US processes over \$500 billion in small business loans

WASHINGTON: The United States has made over \$500 billion in loans to small businesses hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, and about \$145 billion remains in the congressionally approved fund, the US Small Business Administration and Treasury Department said on Sunday.

The SBA has processed about 2.2 million loans worth more than \$175 billion since Congress last month authorised more funding for the Paycheck Protection Programme, part of almost \$3 trillion in spending to fight the heavy economic toll of the pandemic, which has thrown about 30 million Americans out of work.

The second round of funding was launched on Monday, allowing lenders to issue forgivable, govern-



George Washington is seen with printed medical mask on the one Dollar banknotes in this illustration. — Reuters

ment-guaranteed loans to small businesses shuttered by the outbreak.

The average loan size in the second round of the PPP loan processing has been \$79,000, according to the statement released on Sunday.

The US government's

\$660 billion small business rescue programme has stumbled on missing paperwork, technology failure, and the misdirection of funds to big corporations.

It also faces the hurdle of forgiving those hastily arranged loans. — Reuters

SPORTS

‘Players should be able to snub Premier League return’



LONDON: Players should be allowed to refuse to take part if the Premier League resumes amid the coronavirus crisis, former Watford forward Marvin Sordell said on Monday.

Premier League chiefs hope the season can be finished over the summer, but their ‘Project Restart’ has come in for criticism for potentially putting players at risk.

Although the Premier League is reportedly willing to pay for testing for players and staff if matches resume, that has not been enough ease the fears of some stars.

Sordell, who also featured for Burnley and Bolton before retiring last year, believes players should only return if they are comfortable with their personal situations while the virus is still a threat.

“Some people will be living on their own and they won’t have any responsibilities in that sense, or those fears that they may pass

the virus onto somebody else if they contracted it themselves”, Sordell told Britain’s Press Association.

“There will be other players who live with their parents, or they are their parents’ only means of being able to get food.

“Their partners might be pregnant or they might have young kids, and some might have underlying health conditions. Some players themselves might have underlying health conditions.

“I think people’s own situations need to be respected. If they want to play, and it’s safe to do so, then allow them to play. If they don’t want to play because they don’t think it’s safe to do so, I think that needs to be respected”.

While Sordell is concerned players may be forced into returning to action, Norwich manager Daniel Farke has backed the Premier League to find a safe way of completing the season.

— AFP

Froome unsure if TDF organisers can prevent mass gatherings

LONDON: Britain’s four-time Tour de France champion Chris Froome is unsure if the organisers can fully prevent large crowds from gathering at the race that was rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tour, scheduled to start on June 27, was pushed back to August 29 due to the outbreak. Mass gatherings have been banned in France until September, with the country recording more than 168,000 coronavirus cases and over 24,000 deaths.

“Would the organisers be able to keep people from coming and gathering in large crowds? In theory we can put on the race and it can be broadcast on television”, Froome said in an Instagram chat with former England cricketer Kevin Pietersen.

You’re not going to get the same scenes as you would get going through these tunnels of just people everywhere and all the rest of it.

“Maybe that’s the version of the race we need to see this year. I don’t know”.

Froome, who won the Tour in 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017 and is one victory away from equalling the record held by Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain, is using the delay to make up the training time he lost after a crash last year.

The 34-year-old spent over three weeks in hospital after breaking his neck, femur, elbow, hip and ribs in a high-speed crash while training for the Criterium du Dauphine in June.

“Some days I’m doing up to six hours sitting on the stationary trainer — big days”, Froome said.

“A lot of the training I’ve been doing has been indoors so it’s almost prepared me for this whole lockdown period, and mentally I’m able to get through it a bit easier”.

— Reuters



Dr Abdulrahim talks about challenges in pro football

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The sporting season 2013/2014 had registered commencement of first edition of the professional football league in the Sultanate. Conversion from the normal football league into the professional edition was not an easy step taken by the Oman Football Association in 2013.

Many meetings with the clubs' chairmen and top officials at the Ministry of Sports Affairs were approved prior implementation of the football professionalism project at domestic level. Moving into professional league does not mean having professional players at the club only but it is a full project which should feature executive management, dedicated media and marketing team, proper financing and structure and supporting audience to the team.

Dr Abdulrahim al Droushi, an assistant professor in Sports Management and Policy at Physical Education Department in Sultan Qaboos University, executed a detailed study with in-depth interviews with ten different respondents from the Omani sports sector between 2016 and 2018, on the main challenges and difficulties which are facing Oman's football professionalism project. The results of the study were presented at the 5th International Conference of the College of Education: Sport and Sustainable Development.

Al Droushi shared with Observer the five significant difficulties and challenges of the football professionalisation project including the financial aspects, marketing issues and obstacles, absence of audience and fans loyalty and the tough European football club competition.

"The domestic football clubs were struggling a lot financially before the establishment of the profession-



al league. Their annual budget is insignificant. The clubs have to pay a lot to meet the basic requirements of the professional league. In the Sultanate, the clubs provide multi-sports club beside the social activities and youth teams. Definitely, all these activities required a special budget as well", he added.

The sports academic lecturer affirmed that some of the clubs were working hard to provide different incomes from the sponsorship. "Other sources of income include sponsorship deals, TV broadcasting rights, club membership, and match-ticket revenues. Although some companies sponsor these clubs, their sponsorship deals cannot cover even the minimal expenses. In fact, most of these companies sponsor the sports clubs under their corporate social responsibility scheme", Dr Abdulrahim said.

TV RIGHTS

TV rights for any professional league could support the teams to earn some additional income which support the yearly budget. "TV rights include only the Oman Sports Channel because there is a lack of interest from regional TV channels and networks in buying the professional league broadcasting rights.

Sports channels including Oman Sports TV and other GCC channels had been hesitating to buy the league's broadcasting rights for the last decade. A debate between OFA and the Oman TV authorities accordingly ensued. Since Oman TV is a governmental channel, there was an argument made by Oman TV that the league's broadcasting rights should be free because the OFA also receives support from the Ministry of Sports Affairs. After negotiation, the OFA received a smaller TV rights deal than it had requested", he said.

Dr Abdulrahim, who is originally from Sur, pointed out that the study included some respondents relate these challenges to the weakness of marketing strategies. "Internal and external constraints have faced marketing of the OPL. There is an absence of clear marketing strategy on the part of the OFA, the football clubs or MOSA. There is no specialist workforce in marketing, even though there are marketing departments in different organisations of the Omani sports sector", he added.

Fans loyalty was another major challenge that local football clubs face. "The national sports stadiums and complex registered deficient presence of spectator. The statistics for some matches at Omantel

Processional league registered an attendance of less than 300 spectators. Such crowds are significantly lower than those of the Oman football league during the 1990s when spectator numbers exceeded 2,000 for almost every match", Dr Abdulrahim stated in his study.

Commenting on the significant reasons for the decline of spectator attendance by the respondents' point of view, Dr Abdulrahim said: "Firstly, the gap between fan associations and football clubs, lack of proper services in the stadiums, there is no real professional football and there is intense competition from European football clubs in terms of viewing matches on television which is also believed to be critical in explaining why the young generation is disconnected from Omani football clubs and the professional league union".

Dr Abdulrahim al Droushi ended his statement through mentioning some concluding notes from the study.

"There were critical issues mentioned by the interviewees which may affect the development of professional football status in Oman such as the current legal status of sports clubs in Oman, the players', clubs' amateur status, lack of adequate modern sports infrastructure", he added.

SPORT

“

We're in a situation where everyone wants to finish and get the verdict from the pitch. It would be terrible if it all ended like that with nine or 10 games to go in the Premier League.

HUGO LLORIS,
TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR
CAPTAIN



Lloris wants Premier League title settled on the pitch

LONDON: Hugo Lloris believes that ending the English Premier League season without declaring Liverpool champions would be “cruel”, but the Tottenham captain wants the final table decided on the field.

The goalkeeper is following the English social isolation rules at home with his family in London, helping his two oldest daughters with their homework while trying to stay fit in case the season restarts.

“We're in a situation where everyone wants to finish and get the verdict from the pitch,” Lloris told French sports daily L'Equipe. “It would be ter-

rible if it all ended like that with nine or 10 games to go in the Premier League.”

“We're coming into the most exciting, beautiful time of the season. Nobody wants it to end like this.”

Liverpool lead the table by 25 points.

“It would be cruel for Liverpool with the lead they have. They're practically champions.

“There would be a taste of the unfinished business.”

The France captain says that resuming the Premier League without fans will be strange.

“It'll be weird wherever it happens. Football is not a closed-door sport,” he said.

“Without spectators, it's not the same sport. That's not how I see football.

“We're here to bond, to share our emotions. We all want full stadiums, with atmosphere, fans, colour and song.”

“But you have to take the context into consideration.”

“Everyone has to find the right compromise between health, which is above all else, and the need to finish this season,” he added.

The British government still has not given any indication when football will be able to resume.

“We have to be ready. Just in case,” said Lloris, who was among the players to

return to Tottenham's training centre last week for individual sessions.

The World Cup winner contributed the gloves he wore when Tottenham lost the 2019 Champions League final to Liverpool in France for one charity auction. They raised 4,800 euros (\$5,250).

He also organised a France team auction with Blaise Matuidi, the Juventus midfielder, and Raphael Varane, the Real Madrid defender, and raised more than 300,000 euros for Paris hospitals.

“This gesture does not represent much compared to the investment made by caregivers,” he said. — **AFP**