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24 Ramadhan Monday 18/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	04:00	04:05	04:33
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:30	03:33	03:40
MAGHRIB:	06:48	06:51	06:54
ISHA:	08:07	08:09	08:08

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HIS MAJESTY
APPROVES
POSTPONING
OF MUNICIPAL
COUNCIL
ELECTIONS



MUSCAT: Following His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's approval, the Ministry of Interior on Sunday issued a decision postponing the municipal council elections scheduled this year. The decision, taken in view of the current situation of the Sultanate and the whole world due to coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, also retains existing municipal councils till such a time that new elections could be held. The date of new elections will be announced in time. — **ONA**

HOSPITAL IN AMERAT
TO FIGHT COVID-19

MUSCAT: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, opened a temporary hospital set up by the Oman Medical Association (OMA) for the treatment of COVID-19 patients in Al Amerat on Monday.

In addition to setting up the field hospital and as part of its social and humanitarian initiatives in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, the OMA management has drawn up action plans to spread awareness among the society and support the healthcare sector through providing



medical equipment and devices. Based on this, OMA had launched muafaa (recovery) initiative under the title

'for the sake of Oman' after getting an approval from MoH and the Ministry of Social Development.

SEE ALSO P4

Private firms
allowed to hire
expat cleaners

MUSCAT: The government has decided to allow some companies to recruit expatriates for cleaning work. Shaikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Minister of Manpower, issued a Ministerial Decision 115/1 regulating the recruitment of expatriate in private sector companies involved for cleaning works. The employer must be fully dedicated to the administration of the company and insured with the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) and must have a valid Riyadh card.

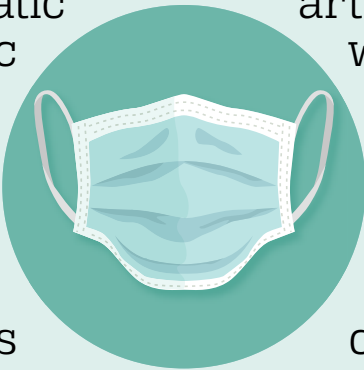
The applicant company must submit a copy of the municipal licence and the lease agreement.

Hamster tests show masks curb virus spread

HONG KONG: Tests on hamsters reveal the widespread use of facemasks reduces transmission of the deadly coronavirus, a team of leading experts in Hong Kong said on Sunday. The research by the University of Hong Kong is some of the first to specifically

investigate whether masks can stop symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers from infecting others.

Led by Professor Yuen Kwok-yung, one of the world's top coronavirus experts, the team placed



hamsters that were artificially infected with the disease next to healthy animals. Surgical masks were placed between the two cages with air flow travelling from the infected animals to the

healthy ones. The researchers found non-contact transmission of the virus could be reduced by more than 60 per cent when the masks were used.

Two thirds of the healthy hamsters were infected within a week if no masks were applied. — **AFP**

MAWALEH MARKET TO BE PARTIALLY CLOSED

MUSCAT: As part of the national effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and following the regulations and guidelines taken in coordination with the Ministry of Health, it has been decided to close the retail business section of the Central Market of Vegetable and Fruits, Mawaleh, while continuing the wholesale trading from 4 to 10 am every day. The decision shall come into effect on Monday, May 18, until further notice.

Muscat Municipality therefore supports the implementation of preventive measures that reduce the spread of the virus and protect people.

MENTAL SUPPORT KEY TO EASING IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: As the whole world grapples with COVID-19, people are under intense strain and stress. Experts warn that mental illnesses may grow into epidemic proportions due to job loss and economic disruptions. The monotony of staying and working from home is also taking toll on mental health.

"These changes along with the fear of catching the virus and becoming unwell, fears of joblessness and financial impact from the lockdown due to business closure are causing a lot of anxiety and fears", said Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

According to him, the massive social and economic effects from the pandemic in the coming years are going to affect the mental health of the population.

"We should not forget the fact that under the shadow of COVID-19, another epidemic is growing with mental health implications", Dr Hamed warned.

The lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues



Dr Hamed al Sinawi

make people at the risk of developing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and sleeping problems, he said.

The isolation as well as the uncertainty about how long it will last and how the pandemic will play out can fuel anxiety.

"Frontline health workers, who had to leave home and work putting themselves in danger, are more at risk of developing mental health problems", he said.

The United Nations and the World Health Organization, last weekend, jointly said that there has been a "high prevalence" of mental distress in countries across the globe due to the coronavirus pandemic, especially among healthcare workers and

children.

"The impact of the pandemic on people's mental health is already extremely concerning", WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

Children being kept out of school, for instance, face uncertainty and anxiety. Along with women, they also face a heightened risk of domestic abuse as people spend lengthy amounts of time cooped up at home.

While pointing out the recent guidelines issued by the United Nations, Dr Hamed stressed the need to include access to psychosocial support and emergency mental care in all aspects of the people's response to the pandemic. This is a collective responsibility of governments and civil society, with the support of the whole United Nations System. A failure to take people's emotional well-being seriously will lead to long-term social and economic costs to society, he said quoting the UN statement.

"These are difficult times for all of us. People around may be facing financial difficulty, donate to people you know or to charities", Dr Hamed urged.



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More flights to transport Indians

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: A total of 11 flights are scheduled to fly Indian nationals from Muscat and Salalah to various Indian destinations as part of Phase 2 of the repatriation programme, the first of which took off from Muscat International Airport to Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala at 1.15 pm on Sunday.

A total of 183 passengers including six infants, people needing urgent medical attention, workers, stranded visitors and people having family emergencies flew home on the Air India Express flight IX 554.

Earlier, the Government of India had announced eight flights in all to help its citizens get home. However,

THIRD FLIGHT CARRIES 183 PASSENGERS TO KERALA CAPITAL



DETAILS OF FLIGHTS	
DATE	SECTOR
May 17	Muscat - Thiruvananthapuram
May 18	Muscat – Hyderabad
May 20	Muscat – Bangalore
May 20	Muscat - Kannur
May 20	Salalah – Kozhikode
May 21	Muscat - Kozhikode
May 21	Muscat – Delhi
May 22	Muscat – Kannur
May 23	Muscat – Kochi
May 23	Muscat - Thiruvananthapuram
23 May 2020	Muscat – Gaya

(Courtesy: Indian Embassy, Muscat)

three more flights were added to the existing itineraries in order to accelerate the repatriation process from May 17 to 23. This is the third flight to carry Indians, the two others being to Kochi on May 9 and another to Chennai on May 12.

"We are grateful to the

authorities of the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ROP, the Airport Authority and all concerned," said Munu Mahawer, the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate.

A total of 149 flights are expected to operate to bring back stranded Indians from 40 countries

across the world. This includes feeder flights as well operated by different countries.

"Passenger lists for all the flights will be finalised by the Embassy on the basis of information received by the mission through the form which was disseminated by the Embassy on its website and social media," the Embassy official in charge of the repatriation programme said.

Priority has been 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 e-mail or telephone.

OMAN AIR OPERATES LONDON-MUSCAT FLIGHT TODAY



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Oman Air is operating a flight from London Heathrow to Muscat on Monday, May 18.

"The flight to Muscat is open to Omani nationals only. Those who wish to travel on this flight should contact Oman Air's sales office at uk.res@omanair.com," the airline said. Following the directives of Heathrow Airport Limited, Oman Air will operate from Terminal 2 with immediate effect until further notice, the airline said. "Social distancing regulations apply and wearing of face mask is mandatory at Heathrow Airport. Only passengers will be allowed to enter the building. We recommend that passengers arrive at the airport at least 4 hours prior to departure," the airline said.

Earlier, the embassies of the United Kingdom and Germany had urged their nationals to take advantage of the special Oman Air flight on May 18.

A'Sharqiya Investment Holding Co. (SAOG) and its Subsidiaries				
P.O. Box 47 PC 118, Al Harthy Complex, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 968 24566160 Fax: 968 24566162. E-mail: admin@asharqiya.com				
Chairman's Report for the Quarter ended March 31, 2020				
Dear Shareholders,				
On behalf of the Board of Directors, it gives me great pleasure to present the unaudited consolidated financial statements of A'Sharqiya Investment Holding Company (SAOG) and its subsidiary Qalhat Real Estate Investments & Services I.T.C. (QREIS) - for the three month period ended March 31, 2020.				
Overview of Operations and Financial Performance				
A summary of the company's operating performance for the three-month period ended March 31, 2020 in comparison to the corresponding period in 2019 and the full year ended 2019 is presented below:				
(RO in '000)				
Quarter ended March 31, 2019	March 31 2020	March 31 2019	% Increase/ (Decrease)	Full Year ended 2019
Total Operating Income	709	653	8.5	1,347
Profit after Tax (PAT)	423	399	6.0	504
Other Comprehensive Income/ (loss)	(741)	(158)	(369.9)	(188)
Total comprehensive income/(loss)	(317)	242	(231.3)	316
Total Assets	15,117	15,838	(4.6)	15,927
It may be noted from above; the company's operations during the three month period ended March 31, 2020 generated an income of RO 708,536 as compared to RO 652,840 during the corresponding period in 2019. Profit before tax recorded an increase of 5.0% at RO 444,736 as against RO 423,759. The profit after tax arising from the company's operations during this period aggregated to RO 423,264 as compared to RO 399,408 generated during the comparable period in 2019 reflecting an increase of 6.0%.				
Other comprehensive loss during the period stood at RO 740,696 compared to a loss of RO 157,627 recorded during the comparable period in 2019. The total comprehensive income				
UN-AUDITED CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31 MARCH 2020				
	31 March 2020		31 March 2019	
	Parent RO	Group RO	Parent RO	Group RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property and equipment	12,851	13,114	1,095	1,446
Lease receivables	-	5,650,891	-	6,159,257
Investment in subsidiary	250,000	-	250,000	-
Fair Value assets through OCI	7,919,888	7,919,888	8,447,136	8,447,136
Deferred tax assets	38,652	38,652	53,654	53,654
Due from subsidiary	-	-	-	-
Total	8,221,391	13,622,545	8,751,885	14,661,493
Current assets				
Due from subsidiary	-	-	1,191	-
Lease receivables	-	551,552	-	372,338
Prepayments/Other receivables	412,469	772,107	390,137	664,603
Bank balances and cash	154,194	170,319	125,926	139,465
Total	566,663	1,493,978	517,254	1,176,406
Total assets	8,788,054	15,116,523	9,269,139	15,837,899
EQUITY				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000
Legal reserve	1,419,953	1,503,287	1,410,193	1,493,527
Fair value reserve	(1,819,187)	(1,819,187)	(1,466,724)	(1,466,724)
Retained earnings	(806,394)	2,595,892	(175,281)	2,796,705
Equity attributable to equity holders of parent	7,794,372	11,279,992	8,768,188	11,823,508
Total equity	7,794,372	11,279,992	8,768,188	11,823,508
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Finance lease payable	-	3,282,649	-	3,296,280
End of service benefits	111,483	132,204	97,615	116,852
Total	111,483	3,414,853	97,615	3,413,132
Current liabilities				
Finance lease payable	-	155,762	-	144,227
Due to subsidiary	742,301	-	-	-
Provision for impairment of FVOCI asset	86,009	86,009	-	-
Bank Borrowings	-	-	335,028	335,028
Accruals and other payables	46,006	77,989	55,699	91,296
Provision for taxation	7,883	101,918	12,609	30,708
Total	882,199	421,678	403,336	601,259
Total liabilities	993,682	3,836,531	500,951	4,014,391
Total equity and liabilities	8,788,054	15,116,523	9,269,139	15,837,899
Net assets per share:	0.087	0.125	0.097	0.131
for the period accordingly stood at RO 317,432 as compared to an income of RO 241,781 during the comparable period in 2019.				
The total assets of the company as at March 31, 2020 was RO 15,116,523 as compared to RO 15,837,899 as at March 31, 2019, reflecting a decrease of 4.6%. The break-up value of the company's equity share works out to Baizas 125 on March 31, 2020 as compared to Baizas 131 on March 31, 2019.				

A noble way to salute the nation

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: For Dr Thomas Alexander, the day his hospital was opened for COVID-19 care, is a day of contentment. He believes that this is a small gesture of gratitude to the country that has been home for him for over three decades. Dr Alexander, Chief Executive Director of Al Adrak Trading and Contracting, was preparing for the opening of his newly built 68-bed hospital 'AdLife' in Amerat on March 23, this year, the day he landed in Muscat some 34 years ago.

But seeing the country fighting the coronavirus pandemic, he postponed the opening of the hospital and he didn't have to think twice before handing over the property to the Ministry of Health to use it as a quarantine facility for COVID-19 patients in the country.

"Oman is my home and this is the place that made me what I am today. I believe that during this pandemic crisis, it is my duty to support the national move in my own way", he said.

He was recently honoured by the Government of Oman with Omani citizenship for all his services to the nation.

"More than ever before, this is the time we have to stand united to fight this pandemic", said Dr Alexander.

Dr Alexander started his business from a very humble way with a lot of dedication, hard work and passion, as he recalled. Today his company, Al Adrak Trading and Contracting, stands tall among the globally recognised engineering and construction services firms. All these three decades, his company has been a partner in the national mission of developing the infrastructure.

TEMPORARY HOSPITAL FOR COVID-19 PATIENTS



MUSCAT: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, on Sunday opened the Oman Medical Association (OMA) Temporary Hospital for COVID-19 treatment in Al Amerat in the Governorate of Muscat. – ONA

SOCIAL HOUSING LAW AMENDED

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Shaikh Saif bin Mohammed al Shabibi, Minister of Housing, issued a decision that is effective from Monday, in which Article 18 of the executive regulations of the Social Housing Law will be replaced by a new text.

According to the new amendment, "The value of housing assistance is determined based on the number of family members and area of construction. The decision said that an amount that does not exceed RO 20,000 for a family consisting of two or three individuals to build or rebuild a house, provided that the building area is not less than 140 square metres, and in the case of the beneficiary's contribution, the building area should not exceed 250 square metres".

It also stated that an amount not exceeding RO 25,000 for a family consisting of four individuals or more to build or rebuild a house, provided that the building area is not less than 190 square metres, and in the case of the contribution of the beneficiary, the building area should not exceed 300 square metres. Besides, there is provision of an amount that does not exceed RO 20,000 to restore the house or make additions to it. In all cases, the beneficiary is

not allowed, in case he wants to extend the construction area by more than 50 per cent of the total value of the housing assistance.

The decision included adding a new article No '18' repeated to the list, stating that "After receiving the initial approval, the applicant for housing assistance shall submit the following: A copy of the title deed, survey and recent maps of the house, authenticated by the

ACCORDING TO THE
NEW AMENDMENT,
THE VALUE OF HOUSING
ASSISTANCE IS
DETERMINED BASED ON
THE NUMBER OF FAMILY
MEMBERS AND AREA
OF CONSTRUCTION

competent authorities, subject to approval by the ministry, a building permit to be valid for the house required to be built, rebuilt, restored or made additions to it, if necessary, a quote submitted by a contractor licensed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, a letter from a consultant specifying

his fees for overseeing the implementation of the house, provided that these fees are deducted from the value of housing assistance, or to be paid by the beneficiary and a certificate of completion, approved by the competent municipality, in case of purchasing a ready-made house".

Article 18, which was replaced in the regulations, states that "the value of housing assistance for building, rebuilding, restoring or making additions to a house is limited to a maximum of RO 20,000, and the minister may raise the value of assistance in areas of difficult topographical nature".

Ramadan Iftar Program

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

1049332798001

Ooredoo users cost 1 RO

Send Donate to 90909

Bank Dhofar

01040609090001

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

Donations Portal for Charitable Organization

www.donate.om

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

South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate

25941087

Sayyid Al-Musallami

North Al-Batinah Governorate

28864241

Sahab Al-Musallami

Musandam Governorate

26731588

Khalid bin Abdulrahman

Dhofar Governorate

23234735

Saleh bin Al-Said

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OCO OMAN



Madayn inspects industrial cities to check virus spread

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates, Madayn, continues its intensive efforts to combat the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and mitigate its effects in various industrial cities.

Eng Basim al Zedjali, senior health, safety and environmental health specialist at Madayn, said that ever since Madayn began fighting the pandemic, inspection visits to 1,855 industrial units have been conducted until last week.

“Of these visits, 1,456 industrial units were found adhering to the precautionary procedures while warnings and practice correction notices were issued to 399 industrial units,” Al Zedjali said.

During these visits, Madayn officials aim at disseminating awareness among the

workers in the companies and factories on safe and healthy practices at the workplace. “The visits also aim at slapping penalties on the industrial units

that are not committed to the procedures. Such violations include the lack of personal protection tools; absence of physical distance between workers, especially those operating in production lines, and in rest areas; units that

have not considered exempting employees with medical conditions and pregnant women; invalidity of temperature measurement devices with inaccurate readings; and insufficient quantities of hand sanitisers at the workplace,” Al Zedjali pointed out.

The inspection visits included issuance of violation notices and closure of industrial units that did not adhere to the precautionary measures, as well as closure of units that violated the decisions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

Taking these into consideration, 15 industrial units were closed, and violations were registered against 13 units until the end of last week.

— ONA

MADAYN HAS CONDUCTED INSPECTION VISITS TO 1,855 INDUSTRIAL UNITS AS PART OF ITS EFFORTS TO COMBAT THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS

80-year-old citizen 22nd victim; 157 new cases

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Sunday announced the death of a male citizen aged 80, who had been suffering from coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, bringing the total number of victims to 22.

The ministry extended its condolences to the family of the deceased, praying to the Almighty Allah to have mercy on the deceased's soul and grant his family patience.

The ministry announced 157 new positive cases with coronavirus, of which 81 are Omanis and 76 expatriates.

This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 5,186, in addition to 22 deaths.

The ministry also pointed out that 1,465 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 also required. — ONA

3,929 CASES IN MUSCAT: Out of the total of 157 cases reported on Sunday, 98 cases were from Muscat.

The number of cases as per the wilayats in Muscat:

Muttrah Cases – 2,445, Deaths – 11 Recovered- 510	Al Amerat Cases- 112 Deaths – Recovered- 15
Bausher Cases- 680 Deaths – 1 Recovered- 87	Al Seeb Cases- 658 Deaths – 6 Recovered- 101
Quriyat Cases- 7 Deaths – 0 Recovered- 1	Muscat Cases- 27 Deaths – 0 Recovered- 6



Persons cured of COVID-19 urged to donate plasma

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health's Department of Blood Banks Services at the Directorate General of Specialised Medical Care has renewed its appeal to those recovering from COVID-19 to donate immune plasma after it has been proved to be effective as a supportive treatment for some cases, in addition to the increasing demand for the blood plasma due to the rise in the number of patients in hospitals.

Dr Zainab Salim al Fana al Araimi, Director of Blood Banks Services Department, explained in an interview that many recovered persons have responded to this call and took the initiative to donate plasma at the department's headquarters in Bausher.

Donors can contact for appointments through WhatsApp at 94555648 or 24591255.

Plasma donation appointments have also been scheduled with a number of recovered persons so that the department can provide it to health institutions continuously, where this treatment is provided to patients in referral hospitals based on the evaluation of the attending physician.

Dr Zainab confirmed that many health centres of primary healthcare and various blood banks in referral hospitals cooperate to make this national project a success. A retest for COVID-19 is

PLASMA CAN BE DONATED AT THE CENTRAL BLOOD BANK IN BAUSHER AND THE DONORS CAN CONTACT FOR APPOINTMENTS THROUGH WHATSAPP AT 94555648 OR 24591255

conducted on the donors to ensure that their result is negative before scheduling appointment for the plasma donation.

It is performed at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher, where plasma is collected through a special device to separate it and then divide it into two to three units.

Dr Zainab said that in an effort to employ the latest technologies, the technique of microbial inhibition for plasma has been introduced, in addition to the COVID-19 antibody measurement test for examining the level of antibodies in the donor blood.

She added that studies indicate that the level of antibodies against the virus in the recovered persons varies from one donor to another. There are several reasons for this difference as recovered patients with severe symptoms are found to have a higher level of antibodies than those who had mild symptoms. — ONA

Resolution on grades of newly appointed staff

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Civil Service Council, issued a resolution No 3/2020 on determining the financial grades of the newly appointed employees as per the provisions of the unified grades and salaries scale for all Omani civil service employees.

The first article stipulated, "The appointment for the qualified persons shall be one grade below to the provisions of the unified grades and salaries scale for the Omani civil employees in the

country on the grades specified for each academic qualification or academic or professional certificate." The new grades for those with PhD degrees will be 9, Masters degree 10, and Bachelor degrees 11.

The decision was based on the Civil Service Law promulgated by the Royal Decree 120/1/2004, Royal Decree 2013/78 on the issuance of a unified grades and salary scale for Omani civil employees in the country. national road network, together with the development of private traffic and transport services.

Bids invited for Salalah-Thamrait Truck Road



MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership has invited local, international, specialised, and experienced companies to submit their qualifications requests for the Salalah-Thamrait Truck Road.

The project is developed by the Ministry of Transport along with Mwasalat through Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

Ministry of Transport seeks to exert more effort to achieve the aspirations set through its annual plans, that the transport sector becomes the second source of national income and that the Sultanate is among the top ten in logistical performance at the international level by the year 2040.



A VIRTUAL RAMADHAN WITH REAL TIME LEARNING

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

If the coronavirus has set new rituals for festivals, the festivities of Ramadhan have become more creative and broad, away from the beaten tracks of cooking for guests and endless iftar parties.

Initially it was an odd situation for everyone when they found that they cannot invite guests or visit friends for iftar besides many other restrictions of not exchanging food with neighbours and even offering prayer in isolation at home.

It, however, turned into an opportunity for many including Zainab, a secondary student in a local school, to learn new skills, help her mum in kitchen and realise her own potential of doing more than her own assessment.

Apart from preparing for her 12th Board Exam, she learnt some skills in sewing and designing on clothes with the help of her mother and sister and sounded confident of doing many more things, which ultimately boosts her confidence.

"Hardly there was time to think about kitchen and learning new skills when regular classes were on. Though the virtual classes are occupying, still we have time due to no other distractions like going for outing or shopping in the

wake of COVID-19 pandemic", she said and added that she was able to get tips from her other sisters through video chatting etc.

Similarly, Ahmed's parents were insisting on him to read books apart from course books. He, however, was never interested in it. This Ramadhan he got chance to go through some

Ramadhan related books like, Amal's Ramadhan, My First Ramadhan, Time to Pray and The White Nights of Ramadhan.

He is happy and happier are his parents that Ahmed's screen time on mobile phone and TV has been largely reduced. Now he is asking for more books and discusses stories with his siblings.

Ahmed is not totally off screen. He is sharing time with his cousins and friends in Oman and other countries telling them about his new hobby of reading

books asking them also to go through some books. He admits his new found hobby as "an interesting pastime".

There are many others like Zainab and Ahmed who are utilising the 'COVID-19 time' by learning new skills like cooking, painting, reading or even listening to Ramadhan stories from their mothers and grandmothers.

Many are utilising the 'COVID-19 time' by learning new skills like cooking, painting, reading or even listening to Ramadhan stories from their mothers and grandmothers.

FATWA

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

Question

Does cauterization during the day of Ramadhan nullify one's fast?

Answer

No, it does not if it is done for a medical purpose.





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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

WORLD

New Zealand’s PM turned away from cafe

MELBOURNE: Hailed for her leadership during the coronavirus pandemic, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and her partner were turned away from a cafe on Saturday because it was too full under the physical distancing guidelines.

Ardern’s government relaxed many social distancing rules on Thursday, reopening cafes, cinemas and malls after two months of some of the tightest restrictions in the world to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

Ardern and Clarke Gayford walked for a brunch to a cafe in the country’s capital, Wellington, where they were initially told it was too full, New Zealand media reported. An employee ran after them a few minutes later when a table became free and the couple went back.

Arden’s partner, Clarke Gayford, took the blame on himself.

“I have to take responsibility for this, I didn’t get organised and book anywhere”, Gayford said on Twitter. “Was very nice of them to chase us down st when a spot freed up. A+ service”.

The prime minister’s press service said that waiting at a cafe is likely with the virus restrictions.

— AFP



A staff member spraying disinfectant at a theatre as it prepares to reopen in Yantai in China’s eastern Shandong province. — AFP

Spraying disinfectants harmful: WHO

GENEVA: Spraying disinfectant on the streets, as practised in some countries, does not eliminate the new coronavirus and even poses a health risk, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Saturday. In a document on cleaning and disinfecting surfaces as part of the response to the virus, the WHO says spraying can be ineffective.

“Spraying or fumigation of outdoor spaces, such as streets or marketplaces, is... not recommended to kill the COVID-19 virus or other

pathogens because disinfectant is inactivated by dirt and debris”, explains the WHO. “Even in the absence of organic matter, chemical spraying is unlikely to adequately cover all surfaces for the duration of the required contact time needed to inactivate pathogens”.

The WHO said that streets and pavements are not considered as “reservoirs of infection” of COVID-19, adding that spraying disinfectants, even outside, can be “dangerous for human health”.

The document also stresses that spraying individuals with disinfectants is “not recommended under any circumstances”.

“This could be physically and psychologically harmful and would not reduce an infected person’s ability to spread the virus through droplets or contact”, said the document.

Spraying chlorine or other toxic chemicals on people can cause eye and skin irritation, bronchospasm and gastrointestinal effects, it adds. — AFP

INDIA EXTENDS LOCKDOWN UNTIL END OF MAY

NEW DELHI: India extended its coronavirus lockdown to the end of May on Sunday as it reported its biggest single-day jump in cases, but said some sectors would be permitted to open up as its economy takes a hammering.

The lockdown affecting 1.3 billion people — the world’s largest — has been in force since late March and has been devastating for India’s poor, with millions of migrant workers

losing their jobs. “Lockdown measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 will continue for a period of up to (May 31)”, the Home Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

Schools, places of worship, shopping malls, cinemas and gyms must remain closed, the ministry said, adding bans on large gatherings for religious and sporting events would also be extended.

— AFP

A black swan in teaching

DR KHALFAN HAMED AL HARRASI

With COVID-19 aggressively trying to colonise every part of our environment, teaching and learning have gone mostly online. How ready are we for this black swan effect? What is the impact of this sudden, forced, and experimental shift from residential learning to emergency remote teaching (ERT) on the quality of teaching, quality of learning, and on the attitudes of students and teachers towards online education?

“Every faculty member is going to be delivering education online. Every student is going to be receiving education online. And the resistance to online education is going to go away as a practical matter,” said James Bradley at Texas’s Trinity University. We could argue that the insufficient and compressed time may result in substandard and flawed outcomes, triggering resentment, skepticism, distrust, and negative attitudes towards online education. The matter then boils down to whether the experience was horrendously boring and painful or it was intellectually engaging and rewarding.

For many institutions, the abrupt migration to online teaching and the unprecedented mandatory immersion required massive preparations and arrangements for education to maintain high quality virtual courses than simple upload of learning materials that learners can view until they slip into a coma (pun intended).

In an interview with Professor Ahmed al Rawahi, Chancellor of University of Nizwa, he assured that “at University of Nizwa (UofN), we have provided the orientation and offered daily training and support to faculty, staff, and students to ensure and maximise the qual-

ity of ERT by meaningfully integrating various types of content (discussions, debates, forums), interaction platforms (the university’s online learning systems such as Eduwave and Moodle, supplemented by the free online available applications), and modes of delivery (synchronous, asynchronous, blended), continuous monitoring and evaluation, fair assessment of learning. Thus, ERT at UofN has materialised in a rewarding and efficacious educational experience for students and faculty”.

Attempting to seal the misconception and low quality, Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) should address both the cognitive and socio-psychological aspect of the teaching-learning process, characterised by interactive and collaborative learning. Variety and flexibility do not equate with leniency and suboptimal standards. Teachers will have to make sure that learners have options of similar validity and reliability in terms of content, interaction modes and platforms, and assessment instruments.

The most controversial part of the ERT, and online education in general, is the reliability of assessment of learning. Has the learner answered the task themselves or has someone helped? Without going into details about the possibility of synchronous online and live quizzes and exams, with online remote technology-enabled invigilation mechanisms, ERT could implement other more flexible types of assessment, such as open-book exam, comprehensive assignments, and open-ended quizzes.

As coronavirus shakes up conventional teaching and learning, ERT will emerge as a catalyst for future robust online education.

The author is Assistant Professor — Head of Essential Skills Unit at University of Nizwa



The nightmare goes on!



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI
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Life is full of challenges and battles. Among them are the pandemics, which usually occur on a scale that crosses international boundaries, affecting a large number of people. Over the past centuries, the world has witnessed different diseases and pandemics. The recent one before COVID-19 being SARS and Ebola.

The number of coronavirus infections worldwide is terribly increasing everyday if not every single minute! Due to the rapid spread of coronavirus, families and individuals are living in moments of stress and panic. They are all experiencing a real horror! The fact that the world is yet to find a vaccine is making it even worse. So scary how this health outbreak aggressively attacking the whole world so fast.

Countries are busy sparing no effort to combat coronavirus and protect its people. In the local front, The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health are leaving no stone unturned to combat the spread of coronavirus. Protecting citizens and residents come as a top priority for the government represented by different bodies.

With the close control of the infection cases, the number of registered

cases in the Sultanate is rapidly increasing. Unfortunately, the daily number has reached three digits already! As one hand does not clap, the government’s burden is our responsibility too.

In a bid to win the battle against coronavirus, we should all join forces with the government and adhere to all the instructions and precautionary measures. Despite the instructions of staying home unless for extreme necessity, unfortunately there are people giving a cold shoulder to government’s directions. I just wonder how dare they risk their health and safety, going out unnecessarily for shopping, going for a walk outdoor and frequently getting together. I believe there is a need for serious punishments to prevent this kind of reckless behaviour.

With the ongoing worldwide struggle of this coronavirus, it seems the world has become ill-prepared to respond to the strong attack of the public-health threatening emergency. Many countries are under threat today of the rapid spread of the virus and struggling to fight back. All are working on different pandemic preparedness plans. They are all on high alert for any unexpected outcomes or emergencies!

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

FEATURES

Biking safely in the time of COVID-19

MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

While the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread, and people are locked down at homes to remain safe, many people especially athletes are finding an avenue so that they still can remain active and exercise. A noticeable occurrence all over the country, bikers had been out and about which made some wonder whether doing such activity is safe not only to the bikers but the community at large. Is it possible for the bikers to do the thing they love but remain safe?

Oman Observer reached out to Naji al Ghailani, deputy team leader of Sur cycling club, who assured that biking is safe as long as a person is adhering to social distancing while doing the activity.

"It is safe most especially when you bike alone. The risk is only high when people ride in groups and if someone sneezes or coughs while doing it in a group. The drop-lets of a sneeze can get onto objects that people touch, and then people touch their faces," Naji shared.

"The best plan for riding

right now is to go out and ride solo and enjoy the outdoors, in noncrowded areas. When you know that the routes are less crowded, it might be good to go out at that time," he suggested.

"Our team, for instance, always adheres to the laws that are in the interest of society. Physical distancing is an essential part of keeping the pandemic at bay. We encourage bikers to maintain their health and to avoid group cycling as usual," Naji said.

For Naji's team, he is most proud that group members are all experienced and are aware of safety procedures. While their group adheres to safety precautions of the relevant ministries they, however, worry for other riders who do not comply.

"We find it disturbing when we see some new riders in the field who are not committed to the safety rules imposed by the country. Since the lockdown started, the number of bikers are increasing. It got worse in Ramadhan as people are trying to go out of houses and also trying to lose weight after having their Iftar," he said.

"If the safety guidelines are followed in the right way, every biker could enjoy the ride and stay safe at the same time," he said.

The Royal Oman Police has urged people to follow the safety regulation to ensure a better outcome of the quarantine. According to the Traffic Law, bicycles are allowed to be used on the right side of the road, and on roads that speed is limited to 60 km per hour. The safety helmet and the reflective phosphorous sweater must be worn. The bike should be equipped with front and backlights that allow road users to easily detect. The bike must be equipped with brakes so that the driver can stop for any emergency.

ROP is also recommending solo biking during these extraordinary circumstances.

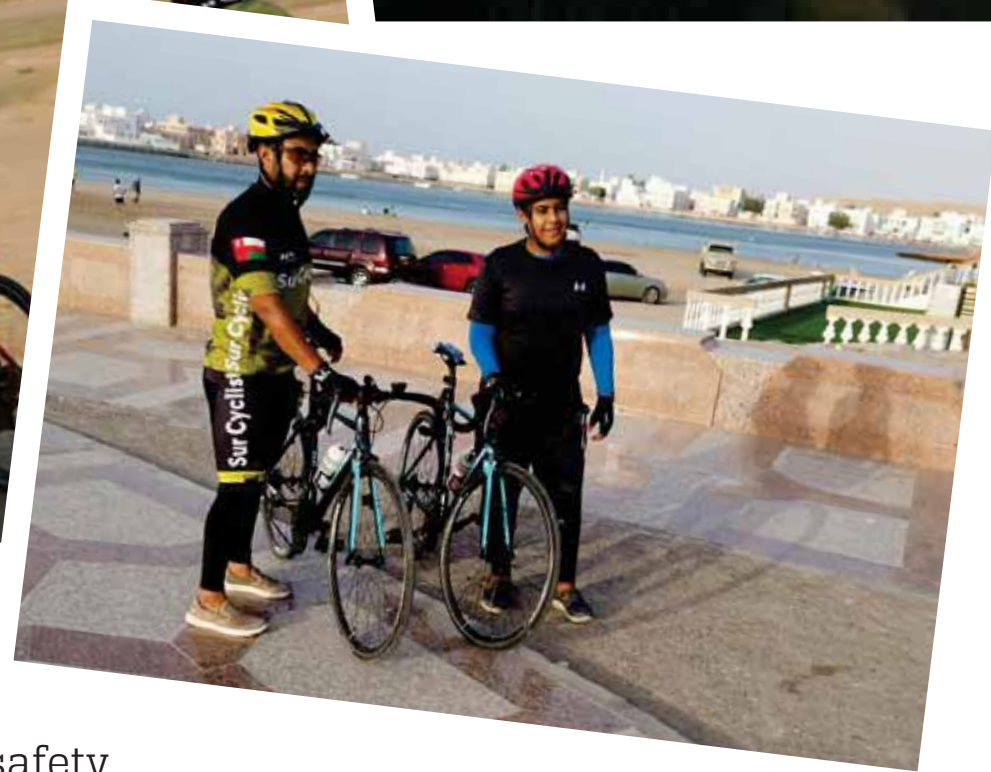
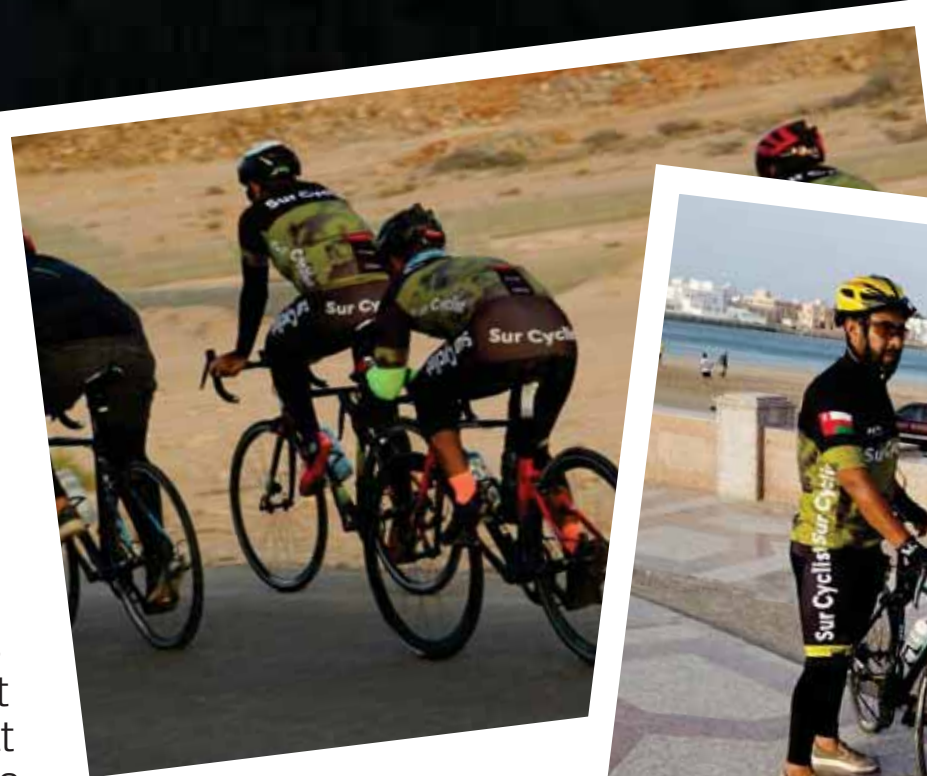
"What these regulations

should mean to athletes, and everyone, is that the situation we are in is very serious. And that we all need to consider the consequences of our actions in the community around us," Naji said.

For Dr. Lamya al Waeli, general practitioner, doing outdoor sports like biking, it is important for people to wear masks.

"Face coverings do two possible things: they contain the spread from the ill and prevent inhalation of the virus for the healthy," she said.

"The degree to which they achieve these things is debated. They are only effective if used properly. Most people are not trained to use masks properly. Even taking a mask on and off incorrectly can be risky and increase your hand-to-mouth exposure," the doctor added.





5 tips for parents struggling to manage home-schooling

MARY OOMMEN

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced an unprecedented shift to home-schooling on a scale never before seen in history. With little warning, parents around the world suddenly found themselves faced with the challenge of having to supervise home-schooling, while in many cases, having to also work from home. Trying to maintain a balance has been difficult, stressful and frustrating and many parents are agonizing over how to juggle it all without falling apart. The good news is that it can be managed. We spoke to some parents, teachers and psychologists and asked them for tips to help keep kids engaged and everyone sane. Here's what they had to say -

CREATE A SCHEDULE THAT WORKS FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY: Aashumi Manazhy, a teacher herself, says "home-schooling lacks the class room camaraderie so essential for kids, and parents are struggling to get children excited and motivated towards school work." Unfortunately, while children may consider this time to be similar to long school breaks or summer vacation, it is however, not exactly the same and this can be difficult for kids to understand. She suggests having a discussion with them and creating a schedule that factors in time for family bonding and relaxation. "Structure and routine are important and children will be able to manage better when they know that specific hours in

the day are marked for school."

SET UP DESIGNATED SPACE AND TIME FOR LEARNING: Experts suggest that it is a good idea to create a space for children to tackle their online classes and school assignments, free of as many distractions as possible. Susan Thomas, mother to a playful 5-year-old feels that, "online schooling may not work in the long term as it is a struggle to get kids to absorb concepts in a non-personal manner, especially as young kids are so easily distracted. It might help them to concentrate if you're able to set up a space away from their toys or other distractions." While this may not be feasible always, especially if there are adults trying to work from home too, it's definitely something to consider implementing if possible. Also, ensure that they have the necessary apps to be able to connect to their school via online platforms.

BE VIGILANT WHEN THE KIDS ARE ONLINE: Schools are now using platforms from Microsoft and Google along with conferencing apps like Zoom to deliver lessons. This means that kids are spending more time online than ever before. It is very important for parents to be vigilant when kids are online as there is an increased risk of them being exposed to potentially harmful content. Parental controls are a discreet and effective way of ensuring that children don't get sucked into the dark side of the internet whether its websites with inappropriate content or malware, bullying and abuse and the ever-present stranger danger. This would also be a good time to talk to the children about online safety.

ENGAGE WITH THE SCHOOL AND TEACHERS ACTIVELY: Schools have had to quickly change the way knowledge is delivered and it hasn't been easy. Teachers are going the extra mile and working harder than ever before. Smitha James, a senior teacher at Indian School Muscat said, "Trying to adapt everything I'd be doing in a physical classroom to an online format, keeping children engaged during sessions, handling an enormous amount of communication with both parents and the school administration and the added stress of managing home without any help during the pandemic has been difficult and exhausting." She has however, stepped up to the challenge and spends many hours creating presentations that she hopes will help children understand complex mathematical concepts in simple ways. "As teachers, we well understand the stress that parents might be facing and we are doing our bit to ease the situation. This is a difficult time for all and we would like to assure parents that we are always there to help."

BUILD IN TIME FOR FUN AND SELF-CARE: Dr. Benny Varghese Paduvan, a psychologist and counsellor, says, "it is important to keep time aside for physical and creative activity, and leisure time with family. Badgering your child to study could prove counter-productive. If they can't get it done, don't stress. It's not worth it. We are all stressed enough as it is. Turn on an exercise or dance video, do something fun and creative. Encourage healthy communication and listen to what your kids have to say. Most importantly, focus on your relationship with your child above all else, and things will work just fine."

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PANDEMIC THREATENS PERFORMANCE OF OMANI LISTED FIRMS

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT:Low oil prices coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic are beginning to weigh on the performance of Oman's publicly listed



FOREBODINGS: Publicly traded firms operating in the banking, leasing, insurance and manufacturing sectors, forecast difficult times ahead as the pandemic rages on into the second quarter

companies, albeit to varying degrees, with some sectors in particular bracing for significant impacts to revenues and profitability in the second quarter of 2020 and beyond.

TURN TO PAGE 13



OMAN UNITED INSURANCE CO. SAOG

P. O. Box 1522, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman - Tel: 24477300, Fax: 24477323, E-mail: info@omanutd.com - www.omanutd.com - C.R. No.: 1/23725/0

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman United Insurance Company SAOG, I have the pleasure to present to you the Un-Audited Financial Statements of the company for the Three months' period ending on 31 March 2020.

Insurance operations and underwriting results:

As for insurance operations, the Gross premium income of all insurance branches reached to OMR10.03 million compared to OMR 10.87 million in the same corresponding period of the year 2019 registering a decrease of 7.7%.

The total underwriting profits (before administrative expenses) amounted to OMR 1.88 million compared to Underwriting profits of OMR 2.01 million in the corresponding period last year registering a decrease of 6.7%.

Investment income:

The negative performance of the MSM index continued in the first quarter of the year 2020 due to the exceptional circumstances surrounding the whole world because of Coronavirus -Covid-19, which led to many pressures and negative impact on the economies of all countries and led to lower oil prices. In addition, MSM30 Index slumped down also because of dividends distribution. Considering all the above, the MSM30 index fell to its lowest level in fifteen years and lowered by 13.4% during this quarter, to close at 3448.29 points, compared to 3983.66 points as at 31/12/2019. Up to this effect, the company was able to achieve a net investment income of OMR 793 Thousand as against investment loss of (1.28) million OMR in the corresponding period last year registering a growth rate of 162.2%. The adopted investment strategy of the company succeeded in avoiding the volatility risk in the prices of the stock markets by turning towards fixed-income investments.

Net profit:

The company's net profit amounted to OMR 1.14 million against a net loss of (RO 607) thousand in the corresponding period last year, registering a growth of 287.5%, and then the earnings per share amounted to 11 Bzs versus a loss per share of (6) Bzs per share for the same period in the previous year. It is worth noting that the net asset value per share amounted to 272 Bzs compared to 250 Bzs in the same period of last year

with a growth rate of 8.7% (Thus despite the dividends distribution to shareholders during the year of RO 3.0 million).

Business risks:

Honorable shareholders: As you know, insurance business is exposed to natural and other risks that are governed by fate and destiny, and on the other hand, the performance of the investment portfolio is also related to the performance of the stock markets and the prevailing economic and political conditions, which they also have their own risks.

However, the management has been exerting its utmost efforts by adopting a conservative risk management mechanism that mitigates the effects of the risks related to the activity.

Future vision:

The company's management always seeks to find other sources of income, so the company's management is looking for new products and reviewing the shares of its insurance products.

Acknowledgement:

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the shareholders, our loyal customers, reinsurers and employees. Our sincere thanks and appreciation extended to Capital Market Authority for their tremendous support in regulating and developing the local insurance sector and for their assistance, which has led to the smooth functioning of its operations.

Finally, our sincere thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimur and to the Government of the Sultanate. We all pray to Almighty Allah to shower His Majesty with blessings, keep him in good health and give him long life.

Thank You and Kindest Regards

Salim Bin Nassir Al Busaidi
Chairman
May / 2020

UNAUDITED BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 31st MARCH 2020

	31st March 2020	31st March 2019	31st Dec. 2019
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, furniture and equipments	1,536,348	1,468,903	1,606,480
Investment Property - Land & Buildings	2,197,673	2,271,320	2,215,979
Available-for-sale investments	1,485,074	2,786,495	1,655,444
Deposits	41,150,000	34,200,000	43,150,000
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	6,870,000	8,620,000	7,918,000
Total Non-Current assets	53,239,095	49,346,718	56,545,903
Current assets			
Financial assets at fair value through income	6,536,839	8,384,299	6,509,162
Insurance & other receivables	12,470,303	10,529,113	7,798,841
Deposits	6,876,253	10,575,392	7,886,505
Cash & Cash equivalents	2,476,853	2,702,389	474,973
Reinsurance Contracts	30,932,465	27,763,078	27,005,880
Total current assets	59,292,713	59,954,271	49,675,361
Total assets	112,531,808	109,300,989	106,221,264
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
Share Premium	871,519	871,519	871,519
Retained earnings	2,782,513	633,622	4,644,868
Legal reserve	3,333,334	3,333,334	3,333,334
Contingency reserve	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
General reserve	100,000	100,000	100,000
Fair value reserve	134,371	100,563	304,739
Total capital and reserves	27,221,737	25,039,038	29,254,460
Non-current liabilities			
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	8,370,000	10,500,000	9,573,000
Employees' end of service benefits	894,882	850,012	892,029
Deferred tax liability	96,042	58,099	96,042
Total Non-current liabilities	9,360,924	11,408,111	10,561,071
Current liabilities			
Insurance Contracts	56,421,544	54,973,822	51,420,707
Trade and other payables	19,270,847	17,561,215	13,963,436
Provision for Income Tax	256,756	318,803	1,021,590
Total current liabilities	75,949,147	72,853,840	66,405,733
Total liabilities	85,310,071	84,261,951	76,966,804
Total equity and liabilities	112,531,808	109,300,989	106,221,264
Net asset per share	0.272	0.250	0.293

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01-01-2020 TO 31-03-2020

	31-3-2020	31-3-2019
Income		
Gross Written Premiums	10,032,122	10,873,403
Net underwriting result	1,875,486	2,009,327
Investment income - net	634,608	(1,424,340)
Other operating income	158,414	148,736
Total Income	2,668,508	733,723
General and administration expenses	(1,311,975)	(1,073,771)
Operating Profit before taxation	1,356,533	(340,048)
Taxation	(218,888)	(266,805)
Net profit for the period	1,137,645	(606,853)
Other comprehensive income:		
Available for sale investments fair value gain/(loss)	(170,368)	311,302
Total comprehensive income for the period	967,277	(295,551)
Earnings Per Share	0.011	(0.006)

SALIM BIN NASSIR AL BUSAIDI
CHAIRMAN

NASSIR BIN SALIM AL BUSAIDI
CHIEF MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVE

	Location	Telephone	Fax
BRANCHES	Head Office	2447 7300	2447 7323
	Darsait	2470 3991	2479 6327
	Al Qurum	2456 2105	2456 2074
	Barka	2688 6687	2688 6698
	Buraimi	2565 0105	2565 0096
	Ibra	2557 2386	2557 2387
	Ibri	2569 2386	2569 1840
	Nizwa	2541 0330	2541 2392
	Salalah	2329 5040	2329 8405
	Seeb	2442 1771	2442 1770
	Sohar	2684 1533	2684 0016
	Sur	2554 3229	2554 2454
Bidaya	2670 9545	2670 9548	

Pandemic threatens performance of Omani listed firms

FROM PAGE 12

According to analysis compiled by Ubhar Capital (U-Capital), a leading Omani asset management and brokerage services firm, listed firms operating in the banking, leasing, insurance and manufacturing sectors, among other economic segments, are predicting difficult times ahead as the pandemic rages on into the second quarter. U-Capital's analysis was based on the financial reports of MSM listed companies for Q1 2020.

Bank Muscat, the Sultanate's biggest lender, warned that in response to the situation, it has "taken certain views in terms of credit provisions which affected the results of the quarter". The bank has put in place specific business continuity plans and those plans were activated and enhanced

as situation progressed, it noted.

Sohar International noted an increase in net impairment charge and other credit risk provisions for Q1 2020. "Increase in credit provisions includes an element of management overlay in response to expected credit deterioration due to economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices. Significant uncertainty exists in relation to potential credit impairments," it said.

Leasing firms said they anticipated significant hardships ahead. Requests for delays in the payment of loans instalments over the next six months will impact cash flows, warned Al Omaniya Financial Services. "Expected delinquencies due to reduced cash flow at the individual and corporate borrower's level and liquidation of

major contracting companies may reduce the net margins and result in dilution of the NPA coverage," it further cautioned.

National Finance pointed out that the projected lower levels of credit offtake combined with increased interest costs would make it "challenging to sustain current profitability levels". United Finance noted: "Market liquidity has tightened triggering higher interest rates resulting in borrowing costs moving up. The market continued to witness delays in settlement of contractual dues triggering an increase in delinquencies."

Listed insurance firms warned that the pandemic was beginning to weigh on their operations, particularly the motor and medical insurance businesses.

"Due to restrictions in banks and financial institutions, retail loans had come down and hence bancassurance and credit life portfolio had a negative growth," reported Arabian Falcon Insurance.

Muscat Insurance said it was "facing an exceptional situation" due to the pandemic. "The Board of Directors has instructed management to change the business plan in line with the efforts made to limit the developments" resulting from the pandemic, it added.

Marking the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day Omantel builds the smart future of Oman

Muscat: 16th May 2020: Decades back when Oman had first embarked on its development journey, heavy trucks loaded with tons of construction materials journeyed around the country to transform the nation into a modern country.

Today, the scene has changed dramatically as the modern world lies beneath the network and cables that transmit data, and the innovative ICT solutions that reshape our lives to become smarter.

As the nation's first and leading telecom provider, Omantel has long envisioned an entirely connected society, and the company has made great strides in its primary role of connecting people with each other and to the world through a robust nation-wide network and an extensive international submarine network linking different parts of the globe. To build up on this role, Omantel has been proactive in taking the necessary steps to establish a dedicated ICT unit since 2016 offering digital transforming solutions in ways that serve the country's vision and its commitments to the global sustainable development agenda.

In September 2015, Oman was among the world's nations at the UN Summit to be recognized for adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), becoming one



of the member states that agreed upon devoting all efforts to attain these goals. Accordingly, Omantel has been supporting the government's efforts through various offerings and partnerships.

Commenting on this occasion, Baha Mohammed Ridha Al Lawati Vice President of Enterprise Business Unit said "As the world celebrates the Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD 2020) under the theme "Connect 2030: ICTs for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)", we would like to strengthen our commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals especially to those that are directly influenced by our business and to those that represent strong contribution to the UN 2030's Agenda and to Oman's 2040 strategic direction".

"Being the national integrated telecom

services provider, Omantel stands proud of its contribution to the achievements of UN's Sustainable Development Goals. In 2014, we set our sustainability framework and objectives which included digital inclusion as one of the three key pillars of the framework. We are proud to have reached unprecedented combined broadband coverage rate of more than 94% using different technologies (fixed , mobile and 5G network)." Al Lawati added.

Omantel contributions to United Nations SDG covered eight goals that are directly related to Omantel business and are among the national priorities for Oman such as education, learning, scientific research and national capabilities, wellbeing and social protection, economic diversification and fiscal sustainability, private sector investment and international cooperation in addition to development of governorates and sustainable cities.

Apart from its core role as the telecom partner of choice for key development projects in the country, Omantel carried out several initiatives to further its contribution to sustainable development goals and national priorities. Among these initiatives were the launch of "Virtual Clinics" enabling patients to communicate with their doctors remotely, "Education as a Service" for schools and educational institutions offering a technology platform for collaboration, "OMREN" project with The Research Council to build a research and education network connecting local universities and colleges with main global educational research networks, "Smart Tracking Solutions" for school buses for



spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its adverse effects, Omantel provided G-Suite for Education to Ministry of Education during the schools closure time as a result of COVID-19, free educational websites surfing, free video conferencing and collaboration applications such as Cisco Webex, Microsoft Teams and Igitmati and "3D Ambulance" initiative using the already available 3D printing capabilities to produce part of the required medical equipment for the Ministry of Health.

The launch of Oman's first 5G network by Omantel last December marked a historical moment for Oman. This network will provide ultra-fast access (up to 1 Gigabit) to thousands of customers in different parts of the country and will enable the adoption of new technologies on a wider scale such as big data, artificial intelligence, smart cities, blockchain and fintech solutions.

Omantel is the Sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment. Today, Omantel is working to achieve the highest level of customers' satisfaction as the most reliable and wide national network.

Recently and to support the efforts of Government authorities combating the

Ministry of Education and International School of Choueifat, "Big Data" solutions through Omantel's first of its kind marketing platform in the region "TASIL" which was also used during emergency situation when Mekunu cyclone threatened the lives of thousands of people in Oman, "Smart City initiatives in Al Mouj, KOM, Muscat, Sohar and Duqm in addition to "Office out of the Box" end-to-end solution for small and medium businesses.



BUSINESS

GLASSPOINT SOLAR LIQUIDATION: PDO REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO RENEWABLES

AMBITIOUS PLANS:

'PDO is fully equipped to operate the (Miraah) solar facilities to its full potential and remains firmly committed to renewable energy and its ongoing transition to a fully-fledged energy company'

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the Sultanate's leading oil and gas producer, has vowed to stay the course in the pursuit of its ambitious renewable energy objectives, notwithstanding the announcement by key technology partner GlassPoint Solar to go into liquidation – a casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A statement by the majority state-owned energy firm acknowledged that the US-based technology startup – billed as a pioneer in the use of solar energy for steam generation in heavy oil production – was facing liquidation.

California-headquartered GlassPoint Solar is a technology partner in the development of PDO's Miraah project – a giant 1,021 MW solar farm currently in an advanced stage of implementation at the Amal field in the south of the Sultanate. Construction on the landmark project began in October 2015 with part of the vast scheme already in operation. At full capacity, it will feature a total of 36 glasshouse modules, covering an area of more than 360 football pitches.

"We regret that GlassPoint Solar Inc has gone into liquidation at a time of considerable global business distress and uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic," said PDO in a statement. "PDO is proud of the flagship Miraah project delivered using GlassPoint technology in our Amal solar steam operations. PDO is fully equipped to operate the solar facilities to its full potential and remains firmly committed to renewable energy and its ongoing transition to a fully-fledged energy company," it noted.

The State General Reserve Fund (SGRF), the largest sovereign wealth fund in Oman, is a key shareholder in GlassPoint Solar. So is Royal Dutch Shell.

In recent years, the Sultanate had emerged as a key focal point for GlassPoint Solar's Middle East operations. In addition to its important partnership with PDO, GlassPoint Solar



Low oil prices forced liquidation decision: SGRF

MUSCAT:Collapsing international energy prices led to the decision to liquidate GlassPoint Solar, the leading provider of solar energy solutions to the global oil and gas industry, according to the State General Reserve Fund (SGRF), the largest sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman with a 31 per cent stake in the US-based technology firm.

In a statement issued on Saturday night, the Omani wealth fund revealed that shareholders and investors decided against pumping additional funds into California-headquartered GlassPoint Solar in light of the steep decline in oil prices and the uncertain outlook surrounding the energy sector.

The SGRF is among 12 international companies and investment funds that are shareholders in GlassPoint Solar. The list includes energy supermajor Shell.

Efforts are now underway to secure suitable alternative employment for Omanis made redundant by the decision to liquidate the company, said the statement.

It noted that GlassPoint Solar's steam generation technology rep-

تبنى مستقبلا مستداما للعمان
Building a sustainable future for Oman

State General Reserve Fund
Ministry of Finance



صندوق الاحتياطي العام للدولة
وزارة المالية

resents intellectual property of significant value. That knowhow has already been localized through the implementation of the 1 gigawatt Miraah solar thermal project through a partnership with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) at the latter's Amal heavy oil field.

The Miraah project, involving an investment of \$600 million, continues to make headway in its execution under PDO's supervision, it said. By harnessing solar energy based on GlassPoint's technology, PDO continues to benefit from substantial savings in natural gas, which is now available for industrial and other economic purposes, it pointed out.

The statement also underlined the potential for monetizing GlassPoint Solar's technological knowhow. Some international investors have evinced interest in acquiring the expertise, although these issues will have to be resolved by the liquidators, it added.

had also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Occidental Oman in November 2018 for the development of a world-scale solar thermal energy, exceeding 2 gigawatts in capacity, at the Mukhaizna heavy oil field in the Sultanate.

As the lead developer of the proposed project, GlassPoint had pledged to deploy solar technology to produce up to 100,000 barrels of solar steam per day. The solar steam would be purchased by Occidental and used to facilitate production of heavy oil.

Meethaq mBanking app provides easy banking access

MUSCAT: Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, in step with the bank's vision "To serve you better, everyday has enhanced its mobile banking application with several innovative features.

The state-of-the-art application is easy to download and provides a secure and convenient 24/7 access to their bank accounts.

The app is very useful to customers as it helps them maintain social distancing even as it offers easy access to many services without the need to visit a branch for conducting various banking transactions.

The mBanking app has a

number of novel features like 'Tap and Pay' - NFC based transfers which allows customers with Android smartphones to transfer funds from their Meethaq account to another by just tapping the phone with the phone of the beneficiary, thereby creating a unique experience for the customer. Meethaq customers can also use the app to pay their utility bills online as well as e-commerce.

The app makes it convenient for Islamic banking customers who can bank '24/7 anytime, anywhere'. Notably, the Meethaq app works on all mobile phones and is customised for



iPhones and Android with simple icons and menus.

The app is available in both English and Arabic. Downloading and using the Meethaq app is easy and instant as no separate registration or filling of form is required for existing mobile

banking customers of the bank. However, new customers require the Meethaq Islamic debit card number and PIN to register their app.

The app also encompasses a range of additional features to assist customers with their daily banking requirements and makes it easy for customers to access account balance, statements as well as transfer funds to their own accounts with Meethaq or to any other account inside or outside Oman.

Customers can also block their card or request for a cheque book through the app and avoid unnecessary trips to the branch.

Milipol Qatar expo to return in October

MUSCAT: At this complex and uncertain time, Milipol teams are keen to reiterate that they remain fully mobilised to assist and support security professionals in their common and future projects and continue to offer them a service and events that rise to Homeland Security & Civil Defence expectations.

In this context, Milipol Qatar, the leading international event for homeland security and civil defence, will be the perfect platform to overcome today's challenges. It will allow the exhibitors to present their latest innovations and will represent a real business opportunity.

The industry-only event, which is under the patronage of the Emir of Qatar, will be held at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) from October 26-28. Organised by Qatar's Ministry of Interior in partnership with Paris-based international event organiser Comexposium, acting on behalf of the GIE Milipol headed by Civipol, the consulting and service company of the French ministry of the Interior, the event is held under the authority of Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.

"Technology solutions are at the core of modern Middle East homeland security policies. Their role is central for planning informed policies, taking adequate decisions in an ever-complex environment and protecting security operators. As a matter of fact, technology solutions are the essential auxiliaries for planning and managing major international events such as the FIFA World Cup 2022," says Préfet Yann Jounot, CEO of Civipol and President of Milipol events. This has led to increasing numbers of high-tech suppliers featuring ever more prominently in the Milipol Qatar exhibitor line-up.

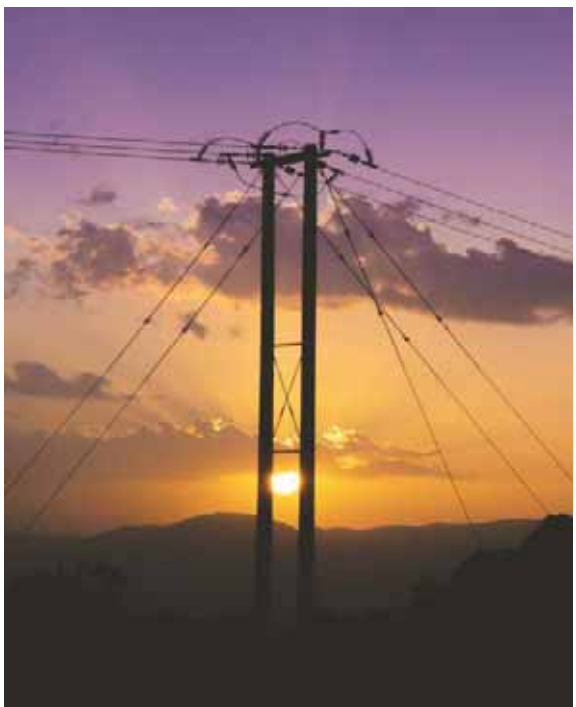


Mazoon Electricity supports social security families

MUSCAT: To support the Omani government's initiatives to mitigate the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, is part of Nama Group's visionary campaign 'For Lasting Prosperity'. The campaign, one of Nama Group's social sustainability initiatives, aims to help those who are directly affected by the pandemic, namely families of social security and SMEs.

As part of the campaign, Nama Group has established a fund with an initial contribution of RO 300,000 to equally cover electricity bill payments for families of social security and SMEs.

All donations from Nama Group and other donors will benefit the targeted categories of individuals and SMEs by covering their electricity bill payments. The campaign has been launched in partnership with the government sector (Ministry of Social Development, Riyadh and Al Raffd Fund) and Dar



Al Atta'a.

To benefit from the initiative, individuals and families of social security should register with Dar Al Atta'a and SMEs must register with Riyadh.

Interested individuals, communities, institutions, and companies from the government and private sectors may donate through the following donation portal: www.donate.om, then select "Dar Al Atta'a" and choose the category: Paying electricity bills for SMEs or Paying electricity bills for families of social security.

BUSINESS

Saudi Arabia sovereign fund seeks \$10bn margin



A money exchanger wears gloves as he counts Saudi riyal currency at a currency exchange shop in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund plans to borrow about \$10 billion by pledging some of its investment in SoftBank Group Corp's Vision Fund, Bloomberg News reported.

The report comes a day after the \$300 billion Public Investment Fund (PIF) disclosed its stakes in major US companies including Boeing, Facebook and Citigroup.

The wealth fund is in talks with investment banks regarding a margin loan backed by some of its investments in Vision Fund, the report said, citing sources.

— Reuters

CHINA URGES FIRMS TO BOOST FOOD OUTPUT

SINGAPORE/BEIJING:

China has asked trading firms and food processors to boost inventories of grains and oilseeds as a possible second wave of coronavirus cases and worsening infection rates elsewhere raise concerns about global supply lines.

Both state-run and private grain traders as well as food producers were urged to procure higher volumes of soybeans, soy-oil and corn during calls with China's Ministry of Commerce in recent days, three trade sources said.

"There is a possibility of a breakdown in supply pipelines due to the coronavirus infections.

For example, a port of origin or destination might shut down," said a senior trader at one of China's leading food processors, which was on a call last week with authorities to discuss purchases.

"They have advised us to increase stocks, keep supplies higher than we usually have. Things are not looking good in Brazil," he



Imported soybeans are transported at a port in Nantong, Jiangsu, China. — AFP

added, referring to China's main supplier of soybeans and a key meat exporter where the number of coronavirus cases has surpassed those in Spain and Italy.

A second source in China who was briefed by a person who attended one of the meetings said China's Ministry of Commerce met with some state companies on Tuesday to discuss how to guarantee supplies during the pandemic.

"One of the main concerns is how the epidemic

in South America might impact supplies (of beans) to China," the source said.

China's Ministry of Commerce did not respond to a fax seeking comments on plans to increase food stocks.

Brazilian shipments of soybeans were delayed in March and April due to a combination of heavy rains and reduced manpower as coronavirus containment measures took effect, leading to a plunge in Chinese soy inventories to record lows. — Reuters

India to privatise state-run companies

NEW DELHI: India said on Sunday it would privatise state-run companies in non-strategic sectors and stop fresh insolvency cases for a year, as the economy grapples with a coronavirus-related standstill.

A list of strategic sectors will also be announced in which only one to four public sector enterprises will remain, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman (**pictured**) said, as part of a slew of measures to kick-start the economy.

Indian officials said most of the privatisations would happen in the next fiscal year. India has been trying to divest parts of state-run companies in sectors ranging from aviation to power to fill its coffers, but poor



investor sentiment and limited demand have crippled its efforts so far.

The government's revenues have been hit hard as a nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of the

novel coronavirus has ground the economy to a halt.

The finances of Indian states have also been in disarray, barring a few well-managed ones, but the lock-

down of people and goods across Asia's third-largest economy has hit tax revenues from fuel to stamp duties. Indian states would be allowed to borrow 5 per cent of gross domestic product, up from 3 per cent earlier, Sitharaman said on Sunday.

The minister also said no fresh insolvency cases would be initiated for up to a year, in a move to avoid a wave of bankruptcies from companies hit by the coronavirus outbreak.

Debt incurred by companies due to the economic fallout of the virus outbreak would not be considered a default under the country's insolvency and bankruptcy code (IBC), she added.

— Reuters

CHICAGO: The immense global success of the documentary “The Last Dance” amid the coronavirus lockdown has boosted sales of collectibles related to NBA icon Michael Jordan, some of which are trading in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“Timing is everything”, says Jordan Geller, a collector who on Sunday will be richer by at least \$240,000 thanks to the sale at Sotheby’s of a pair of Air Jordan 1 sneakers — the first model created especially by Nike for Michael Jordan, who made his NBA debut in 1984.

The game-worn pair could set an auction record for sneakers set last year by Nike’s Moon Shoe, a pair of which sold for \$437,500.

The various Air Jordans have been popular with collectors for 30 years, along with jerseys and trading cards featuring Jordan — who won six NBA titles with the Chicago Bulls and is widely considered the greatest player in league history.

Many specialists

Jordan memorabilia soars in value amid ‘Last Dance’ nostalgia

consider Jordan a key figure in creating the market for collectible sneakers, with only non-sports personalities such as Kanye West or Travis Scott able to compete with him today.

But ESPN’s 10-part documentary “The Last Dance” which weaves details of Jordan’s entire career through the narrative of the Bulls’

pursuit of a sixth NBA title, has ramped up interest in all things Jordan.

“I think this is a game-changer”, Chris Ivy, Director of Sports Collectibles at Heritage Auctions, said of the documentary series that was carried globally by Netflix.

Ivy predicted the interest fueled by “The Last Dance” will continue.

‘ICONIC, MYTHICAL’

On the StockX shoe resale platform, the Air Jordan 1 Chicago model now sells for up to \$1,500, compared to \$900 in March. The first episode of “The Last Dance” aired on April 19.

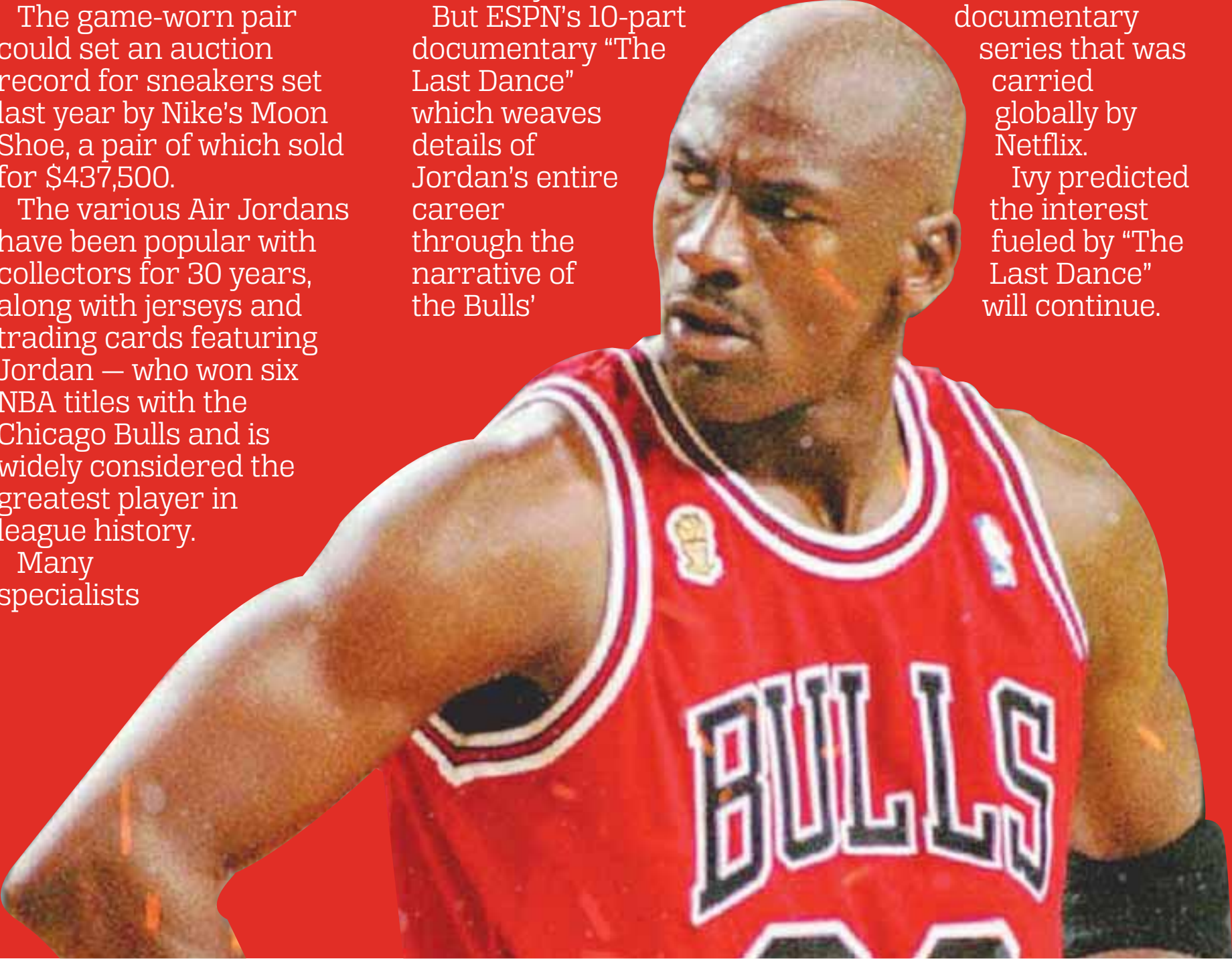
“That could be largely attributable to the documentary because that’s a sneaker that’s been on the market for years”, says StockX economist Jesse Einhorn.

Likewise, a 1986 Fleer collector’s card sold for \$96,000 in early May at Heritage, an item that was worth \$20,000 to \$30,000 at the beginning of the year.

“A lot of people who had a sports cards collections as a kid have been frantically going through their attics to find those boxes and those binders”, laughs Geoff Wilson, founder of the Sports Card Investor platform.

“I haven’t seen anything like this, where it’s well past his career”, Ivy said, noting Jordan retired in 2003.

— AFP



‘SUPERMARKET, PETROL STATION MORE DANGEROUS THAN FOOTBALL’

LONDON: Newcastle Manager Steve Bruce believes going to the supermarket or petrol station could pose a greater risk of coronavirus than a return to football given the strict measures put in place to protect players.

However, Bruce warned his squad could “fall down like a pack of cards” with injuries if they are not given enough preparation time to get back up to speed before matches restart.

The UK government gave the go ahead for sport behind closed doors from June 1 this week.

Newcastle last played on March 7 and Bruce believes his players will not be fit to return until the end of June.

The Premier League is reportedly hoping for a restart on June 12.

“You have to remember that they have had eight weeks off and that is probably the longest break some of these players have had in their careers”, he told the *Sunday Telegraph*.

— AFP



SPORTS

PARK TRIUMPHS IN GOLF'S RETURN TO ACTION IN SOUTH KOREA



SEOUL: Park Hyun-Kyung won the KLPGA Championship title on Sunday as women's golf in South Korea joined the country's professional baseball and soccer leagues to restart amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Park signed off with a second successive round of 67 to erase a three-shot deficit and triumph by one stroke in the tour's first event since December.

Overnight leader Lim Hee-Jeong (71) and Bae Seon-Woo (68) shared second place at 16-under 272 in the event played without spectators at the Lakewood Country Club in Yangju.

An emotional Park hugged her father, who was caddying for her, after the winning putt and was showered with petals from her peers who also did elbow bumps in what is likely to be a new normal in sports.

"I was so disappointed not to have been part of that winner's group last year", Park was quoted as saying by the Yonhap news agency.

"I am so happy that I got the first win out of the way in the first tournament of the year".

"I don't think the next win will come easily for me. I have to keep trying".

Park pocketed \$178,400 for her maiden KLPGA victory in her second year on the tour. It was an unusual experience for those at the Lakewood Country Club, which was open only to players, caddies, officials and media.

Caddies wore masks, players dined separately and fist and elbow bumps replaced post-round hugs and handshakes over the last four days.

Next month's men's Korea Open, co-sanctioned by the Asian Tour, was cancelled on Friday owing to the pandemic.

South Korea on Sunday reported five new domestic cases of coronavirus, raising fears of a fresh wave of contagion after weeks of nearly no new domestic cases.

— Reuters Athletics' Diamond League may only start in August and finish in October. Coe said competitions will look very different with athletes battling each other in empty stadiums.

"Meeting directors will have to take their own decisions about how to get athletes to competition in a safe and secure manner that doesn't risk infection", he said. — **AFP**

VETERAN HAMSKY MAKES RETIREMENT OFFICIAL

LOS ANGELES: Fifteen-year veteran Ales Hemsky officially retired from the NHL.

Hemsky, 36, was the No 13 overall pick in the 2001 NHL Draft by the Oilers and spent 10-plus seasons in Edmonton. He also played for the Ottawa Senators and Dallas Stars before ending his career with the Montreal Canadiens, playing in seven games in the 2017-18 season.

The NHL Alumni Association announced his retirement on Friday.

Hemsky, a right wing, played in 845 career games, 652 of them with Edmonton. He scored 572 career points (174 goals, 398 assists) in the regular season. He added 21 points (seven goals, 14 assists) in 43 career games in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

He won a bronze medal with the Czech Republic in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy. — **Reuters**



OMAN COACH DISSECTS VOLLEYBALL SCENE IN THE SULTANATE

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: Fewer domestic competitions, less number of games for the players, many stops during the season are some of the main challenges that are facing the development of volleyball in the Sultanate, according to Shihab Aldin Ahmed al Riyami.

The experienced national volleyball coach mentioned details of some of the obstacles in his recently released book titled “An Investigation into the Challenges of Volleyball in Oman”. Raising number of activities and events and coordinating with more clubs to take part in volleyball events will boost the technical performance domestically. “During the season, players must continue to train between games to maintain or over enhance their conditioning and skill level” (Louise, 2007, p.192).” Coach Al Riyami said.

Since its establishment in 1985, OVA conducted many volleyball activities. As many as 12 clubs approximately are taking part in volleyball events each year. “The current situation for the clubs and sports marketing in Oman is unsatisfactory because several clubs cannot utilise volleyball professionals in their



league because they lack sufficient financial support,” he mentioned in the book.

The international FIVB coach, addressed another issue in his book, “Using many foreign coaches in local clubs. It is usually assumed that foreign coaches have better experience than local trainers despite the high salary payments for foreign coaches. Club boards believe that

Oman has a lack of volleyball coaches that they hire foreign coaches to develop the players and team’s ability,” he explained.

Coach Shihab Aldin Ahmed al Riyami recommended that development of coaching education system should be treated as top priority with the OVA along with other government related stakeholders to raise number of qualified coaches.

There is a lack of domestic coaches required for high profile forums to enhance their capacities as the only existing department is in Sultan Qaboos University and is aimed at preparing scholars as sports teachers only. This is a result of the Omani volleyball system which possesses no background or information on the number of local trainers from their own homelands.

La Liga clubs given permission to expand into group training

MADRID: La Liga have told clubs they will be able to increase training to involve groups of up to 10 players on Monday as teams take another step towards the planned resumption of the season next month.

The Spanish government has announced protocol that will allow training sessions to be expanded by



all clubs, even those belonging to areas that are further behind in the country’s de-

escalation programme.

It means teams like Real Madrid, Barcelona and

Aletico Madrid will be able to train in groups of 10, a source at La Liga said, despite both Madrid and Catalonia remaining in ‘phase 0’ as two of Spain’s worst-hit regions by coronavirus.

Espanyol, Leganes, Getafe and Real Valladolid will also be given special permission to do training in larger groups. — AFP

SPORTS



BAYERN AIM TO SHAKE OFF RUST IN BERLIN

MUNICH: Bayern Munich restart their charge for an eighth straight Bundesliga title at Union Berlin on Sunday amid doubts the Bavarian giants will be able to last the distance after a two-month hiatus.

Hansi Flick's side hold a one-point lead at the top of the league heading into their trip to the German capital, which has been the scene of some impressive upsets thanks to promoted Union's form at their Alten Foersterei stadium.

Union have twice shocked the league leaders this season, beating Borussia Dortmund 3-1 in August and turning out 2-0 victors over Borussia Moenchengladbach

“

We don't know if the team can hold out over 90 minutes. We have trained well and played three matches of 20 minutes each last Sunday.

HANSI FLICK,
BAYERN MUNICH
MANAGER

three months later.

Now it's Bayern's turn.

Flick is unsure of his team's ability to play out a full match of professional football after having only received the go-ahead to resume full team training last

week.

“We don't know if the team can hold out over 90 minutes,” said Flick. “We have trained well and played three matches of 20 minutes each last Sunday.”

“They were played at a very high intensity, but we don't know clearly where we stand.

“We have to just deal with the situation.”

The Bundesliga is the first major league in Europe to return to action since the coronavirus brought football to a halt two months ago and has only come back with a host of strict health regulations, chief among them empty stands in what are usually passion-filled stadiums. — **AFP**