



109 new coronavirus cases; human traffickers slammed

MoI launches new online services • Fish, livestock markets closed to public

Kuwait backs call for talks on cutting oil output

DUBAI: Kuwait supports Saudi Arabia's call to renew talks on cutting oil supply due later this week and hopes for a successful outcome to stabilize the oil market. Kuwait's oil minister said on Sunday. OPEC and allies led by Russia, a group known as OPEC+, are due to hold a meeting on Thursday to discuss a new pact on curbing output and ending a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia which has prompted US President Donald Trump to intervene.



Khaled Al-Fadhel

Saudi Arabia has called for an emergency meeting between OPEC and its allies as well as other oil producers. "We totally support Saudi Arabia... and its current efforts in bringing back OPEC and non-OPEC countries to the table," Khaled Al-Fadhel

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- Coronavirus lands British PM in hospital (Page 16)
- Bronx zoo tiger tests positive for virus (Page 15)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry yesterday announced 109 new coronavirus cases, the largest number of cases in a single day, raising the total to 665. The new cases include 79 Indians, six Egyptians, six Iranians and six Bangladeshis. They also include eight Kuwaitis, three Pakistanis and one Filipino. No new deaths were reported. Four cases recovered yesterday, bringing the total number of recoveries to 103. There are 561 cases receiving treatment, of whom 20 are in the intensive care unit, seven in critical condition. Ministry spokesman Abdullah Al-Sanad said the number of cases resulting from contact with infected cases has grown rapidly in the past few days, and that many of them contracted the disease from unknown sources.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday blasted visa traders who exploit expat workers, describing them as "traffickers in human beings" and called on the

government to severely punish them. The speaker's call comes amid a steep rise in the number of coronavirus cases among expat workers and calls by lawmakers on the government to impose lockdowns on certain residential areas.

"The crisis has unveiled how ugly and brutal visa traders are," Ghanem said in a statement. "This is an opportunity for amending the demographic structure and there will be no other chances in the future," he said. "But, we in Kuwait fear God and we do not want to be unfair to the people," said the speaker, adding that crowding of workers in certain areas and leaving them wandering on the streets is the outcome of visa trading in the country.

"The government should hold these traffickers in humans responsible for the unfair treatment of expat workers. The government should make them pay for setting up camps or any other alternatives and later should send them to court," Ghanem stressed.

Continued on Page 16

Mon. 06/04/2020

Updates on COVID 19

Total cases	New cases	Active cases	Recovered	ICU	Deaths
665	109	561	103	20	1

Related to travel 8

5 cases of Kuwaiti nationals related to travel to United Kingdom.
2 cases of Kuwaiti nationals related to travel to Spain.
1 case of Kuwaiti national related to travel to U.S.A.

Cases in contact 101

79 cases of Indian residents, 3 cases of Pakistani residents, 6 cases of Bangladeshi residents, 6 cases of Egyptian residents, 6 case of Iranian resident, 1 case of Philipini resident (all in contact with confirmed cases under investigation.

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STAY SAFE STAY HOME



Minister defends Kuwait's charities, lauds their contributions in time of crisis

Economic package to include laws on rent, private sector labor act: Aqeel

Pandemic Diaries

Panic. Don't panic.

By Jamie Etheridge

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late last night we got the news that the interior minister will likely begin locking down certain areas in Kuwait, starting with Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Farwaniya and Mahboula. The news sent a shock of fear through me. Just the idea of quarantining an entire area, with hundreds of thousands of residents, is terrifying. Imagine how difficult this will be and how scary for all the residents living in those areas?

I'm a mom of two children and cannot fathom how terrifying this must be for every mother living there. How will she get regular access to food for her babies? How will the Interior ministry continue to protect and ensure law and order? What happens to people in these areas if they get sick? What about those who live in shared accommodations with many others? How long would the lockdown last?

I'm sure the government has a plan and answer to all these questions. So far, Kuwait's government and especially the ministry of health and the ministry of interior (as well as the ministry of commerce and ministry of education) have handled the pandemic crisis with unprecedented speed, professionalism and purposefulness. They have a very clear idea of what they need to do to protect us all and they are doing it.

The closures of schools, mosques, malls, shops, salons and the lockdowns are all unprecedented (or nearly so) and the government has kept things running smoothly in almost everything. I've heard so many people say Alhamdulillah we are here in Kuwait as opposed to many other places where the response and leadership has been grossly lacking.

Still, it is terrifying to think of area lockdowns, of the field hospital in Mishref filling up with sick patients, of a large number of deaths, of community transmission. Each day is a battle between panic. Don't panic. Panic. Don't panic. Not that panicking will help in any case.

I just keep reminding myself that I can help by staying home, by staying safe and by staying informed. The only way to gain control over a circumstance is to acknowledge what we can and cannot do, no matter how big or small our contribution. I cannot reverse this situation or make it go away. But I can slow and help stop the spread. Not going out means I'm not contracting the coronavirus, Insha'Allah and should I get it, not spreading it to others. So today, I'm not panicking and staying at home.

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: At a time when a number of charities have urged the Ministry of Social Affairs to defend them against those questioning their performance and hold them legally accountable on grounds that such criticism discourages both charities and donors, Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel stressed that on presiding the extraordinary Cabinet meeting, HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah thanked all charities and highly commended the role they play inside and outside Kuwait in this crisis. "HH the Amir's gratitude is the best message to everyone," she underlined.

Speaking during a meeting with the chairmen of charities and organizations participating in the 'Faz'at Al-Kuwait' campaign, Aqeel stressed that the campaign is exceptional and adds to the success Kuwait has so far achieved in dealing with the coronavirus crisis. Aqeel also commended charities for supporting government efforts by providing foodstuff and preparing and equipping quarantine and accommodation centers. "We still have a long way to go and the crisis will apparently last longer than expected. We do not know when it will end and we will be lucky if it ends by the end of the year," she underlined.

Aqeel stressed that periodic meetings are held to review remarks with the aim of preserving the efforts and funds raised and distributed over a long period and protect them from being wasted. She added that charities should focus and direct their activities inside Kuwait during this crisis in order to conserve their resources.

In addition, Aqeel stressed that government reports suggest that the COVID-19 crisis will be over in April or May, adding that measures imposed by the government aim at preventing crowding and direct contact and that the current shutdown will not last till the end of the crisis. "There will be other alternatives including working online from home," she added.

"International reports suggest that certain jobs will vanish and others will emerge once this disease dis-

appears. The nature of office work will change. No certain experiment has so far proved successful. We are still in the trial and error phase," she underlined, pointing out that so far, there is no treatment, and that once there is one, it will take long to get to the market.

Responding to a question about the economic effects of the crisis and free market prices, Aqeel stressed a free market has pros and cons, including rising inflation. "These concerns will be addressed in an economic package to be launched soon including laws on lease (rent) and private sector labor act, especially with the emergence of intentions to lay off some manpower," Aqeel explained, without providing further explanation.



Mariam Al-Aqeel

Imam sued

Ministry of Social Affairs recently filed a complaint with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs against an Imam who posted a social media video urging Kuwaitis not to donate to charities and accusing 90 percent of them of being 'thieves'. In this regard, under-secretary of the ministry of social affairs, Abdul Aziz Sho'aib contacted the awqaf ministry complaining about the Imam of Ibn Abi Al-Donia mosque in

Jaber Al-Ahmed area who had posted a video accusing charities of being thieves. "This is an abuse of charities and the government bodies supervising them. It is an insult to the staffs of the ministry's charity department and undermines charity efforts that had made Kuwait an international icon of charity," Sho'aib complained. Further, Sho'aib stressed that all charities operating in Kuwait are supervised by the ministry of social affairs and have accredited annual budgets that are regularly audited by the ministry and accredited auditors. Finally, Sho'aib urged the ministry of awqaf to take legal measures against the Imam.

“ We still have a long way to go ”

COVID-19 free people must quarantine

KUWAIT: Persons who leave mandatory quarantine or discharged from hospital because they were free of coronavirus should also stay in home quarantine for at least another 14 days, Kuwait Ministry of Health (MoH) said Sunday. Ministry's Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha said this decision stemmed from MoH's keenness to implement plans and strategies related to confrontation of coronavirus and prevention of its spread. He said the file of every person leaving mandatory quarantine or hospital should be sent to the public health services team in every health zone to make sure this person abided by the home quarantine. — KUNA

Woman arrested for attacking policeman

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior said Sunday a woman was arrested for attacking a policeman with a sharp object when police forces attempted to stop her for driving in the wrong side of the road during curfew in Mubarak Al-Kabeer. Policemen manning a checkpoint in Mubarak Al-Kabeer during the partial curfew attempted to stop a car that was coming on the wrong side of the road, the ministry said in a statement. The curfew is between 5:00 pm and 4:00 am. The car, it added, hit the police vehicle and then the female driver came out of the car and stabbed the policeman with a sharp object, inflicting an injury. The woman, whose name, age and nationality were disclosed, attacked the other servicemen and caused slight injuries to one of them, and one policeman was forced to fire in the air before she was subdued, it said. —KUNA

IN MY VIEW

Have mercy

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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Since the coronavirus crisis began, I noticed that all my neighbors keep to their apartments, while those who working at various health facilities around Kuwait only leave home to board their transport vehicles taking them to their workplaces. But last night I heard a knock at the door. I found two of my neighbors standing with a petition in their hands asking the landlord to consider easing arrangements for rent payment under the current circumstances, and of course I signed it without hesitation. I really felt very comfortable at the spirit of cooperation the residents had, because the benefit will be for all and not just the two standing at the door.

The instructions given by the health authorities must be followed by all to the letter, most important of which is staying at home. The authorities have issued several decisions including the consideration of the current break as official paid holiday, and this is something appreciated by expatriates who rely on their monthly salaries as the only source of income. But there are hundreds who work and are paid on a daily basis, who cannot earn a living unless they have a job to perform. These people live jointly to reduce the burden of rent and other expenses.

Companies with contracts with the oil sector employ hundreds of workers at all levels, and every morning I see about 10 buses with a capacity of 50 passengers each arrive every morning to take the workers to their workplaces. I wonder how these 500 workers are accommodated in apartments! What about social distancing? When the workers go to the field, they will mix with other workers who may be infected, as proven by recent discoveries in various locations in Kuwait.

There can be solutions like some co-ops have done, to use schools and sports clubs to house some workers to reduce their numbers in buildings and make sure they are coronavirus negative, and this in turn will prevent the spread of disease around the country. We must cooperate with each other and the government to place the disease in quarantine instead of it forcing us into all types of quarantines!

Back to the rent payment issue: I saw on social media a circular issued by a real estate company asking tenants to stay home. It added that they should continue paying the rent for the current month of April and upcoming months in order to avoid any legal consequences once the curfew is lifted. I hope this circular is fabricated and not true, as its wording is very strong and contrary to all initiatives taken by several companies and individual landlords.

To all property owners, I say: "Be merciful to those on earth, then Allah (God) will be merciful to you".

Final word: "Life is like a camera. Focus on what's important, capture the good times, and develop from the negative". Thank you.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 665 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to one death. With the exception of 20 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while 911 have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 103 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 561 people receiving treatment and 2,474 quarantined as of yesterday. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of people. Meanwhile, Kuwait requires all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center at Hall 6 to test people for possible infection.

Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew from 5:00 pm to 4:00 am until further notice. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed restaurants to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people.

Operating businesses

The following activities are allowed to operate outside of the curfew period between 5:00 am and 4:00 pm:

- 1- Various types of foodstuff and supplies stores and markets.
- 2- Pharmacies.
- 3- Various types of restaurants.
- 4- Cooking gas branches.

5- Co-ops' family needs branches.

Meanwhile, the following industrial and craft activities, which are licensed by the Public Authority for Industry (PAI), are allowed to open:

- 1- Food.
- 2- Petrochemicals.
- 3- Gases.
- 4- Plastic.
- 5- Cardboard and paper.

Precautions

All arrivals to Kuwait from all countries are to be placed under compulsory institutional quarantine for 14 days, during which the person is monitored, and prescribed health procedures are applied, the health ministry said. Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to April 9, with work resuming on April 12, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs); first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Amnesty

The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The

amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and are willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations will be allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

Special centers in Farwaniya were allocated to accommodate violators who finalize their papers pending departure. Male violators are received at Al-Muthanna primary school for boys, Farwaniya, block 1, street 122, while female violators are received at Farwaniya primary school for girls in Farwaniya, block 1, street 76. Violators are received from 8 am till 2 pm according to the following dates and nationalities: Philippines (April 1-5, 2020), Egypt (April 6-10), India (April 11-15), Bangladesh (April 16-20), Sri Lanka (April 21-25), other nationalities (April 26-30, 2020).

The Interior Ministry later opened two new locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh to receive residency violators from all nationalities: Female violators are received at Roufayda Al-Aslameya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naeem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

Hotlines

- The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.
- The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:
 - 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
 - 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
 - 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
 - 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
 - 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
 - 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)

- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a new medicine delivery service for people in Kuwait, which they can use to order medications to be delivered during curfew hours. The medications will be delivered within 72 hours after the order is submitted. To place an order, patients should send a WhatsApp to the numbers for the hospitals and medical centers as listed below. The patient should include their name, Civil ID number, hospital or clinic file number, mobile phone number and the medicine needed to the following numbers:

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
- Zain Hospital: 97552031
- NBK Hospital: 96931761
- Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
- Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
- Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
- Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
- KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Local

Assembly panel meets ministry officials to discuss e-learning

Education ministry to submit a work plan within a week

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The parliamentary culture and guidance affairs committee held a meeting on Sunday with Ministry of Education (MoE) officials to discuss e-learning in both private and public schools. In this regard, committee member MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said MoE promised to submit a work plan within a week after the private education department announced the optional use of e-learning platforms.

Dallal said the e-learning decision is legally effective since April 1 and that schools will not include assessment grades given before the suspension in the e-learning assessment process. "This would be wrong and legally contestable and questionable," he stressed, noting that this achieves equality amongst all students. Dallal said effective April 4, parents will have to sign a special form of approval to have their children study online.

Education Minister Dr Saud Al-Harbi had chaired the ministry's undersecretaries' council meeting Saturday morning to discuss a mechanism to implement the Cabinet's decision approving the resumption of the current school year (2019-2020) in foreign schools through e-learning. According to the ministerial decision issued in this regard, foreign private schools will be allowed to resume the 2019-2020 academic year using online and e-learning platforms, which will be optional subject to parents' approval, while parents who refuse will be allowed to have their children resume studies once schools reopen as

planned by the ministry on August 4 to undergo a 5-to 6-week course after signing a special affidavit.

In a bid to ensure effective control on schools, the ministry has prepared a special form for parents' approval to have their children resume studies online, according to decision number 14550/2020 issued by the assistant undersecretary for private education Abdul Mohsen Al-Huwailah regulating the study plan, means of assessment and tuition fees. The decision commits foreign private schools to prepare special plans to resume the 2019-2020 academic year online with clearly a defined curriculum, schedule, interactive online student-teacher tools and timetables showing students' daily and weekly tasks.

Optional e-learning in private schools



In addition, the decision includes the basic system schools will follow to ensure follow up and effective control of students' performance and details the assessment tools applied in each school in accordance to its educational system. Every school will also explain its 2020-2021 academic year schedule and timings, taking into consideration that the new academic year starts at a date following the period to be dedicated to completing the current school year for students who do not wish to study online.

The ministry also decided to adopt assessment methods for e-learning based on student-teacher interaction and communication, attendance, participation, homework assignments and students' commitment to doing them in view of the basic skills they acquire during the assessed period, after giving students a suitable grace period to do these tasks.

As far as tuition fee is concerned, the 2019-2020



KUWAIT: This photo released by the National Assembly's office on Sunday shows members of the parliamentary culture and guidance affairs committee meeting with Ministry of Education officials.

school year regulations set by the ministry include a condition banning collecting any fees for students' use of online learning and deferring the payment of the delayed fees until the distribution of certificates at the end of the school year - be that following the online courses or after the conclusion of the period dedicated to resuming the current school year studies. The decision also included a regulatory measure that guarantees the privacy of information and data transmitted and exchanged between the student and the school, and the prohibition of publishing anything

that might affect this privacy policy.

The education ministry had also ordered private schools, closed as a preventive measure to prevent spread of coronavirus among students and teachers, to pay salaries of their staff. The ministry said Law No. 6 of 2010 gave the ministry authority to take legal, financial and administrative measures if private schools failed to pay wages of their employees. The ministry's private education sector would take legal action against any school failing to pay wages of their employees, it said.

Kuwait reaping fruits of prudent monetary policies

KUWAIT: Kuwait is currently reaping benefits of prudent monetary policies that have been adopted since a decade ago, in face of current unprecedented crisis ripples of which extended to all corners of the world, Central Bank of Kuwait Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel has said. Basically, the present crisis is humanitarian, as coronavirus pandemic continues to take lives, however it has drastically affected demand and supply in various economic sectors, the CBK Governor indicated in a freshly-aired interview with Al-Arabiya television channel. At regional level, "we are fighting on two fronts," with the human race struggling to choose between saving lives or their livelihoods. Moreover, "We have witnessed drastic fall of oil prices at 65 percent since end of 2019," said Hashel as he analyzed some aspects of the issue.



Mohammad Al-Hashel

was expected in shadow of these circumstances." However, he indicated that although Kuwait lost a single degree in the latest assessment, its ranking in this respect remained relatively high. He attributed question to slow reforms and low oil prices amid lack of a consensus among producers on a new output ceiling, noting Kuwait could regain its former ranking once the oil issues have been tackled. About Kuwaiti's banks measures in face of the pandemic breakout, Hashel said the CBK, since eruption of the 2008 global financial crisis, has worked out protective measures, guiding the banks to boost their capitals, secure back-up emergency funds, in line with Basel-3 package of criteria that "we fully implemented in 2014 and 2015."

"We kept working and shrugging off complacency in good times," he said. Hashel added that due to the CBK well calculated policies, the banking sector currently "enjoys robust financial conditions mirrored in the Kuwaiti banks financial safety indices as solvency and liquidity, at rates higher than those internationally accredited, and this what we are benefiting from today in the face of the current crisis."

On the CBK measures to back up the economy and the banking sector, Hashel noted that the CBK had lowered discount rate to 1.5 percent, the lowest and historic fall. Moreover, the central bank slashed the Ribo interest, prices of the CBK intervention tools in the monetary fund, part of a chain of measures aimed at lowering borrowing costs and beefing up liquidity as well as maintaining the Kuwaiti dinar "attractiveness." —KUNA

Each of these dimensions in itself is a "grave shock," and now they have come together, Hashel said, also indicating at lack of sufficient information about the virus and its effects; thus the crisis impact on macro-economic conditions cannot be accurately measured, for now. Moreover, there have been no accurate assessment of efficacy for states' policies to cope with economic repercussions. "What awaits us in the future cannot be predicted," added Hashel, describing how the coronavirus crisis has resulted in a chain of multiple problems at various levels, namely in the economic, monetary and financial fields.

As to Standard and Poor's lowering of Kuwait sovereign rating, the governor commented, saying, "Such a matter

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KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah met Sunday with Egypt's Ambassador to Kuwait Tariq Al-Qouni to discuss bilateral relations between the two countries, as well as regional and international developments in light of efforts to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — KUNA

Local



KUWAIT: A combination of photos showing roadwork at the Fifth Ring Road. Reduced traffic as a result of the lockdown allowed the Ministry of Public Works to push forward roadwork and construction around Kuwait. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

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local spotlight

Food security



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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When the health crisis started almost three months ago with the spread of the coronavirus, Kuwait was clear about providing food for all citizens and expats, and I believe this was a source of relief in a small country like Kuwait with a population of approximately four million. The issue of food security is not new to Kuwait, as Kuwait was ranked first in the field of food security in the Arab region in 2014 and 2017. Kuwait has developed a state strategy and deserves to be at the forefront of countries in this important field. Achieving food security is represented in three sectors: Livestock, fish, and plant wealth. Each of these sectors has a role in achieving food security and preserving it. In fact, food security in Kuwait is not limited to securing basic food needs and requirements, but focusing on food safety, production, sustainability and enhancing food wealth.

So, when some rioters tried to create problems at the vegetable market a few days ago by stealing vegetables like onions to sell on the black market, the ministry of commerce intervened and mandated sales only through official outlets, such as cooperative societies, to curb such evil attempts during hard times like now. The livestock sector is under the management of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources. It is considered a major sector in Kuwait to provide the public with their needs of meat, poultry, eggs and milk. The Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company is the most successful local example of food security.

In 2018, local newspapers published reports that the Kuwaiti government has developed a strategic plan to develop and improve food security and the country's strategic stockpile. The plan was a precautionary process against political tension in the region, as Kuwait imports its food via safe transport lines that may be under threat in case of escalating tensions. I believe that the government's policy to provide an advanced level of food security has resulted in the country today reaching the first place in the field of food security in the Arab region and even some foreign countries, as we see long queues and shortages of food items in most countries. The food security index in Kuwait is based on three basic criteria: The availability of food, affordability and quality and safety standards.

This crisis we are experiencing these days confirms that Kuwait has taken adequate precautions to provide most of the materials that are required by the public, especially since the state provides the necessary foodstuffs and distributes it to citizens through the ration card, while most local markets have enough food items.

Food security in Kuwait is not limited to the issue of securing primary and secondary needs. It focuses on producing and promoting sustainable food wealth despite Kuwait's natural constraints - which include harsh climate, scarcity of arable land and low fertility. However, domestic production is good, but it needs more support by the government to develop agricultural technology.

Therefore, the support of Kuwaiti farmers is important, and they are now working to open their farms for everyone to buy their needs of fresh vegetables, which I see as a beautiful and patriotic action.

Local



KUWAIT: Shuwaikh Industrial, one of the busiest districts in Kuwait, has turned into a ghost town after the government closed down car repair shops as part of preventive measures to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh





Pope livestreams Palm Sunday mass due to COVID-19 tragedy

Ecuador city runs out of coffins amid COVID-19 crisis

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NEW YORK: A patient arrives to Wyckoff Hospital in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn in New York. The coronavirus death toll in New York state spiked to 4,159, the governor said, up from 3,565 a day prior. — AFP

US girds for 'Pearl Harbor moment'

Death toll creeping toward the grim milestone of 10,000

NEW YORK: US governors have appealed to the White House for a national strategy against the fast-spreading coronavirus, as deaths surged and health authorities warned the coming week could resemble a "Pearl Harbor moment." The US death toll was creeping toward the grim milestone of 10,000 as the pandemic's epicenter in New York racked up hundreds of lives lost a day and hospitals girded for an influx of new infected patients.

Anthony Fauci, the senior American scientist battling the pandemic stateside, warned of a looming "escalation," saying Americans should prepare for "a bad week." "I will not say we have it under control," Fauci told CBS Sunday. "That would be a false statement." US Surgeon General Jerome Adams sounded an even more dire alarm. "This is going to be the hardest and the saddest week of most Americans' lives, quite frankly," he told Fox News. "This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9-11 moment, only it's not going to be localized."

Most of the nation is under shelter-in-place orders, but nine states have yet to issue such regulations, while the federal government has declined to mandate anything on a national level. Adams noted that the nine states without orders were producing much of the US food supply. Still, he pleaded with



Coronavirus spreading very fast across US

state leaders to urge residents to stay home for at least the next seven to 10 days: "There is a light at the end of the tunnel if everyone does their part."

Sunday night the White House aimed to emphasize progress in the fight including plans to send hundreds of thousands of masks to counties in New York, but could not sugarcoat the difficult weeks ahead. "We all know that we have to reach a certain point, and that point is going to be a horrific point in terms of death," President Donald Trump said at his briefing.

Hitting a plateau?

The coronavirus death toll in hardest-hit New

York state rose to 4,159, Governor Andrew Cuomo said, up from 3,565 a day prior. It was the first time the day-over-day toll had dropped - on Saturday it hit a record 630 deaths in 24 hours - but Cuomo told journalists it was too early to tell whether that was a "blip." New York's peak could arrive over the next week, he said, though he cautioned it was unclear if the apex would be a point, followed quickly by a decline, or a lingering plateau.

The state has now reported 122,031 confirmed infections - roughly one-tenth the worldwide total. Cuomo said he aimed to shift patients away from already overburdened hospitals to others with more capacity and equipment. "I can't say to a hospital, I will send you all the supplies you need, all the vents you need. We don't have them," he said, referring to life-saving ventilator equipment.

"You are going to have to shift and deploy to different locations." The governor said rapid testing, still out-of-reach, was key to a "return to normalcy," while reiterating appeals for equipment including ventilators from other states as well as from the federal stockpile. Cuomo vowed to return the favor as the virus spreads elsewhere - New Jersey, Michigan and Louisiana are all emerging hotspots - saying that New York could offer a strategic blueprint.

'All hands on deck'

On the Sunday morning talk show circuit, other state governors voiced alarm that the Donald Trump administration has not offered a unified policy plan. "Not having a national strategy where there is one policy for the country as opposed to a patchwork based on whomever the governor is, is something that I think is creating a more porous situation where COVID-19 will go longer and more people will get sick," Michigan's Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer said on Fox News.

"We are not one another's enemy," she added. "The enemy is COVID-19. And it has to be all hands on deck, from the federal level, to the state level, to the local level." Throughout the weekend Trump stressed that the US - where infections have surpassed 330,000 - cannot remain economically shut down forever, and continued to leave it to the states to declare their own mitigation strategies and lockdown orders. Illinois' Democratic governor JB Pritzker skewered the Trump administration for not better preparing the nation, leaving the virus to slam the US as it has Europe and China. "If they had started in February building ventilators, getting ready for this pandemic, we would not have the problems that we have today, and frankly, very many fewer people would die," Pritzker told CNN. At his briefing the president later accused Pritzker of "always complaining." — AFP



ABIDJAN: A worker dressed in full body gear disinfects streets in Abidjan during a cleaning and disinfecting campaign, launched by Ivory Coast's Minister of Sanitation and Hygiene, as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

Crowd in Ivory Coast destroys virus test centre

ABIDJAN: Residents in a working-class district of the Ivory Coast city of Abidjan on Sunday destroyed a coronavirus testing centre that was under construction, police and health ministry officials said. Videos posted on social media, showed several dozen people dismantling the building, some of them shouting: "We don't want it!"

The incident happened in Yopougon district of the city of five million inhabitants, which is the country's commercial capital. Locals had demonstrated against the centre because they thought it was too close to their homes and right in the middle of a residential district, one police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity. But the building, which was still under construction, had never been intended as a treatment centre for virus patients-only as a testing centre, said a

health ministry official, who also asked not to be named.

This was the first violent incident connected to the COVID-19 outbreak in the country, which so far appears to have been relatively untouched by the virus, at least according to official figures. They put the number of cases at 261, with three deaths so far. Nevertheless, the authorities are trying to increase their capacity to treat the outbreak. President Alassane Ouattara declared a state of emergency on March 23. Abidjan has already been placed under quarantine, effectively cut off from the rest of the country, and a nationwide overnight curfew is in force.

Schools, churches and non-essential shops have been closed and gatherings have been banned. On Saturday, senior health officials recommended that people wear masks in public places to try to slow the spread of the virus. So far however, the government has not ordered a full lockdown. Last Tuesday, the government announced a 2.6-billion-euro plan (\$2.8 billion) to tackle the economic and social effects of the pandemic, which is forecast to halve the country's growth rate to 3.6 percent in 2020. — AFP

Locked-down India lights up to mark coronavirus fight

NEW DELHI: Twinkling flames from candles and traditional lamps lit up India's night sky Sunday in a nine-minute show to mark the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, which has left the vast nation in lockdown. Across major cities and towns in the world's second-most populous country of 1.3 billion people, many heeded the call of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to turn off their lights at 9:00 pm local time. Residents shouted "Hail mother India" and "go corona go". They cheered, clapped, and set off firecrackers and fireworks that shattered the quiet evening, in scenes reminiscent of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.

"Salute to the light of the lamp which brings auspiciousness, health and prosperity, which destroys negative feelings," Modi tweeted in Sanskrit. He shared photos of himself lighting a "diya" clay lamp. In a modern touch, some residents turned on the lights from their mobile phones. Modi on Friday had called on Indians to take part in the event to "defeat the deep darkness of the crisis by spreading the glory of light in all four direc-

tions". India has been under a strict lockdown since March 25, halting public transport and closing offices and shops apart from essential services. But the shutdown has badly hit rural migrant workers, leaving them jobless with hundreds of thousands trying to return to their villages, many on foot. Many others have been blocked from returning home. The government has set up tens of thousands of makeshift camps and feeding centers for 7.5 million people.

The confirmed number of new coronavirus cases in India has passed 3,500 with 83 deaths, the government said, although experts say wider testing is needed. The health ministry has blamed a recent jump in cases on a large religious gathering in the capital New Delhi in March that has been linked to more than 1,000 infections. "If the Nizamuddin incident (in Delhi) had not happened, then our case doubling rate which is currently 4.1 would have been 7.4 days," health ministry official Lav Agarwal told reporters on Sunday.

The ministry on Saturday issued an advisory for Indians to use homemade reusable face covers to "help in protecting the community at large". The government imposed a ban on the export of malaria treatment drug hydroxychloroquine, removing exemptions such as for fulfilling export obligations that it put in place several days ago. Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine to treat malaria have shown early promise against the COVID-19 illness in early studies in France and China. — AFP



NEW DELHI: Light candles are seen in a balcony to observe a nine-minute vigil called by India's Prime Minister in a show of unity and solidarity in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

International

Lebanon repatriates nationals in rare flights despite coronavirus

COVID-19 kills 18 nationwide; 527 people infected

BEIRUT: Lebanon has started repatriating nationals who were stranded abroad in its first flights in weeks since it closed its international airport to stem the novel coronavirus. Many Lebanese work abroad, in the Gulf or in Africa, while thousands of youth study in Europe. The first of four planes touched down at the Beirut international airport late in the morning bringing in 78 passengers from Riyadh, local television reported. A second carrying 79 passengers from Abu Dhabi followed in the afternoon, the National News Agency said.

Local television showed health personnel in protective gear taking the temperature of disembarking passengers. The Mediterranean country announced a lockdown and closed its airport from March 19 as part of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, which has officially infected 527 people and killed 18 nationwide. An AFP photographer saw a dozen buses outside the airport, which the health ministry said were to transport the passengers to their homes to self-quarantine or to a hotel to await the results of tests on arrival.

Health Minister Hamad Hassan said at a news conference Sunday evening that all the tests carried out on passengers arriving from Saudi Arabia were negative. But he added the passengers will still have to self-quarantine. Prime Minister Hassan Diab had arrived earlier amid heavy deployment of the Lebanese army. Authorities said more than 20,000 people had signed up to be repatriated in total this

week or at the end of the month. Lebanese carrier Middle East Airlines said flights would land in Beirut later on Sunday from Lagos and Abidjan. It has also announced return trips to Paris, Madrid and Kinshasa on Tuesday.

Steep fares

Lebanese returning home must either test negative for the virus no longer than three days before their return, or be tested immediately upon arrival, according to government guidelines. They must pay for their own ticket and their families are not allowed to meet them at the airport. The government has said priority will be given to those with critical health conditions such as diabetes or cancer, those aged over 60 and under 18, and families. But critics have complained of steep ticket fares, while a financial crisis has severely restricted transactions from Lebanese bank accounts.

Critics complain of steep ticket fares

Coronavirus is the latest crisis to hit Lebanon, which is already reeling under a crumbling economy.

Due to an acute liquidity crisis, banks have since September increasingly been restricting access to dollars and have halted money transfers abroad. Yesterday, however, the banking association agreed to allow dollar transfers to Lebanese students outside the country to help them face the coronavirus pandemic, the finance ministry said. Diab on Sunday told reporters the government was studying the possibility of supporting returning Lebanese students with a ticket.



BEIRUT: Lebanese nationals, residing in Saudi Arabia, arrive at the Beirut international airport yesterday. Lebanon started repatriating nationals stranded abroad in its first flight in weeks since it closed its international airport to stem the novel coronavirus. —AFP

The public transport minister said the MEA would offer half-price tickets to students in need, while the foreign and health ministers said Lebanese donors would cover the other half, according to the NNA. Lebanese expatriates and activists have clamored online for MEA to lower the price of its

tickets and help those who cannot afford it. The airline on Friday claimed tickets were more expensive - \$650 for an economy class seat from Riyadh and \$1,800 for a cheaper fare from Abidjan for example - because planes would be empty on the way out to evacuations. —AFP

Japan gears for 'state of emergency'

TOKYO: As Japan faces a fresh wave of coronavirus infections and the government prepares for a state of emergency, medical staff say a shortage of beds and a rise in cases linked to hospitals are pushing Tokyo's medical system to the brink of collapse. The crisis has already arrived at Eiju General Hospital, a pink, 10-storey building in central Tokyo, which has reported 140 cases of COVID-19 in the past two weeks. Of those, at least 44 are doctors, nurses and other medical staff. On a recent weekday, the glass doors of Eiju General were plastered with posters saying the hospital was closed until further notice.

More than 60 patients with the virus are still being treated inside. One person who was transferred to another hospital infected others, according to health officials in Tokyo's Taito ward. Japan has only a small fraction of the number of cases reported by its neighbors China and South Korea. Yet scenarios similar to that at Eiju General are playing out across Tokyo, as a dozen doctors and nurses in the city told Reuters there is a shortage of gear and staff even as infections surge.

"We could empty out an entire ward and use it just for corona patients, but that means those patients (with other illnesses) will have to go elsewhere," said a doctor specializing in infectious diseases at a major hospital in the greater Tokyo area. "If we can't do that, it will lead to the virus spreading all through the hospital and lead to a collapse of our medical system." Official data tell a similar story. Tokyo's government said that as of Sunday, 951 people with COVID-19 were hospitalized in a live YouTube address Sunday night, Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike said there were about 1,000 beds allocated for coronavirus patients in the city.

Even as other countries have locked down borders and ramped up testing,

Japan appeared to have side-stepped the kind of mass infections seen elsewhere - an effect some experts say was mostly due to a lack of testing. In the early stages of the epidemic, Japan was also weighing whether to postpone the Summer Olympics, a decision that eventually came in late March. Since mid-January, Japan has tested 39,446 people, while the United Kingdom has tested 173,784 and South Korea has conducted 443,273 tests, according to data from Oxford University.

Authorities have tried to test and track in a way that avoided overwhelming Japan's hospitals, said Hitoshi Oshitani, an infectious disease specialist on the government panel shaping the country's coronavirus policy. Despite that, the total number of positive cases nationwide nearly doubled in the last seven days to 3,654. Tokyo is now the largest hub for COVID-19 in Japan, with more than 1,000 confirmed cases. With cases surging, officials said, some who tested positive have had to briefly wait at home or in outpatient sections of hospitals until beds became available.

Koike said on Sunday that to ease the burden on medical staff, Tokyo would transfer people with mild symptoms into hotels and other accommodations starting Tuesday. Hiroshi Nishiura, a Hokkaido University professor and member of a panel advising the government on its coronavirus response, said Eiju General, like many Tokyo hospitals, has no infectious disease department. That meant coronavirus patients were initially treated alongside everyone else, allowing the virus to spread.

"We have not been able to clearly contain the contagion from the first wave," Nishiura said, referring to Eiju General. A spokesman from the hospital declined to comment on Monday. On Friday, another hospital in Tokyo said three nurses and one doctor had been infected while treating patients. The next day, Tokyo saw its daily coronavirus cases top 100 for the first time, and on Sunday 143 people tested positive. A representative for the Tokyo government said Monday that "the medical system remains secure," adding that



TOKYO: People wearing face masks amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus walk in Shinjuku station in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Tokyo was continuing to urge residents to avoid all unnecessary outings.

Scramble for beds

Contagion is an enormous risk in dense Tokyo, a city of nearly 14 million people. Japan also has one of world's oldest populations, with nearly a third of the country - 36 million people - older than 65. According to Japan's health ministry, there are some 1.5 million hospital beds nationwide, but beds in negative-pressure rooms reserved for infectious diseases excluding tuberculosis have dwindled to just 1,882, with only 145 in Tokyo. Though people with COVID-19 do not all need such rooms, they still must be kept apart from other patients.

In recent days, Tokyo officials have been scrambling to secure 4,000 beds for coronavirus patients, asking hospitals to free up space in ordinary wards and even offering financial incentives, said one city official with direct knowledge of the planning. He declined to be named as he was not authorized to speak to media. "There isn't that much capacity (of hospital beds) left in Tokyo, so a (medical collapse) is no longer unforeseeable," said Satoshi Kamayachi, an executive board member of the Japan Medical Association, which has pushed Japan to call for a state of

emergency. "The number of patients is clearly rising, so the situation is becoming more urgent."

Japan's response

Even after Japan drew fire for how it handled patients on the cruise ship Diamond Princess, it did little to step up testing and preparations, some critics say. Tokyo assemblyman Akihiro Suzuki wrote to Koike on Jan. 31, asking her to set up a medical and consultation system for coronavirus cases. "The response was slow and even now it's (too) slow," he said. Suzuki has submitted 10 requests since then asking for a range of measures, from procuring more ventilators to clarifying Tokyo's policy on treating critical patients.

A representative for the Tokyo metropolitan government said the city had been preparing "specific medical measures" since March 23 for a possible increase in cases, including securing more beds. A half-dozen nurses working at clinics and mid-sized Tokyo hospitals said that they had been told to reuse masks and were concerned about having enough staff to deal with a surge. Several doctors said they had been told not to discuss the capacity of their hospitals with the media. —Reuters

Palestinian, Syrian refugees in Lebanon camps brace for virus

BEIRUT: Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian and Syrian refugees living in overcrowded and rundown camps in Lebanon are bracing for the novel coronavirus as aid groups mobilize to help. Lebanon is home to tens of thousands of Palestinians in camps that over the decades have become bustling neighborhoods, and at least 1.5 million Syrians who have fled the war next door. So far just one Palestinian, who lives outside a camp, and three Syrians have tested positive for COVID-19 compared to 520 infections and 17 deaths across Lebanon, according to officials.

But Palestinian and Syrian refugees who live in cramped quarters, including tent camps where basic services like water are poor, are particularly vulnerable to the illness. "The main concern remains... the spread of coronavirus in the overcrowded Palestine refugee camps where there are very limited possibilities for home isolation," said Huda Samra, a spokeswoman for the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA.

The agency, she said, is looking to set up "isolation centers" inside the camps to quarantine anybody who needs it. Similar structures are being set up for Syrians living in close quarters in seas of canvas tents in the east of the country, the UN refugee agency UNHCR says. But deteriorating cases will have to be evacuated to Lebanese intensive care units, where aid workers fear there may not be enough beds.

More hospital wards

Aid organizations have also been ramping up efforts to raise awareness about basic hygiene among both the Syrian and Palestinian communities. The Norwegian Refugee Council says it has increased water deliveries and supplied soap and bleach to both. Cars mounted with loudspeakers have been making the rounds of Palestinian camps, blaring messages about hand washing and not touching one's face.

An AFP photographer recently saw volunteers in sky blue protective suits spray disinfectant in the gloomy narrow streets of the Shatila camp in Beirut. More than 174,000 Palestinians live in Lebanon, according to official figures, with most residing in camps ruled by Palestinian factions beyond the reach of Lebanese security forces. But unofficial estimates say the Palestinians, whose forefathers fled the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, could number as many as 500,000. And out of the 1.5 million Syrians Lebanon says it hosts since the civil war broke out in the neighboring country nine years ago, nearly one million are registered with the UNHCR as refugees. Most of the Syrian refugees live in abject poverty and rely on handouts from aid groups to survive. In both communities, the United Nations has promised to pay for tests or hospitalization if the need arises.

And because any serious surge in cases among refugees would further burden the Lebanese healthcare system, efforts are being made to strengthen existing hospitals to face the pandemic. "We are working with the ministry of public health to support hospitals," said UNHCR spokeswoman Lisa Abou Khaled. "We will create additional wards with additional beds, including additional intensive care units so there is sufficient response capacity for all communities, Lebanese and refugees," she said. —AFP

Ex-head of Libya's anti-Gaddafi revolt dies of coronavirus

TRIPOLI: Mahmud Jibril, the former head of the Libyan rebel government that overthrew dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, died Sunday of the coronavirus, his party said. Jibril, 68, died in Cairo where he had been hospitalized for two weeks, said Khaled Al-Mrmi, secretary of the Alliance of National Forces party founded by Jibril in 2012. He had been admitted to the Ganzouri Specialized Hospital in Cairo on March 21 after suffering from cardiac arrest and three days later tested positive for coronavirus, hospital director Hisham Wagdy said.

"He started... recovering the day before yesterday but then he began deteriorating again", Wagdy told AFP in Cairo, confirming that Jibril died at 2:00 pm. Jibril headed the rebel National Transitional Council (NTC), the interim government during the NATO-backed rebellion that toppled and killed Gaddafi. He had been an economic advisor to the Gaddafi regime in its final years, before joining the

revolution in 2011 and briefly serving as premier.

Jibril resigned three days after Gaddafi was captured and killed when NTC fighters overran his hometown Sirte on October 20, 2011. In the early days of the Libyan uprising, Jibril made several trips abroad to rally European and US support for the rebels against Gaddafi. In 2012, after the veteran leader was ousted and killed, Jibril stood in the country's first ever democratic elections and his party won the vote but failed to clinch a majority in parliament which chose an independent candidate to become prime minister.

Amid the chaos and violence that erupted in the following years, Jibril left Libya to live abroad. Libya, now divided between a UN-recognized government based in Tripoli and a rival administration in the country's east, announced its first death from coronavirus earlier this week. Health authorities said an 85-year-old woman was confirmed to have had COVID-19 on examination after her death, without giving further details. The UN-recognized Government of National Accord which controls the west of the country has officially recorded 10 cases.

No cases have been declared in the south and east, which are largely under the control of the rival administration supported by military strongman Khalifa Haftar who has been battling to seize Tripoli.



TRIPOLI: In this file photo, Mahmud Jibril, the former head of Libya's Transitional Council during the country's uprising, holds a press conference in Tripoli. Jibril, the former head of the rebel government that overthrew Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, died of the coronavirus on April 5, 2020. —AFP

Wagdy, the hospital director in Cairo, said that Jibril was in and out of consciousness during his time in the hospital's intensive care unit, where he had been quarantined since his admission. Mrmi said that Jibril had appeared in stable conditions in recent days "and was even getting ready to leave the hospital" before his condition deteriorated again. —AFP

International

Pope livestreams Palm Sunday mass due to COVID-19 tragedy

Panama archbishop delivers blessing by helicopter

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis called for courage in the face of the coronavirus pandemic as he delivered Palm Sunday mass by livestream instead of before Saint Peter's Square crowds. The Vatican is abandoning centuries of tradition and refraining from public celebrations of the official start of the Catholic world's Holy Week. Pope Francis called the pandemic a tragedy on Sunday that must be faced with courage and hope.



1.3 billion Catholics observe sacred days under confinement

"Today, in the tragedy of a pandemic, in the face of the many false securities that have now crumbled, in the face of so many hopes betrayed, in the sense of abandonment that weighs upon our hearts, Jesus says to each one of us: 'Courage, open your heart to my love,'" the pope said. Palm Sunday marks the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem before his crucifixion. Easter Sunday on April 12 celebrates his resurrection from the dead. But many of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics are observing the sacred days under home confinement—just like the 83-year-old pontiff.

Pope Francis has been communicating with the outside world by video so that crowds do not gather to see and hear him in one of the world's most famous

squares. Vatican City itself has been closed to tourists for nearly a month as part of global efforts to stop the spread of a disease that has officially killed more than 65,000 people worldwide. The Argentine-born pontiff went on to call on the faithful to overcome their fears and remember that they are not alone.

"When we have our back to the wall, when we find ourselves at a dead end, with no light and no way of escape, when it seems that God himself is not responding, we should remember that we are not alone," the pope said in his prayer. Pope Francis himself went down with a cold in late February and was reportedly tested for COVID-19 twice as a precaution because seven people in the Vatican have caught the virus. The Vatican says the pope is now in good health. Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter a week later on April 19.

Blessing by helicopter

In another development, Panama's Archbishop Jose Domingo Ulloa took to the skies to deliver the traditional Catholic Palm Sunday blessing from a helicopter after the coronavirus pandemic forced the closure of churches across the country. The Church is abandoning centuries of tradition and refraining from public celebrations of the official start of Holy Week among Christian faithful.

Ulloa celebrated mass at Panama's Howard Air Force base before overflying the city's deserted streets and surrounding countryside. Along with the two priests accompanying him, the archbishop wore a white mask that covered his mouth and nose. "We are living through an unprecedented event in the history of Christianity, celebrating Holy Week without a congregation in our churches," the archbishop said.

Ulloa carried with him a statue of Santa Maria La Antigua, Panama's patron saint "to protect the country



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis holds a palm branch as he celebrates Palm Sunday mass behind closed doors at St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, during the lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection, caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP

from disease," as many residents placed palm fronds on balconies and at front doors to receive the blessing from the air. Ulloa dedicated Holy Week to health workers "and so many people who are determined to advance our country at the cost of risking their own lives." The ceremony is normally performed in churches where priests sprinkle holy water on palm fronds brought by the congregation.

Palm Sunday marks the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem

before his crucifixion. Easter Sunday on April 12 celebrates his resurrection from the dead. After shutting its borders and closing schools Panama decreed a total lockdown. Since last week, men and women are being allowed to leave their homes on alternate days to shop for food and essential medicines. Nobody is allowed out on Sunday. The Central American country has registered 1,801 infections with 46 deaths from the pandemic, according to the latest figures.— Agencies



NAPLES: Two solidarity baskets ('Panaro solidare') are displayed with a note reading 'Who can put, who cannot take' in one of the deserted streets in the historic center of Naples. — AFP

In Naples, 'solidarity' food baskets abound as pandemic bites

NAPLES: Angelo Picone lowers a wicker basket full of food to the ground on a rope, leaning over his rustic balcony, verdant with pot plants. "If you can, put something in. If you can't, take something out," Picone, a Naples street artist, merrily hollers to bemused passersby in the alleyway below. Picone's simple message is resonating in a country trying to feed a growing number of poor during the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 has officially killed nearly 200 in Naples and more than 15,000 across Italy in just over a month. It has also shattered the Mediterranean country's economy and left millions at least temporarily unemployed. This makes the hanging "solidarity baskets" and foldout tables laden with food—everything from bread and bananas to boxes of milk and tins of sardines, as well as hot dishes—all the more important at one of the most surreal moments in the city's history. "This is a special sign of solidarity," Picone says. "The basket is there. It ensures anonymity."

For a song

Yet Naples' unrepressed romance is in the spring air at even the doourest of times. A slender young man wearing a black coat and a loose scarf breaks into song for no apparent reason. A few smiling women on the nearby balconies of squat pastel buildings shout "bravo" and applaud after he finishes with a hand-waving flourish and takes a bow. The young man then sticks his hand in the food basket and walks away with a cheeky bounce in his step. The performance was his personal contribution in exchange for the food. Picone speaks with nonchalance about how he drew his inspiration from a city doctor who did something very similar for the poor a century ago.

According to local legend, doctor Giuseppe Moscati held out his hat at

the end of his consultations. Patients were not obliged to pay and dropped in as many coins as they could afford. The good doctor was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1987. "We are fortunate that in Naples we feel like we need to help each other out," says Gennaro, a street artist like Picone. A person wearing a facemask pulls two bags of cookies from the wicker basket and holds them aloft in self-deprecating celebration.

Big heart, little money

"Naples is a city with a tremendous resilience to suffering," Mayor Luigi de Magistris tells AFP. EU statistics show about two out of five at risk of poverty in 2018 in the city of 2.2 million. A UN study found that a third of the Naples' 15- to 29-year-olds either had no job or had dropped out of school that year.

The black market economy thrives, as well as the accompanying crime. An estimated 3,500 Neapolitans have so far asked for food aid under a coronavirus relief program launched last month. The two street artists and others like English language tutor Teresa Cardo decided that something more substantial—possibly more personal and immediate—needed to be done. They lowered their first baskets, explaining the idea in a little note. "We started by putting a piece of bread, a bag of pasta, a box of peeled tomatoes," Cardo says.

"And two hours later, the basket was completely full." The mayor is understandably proud. "Naples is a city with a big heart," he says. But he also laments the various social distancing measures designed to keep people away from each other as much as possible. The mayor wants the old Naples back. "I miss it very much, because in general for human beings but even more so for Neapolitans, it is absolutely against our nature not to hug, not to shake hands." — AFP

'Nick Hard' and the prof keeping Greeks safe

ATHENS: A hard-hitting ex-mayor with a penchant for upper body selfies and a soft-spoken health professor are the duo behind Greece's drive to keep the coronavirus cases to manageable numbers. Deputy minister for civil protection Nikos Hardalias and infectious diseases specialist Sotiris Tsiodras oversee Greece's daily briefing on the virus, mixing life-saving advice with stern warnings. The country of 11 million has so far registered 73 deaths and 1,735 cases, far below other European countries.

In some respects, the two men are polar opposites. Tsiodras has been known to visibly fight back tears as he reads the daily death toll and urges Greeks to protect elderly loved ones. "Every life won, every death avoided gives us strength to carry on," he said Saturday, his voice cracking. A poll last week gave the disease expert an 89-percent approval rating. Hardalias comes across as the bad cop in the unlikely partnership, repeatedly hammering home a message of unbending discipline to quarantine.

"Difficult weeks lie ahead... If we relax our efforts, the virus will destroy us," Hardalias said in Saturday's nationally televised briefing, as he announced a three-week extension to Greece's lockdown on non-essential movement. There would be "zero tolerance" for anyone trying to get around the restrictions, he warned. In past news conferences he has poured scorn on some of the excuses offered by those caught out, such as claims of broken plumbing at summer homes.

'No excuses, no exceptions'

"We should all stop with the excuses," he said. In another news conference, he took time to rebuke a group of Greeks who complained about having to spend two weeks in quarantine at a four-star hotel at state expense after being flown back from Spain. "This is almost a joke," he said. "The Greek people paid to repatriate them ... accommodate them ... and guard them," he said.

"Exceptions will not be made for anyone." Tattooed Hardalias, 51, enjoys posting bare-chested pictures of himself on the beach on his Instagram page—which runs under the handle NickHardGr. The Kent University graduate and father of two is married to a fitness trainer. The bookish Sydney-born, Harvard-educated Tsiodras, 54, is a father of seven who enjoys church psalm singing in his spare time.

Hardalias had served as mayor of the Athens district of Vyronas for 11 years. But in July, he was thrust into the firing line by newly elected Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis as head of civil protection. Very soon he was put to the test, tackling wildfires, an Athens earthquake and a fierce storm that killed seven people in northern Greece. He was promoted to deputy minister by Mitsotakis on March 16, just as the restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus began to be rolled out.

Ahead of the Orthodox Easter on April 19, the suspension of church services for the public and a ban on travelling to the countryside and islands have rankled with many Greeks. On Sunday, police said they had arrested a man after a crowd of 100 gathered at a church in western Athens, chanting slogans against the lockdown. "Chill out Nikos Hardalias... people are being patient, but don't wag your finger in their faces." Ta Nea daily wrote earlier this week, likening the crisis official to US action star Chuck Norris after he called out pensioners queuing too closely at cash machines.—AFP

Ecuador city runs out of coffins amid COVID-19 crisis

QUITO: Soaring numbers of COVID-19 deaths in Ecuador's second city Guayaquil have led to a shortage of coffins, forcing locals to resort to using cardboard boxes, city authorities said Sunday. Authorities in the Pacific port city said they had received a donation of 1,000 pressed cardboard caskets from local producers, and delivered them for use in two local cemeteries. "It's so they can meet demand," a city hall spokesman told AFP. "There are either no coffins in the city or they are extremely expensive." Businessman Santiago Olivares, who owns a chain of funeral homes, said his company was unable to keep up with demand.

"I sold the 40 that I had at the downtown branch, and 40 others from my headquarters. I had to order 10 more at the weekend and they've run out," Olivares said. The cheapest coffins cur-

rently cost around \$400. Olivares said a 15-hour curfew in the city was contributing to the shortage of basic raw materials for coffin makers like wood and metal. Last week, residents posted videos on social media showing abandoned bodies in the streets in the Latin American city worst hit by the pandemic.

The government called in troops to pick up 150 corpses from streets and homes earlier this week after mortuary workers in the city were unable to keep up with a backlog of removals. The cardboard coffins "will be a great help in providing a dignified burial for people who died during this health emergency," the Guayaquil mayor's office wrote on Twitter. Ecuador reported 3,646 cases of the coronavirus on Sunday, including 180 deaths, the majority of them occurring in Guayaquil and its surrounding province of Guayas.— AFP



GUAYAQUIL: A police officer looks at a body said to be laying for three days outside a closed clinic in Guayaquil. — AFP

Argentine homeless stuck on the streets during lockdown

BUENOS AIRES: The Argentine government has ordered people to stay at home until mid-April, but thousands have literally nowhere to go for them "home" is the street. The homeless are among the very few seen on the streets of the capital Buenos Aires since President Alberto Fernandez issued a mandatory confinement order on March 20, and since extending beyond it an initial two weeks. They sleep in squares and in the doorways of bank buildings and now-shuttered stores in the city's swanky center. They say municipality shelters are overcrowded and some have decried police violence, saying they have at times been forcibly removed from spots they have lived on for years.

Trying to cope

A year ago, Richard Marcelo set up an improvised shelter on the street near the landmark Obelisk monument on the city's broad July 9 avenue. "We are trying to cope with it as best we can," said the Uruguayan, 46, surrounded by rows of cardboard and mattresses where he and his companions sleep. But for the

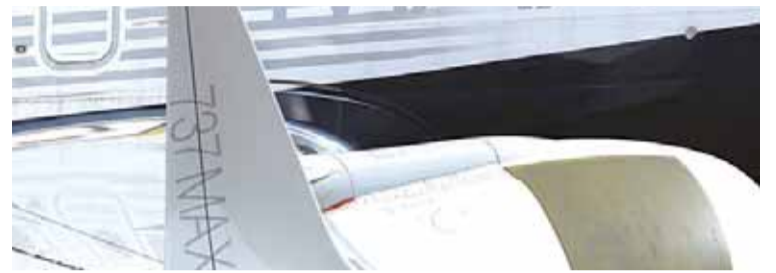
homeless, there are worse things than the pandemic. "What we are afraid of is hunger, everything else including the coronavirus, no."

Emilio Sebastian Barcia, 28, is the newest of the group, among the recent wave of Buenos Aires homeless. He has been on the streets only three months since losing his job as a cook. "I was desperate, I was hungry and I met this group," which has provided him with a lifeline. "Now with everything that's going on with the coronavirus, if you were to leave me alone in the corner, I would die."

The city authority says it has accelerated plans to transfer homeless people to temporary shelters in sports centers or hotels, which have been readied to ease pressure on normal municipal shelters during the pandemic. Official figures showed 1,146 people were living on the streets in Buenos Aires in 2019. However, according to a count by social and political organizations, the number of homeless in the capital soared to more than 7,500 in the last few months of Argentina's crippling economic crisis.—AFP

Business

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LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY: A sign shows the price of gas at a gas station as the national average falls under \$2 per gallon amid the coronavirus pandemic in Louisville, Kentucky. Saudi Arabia and Russia are 'very, very close' to a deal on oil production cuts, Kirill Dmitriev, head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, told CNBC yesterday.— AFP

Russia eyes oil deal with Saudi soon

Oil prices fall as doubts grow over output cut deal

MOSCOW: Saudi Arabia and Russia are "very, very close" to a deal on oil production cuts, Kirill Dmitriev, head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, told CNBC yesterday.

"I think the whole market understands that this deal is important and it will bring lots of stability, so much important stability to the market, and we are very close," Dmitriev, who is also one of Moscow's top negotiators, told CNBC. Dmitriev was first to make a public declaration of the need for an enlarged supply pact, potentially involving producers outside the OPEC+ group that currently consists of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and some other oil producers led by Moscow.

A previous three-year deal to stabilize oil prices collapsed a month ago, with Saudi Arabia and Russia blaming each other for failure to find a compromise at an OPEC+ meeting in Vienna on March 6.

Saudi Arabia and Russia were initially set to meet



Trump expects
10m bpd oil
production cut

yesterday to discuss output cuts, but that has now been pushed back to April 9, as oil prices continue to come under pressure. G20 energy ministers and members of some other international organizations will hold a video conference to be hosted by Saudi Arabia on April 10, a senior Russian source told Reuters yesterday, as part of the efforts to get the United States involved in a new deal on production cuts.

Meanwhile, oil prices fell sharply yesterday after a meeting to discuss output cuts between OPEC and its allies was delayed, dimming hopes of swift action to support coronavirus-ravaged energy markets.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate plunged eight percent at the open in Asia but clawed back some ground and was trading 5.7 percent lower, at \$26.72 a barrel. International benchmark Brent crude was down 4.3 percent to trade at \$32.64 per barrel.

Oil prices have tumbled to levels not seen for years due to the coronavirus pandemic and a price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, the kingpin of exporting group OPEC.

Business shutdowns, travel restrictions and other measures put in place to contain the virus outbreak have battered demand. Prices had bounced back from 18-year lows last week after US President Donald Trump said that Riyadh and Moscow would draw a line under their dispute and agree to major output

cuts. But analysts had been sceptical about a quick resolution, and doubts only grew when the meeting between OPEC and its allies, including Russia, was delayed. They had been expected to meet via video conference to discuss oil production cuts on Monday but the meeting has been postponed to Thursday, the government of energy-rich Azerbaijan said at the weekend.

Trump surprised investors last week by tweeting: "I expect & hope" Riyadh and Moscow will be cutting back "approximately 10 million barrels, and maybe substantially more". On Friday, Moscow said it was prepared to discuss a reduction in the volume of about 10 million barrels a day.

But Stephen Innes, chief global markets strategist at AxiCorp, said that "traders remain extremely skeptical a deal will be forthcoming, and if one does occur, it will be woefully insufficient to stem the oil supply gushers." — Agencies

EU ministers to focus on quick stimulus options

BRUSSELS: Eurozone finance ministers are likely to converge today on three quick options to support the economy in the wake of the coronavirus epidemic, officials said on Friday, with some discussion also of longer-term ideas to aid a recovery.

EU leaders asked the ministers on March 26 to come up with proposals for cushioning the effects of the pandemic, which economists expect will push Europe into a deep recession this year as activity has slowed to a crawl amid lockdowns. "The ministers are likely to put together a list of ideas for leaders to discuss and choose from. They do not all have to have the full backing of all the ministers," one senior euro zone official said.

"The three ideas that are likely to get the most support are probably the use of the ESM bailout fund, the European Investment Bank and the Commission's short-term work scheme," the official said.

The standby credit line from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) could be up to 2 percent of the requesting country's GDP, be available for 12 to 24 months and, if drawn upon, have a maturity of 5-10 years. The credit line would come with minimal conditions focused on the pandemic and, crucially, would unlock the possibility of European Central Bank unlimited bond buying if yields surge. The second idea is guarantees for the European Investment Bank, the government-owned investment arm of the EU, possibly up to 25 billion euros. This would allow the bank to provide 200 billion euros more in loans to small and medium-sized companies. There is also an option of increasing the EIB's capital.—Reuters

BoE won't print money to fund virus fight: Bailey

LONDON: The Bank of England will not resort to irreversibly printing money in order to fund a surge in government spending as it tries to shield Britain's economy from the coronavirus crisis, its governor Andrew Bailey said on Sunday. The BoE last month ramped up its bond-buying program by a record 200 billion pounds (\$245.2 billion), similar to moves by the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank as central banks around the world scrambled to limit a deep recession.

The next day, finance minister Rishi Sunak announced the British state would pay 80 percent of the wages of workers who are temporarily laid off by companies, in the hope of getting them back into work quickly when the crisis abates.

That historic step was part of a series of emergency measures that will cost the government at least 60 billion pounds at a time when it will also suffer a plunge in tax revenues. Bailey, acknowledging that the world faced a "time of great uncertainty", said he would oppose any calls for the BoE to print money simply to help the government. "Using monetary financing would damage credibility on controlling inflation by eroding operational independence," Bailey said in an opinion piece published by the Financial Times.

"It would also ultimately result in an unsustainable central bank balance sheet and is incompatible with the pursuit of an inflation target by an independent central bank."

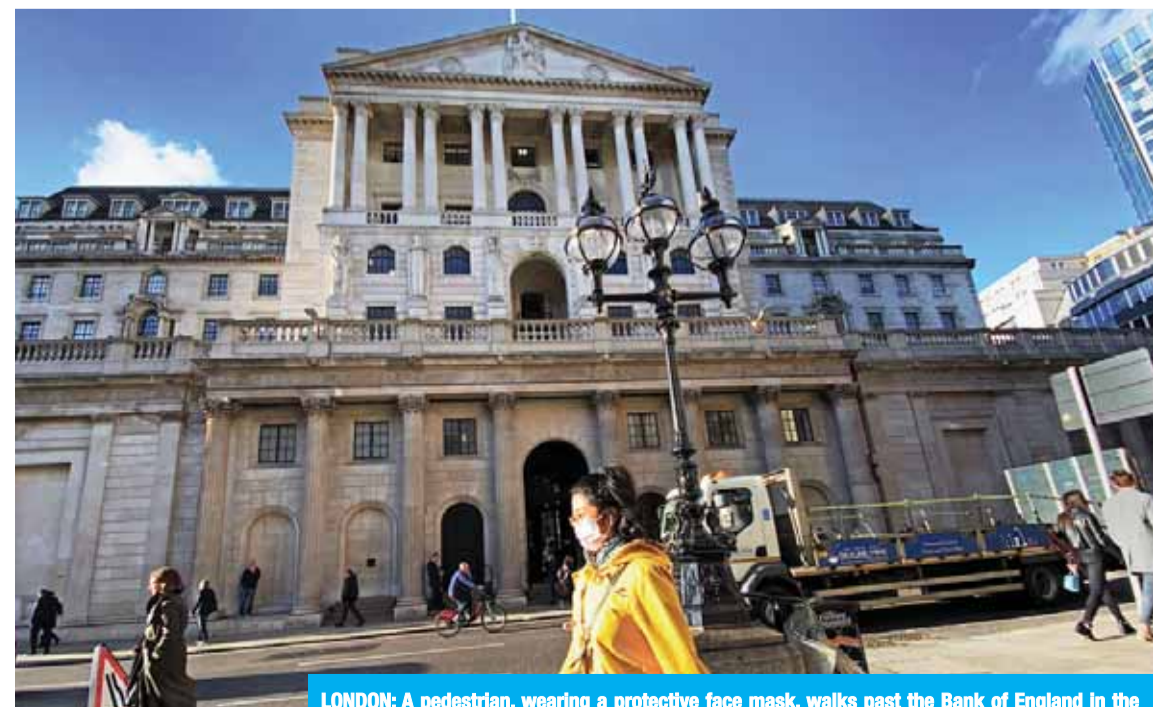
When the BoE announced the expansion of its bond purchase plan to 645 billion pounds on March 19 - most

of it for government bonds - Bailey stressed he was not abandoning the long-standing concerns of central bankers about monetary financing "because history tells us where that leads".

The idea of central banks helping governments to spend more has raised concerns about a rise in inflation in the future. It has even drawn parallels with the disastrous hyperinflation of 1930s Germany and 1990s Zimbabwe. In his article for the FT, Bailey said the BoE remained in full control of how and when the expansion of its reserves to buy bonds is unwound, and that the

central bank would not allow its 2 percent inflation target to be threatened.

"If the recent expansion of bond buying appears to threaten that goal, the MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) can react," he said, adding the BoE had clear operational independence even as it worked with the government to support the economy. "The BoE will not hesitate to take all necessary actions both to support British businesses and households through this period of uncertainty and to ensure inflation is consistent with the 2 percent target in the medium term," he said. — Reuters



LONDON: A pedestrian, wearing a protective face mask, walks past the Bank of England in the City of London. — AFP

Business

Mexican president pitches frugal economic plan against COVID-19

Govt vows to help the poor, create 2 million new jobs

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's president unveiled a plan on Sunday to lift the economy out of the coronavirus crisis, vowing to help the poor and create jobs, but his promise of fiscal discipline sparked criticism that the measures fell far short of what was needed. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador pledged Mexico would create 2 million new jobs in the next nine months and boost small business and housing loans. He also vowed to tighten public sector austerity to avoid debt.

Governments worldwide have unleashed unprecedented spending pledges to minimize damage to their economies from the coronavirus, including a \$2-trillion package by Mexico's top trading partner, the United States. But Mexico's leftist leader, targeting measures for the "most vulnerable", said he would use a budget stabilization fund and cash from public trusts to fund plans to shield the poor from a slump economists expect to be severe.

"This crisis is temporary, transitory," Lopez Obrador said in a televised speech. "Normality will return soon. We will defeat the coronavirus, we will reactivate the economy."

Last week, Lopez Obrador said about \$10 billion was available from various rainy day funds, while the finance ministry said "buffers" for the economy included a stabilization fund of about \$6.6 billion available from the end of 2019.

Known by his initials "AMLO", the president said Mexico would announce next week investments in the energy sector worth 339 billion pesos

(\$13.5 billion) to boost the economy, which some private analysts forecast to contract by up to 10 percent in 2020.

That sum is far less than \$92 billion in energy investments the private sector has proposed to the president. His speech coincided with growing calls for his government to emulate the United States and European nations with a major stimulus package to fight the recession.

"The mechanisms that AMLO is thinking about are going to be completely insufficient to deal with this type of recession," said Viri Rios, a Mexican political analyst.

Gustavo de Hoyos, head of employers' federation Coparmex, was scathing about the economic plan.

"No relevant measure to deal with the #COVID19 economic crisis was announced," de Hoyos said afterwards on Twitter. Lopez Obrador's former finance minister, Carlos Urzua, called last week for Mexico to run a bigger deficit, saying it was "obvious" national governments should significantly increase public deficits in the crisis. The government's latest estimate projects the economy could contract by up to 3.9 percent in 2020, though Lopez Obrador has said he does not agree, calling for more optimism on the economy, which was already contracting last year.

Without unprecedented measures, there could be "an economic depression and a deepening of poverty not seen in Mexico in many decades," a group of economists, policymakers and politicians

Boost for small businesses



An elderly woman stands next to bags at a market in downtown Ozumba, Mexico state during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. —AFP

told Lopez Obrador in a letter urging quick government action.

One signatory, Rolando Cordera, a left-leaning economist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), applauded the president's commitment to helping the poor, but said his initial response to the plan was one of disappointment. Cordera was skeptical of how a struggling economy

would generate hundreds of thousands of new jobs while the government stuck to its budget goals, and felt not enough was being done to protect workers and companies against a potentially huge blow.

"I didn't see anything that would allow me to conclude that a change was starting to take shape in the vision and focus of current economic policy," he told Reuters. —Reuters

EU commissioners prod Germany over 'coronabonds'

FRANKFURT: Two European Commissioners urged Germany yesterday to agree to the European Union issuing joint debt to fight the coronavirus crisis, as wealthy northern nations remain reluctant to back so-called coronabonds. "Like the European Central Bank in the monetary and financial sphere, the member states must now prove their joint decisive and innovative spirit," internal market commissioner Thierry Breton and economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni wrote in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) daily.

That could take the shape of "a European fund whose explicit function would make possible issuing long-term bonds," Breton and Gentiloni suggested. "Strictly limited to collective investments for industrial revitalization in the context of the current crisis," the instrument would be proof of "unshakable solidarity" among EU nations, they argued.

A group of states including southern European heavyweights Italy, France and Spain have been imploring northerners like Germany, Austria and the Netherlands for common debt facilities to cushion the economic impact of the virus. But conservative politicians in the north fear the plans would mean the eventual mutualization of all sovereign debts and their taxpayers footing the bill for supposed southern profligacy. Finance ministers from the 19 euro single currency member states will meet Tuesday to again seek a solution to the deadlock.

Germany's Olaf Scholz on Friday proposed a three-pronged scheme including cheap loans from the financial crisis-era European Stability Mechanism (ESM), cash from the European Investment Bank and an EU-wide unemployment reinsurance scheme, skirting the issue of joint debt. —AFP

UK new car sales plunge 40% in March

LONDON: New car registrations in Britain fell by an annual 40% in March as the coronavirus crisis hit the economy and forced many would-be buyers to stay at home, preliminary data from an industry group showed yesterday. Sales totalled around 250,000 units, making it the weakest March—typically one of the top two selling months of the year—since 1999 when bi-annual plate changes were introduced. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered a shutdown of much of the economy last month as his government sought to slow the spread of coronavirus.

March accounted for nearly 20 percent of total registrations in 2019 as it is one of two annual occasions when a new license plate series is issued.

Car sales in Britain have been falling since hitting a record high in 2016. The SMMT's latest forecast, published in January, predicted a drop in full-year demand of just over 2.5 percent to 2.25 million cars. The Society for Motor Manufacturers and Traders is due to publish its full data for March at 0800 GMT. —Reuters

Investors look to data to support stabilizing markets

NEW YORK: Investors are parsing a broad range of signals, from infection counts to more traditional indicators, for clues on the trajectory markets may take in coming weeks as the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus continues to spread.

Some point to signs that the worst of a vicious sell-off that took the S&P 500 down as much as 34 percent from its record closing high may be fading, though markets remain turbulent and far off their highs. Volatility has eased from its March peaks. Fewer US stocks are hitting new 52-week lows. Liquidity in fixed-income markets has improved, and credit spreads, while still wide, have come in from their March highs. "Most of the damaging, indiscriminate selling was reached in mid-March," said Keith Lerner, chief market strategist at Truist/SunTrust Advisory Services in Atlanta.

Economic indicators like employment data are only beginning to factor in the scale of economic damage wrought by the pandemic, leaving investors looking to various corners of the markets and information on the virus' spread to gauge the direction asset prices are likely to take.

Investor sentiment, often seen as a contrarian indicator, is one signal pointing to an eventual turnaround in

US stocks. Bank of America Global Research's Sell Side Indicator in March dropped to 54.9 percent. At that level or lower, US stock returns over the following 12 months have been positive 94 percent of the time, the bank's analysts wrote.

Contrarian indicator means bearish investors may presage a bullish market — and vice-versa.

Some investors have also noticed parallels between the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, and movements in the Cboe Volatility Index, known as Wall Street's fear gauge.

The VIX, which climbed to its highest levels since 2008 amid the market sell-off, has closely tracked the number of countries where the daily growth of coronavirus cases exceeds 10 percent, according to Jason Hunter, head of global fixed income and US equity technical strategy at J P Morgan. The index has fallen as the number of countries with a sharp rise in cases has abated. "Any improvements in that trajectory have the potential to limit the severity of an equity index retest this spring," Hunter wrote in a research note. "More importantly, how the outbreak story evolves over the summer and into the fall will likely dictate the overall duration and magnitude of the bear market."

Tracking the number of US states with 10 percent or higher daily growth in confirmed cases reveals a similar pattern, Hunter found. The index on Friday stood at 48.43, below its all-

Al-Yousifi & Sons launches new microwave oven

KUWAIT: Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Company has announced the launch of its new Panasonic flagship microwave oven model, the NN-CD87. Boasting unmatched multi-purpose functionality, the NN-CD87 combines convection, grill and combination microwave cooking along with a Healthy Air Frying technology, taking convenient cooking and healthy eating to the next level.

The NN-CD87's intuitive 'Healthy Air Frying' Auto Menus allow users to enjoy guilt-free versions of popular deep-fried foods such as French fries and crispy chicken without the oil. Using its advanced powerful heating innovations, Panasonic eliminates the need for deep-frying yet still able to create food that is crispy on the outside, and moist and juicy inside. In addition, the NN-CD87 packs other top-notch features, most notably the Genius Sensor, which monitors steam levels to achieve optimal heating and cooking results without the guesswork. There is also the 'One-Push Reheating' button, which ensures reheating time is calculated accurately to prevent over or undercooking. This easy single step effectively eliminates the need for users to set the time after specifying the weight of the food.

With superior features that help nurture

opportunities to create and enjoy wholesome home-cooked meals, the NN-CD87 is central to Panasonic's Home-made Goodness philosophy, its newest kitchen concept aimed at celebrating the joy of fresh food and creating social experiences to remember. The Panasonic Home-made Goodness Appliance Range, inspired by timeless Japanese culture, cooking techniques and technologies where food is prepared from scratch, has been expertly designed and manufactured to enable cooks of any level to truly enjoy healthy cooking with ease.

Wael Deeb - General Manager of electronics dept at Al-Yousifi Company said, "The NN-CD87 Healthy Air Frying Microwave Oven is at the forefront of microwave oven technology with its versatility and state-of-the-art features. Panasonic have developed this model to cater to our consumers in the region who have identified mindful eating as a top priority. This new microwave model also champions the philosophy behind our kitchen concept for this year."

The Panasonic Home-made Goodness concept is all about helping our customers capture and enjoy the simple pleasures and spontaneous moments through home-cooked fares. We are confident that, with the appliance's wide selection of cooking programs, the NN-CD87 is the ideal solution for busy families who seek to enjoy more home-cooked flavors without spending extra effort and time in the kitchen."

Built with 1000W Inverter Technology, the NN-CD87 is able to generate a con-



NEW YORK: In this file photo a view of New York Stock Exchange is seen on Wall Street in New York City. —AFP

time closing high of 82.69 on Mar. 16. For now, the overall numbers look grim. Confirmed US cases surpassed 256,000 on Friday. More than 6,500 Americans have died, according to a Reuters tally of official data, and more than a quarter of those deaths have been in New York City.

Economic data have been just as dour. On Friday, the Labor Department's monthly payrolls report showed the US economy shed 701,000 jobs in March, ending a record 113 straight months of job growth. The previous day, the Labor Department reported that weekly US

jobless claims hit a record 6.6 million. That scale of market disruption has made some market participants more doubtful. Investors may be overly optimistic in their expectations for a sharp market rebound even if the number of US coronavirus cases flatlines earlier than expected, said Nancy Perez, senior portfolio manager at Boston Private. "The market has discounted a V-shaped recovery," she said. "I don't know if it's discounted a U-shaped recovery. When people figure out it's going to be more U-shaped, we may start giving some of (these gains) back." —Reuters



stant stream of power to deliver heat evenly from the edges to the center and across a wide range of cooking techniques. Combination cooking programs are also a big plus for the appliance. Advanced inverter control enables simultaneous use of two heat sources, guaranteeing faster and tastier results every time. The microwave oven's seven power levels, along with a wide selection of Auto cooking program options, also ensure that you have everything you need in one appliance to get the job done. For one, there is the ingenious Re-Bake Bread Program, which has been developed with simultaneous microwave, grill and convection cooking functions. This allows users to heat bread moderately retaining the savory smell and the crispiness of the food's outer layer.

On top of all these features, the NN-CD87 has a big capacity of 34L with a large interior. Ample space for 36cm wide dishes and food items mean one-pot wonders that you can take from the microwave straight to the dining table. It's compact sophisticated design and sleek stainless-steel finish will blend in beautifully in any kitchen space, while ensuring no-sweat cleaning.

Meanwhile, energy-saving LED lighting inside the oven and on LCD display helps users to easily keep track of the cooking progress. The NN-CD87 is also built with Child Lock feature, making the appliance truly family-friendly. The Panasonic NN-CD87 Healthy Air Frying Microwave Oven is now available in Kuwait at all Best Al-Yousifi electronics showrooms.

Business

NBK Capital: Corona is entering the world market in a state of panic

Dramatic losses and a turn for the worse for regional markets

KUWAIT: In 2020, the month of March saw global markets go into panic mode over the covid-19 pandemic that is sweeping the planet. With the center of the pandemic moving to the United States now after Europe, the total number of confirmed cases globally surpassed the one million mark with tens of thousands of deaths. In the US, where the pandemic is growing exponentially, more than 250 thousand cases have been declared so far. In the meantime, President Trump has warned of "very painful" two weeks at the beginning of April, as infections are expected to peak around mid-April.

The longest running bull market in the history of the United States came to a dramatic end in March. Major indices tumbled into bear territory with the S&P 500 and Dow Industrial Average (DJIA) declining by 34 percent and 37 percent from peak to trough between February 20 and March 23. Volatility spiked as the CBOE Volatility Index (VIX) surpassed 85.5, a level last seen during the financial crisis in 2008. For the month, the S&P 500 and the DJIA registered declines of 12.5 percent and 13.7 percent, while declining 20.0 percent and 23.2 percent respectively for the first quarter. The Nasdaq Composite held better than the broad market, declining 10.1 percent for the month and 14.2 percent for the quarter. Treasury yields, on the other hand, continued to sink to all-time lows, especially on the short end. The 2-year yield closed the month at 0.23 percent down from 0.86 percent at the end of February, while the 10-year closed at 0.62 percent down from 1.13 percent over the same period.

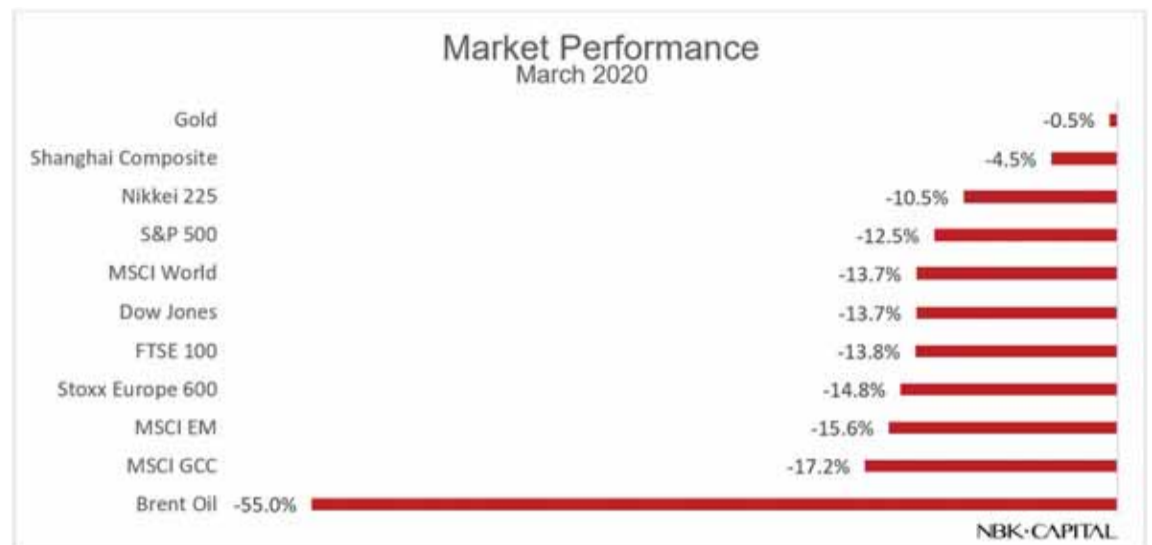
Markets around the world recorded double-digit losses, while central banks and governments scrambled to enact measures that would provide support for their economies amid fears of a deep global recession.

The MSCI AC World Index declined by 13.7 percent in March bringing its quarterly performance to a negative 21.7 percent, while the MSCI EAFE saw declines of 13.8 percent for the month and 23.4 percent for the first quarter. The Federal Reserve slashed its federal funds rate by 50bps to a range of 1.0-1.25 percent then by a full percentage point to a range 0.0-0.25 percent in two

emergency meetings on March 3 and March 15. The Fed also announced a massive easing program, which includes an unlimited asset purchase program, a lending program for businesses, and for the first time, a program to buy corporate bonds. On top of this monetary easing program, the US government is finalizing an economic stimulus package that is the largest in US history.

A \$2 trillion bill that will provide the economy with a massive amount of loans, tax breaks, and direct payments to large and small corporates and individuals. In terms of economic activity, the numbers that were published for March would carry little meaning in terms of reflecting the actual state of the economy due to their lagging nature. Of the number announced so far and that would give a glimpse of how the lockdowns are affecting the US economy is the initial jobless claims for the week ending March 20, which shot up to 3.28 million from 282,000 the previous reading then recorded 6.65 million for the week ending March 27 shattering all expectations, while the Nonfarm payrolls for March, representing new jobs created by the US economy, plummeted to a negative 701,000. In the meantime, the unemployment rate ticked higher to 4.4 percent from 3.5 percent. It is worth noting here that these numbers still don't reflect the full picture of the economic reality which will become clearer in the coming weeks.

The picture in Europe wasn't any better during March where Italy, Spain, France and Germany were at the center of the global coronavirus pandemic. Travel bans across the globe including that to the US from Europe in addition to the underwhelming policy response from the European Central Bank pushed European markets further into negative territory during the month. The Stoxx Europe 600 fell by 14.8 percent to end the first quarter of the year down 23.0 percent. The German DAX and French CAC 40 dropped by 16.4 percent and 17.2 percent during the month to record declines of 25.0 percent and 26.5 percent respectively for the first quarter. Prior to the pandemic-induced market rout, the European economy was growing modestly.



Boursa Kuwait indices drop

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GDP estimate for the fourth quarter was revised up to 1.0 percent year-on-year from 0.9 percent previously, compared to 1.2 percent for the two previous quarters. All economic indicators are, however, expected to increasingly show significant declines. The Market Manufacturing PMI declined to 44.8 in March compared to 49.2 a month earlier, but this level is still far from reflecting the full effect of the current crisis. The market is generally expecting much worse statistics to come out in the coming few weeks. The same applies to the UK where the FTSE 100 plunged by 13.8 percent during March recording a quarterly decline of 24.8 percent for the quarter.

In Emerging markets, the slump was generally more severe especially outside Asia. The MSCI EM Index declined by 15.6 percent during the month and 23.9 percent for the first quarter, whereas the MSCI Asia ex-Japan declined by 12.2 percent in March and 18.6 percent for quarter. The hardest hit markets during the month were Brazil's Ibovespa Index with a decline of 29.9 percent followed by India's Nifty 50 which lost 23.3 percent during the month. Elsewhere, Turkey's Borsa Istanbul 100 was down 15.4 percent and Russia was 9.9 percent, whereas Mexico and Taiwan were down 16.4 percent and 14.0 percent respectively.

In the GCC, equity markets sustained heavy losses during the month pressured by the global fallout of the coronavirus pandemic and by the unprecedented drop in oil prices which was triggered by the collapse of the production cut agreement. The collapse of oil prices was further compounded by concerns of significant demand declines for oil triggered by the worldwide drop in transportation activities as many countries moved into lockdowns in an effort to stem the spread of the pandemic. The S&P GCC composite lost 17.7 percent during March compounding its first quarter losses to 24.8 percent, while the S&P Pan Arab Index recorded declines of 18.6 percent and 24.8 percent for March and Q1 respectively. Dubai's DFM General Index and Abu Dhabi's ADX General Index topped the list of decliners with 31.6 percent and 23.8 percent for the month respectively.

Kuwait followed with The Boursa Kuwait All Share Index down 20.6 percent and the Premier Market Index down 22.8 percent. Bahrain's All Share Index and Oman's MSM 30 index, on the other hand, recorded losses of 18.7 percent and 16.5 percent respectively, while the Qatar Exchange Index was down 13.5 percent. Elsewhere in the Middle East, Egypt's EGX 30 dropped by 26.3 percent while the Morocco's Madex was down 21.3 percent.

Africa could lose 20m jobs due to pandemic: AU

JOHANNESBURG/ADDIS ABABA: About 20 million jobs are at risk in Africa as the continent's economies are projected to shrink this year due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, according to an African Union (AU) study. So far, Africa accounts for just a fraction of total cases of the disease which has infected more than one million people worldwide, according to a Reuters tally.

But African economies are already facing an impending global economic downturn, plummeting oil and commodity prices and an imploding tourism sector.

Before the onset of the pandemic, continent-wide gross domestic product (GDP) growth had been projected by the African Development Bank to reach 3.4 percent this year.

However, in both scenarios modelled by the AU study - seen by Reuters and entitled "Impact of the coronavirus on the Africa economy" - GDP will now shrink. Under what the AU researchers deemed their realistic scenario, Africa's economy will shrink 0.8 percent, while the pessimistic scenario said there would be a 1.1 percent dip.

Up to 15 percent for foreign direct investment could disappear. The impact on employment will be dramatic. "Nearly 20 million jobs, both in the formal and informal sectors, are threatened with destruction on the continent if the situation continues," the analysis said.

African governments could lose up to 20 to 30 percent of their fiscal revenue, estimated at 500 billion in 2019, it found. Exports and imports are meanwhile projected to drop at least 35 percent from 2019 levels, incurring a loss in the value of trade of around \$270 billion. This at a time when the fight against the virus' spread will lead to an increase in public spending of at least \$130 billion.

Africa's oil producers, which have seen the value of their crude exports plunge in past weeks, will be among the worst hit.

Sub-Saharan Africa's biggest oil producers Nigeria and Angola alone could lose \$65 billion in income. African oil exporters are expected to see their budget deficits double this year while their economies shrink 3 percent on average.

African tourist destinations will also suffer. Africa has in recent years been among the fastest growing regions in the world for tourism. But with borders now closed to prevent the disease's spread and entire airlines grounded, the sector has been almost entirely shut down.

Countries where tourism constitutes a large part of GDP will see their economies contract by an average of 3.3 percent this year. However, Africa's major tourism spots Seychelles, Cape Verde, Mauritius and Gambia will shrink at least 7 percent. —Reuters

Boeing extends factory shutdown in Washington

WASHINGTON: Boeing has said it will indefinitely extend a shutdown at its factories in Washington state because of the coronavirus pandemic. The aerospace giant had already halted production at its Puget Sound facility near Seattle, where the company builds the long-range 777 jet and other models, after announcing a two-week stoppage last month.

It had also shut its other major state factory at Moses Lake because of the 737 MAX grounding.

Boeing announced Sunday that the shutdown would continue indefinitely in an effort to protect staff from COVID-19, which has already claimed

the life of one employee at the company's Everett facility. "The health and safety of our employees, their families and our communities is our shared priority," Boeing's commercial airplanes division president Stan Deal said in a statement.

Boeing was already facing significant headwinds prior to the coronavirus pandemic because of the crisis surrounding the 737 MAX, which has been grounded for more than a year following two fatal crashes. But the pandemic has further hit the company's outlook with most commercial airline travel suspended and major carriers thrust into a life-or-death fight.

The company is seeking more than \$60 billion in federal support for the US aerospace industry in the wake of the two crises.

It announced a voluntary worker layoff plan on Thursday and said it expected "several thousand employ-



A Boeing 737 MAX airplane is pictured on the tarmac with its signature winglet and fuel efficient engines outside the company's factory in Renton, Washington. —AFP

ees" to take a severance package or retire. Boeing currently employs around 70,000 people in Washington state. —AFP

As Germany reels, some debate impact on banks

FRANKFURT: As Germany rolls out a 750 billion-euro economic stimulus package, officials and experts are discussing whether German lenders, including Deutsche Bank AG and Commerzbank AG, will be able to weather the economic fallout of coronavirus without state help.

Interviews with more than a dozen people, including government officials and senior bankers, show some officials fear that if the crisis persists, weakened lenders would choke off credit to the economy and worsen the situation.

For now though, several sources said Chancellor Angela Merkel's government is focusing on propping up non-financial companies under the stimulus package and no action is expected on banks in the

near term. Their hope is that the support to non-financial companies through the aid package will prevent the loans from going bad, avoiding a hit to the banking sector, the sources said.

Deutsche Bank said it is financially strong, and its discussions with the government were focused on how the banking industry could support the real economy. Commerzbank pointed to its low proportion of non-performing loans of 0.9 percent to underscore its strength. In a statement to Reuters, the finance ministry said: "All Corona-based programs of the German government are explicitly focusing on the non-banking sectors. There are no plans to extend such programs to other sectors."

The government believes the aid package has bought Germany three months of breathing space, three of the sources said. Nevertheless, a debate has begun over what could be done to reinforce the banks should the need arise. Officials have discussed various options in recent weeks to reinforce the banking sector, should it become necessary, several sources said. These include a state agency taking stakes in banks to inject capital, said four of the

The coronavirus and the measures taken by authorities around the world to contain its spread have hit economies hard. Sweden's government expects GDP will shrink 4 percent this year and, with unemployment set to rise, there are worries that many households will struggle to meet mortgage payments. Sweden's Financial Supervisory Authority (FSA) said last week it would suspend rules forcing banks to demand mortgage repayments from borrowers.

The government had already announced a raft of measures to head off mass layoffs, but many firms have already sent workers home or put them on shorter working hours. The government has also eased rules on claiming benefits to soften the blow to individuals.

The Swedish housing market barely reacted to the financial crisis of 2008-2009 but has long been seen as the economy's Achilles heel. Prices have shot up over the last two decades and debt levels in

sources. State guarantees could be given to vouch for the creditworthiness of listed banks as well as state-backed commercial lenders, bolstering their standing, one person said. A spokesman for the finance ministry denied these options were currently under consideration. "None of this is happening," he said.

Risk build-up

Lars Feld, the chairman of the German government's council of economic experts, played down current risks to lenders such as Deutsche. "If you can avoid insolvencies of companies, the banks are safe," he told Reuters in an interview. "But if additional support is required for the banking sector, the government will do it. All of this assumes, however, that the current measures have failed," Feld said.

The council, which advises the chancellery, finance ministry and economy ministry on policy, warned the government in an 101-page report in late March that an economic slump could spill over to banks. "If tackling the coronavirus takes longer, the number of insolvencies will rise, which could, in turn, put banks in distress," the council wrote. —Reuters



STOCKHOLM: Swedish SEB's sentiment indicator falling to minus 20 - a record drop for a single month - from 47 points in March. —Reuters

relation to GDP are amongst the highest in Europe. In recent years, the FSA has tightened lending rules and hiked the buffers banks need to hold against possible loan losses from the mortgage market, but concerns remain. —Reuters

'Superheroes': Coronavirus survivors donate plasma hoping to heal the sick

NEW YORK: As she emerges from quarantine, recovered COVID-19 patient Diana Berrent is eager to join the battle against the pandemic and donate precious antibodies that researchers hope might help others. In mid-March, the New Yorker woke up with a 102-degree (39 Celsius) fever and intense chest heaviness, becoming one of the first from her Long Island neighborhood to test positive for coronavirus.

This week, Berrent was the first survivor in her state screened for antibodies - immune system-generated proteins that can ward off viruses - to contribute to initial tests seeking treatment for the infection that's left more than 51,000 people dead worldwide. Convalescent plasma, the fluid in blood teeming with antibodies post-illness, has proven effective in small studies to treat infectious diseases including Ebola and SARS.

Now, the US Food and Drug Administration has greenlit physicians to experiment with the strategy as coronavirus patients fill hospitals and the nation's positive caseload spikes to over 236,000. Bruce Sachias, chief medical officer of the New York Blood Center - which will collect, test and distribute donations in the city - said while there is reason to believe plasma transfusions can help alleviate the current crisis, tests underway are not intended to yield golden-ticket solutions. "It's really important for us to be very cognizant of the fact that we're still in very new territory," he said.

Eldad Hod and Steven Spitalnik - transfusion medicine doctors leading trials at Columbia University's Irving Medical Center - are cautiously optimistic but, like Sachias, emphasize the unknowns. Spitalnik told AFP they believe "within seven to 14 days after the onset of an infection, that people will develop an immune response and eventually make high amounts of antibodies - although exactly when the peak of antibody production will be, we don't know."

He said some data suggests antibody production

could peak around 28 days post-infection, and hopes the new research could provide a clearer picture. Hod said each donation "can potentially save three to four lives." The primary goal now is acquiring a significant plasma stock, so researchers can conduct formal studies with control groups who would receive non-convalescent plasma, and others the antibody-packed donations.

Initial plasma, however, will be distributed for "compassionate use," Hod said - to patients outside studies but for whom other strategies have failed. They also aim to test treatments on already-hospitalized patients and as a preventative therapy in settings like nursing homes. Spitalnik said that normally they would want "highly controlled" clinical trials, which take longer but are more definitive. But "this is a crisis," he said. "We understand and we are amenable to doing things that will take shorter amounts of time - but hopefully we'll yield at least some rigorous results."

Internal hazmat suit

Berrent is eager to open her personal blood bank and crossing her fingers in hope the process can prove life-saving. "We can be superheroes," the 45-year-old photographer told AFP. "These are unprecedented, frightening times where everything is beyond our control - except for we as survivors can help," Berrent said. "We can be the ones running towards the fire in our own internally built hazmat suit. And that is a tremendous opportunity - how could you not take advantage of that?"

Berrent's antibody levels met donation requirements - but she is waiting on results of a nasal swab test to make sure any remnants of coronavirus have dissipated. In the meantime, she's started the more than 17,000-member Facebook group "Survivor Corps" to mobilize other survivors to share their immunity. "I can't wait to donate," Berrent said. "We need a forward-looking solution-based approach that offers hope because things are



NEW YORK: A man wearing a protective mask walks by street art amid the coronavirus pandemic in New York City. COVID-19 has spread to most countries around the world, claiming almost 70,000 lives with infections nearing 1.3 million people. — AFP

very, very bleak right now."

A Houston hospital has already transfused plasma from a recovered patient into someone critically ill, though it's still too early to determine efficacy. Sachias said hundreds of people who believe they have recovered from COVID-19 have applied to help in New York, the US epicenter of the highly contagious virus that accounts for nearly half of related deaths state-

side. As their research gets underway, Hod said one silver lining of coronavirus' global scale has been the boost to collaborative scientific efforts, saying data is being shared more openly than ever before. "I think a lot of the scientific community has tried to put their egos aside... and banded together to try and work together for the common good," he said. "And I think in the end, science will win." — AFP

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Bell and Shepard waives rent for their tenants amid the coronavirus crisis

Kristen Bell and Dax Shepard have waived their tenants' rent for the month amid the coronavirus crisis. The couple - who own at least two properties across California - have reportedly decided to let their tenants live at their homes for free for the month of April as some of the occupiers have lost their jobs under the state's new stay at home order in a bid to prevent the spread of COVID-19. A manager for the pair's company Pringus Property LLC, which was thought to be Dax's sister, reportedly emailed all tenants over the weekend to let them know the plan for the upcoming month. A source told TMZ.com that the email showed sympathy towards the tenants and said that the company would

work with residents going forward as the world attempts to stamp out the deadly virus. Kristen and Dax - who got married in 2013 - have taken precautions to prevent them spreading the disease, which originated from Wuhan, China, and even lived separately in recent weeks. The 45-year-old had been travelling a lot for work when the coronavirus began to spread to other parts of the world so in a bid to keep Kristen and their children Delta, five, and Lincoln, six, safe, he self-quarantined at a friend's empty apartment nearby when he returned to California. Taking to Instagram recently, the 39-year-old actress said: "To be cautious, I asked him to stay at a friend's empty apartment for a bit to make sure he had no symptoms.

"Today we were missing him so much, we did the only logical thing we knew how to do. Danced outside his window to a @bensplatt and @dearevanhansen serenade." Kristen has been very vocal during the pandemic and has been urging her fans to stay at home. She said: "Many people have many [different] reasons for being more susceptible to this virus that we others may be. Some may be obvious, others may not. "It's incredibly important that we socially distance, to protect the vulnerable ones among us. Let's show up for one another, by staying home for one another."

Nikki Bella is worried she'll have to deliver her baby at home



The 36-year-old retired wrestler is due to give birth to her first child at the end of August and is terrified that she'll have to deliver naturally without any intervention from doctors if the coronavirus crisis goes on longer than predicted. Speaking to 'Entertainment Tonight', she said: "I told Artem [Chigvintsev, her partner and the baby's father], I am happy our baby is coming the beginning of August. I feel really bad for the people who are due over the next few weeks. "I told Artem it's just a really scary time to be in the hospital. I mean, your doctors are getting coronavirus just by working on patients, so it's almost scarier to go in a hospital than anywhere else right now. "I told him that really worries me about our baby. Like, are we going to have to have it at home? I don't want a natural birth. "So, it worries me. But we are lucky being the end of August. I pray every morning and night that [this virus] changes for us. As of right now, we're still due to have our baby in Los Angeles. We have a reservation in the hospital." Nikki is currently self-isolating at home with Artem, her twin sister Brie - who is also expecting a baby in July - and her two-year-old daughter Birdie. Brie explained: "The nice thing is we're neighbors so we've been keeping each other company, keeping each other calm, and helping each other with our fears and anxiety of the uncertainty of this virus." We're really lucky we have each other. We have definitely built a compound. We don't let family come over; it's just been Nicole, Artem, Birdie and I. We enjoy our coffees in the morning and then we switch having dinner at each other's houses so it feels like we have somewhere we're going." Brie's husband Daniel Bryan is currently in Orlando, Florida, and said he will stay in a hotel for 15 days once he returns home.

CRAIG ATE KIMCHI FOR BREAKFAST EVERY DAY

The 52-year-old actor started working on his bulging biceps and chiseled abs for 'No Time To Die' - his fifth and final outing as James Bond - a year before filming the movie, and did so by stuffing his face with salted and fermented vegetables in the mornings followed by a shot of turmeric and lemon and ginger. Speaking to The Times, Daniel's personal trainer Simon Waterson said: "Daniel started the day with rye bread, poached eggs, avocado and kimchi, maybe some kale. And turmeric shots. Then it's lemon and ginger shots and off to work we go. Oh and, you know, a coffee." Although his breakfast always stayed the same, Daniel would follow a plant-based diet on Mondays, go pescatarian on Tuesdays, weave in some white meat on Wednesdays, go vegetarian on Thursdays, and tuck into red meat on Fridays. The hunk also did a 30-minute high intensity interval training session involving reverse lunges and mountain climbers. Simon explained: "If I can add three components into one movement, I bring down the time. What would normally take two hours? Done in 30 minutes." Simon has been working with Daniel since 2005 and has admitted he was the person who encouraged him to give up smoking all those years ago. He said: "I knocked on his door and he said, 'Ah, trainer?' I said yes. And he said... 'No?' And I said, 'Make it your last!' " He's also not a very big drinker when it comes to alcohol as it's not really "on the cards for a professional like Daniel" but he did like to enjoy a beer on his days off.



Richards suing former landlords

Denise Richards is suing her former landlords for leaking "private information" about her. The 'Real Housewives of Beverly Hills' star has filed a countersuit against Anthony Ellrod and Christopher Masterson after they accused her and her husband Aaron Phypers of trashing their home in Calabasas, California, when they moved out. In the court documents, obtained by the New York Post newspaper's Page Six column, the 49-year-old actress has claimed she was a good tenant and the landlords have caused her emotional distress by leaking delicate information about her. It's not known what information Denise is upset about but her former address, rental amount and various other details are listed in the

agreement which was submitted to the courts when Mr Ellrod and Mr Masterson filed the original lawsuit. Denise and Aaron moved into the property in July 2018 - two months before they tied the knot - and the landlords are seeking \$113,000 in damages. A source said: "Denise rented this place out for a short period of time for a family member. It was in a state of disrepair to begin with, but now the present owners, who are two lawyers, are having trouble selling it - and it is also across the street from a residential treatment program." However, Denise has claimed "there are no actual damages and no actual violations of the agreement" between the two parties and has since accused the landlords of making the contract with the "intent to defraud" her and Aaron. She added in the paperwork: "Further, said conduct was despicable in that it was so vile, base, contemptible; miserable, retched, and loathsome that it would be looked down upon and despised by ordinary decent people." The blonde beauty went on to claim that "a reasonable person in [her] position would consider the publicity highly offensive" from the landlords filing the suit and, as a result, she has suffered from "great mental and physical pain and discomfort, annoyance, distress, anguish, worry, anxiety, pain and suffering, and has lost wages and related benefits, past and future, all in the amount to be proven at the time of trial." Denise and Aaron are seeking damages and for their legal fees to be covered.—Bang Showbiz



Kylie Jenner 'loves' being at home amid the coronavirus pandemic

The 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star's father Caitlyn Jenner has been keeping in touch with the 22-year-old beauty via FaceTime every day since California was put into lockdown in a bid to slow the spread of COVID-19 and thinks she's actually enjoying being confined to her mansion because she can spend every minute of every day with her two-year-old daughter Stormi. Speaking to 'Entertainment Tonight', Caitlyn, 70, said: "I think Kylie's happy because she's at home and spending a lot of time with Stormi and she loves that." While Kylie has Stormi, whom she has with her ex-partner Travis Scott, to keep her company, her sister Kendall, 24, is in Palm Springs with some of her friends. Caitlyn explained: "Kendall has a couple of



friends out in Palm Springs. Everyone's kind of coping with it. "We just have to realize that the health of our country is much more important, and suck it up business-wise. And when things stop and things go back to normal at some point, we'll fire back up again. Right now, everyone's just laying low. "Kylie is a homebody. Kendall likes getting out, but [Kylie] loves being at home. She likes cooking, loves being with little Stormi. And she's doing just fine." The 'I Am Cait' star is also self-isolating and has admitted "it's kind of scary" not to be able to see her children in person but she's trying to stay positive. She said: "I always look at the positive side of these types of things, and I try to relay that to my kids. This is not the end of the world. We will get through this. "For some of the kids that are actually very young, this may be the first time they've been through a real scare like this. You have to take it seriously, but you also have to be optimistic, because we always get through these things. "It's not easy, but we always get through these things. So enjoy your time off, enjoy your time with your family, and we'll get through it."



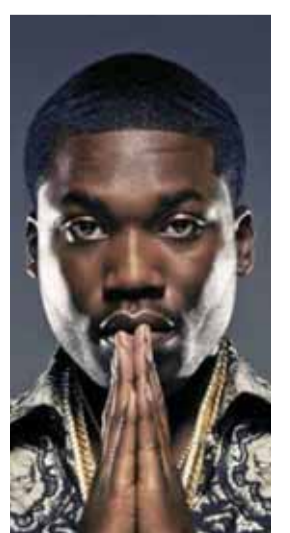
Charli XCX feels like she's 'really high' in light of coronavirus crisis

Charli XCX feels like she's "really high" at the moment because of how quickly the world has changed since the coronavirus crisis spread around the world. The 27-year-old singer has spent the past six days inside her home after Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged the nation to stay indoors to help slow the spread of COVID-19, which has already killed 16,527 people around the world at time of writing, and she's still trying to get her head around her new way of life. Speaking to Zane Lowe on Apple Music, she said: "(The last time I left the house) was six days ago. Although we're running low on some stuff now, so I might have to go out to a supermarket in a safe way and get some more supplies. "I went out into my garden this morning, but I haven't gone out on a walk, I haven't left my property. It's been six days and I have these moments where I'll just be living my life and then suddenly I'll have this kind of existential thought where I'm like, 'Whoa, this is crazy. I'm doing this, but the rest of the world is also doing this. Everybody is inside their house. This is the world now.' It kind of blows my mind. "I feel like I'm really high or something and I'm like, 'This is insane.' This is life. What's interesting as well is I'm fortunate enough that whilst, yes, I am inside, my circumstances have not drastically changed to a point where I'm in an extremely different situation. I don't have to support a young family, I don't have to support anybody who's elderly, and suffering with the virus, and has a low immune system. I'm extremely lucky and fortunate to be in that situation. "For me, when I look around my world, yes, it's changed because I'm indoors and a lot of things have been cancelled. I think it's the same for a lot of people who are also in my situation. That's kind of trippy in itself because there's been this massive change, but it's also like we're in this bubble. It's kind of hard to register exactly how drastic it is. It's this very strange catch 22." However, the 'Break the Rules' hitmaker has admitted she's starting to get a little bit frustrated with staying indoors now but is trying to keep herself occupied.

Meek Mill convinced he caught coronavirus at Christmas

The 32-year-old rapper has revealed he was "extremely sick" with "flu-like symptoms" around the festive period and, although he never got a in-depth diagnosis from doctors, he thinks he may have been battling the deadly virus. Taking to his Twitter account, he said: "I was extremely sick in December around Christmas time with flu like symptoms... everyday I said to myself a older person cannot survive this! I lost like 15 pounds and could barely move! I never been that sick.. a doctor never told me what it was. (sic) A number of celebrities have caught the illness since it began to spread outside of Wuhan, China - where it originated from - at the beginning of the year and a few older stars have sadly died as a result of complications from the virus. Tom Hanks and his wife Rita Wilson revealed earlier this month that they tested positive for the virus - which has killed over 16,000 worldwide - but they appear to be com-

ing out of the other side now and have stressed the importance of isolation. The 63-year-old actor wrote on Twitter: "Hey, folks. Two weeks after our first symptoms and we feel better. Sheltering in place works like this: You don't give it to anyone - You don't get it from anyone. Common sense, no? Going to take awhile, but if we take care of each other, help where we can, and give up some comforts...this, too, shall pass. We can figure this out. Hanx. (sic) Idris Elba and his wife Sabrina Dhowe Elba have also tested positive for the virus. The 47-year-old actor said recently: "My wife and I felt like it was the right thing to do, to share it with you guys." Right now though, I am feeling okay. "Woke up this morning, didn't have any symptoms. My voice is a little tired ... checking my fever twice a day. Feel good, feel okay. Been doing a lot of reading about it. You know, asymptomatic is what comes up."



Lifestyle | Features



A sand sculpture by Palestinian artist Rana Al-Ramlawi is pictured in her yard in Gaza City, during the novel coronavirus pandemic crisis, on April 3, 2020.—AFP

We don't need no social distance: US police bust Pink Floyd 'corona party'

Partygoers at a Pink Floyd tribute night have been scolded for shouting abuse at New Jersey police after defying social distancing rules brought in to contain the coronavirus pandemic. Around 30 people gathered to watch an acoustic rendition of the British rock band's greatest hits on the front lawn of a home in Rumson, a seaside community south of New York City, that was also broadcast live over social media. Police were called to end the revelry, but met a hostile crowd on arrival. "When we informed everyone that they must leave... we were met with well wishes of 'F-the police' and 'Welcome to Nazi Germany,'" said the town's police department on Facebook late Saturday. Officers then instructed the band to cut the night short as they were halfway through a performance of Pink Floyd's

1975 anthem "Wish You Were Here" — fittingly, a song often played as an anthem for absent friends. "The Rumson Police Department takes no enjoyment in ruining anyone's fun," the police statement said. "However we ALL have a responsibility to take this pandemic SERIOUSLY and adhere to the social distancing requirement." New Jersey governor Phil Murphy ordered residents to stay home and non-essential businesses to shutter indefinitely last month. He has since taken to social media to rebuke residents for ignoring the lockdown rules after several news reports of social gatherings. Can't believe I have to say this at all," he tweeted last week. "But here we are. NO CORONA PARTIES. They're illegal, dangerous, and stupid."—AFP



Arigato! Japanese chefs serve up feast for French hospital staff

Asparagus soup, cheesy profiteroles and fluffy chocolate mousse were on the menu Sunday as five Japanese chefs showed culinary gratitude to hospital workers treating coronavirus patients in the French city of Dijon. "It's a way of saying 'arigato', thanks," said Takashi Kinoshita, chef at Chateau de Courban, a Michelin-starred eatery around two hours' drive from Paris. "In Japan, when there is a natural or health-related catastrophe we look to see what we can do. One must always think of others," said Kinoshita, whose establishment closed its doors in mid-March as France went into a nationwide lockdown to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

The chef kicked off the movement last week, offering about 100 meals to frontline hospital workers. "But since then, my Japanese chef friends have called me and joined in. Each prepares his own dishes," Kinoshita told AFP. For Sunday's offering, Tomofumi Uchimura from Dijon's Stephane Derbord restaurant prepared asparagus soup and poached egg in pine nut oil. Keiko Kimura, from the Michelin-starred L'Asperule also in Dijon, and Keishi Sugimura, from Beaune's one-starred Benaton, made a dish of Pinot Noir-marinated braised chuck steak. For appetizers there were Kinoshita creations in the form of gougeres — profiteroles made from soft, creamy, and famously stinky cow's milk cheese from the Burgundy region — as well as savoury macarons with black currant mustard.

And for dessert, Kinoshita and Sae Hasegawa, head patissier at Chateau de Courban, prepared a delicate chocolate mousse and pear-and-Philippine lime crumble. The Japanese quintet cooked up their creations entirely with donations from restaurants and producers. "We will continue," Kinoshita said. "Next week we will deliver to the Beaune Hospital and then the one in Troyes." Sunday's banquet was served in a parking lot outside the university hospital in Dijon at a safe distance from the main building as "you have to respect the rules" of social distancing during lockdown, Kinoshita noted. The chef said he had received "a number of messages" of gratitude from hospital workers treating people sickened by the virus that has left more than 7,500 people dead in France to date. "They say thanks, and that it gives them strength" to keep going, he said.—AFP



Takashi Kinoshita, chef at Chateau de Courban

Canadian actress and activist Shirley Douglas dead at 86

Canadian actress and civil rights activist Shirley Douglas died Sunday at the age of 86, her son actor Kiefer Sutherland said. Douglas died following a bout of pneumonia, Sutherland wrote on Twitter, specifying that it was not related to the novel coronavirus pandemic. "My mother was an extraordinary woman who led an extraordinary life," wrote Sutherland, best known as agent Jack Bauer in the TV thriller "24." "Sadly she had been battling for her health for quite some time and we, as a family, knew this day was coming," he wrote.



Actress Shirley Douglas arrives at the gala premiere "Lord of the Rings" play on March 24, 2006 in Toronto, Canada.—AFP

Douglas spent her acting career between Canada and Hollywood, where she worked with big-name directors such as Stanley Kubrick and David Cronenberg. She is also known for campaigning for several progressive causes, including the civil rights movement and the Black Panthers in the 1960s and later defending Canada's public health care system. Douglas had three children, two of them — including Kiefer — with Canadian-born Hollywood actor Donald Sutherland. She was the daughter of Tommy Douglas, the founder of Canada's medicare system and a one-time prime minister of the western Canadian province of Saskatchewan.—AFP

Frenchman fined after crossing mountains to buy smokes

A man who tried to walk from France to Spain to buy cheap cigarettes was rescued in the Pyrenees mountains — only to be fined for flouting anti-coronavirus regulations. The man had initially set out by car Saturday from Perpignan in southern France to La Jonquera in Spain, but was stopped at a checkpoint, and decided to make his way on foot across the mountain range that separates the two countries. "He fell into a stream, in brambles, got lost and ended up contacting" the emergency services, a mountain unit of the gendarmerie police force in the Pyrenees-Orientales region said on Twitter on Sunday.

A helicopter was sent to rescue the man, "exhausted, shivering with cold and lost," it added. After being brought safely back, the man was given the 135-euro (\$146) fine for breaking the confinement rules under which French residents can leave their homes only for essential reasons, and then with a self-certified note stating their business. "We remind you once more. STAY AT HOME," concluded the gendarmerie's Tweet. Many people in southern France cross the border to buy cigarettes, alcohol, some foodstuffs and fuel, which are cheaper in Spain.—AFP

Bronx zoo tiger tests positive for coronavirus

A tiger at New York's Bronx Zoo has tested positive for COVID-19, the institution said Sunday, and is believed to have contracted the virus from a caretaker who was asymptomatic at the time. The four-year-old Malayan tiger named Nadia along with her sister Azul, two Amur tigers and three African lions all developed dry coughs and are expected to fully recover, the Wildlife Conservation Society that runs the city's zoos said in a statement. "We tested the cat out of an abundance of caution and will ensure any knowledge we gain about COVID-19 will contribute to the world's continuing understanding of this novel coronavirus," the statement sent to AFP said.



This handout photo released by Wildlife Conservation Society's Bronx Zoo on Sunday shows the Malayan tiger Nadia who tested positive for Covid-19.—AFP

"Though they have experienced some decrease in appetite, the cats at the Bronx Zoo are otherwise doing well under veterinary care and are bright, alert, and interactive with their keepers," the statement continued. "It is not known how this disease will develop in big cats since different species can react differently to novel infections, but we will continue to monitor them closely and anticipate full recoveries." All four of the zoos and the aquarium in New York — whose virus death toll has topped 4,000 — have been closed since March 16. The zoo emphasized that there is "no evidence that animals play a role in the transmission of COVID-19 to people other than the initial event in the Wuhan market, and no evidence that any person has been infected with COVID-19 in the US by animals, including by pet dogs or cats."

Chinese disease control officials had identified wild animals sold in a Wuhan market as the source of the coronavirus pandemic that has infected well over one million people worldwide.

According to the US Department of Agriculture website there had "not been reports of pets or other animals" in the United States falling ill with coronavirus prior to news of the tiger Nadia. "It is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus," the department's website says.

In late March a pet cat was discovered infected with the novel coronavirus in Belgium, following similar cases in Hong Kong where two dogs tested positive for COVID-19. All of those animals are believed to have contracted the virus from the people they live with. The Bronx zoo said preventative measures were in place for caretakers as well as all cats in the city's zoos.—AFP



In this file photo British singer Marianne Faithfull performs at the Bataclan concert hall in Paris.—AFP

60s icon Marianne Faithfull treated for COVID-19

British singer Marianne Faithfull has tested positive for coronavirus and is being treated in hospital, her publicists said on Saturday. "Marianne Faithfull's manager... has confirmed that Marianne is being treated for COVID-19 in hospital in London," music industry publicists Republic Media tweeted. "She is stable and responding to treatment. We wish her well and a full and speedy recovery." Faithfull's friend, the US avant-garde performer Penny Arcade, wrote on her Facebook page that the singer went into hospital on Tuesday, reportedly after developing a cold while self-isolating. "She has withstood and survived so much in her life

— including being Marianne Faithfull, that to be taken down by a virus would be such a tragedy," wrote Arcade, whose real name is Susana Ventura.

Faithfull, 73, was one of the icons of the 1960s and was catapulted to fame at the age of just 17 singing "As Tears Go By", written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones. She has had a five-decade career as a singer-songwriter, and stage and film actress. But she has also had well-documented battles with drug addiction and health issues.—AFP



Confined Spaniard stays safe by skiing in his living room

When Philipp Klein Herrero had to cancel a skiing holiday because of the coronavirus pandemic he recreated the winter sport experience in confinement in his Barcelona flat. The video has gone viral. "I had a spark of creativity," the 28-year-old video maker and amateur skier told AFP. The result was a 57-second video called "Freeride at home" shot from a camera attached to the ceiling which has been viewed several hundred thousands times on YouTube and other platforms.

"The day Spain decreed a lockdown for the whole country, I had a bus ticket to go to La Grave, France, for a week's skiing with my family. It was the freeride trip I had saved up for all year, everything was planned," said Klein Herrero, an engineer at Spanish car-maker SEAT, told AFP. "I could have got on that bus, but

when I saw that the situation was getting crazier by the minute, I decided that it was a bit immoral to go skiing while people were dying in Spain," he added. The total number of deaths from the coronavirus in Spain has passed 11,700. "The lockdown had me thinking about skiing the whole time, so I started to think how I could ski without leaving my living room," he wrote when he posted the video.

In the video, edited in stop-motion, Klein Herrero wakes on the floor in a sleeping bag in full gear. Shot from above to make it seem that he is standing when he is, in fact, lying on the floor, he climbs a show-capped peak made of white sheets and then skis down. He finishes with a crash. As his helmeted disappears into the sheets, the message: "Stay safe, stay at home," appears.—AFP

Coronavirus lands British PM in hospital, but Europe offers hope

LONDON: Europe's hardest-hit countries showed tentative signs of progress in the battle against coronavirus yesterday, even as the disease hospitalized British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The virus has infected virtually every corner of the planet, confining nearly half of humanity to their homes and turning life upside down for billions on a deadly march that has claimed nearly 70,000 victims.

Queen Elizabeth II delivered only her fourth emergency address in a 68-year reign to urge Britain and Commonwealth nations to "remain united and resolute". The rare speech came as the 55-year-old Johnson was admitted to hospital for tests as a "precautionary step" after 10 days of persistent symptoms, but colleagues insisted he remains in charge of the government.

The Conservative leader announced on March 27 that he had tested positive for COVID-19, and has been self-isolating in his flat above Downing Street ever since. He still has a high temperature among other symptoms, officials say. "Today he's in hospital having the tests, but he will continue to be kept informed as to what's happening and to be in charge of the government," his housing minister, Robert Jenrick, told BBC television. Britain is in the middle of a serious coronavirus outbreak, with almost 50,000 confirmed hospital cases and nearly 5,000 deaths so far.

Officials say Johnson was admitted to hospital not because his condition worsened but because it had not improved. There was no need for an ambulance. "The prime minister continues to have persistent symptoms of coronavirus ten days after testing positive for the virus," a spokeswoman said on Sunday evening. The Times newspaper reported that the prime minister had been given oxygen treatment.

"Doctors will be monitoring important vital signs such as oxygen saturations," said Rupert Beale, group leader at the cell biology of infection laboratory at the Francis Crick Institute. He said they would also check Johnson's blood to "see what the immune response to the virus looks like, and to assess liver and kidney function", and may also perform an electrocardiogram to check the heart.

But there was cause for cheer in some European hotspots, with Italy reporting its lowest death toll in two weeks, Spanish fatalities dropping for the third straight day, and France seeing its fewest dead in a week. "The curve has started its descent and the number of deaths has started to drop," said top Italian health official Silvio Brusaferra, adding the next phase could be a gradual easing of a strict month-long lockdown.

In Spain, nurse Empar Loren said: "The situation is more stable. The number of patients in intensive care is not growing much anymore, and we are starting to discharge quite a few." At a field hospital set up at a Madrid conference centre, staff applauded whenever a patient was healthy enough to be sent home. Builder Eduardo Lopez, 59, gave a "10/10" rating to the staff who cared for him "with tender-



SURABAYA, Indonesia: A man walks past a mural depicting the COVID-19 coronavirus yesterday. — AFP

ness and a great dose of humanity".

But while the curve was bending in Europe, there was little sign of let-up in the United States, where the death toll approached 10,000 and authorities warned worse was around the corner. "This is going to be the hardest and the saddest week of most Americans' lives, quite frankly," US Surgeon General Jerome Adams told Fox News. "This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment, only it's not going to be localized."

The death toll in hardest-hit New York state rose to 4,159, Governor Andrew Cuomo said, up from 3,565 a day earlier. It was the first time the daily toll had dropped, but Cuomo said it was too early to tell whether that was a "blip". Images from New York showed medics in protective gear wheeling bodies on stretchers to refrigerated trailers repurposed as makeshift morgues.

The city that never sleeps was quiet, the streets around Time Square deserted as neon lights continued to flicker, one reading: "2020. To those fighting for our lives, Thank you." President Donald Trump has warned of "horrific" death toll numbers and Johns Hopkins University said more than 1,200 people had died of coronavirus complications over the past day.

Information, Amjad Al-Adayleh, told a press briefing late Saturday.

In neighboring Israel, where the pandemic has seen a flurry of new technologies emerge designed to contain transmission, authorities are also using the unmanned aircraft. Israeli police said Sunday that teams in the northern coastal city of Naharia were using drones to patrol the beachfront area and enforce movement restrictions. A police spokesperson said that the force had also been using the technology in other parts of Israel in response to the pandemic.

Several states in the oil-rich Gulf have embraced drones in the fight against COVID-19. Kuwait, which has largely locked down the country, sent drones to the skies in mid-March to broadcast messages in multiple languages urging people to return to their homes. Later in the month, in the United Arab Emirates, police were using drones equipped with a loudspeaker in the emirate of Sharjah to order people to

stay home, while police in Dubai have taken similar steps. The drones were giving instructions in several languages, including Arabic, English, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali. Expatriates make up over 80 percent of the UAE population. In Saudi Arabia, municipal authorities have deployed drones to measure the body temperature of shoppers in Buraidah, in the north-central Al-Qassim region, the state-run Saudi Press Agency reported in late March. The drones were fitted with artificial intelligence-enabled thermal cameras, SPA said.

And in Oman, authorities have used the aircraft to reduce gatherings in public places in the capital Muscat. Qatar, meanwhile, announced on Thursday that it was carrying out a drone-based "awareness drive" that targeted foreign workers, just ahead of the Islamic weekend. The move came after images of what appeared to be foreign nationals praying on the roof of apartment buildings in a Doha suburb the previous week-

end were published by local media. The Qatari interior ministry's Twitter account on Thursday posted a video simulation of a drone directing announcements at South Asian workers. Ninety percent of Qatar's 2.75 million people are expats, and many are from developing countries. "The Ministry of Interior carries out awareness drive among expatriate communities using drones," the English-language tweet said. "The messages were announced in different languages to stay away from social gatherings and not to leave home except for necessary purposes."

Qatar has officially reported three deaths and 1,325 cases of COVID-19. A densely populated working class district southwest of the capital Doha known as the Industrial Area has been under strict lockdown since mid-March, with residents prohibited from leaving, after a number of coronavirus cases were detected there. — AFP

Jordan deploys drones to fight virus pandemic

AMMAN: Jordan on Sunday started to deploy drones to fight the coronavirus pandemic, joining a host of Middle East countries using the technology to enforce curfews, deliver public health announcements and even monitor people's temperatures. Jordan has declared five deaths and 323 cases of COVID-19 and says it has arrested at least 1,600 people for violating a nationwide curfew in force since last month. "The armed forces and security services will ensure the curfew is being respected by using modern technology such as drones and surveillance cameras," Minister of State for

grades. Fadhel said that Kuwait will ship its first cargo of 1 million barrels out of its share of Khafji production to Asian markets. "In the coming days we will have another cargo, also of 1 million barrels, from Khafji joint operations," he said, adding that output from Khafji is expected to reach around 70,000 bpd in coming days. Kuwait will also ramp up production from the Wafra oilfield this month, which can be used domestically or exported, he said.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait started trial oil production from the jointly operated oilfields, known as the Neutral Zone, in February, after agreeing last year to end a five-year dispute over the shared zone. "The divided zone is not maxed up yet 100 percent. When that reaches 100 percent we will be able to increase production further and Kuwait's production could reach 3.25 million barrels per day then," Fadhel said.

He said that Kuwait is working towards boosting production from the Neutral Zone to its maximum capacity, which might be more than 550,000 bpd, by the end of 2020. "Also we have already started heavy oil production (in North Kuwait) and it will increase in the days to come," he said, adding that heavy oil output will add 30,000-60,000 bpd to Kuwait's total production by June or July.

Saudi Aramco will delay the release of its May crude official selling prices (OSP) until April 10 to wait for the outcome of the OPEC+ meeting, a senior Saudi source familiar with the matter said on Sunday. Fadhel said Kuwait would also delay the release of its May crude pricing until after the talks. Kuwait will commit to the outcome of the OPEC+ meeting and its production and exports plans will adjust according to any agreement reached, Fadhel said. — Reuters

Kuwait backs call for talks on...

Continued from Page 1

told Reuters by telephone. "We always welcome efforts to stabilize the market for the benefit of producers and consumers. We are being proactive and many countries are working hard on it to make it a success. We all care about energy investments and we all hope for a successful outcome out of the meeting," he said.

Brent oil futures on March 30 fell to an almost 18-year low close and remain down more than 50 percent from January levels. OPEC+ members are debating a global pact to cut 10 million barrels per day (bpd) or about 10 percent of total supply, an OPEC source told Reuters on Friday. A cut that size would be unprecedented and would require a widening of OPEC+ to bring in other major players such as the United States, according to OPEC sources and analysts.

After the collapse of the OPEC+ talks in Vienna on March 6, oil producers announced plans to increase production. While Kuwait over-complied with its previous pledges under the OPEC pact, it increased its output to 2.9 million bpd by the end of March after the collapse of the talks, the minister said. He said Gulf OPEC producer Kuwait plans to pump 3.15 million bpd in April, after resuming production from the Khafji and Wafra oilfields in the Neutral Zone, which it shares with Saudi Arabia, for the first time in five years.

It also aims to boost exports of new crude

109 new coronavirus...

Continued from Page 1

The speaker said the demographic structure must be rectified and that names of visa traders should be made public.

With the announcement of 77 cases on Sunday, a majority of them expats, they surpassed the number of Kuwaiti cases, and the problem is that the source of infection remains unidentified for many. MP Adel Al-Damkhi called for imposing lockdowns on certain densely populated expat areas to prevent the spread of the disease, saying that health authorities have not disclosed where the infection curve is heading. He also called for seeking the help of highly-qualified medical consultants to prepare a long-term plan based on the worst-case scenario.

Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel said yesterday that a string of economic decisions will be issued soon over workers in the private sector and their salaries, rents and prices of food items and others. The minister called for continued efforts against the disease, expecting that the crisis could continue for months and maybe until the end of the year.

Around 2,000 Filipinos have benefited from the interior ministry amnesty offer for expats illegally residing in the country. Several hundreds of them have already departed as the ministry started processing the applications of another nationality - Egyptians - yesterday.

In another development, the assembly speaker yesterday said he was opposed to the government-sponsored bill that seeks to allow the government to borrow

KD 20 billion. He said the draft law includes flaws and it was sent to the Assembly at an inappropriate time, and called for the government to withdraw it and allow a special economic team to study it. MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said he plans to file to grill the finance minister if the government insists on submitting the debt draft law.

The interior ministry has launched new online services for citizens and residents amid the exceptional circumstances the country is experiencing. The new services, which are now available on the ministry's website (www.moi.gov.kw), include transfer of residency from one passport to another for residents, Latin name modification, family residency renewal (article 22) and sponsors' residence (article 24), the ministry said in a statement late Sunday.

However, the residency renewal service will be available on the ministry's website only for those whose residency expired as of early March. The move came following necessary coordination between the ministry's general department of residency, information technology and communication sector, Public Authority for Civil Information and the health ministry, according to the statement.

Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi decided Sunday to shut the fish, livestock and sheep markets to the public as part of efforts to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. "Sales at fish wholesale markets will be confined to cooperative societies, supermarkets, restaurants, hotels and retailers," he told KUNA.

"The livestock markets are allowed to sell only to slaughterhouses, which will, in turn, be closed to the public," he said, noting that slaughterhouses will sell meat to cooperative societies, supermarkets, butcher shops, restaurants and hotels. The public authority for food and nutrition and competent authorities have been notified of the decision to execute it immediately, Manfouhi added.

Stars

Daily SuDoku

6	5		1					
4	2	9	3	7				
7			4					
	3							6
	7	8		6		3	5	
2								8
				1				4
			5	9	3	6	7	
			4		2	3		

very hard

Yesterday's Solution

9	4	8	1	2	3	5	7	6
2	5	1	7	6	4	8	3	9
3	7	6	9	5	8	2	4	1
8	9	2	3	4	7	6	1	5
7	1	4	6	8	5	9	2	3
6	3	5	2	9	1	4	8	7
5	8	7	4	3	9	1	6	2
4	6	3	5	1	2	7	9	8
1	2	9	8	7	6	3	5	4

easy

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

Paperwork involving money needs to be executed today, Aries. It could be a settlement, new commission, or bonus of some kind. This is likely to be a joyous occasion because money is coming your way, even though the paperwork itself might be a drag. Try to concentrate and get it done quickly so you and those close to you can go out and celebrate. Make a reservation at your favorite restaurant.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Some big upheaval in your career could take you by surprise, Libra, but it's apt to make a very positive difference to you. Your public standing and income could both skyrocket. Legal papers might be involved in some way. This could happen so suddenly that it has you in a daze, but try to remain focused and go with the flow. You won't want this opportunity to pass you by.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today your mind should be especially quick and penetrating, Taurus. You could decide to tackle some in-depth research that you've been considering doing for a while on a subject that fascinates you. You might also want to discuss the subject with someone close to you who shares this interest. Don't be surprised if you come up with some intriguing insights. Write everything down.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

A social event could bring you into contact with a very intense, fascinating person in an intriguing profession, Scorpio. You could find him or her very charming and sexy. If you aren't romantically involved at the moment, there could be potential here! If nothing else, this person might steer you in a new intellectual or spiritual direction. You could seem somewhat transformed when you leave the party tonight.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Some vivid, beautiful dreams or visions could awaken you and make you aware of new opportunities. They could be creative in nature, and you should consider taking advantage of them, Gemini. This revelation could have been there, unnoticed, for a long time. Don't write it off because of the unorthodox way it appeared. Look into it and see where it leads you.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You always tend to have good powers of concentration, Sagittarius, but today you're more focused than usual, probably on a project that means a lot to you. This could be job related, it might involve helping a friend, or it may just be a personal project. Whatever it is, you should accomplish a lot today. The downside is that you might forget to eat, sleep, or take any breaks. Take care!

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today you might decide to attend a group activity that is primarily concerned with an intellectual, philosophical, or spiritual interest of yours, Cancer. You might meet a charismatic person whose conversation stimulates your mind and causes you to come up with new insights. During the course of the day, you might notice that this person is very appealing to you, and you could imagine getting romantically involved at some point.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

An intense conversation with your romantic partner could take place today, Capricorn. This could involve taking the relationship to the next commitment level, and the subject of marriage could come up. If you're already married, this could mean taking on a new responsibility, such as a house or child. If you aren't currently involved, expect to meet someone new and exciting who appeals to you on a number of levels.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

A public figure, perhaps an author, might capture your interest in some way today, Leo. This person could have a lot to say that appeals to you on a number of different levels. You'll want to acquaint yourself with as much of this person's work as possible. You could experience some valuable personal insights. Don't worry if your practical mind chides you for this obsession. Sometimes it's a good thing!

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Today you and the other members of your household might discuss the possibility of making some changes, Aquarius. This could involve some redecorating or remodeling or even something as mundane as a thorough cleaning. However, it could also involve the possibility of moving to a completely different place. The need for change in your surroundings is apparent, so don't hesitate. Go ahead and initiate the first steps!

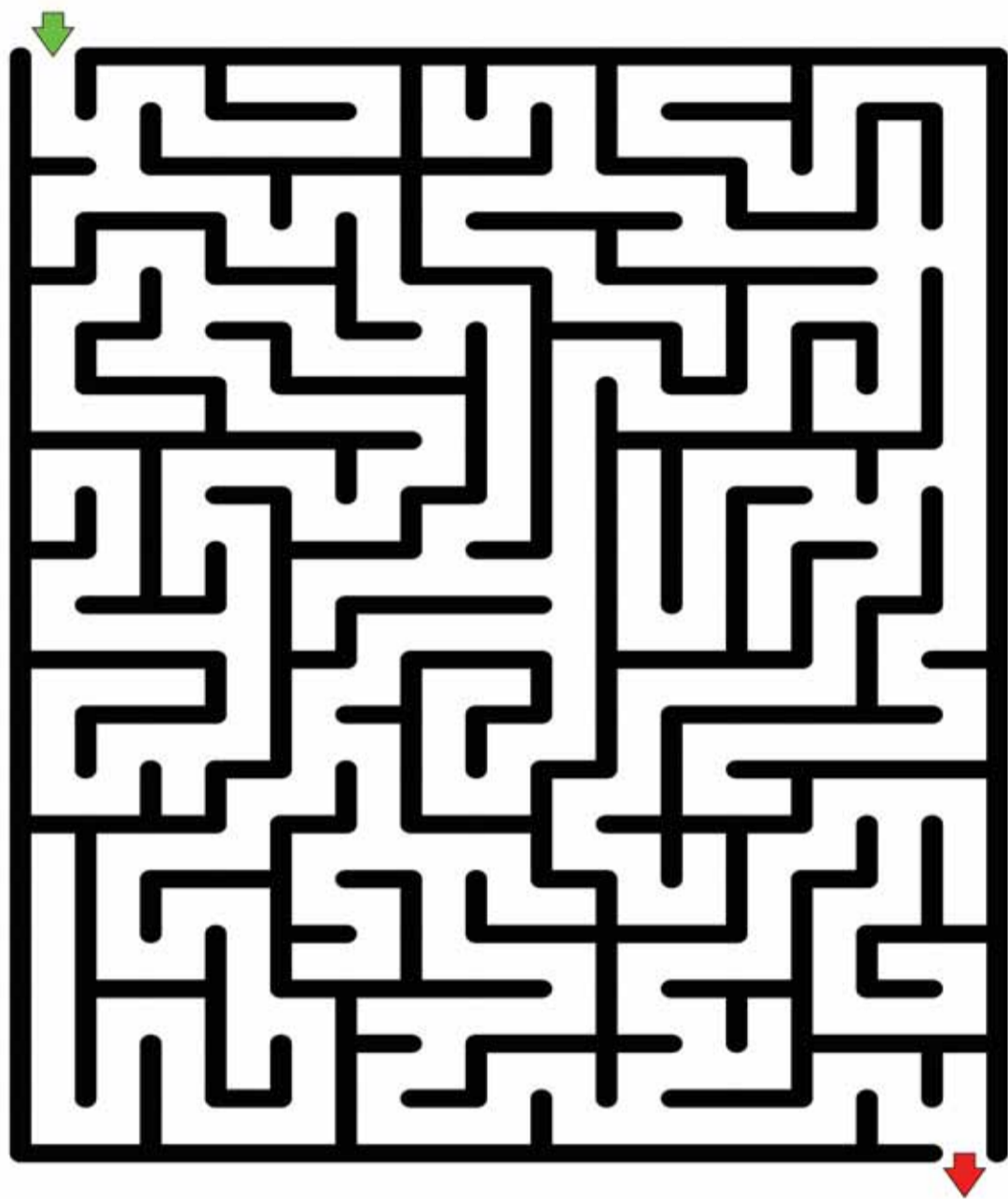
Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Today you might attend a party or group activity that puts you in touch with some interesting people from far-away places, Virgo. You could find their conversation intellectually stimulating. You're apt to learn a lot from them. Books could be involved in some way. You'll want to stay in touch with them, so be sure to get names, phone numbers or email addresses. This could open up some new doors for you.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Today you might feel the urge to write, Pisces. This could involve nothing more than a lengthy letter or email to a friend, but it could also be creative work, such as a novel, essay, screenplay, or poem. Whatever it is, you're likely to express some intellectual, philosophical, or spiritual concerns that you hope to shed some light on. Don't be surprised if you come up with more questions than answers.

Find the way



Color It



Crossword

Baby Animals

DIRECTIONS: Fill in the crossword puzzle grid with the names of each animal's baby. Use the word bank if you get stuck.

Across

2. Sheep
4. Crocodile
5. Fox
6. Dog
7. Duck
11. Eagle
12. Bear
14. Deer
15. Kangaroo

Down

1. Horse
3. Rabbit
5. Goat
6. Pig
8. Chicken
9. Cow
10. Cat
13. Human

WORD BANK

BABY	HATCHLING
BUNNY	JOEY
CALF	KID
CHICK	KIT
CUB	KITTEN
DUCKLING	LAMB
EAGLET	PIGLET
FAWN	PUPPY
FOAL	

Sports

Photo of the day



ERFOUD: Sam Sunderland of Red Bull KTM Factory Team performs in Erfoud, Morocco.—Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Former Saints kicker Dempsey dies of coronavirus infection

MIAMI: Legendary New Orleans Saints kicker Tom Dempsey, who held the record for the longest field goal in NFL history from 1970 until 2013, has died after contracting COVID-19, the team said Sunday.

Dempsey, 73, died on Saturday at a care home where he had been battling Alzheimer's and dementia. Several other residents of the facility where Dempsey was staying have contracted the novel coronavirus.

Dempsey's mammoth, game-winning 63-yard field goal struck on November 8, 1970, was the most famous moment of his NFL career.

Born without toes on his right foot or fingers on his right hand, Dempsey was an unlikely candidate for a career in grid-iron.

However Dempsey flourished with a specially modified, flat-fronted right boot which critics said gave him an unfair advantage in kicking. It did not prevent him from spending a decade in the NFL between 1969 and 1979 with stints in New Orleans, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Houston and Buffalo.

His record-setting 63-yard field goal — which clinched a 19-17 triumph over the Detroit Lions — was the longest in NFL history until Matt Prater converted a 64-yard effort for the Denver Broncos in the thin air of Mile High Stadium in 2013.

"Our thoughts and prayers are extended to Carlene and the entire Dempsey family on the passing of their dear Tom," Saints owner Gayle Benson said in a statement on Sunday.

"The New Orleans Saints family is deeply saddened and heartbroken at this most difficult time. Tom's life spoke directly to the power of the human spirit and exemplified his resolute determination to not allow setbacks to impede following his dreams and aspirations.

"He exemplified the same fight and fortitude in recent years as he battled valiantly against illnesses but never wavered and kept his trademark sense of humor. He holds a special place in the hearts and minds of the Saints family." —AFP

Leitch fears Japan failing to build on World Cup heroics

JRFU hope to fill void with an improved domestic competition

TOKYO: Japan's fairytale run to the Rugby World Cup quarter-finals was a highlight of last year's tournament but with the afterglow all but gone captain Michael Leitch fears not enough is being done to secure the Brave Blossoms a place at the game's top table.

Almost six months after Japan's emotional victory over Scotland in Yokohama secured their spot in the last eight for the first time, rugby, like the rest of world sport, has been brought to a standstill by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the unprecedented shutdown, however, questions were being raised as to whether Japan was fully capitalising on the success of rugby's first World Cup in Asia.

There had been talk of bringing Japan into the southern hemisphere's Rugby Championship or even Europe's Six Nations but Leitch said getting Japanese rugby back to a place where it could compete with the world's top sides was a big ask. "To get to that point (at the World Cup) took a lot of hard work, four years of hard work, and we did that for a short period," Leitch told Reuters last month in the coffee shop he owns on the outskirts of Tokyo. "To do it back-to-back ... would be a very difficult process. If that was going to happen, you would have to change the way Top League operates and have certain times when the national team can get together and train. "But at the moment, it is a bit ... I wouldn't say disorganised ... but we are not focusing on the Japanese team at the moment."

KEY TESTS

In an unprecedented move last year, the corporations that own Japan's domestic clubs allowed players to train with the national team for nine months ahead of the World Cup.

Since then, however, the Top League had returned to

normal, meaning the players would only be available to Japan for short periods before test matches. If the coronavirus shutdown is lifted and test matches go ahead this year, Japan will face tier one nations New Zealand, England and Ireland as part of a packed schedule.

Leitch said there was a lot riding on those tests.

"If we start losing those test matches then we could get back to only playing against tier two countries," he said.

"There is a lot of pressure on us to keep playing well and to be competitive against those top tier one countries." Japan has also lost its Super Rugby side, the Sunwolves, who will not be returning to the competition in 2021 after the Japan Rugby Football Union (JRFU) and southern hemisphere governing body SANZAAR were unable to agree terms on a deal.

"It is very disappointing," Leitch said. "It was such a great tool for us to develop good Japanese players, and for us to not be a part of that next year ... I don't know how else we are going to develop good Japanese players."

The JRFU hope to fill the void with an improved domestic competition. Some big names, including Kieran Read, Dan Carter and Will Genia, had been playing in Japan before the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

The JRFU has also announced there will be a new league format from 2021, though it has been short on details.

JRFU CEO LEITCH?

For Leitch, who was born in New Zealand and moved to Japan when he was 15-years-old, any new structure must prioritize the development of young Japanese talent.

"It is great that a lot of international players are playing in our Top League but if we look five years

most likely in Arizona, with the players quarantined and no fans in the stands, The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal reported.

MLB pushed back its scheduled March 26 start date because of the coronavirus pandemic and hasn't set a new date for Opening Day as it weighs its options.

While extending the season until Thanksgiving and playing multiple doubleheaders are options discussed between MLB and the players union, Rosenthal said games in Florida and Arizona also are possible.

Arizona would be more likely logistically because the spring training sites are closer together, but it still presents a problem to house all 30 teams in one area. Rosenthal added the plan could be "potentially controversial, sources say, requiring local, state and federal government cooperation and resources that might be necessary to fight the coronavirus pandemic."

Rosenthal said there is some worry that despite being isolated from the public, players could be exposed to the coronavirus from a hotel worker, for example, who leaves the property and encounters someone with the disease.

While MLB had hoped for a mid-May start, that is unlikely. There are social distancing guidelines in place through the end of April and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended against gatherings of 50 or more through at least May 10.

With the coronavirus yet to reach its peak in the United States, the CDC could extend that date. As of Saturday, there were more than 290,000 cases and about 8,000 deaths in the United States, according to Johns Hopkins University. —Agencies



Four years of hard work



Michael Leitch

ahead we need to start bringing up strong Japanese players," he said.

"I don't want to see Japanese rugby turned into a league that has no Japanese players, or the national team with no Japanese players.

"There needs to be a way where we promote Japanese rugby players and I think that is the next step we need to take." As he does on the pitch, Leitch is prepared to back up his words with action, and the future of rugby in his adopted nation is at the forefront of his thinking.

"After the World Cup, I had six weeks in New Zealand," said the 31-year-old loose forward.

"I got thinking, 'I can't retire from rugby, come back here, live and do nothing'. I was thinking about getting

into some kind of administration job.

"Maybe become the CEO of Japanese rugby one day," he added with a smile. The small coffee shop he has run since 2015 is his first venture into the world of business but he says his skill set would be of benefit in an administrative role.

"I have genuine passion for Japanese rugby and I can use my English and my Japanese to communicate with different unions," he said. "I need to now get a business background so hopefully this coffee shop starts to make money. "My heart is genuine when I say I want to make Japanese rugby better, so if that means starting at the top, or a different way of doing it, then I would be happy to do it." —Reuters

Astros ace to donate pay to COVID-19 relief

LOS ANGELES: Houston Astros pitcher Justin Verlander said he plans to donate his pay to COVID-19 relief efforts during baseball's shutdown. In a post on Instagram, Verlander and his wife Kate Upton said they had decided to give his paycheques to a different organization each week as baseball awaits the start of the season.

The 2020 Major League Baseball season was due to get under way on March 26 but was suspended before a single pitch had been tossed as the coronavirus pandemic erupted.

"(Kate Upton) and I have decided to donate those funds to a different organization each week so that we can support their efforts and highlight the great work they're doing during the COVID-19 crisis," Verlander said.

"Everyone around the world is affected by this virus, and we hope to contribute to the families and jobs affected, the healthcare workers and first responders on the front lines and the many others in need of basic necessities, medical supplies and support at home."

USA Today reported that Verlander would be paid \$4,773 per day for 60 days of the shutdown, or \$286,980.

Major League Baseball is considering the use of spring training sites to start the 2020 regular season,

With 'no competition', golfers play waiting game

PARIS: From honing their short games in the garden to giving their children dubious haircuts and chatting to footballers, golfers have been finding ways to fill the time without competitive sport.

The world's major golf tours have all been suspended until late May at the earliest due to the coronavirus pandemic, with the Masters and PGA Championship suspended indefinitely and three of the five women's majors rescheduled.

Former Ryder Cup winner Edoardo Molinari is in his native Italy, which has been one of the hardest-hit countries by the COVID-19 outbreak, with the virus causing over 15,000 deaths in the European nation.

"Golf is not a priority. The most important thing right now is to make sure we all behave in a way that can help this situation get under control," Molinari wrote in his blog for the European Tour website.

Top golfers find it easier to get through the lockdown than most people, with many having personal gyms, practice facilities and swimming pools at their homes. Major champions Sergio Garcia and Martin Kaymer have joined fundraising efforts to help those suffering from the disease. Molinari has been doing a daily quiz on Instagram to help give fans something to do and raise money for his local hospitals in Turin.

"The only thing we ask is that in order to be able to participate, you have to make a donation on our

gofundme page, which goes to help hospitals in Turin," he said.

On a lighter note, English Ryder Cup hero Ian Poulter used his spare time to cut his son's hair "like Ronaldo's". Unfortunately for his son, the end result, shown in an Instagram video, was a copy of Brazilian star Ronaldo's infamous trim from the 2002 World Cup, not the style worn by five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo.

He isn't the only golfer keeping busy on social media, with numerous Tour pros taking part in the "bounce" golf ball keepy-ppy challenge, while others have been answering questions from fans, or doing interviews with other famous sportspeople. "I love golf, but I think I love the competition more. If there's no competition and there's nothing to look forward to, I don't really see the point in going out and practising," world number one Rory McIlroy told former England international footballer Jamie Redknapp. The players don't know when the tours will resume, with the potential for a packed schedule later in the year. "Potentially you're looking at four majors, the Ryder Cup and the FedEx Cup in the space of 12 weeks," said McIlroy.

But some professional players are still competing, with several 'mini-tours' continuing behind closed doors in the US, where golf is allowed in most states as a designated activity despite the lockdowns. PGA Tour rookie Haley Moore collected \$2,500 for winning on the Cactus Tour in Arizona on Sunday.

"I just want to stay competitive and stay sharp with my game," Moore told the Golf Channel after winning the event played under special rules, with players in twosomes, no bunker rakes and one player to a cart. "It's very safe what they're doing." —AFP

Sports

Three sports habits that could change after coronavirus

Spit, sweat and shaking on it

PARIS: As the coronavirus brings the international sports calendar to a grinding halt, AFP Sport looks at three long-standing habits which could change forever once competition resumes.

SALIVA TO TAKE SHINE OFF SWING BOWLING

— It's been a tried and trusted friend to fast bowlers throughout the history of cricket. But the days of applying saliva to one side of the ball to encourage swing could be over in the aftermath of COVID-19. "As a bowler I think it would be pretty tough going if we couldn't shine the ball in a 'Test match,'" said Australia quick Pat Cummins. "If it's at that stage and we're that worried about the spread, I'm not sure we'd be playing sport."

“No more high-fiving”

TOWELS IN TENNIS - NO TOUCHING

— Tennis players throwing towels, dripping with sweat and blood and probably a tear or two, at ball boys and girls, has often left fans sympathising for the youngsters. Moves by officials to tackle the issue took on greater urgency in March when the coronavirus was taking a global grip. Behind closed doors in Miki, ball boys and girls on duty at the Davis Cup tie between Japan and Ecuador wore gloves. Baskets, meanwhile, were made available for players to deposit their towels.

Back in 2018, the ATP introduced towel racks at some events on a trial basis, but not everyone was

overjoyed. "I think having the towel whenever you need it, it's very helpful. It's one thing less that you have to think about," said Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas when he was playing at the NextGen Finals in Milan. "I think it's the job of the ball kids to provide towels and balls for the players."

LET'S NOT SHAKE ON IT

— Pre-match handshakes were abandoned in top football leagues just before the sports shutdown. Premier League leaders Liverpool also banned the use of mascots while Southampton warned against players signing autographs and stopped them posing for selfies.

Away from football, the NBA urged players to opt for the fist bump rather than the long-standing high-five. "I ain't high-fiving nobody for the rest of my life after this," NBA superstar LeBron James told the "Road

Trippin' Podcast".

"No more high-fiving. After this corona shit? Wait 'til you see me and my teammates' handshakes after this shit." Basketball stars were also told not to take items such as balls or teams shirts to autograph.

US women's football star Megan Rapinoe says edicts to ban handshakes or even high-fives may be counter-productive anyway. "We're going to be sweating all over each other all game, so it sort of defeats the purpose of not doing a handshake," she told the New York Times in March. —AFP



NBA advise players to avoid high-five.

Dybala too good for Bale in video game clash

LONDON: Paulo Dybala left Gareth Bale out of his Real Madrid starting line-up but had no trouble beating the Welshman's Manchester City side in a FIFA 20 video game as part of a Combat Corona fundraiser for UNICEF at the weekend.

Juventus striker Dybala only recently recovered

from the coronavirus himself but was in good spirits and proved too good for the Real winger at the console on Sunday.

"I think it's a quick retirement back out of FIFA for me to be honest ... all it takes is one moment and my defence wasn't good enough," Bale, who is the co-owner of esports organisation Ellevens Esports, said.

With the coronavirus pandemic bringing soccer across the globe to a standstill, the world of esports has helped keep players and fans entertained.

"It's just about people staying home and finding things to do... obviously everybody is going to find it difficult at different points (to self isolate) but if we can stay in and keep everyone safe, it'll save lives," Bale added.

"Everyone try your best to stay at home and keep yourself entertained."

Other top players such as Luke Shaw, Dominic Calvert-Lewin, Jordan Pickford and Ruben Loftus-Cheek were also part of the event, which was broadcast live on Twitch and raised around 17,000 pounds (\$20,791) through online donations.

Dybala, who won the game with a quick-fire brace from the Karim Benzema avatar and another goal from the virtual Eden Hazard, said the rematch would be in video game version of another sport close to Bale's heart.

"It will be on the golf course," said the Argentine, who admitted he had never played the sport in the real world. — Reuters

Wickens feels like he's almost back after 8th in virtual race

LONDON: Robert Wickens' first virtual IndyCar race seemed almost like the real thing. "My eyes were burning," the Canadian told NBCSN after getting behind the wheel for the first time since a near fatal crash two years ago.

"It was a ride," Wickens said of working his way through the turns of the virtual Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama while sitting in his basement as he finished eighth behind Australian winner Scott McLaughlin after an embarrassing moment in qualifying.

"I was so mad at myself," Wickens said. "I spun out in the last corner, which I had never done in the entire time on the simulator."

"So I started last and so we made the bold strategy of trying to make it on one stop under yellow. I felt there was a better chance of me not spinning out by saving fuel. We just made it with 0.02 gallons left at the finish. So good team work."

While other drivers treated the iRacing IndyCar Challenge as a diversion and a bit of fun, for Wickens it was serious business that he hoped would take him closer to his stated goal of getting back in the cockpit of an IndyCar.

That had seemed an impossible dream in the aftermath of his horrific crash on Aug. 19 almost two years ago when his car became airborne, catapulted into the catch-fencing and disintegrated across the track.

Along with a thoracic spinal fracture and a spinal cord injury that left him paralyzed, Wickens also suffered tibia and fibular fractures to both legs, fractures in both hands, a fractured right forearm, a fractured elbow, four fractured ribs and a pulmonary contusion.

His courageous efforts to walk, dance at his wedding and get back into a race car have been documented with regular posts on social media as the 31-year-old Canadian made remarkable progress, regaining some feeling in his legs and standing on his own.

He raced on Saturday in a field that featured drivers from around the world as motor racing sought ways to entertain fans while the sport is shuttered during the coronavirus pandemic.

McLaughlin, who said he was a long-time virtual driver, noticed the clock at 10 minutes to 6 in the morning as he chatted about his win from Brisbane, Australia.

"I started iRacing 10 years ago and it was one of the best things I did," said McLaughlin. "For an aspiring race car driver coming up through the ranks, I think to be able to drive and keep sharp between races it's fantastic."

"I think it is worth the investment in your future. When you get on the track in real life you just feel that little bit of ready. It's been an awesome tool for me and it's great fun."

The Australian held off Team Penske mate Will Power for the victory. Scott Speed finished third, followed by Alex Palou, Simon Pagenaud, Felix Rosenqvist and Colton Herta. —Reuters

NBA 2K Players Tournament finally delivers thriller

WASHINGTON: After an opening night Friday in which the closest games were decided by 16 points, the NBA 2K Players Tournament provided a much more competitive day Sunday, as eight players concluded Round 1 play.

The best game of the day — and the first round — was between No. 4 seed Donovan Mitchell of the Utah Jazz and No. 13 seed Rui Hachimura of the Washington Wizards.

After three teams won with the Milwaukee Bucks on Friday, Hachimura went with the Western Conference-leading Los Angeles Lakers and LeBron James, while Mitchell countered with the Brooklyn Nets — whose lineup included the injured Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving.

With his Lakers up two and 4.9 seconds to play, Hachimura went to the line with Danny Green and a chance to put the game away. Instead, Green made the first free throw but missed the second, giving Mitchell's Nets one shot at sending the game to overtime. But Spencer Dinwiddie's 3-pointer at the buzzer was off target, and Hachimura escaped with a 74-71 win.

He will next play Phoenix's Devin Booker, who topped 12th-seeded Michael Porter Jr. of the Denver Nuggets 85-75 in the tournament's 5-12 matchup. Booker used the Bucks while Porter was on the Lakers.

The other two games were more like Friday night's blowouts, starting with the day's first game. Eighth-seeded Montrezl Harrell, playing as his own Los Angeles Clippers, blew past No. 9 seed Domantas Sabonis of the Indiana Pacers 73-51. Sabonis was also playing as his own team.

In the day's final game, No. 6 seed Andre Drummond of the Cleveland Cavaliers blew out No. 11 seed and current free agent DeMarcus Cousins 101-49. Like the Mitchell-Hachimura game, the Lakers got the better of the Nets in that one.

The quarterfinals are scheduled for Tuesday night on ESPN2, and the semifinals and final will air April 11 on ESPN. The champion will get \$100,000 to donate to the coronavirus-relief charity of his choice.

All games are available live on the NBA or NBA 2K Twitter, Twitch, YouTube and Facebook channels.

Quarterfinal matchups

—No. 16 Derrick Jones Jr. vs. No. 8 Montrezl Harrell
—No. 5 Devin Booker vs. No. 13 Rui Hachimura
—No. 6 Andre Drummond vs. No. 14 Patrick Beverley
—No. 2 Trae Young vs. No. 10 DeAndre Ayton.
— Reuters



McLaren boss Zak Brown

Formula One in 'fragile state'

LONDON: McLaren boss Zak Brown said Sunday that the coronavirus pandemic has plunged Formula One into "a very fragile state", warning that as many as four teams could even be driven out of business.

The 2020 world championship has been unable to start with eight races of a scheduled 22 already either scrapped or postponed. "This is potentially devastating to teams, and if (it is devastating) to enough teams then it's very threatening to F1 as a whole," Brown told the BBC on the eve of a meeting planned to discuss cost-cutting in the sport.

Brown insisted that all the teams have agreed to lower the 2021 budget cap to \$150m (138.7 million euros) down from \$175 million. However, he said the ceiling needs to be reduced further to counter the financial fall-out from the virus-hit season.

"Could I see — through what is going on right now in the world if we don't tackle this situation head on very aggressively — two teams disappearing? Yeah," said Brown. "In fact, I could see four teams disappearing if this isn't handled the right way."

"And then, given how long it takes to ramp up an F1 team, and given the economic and health crisis we are in right now, to think there would be people lined up to take over those teams like there has historically been... I don't think the timing could be worse from

that standpoint.

"So I think F1 is in a very fragile state at the moment."

Earlier, Bernie Ecclestone says this season's Formula One championship should be cancelled because it appears unlikely that enough races can be completed for it to be valid due to the coronavirus crisis.

The opening eight rounds of the 2020 season have been either cancelled or postponed, with doubts over a number of the other 14 races as the pandemic continues to overshadow the sporting calendar.

A minimum of eight races are required for the championship to be valid, but former F1 chief executive Ecclestone believes that will not be possible.

"We should stop the championship this year and start again next year, hopefully, because I can't see it's going to be possible to get the right amount of races in that count for a championship," the 89-year-old told BBC Radio.

"There's got to be eight from memory, and I can't see them getting that in. It's a difficult situation."

Lewis Hamilton was this year aiming to match Michael Schumacher's record of seven drivers' titles, though there have been suggestions a truncated season would diminish the achievement.

But Ecclestone, set to become a father for the fourth time, said: "I don't think it will make a lot of difference to Lewis. He would win whatever the race number, whether it be eight, 16 or 20."

"If it's a world championship and he wins, it would go on his record and say he has won a world championship. The terrible thing is he would win all eight races. It wouldn't be a super championship." — AFP

18 Leitch fears Japan failing to build on World Cup heroics



19 Three sports habits that could change after coronavirus



19 Formula One in 'fragile state': Zak Brown



Handling of EPL pay row 'a disgrace': Rooney



LONDON: In this file photo taken on March 5, 2020 Derby County's English striker Wayne Rooney reacts during the English FA Cup. Rooney has criticised the British government and the Premier League for placing footballers in a "no-win situation" over the issue of pay cuts, branding their interventions "a disgrace". — AFP

LONDON: Wayne Rooney has criticised the UK government and the Premier League for placing footballers in a "no-win situation" over proposed pay cuts after players were urged to make sacrifices during the coronavirus crisis.

The former England captain, now playing with Championship side Derby, penned an impassioned column in the Sunday Times saying his fellow professionals were "easy targets" in the wider response to the pandemic.

It came after the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) said a proposed 30 percent pay cut could hurt Britain's state-run National Health Service (NHS) because it would hit tax receipts.

Rooney said he had both the means and the will to make financial contributions, either in the form of salary reductions or direct donations to the NHS, but felt the public pressure being exerted on players was unhelpful. The Premier League's suggested strategy involving a combination of pay cuts and deferrals amounting to 30 percent of wages, was discussed in a conference call with players' and managers' representatives on Saturday.

Initial talks were already taking place before key political figures, including Health Secretary Matt Hancock, called for action.

"If the government approached me to help support nurses financially or buy ventilators I'd be proud to do so — as long as I knew where the money was going," wrote Rooney.

The 34-year-old added: "I'm in a place where I could give something up. Not every footballer is in the same position. Yet suddenly the whole profession has been put on the spot with a demand for 30 percent pay cuts across the board. Why are footballers suddenly the scapegoats?"

"How the past few days have played out is a disgrace." The Premier League has been seen as lagging behind other European leagues in its response to coronavirus and was accused by one British lawmaker of operating in a "moral vacuum". But Rooney questioned the wisdom of the Premier League in preempting behind-the-scenes talks involving players with its own proposals for sweeping reductions. "In my opinion it is now a no-win situation," he said. "Whatever way you look at it, we're easy targets." He said the Premier League's contribution of £20 million to the NHS was "a drop in the

ocean" compared with the amount clubs would save with wage cuts.

And he questioned why stars from other sports were not the focus of similar attention. Former England striker Gary Lineker echoed Rooney's sentiments, telling the BBC that footballers he had spoken to were "desperately keen" to offer help but were an easy target.

"Why not call on all the wealthy to try and help if they possibly can rather than just pick on footballers?" he said. "Nobody seems to talk about the bankers, the CEOs, huge millionaires. Are they standing up? Are they being asked to stand up? We don't know."

The PFA said its members wanted to play their part but warned that a proposed 30 percent salary reduction would cost the country 200 million pounds (\$245 million) in lost tax receipts.

England manager Gareth Southgate has reportedly taken a 30 percent pay cut, although the Football Association is yet to confirm the move. A handful of top-flight clubs, including last year's Champions League finalists Liverpool and Tottenham, have opted to fur-

ough non-playing staff using the safety net of the government's job retention scheme.

Former Liverpool players including Jamie Carragher strongly criticised the move by the European champions, who in February announced pre-tax profits of 42 million pounds for 2018/19. Manchester City said they would not be furloughing employees. Britain's Press Association said the club's stance was approved and staff informed before Liverpool's position became public.

"We remain determined to protect our people, their jobs and our business," City said in a statement. Rooney's former England and Manchester United teammate Gary Neville, now a leading broadcaster, was highly critical of the Premier League.

"The PL are handling the CV (coronavirus) crisis terribly," he wrote on Twitter, before outlining a checklist of perceived mis-steps including their slowness in imposing a lockdown and the "PR disaster" of furloughing.

Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport said he was concerned about the way the talks had progressed. "Football must play its part to show that the sport understands the pressures its lower-paid staff, communities and fans face," he tweeted. —AFP

Italian union urges pay deal for lower league players

ROME: The head of the Italian footballers' association (AIC) on Sunday urged football authorities in the country to strike a deal to safeguard lower league players, who risk losing their livelihoods due to the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

"In Lega Pro (which manages the third-tier Serie C), Serie D and women's football there are players who provide for their families with very low earnings," AIC president Damiano Tommasi told Rainews24.

"We're looking to see if the resources we can get our hands on can help give them some security... 70 percent of players in the Lega Pro have gross earnings of less than 50,000 euros (\$54,000) a year."

"Even going beyond individual athletes, I believe we have a responsibility to protect the kit men, physical therapists, drivers and pitch-side workers."

Tommasi spoke a day before a videoconference

meeting between Serie A clubs in which player salaries — as well as potential dates to restart the league — will be on the agenda after failing to strike a deal with the AIC.

The top-flight outfits had reportedly proposed a four-month suspension of salary payments in line with what Juventus players have already agreed with their club, an idea that was given short shrift by the AIC, who according to newspaper Gazzetta Dello Sport counter-proposed a one month stop.

On Saturday, the president of the Lega Pro Francesco Ghirelli said sides in the division could disappear in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, which appeared on Sunday to be slowly abating in Italy but has still killed thousands.

"With every day that passes, there is a greater risk that entire clubs and companies could be forced out of business," Ghirelli said in a statement.

"The whole network of Serie C clubs is very close to collapse... The very real risk is that owners could see their clubs go bankrupt. Players would then find themselves with no club and, consequently, no salary at all. "This is why we need sacrifices from everyone to save football. We need to realise as soon as possible that this virus could see many Serie C clubs disappear." —AFP

“No-win situation”

Walker faces Man City probe during lockdown

LONDON: Kyle Walker is facing disciplinary action from Manchester City after reportedly breaking coronavirus lockdown conditions by hosting a "sex party" even though he has advised people to stay at home.

The England defender, 29, has apologised after the Sun newspaper reported that he invited two call girls to his flat on Tuesday. On Wednesday Walker posted on social media, urging the public to follow government guidelines on social distancing. Britain reported 621 more deaths from COVID-19 as of 1600 GMT on Saturday, taking the total toll to 4,934.

"I want to apologise to my family, friends, football club, supporters and the public for letting them down," Walker said in a statement. "There are heroes

out there making a vital difference to society at the moment and I have been keen to help support and highlight their amazing sacrifices and life-saving work over the past week."

Walker is the second high-profile Premier League player to have been caught flouting the government's guidelines after Aston Villa's Jack Grealish. The Villa captain went to a party last weekend and was pictured next to a road in slippers, just hours after he posted a video urging fans to stay safe at home on social media.

Grealish apologised and was fined and disciplined by Villa. Football is on hold due to the coronavirus outbreak and City will now look into Walker's conduct. A club statement said: "Our staff and players have been working to support the incredible efforts of the NHS (National Health Service) and other key workers in fighting the effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus in any way we can. Kyle's actions in this matter have directly contravened these efforts."

"We are disappointed to hear the allegations, note Kyle's swift statement and apology, and will be conducting an internal disciplinary procedure in the coming days." — AFP