

# Search for expats moved from Jleeb, Mahboula; 112 new cases

Adasani opposes govt debt law • Gulf states urged to unblock Internet calls

## Some citizens quibble in 5-star quarantine

KUWAIT: The meat is too fatty and the staff are slow to clean up coffee stains - some Kuwaitis quarantined in five-star hotels due to the coronavirus outbreak have a litany of complaints. Authorities in the country have forced citizens returning from abroad to isolate for 14 days in luxury properties before they are permitted to reenter society. Kuwait has adopted the strictest measures in the Gulf to combat the spread of coronavirus. It has recorded more than 700 cases, and one death.

Plush hotels have turned into quarantine shelters, preparing to host around 60,000 Kuwaitis returning from countries including Italy, Germany, Iran, Egypt and Lebanon. The first batch arrived two weeks ago, and for some accustomed to the best in life, their accommodation has proven less than satisfactory.

"Dear minister of finance, the food has no taste, it is inedible and we're throwing it away," one woman, who did not reveal her face, said in a video uploaded online. "We are emotionally tired, and our health is deteriorating because the food is not nutritious," she added as she examined catering trays delivered to her hotel room. "They served us salad with no dressing, and everything else is also dry."

Her comments prompted a backlash online with some saying she should be grateful. "I stayed in a hospital for a week with my mother and did not complain, eating bread and cheese," one Twitter user fired back. Another uploaded

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The ministry of health yesterday reported 112 new coronavirus cases in Kuwait, raising the total to 855 cases, 79 of whom are Indians, 10 Egyptians, 10 Bangladeshis, five Pakistanis, one Kuwaiti and the remaining of different nationalities. Of the 743 cases in hospital, 21 are in the intensive care unit. The health ministry also said that there were six new recoveries, bringing the total to 111.

The government has formed a special committee comprising of the municipality and the ministries of health, interior and electricity and water in addition to the Public Authority for Manpower with the aim to bring back expatriate workers who left Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula hours before they were placed under a lockdown to prevent the spread of the disease.

The health ministry will test those workers for coronavirus, while the manpower authority will locate their sponsors. Search campaigns will focus on Jahra, Wafra and Fahaheel, where thousands of workers are believed to have been moved by their

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KUWAIT: Police officers man a checkpoint at the entrance of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on Tuesday after the area was put under lockdown. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## #Stayhome Gulf influencers take the glam factor indoors

DUBAI: From extravagant trips to the Amalfi Coast and sunset photoshoots on Dubai's beaches to an almost complete lockdown - the coronavirus has forced the Gulf's social media "influencers" indoors but hasn't lowered their glamour factor. While they can no longer upload pictures of themselves zipping through international airports or strutting down London streets in high-end brands, many have turned the cameras on their lives at

home as they spend time with family, cooking and decorating.

Most have encouraged their followers to stay home as the number of novel coronavirus cases in the oil-rich Gulf, which is also home to millions of foreigners, rises past 9,000 despite tough lockdown measures. Others have given their audiences an inside look into their personal lives. Kuwaiti beauty-salon owner and style queen

Continued on Page 16



DUBAI: A girl looks at the Instagram page of Fouz Al-Fahd, a Kuwaiti beauty salon owner, on Tuesday. — AFP

## Protecting our readers

We at Kuwait Times are keen to protect the health and safety of our readers, our employees and our beloved Kuwait. To that end, and in line with Ministry of Health guidelines, we are halting the print edition of the newspaper to avoid readers' contact with any unnecessary surfaces that might get contaminated on the way to you while maintaining your source of up to date news. The suspension of the print edition will begin Friday, April 10 until further notice.

Kuwait Times is committed to providing updated, in-depth reporting on all news and information our readers need to know in these challenging times and will continue to publish via all our digital channels. Stay home, stay safe and stay informed with Kuwait Times.



# Expats complain penalties imposed despite shutdown

## New services available on interior ministry's website

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has launched new online services for citizens and residents amid the exceptional circumstances the country is experiencing over the COVID-19 pandemic. But some expats who tried the new service said even during the pandemic shutdown, they are being required to pay fines for delays in renewing visas that expired during the lockdown. "My son's visa expired on March 23, during the shutdown because of the coronavirus outbreak. I tried the online renewal service launched recently, but my question is why are we being required to pay penalties," Umm Ali asked.

"I paid because I don't want to have any problems with the authorities here. But I want to know why we are being penalized. They know that it's not our fault we did not renew the visa, so why do we have to pay? I hope the ministry will pay attention to this - they should give some sort of amnesty to us," she said.

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.

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am until further no-

tice, and announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to April 23, with work resuming on April 26.

## Council discusses projects affected by pandemic

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Khaled Mahdi stressed that despite the government shutdown, the council's secretariat general still carries out many of its tasks through online communication amongst its officials. Mahdi added that regular reports will be issued as usual, in addition to a periodic report issued by the Kuwait Center for General Policies about COVID-19.

Mahdi noted that the secretariat's officials discuss the impact of COVID-19 on development plan projects, the projects affected and those unaffected, monitoring manpower at strategic project sites, implementing the Cabinet's decisions and reviewing the measures taken by site managers. He added the secretariat general also takes part in the government-private sector joint economic team formed to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. Mahdi said some development projects have been affected due to the crisis, while

others are still proceeding according to schedule.

### Camping sites

The head of the 2019-2020 spring camps committee and manager of Jahra municipality cleaning department Fahd Al-Quraifiah said control teams assigned to remove the 2019-2020 spring camps in Jahra and Ahmadi had started notifying camp owners to remove their camps as soon as the Municipality announced concluding the camping season on March 15, adding that it distributed 688 warning notices urging camp owners to willingly remove the camps in view of the current circumstances and the precautionary measures taken to fight COVID-19. Quraifiah highly commended the response of camp owners who complied, adding his inspection teams removed 1,082 illegal camps in Jahra and Ahmadi, impounded 209 ATVs, removed 26 grocery trucks, confiscated 1,300 water guns and removed 40 illegal ads and three camps used as cafes.

### Pandemic Diaries

## 10 good things to think about today



By Jamie Etheridge

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Some days it is necessary to look past the negative and focus on the good. Today is one of those days.

10. Air quality in many cities around the globe has improved as a result of the pandemic and stay at home measures.

9. There is more time to take naps. Scientific studies have shown that adults who take daytime naps once or twice a week live longer, are less prone to strokes and heart attacks and manage stress better.

8. E-learning for kids at home has added a lot of stress on parents (and means more noise in the house, less quiet for naps!) but it also gives school-age children, especially older kids, a chance to grow more independent and to develop more skills involved with self-directed learning. Self-directed learning, time management and organizational skills are all part of executive functioning and are important for success in college.

7. Across the world, communities are coming together to help each other, neighbors are getting to know neighbors, people's lives have slowed down and as a consequence there is more time for all of us to reconnect with our families, our friends and our communities (if at a safe social distance).

6. We are learning to cook without onions, practicing creative and imaginative skills many of us didn't even know we had. Our breath will also smell better.

5. Americans might eventually get fair access to healthcare as a result of the pandemic.

4. We are reminded that humans are resilient. Societies are resilient. We can and will survive this pandemic.

3. This pandemic is showing us that farmworkers, cleaners, grocery store stockers and clerks, doctors, nurses, policemen, lab technicians, street cleaners, teachers and moms are all essential to our society and we need to respect them more and pay them better.

2. I am usually a cynic when it comes to human kindness but the pandemic has reminded me how many genuinely kind- and generous-hearted people there are in this world. Carrying this forward into the post-pandemic world, insha'Allah.

1. No final exams in Ramadan or Eid!

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 855 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to one death. With the exception of 23 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, 111 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 743 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 6:00 am until further notice. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. 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.

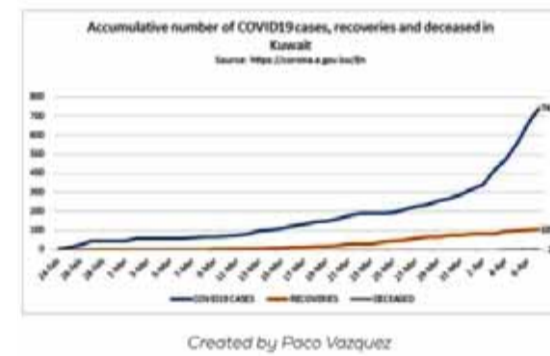
### Precautions

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 23, with work resuming on April 26, 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-Aslamaya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naeem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

### 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

### In My View

## Rumors: A real danger



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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A man tells his friend something, the friend tells his neighbor, the neighbor tells a colleague and the chain continues until complete communities start dealing with it...this is how a rumor starts and spreads. But does the rumor end as it started? The sad and unfortunate answer is no - at least in the majority of times. Each person either adds to or removes from it, until the words are totally distorted or changed.

This is something serious, as each one of us has a unique mindset, which connects bits of information from what we see or hear, in addition to already-formed perceptions. The culture we live in has much influence on our thinking and the way we conduct ourselves, and regardless of how honest the first words of the rumor can be, they will be badly distorted as they spread and sometimes will totally be out of context. This is apart from rumors that are intended to do harm, and these are the worst, of course.

Just an example of what rumors can do - I remember once when a rumor made people believe fuel prices will jump by a whopping 25 percent, so within minutes gas stations were literally flooded by people on foot, motorcycles and vehicles to get fuel at the current price and save a little, only to later discover the price dropped by 2.5 percent (this happened in a country other than Kuwait). Just one example of what a rumor can do.

"Rumors are fed from every single thing they are surrounded by, either positive or negative. This phenomenon can be studied under many angles - sociology, psychology, narrative theory, marketing, communications, advertisement and internal communication," a writer said. Some people believe anything they hear, especially if it comes from someone they know and will not take the slightest of efforts to make sure whether the information is true or not.

Rumors are getting very dangerous, as they are spread on social media and people are believing and resending them. We have to be very careful nowadays, as we are living through the most dangerous crisis in many years, with what we say and do. We have to always take information from their authentic sources and authorities, and only official authorities.

Let us cooperate and be honest with each other and keep rumors behind our backs. Yes, let us spread the good word and assure people that things will be better as long as we help ourselves and others by following instructions of professional people.

The Holy Quran tells us in Surah Al-Hujarat, verse 6 to always make sure about what we hear: "O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful."

A final word: Oh Allah, Grant health to my body. Oh Allah, Grant health to my hearing. Oh Allah, grant health to my sight. Oh Allah, I ask You by Your mercy which envelops all things that You forgive me.



Local

# Kuwait Amir, Oman Sultan discuss anti-coronavirus measures

## GCC interior ministers coordinate on coronavirus

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday a telephone call from Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq, discussing the historic and distinctive relations between the two brotherly countries. His Highness the Amir and the Sultan of Oman also pondered mutual cooperation between the two countries in various arenas and preventive measures taken in the two states to halt spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The sultan wished His Highness the Amir full well-being and further progress and prosperity for the State of Kuwait under the sagacious leadership of His Highness the Amir. His Highness the Amir expressed deep gratitude to the sultan, manifesting identical sentiments for him, his country and people.



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh participates in a meeting for GCC interior ministers via video conference.— KUNA

**GCC cooperation**  
In the meantime, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh has voiced Kuwait's eagerness to boost cooperation among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states to secure the region's security and national interests amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. In a press statement following a meeting for interior ministers in the GCC states held Tuesday via video conference, Salah, also minister of state for cabinet affairs, unveiled that the conferees have discussed a variety of key security issues related to the coronavirus pandemic.

The meeting, held at a delicate time as the world is facing the novel coronavirus, tackled the latest developments related to the killer virus spread and the best practices in the fight against it, said the minister. He pointed out the GCC ministers have assigned the General Secretariat of the pan-Arabian Gulf organization to organize similar meetings in the future to help member states coordinate security response to the pandemic when need arises. The meeting was

chaired by the United Arab Emirates' Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

**Int'l coordination**

In other news, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Tuesday received a telephone call from Nepalese counterpart KP Sharma Oli, addressing bonds between the two countries and the current combat against the pandemic. The two prime ministers, during the call, discussed bilateral relations between the two countries, mechanisms of beefing up these bonds in various sectors, in addition to regional and international issues of common concern. Moreover, His Highness the Prime Minister and the Nepalese premier addressed developments related to spread of COVID-19 on

the international arena and preventive measures by the two friendly countries to stem the virus and deal with its repercussions.

They also pondered coordination between the two countries as well as necessity of international cooperation and placing all resources for combating the pandemic. Sharma Oli expressed deep gratitude for the State of Kuwait, namely His Highness the Amir, the government and people, for the substantial care granted for the Nepalese community in the country, in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Tuesday received a telephone call from his Sri Lankan counterpart Dinesh Gunawardena. The two sides discussed the close relations between the two countries and fallouts of the novel coronavirus.— KUNA



### Kuwait coordinates with Nepal

## Lieutenants take oath



**KUWAIT:** The new lieutenants take oath before senior Interior Ministry officials.



**Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh and senior Interior Ministry officials in a group photo with the new lieutenants.**

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh received five lieutenants to take their oath of duty at his office on Tuesday. The minister congratulated them on their graduation from the colleges, and urged them to exert more effort as they join their col-

leagues, which is a major responsibility especially under the current circumstances. Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Naham, Assistant Undersecretary for Education and Training Maj Gen Sheikh Mazen Al-Jarrah and Acting Director of Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences Director General Maj Gen Nasser Boursely were present.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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## Local

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Lightning flashes in the sky over Rumalithiya during a thunderstorm on Tuesday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## KFSD ready to double staff of home delivery of drugs

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KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Fire Service Directorate Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad tours the pharmacy of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad said Tuesday the directorate was ready to double the number of teams delivering medicines to homes of citizens when need be. "The drug distribution process has been well underway since March 29 as per the set plan without any obstacles," he said in a press release following his tour of the pharmacy of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital to inspect the process. Lt Gen Mekrad reminded the citizens of the importance to stay at home and order the medicines they might need via the phone numbers specified by the Ministry of Health for this purpose. During the inspection tour, he conveyed the greetings of Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh to the teams delivering drugs to patients across the country commending the coordination with the Ministry of Health. KFSD embarked on the process to deliver drugs to homes of the persons who suffer from chronic diseases with a view to making life easier for them amid the restrictions on movement enforced due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. —KUNA



### News in brief

#### Expat quarantine sites ready soon

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Dr Rana Al-Fares said the ministry would complete preparations of quarantine facilities and housing centers for expatriates in the coming days, part of the government's action to curb spread of coronavirus. Fares, also Minister of State for Housing, said the quarantine facilities would be located in Al-Jahra, South Sabahiya and Abdaly. She added in a statement the facilities would include testing zone and housing units.

#### Transport fees

KUWAIT: Due to the current circumstances, and as private schools are not open based on the cabinet's decision on February 26 and March 19, the education ministry's Private and Qualitative Education Department issued a circular asking private schools not to collect transport fees as well as school activities, expenses during the schools, shut down. Schools shall deduct those fees, in case payments were made from school fees or refund parents who paid in advance.

#### Oil price down

KUWAIT: Price of Kuwaiti crude oil went down 91 cents to \$21.20 per barrel (pb) in Tuesday's trades against \$22.11 pb on Monday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In global markets, the crude rates dropped yesterday due to excessive crude supplies and low demands, including the repercussions of coronavirus. Meanwhile, Brent blend crude concluded contracts, dropping \$1.18 to settle at \$31.87 pb. Price of the American Intermediate West Texas crude moved down yesterday by \$2.45 pb, settling at \$23.63 pb.



Local



KUWAIT: Police officers man a checkpoint at entrances of Jeeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula on Tuesday, after the districts were put on lockdown. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shalkh

Nothing happens without Allah's will

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

It is important to note and acknowledge that everything that happens has already been pre-ordained by Allah (the Almighty and Majestic). Nothing happens without Allah's will, and there is wisdom behind whatever happens.

During Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) time, the hypocrites and other enemies of Islam used to grieve over whatever bounty the Muslims were blessed with, and rejoiced whenever the Muslims were afflicted with a trial. In such a situation, when Muslims faced a hardship, their enemies would claim that they didn't take precautions. Allah (SWT) instructed Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to inform them that nothing would befall the Muslims without Allah's will. We read in the Noble Qur'an, what can be translated as: "Say, Nothing will befall us except what Allah has decreed for us. He is our protector, and upon Allah, let the believers rely" (At-Tawbah 9: 51).

If any affliction strikes you, Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) is the only one who can remove it. We read thus in the Noble Qur'an, translated as: "If Allah afflicts you with any hardship, none other than Him can remove it. And if He wills good for you, none can block His bounty. He grants His bounty to whomever He will among His servants. And He is the All-Forgiving and Most Merciful" (Yunus 10: 107).

Therefore, it is very important to completely submit to Allah (SWT) and depend entirely on Him. Whenever you are afflicted with a hardship, remember the following two elements of true reliance on Allah (SWT):

a. To believe, trust, surrender and rely on Him completely, without any iota of doubt.

b. Take precautionary measures if you see or sense that danger is looming in the horizon. And if an affliction strikes you, try your level best to find a way out with the realization that none can remove it except Allah (SWT). So do not depend on the means, but rather on Allah (SWT). Conversely, if you have some goals that you intend to achieve, take effective means of success, keeping in mind that everything happens by Allah's will. Therefore, it is imperative to take effective means of success and find credible solutions to our problems with the realization that nothing happens with-

out the will of Allah (SWT).

Guiding us towards true dependence on Allah (SWT), Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, translated as: "A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in both. Be keen to do and say things that are beneficial for you, seek help from Allah, and do not lose heart. And if any trouble befalls you, don't say, "Had I done such and such" (it would not have happened), but rather say, "Allah has pre-ordained (everything), and whatever He wills happens. For "if" or "had I" opens the (door) for the Devil" (to tempt you.) (Narrated by Abu Huraira and found in Saheeh Muslim # 2, 664).

Among the lessons that we learn from the above-mentioned Hadeeth, is that we should work hard to find solutions to our problems, and never to lose hope.

It should also be clearly understood that if you are afflicted with any hardship despite all your precautionary measures, then there is reason for that and Allah (SWT) will reward you abundantly if you patiently persevere and avoid any negative statement or thought about Him.

Abu Saeed Al-Khudrey and Abu Huraira (RA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, translated as: No believer is afflicted by a chronic or normal disease, fatigue, sadness or grief except that it expiates some of his sins" (Saheeh Muslim # 2, 573).

What are the supplications to repeat during a difficult situation? Uthman bin Affaan (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, translated as: "Whoever recites three times (at night): "In the name of Allah, with Whose name (when mentioned) nothing on Earth or in Heaven can harm (anyone), and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knower," no sudden affliction will befall him until morning, and if anyone says it in the morning, no sudden affliction will befall him until the evening" (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh Abi Dawud # 5, 088).

Anas bin Malik (RA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) used to say (in supplication), translated as: "O Allah, I seek refuge in You from leprosy, leukoderma, madness and (all) evil (infectious) diseases" (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh Abi Dawud # 1, 554).

— Courtesy of the TIES Center

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Monster cyclone tears through Fiji

## Turkey PM under pressure as coronavirus cases spike

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NEW YORK: People who believe they have COVID-19, and who meet the criteria, wait in line to be pre-screened for the coronavirus outside of the Brooklyn Hospital Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York. — AFP

# Why are African Americans dying?

## Blacks are bearing the brunt of COVID-19 in US

WASHINGTON: The new coronavirus isn't biased about who it infects—so why does data emerging from some states suggest that African Americans are bearing the brunt of the pandemic in the US? Experts say blacks are disproportionately impacted by underlying health conditions linked to poverty, face discrimination in medical care, and are more likely to work jobs that require them to leave their home.

"We know that blacks are more likely to have diabetes, heart disease, lung disease," the nation's top doctor, Surgeon General Jerome Adams told CBS News on Tuesday. These chronic illnesses, which are in turn linked to poverty and structural racism, can lead to more serious forms of the COVID-19 disease. Adams, who is himself black and has high blood pressure and asthma, added: "I represent that legacy of growing up poor and black in America. 'And I, and many black Americans, are at higher risk for COVID.'"

### Emerging trend

There is no nationwide data available on COVID-19 cases by race, but a pattern of over-representation by black Americans has emerged in states or jurisdictions that are sharing the numbers. Sixty-eight percent of coronavirus deaths in Chicago have been

among African Americans, who make up just 30 percent of the city's population. "Those numbers take your breath away," the city's mayor Lori Lightfoot said Monday at a coronavirus briefing. "This is a call to action for all of us." The trend is repeated in North Carolina, Louisiana, Michigan, Wisconsin and the capital Washington.

Doctor Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, told AFP the issue was also linked to social class, with black people more likely to work jobs deemed essential that expose them to potential infection. "That population is more public facing," he said. "More bus drivers, more people taking public transportation to work, more people providing services in nursing homes, more folks working in grocery stores."

### Structural bias

The problem is compounded by implicit and ex-

PLICIT bias that African Americans face in the medical system. Doctor James Hildreth, president of the historically black Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee told AFP that in his city, most of the initial testing took place at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Most of the patients who go to hospital systems like these have insurance, and it was only recently that three assessment centers run by the city of Nashville were built for the underprivileged and minority communities—one of them located at Meharry's campus and run by its staff.

"My point is, depending on which community you live in, and whether or not you have insurance... the chances for getting assessed are much less," he said. What's more, it's well documented that when black people seek care, they are less likely to have their symptoms believed or get adequately treated, Doctor Ebony Hilton, an anesthesiologist at the University of Virginia Med-

ical Center told AFP.

For example, black women are less likely to have their breast cancer mammograms seen by a specialist as opposed to a general radiologist, according to a 2012 study from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Black heart patients who present with elevated levels of a group of proteins indicating cardiac injury are also less likely to be seen by specialists, per a 2018 study.

A civil rights group wrote this week to the US health secretary, Alex Azar, calling on him to "release daily racial and ethnic demographic data related to COVID-19 testing, disease burden and patient outcomes." This, said the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, was necessary to ensure a robust public health response, and to make certain care and testing aren't being administered in a discriminatory manner.

The group said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was already collecting the information but deliberately withholding it. Hilton stressed that it was in the interests of Americans as a whole to address the problem, because—unlike high rates of heart disease or cancer—a wave of coronavirus spreading through the black and Hispanic population will ultimately impact everyone else. — AFP



Health conditions linked to poverty, discrimination

## Virus triggers global condom shortage

KUALA LUMPUR: A global condom shortage is looming as the coronavirus pandemic shuts factories and disrupts supply chains, the world's top maker of the contraceptives said, with the United Nations warning of "devastating" consequences. Over half of humanity has been confined to their homes as the highly contagious virus marches round the planet, while governments worldwide have ordered the closure of businesses deemed non-essential. Malaysia - one of the world's top rubber producers and a major source of condoms - imposed a nationwide lockdown last month as infections surged to the highest level in Southeast Asia.

But restrictions on the operations of Malaysian contraceptive giant Karex, which makes one in every five condoms globally, mean the firm expects to produce 200 million fewer condoms than usual from mid-March to mid-April. With other producers around the world likely facing disruption and difficulties in getting condoms to market due to transport problems, supplies of contraceptives will be hit hard, warned Karex chief executive Goh Miah Kiat.

"The world will definitely see a condom shortage," Goh said. "It's challenging, but we are trying our best right now to do whatever we can. It is definitely a major concern - condom is an essential medical device." "While we are fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, there are also other serious issues that we need to look at," he said, adding he was particularly worried about supplies of condoms to developing countries.

### UN sounds alarm

Karex, which supplies condoms to many companies as well as governments and for distribution by aid programs, had to close its three Malaysian factories for a period at the start of the country's lockdown, which is due to last until April 14. The company has since been allowed to resume operations but with only 50 percent of its usual workforce, and Goh wants permission to ramp up production.

The UN is also sounding the alarm, with its sexual and reproductive health agency warning it can currently only get about 50-60 percent of its usual condom supplies due to virus-related disruptions. "Border closings and other restrictive measures are affecting transportation and production in a number of countries and regions," said a UN Population Fund spokesperson, adding they were taking steps such as adding extra suppliers to support urgent needs.

The agency, which works with governments worldwide to support family planning, said a key concern was being able to ship condoms to where they were needed quickly enough - and warned the poorest and most vulnerable would be hit hardest if stocks run low. "A shortage of condoms, or any contraceptive, could lead to an increase in unintended pregnancies, with potentially devastating health and social consequences for adolescent girls, women and their partners and families," said the spokesperson.

There could also be an rise in unsafe abortions and an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV, the agency said. Even as factory shutdowns and border closures throw the condom industry into chaos, demand appears to be increasing. Goh said Karex had seen growing demand as people worldwide are confined to their homes, while Indian media reported that condom sales had jumped 25-35 percent in the week after the country of 1.3 billion people announced a lockdown. — AFP

## Britain's Johnson spends 2nd night in intensive care

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was spending a second night in intensive care battling the coronavirus which has infected more than 55,000 across the country and killed nearly 6,200. "He stayed at work for you... now pray at home for him," The Sun tabloid splashed across its front page yesterday while the Daily Express said: "Boris 'will pull through'." Deputizing for Johnson, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said he was "confident he'll pull through, because if there's one thing I know about this prime minister, he's a fighter and he'll be back, leading us through this crisis in short order".

In an update Tuesday evening, the prime minister's spokesman said his "condition is stable and he remains in intensive care for close monitoring." He earlier said the 55-year-old Conservative leader was receiving "standard oxygen treatment and breathing without any other assistance" and had not required a ventilator. Johnson is the most high-profile government leader to become infected with COVID-19 and messages of support flooded in from across Britain and the world.

He was admitted to intensive care on Monday evening after spending Sunday night in hospital following concerns he still had a cough and high temperature 10 days after being diagnosed with COVID-19. His transfer to intensive care is unprecedented for a prime minister during a national emergency. For many people, it brought home the seriousness of the disease that has so far seen 6,159 deaths in Britain, with a record 786 more reported in a daily update on Tuesday.

### 'Work goes on'

Despite the record daily death toll, there



LONDON: Flowers from the Pakistan embassy are delivered to 10 Downing Street in central London as Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson spent the night in intensive care at St Thomas' Hospital with symptoms of COVID-19. — AFP

was more encouraging news with the number of new daily cases remaining at a roughly stable 3,643. In a round of broadcast interviews, senior minister Michael Gove insisted the "work of government goes on". He later said he was now staying at home after a family member displayed mild coronavirus symptoms. Raab chaired the daily coronavirus meeting in the prime minister's place on Tuesday.

"There is a clear plan... the government and the cabinet are working together to implement that plan," Johnson's spokesman said when asked if there was a power vacuum in Britain. The country does not have a formal constitutional role of deputy prime minister, and experts said Raab would need the support of the rest of the cabinet to make any big decisions. The most pressing issue is a review expected next week on whether to continue the nationwide lockdown introduced on March 23 to try to stem the spread of COVID-19.

### 'Enormous shock'

Johnson announced on March 27 that he

had coronavirus and went into self-isolation in a flat above his Downing Street office. But on Monday evening he was moved to intensive care in London's St Thomas' hospital after his condition worsened. The prime minister has received messages of support from around the world, with US President Donald Trump sending best wishes to his "very good friend" while Russian leader Vladimir Putin said Johnson's "energy, optimism and sense of humor" would see him through. For some, Johnson's larger-than-life personality has made his hospitalization all the more shocking.

His biographer Andrew Gimson said Johnson always made him feel upbeat, and "now here he is the stricken one". "This is an enormous shock, completely unfamiliar territory for all those who know him," he told BBC radio. Experts said it was not uncommon for coronavirus patients to move to intensive care, but said it showed Johnson's condition was serious. "There is no doubt this turn of events means Boris Johnson is extremely sick," said Derek Hill, professor of medical imaging at University College London. — AFP



## International

# Paris bans 'daytime jogging' as virus deaths hit new high

## Coronavirus death toll hits 10,328 in France

**PARIS:** Paris has banned daytime jogging to keep people from bending anti-coronavirus lockdown rules as France breached 10,000 deaths due to the outbreak. Other cities also announced stricter restrictions, some controversial, on the day top health official Jerome Salomon told journalists 10,328 people had died of COVID-19 in France since March 1.

Of these, 7,091 had perished in hospitals - 597 in the last 24 hours-and 3,237 in old age homes, Salomon said, warning "the epidemic is continuing its progression." "We are in the ascending phase of the epidemic, even if it is slowing a bit," he said, adding "we have not yet reached the peak." Senior government officials warned it was too early to think of lifting the nationwide lockdown which entered into force on March 17 and is set to run until April 15, for now.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner has urged municipal officials to toughen restrictions on movement if necessary, and Paris announced it would enforce a ban on individual outdoor sports between the hours of 10:00 am and 07:00 pm. Under the nationwide orders, people can leave home only for essential purposes, which include a solo walk or run within a one-kilometer radius of home.

But amid a spell of sunny spring weather, large groups of Parisians were seen running, walking and congregating over the weekend, even as police stepped up patrols and already overstretched hospitals grappled with an influx of patients. "Every excursion avoided aids the fight against the epi-

dem," Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo and police chief Didier Lallement said in a statement Tuesday announcing the partial jogging ban. Paris and other cities have already closed public parks and gardens as part of the nationwide lockdown that requires people to carry a document justifying any excursion from the home.

Those caught without the document risk a fine starting at 135 euros (\$147). In the north of France, the mayor of Marcq-en-Baroeul has made spitting in public, coughing or sneezing without covering one's face, and throwing used masks and gloves in the street punishable by a fine of 68 euros. But France's Human Rights League said Tuesday it would take the mayor to court for what it considered a violation of fundamental human liberties.

And the Atlantic coastal resort city of Biarritz on Tuesday overturned a two-minute limit it had set for people to spend on public benches after widespread criticism. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe told parliament, meanwhile, that "the period of confinement will continue." The lockdown "is difficult for many French people, I am fully aware of this. But it is essential if we do not wish to find ourselves in an even worse situation than the one we are experiencing today," he said.

### 'Far from over'

Like many other nations, France on Tuesday also debated the merits of encouraging, even compelling, people to wear face masks to prevent virus spread. Health Minister Olivier Veran told lawmakers it

tries that have had outbreaks, figures show that the vast majority of serious cases are in men. British data from 2,621 patient admissions to intensive care up to April 3, showed that 73 percent were men, with an average age of 60.

"It is becoming increasingly recognized that there are substantial differences in the immune system between males and females and that these have significant impact on outcome from a wide range of infectious diseases," said Philip Goulder, Professor of Immunology in the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Oxford. He said lifestyle and social factors could also be involved, including smoking "which affect the level of pre-existing disease such as heart disease, chronic lung disease and cancer."

### What is involved?

The guiding principle of intensive care is to help patients whose vital organs-heart, lungs, kidneys-are at risk and need immediate and constant help. In COVID-19 cases, it is the lungs which come under attack, with patients struggling to get enough oxygen, often deteriorating very quickly as a result.

This deterioration "can happen very quickly between the eighth and tenth day of the illness, often in the space of just a few hours," Dr Albrice Levrat, head of intensive care in the eastern French city, explained to Le Point weekly. In the first instance, the patient is given oxygen through tubes to the nose, progressing to a pressurized full face mask. If that does not work, then medical staff with turn to mechan-

ism these people are forced to endure," she added. "The cells are also very poorly lit and have little ventilation, so the prisoners become very weak," said Auguste. Because there is not money to hire enough guards, prisoners are not allowed outside to get fresh air or exercise, said Auguste. Human rights groups have complained for decades about the appalling conditions in Haiti's prisons.

But now, as the novel coronavirus sweeps the globe and even countries as rich as the United States struggle to keep prisoners safe-sometimes simply releasing them-Haiti is in a race against time. The idea is to thin out the prison population before coronavirus hits the destitute Caribbean nation in earnest and conceivably spreads like wildfire through the inmates. Charles Nazaire Noel, the director of the national prison system, said he has sent the Justice Ministry a list of 600 prisoners as candidates for release.

While consumer companies currently have enough stock of most products to meet the unprecedented demand, they are urgently ramping up production so they have inventory on hand if quarantines extend. Even brief delays of pulp will stop machines from running - a waste

of time and money that will drive up costs. "Normally you don't need to worry about transportation: is it on time? Has it left? Is it in cargo? We have to have more communication to minimize the risk," said Ari Harmaala, head of sales at Mets? Fibre, the world's second largest softwood pulp producer and a vendor to Kimberly-Clark.

To meet deadlines, pulp suppliers are hunting for new drivers, putting more trucks on the road and redirecting shipments, industry data firm Pulp & Paper Industry Intelligence (PPI) said. That is prompting some pulp suppliers to shift to rail for deliveries, according to Steven Sachoff, editor for PPI Europe. Many truck drivers are also quitting because they don't want to risk getting sick far from their homes. Mets? and Sodra said they have not missed deadlines so far. —Reuters

### Shortage of masks

"That is not much," Nazaire added, although he is making up a second list that would comprise only people awaiting trial. Indeed, that is the case for a staggering three-quarters of the prison population. And some have been held even longer than they would be if found guilty of the crime they are accused of. "There are people in prison for stealing a cellphone or a goat. For petty larceny like that, they are supposed to spend a year in prison. But some have been in prison for five or six years," said Nazaire.

He said he has warned the government time and



**PARIS:** Photo shows runners at the closed Jardin du Champs de Mars garden in front of the Eiffel tower in Paris, on the 22nd day of a lockdown in France aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus. —AFP

remained an "open question" that required further scientific investigation. France's Academy of Medicine, which advises the government on epidemics, has advocated mask-wearing as an aid in curbing the outbreak, but international bodies, including the World Health Organization (WHO) disagree.

The WHO said Monday that asking the general public to wear face masks could be justified in areas where hand-washing and physical distancing were

difficult, but warned that masks alone could not stop the pandemic. France's Order of Pharmacists and two labor unions urged the government Tuesday to allow pharmacies to sell "alternative" non-medical grade masks to members of the public as an added protection. France also announced that anyone wishing to enter the country starting yesterday would need a special "travel certificate" in an extension of the lockdown measures.—AFP

## Coronavirus intensive care; what's involved?

**PARIS:** The coronavirus pandemic has caused many thousands of people, including Britain's prime minister, to need treatment in intensive care units, where severe cases of COVID-19 often receive breathing support. Boris Johnson was moved into intensive care when his condition worsened on Monday, 10 days after diagnosis—a typical progression as the virus begins to attack the lungs, reducing the amount of oxygen going to the body and its vital organs. Failure to at least halt COVID-19 will lead to organ failure and death but keep the patient alive long enough, and they stand a chance of overcoming it and pulling through. Here is a summary of what is involved in intensive care treatment:

### Who ends up in intensive care?

Life support is reserved for patients suffering from severe respiratory failure resulting from the lungs being affected by the virus. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated at the end of February that in China some 20 percent of infections resulted in severe cases - 6.1 percent who were critical, as well as 13.8 percent deemed severe.

Admission depends on the seriousness of the symptoms-as well as the availability of beds. In Italy, a March estimate put the number of confirmed cases requiring intensive care at 12 percent. So far in coun-

## Pulp friction: Border jams delay supply of toilet paper material

**LONDON:** As several European borders limit travel to stop the spread of COVID-19, two of the world's biggest pulp makers say transportation logjams are delaying shipments of the raw material - the only ingredient in the toilet paper that people are hoarding to weather quarantines. In March, countries including Norway, Germany and Spain shut their borders to non-essential travel. Freight can still

## Haiti crowded jails a virus catastrophe waiting to happen

**PORT-AU-PRINCE:** Imagine the struggle of containing the coronavirus if it hits Haiti's hellish prison system, the world's most overcrowded, where filthy, sometimes windowless cells meant to house 20 people are teeming with up to 80, unable to even go outside for fresh air. The poorest country in the Americas has reported only one coronavirus death out of 25 recorded cases so far. But activists and officials fear the prison network is an epidemiological ticking time bomb.

The system is a mess, from a new women's prison built in 2016 to crumbling provincial jails that over time have become places for long-term detention rather than short stays. All of them are overcrowded. Haiti has 11,300 people behind bars-most of them waiting to go on trial, sometimes for years-in conditions that human rights activists liken to torture. "Prison cells in Haiti are small rooms with space for 10 to 20 people if you use the rule of 4.5 square meters per prisoner," said Marie Rosy Auguste Ducena of the National Human Rights Network. That works out to about seven feet by seven feet per man or woman. "But these cells hold up to 80 people. So you can just imagine the levels of overcrowd-



**BARCELONA:** Healthcare workers wearing protective suits attend to COVID-19 coronavirus patients at the Intensive Unit Care (ICU) of the Vall d'Hebron Hospital in Barcelona. —AFP

ing ventilation, which requires the patient to be sedated heavily.

A tube is then inserted through the trachea to carry oxygen directly into the lungs as a machine effectively takes over the patient's breathing. Intubation is a major medical procedure which can last for several weeks, requiring an entire medical team to monitor and adjust as required until the patient can breathe on their own again unaided. Some doctors have resorted to a new technique: they artificially oxygenate blood by extracting it with a machine and then returning it into the body. —AFP

time again about the dangerous conditions in the prison system, to no avail. "Our prison overcrowding has reached a limit. The government should have been aware of this," said Nazaire. Another threat comes from a shortage of protective masks for prison guards. "Prison guards and other employees are people who go home at night. They are potential COVID-19 vectors for the prison system," said Auguste. "If COVID-19 makes it into the prisons, we will be facing an absolute catastrophe," she warned. —AFP



**GONAIVES:** Prisoners of a Gonaives jail are seen as they argue with a UN member about their situation in the flooded prison of Gonaives some 200 kilometers north of Port Au Prince. —AFP

time again about the dangerous conditions in the prison system, to no avail. "Our prison overcrowding has reached a limit. The government should have been aware of this," said Nazaire. Another threat comes from a shortage of protective masks for prison guards. "Prison guards and other employees are people who go home at night. They are potential COVID-19 vectors for the prison system," said Auguste. "If COVID-19 makes it into the prisons, we will be facing an absolute catastrophe," she warned. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Syrian girl battered to death

**BEIRUT:** A young Syrian girl died in Lebanon after she was reportedly beaten by her father, security forces said Tuesday. The girl aged around six was dead on arrival at a hospital in the northern city of Tripoli in the early hours of Tuesday, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) reported. "Immediately after news circulated of the girl's death due to being severely beaten by her father... ISF detained him at the hospital," they said in a statement. "During the interrogation... with the father and his wife... it appeared that they were used to beating the girl," it said. The coroner found traces of beating on the girl's body, the ISF said in a statement. Lebanon last month ordered all people to stay at home to stem the spread of coronavirus, which has infected 548 people and killed 19 in the country, according to official figures. —AFP

#### Trump threatens, slams WHO

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump has threatened to cut US funding to the World Health Organization, accusing it of bias toward China during the coronavirus pandemic. Trump told reporters he was "going to put a very powerful hold on" funding to WHO, the UN body whose biggest funding source is the United States. "We're going to put a hold on money spent to the WHO," said Trump, who pursues an "America First" agenda and has previously criticized other UN and multilateral agencies. He gave no details about how much money would be withheld and minutes later during the same press conference he said: "I'm not saying I'm going to do it." "We will look at ending funding," he added. According to Trump, the WHO "seems to be very biased toward China. That's not right." His comments built on an earlier statement on Twitter in which he accused the WHO of being "very China centric." —AFP

#### Police 'torturing' women

**KAMPALA:** A Uganda court has charged 10 police officers with "aggravated torture" for allegedly forcing dozens of women to rub mud on their genitals as punishment for breaking a coronavirus curfew. The incident took place on April 2 in the northern town of Elegg, on the border with South Sudan, the day after a nighttime curfew took effect in the fight against COVID-19. The police officers appeared before the court in nearby Gulu on Tuesday and were ordered held until May 7. Ugandan police said on their Twitter account. On Monday, police spokesman Fred Enanga had announced a joint investigation with the army into the "alleged aggravated torture of several women and a few men who were being accused of flouting curfew orders and the ban on public spaces". He said security forces had used a "heavy-handed approach" to disperse the 31 women, described by Uganda Radio Network as sex workers, and seven men. —AFP

#### Turkmenistan defies concerns

**ASHGABAT:** Authoritarian Turkmenistan gathered thousands of citizens for mass exercise events to mark World Health Day, state media said, ignoring the global trend for social distancing to fight the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The Central Asian country, along with North Korea, is one of a handful of territories which claim they have no cases of the virus which is sweeping across the globe. A state television broadcast late on Tuesday showed hundreds of people wearing identical colored tracksuits cycling in close formation on a cold, damp day in the capital Ashgabat. Another sequence showed state employees including medical staff doing stretches inside and outside government buildings. —AFP



## International

# Turkish PM under pressure as coronavirus cases spike

## Turkey records 725 deaths and 34,109 cases

ISTANBUL: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has stepped up measures to stem rapidly growing coronavirus cases in Turkey but his refusal to impose a full lockdown to keep the economy afloat is drawing criticism. With gatherings banned, restrictions on intercity trips, and the obligation to wear masks almost anywhere, Erdogan has imposed a series of tough measures but thus far resisted calls for a complete confinement. Parliament began on Tuesday debating a government-sponsored bill to release up to a third of detainees in the country's overcrowded prisons as a safety measure against the coronavirus outbreak.

With 34,109 cases and 725 deaths, according to official figures published on Tuesday, Turkey is the ninth country in the world most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. What's alarming is the fast spread of the disease in Turkey, which reported its first official case on March 11. The number of cases is doubling in every few days: From 7,400 on March 28, it reached 15,000 on April 1 and exceeded 30,000 on Monday, according to official figures.

### 'Limits'

The government has very quickly taken nationwide measures from shutting schools and cultural spaces to suspending flights with the countries hit by the virus. They have been gradually reinforced with a confinement order for people aged over 65 and under 20 and quarantine of dozens of towns and villages. On Tuesday, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said in a reassuring tone that the occupancy rate in the intensive care units was only around 60 percent.



### Erdogan resists calls for complete confinement

Doctors' Union (TTB), Sinan Adiyaman, told the Turkish media this week. In an interview with AFP last week, the opposition mayor of Istanbul called for a confinement in the country's economic capital where more than half of the COVID-19 cases have been recorded. "Even if 15 percent of the population goes out, we quickly reach two million people ... This has the potential to increase the threat."

### 'Time lost'

Erdogan has so far urged Turks to place themselves in "voluntary quarantine" rather than declare

But as the number of victims soars, there have been increasing calls on the government to impose a complete confinement like in Italy or France.

"Everyone absolutely has to stay at home, it must be made compulsory," a doctor who treats infected patients under intensive care at an Istanbul hospital told AFP on condition of anonymity. "We are receiving more and more patients every day. We will soon reach the limits of our capacity." The opposition parties, the country's main medical association TTB and unions have also urged the government to take

tougher measures to deter people from going out.

"It will be impossible to control this pandemic if millions of people ... go out to work," the president of the Turkish



ANKARA: Members of Parliament wearing face masks as a precaution against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) attend the general assembly meeting of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) in Ankara. — AFP

a compulsory order for them to stay home, in an attempt not to stop an already fragile economy which has been in a recovery state after years of crises. Last week, he said: "Turkey is obliged to continue producing and keep the wheels (of the economy) turning under any circumstances." Before any hardening of the measures, many Turks have already taken their own precautions. Most of Istanbul's usually busy arteries including the pedestrian Istiklal Street are almost deserted.

Many Turks no longer set foot outside-some of

them have returned to the age-old tradition of lowering baskets through their window for their groceries, while some others rely on very efficient delivery services. The doctor at Istanbul hospital hailed residents' common sense and "good measures" taken by the government which has ramped up tests to reach over 200,000 thus far. But he warned: "If the number of cases keeps increasing at this pace, the result will be the same as elsewhere: many losses of lives. We have already lost a lot of time." — AFP

## Bucking the lockdown trend in Asia

HONG KONG: As the coronavirus pandemic sparks global lockdowns, life has continued comparatively unhindered in places like Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong after their governments and citizens took decisive early action against the unfolding crisis. At first glance Taiwan looks like an ideal candidate for the coronavirus. The island of 23 million lies just 180 kilometers off mainland China. Yet nearly 100 days in, Taiwan has just 376 confirmed cases and five fatalities while restaurants, bars, schools, universities and offices remain open.

The government of President Tsai Ing-wen, whose deputy is an epidemiologist, made tough decisions while the crisis was nascent to stave off the kind of pain now convulsing much of the rest of the world. "Countries like Taiwan are exemplary," Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who is funneling his billions into vaccine research, told Fox News this week. "And so they won't either have the disease burden or the economic effect that other countries will have." Much like antibodies are formed to fight off the next infection, Taiwan's response was forged in a previous epidemic - the deadly SARS outbreak in 2003. This time the island was ready.

## From N Korea to Gangnam Ex-diplomat on ballot

SEOUL: For decades, Thae Yong Ho served the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, rising to become Pyongyang's deputy ambassador to London before defecting. Now he is standing for election in South Korea's multi-party democracy. If he wins his constituency in Gangnam, the wealthy Seoul district made famous by rapper Psy, Thae will become the first former Northern official ever to be directly elected to South Korea's parliament.

And he believes it would send an unmistakable message to the upper echelons of which he was once part that abandoning Kim Jong Un's regime could open up a different path for the country. "I want to tell them that there is a new way for their future," Thae said. The general assumption in Pyongyang, he explained, is that "if Korea is reunited under the concept of freedom or democracy", those who have previously served the Kim family "must be the target of the purge".

"I'm sure once we can change the minds of the elite group in North Korea, we can easily bring down the Kim system." Voting styles are radically different on either side of the Demilitarized Zone

that divides the neighbors-which are technically still at war. In the isolated, nuclear-armed North, citizens line up to cast ballots pre-printed with a single candidate's name, under the watchful gaze of portraits of the country's founder Kim Il Sung and his son and successor Kim Jong Il.

In the South, a plethora of parties compete in a rambunctious, sometimes ferocious, contest for power, deploying everything from social media campaigns to squads of party members bowing to commuters to seek support. The April 15 vote will elect a new parliament through a mix of first-past-the-post constituencies like Thae's and proportional representation. President Moon Jae-in's position is not at issue as he is directly elected, but the vote is largely a referendum on his performance.

### 'One by one'

Thae comes from a family with good revolutionary credentials but fled his post in London in August 2016 after becoming disillusioned with Kim Jong Un's regime. Thae said he defected to prevent his children-who had lived in both Pyongyang and Europe-living "miserable" lives in North Korea. "Once in the outside world, you can't endure that kind of slavery," he added. About 33,000 North Koreans have fled to the South in the past two decades, but it is rare for high-level officials to change sides. Thae has since become a prominent and outspoken critic of North Korea and the engagement approach pursued by the South's Moon. — AFP

## Monster cyclone tears through Fiji

SUVA: A deadly Pacific storm slammed into Fiji yesterday, tearing off roofs and flooding towns, after leaving a trail of destruction in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Tropical Cyclone Harold weakened slightly overnight from a scale-topping Category Five to a Four, but was still lashing Fiji with winds of up to 240 kilometers per hour, forecasters said.

The official NaDraki weather service said the cyclone was offshore south of Fiji's main island Viti Levu, but passing closer to land than initially expected. Despite the downgrade, it said Harold remained "extremely dangerous" as it barrels eastward, threatening further damage in Tonga today. Images on social media showed extensive damage at Nausori, just outside the Fijian capital Suva, with corrugated iron roofs peeled back by the ferocious winds.

The main street of Ba, in the island's north, was submerged after the local river burst its banks. "Emergency authorities are the only personnel allowed to travel, all Fijians should stay indoors," Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama said. "There are a number of reports of winds whipping up flying debris in the Suva area. It can be deadly. Keep yourself indoors and out of harm's way."

The National Disaster Management Office said residents along much of the south coast, home to many of the country's major tourist resorts, should evacuate. NDMO di-



SANTO: This aerial handout photo shows damaged houses in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Harold on the island of Santo in Vanuatu. — AFP

rector Vasiti Soko said 85 evacuation centers had been set up and officials were attempting to maintain social distancing to ensure COVID-19 did not spread among those fleeing the cyclone. Fiji has 15 cases of the coronavirus, with all known sufferers in quarantine before the cyclone hit.

### Town 'obliterated'

Harold claimed 27 lives in the Solomon Islands last week, and on Tuesday ripped through Vanuatu, destroying much of the country's second-largest town Luganville. World Vision's Vanuatu director Kendra Gates Derousseau said an aerial survey carried out by disaster officials late Tuesday showed the town of Melsisi on Pentecost is-

land had also been devastated. "We've done some programming there in the past, so I can recognise the landmarks-you can see that 90 percent of all buildings are obliterated, is the term I'd use," she said.

A massive international aid effort was launched after the last Category Five storm to hit Vanuatu, Cyclone Pam in 2015, flattened the capital Port Vila. But Vanuatu's international borders are currently closed as the impoverished Pacific nation bids to remain one of the world's few places with no confirmed COVID-19 cases. The government has revoked a domestic travel ban imposed as part of its virus response, which will allow disaster relief to flow from Port Vila to the worst-hit islands in the north. — AFP

## Joy, relief as exodus from Wuhan begins

WUHAN: Voicing joy and excitement from behind face masks, tens of thousands of people fled Wuhan yesterday after a 76-day travel ban was lifted on the Chinese city where the coronavirus first emerged. Previously quiet train and bus stations bustled as an exodus began from the city of 11 million, with some passengers wearing hazmat suits. Hao Mei, a single parent from the nearby city of Enshi, said her two children had been home alone since she got stuck in Wuhan, where she works in a school kitchen.

"You have no idea! I was already up around 4 am. I felt so good. My kids are so excited. Mum is finally coming home," the 39-year-old told AFP as she waited to board a train. "At the start of the lockdown, I cried every night. I was really miserable, because my little girl is still young, she's only 10." Up to 55,000 people are expected to leave Wuhan yesterday just by train, according to government estimates. Steady streams of cars were on the roads heading out of the city yesterday morning, after barricades on its outskirts were dismantled with the ban on outbound travel being lifted at midnight.

Ferries, trams and taxis resumed operations and the airport also opened again for domestic flights, with queuing passengers in protective wear wheeling cases. State news



WUHAN: This aerial photo shows cars queuing at a highway toll station in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province, as they prepare to leave the city after authorities lifted a more than two-month ban on outbound travel. — AFP

agency Xinhua said there would be around 200 inbound and outbound flights leaving the city yesterday. A group of medics leaving Wuhan hugged their colleagues from the city goodbye as they prepared to board flights home.

### World-first lockdown

Wuhan led the world with an unprecedented quarantine lockdown on January 23 in a bid to stop the spread of the then-mysterious respiratory virus. Chinese disease control officials said in January that the virus likely leapt from wildlife to humans at a Wuhan market that sold wild animals for

food. The rest of surrounding Hubei province quickly followed Wuhan, cutting tens of millions of people off from the world.

As the virus spread rapidly around the globe, many countries imposed similar draconian measures that have forced around half of humanity into some form of lockdown. But while the pandemic continues to worsen in many other parts of the world, with the global death toll surpassing 80,000, the quarantine measures have appeared to pay off in Wuhan and other parts of China. Its officially reported number of deaths and overall infections has plummeted in recent weeks. — AFP



## Business

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2020

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KUWAIT: The skyline of Kuwait City is seen in this aerial image. — KUNA

# Fitch affirms Kuwait rating at 'AA'

## KIA's foreign assets estimated at around \$529bn at end of FY19/20

**HONG KONG:** Fitch Ratings has affirmed Kuwait's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'AA' with a Stable Outlook.

### Key rating drivers

Kuwait's key credit strengths are its exceptionally strong fiscal and external balance sheets. These are increasingly offset by Kuwait's institutional paralysis and slow pace in addressing growing public finance challenges stemming from heavy oil dependence, a generous welfare state and its large public sector. Indicators on governance and the business environment are well below the 'AA' median.

We estimate the foreign assets of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) at around \$529 billion at the end of the fiscal year ending March 2020 (FY19/20), accounting for the bulk of Kuwait's sovereign net foreign asset position of 472 percent of GDP (the highest of any Fitch-rated sovereign).

Financial losses in IQ20 largely erased double-digit gains in 2019. Of the KIA total, the Reserve Fund for Future Generations (RFFG) accounted for around USD489 billion and has grown over an extended period, due to investment returns and the statutory annual transfer of 10 percent of government revenue. Meanwhile, the



**Outlook stable**

value of the General Reserve Fund (GRF), which holds the accumulated government surpluses after transfers to RFFG, is estimated to have fallen for the sixth year in a row as the government tapped the GRF for deficit financing and the repayment of domestic maturities.

We expect a general government deficit of 20 percent of GDP (KD 7.3 billion) for FY20/21, reflecting our baseline assumption that the Brent price will average \$35/bbl in 2020 and \$45/bbl in 2021. The government is unlikely to be able to mount a significant fiscal policy response to the oil shock given the ongoing pandemic and parliamentary elections in October 2020. On the government's reporting convention (not including KIA investment income in revenue and treating the RFFG transfer as expenditure), the deficit would be over 33 percent of GDP. We estimate the fiscal surplus in

FY19/20 at around 1 percent of GDP for FY19/20.

The government's authorization to issue debt has expired and it is unable to borrow, even to refinance existing maturities, which currently have to be met out of the GRF. As a result, general government debt fell to 14 percent of GDP at the end of FY19/20. Kuwait's outstanding eurobonds mature in 2022 and 2027.

Under our forecasts, the foreign assets of the GRF will be nearly depleted in FY20/21, and we assume that the government will resume borrowing and open up the RFFG for financing starting FY21/22. Accessing RFFG assets would allow the deficit to be financed at the FY20/21 level for over a decade, but will require parliamentary approval and will be politically contentious. The government is currently making a renewed push on the debt law and is not contemplating a change in the framework governing RFFG assets. Our understanding is that Kuwait's constitution would give the Amir the flexibility to issue an emergency decree permitting debt issuance or the use of the RFFG. In our view, other extraordinary measures might be possible in order to ensure timely debt service.

The government has made minimal progress on its reform program aimed at boosting its underlying fiscal position, improving the business environment and boost-

ing the role of the private sector as a provider of jobs for a young and growing population of Kuwaiti nationals (80 percent of Kuwaiti citizens were employed in the government sector in 2018). It has focused its efforts on regulatory and administrative measures that do not require approval from parliament, which in turn is trying to minimize the immediate costs to its constituents of reform.

We estimate that real GDP growth was around zero in 2019, weighed down by oil production cuts as per the OPEC agreement and delays to refinery upgrades as part of the Clean Fuels Project (CFP). In 2020, overall real GDP growth is likely to be positive amid an expansion of oil production and the commissioning of refinery upgrades, although disruptions related to the coronavirus will likely push the non-oil economy into recession for the year. The banking sector could absorb a rise in problem loans, being adequately capitalized, liquid and profitable.

We expect Kuwait's oil output to average to 2.8 million bbl/day in 2020 (from less than 2.7 million bbl/day in 2019). Kuwait has not yet announced an intention to raise oil output, unlike Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, and our forecast increase reflects the restart of production at the Saudi-Kuwait Divided Zone.

## Iran doesn't agree with OPEC+ meet without outcome

**DUBAI:** Iran does not agree with holding any OPEC+ meeting in the absence of a clear proposal and expected outcome from such talks for the oil market, its oil minister said in a letter to OPEC and seen by Reuters.

"The vague circumstances around which the upcoming OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial (meeting) is being organised is of grave concern to me," the minister, Bijan Zanganeh, wrote in the letter dated April 7 and addressed to the Algerian oil minister, who holds the presidency of OPEC.

Zanganeh said that organising a meeting "in the absence of any clear and consensual outcome (to) convey to the market" would be a message of failure even before it starts, which "may aggravate the current low price environment even further". Saudi Arabia, Russia and allied oil producers, a group known as OPEC+, will agree to deep cuts to their crude output at talks this week only if the United States and several others join in with curbs to help prop up prices that have been hammered by the coronavirus crisis, OPEC+ sources said.

OPEC+ is due to hold a video conference today at

1400 GMT, after US President Donald Trump said last week that Riyadh and Moscow had agreed to cut an unprecedented 10 million to 15 million barrels per day, or about 10 percent to 15 percent of global supply. He has not committed to any action by US companies.

The US Department of Energy said on Tuesday that U.S. output was already falling without government action, in line with the insistence of the White House that it would not intervene in the private markets. That decline, however, would take place slowly, over the course of the next two years. Global oil demand has dropped by as much as 30 percent, or about 30 million barrels per day (bpd), as measures to reduce the spread of the coronavirus have caused demand for jet fuel, gasoline and diesel to crash.

While Saudi Arabia, Russia and other members of the OPEC+ group have expressed a willingness to return to the bargaining table, they have made their response conditional upon action by the United States and other countries that are not members of OPEC. No agreement has been formalised.

### Not fruitful

Zanganeh said a meeting "will not be fruitful without first understanding what is the perceived outcome from the meeting, how the meeting is expected to facilitate achieving this outcome, and what might be the likely oil market reaction to it".

He said that issues like the size of a cut and duration, how much would countries like the United States

and Canada cut, what is the baseline for the cuts for each country and how would the reductions be distributed, should be discussed first before holding a meeting. Iran, which is under U.S. sanctions, has been exempted from any output reductions.

Any final agreement for how much OPEC+ will cut during their talks today would depend on the volumes that other producers such as the United States, Canada and Brazil are willing to reduce, an OPEC source said on Tuesday.

After the OPEC+ talks, Saudi Arabia will host a video conference tomorrow for energy ministers from the Group of 20 (G20) major economies to alleviate the effects of the pandemic on energy markets, the group said in a statement on Tuesday.

Riyadh and Moscow are trying to overcome the rancor stemming from talks in March, when a deal to extend production cuts fell apart.

Since then, Saudi Arabia has been flooding the market with extra crude, and it has insisted it would no longer carry what it considered an unfair burden of output cuts when other producers are not complying with their cuts.

Oil bounced back yesterday with US crude jumping more than \$1, lifted by hopes that today's OPEC+ meeting would trigger output cuts to shore up prices. Brent crude LCOc1 was up by 75 cents, or 2.4 percent, at \$32.62 per barrel by 0246 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CLc1 rose \$1.30, or 5.5 percent, to \$24.93 a barrel. — Reuters

## Europe Inc profit hopes plunge amid lockdowns

**LONDON:** Profit expectations for European companies in the second and third quarters continue to deteriorate sharply, Refinitiv data showed yesterday, as countries such as Britain, Italy and France implement lockdowns to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Countries around the world are forcing people to stay at home in an attempt to contain the fast-spreading virus, leading to businesses shutting down and curtailing economic activity. Companies listed on the pan-European STOXX 600 are now expected to report an average 30.2 percent decline in earnings in the second quarter, down from the 21.9 percent drop forecast a week ago. For the third quarter, analyst expectations are now set for a 21.6 percent fall in earnings versus a 15.4 percent drop previously.

"Given the more total stop most economies are experiencing this time, the trough in activity should be deeper than in 08/09, but the rebound is also likely to be higher and quicker," Barclays European equity strategist Emmanuel Cau said in a note, referring to the global financial crisis of 2008-9. The British bank said it expected 2020 earnings for companies in the region to fall 30 percent to 40 percent. — Reuters



## Business

# 25m jobs at risk, airlines can't afford refunds: IATA

## Impact on world economy severe if govts let airlines collapse

**LONDON:** Global airlines warned that 25 million jobs across the world could be at risk from the coronavirus travel downturn and the industry's representative body said airline finances were so fragile they could not afford to refund customers.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has held a series of weekly news conferences, issuing increasingly desperate messages about the state of airline industry, and urging governments to help carriers.

In its latest warning, IATA whose members include the likes of Lufthansa and British Airways parent IAG said global air travel slumped by 70 percent at the beginning of the second quarter, and its Director General Alexandre De Juniac said airlines could not afford to issue refunds. He said customers should accept vouchers.

"The key element for us is to avoid running out of cash so refunding the cancelled ticket for us is almost unbearable financially speaking," De Juniac told reporters on Tuesday.

IATA highlighted the loss of jobs and the impact on the world economy if governments let airlines collapse.

Three months of severe travel restrictions plus lower traffic over 2020 could put 25 million jobs at risk, IATA warned, adding that about a third of 2.7

million direct jobs in the airline sector had either been lost or were furloughed.

Airlines are burning through their cash reserves as they try to stay afloat, IATA said, and providing refunds for cancelled flights, as rules in many parts of the world such as EU261 in the European Union, require them to do, was not possible.

Consumer groups are angry at airlines for ignoring those rules and say hard-up passengers need the cash just as much as the airlines.

IATA said about \$35 billion of tickets were due for refund at the end of the second quarter, and vouchers or a delayed refund was all airlines could offer. IATA has approached governments to ask them not to force airlines to provide cash refunds. But the US Transportation Department has told airlines they must refund tickets for flights that they

### Consumers complain amid crisis

cancel, or make a significant schedule change that passengers do not accept, following a rising number of consumer complaints and inquiries.

In the United States, a passenger filed a class-action lawsuit on Monday against United Airlines for refusing to pay a refund after his family's flight was cancelled. Separately, an environmental group called Stay Grounded published an open letter signed by 250 environmental groups and charities from across Europe calling on governments to attach climate and



**MIAMI:** In this file photo, American Airlines planes are seen at Miami International Airport (MIA) in Miami, Florida. US airlines have been all but paralyzed by the coronavirus, and as they face an uncertain future they have turned to Washington for financial help. —AFP

labor conditions to any airline bailouts.

IATA has been asking governments for a reduction of charges and taxes to help its members, which represent 82 percent of global air traffic, survive,

and for funds to help restart routes in future. It said that European countries had agreed to defer air traffic control charges totaling some 1.1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) from February to May. —Reuters

## Submerged by debt: Emerging economies at risk

**PARIS:** The COVID-19 pandemic has piled pressure on the finances of many emerging countries, leading to calls for some debt payments to be postponed or cancelled altogether. Last month, Lebanon declared a default on debt payments, and this week Argentina said it would delay payment of almost \$10 billion in debt.

Many emerging economies were already in dire straits before anybody had heard of COVID-19. "Even before the new coronavirus arrived, we were seeing public debt close to historic highs in almost all emerging regions," noted Julien Marcilly, chief economist at the French credit-insurance group Coface.

Levels of public debt in Africa are near those seen just before huge cancellations were agreed early this century, while those in Latin America "are closing in on those of the 1980s," he told AFP. The 1980s are often referred to as the "lost decade" for Latin America countries as they tightened belts to meet debt payments, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) usually demanding painful reform conditions as part of its bailouts.

Christopher Dembik, head of economic research at Saxo Bank, said emerging countries have fuelled "market suspicion" because they are squeezed between the need to increase public spending now and implacable debt-repayment schedules. The unprecedented shutdown of economic activity many nations have imposed to slow transmission of the coronavirus means governments will soon be facing a revenue crunch as tax earnings decline. The need to make payments on foreign loans means that there will be less revenue to support public health measures and support the economy.

### Growth shock

"Investors anticipate the coronavirus shock to growth will be much bigger to emerging countries than developed ones," Dembik told AFP.

That is because those which are oil exporters are being struck by the plunge in global crude prices while those that fashioned themselves as holiday destinations are confronted by a collapse in tourism. And as the pandemic unfurled institutional investors pulled enormous amounts of dollars from emerging and less developed countries to place the funds in less volatile markets.

"In March, capital withdrawn from emerging countries was four times more than in 2008-2009. That is huge," Marcilly noted. "Many African countries are going to find themselves in a very tight situation, like Angola or Zambia," he said. Bahrain, Oman, Sri Lanka and Tunisia are also in a difficult situation, he said. Ecuador is already dependent on IMF help.

### South Africa

The economist believes some larger emerging economies might also have to ask the IMF for a bailout. "The one that is in the worst shape is South Africa, because it combines external vulnerability with weak public finances," said Marcilly. South Africa's sovereign debt rating was recently downgraded by Fitch and Moody's. Some are now calling for the Group of 20 (G20) advanced countries to declare a moratorium on debt payments, or even a cancellation of debts. In late March, the IMF and World Bank urged governments to put a hold on debt payments from the world's poorest nations so they could fight the pandemic. —AFP

## WeWork sues Japan's SoftBank for dropping deal

**WASHINGTON:** Office-sharing giant WeWork on Tuesday sued SoftBank claiming the Japan-based technology investment group breached its contractual obligations by backing out of a \$3 billion rescue plan. The lawsuit filed in a US court in Delaware came just days after SoftBank said it was backing out of the plan to purchase WeWork shares to shore up the finances of the struggling sharing economy giant.

WeWork's board of directors called the SoftBank action "a clear breach of its contractual obligations" under an agreement between the two firms last year as well as a breach of SoftBank's fiduciary obligations to the firm's current and former employees who were to sell their equity.

The complaint alleges SoftBank yielded to pressure from "activist investors" and made the move after it had "received most of the benefits" under the deal, including control of

WeWork's board. WeWork is asking the court to force SoftBank to live up to the agreement or pay damages. Last week, SoftBank said it was terminating the agreement, claiming WeWork failed to live up to its obligations and cited "multiple, new, and significant pending criminal and civil investigations" surrounding WeWork and its co-founder Adam Neumann.

Neumann was to have received an estimated \$1 billion from the SoftBank investment. The deal also would allocate some \$450 million to current or former WeWork employees who have equity in the group. A WeWork board special committee said it "regrets the fact that SoftBank continues to put its own interests ahead of those of WeWork's minority stockholders."

The move by SoftBank marked a dramatic turn of events at troubled WeWork, once hailed as a shining unicorn valued at \$47 billion.

Things began to unravel last year as WeWork lost cash and cancelled its share offering, with Neumann pushed out—albeit with a generous package.

The tender offer would have most benefited Neumann, his family, and major institutional stockholders like Benchmark Capital, SoftBank Group

## Stocks, FX snap two-day rally

**LONDON:** A two-day rally in developing world markets ran out of steam yesterday as concerns over the coronavirus outbreak persisted, with anticipation ahead of a key OPEC+ meeting adding to uncertainty. Risk assets had rallied this week on hopes that the coronavirus outbreak was beginning to peak in its European and US epicentres.

But with its death toll steadily rising and deep economic cracks becoming increasingly apparent, investors dialled down their optimism.

The MSCI's index of emerging market stocks

## Exxon slashes investment 30% in 2020

**HOUSTON:** Exxon Mobil Corp on Tuesday throttled back investment in shale, natural gas and deep water production, cutting planned capital spending by 30 percent this year as the coronavirus pandemic saps energy demand and oil prices tumble.

Oil companies have pulled back 2020 spending plans by an average of 22 percent as countries limit air travel, order businesses closed and tell residents to stay home to combat the pandemic that has killed more than 76,000 worldwide.

In a one-two punch, crude prices have sunk nearly 60 percent this year on lower demand for fuel spurred by the pandemic-driven economic hit and an oil price war. "We haven't seen anything like what we're experiencing today," Exxon Chief Executive Darren Woods said on Tuesday as he detailed spending cuts on a conference call.

Exxon was the last of the oil majors to move, and its spending cut was deep-

er than those of most rivals. The largest US oil producer set 2020 capital expenditure at \$23 billion, down \$10 billion from its earlier plan and the lowest in four years. Spending could drop even further and continue into next year if required, Woods said.

### No action on dividend

The company took no action on its shareholder dividend, which analysts had been closely watching for any reduction. Exxon spent \$14.8 billion last year on shareholder payouts.

"We view these moves favorably as it helps reduce its cash flow shortfall and supports the dividend," said Edward Jones analyst Jennifer Rowland. Exxon's cuts will weigh the heaviest on US shale, where it had plunked down \$6 billion in 2017 for drilling leases and boosted output in a drive to pump around 360,000 barrels per day (bpd) this year.

Its output there this year will be around 15,000 bpd lower than planned and up to 150,000 bpd lower next year, Woods said. Exxon did not detail its Permian spending cuts, where it recently had 58 drilling rigs at work. RBC Capital Markets analyst Biraj Borkhataria estimated it was spending up to \$6 billion a year in the Permian, "and we see no rea-



**NEW YORK:** In this file photo a WeWork office is seen in New York City.—AFP

said. SoftBank has said its decision would not impact the day-to-day operations of WeWork.

The Japanese firm and its Vision Fund have already committed more than \$14.25 billion to WeWork. The lawsuit claims SoftBank took the action in part due to growing losses in

its other investments, including its massive technology investment fund.

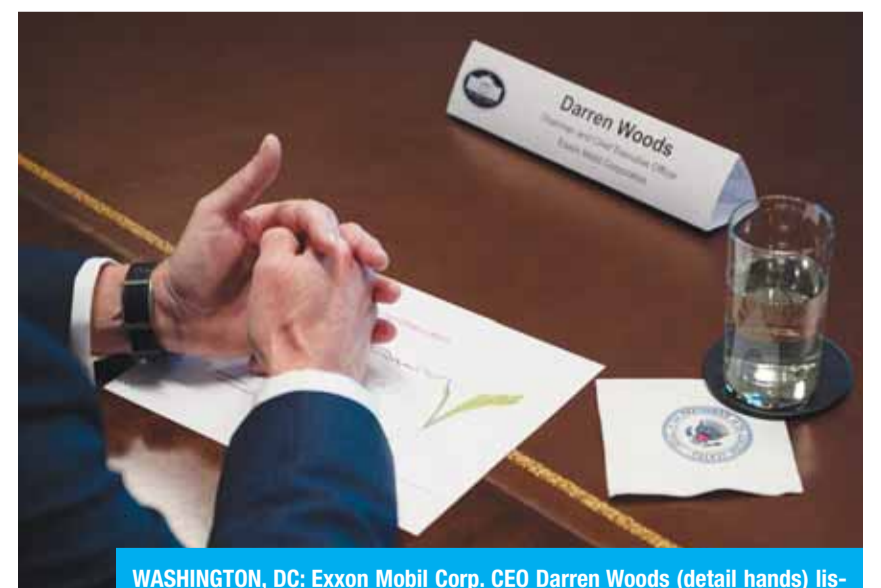
SoftBank has seen its stock sink in recent weeks on worries about the liquidity of the heavily indebted company, as global financial markets are roiled by fears about the economic consequences of the pandemic. —AFP

with the rupee nearing a record low to the dollar.

Further souring sentiment, European ministers failed to agree on more support for their pandemic-hit economies. With talks now suspended until today, the discussions underscored deep rifts in the bloc over its response to the outbreak.

The Hungarian forint, Czech koruna and Polish zloty all retreated versus the dollar and the euro.

The Turkish lira eased 0.4 percent to the dollar, while the country's stocks inched up slightly. Chinese stocks ended lower, while the yuan also fell after China reported that new coronavirus cases doubled yesterday from a day earlier, and as new asymptomatic infections more than quadrupled. The US dollar also saw some safe-haven demand on the day, indicating that anxiety over the virus remained the focus of markets. —Reuters



**WASHINGTON, DC:** Exxon Mobil Corp. CEO Darren Woods (detail hands) listens as US President Donald Trump participates in a meeting with energy sector CEOs at the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

son why capex and the rig count cannot be reduced by 50 percent at a minimum in 2020." Exxon expects world oil demand to tumble by 25 percent to 30 percent in the short term, Woods said.

"Storage is becoming very tight. Logistics are becoming tight," Woods said, forecasting widespread oil-well

"shut-ins across the industry." It delayed an investment decision to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Mozambique and some spending in offshore Guyana, where it has made one of the world's largest oil discoveries in years. Current operations in Guyana are not affected, it said. —Reuters



## Business

# Kamco Invest concludes exit from Abbott's Nutritional HQ in Ohio

## Investment in property generates total returns of 22.8%

**KUWAIT:** Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced that it has successfully completed the exit from the asset under management called "the Abbott Laboratories Nutritional HQ in Columbus - Ohio" achieving a total return on investment for its investors beyond the targeted IRR.

Investment in the property has achieved total return of 22.8 percent during the investment period, an internal rate of return of 8.2 percent including a cash yield of 7.5 percent per annum which was distributed quarterly. The proceeds of the exit were distributed to investors on 6 April 2020.

Acquired in 2017, the property serves as the headquarters for Abbott Laboratories, a Fortune 500 company and one of the world's largest diversified healthcare companies with presence across 150 countries, and located in the City of Columbus, less than 15-minute drive from the central business dis-



### Exit proceeds distributed to investors

trict and a 10-minute drive to John Glenn Columbus International Airport. It comprises of 215,038 sq. ft. of office space across four floors on an 808,909 sq. ft. site, including 1,075 parking spaces and outdoor amenity space including walkways, benches and bike racks.

Mohammad Al-Othman, Executive Director of Real Estate Investments at Kamco Invest, said, "The exit was just ahead of the Q2-2020 business plan

expiration as set forth at the investment date, hence strongly confirming the solid real estate investment strategy particularly amid the uncertain market conditions revolving around COVID-19 and its implications on local and international markets."

Al-Othman concluded, "We continuously explore new acquisition of Class A commercial property with strong and sustainable cash flows from credit tenants leveraging on our expertise, reach and full cycle track record."

It is worth noting that Kamco Invest manages currently 12 Grade "A" international commercial properties in US, UK and Europe and leased to tenants with strong financial positions and high cash and those properties are valued at \$1.18 billion. The properties generate an average annual cash yield of 7.8 percent. The team have successfully concluded four fully realized exits achieving an average equity IRR of 9.63 percent.



Mohammad Al-Othman



## Flydubai Cargo enables movement of vital goods

**KUWAIT:** Flydubai has allocated six Next-Generation Boeing 737-800 aircraft to operate as all-cargo flights to enable the movement of essential goods across its network and beyond. This follows the temporarily suspension of passenger operations as part of the precautionary measures announced by the National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority (NCEMA) and the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) in the UAE.

Hamad Obaidalla, Chief Commercial Officer at flydubai, said: "we recognise that air cargo has an important role to play in supporting the continuity of the supply chain and the efforts at a government and a private sector level to ensure the movement of essential supplies especially during these unprecedented times."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, air cargo has been a vital partner in delivering medicines, medical equipment, perishables, valuable goods, courier, spare parts,

electronic items and post office mail to affected areas. flydubai is utilising the cargo hold capacity in its passenger aircraft and has been working with the authorities to increase its cargo capabilities by allowing cargo in the cabin to a number of destinations, in line with the guidelines and recommendations issued by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and Boeing.

flydubai Cargo has currently operated 44 cargo flights, carrying 146 tons of cargo. The airline has operated relief flights to a number of countries affected by the travel restrictions including Azerbaijan, Egypt, India, Kuwait, Lebanon, Montenegro, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

Mohamed Hassan, Vice President of Cargo Operations at flydubai, added: "we have seen a strong global demand for cargo and we are working towards expanding our operations beyond the flydubai network to enable more goods to be transported to those who need them the most. We are following the guidelines set by the IATA and the World Health Organization (WHO) to the highest standards and coordinating closely with our strategic partners to maximise existing capacity, resources and our network reach."

beds to treat severe infection cases in the near future.

The package also encourages development of ventilators and greater use of telemedicine.

### Helping families

Low-income families that suffer a significant reduction of income due to the outbreak will be eligible for handouts of 300,000 yen per household. And families with children will also receive 10,000 yen per child, with high-income households excluded. Individuals in need will also be given access to interest-free emergency loans.

### Bringing back manufacturing

The package includes financial incentives worth an estimated 15.7 trillion yen for businesses to bring manufacturing back to Japan, in the hope of reducing supply chain disruptions during future global crises, including pandemics. In particular, businesses are encouraged to repatriate the production of items such as masks, protective suits, sanitiser, ventilators, artificial lungs and materials to produce drugs.

Business will also be encouraged to diversify foreign sources of necessary supplies, particularly by investing heavily in various countries in Southeast Asia. Measures to promote telework and remote education are also included.

### Eye toward post-pandemic world

In addition to easing the current economic pain, the package looks ahead, offering ways to jump-start the economy after the pandemic.

Measures intended to have a total 8.5 trillion yen worth of impact include campaigns to boost tourism, transport and the restaurant and entertainment sectors after the coronavirus is contained.

Coupons and discounts will be offered to help those sectors hardest hit by the slump in consumption. Community-based promotional events will also take place to help local businesses and shopping districts.

Sports and cultural events, as well as marketing campaigns to encourage tourists to return to Japan, are being planned.— AFP

## Main points of Japan's \$1tn crisis package

**TOKYO:** Japan is unleashing economic stimulus measures worth around \$1 trillion as it battles the coronavirus outbreak, which has prompted a state of emergency in several parts of the country, including Tokyo.

The package, valued at 108 trillion yen, envisages the government spending 39.5 trillion yen to protect jobs, bolster the medical sector and ease the pain for working families. Bonds worth 16.8 trillion yen will be issued to help pay for the measures.

Here is a look at the key items:

### Protecting jobs

The bulk of the stimulus — worth 80 trillion yen — aims to protect jobs and save small and medium-sized businesses. The government will expand employment subsidies to help firms pay salaries and interest payments, and avoid job cuts. Government-backed lending institutions will offer interest-free loans, and handouts of up to two million yen will be available for small and medium-sized businesses whose revenues plunge by more than 50 percent.

Tax cuts and other assistance will also be available for event organisers who cancelled or delayed their projects at the request of the government.

### Boosting healthcare systems

The package also sets aside 2.5 trillion yen to assist medical institutions and pay for development of drugs to treat coronavirus patients. The government plans to stockpile enough flu-treatment drug "Avigan", or favipiravir, to treat two million patients, with reports saying it can shorten recovery time in coronavirus infections.

It also aims to distribute 15 million masks to medical institutions in April and secure up to 50,000 hospital

## NBK raises awareness about fraud risks

**KUWAIT:** Ensuring its customers are well aware of fraud risks and ways to protect themselves against possible threats, National Bank of Kuwait continues to run its awareness campaigns and provide customers with advice and guidance on fraud.

In that line, NBK intensified its efforts to raise awareness through various communication channels in which it provides instructions that aim to educate customers about the risks of theft and fraud that take place by employing tempting methods over the phone or online.

With the current circumstances amidst the global outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), third parties may take advantage of the situation or the decision to postpone loan installments and credit card payments for six months to obtain customers' private information about their bank accounts. Therefore, customers must be alert at all times of suspicious emails, SMS or phone calls that ask for information related to their bank accounts, debit card, credit card or request immediate payments. NBK warns from sharing any type of information with anyone or any party, such as information related to bank accounts, credit and debit cards as well as the PIN code, CVV card verification code, account passwords for NBK Mobile Banking and NBK Online Banking and one-time passwords (OTP).

The bank has also warned its customers of suspicious attempts that are made via text messages, WhatsApp and the Viber app. These fraudulent methods delude customers to share private and sensitive information about their personal account in return of winning valuable financial prizes.

One of the fraudulent methods informs customers that their debit card has been blocked because they had not updated their personal information. They then request the customers' phone number to unblock the card, giving them direct access to identify the customers' data and steal their money by conducting online transactions or make transfers to intermediary accounts, passing money in and out of Kuwait and making it difficult to track and retrieve.

NBK requested customers to be vigilant of fraudulent operations made by hacking the emails of suppliers who deal with customers, whether individuals or companies. The bank stressed on the importance of being cautious at all times when obtaining information about the beneficiary account to make transfers and which includes the beneficiary's name, account number, bank information and other via email.

The bank asked customers to consider requesting a confirmation of this information through other communication channels such as a phone call or SMS before submitting them to the bank and ensure they complete transfers with the correct information.

NBK stressed the importance of using its digital

## EU struggles to bridge split over 'coronabonds'

**BRUSSELS:** EU finance ministers struggled early yesterday to bridge differences on how to rebuild their economies after the coronavirus, with Germany refusing Italy's call for unprecedented burden-sharing with hard-hit countries. The European economy has been battered by the pandemic as countries impose strict lockdowns that have closed businesses and put normal life on hold. For weeks the EU's 27 member states have bickered about ways to respond to the economic havoc, with Italy and Spain pleading for a solidarity fund that would be paid for by European partners jointly borrowing money on the markets. Sometimes called "coronabonds", this proposal has been firmly rejected by Germany, the Netherlands and other rich countries who see it as an attempt by the indebted south to unfairly take advantage of the north's fiscal discipline. But after more than seven hours of talks that started on Tuesday and pushed past midnight, Italy was refusing to back down, calling for the eurozone's wealthiest powers to move on their long-held red lines. "Nothing is agreed at this stage. This will take time," a European source said, adding that talks would go on through the night.

### 'No business as usual'

Berlin and its allies are insisting that the any European rescue should use the eurozone's 410-billion-euro (\$443-billion) bailout fund, as well as wait to see the effects of monetary stimulus already unleashed by the European

channels, which include NBK Corporate Online Banking or NBK Online Banking for individuals, when completing transfers instead of traditional methods such as having a company representative make transfers manually. Digital methods reduce a number of risks and avoid theft of transfer orders, counterfeited when a third party person modifies the beneficiary information, IBAN or account number to which the payment should be sent.

Transfers completed by a bank cannot be reversed and customers are fully responsible of the information being correct in the transfer orders, including the beneficiary information or other appendices supporting the transfer such as invoices and other documentations.

Commenting on the bank's awareness campaigns, Ali Al-Mulla, Executive Manager, Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK is committed to educating its customers about the latest methods employed for fraud and ways to prevent them."



Al-Mulla added: "Fraudulent parties are constantly seeking to bypass security measures by stealing personal information and obtaining private data. This is why at NBK, we ensure we are always close to our customers and provide them with the ways that protect them and their accounts from increasing suspicious operations that have claimed victims."

Al-Mulla explains that new fraud methods have been introduced lately, some performed by phone and through which the customer is deluded to share private banking information in return of winning a prize. NBK has therefore intensified campaigns to educate customers and warn them of fraudulent text messages or phone calls requesting for their personal or financial information, and confirming that the bank will never request for their personal information. He added that scammers are taking advantage of the current situation to get access to customers' information and advises customers to take precautions and never share their bank information with anyone.

He asked customers to immediately report any suspicion of fraud by calling 1801801 where an agent will assist them. NBK also requires customers to follow the bank's social media channels where they can find information and instructions to guide them. They can also visit nbk.com to learn more about fraud methods and ways to prevent them.

NBK also held educative events for the community about the banking sector. The bank organized as well training courses for its employees to increase their knowledge and expertise in mitigating fraud operations and combating financial crimes.

Central Bank. Eurogroup chief Mario Centeno is tasked with finding a compromise in a fight that has taken an emotional turn. The virus has killed more than 50,000 people so far in Europe.

"We all know this is not time for business as usual policies. We must show our citizens that Europe protects them," said Centeno, who is also Portugal's finance minister. Ministers must "make a clear commitment for a coordinated and sizable recovery plan," he said. On Monday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated her government's position in favor of activating the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) bailout fund to help countries that need it. But she pointedly did not mention shared borrowing such as coronabonds or eurobonds, angering Rome. "Eurobonds represent a serious response tailored to the crisis we are living through," Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte argued on Monday. Influential France backs Italy and Spain and insists the economic destruction caused by COVID-19 demands a new way of thinking in Europe, and wants member countries to help each other in unprecedented ways.

### 'Debate will continue'

Italy is refusing recourse to the ESM, which was created in 2012 during the eurozone debt crisis when states like Greece no longer had access to borrowing on the markets. Its programs come with strings attached for countries that use it: heavy conditions that Italy and Spain say they would refuse if other capitals were to try to impose them after the virus. Northern countries insist that conditions can be held to a minimum given the cause of the crisis, but that in the longer term a country would have to get their finances in order. Officials in Brussels had expected Germany and its allies to prevail on Tuesday, although ministers would not dismiss ideas such as coronabonds outright.



# Virus drives expectant moms in US to embrace home births

WASHINGTON: Like many expectant mothers, Gina Conley is nervous. But there is a lot more to worry about these days, with a virulent outbreak overwhelming hospitals and convincing pregnant women to opt for the relative safety of a home birth. "I won't have to go to a hospital where there are potentially a lot of sick people and staff that have been exposed to the coronavirus," says the 32-year-old from North Carolina. The pandemic has torn through one country after another, laying waste to economies, roiling public institutions and notching around 400,000 infections in the United States - more than 12,000 of them fatal.

As hospital wards become battlefields in the war against this looming threat, choosing where to give birth is a quandary many expectant mothers did not expect to have to face. Fear of infection, staff and drug shortages, and increasingly strict rules on visitors are leading more and more women to consider shunning hospitals. But soon-to-be moms must weigh fears for their newborns and worries over their own health with the prohibitive cost of having a baby at home.

Conley, who is seven months pregnant, said she will pay more than \$4,000 to cover the services associated with a home birth, the largest of which is typically the midwife. "It's definitely not cheap but having the birth experience that we want, with a lot less anxiety - we felt like it was worth it," the fitness coach told AFP. Home births are considered "out of network" under many plans in the byzantine US health insurance ecosphere, and couples are rarely lucky enough to be fully covered.

Ashley Esposito, a 35-year-old data specialist from the East Coast port city of Baltimore, expects to fork out up to \$8,000 up front. "Paying all that chunk of money, especially given the financial situation, you know - there are people from my husband's job who were laid off," Esposito told AFP. "Nothing is, like, 100 percent guaranteed."

Esposito has added her name to a list of 1,300 people

who have signed a petition urging health insurers in the state of Maryland to provide better coverage of home births. Like many soon-to-be moms, she worries about new anti-infection rules adopted by some hospitals that limit the number of people who can be in the delivery room. "This is our first healthy baby so my husband not being there is not an option for me," said Esposito, who used in vitro fertilization after two miscarriages. In New York, hospitals had barred husbands or partners from delivery rooms until Governor Andrew Cuomo stepped in last month and signed a decree stating no women had to give birth alone. Jordan Perez, 30, will soon reach full term in Homer, Alaska, where she decided to have her baby at home. "I've always wanted to have a home birth but before the virus happened, my midwife team didn't offer home birth," said Perez, who sells cosmetic products.

"I think about a week ago, they said, 'OK, let's go for it. With the virus that's happening, we can make it happen,'" she added. With health services bracing for worse to come in a crisis of historic proportions, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says hospitals remain safe places to give birth. Nevertheless, midwives are struggling to cope with the sudden boom in demand for their expertise in home births. Of roughly 12,000 certified nurse-midwives and midwives in America, an estimated 3,000 practice outside hospitals.

"We usually have between four and six (births) per month... and now we are maxed out at eight per month, and we actually have 10 in July," said certified nurse midwife Mairi Breen Rothman. Her practice - M.A.M.A.S., just outside Washington - has hired a third midwife, its schedule is booked solid through August, and it has had to turn away potential clients.

Midwives are being forced to change the way they work in order to prevent the spread of the virus - cutting down on house calls, seeing patients via online



BALTIMORE: Ashley Esposito, who is pregnant with her first child due in July, stands outside her home in Baltimore, Maryland. There is a rising demand for home birth in the US because of the coronavirus pandemic, even if the procedure is costly and "out of network" for most of them. — AFP

tools like Zoom and wearing face masks. Rothman makes patients wait in their car rather than in the waiting room, and asks them to leave behind their personal possessions before going in for the examination. "The clients come to the house and they text us from their car. When the person before them is gone, we tell them that they can come in. They come to the door via the separate entrance," she said.

After the check-up, when the patient leaves, staff wipe down every surface that might have been

touched, as well as door knobs, light switches, clinical equipment and so on. "We clean the bathroom. And then we call the next person to come in," Rothman says with a nervous laugh. Esposito, who plans to give birth while watching part of the "Lord of the Rings" saga, said she will take no risks once her child is born into a world that has changed almost overnight. "I'm just going to stay in my bubble for the most part," she said. "I don't think we're going to have much interaction with people other than, like, Skype." — AFP

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## Lifestyle | Features

## Dead, ill, cured: Celebrities hit by the coronavirus

From world leaders and royalty to musicians, sports stars and actors, the coronavirus has hit millions around the world, including the rich and famous. Here is a roundup of high-profile figures who have died, been infected by or cured of COVID-19.

## Deceased

Jazz great Ellis Marsalis died on April 1 aged 85 after contracting the virus. Veteran Afro-jazz star Manu Dibango, 86, and revered American playwright Terrence McNally, 81, both died on March 24, following coronavirus complications. Senegal's Pape Diouf, 68, ex-president of French football club Olympique de Marseille, died March 31 in Dakar. Former Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz died March 21, aged 76. Former Republic of Congo president Jacques Joachim Yhombi Opango died in France on March 30, aged 81. Mahmud Jibril, former head of the Libyan rebel government that overthrew dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011, died April 5.

## In hospital

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was admitted to hospital on April 5 and is battling the virus in inten-

sive care after his diagnosis on March 27.

Marianne Faithfull, 73, a 1960s icon and celebrated singer songwriter, was hospitalised in London on April 4 after testing positive.

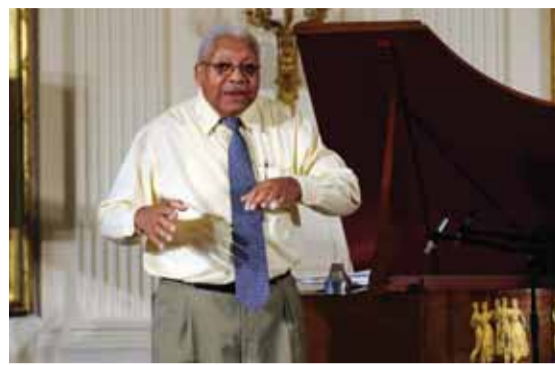
Chilean author Luis Sepulveda, 70, has been hospitalised in Spain after first showing symptoms on February 25.

## Infected

Michel Barnier, who leads the EU's negotiations with Britain on Brexit, announced March 19 that he had the virus and is now recovering at home. Britain's Prince Charles tested positive and completed seven days in self-isolation, in line with British government advice, but is isolating another week as a precaution. Prince Albert II of Monaco, who had tested positive, came out of quarantine on March 31.

Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks and his wife, actress and singer Rita Wilson, have recovered and returned home to Los Angeles after being quarantined for two weeks in Australia. British actor Idris Elba, who tested positive but was asymptomatic, announced the end of his isolation March 31.

Nobel laureate and former Finnish president Martti



In this file photo taken on June 15, 2009 jazz musician Ellis Marsalis talks to students during a jazz music workshop hosted by First Lady Michelle Obama at the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC.—AFP

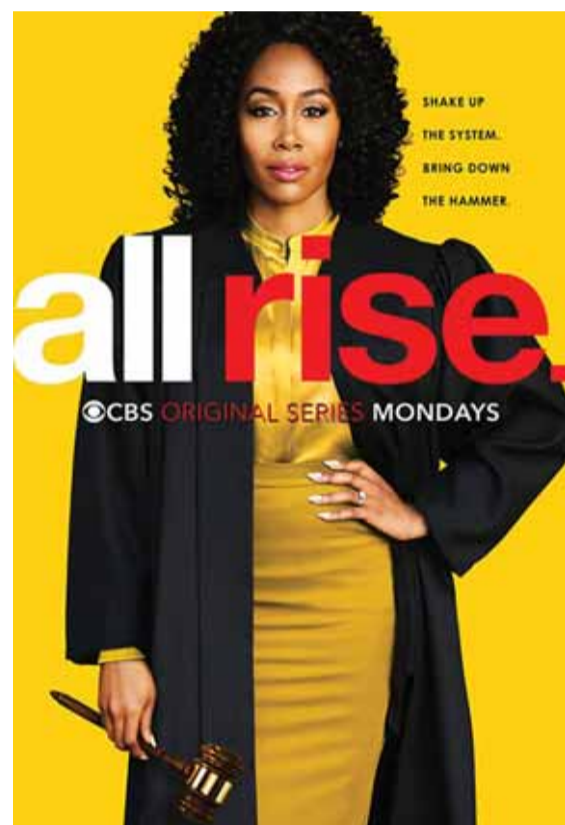
Ahtisaari has contracted the virus. In Italy several football players at Juventus are infected, including France's 2018 World Cup winner Blaise Matuidi, asymptomatic but in quarantine, and Argentinian attacker Paulo Dybala, who said March 27 he felt

"much better". Former AC Milan defender Paolo Maldini and his footballer son Daniel are also positive. American business tycoon and New York Knicks owner James Dolan has also tested positive. In England, Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta tested positive on March 12 and is now recovered.

Among the 14 NBA basketball players who have tested positive, Rudy Gobert, Donovan Mitchell, Christian Wood and Marcus Smart have since said they have recuperated. Spanish opera star Placido Domingo, 79, who had tested positive and been hospitalized in Mexico, was released March 30 and is being treated at home.

## In isolation... just in case

On April 2 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu re-entered precautionary quarantine after Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, a leading member of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, tested positive. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has remained in isolation though his wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau, who had tested positive, is now recovered.—AFP



## 'All Rise' episode to be shot remotely to reflect virus realities

An episode of the CBS courtroom drama "All Rise" will be filmed remotely to reflect real-life restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic, with each actor performing from home. In a first for a US television series, the virtual production will use apps such as Zoom, FaceTime and WebEx, CBS said Monday. Once the sequences for each actor have been shot, the production team will use special effects to change the background.

A cinematographer working alone from a vehicle will get external footage in Los Angeles — where the show is based — including shots of empty streets and desolate neighborhoods. The episode will reflect the "COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing, and its impact on the criminal justice system," CBS said. The episode will be produced in accordance with the confinement guidelines currently in force in many places around the world, CBS said. Characters will be shown managing their personal and professional lives under the tough restrictions designed to contain the virus. "It's a unique chance for our All Rise family to band together — in our different homes, even cities — to tell a story about resilience, justice, and the power of community," said Greg Spottiswood, the show's executive producer. The episode is due to air on May 4.—AFP

## Italian tenor Bocelli to sing on Easter from empty Milan Cathedral

Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli will sing on Easter Sunday in a presentation from Milan Cathedral to be streamed online, the city's mayor said on Tuesday. "At 7 o'clock, in an empty Duomo, he will present a few pages of sacred music," Mayor Giuseppe Sala said in his daily Facebook message, saying the famous singer would "offer his voice to the whole world". The region of Lombardy, of which Milan is the capital, has been the hardest hit in Italy's coronavirus crisis, with more than 9,000 deaths.

Bocelli's broadcast from the gothic Duomo will be accessible on YouTube,

wrote Italian newspaper Il Corriere della Sera. "This won't be a concert," said Bocelli, in an interview published in the paper. "It will rather be an opportunity to pray together." "We will concentrate all our energy to give courage and confidence to this marvelous city," Bocelli said. "A prayer then, for Milan and for the world, in front of an absolutely painful, tragic and unsettling event." Churches in Italy remain closed and even the prayer to be given by Pope Francis on Easter Sunday will be live streamed.—AFP



## 50 Best restaurants list shelved by virus

50 Best will not publish its annual ranking of the world's top restaurants this year because of the coronavirus, it said Tuesday. The British-based list was due to announce its latest league table of global haute cuisine in June in the Belgian city of Antwerp. But with half of the planet under coronavirus lockdown, and most top establishments shuttered, its organizers said they would postpone the announcement until next year. "There is a time to celebrate and a time to act," they said. "We stand united with the restaurant sector at this unprecedented time," said 50 Best chief William Drew, who praised chefs who had been cooking

for health care workers and supporting their communities.

Mirazur, a restaurant perched over the Mediterranean at Menton in the south of France run by the Argentinian-born chef Mauro Colagreco took the top spot last year, followed by the reborn Noma in Copenhagen. 50 Best has criticised for the opacity of its judging in recent years with the rival French ranking La Liste — a guide of guides — claiming to be more scientific. One of 50 Best's founders also set up the alternative World Restaurant Awards last year, which was won by the South African beachside restaurant, Wolfgang.—AFP



## TikTok's time: Video platform sees appeal growing during lockdowns

This is TikTok's time. The social video platform which was already a favorite of teens is increasingly being used by adults looking for ways to pass the time during coronavirus lockdowns. Users post short videos — no longer than 60 seconds but often as short as 15 — to showcase their bite-size dance skills or share relatable experiences with a humorous twist. The application, owned by Chinese tech company ByteDance, saw 65 million worldwide downloads in March, according to analytics site SensorTower.

In addition to the existing 800 million reported in January by DataReportal, the app is nearing a billion users — though TikTok itself does not publish such data. And though teens have been posting on the platform for months, it seems adults with more free time — as much of the world is encouraged to stay at home to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus — are finally catching on. Cecile, stuck at home in Paris with her six- and three-year-old children, was intrigued when a friend sent her a video. Soon, she had downloaded the app and was posting clips herself. "I said to myself: 'Well, this is something funny I could do with the boys to pass the time, if only for fifteen minutes,'" she said. "When I say, 'Come on, we're making a video,' they're ready to go. It makes them laugh."

Celebrities have joined the fun too, from Jennifer Lopez to Mariah Carey — even 82-year-old Jane Fonda. Social media use is up across the board as movement is restricted around the world, but TikTok — already having a moment before the pandemic — is doing better than others. Idyllic vacation views and perfectly framed artistic shots —



In this file photo youths act in front of a mobile phone camera while making a TikTok video on the terrace of their residence in Hyderabad.—AFP

long the markers of the Instagram aesthetic — are currently out of reach for most. But the typical TikTok post does not require a beautiful background, explained Thibault Le Ouay, founder of Pentos, a company that helps brands with their marketing strategy on the platform.

"On TikTok, you do a dance in your own house," he said, pointing to 15-year-old Charli D'Amelio, one of the app's biggest stars with 46 million subscribers. "She is at home in leggings. It's not a video of a beach paradise," he said. "It's still something you can do at home." Plus, TikTok has levity baked into its DNA. Many videos on the platform — a descendant of the website Musical.ly — are amateur performances of short choreographed dances and lip syncs to song clips, repeated and riffed on over and over.

"It's a very interesting position to be in for TikTok right now, because the videos are generally pretty light, humorous, fun and easy," said Debra Aho Williamson, principal analyst for market research company eMarketer. "And with all of the negative news that people are hearing on a daily basis from other media, TikTok is something different, and I think that people need that right now."—AFP

## To cut or not to cut? In US, quarantine slows everything but hair growth

The economy may have slowed and normal life come to a standstill, but in the world of hair, a follicle free-for-all unencumbered by coronavirus has Americans asking one critical question — to cut or not to cut? For Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot, the answer was clear: "I thought I would do it myself but I thought it would be a disaster." She only admitted to having had her hair cut after being caught red-handed when her hairdresser posted on Facebook that giving the mayor a trim had been a pleasure: cue the chorus of public shaming.

In her defense, Lightfoot invoked her visibility and the fact that the hairdresser wore a mask, but the accusations of privilege and elitism poured in. Stuck at home for several weeks, Americans are finding their normally carefully coiffed 'dos growing roots or even transforming into mullets. Rather than despair, many are using their intriguing growth patterns and bird's nest-like locks as an antidote to tragedy, posting jokes, memes, video montages and even helpful video tutorials online. Even The New York Times has gotten in on the act with articles explaining "How to Take Care of Your Hair at Home" and "How to Touch Up Your Roots at Home."

Not everyone — celebrities included — has seen success. Actor Riz Ahmed of "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story" appeared to have taken a razor to his head with a near buzz cut. "Anyone else do a #StayAtHome haircut that got outta hand?" he posted on Twitter, along with a photo of his new look and a forlorn expression. "Least now feels like there's someone else here when I look in mirror." Mary Lee Gannon, a 59-year-old Pittsburg resident, is not a celebrity but said her spouse was beginning to look like one. "I offered to cut my husband's hair two weeks ago because he looked like Mike Jagger — he turned me down," she said.

When he finally took her up on her offer, she armed herself with an old pair of scissors previously used to cut their dog's hair and took his tresses to task. The end result: "He was very pleased, it worked out OK," she said. For child star Julia Butters from "Once Upon a Time..."

in Hollywood," cutting her father's hair did not end in a happily-ever-after storybook finish, even if the experience — and extremely patchy looking 'do — provided a bit of fun. "This is one of the bravest fathers I have ever met," she says as she goes to town on his hair in a video posted online. His response: "There is a thin line between bravery and stupidity."

## 'Don't cut your hair!'

Most hairdressers live by the adage that it is better to wait for a cut than embark on experiments that will later have to be fixed. "Don't cut your hair! You're going to have more anxiety," celebrity hairstylist Scotty Cunha, who has counted the Kardashians among his clients, said in Page Six Style. This is even more true for chemically dyed hair. "I worry that some of the individuals who put products on their head do not understand the impact of those chemicals," said Leslie Young, vice-president of communication for the Associated Bodywork and Massage Corporation, an organization of workers in the field.

According to Young, some people are "so desperate" that they insist on going to their hairdresser's house or having the stylist come to their home. With salons closed, some hairdressers might be tempted to accept, but Young strongly advises against the practice: "It's dangerous," she said, and insurance will not be valid in the event of any issues. In the meantime, some stylists are trying to make a little side money by giving their advice in online videos or directly to their clients by videoconference.

Even though Americans normally go every six to eight weeks to the hairdresser, Young said most seemed resigned to waiting longer. And too bad if it means revealing a few secrets in the meantime, particularly in the very blond world of television. Faced with that very prospect, journalist Kayla Tausche of CNBC tweeted a picture of herself as a child: "You're going to find out soon, and it's best you hear it from me directly," she said. "I'm a dark brunette."—AFP



In this file photo Nicole Spuntarilli cuts Stefano Pinto's hair in his apartment as hair salons and barber shops are closed during the coronavirus outbreak in Miami Beach, Florida.—AFP



Lifestyle | Features



Inventor Sudhakar Yadav gestures as he instructs a driver to drive a coronavirus-themed made car to be used in a awareness campaign, during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Hyderabad.—AFP

Pandas use lockdown privacy to mate after a decade of trying

Stuck at home with no visitors and not much else to do, a pair of pandas in Hong Kong finally decided to give mating a go after a decade of dodging the issue. Like half the planet, Ying Ying and Le Le have only really had each other for company since coronavirus-caused lockdowns shut off the flow of guests to their themepark pad. And like couples everywhere, they've been making the best of the time on their own. "Since Ying Ying and Le Le's arrival in Hong Kong in 2007 and attempts at natural mating since 2010, they unfortunately have yet to succeed until this year upon years of trial and learning," said Ocean Park conservation official Michael Boos.

The park released photos of the pair embracing in an enclosure uncharacteristically free from prying eyes and cameraphones. Pandas are notoriously bad at reproducing, especially in captivity. But vets had their hopes up when the monochromatic lovers started showing an interest in each other during the short spring mating season. For those who knew where to look for the tell-tale signs, ursine love was in the air. "Since late March, Ying Ying began spending more time playing in the water, while Le Le has been leaving scent-markings around his habitat and searching the area for Ying Ying's scent," the park said. "Such behaviors are consistent with those common during breeding season, which occurs once every year between March to May," it added.

Experts will now monitor Ying Ying for signs of pregnancy, but it may be quite some time as the gestation period for giant pandas ranges from 72 to 324 days. The park said confirmation of pregnancy can only be detected by an ultrasound scan some 14 to 17 days before birth. But Ying Ying might exhibit hormonal fluctuations and behavioral changes as early as June if fertilization has occurred. The announcement was a rare bit of good news as Hong Kong reels under a recession and movement restrictions caused by the coronavirus.

Ocean Park, which is earmarked for a HK\$10.6 billion (\$1.4 billion) bailout from the city government, has been shuttered since late January because of the pandemic. Many Facebook commenters speculated that the absence of crowds might have boosted Ying Ying and Le Le's confidence. "It's a good time to make baby bear when you are on holiday and have no pressure," wrote Janet Mok. Chan Fong added: "It's no pressure when no one is watching."—AFP



This handout photo provided by Ocean Park Hong Kong shows giant pandas Ying Ying and Le Le before mating at Ocean Park in Hong Kong on April 6, 2020.—AFP

World's top animation festival moves online over virus

The world's top animated film festival was cancelled Tuesday because of the coronavirus, but organizers said they would hold an online version instead. The Annecy Festival in eastern France is the latest in a string of major cultural events to be cancelled or postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 60th annual gathering was due to start on June 15. The organizers said they were working on staging an online

version of the festival "which would allow access to the films", with the line-up to be announced on April 15. The South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, came up with a similar solution, showing its films on Amazon Prime. The Cannes film festival, the world's biggest, still hangs in the balance after it was postponed from May until the end of June.—AFP



John Prine, revered American folk songwriter, dies of coronavirus complications

John Prine, an American folk legend widely considered one of his generation's most influential songwriters, died following complications of coronavirus Tuesday, his publicist told AFP on behalf of his family. He was 73 years old. On April 3 Prine's wife Fiona had posted on social media the beloved country and folk star was on his eighth day in the ICU on a ventilator, and had pneumonia in both lungs.

Once dubbed the "Mark Twain of American songwriting," over his five decades in the music business Prine carved an image as an off-the-cuff wordsmith who forged melancholy tales with a dose of surrealist wit. Bob Dylan has named Prine among his favorite songwriters, citing the literary yarn "Lake Marie" as a favorite from his fellow folk bard's vast catalogue. "Prine's stuff is pure Proustian existentialism," Dylan said in 2009. "Midwestern mind-trips to the nth degree." Born October 10, 1946 in Maywood, Illinois, Prine took up music as a hobby before emerging on the Chicago folk revivalist scene in the late 1960s, when he was discovered by country star Kris Kristofferson.

His 1971 self-titled debut album was a critical hit, a first collection of his unique social commentary and protest songs that would make the troubadour a staple of Americana for decades to come. His anti-Vietnam War hit "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You Into Heaven Anymore" found a second coming in the early 2000s as the United States embarked on wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, earning Prine both standing ovations and angry hate mail. "When someone turns the country backwards," he told Florida's St. Petersburg Times in 2005, "they should at least expect to be called out on it."

The bluegrass-loving musician with a penchant for allegory enjoyed riffing on country music tropes with stereotypical spoofs, adding whimsical touches to heavier lyricism. Prine spun tales of past loves as well as solitude, estrangement and regret, in work often streaked with prominent threads of mortality. "His is just extraordinarily eloquent music — and he lives on that plane with Neil [Young] and [John] Lennon," said Pink Floyd's Roger Waters of Prine in 2008.—AFP



In this file photo taken on June 13, 2019 US singer-songwriter John Prine performs onstage during the 2019 Songwriters Hall Of Fame Gala at The New York Marriott Marquis in New York City.—AFP photos



In this file photo taken on February 08, 2006 Best Contemporary Folk Album winner John Prine accepts his award during the 48th Annual Grammy Awards pre-telecast at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

1960s Bond girl Honor Blackman dead at 94

Honor Blackman, one of the most memorable co-stars of the early James Bond films, has died at the age of 94, her family said. The actress shot to fame in her late 30s after playing legendary Bond girl Pussy Galore in the 1964 movie "Goldfinger", starring alongside Sean Connery. It was only the third installment in the storied spy franchise, and received critical acclaim and box office success. "It's with great sadness that we have to announce the death of Honor Blackman aged 94," the family said in a statement Monday. "She died peacefully of natural causes at home in Lewes, Sussex, surrounded by her family."

"As well as being a much adored mother and grandmother, Honor was an actor of hugely prolific creative talent." Her family added she possessed "an extraordinary combination of beauty, brains and physical prowess, along with her unique voice and a dedicated work ethic". Blackman also became well-known in Britain for playing the character Cathy Gale in the popular 1960s TV spy series The Avengers alongside Patrick Macnee as the bowler-hatted John Steed. She learned judo for her role as the leather-clad Gale and her martial arts skills helped land her the iconic role of Pussy Galore.

"Today we mark the passing of a film icon, Honor Blackman who shall forever be remembered as Pussy Galore in Goldfinger," Bond producers Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli said in a statement on Twitter. "She was an extraordinary talent and a beloved member of the Bond family. Our thoughts are with her family at this time." Among her other screen roles, Blackman played the goddess Hera in 1963 film "Jason and the Argonauts" and appeared in "Bridget Jones's Diary". On television, she had



In this file photo actress Honor Blackman smiles prior to the release of 42 balloons in Westminster London.—AFP

guest appearances on "Doctor Who", "Colombo" and "Coronation Street".

Her long and successful career also included theatre roles in productions such as The Sound Of Music, My Fair Lady and Cabaret. "RIP, ultimate Bond Girl and original Avenger, Honor Blackman," film director Edgar Wright tweeted. British comedian and actor David Walliams was also among those to pay tribute. "Farewell Honor Blackman," he said on Twitter. "She will live forever as Pussy Galore in 'Goldfinger.'" Blackman was five years older than Connery whom she starred opposite in "Goldfinger" and is thought to be the oldest actress ever to play a Bond girl. "Most of the Bond girls have been bimbos," the BBC reported her as once saying. "I have never been a bimbo."—AFP

UK restaurants find new recipes for success amid virus

Facing wipeout from the coronavirus outbreak, many British cafes, bars and restaurants have reinvented themselves as delivery services and mobile greengrocers to survive. "Love Shack", a vegan restaurant in Hackney, east London, explained on its website that "in these tough times we need to look at new ways of keeping the good ship love afloat". Rather than let its stock go to waste, the restaurant now delivers ingredients to local homes. "Former restaurant, now accidental greengrocers," quips its Instagram page. "We've somehow turned into vegan grocers and food delivery service."

For community food market Mercato Metropolitan, the reinvention "was an inevitable business change", spokeswoman Nezahat Sevim told AFP. Before the outbreak, diners would buy their meals from one of its food vans and eat it at large communal tables. Now they deliver to members of their "loyal community" but also to new customers, "since the essentials have become harder to find, in shops and also online". "If the supermarkets can't do it we can!" says Nonna Tonda's Instagram page. "We are delivering our fresh pasta and sauces to your door." The Italian restaurant in West London now delivers fresh pasta across the city, a highly prized delicacy often missing from supermarket shelves since the virus took hold.

What started out as isolated initiatives quickly became widespread, with



The Leon restaurant chain is one of those adapting to the lockdown, converting themselves into mini-supermarkets.—AFP

an Instagram account opening this weekend under the name "Shop local London". The site lists projects cooked up by businesses across the catering sector, from food vans to wholesalers — many of whom have lost their main customers since the restaurants closed. Nattoora, which supplies 30,000 restaurants, has now opened up to the public, its employees packing crates of basic necessities for delivery direct to the doors of Londoners. The company has been able to maintain "90-95 percent" of its usual revenue, founder Franco Fubini told AFP, but not without a few adjustments. "We don't sell a lot of artichokes to consumers, but we'd sell a lot to restaurants," he explained. "Consumers are buying a lot more avocados than restaurants would."—AFP

Japan viral comedy song swaps 'Pineapple-pen' for handwashing advice

The Japanese comedian who stormed the world with his nonsense 'Pineapple-pen' hit and even entertained President Donald Trump is back with a new message: wash your hands! The entertainer known as Pikotaro grabbed a Guinness World Record in 2016 for his 45-second "Pen-Pineapple-Apple-Pen" or "PPAP" hit, which became the shortest song to break into the Billboard Hot 100. And now he has repurposed the catchy if bizarre hit to promote proper handwashing as the world battles the global coronavirus pandemic.

Dressed in his trademark garish animal print with a pencil-thin moustache, Pikotaro swaps out his "I have a pen. I have an apple. Apple pen!" lyrics for "I have a hand. I have a soap. Wash! Wash! Wash! Wash!" "Clean hand, clean hand," he adds, displaying his palms before pressing them together. "Pray for People and Peace (PPAP)." In just three days, the song has racked up over three million views on YouTube, and the comedian's Twitter page has been flooded with videos of Japanese children laughing and imitating his handwashing dance. "My three-year-old gets thrilled by Pikotaro's PPAP 2020. Let's wash hands," one amused parent wrote. Pikotaro's 2016 hit became an internet sensation after popstar Justin Bieber shared it as his "favorite video on the internet". It was viewed more than 67 million times within a few months after hitting YouTube and mimicked by children in the world, including Trump's grandchildren. Pikotaro was a surprise choice to entertain the US president when he visited Japan in 2017.—AFP



Wash! Wash! Wash!



# Virus pandemic deals heavy blow to Egypt working poor

CAIRO: Haggard and disheveled from the stress of making ends meet, day laborers line up in Cairo for food parcels after losing their jobs to the sharp downturn caused by the coronavirus. Sayed Shaaban, 42, who used to work in a cafe, said for him the pandemic is not just a health scare but a crushing blow to his already precarious livelihood. Wearing a mask and gloves, he waited in line outside a charity centre affiliated with the Egyptian Food Bank (EFB) in Salam City, a poor neighborhood of eastern Cairo.

"You see how I have only one functioning arm - I used to serve drinks and get paid," he told AFP. "But now there's not even one piastre coming in." EFB, a large Cairo-based charity, has been at the forefront of a public relief effort in the most populous Arab country. One third of Egypt's population of more than 100 million lives in poverty, surviving on about \$1.50 or less a day. For many who were already struggling, meagre incomes have vanished since a curfew was imposed on March 24 to stem the spread of the virus.

Egypt has so far recorded 94 deaths out of 1,450 confirmed cases of the COVID-19 respiratory disease. Shaaban, a father of two young children from Salam City, has been housebound since his local "baladi" cafe was shuttered. "We have no social insurance to fall back on since the cafe has been closed," he said. "I wouldn't have come here if I wasn't in need."

Mohamed Said, 36, a carpenter and father of three queuing behind Shaaban, said that "since this crisis started we've been sitting at home and there's no money coming in." "We don't know how to feed our kids ... and if, God forbid, something happens to any of them, I won't be able to foot a hospital bill."

Egypt's official unemployment rate is

around 10 percent, and more than five million people work as day laborers in the informal economy, the government estimates, often without any form of social protection. EFB director Mohsen Sarhan said his charity is working to deliver 10,000 food parcels a day, containing staples such as rice, pasta, oil, sugar and canned beef - far less than what is needed by the hundreds of thousands of struggling families. "We felt the economy slowing down with the coronavirus pandemic, so on March 19 we launched an initiative aimed at aiding a large cross-section of society who would be adversely affected," he said.

Millions of pounds in donations have poured in over the past month, but the demand to alleviate the suffering of the working poor is at an all-time high. EFB is committed to shipping out an initial lot of 500,000 food cartons throughout Egypt's 27 governorates with around 5,000 charities distributing the parcels. "We are in an emergency situation," Sarhan said. "We need to feed hundreds of thousands of people in a period of weeks ... time is very critical here."

## 'Life has stopped'

President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi on Monday issued a directive to provide day laborers 500 pounds (just over \$30) per month for three months to ease their financial hardship. But experts say this will only partially cushion the blow. "The pandemic is certainly going to mean a massive increase in the numbers of working poor in countries such as Egypt," said Adam Hanieh, who researches labor issues in the Arab world at London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

The virus and its economic impact could spawn "a range of unpredictable and unexpected consequences," he said,



CAIRO: Workers of Egyptian non-governmental organization Egyptian Food Bank prepare cartons with foodstuffs to distribute to people who lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic crisis on April 05, 2020. — AFP

pointing to "significant disruptions in food supplies" and "enormous pressures on the country's healthcare system". "This will undoubtedly provoke social protest and - if Egypt's history is any

guide - a ratcheting up of repression and the increased use of authoritarian measures," Hanieh warned. As COVID-19 cases mount, carpenter Said expressed his deepening sense of help-

lessness. "The situation has made me want to up and leave everything - but I can't just leave my family", he said. "We're not begging, but life has well and truly stopped." — AFP

## Some citizens quibble in 5-star...

Continued from Page 1

footage of people in a developing country standing in line to drink water. "If only they saw how we opened our fridge to choose the (brand of) water we want. God, don't deny us your generosity," read the sarcastic caption.

Kuwait, which pumps 2.7 million barrels of oil per day, has a sovereign wealth fund worth more than \$600 billion, providing a substantial cushion for state finances. Many of its 1.5 million citizens, who make up just 30 percent of the population, have become accustomed to a life of luxury, especially in Europe where some own palaces and supercars. One in ten Kuwaitis is a dollar millionaire - a fact proudly announced by the state airline on flight approaches to Kuwait City.

In one social media video, a Kuwaiti man complains that his luggage has not yet reached the hotel room, which he describes as small with "the bed stuck to the closet". In another, a woman says there is "more fat than I like in my meat". Another quarantine guest said it was taking room service "too long to clean a coffee

stain on the couch".

Kuwait has in the past few weeks passed strict regulations to curb the spread of the deadly virus that has claimed more than 75,000 lives worldwide. It has prosecuted more than 100 people for breaking the dusk to dawn curfew or quarantine rules, with offenders facing up to six months in jail or a KD 10,000 (\$32,000) fine. On Tuesday, it announced a lockdown on two areas that are densely populated with expatriate workers.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet said anyone caught intentionally spreading the virus could face up to 10 years in prison and a KD 30,000 fine. The government has also said it will not tolerate online sarcasm or ridicule of the precautionary measures. In one case a citizen returning from Germany posted a video mocking flight attendants in protective gear likening them to "beekeepers". Some responded online, calling for calm and support for those on the frontline of the pandemic, including air crews.

MP Ahmed Nabil Al-Fadl urged people to be patient and see the bigger picture. "It's very common that the sink does not work properly or that there are some problems... given the short period of time to prepare the place," Fadl, who was also quarantined after returning from Spain, said of quarantine facilities. "Can you be patient? There are doctors who have not slept in three days." —AFP

coronavirus fallout. MP Saleh Ashour meanwhile called on the government to suspend giving loans through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development in order to direct investments inside the country.

Human rights groups urged three Gulf Arab states yesterday to lift bans on free Internet calls to help their large migrant workforces stay in touch during the coronavirus pandemic. Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have long blocked many voice and video calling apps on the grounds of protecting the commercial interests of state-owned telecoms utilities. "This has caused serious problems for the people living in those countries, especially the majority of migrant workers and foreign national residents who need to connect and communicate with their families and communities overseas," the rights groups said.

A majority of the estimated 17 million people living in the three Gulf states are expatriates, most of them low-paid workers from Asia. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UAE and Oman have relaxed restrictions on some calling apps but on a temporary basis. They have unblocked apps that allow for distance learning such as Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business, Google Hangouts, and Zoom. Microsoft Teams and Zoom are also available in Qatar.

State-owned telecom firms in the UAE have also introduced a new app, UAE Voice, that allows for free video and audio calls. But popular apps such as WhatsApp, Skype and FaceTime remain blocked despite persistent calls for a change of policy to face the pandemic, Human Rights Watch and 28 other civil society groups said in a joint statement. "Denying the Gulf population access to these platforms puts people at serious risk, as this cuts them off from their communities abroad and the resources they need in times of such crisis," they said.

Despite its ambition to become a major technological power, the UAE has harsh cybercrime laws and maintains what civil society groups call a high level of online restrictions and surveillance. In December, the New York Times accused the UAE intelligence services of using popular new app ToTok to spy on users.

## Wuhan exodus sparks virus hope despite mounting death toll

WUHAN: Thousands of relieved citizens streamed out of China's Wuhan city yesterday after authorities lifted months of lockdown at the coronavirus epicenter, offering some hope to the world despite record deaths in Europe and the United States. China has come under fire for its handling of the coronavirus crisis that originated there late last year and President Donald Trump threatened to cut US funding to the World Health Organization over perceived bias towards Beijing.

From Wuhan, the coronavirus spread rapidly to infect nearly every country on Earth, killing more than 80,000 people, battering the global economy and forcing around half of humanity into some form of lockdown. Its march across the planet has affected every level of society from workers to royals, with Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson fighting the illness in intensive care.

But the joy of people finally free to leave Wuhan - many of them queuing up to depart in hazmat suits - provided some cheer to a gloomy world, offering proof the virus would not last forever. "You have no idea! I was already up around 4 am. I felt so good. My kids are so excited. Mum is finally coming home," said Hao Mei, a 39-year-old single mother rushing to nearby Enshi to see her young children for the first time in two months.

"I've been stuck for 77 days! I've been stuck for 77 days!" shouted one man, who arrived at the railway station for a train back to his home province of Hunan. A

robot whizzed through crowds of passengers at the station, spraying their feet with disinfectant and playing a recorded message reminding them to wear face masks. "Wuhan deserves to be called the city of heroes," blared the PA system at the train station as an estimated 55,000 people departed the city.

While China celebrated its first day without coronavirus deaths on Tuesday, the relentless disease chalked up fresh milestones in hard-hit areas of Europe and the US. A total of 1,939 people died in the US over the past 24 hours, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, as the country approaches tolls in worst-hit Italy and Spain. Virus deaths hit a new daily high in Britain, where 55-year-old leader Boris Johnson was said to be "stable" and in "good spirits" despite receiving oxygen treatment in intensive care.

And Paris toughened its lockdown measures, banning daytime jogging to keep people from bending the rules as France breached 10,000 deaths. In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo said the state appeared to be nearing the peak of its outbreak but urged citizens to continue staying indoors. Trump, under fire for his own response to the virus, lashed out at the WHO and said there would be a "hold on money" provided to the UN body, which he accused of being "very China-centric." — AFP

## Search on for expats moved...

Continued from Page 1

companies to avoid the lockdown and continue work. MP Yusef Al-Fadhalah said he hopes that all Kuwaitis stranded overseas because of coronavirus will be repatriated before the start of the holy month of Ramadan, expected to commence on April 24.

Meanwhile, opposition MP Riyadh Al-Adasani yesterday reiterated his strong opposition to a government legislation that would allow authorities to borrow KD 20 billion over the next 10 years to finance a persistent budget deficit. Adasani said the government has more than KD 20 billion that can be injected into the General Reserve Fund either by releasing frozen profits, rationalizing expenditure or seeking transfers from the cash-abundant Fund for Future Generations.

The lawmaker also said that under this exceptional situation, the government and the Assembly can issue legislation to suspend the transfer of 10 percent of public revenues to the Future Generations Fund in fiscal years when the budget is in deficit. This could provide the General Reserve Fund with between KD 1.5 to 2 billion a year.

Adasani said a number of government departments have been keeping profits totaling some KD 9 billion for years, which is against the law, and these funds must be sent to the General Reserve Fund. After these procedures, if there is still a budget shortfall, some transfers should be made to the General Reserve Fund from the Future Generations Fund, which has available cash of more than the KD 20 billion debt the government is seeking. This means the government will not need to liquidate some of the country's assets held overseas.

The Assembly's budgets committee was due to start talks with the newly-appointed government economic team headed by Central Bank Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel on ways to finance the deficit and support national economy in the face of the

## #Stayhome Gulf influencers take...

Continued from Page 1

Fouz Al-Fahd shared images of her March 17 marriage ceremony, showing her smiling as she received an enormous diamond ring from her new husband amid a lavish backdrop of white flowers.

While few people were in attendance - in line with social distancing rules - Fahd's three million Instagram followers were virtual guests. "Thank you for making us forget the coronavirus even if it just for one day... how lovely you are as your hands shake when putting on the rings. My eyes teared up, I love you, Fouz," said one follower.

In the past year, Instagram influencers have played a big part in promoting events in the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia which has been touting its tourism and entertainment industries as it diversifies its economy away from oil. Some top figures on social media were reportedly paid six-figure sums to help rehabilitate the kingdom's image amid scrutiny of its human rights record. But cultural and sporting events have been scrapped across the region as governments try to curb the spread of the pandemic, leaving influencers scrambling for content.

"It's not easy for one to create content and attract thousands... and millions, it takes a lot of dedication," said Joelle Mardinian, a Dubai-based influencer and founder of beauty brand Joelle Group, in one of her Instagram stories. "From the morning I think 'what can I upload for you'" she said. "I like to share with you nice things, such as playing with (my son)... or if my daughter is doing something cute, or if I cooked something I'm proud of," she told her more than 12 million followers.

Mardinian has encouraged her followers to "find things to do at home" as she posts content ranging

from whipping up a dish, to refurbishing outdoor furniture with her daughter in a garden filled with reproduction classical statues. Also making guest appearances were her dogs, including one that had a bedazzled pink collar that reads "SPOILED". "I was proud of myself, and I also wanted to encourage you, not only for the sake of content. You are always on mind," she said.

Social media influencers can play a positive role during the pandemic, said Rima Sabban, an associate professor of sociology at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates. "They can help, even with the little things," she told AFP. But she urged influencers to drop their "social masks" and avoid putting such a gloss on the situation that it makes ordinary people even more miserable about their locked-in existences. "At this time it is important to be honest with people," she said. "This is now a moment for humanity... to drop these masks and be courageous."

Ragda Bakhorji, a Saudi with more than 14,000 followers on Instagram, said now was the time to bring "authenticity" to the forefront. "Generally, my posts reflect my daily activities with a focus on sarcasm and social matters, that raises curiosity and allows my followers to come to their own conclusions," she told AFP. "I think it's important to be honest and authentic, especially at this time when we should focus more on humanity and be considerate, rather than focus on trivial stuff."

For Souad Naim, a marketing manager in Dubai, social media figures in the Gulf have been a reliable source of entertainment as well as inspiration. "I check my phone in the morning and in the evening, and I like to see what the influencers are planning for the day or what they did already," the 35-year-old told AFP. "When I see something I like, I get inspired." Her favorite figures have changed tack dramatically during the crisis, she said, adding: "I'm enjoying their live discussions with their followers and how they're adapting to the circumstances and making home-cooked dishes. There aren't many things to do now, so it's entertaining." — AFP



Stars

**Daily SuDoku**

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


very hard


**Yesterday's Solution**


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


easy

STAR TRACK

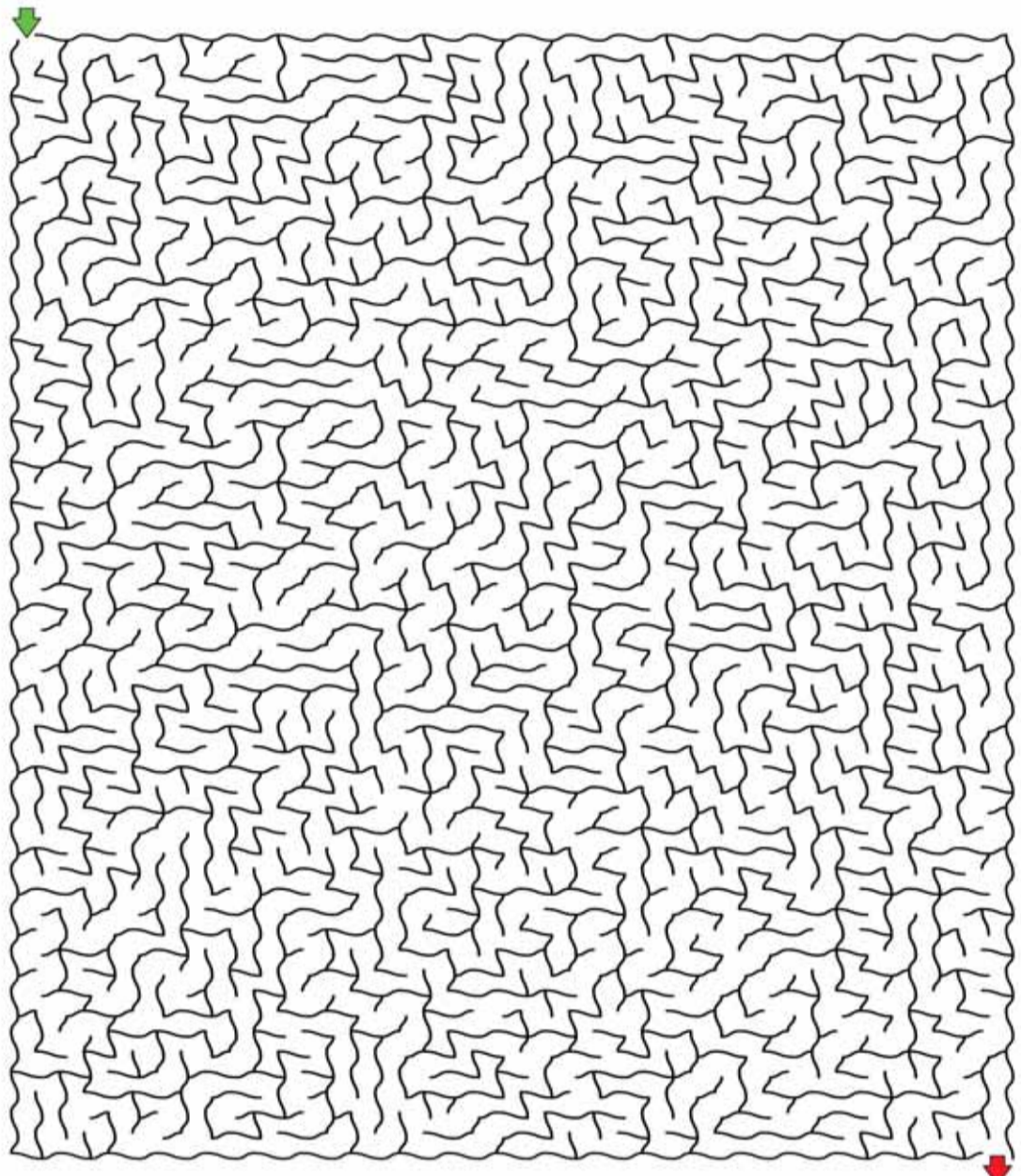
**Aries (March 21-April 19)**  
 Today you could feel full of energy and eager to get out for some exercise, Aries, but other responsibilities might threaten to keep you from doing it. The resulting frustration could zap all your energy and put you in a lethargic mood. Don't fall into this trap! Get the most urgent tasks done and then get the exercise you need. This way, you can recoup both your physical and mental energy.


**Libra (September 23-October 22)**  
 Libra, you're likely to want to retreat into your bedroom and slam the door today. You won't feel like talking or socializing with anyone, not even those closest to you. Too much work could have you in a state of near exhaustion and almost total burnout, which means that getting some rest is probably the best thing you could do right now. Relax now, and get yourself going again tomorrow.


**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**  
 Your energy is probably pretty low today, Taurus. You won't feel like socializing, nor will you feel like staying in and reading or watching TV. Chances are you won't know what to do with yourself all day. Under these circumstances, the best thing to do is find a distraction. Go work out, read a thrilling book, go to a funny movie. Get your mind off your lethargy and it could well disappear.


**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**  
 This might prove to be one of those days in which it's very hard to get anything related to work or communication off the ground, Scorpio. You could find excuses to stop working more often than usual, particularly if it involves calling people on the phone. Don't fight it. Take care of the most urgent tasks. The world won't come to an end if you put the rest off a while.


Find the way





**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**  
 Career and financial goals could seem completely stalled, Gemini, and this could have you depressed, frustrated, and in something of a panic. Don't fall into this trap. This isn't a permanent condition. You'll be back on track in a few days. In the meantime, be good to yourself. Go to your favorite restaurant, buy yourself a present, or spend the afternoon in a bookstore.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**  
 You might have planned to make a particular purchase today, Sagittarius, but a quick check of your financial situation could reveal that it would be better if you waited until your next payday. This could prove disappointing and frustrating, but look at it this way - you've waited this long for this item. It isn't urgent, so waiting a little longer certainly won't hurt. Do something else today.


**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**  
 A colleague could be in a very bad mood, Cancer, and therefore not the easiest person in the world to deal with. In fact, today he or she could resist working at all, and you might feel obligated to take up the slack. Only do it if the tasks are urgent. It isn't fair to you to have to do someone else's job. Don't feel guilty if you leave it unfinished.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**  
 A lack of physical and mental energy as well as motivation could have you in a lethargic mood today, Capricorn. You won't feel like doing much of anything. You might get extremely irritated at the thought of having to work in any way. It might be a good idea to go to a movie in the evening, preferably a thriller or action movie. This will get your juices flowing again.

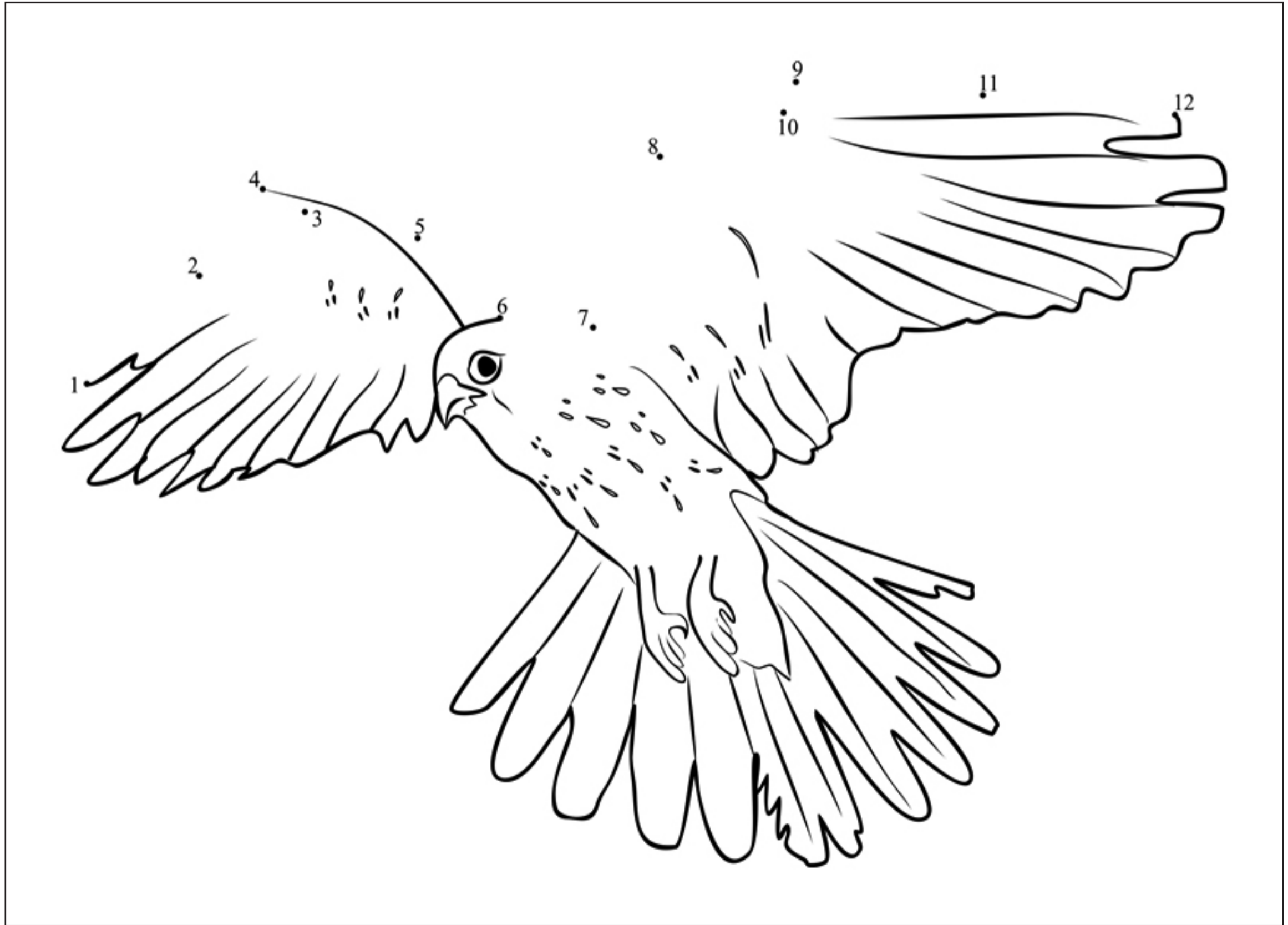
**Leo (July 23-August 22)**  
 Plans to go away on vacation or perhaps a business trip could be put on hold today, Leo. Events you might have been scheduled to attend could be temporarily postponed. This could leave you feeling somewhat at a loss because you'd planned to be away and now you don't know what to do with yourself in the meantime. Be your usual ingenious self and you'll find something! Go to it!

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**  
 Usually you enjoy talking with others, Aquarius, but today you won't even want to answer the phone. Your physical stamina and mental energy are low, and you could feel out of sorts. It might help if you go for a walk sometime in the afternoon. You won't want to waste your evening lying around the house. Get the endorphins going and then go to a movie. You'll soon be your old self again!

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**  
 This isn't a good day to visit the racetrack, Las Vegas, or any store that sells lottery tickets. Stay away from the stock market, too, Virgo. Speculation of any kind now could be risky at best and disastrous at worst. Romance is also likely to be blocked today, since you're probably feeling a bit lethargic and not very sociable. Read a good book. That's the most productive thing you could do today!

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**  
 A group of friends might want you to go out with them today, Pisces, but you probably won't feel up to it. Your financial situation could also require a little belt-tightening now, so you may not feel you can justify the expense. In any case, you aren't going to want to spend the evening alone. Invite a friend or love partner over to watch a movie with you.

Join the dots and color It





## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Alex Roudayna "Chikorita" climbing Iztaccihuatl volcano during Tres Picos challenge in Mexico. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Basketball fans to get refunds for USA games

**SYDNEY:** A sports promoter has promised to refund fans left disappointed by poor views and a lack of big-name NBA stars, such as LeBron James, at two Australia v USA basketball matches last year.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) said TEG Live would refund Aus\$5 million (US\$3 million) to about 5,000 people who bought 20,000 tickets to the games in Sydney and Melbourne in August.

The ACCC found the promoter had made "false or misleading claims" about the views fans would have of the court and which USA stars would be playing.

"In our view, TEG Live's conduct was unacceptable, and we are pleased around 5,000 consumers will receive automatic refunds," ACCC chair Rod Sims said.

TEG Live advertised the games using an image of an American basketball stadium showing floor-level seats as tiered, which was not the case in Melbourne. Many of the premium seats — which cost between \$895 and \$3,995 — had obstructed views of the court. Advertising also suggested top NBA stars such as the Los Angeles Lakers superstar James and Kevin Durant of the Brooklyn Nets would be playing in the exhibition games, when the promoter had not confirmed their appearance.

"In the end, only four players from the 35-man squad — Harrison Barnes, Kemba Walker, Khris Middleton and Myles Turner — played in the games," ACCC chair Rod Sims said. "We are concerned consumers may have purchased tickets believing many of these advertised high profile players would be playing when, in the end, this was not the case." The ACCC said affected ticket-holders would be refunded by July. — AFP

# On this day: Born April 9, 1957: Seve Ballesteros, Spanish golfer

## Ballesteros helped Europe win five Ryder Cups

**MADRID:** Renowned for audacious shot making, and an infectious smile twinned with a fierce competitive edge, Seve Ballesteros revolutionised golf in Europe and remains one of the most captivating figures in the game even nine years since passing away.

The son of a farmer, the Spaniard honed his skills on the beaches of Santander by hitting stones with sticks before taking the sport by storm aged 19 at the 1976 British Open, leading the tournament for three days before coming second.

He delivered an even more impressive performance at the Open three years later to win the first of five majors in the space of nine years, his show-stopping moment coming when he birdied on the 17th hole despite teeing off into a row of parked cars.

That escape act earned him the nickname 'the Car Park Champion' and cemented his reputation for outlandish shots which Ben Crenshaw summed

up by saying "Seve plays shots I don't even see in my dreams".

Jack Nicklaus, a winner of a record 18 majors, would later claim Ballesteros was responsible for the greatest shot he had ever seen, a 210-metre three wood from a bunker at the 1983 Ryder Cup.

Ballesteros overtook Nicklaus as the youngest ever winner of the Masters in 1980, also becoming the first European player to win the tournament, although his most famous win came back in Britain at the competition that launched his career.

His final putt at the 1984 Open clinched victory

after a tense battle with Tom Watson and sparked one of the most iconic celebrations in sport, Ballesteros relentlessly punching the air while shouting in Spanish "I got it in".



### The king of gamesmanship

The celebrations from the crowd were no less wild, which spoke of his popularity. Ballesteros could not please everyone, though, making enemies with a series of American opponents in the Ryder Cup, a tournament he helped transform from a one-sided event into one of sport's greatest spectacles.

Paul Azinger labelled the Spaniard "the king of gamesmanship" after a dispute over a

scuffed ball in the 1991 tournament. Ballesteros bit back by remarking "The American team has 11 nice guys. And Paul Azinger."

Azinger's partner Chip Beck meanwhile accused Ballesteros of coughing during his backswing. The Spaniard's defence that he had allergies convinced no-one. Ballesteros helped Europe win five Ryder Cups, his crowning glory coming when he captained the team to victory in 1997 on home soil, roaring encouragement to his charges as he whizzed across the Valderrama course on a golf cart.

"He believed anything was possible. He constantly shocked me," team mate and compatriot Jose Maria Olazabal said after Ballesteros' untimely death in 2011 after a three-year battle with brain cancer.

"No one has ever made a bigger contribution to the European Tour. He was the one who broke down all the barriers, all the walls." — Reuters

## Jet ski master brings world records home

**KUWAIT:** Professional jet ski athlete and Kuwait native Mohammed Burbayea has brought home more championships than most other living athletes, and his sense of honorable and quiet pride in victory is unmatched.

145 trophies, 23 World Championships, and 2 Guinness World Records wins later, Mohammed Burbayea's passion for the watercourse is still peaking.

His proudest moment was winning the World Series Triple Crown 3 times. Facing the best athletes, overcoming the challenges and turning them into wins has taught him a lot about what it takes to be a champion.

"In my first ever race," Mohammed Burbayea remembers, "my engine ignited." But he persevered and chose to pursue the sport. He notes that early engine troubles were not a factor in his consideration to continue. With the help of his coach, he has



made them a blip in his past. He trains for his sport year-round and keeps a strict regimen in order to meet his goals. Through it all he is driven by a central, unifying passion.

"My love of Kuwait drives me each day," he said, and looks forward to when both public and private sectors in Kuwait collab-

orate together for the general improvement of sport. Mohammed Burbayea lives in Kuwait and divides his time between his post as a Captain in the General Directory of Traffic, at the Ministry of Interior of Kuwait, and as a professional athlete, representing his country in his sports' biggest stages.

factors that individual club employees may face," Goodell said.

"I have spoken to many of you in the past several days and recognize the challenges facing all of us. We are operating in an environment unlike anything we have experienced before, one that requires flexibility, patience, and cooperation.

The NFL is nervously following the progress of the COVID-19 crisis with the start of the 2020-2021 season just five months away.

So far there are no plans to delay the start of the season although there is the strong possibility of disruption to pre-season training, which could force a rejig of the season schedule. The coronavirus outbreak has brought sport in North America to its knees with most major professional leagues for basketball, baseball, soccer and ice hockey either halting play or delaying the start of their season. — AFP

## English classic horse races postponed

**LONDON:** The first four of England's five annual Classic horse races, including the Epsom Derby, have all been postponed due to the coronavirus it was announced Tuesday.

In a separate development, organisers of June's Royal Ascot said the meeting would not "take place as an event open to the public".

Course owners Jockey Club Racecourses (JCR) said the Guineas Festival at Newmarket, featuring both the 1,000 and 2,000 Guineas on the first weekend of May and the Derby Festival, which was due to stage the Oaks and the Derby at Epsom on June 5-6, had both been postponed in response to the outbreak.

"We are now working with our partners in the industry to seek to establish a future date when the Investec Oaks and the Investec Derby races can take place, and will keep you informed on any future developments," JCR said in a statement.

As for the Guineas meeting, JCR east regional director Amy Starkey, responsible for Newmarket, said: "The future is too uncertain at the moment and there is no opportunity for any preparation races before such important contests for the 2020 classic generation. "Therefore we feel now is the right time to take the decision to cancel the Guineas Festival and turn our attention to determining, in conjunction with the British Horseracing Authority (BHA), participants and stakeholders, the earliest possible opportunity to reschedule the 2,000 Guineas and the 1,000 Guineas."

The Classics, all for three-year-olds and run over differing distances, with the 1,000 Guineas and the Oaks restricted to fillies, are some of the old-

est and most prestigious in the global racing calendar.

With that in mind, the governing BHA said the races would be central in their plans were they allowed to restart racing after suspending it last month in response to the spread of COVID-19.

"As a sport we have a responsibility to safeguard the staging of our Classics, and to position them within a sensible, balanced schedule of complementary events wherever possible," Ruth Quinn, the BHA's director of international racing and racing development told the BBC. "Naturally one of the key priorities is the staging of the generation-defining races."

### ASCOT BEHIND CLOSED DOORS?

Another highlight of the English racing season is Royal Ascot, situated near Windsor Castle and long a favourite of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, a noted horseracing enthusiast.

Staging major events without spectators is a prospect officials across all sports are contemplating following the spread of the coronavirus and Ascot chief executive Guy Henderson said: "It may prove possible to run the Royal Ascot races behind closed doors, dependent on government and public health policy and the approval of the BHA for us to re-start racing."

The St Leger, English racing's other annual Classic, is traditionally run much later in the season in Doncaster, with this year's edition scheduled for September 12. Pinatubo, owned by the Godolphin team bankrolled by Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed and trained in Newmarket by Charlie Appleby, had been favourite for both the 2,000 Guineas and the Derby.

All racing in Britain was suspended on March 17 in response to the spread of COVID-19 after the BHA were criticised for allowing that month's four-day Cheltenham Festival jumps meeting, which attracted more than 250,000 spectators, to go ahead. — AFP

## NFL readies virtual draft this month

**LOS ANGELES:** The National Football League has outlined details for a "virtual draft" to be held later this month after original plans for the April 23-25 event in Las Vegas were scrapped due to the coronavirus pandemic.

An NFL report on the league's website said commissioner Roger Goodell had notified all 32 teams that the draft would take place using the phone and internet in order to comply with social distancing guidelines.

All NFL league and club facilities are currently shuttered due to the COVID-19

crisis, meaning team officials and draft hopefuls this year will need to participate in separate locations.

"Because of these circumstances, clubs have been advised to prepare to conduct the 2020 draft entirely outside of their facilities and in a fully virtual format, with club personnel in separate locations and able to communicate with one another and draft headquarters by phone or internet," Goodell said. NFL employees would be separated in the same way, Goodell added, working in locations outside of league offices.

Goodell said the arrangements for a virtual draft had been made after officials failed to find any other viable alternative.

"After consulting with medical advisors, we cannot identify an alternative that is preferable from a medical or public health perspective, given the varying needs of clubs, the need properly to screen participants, and the unique risk



## Sports

# Virus prevents play at Trump-opened world's biggest cricket stadium

## No sound of leather on willow and the roar of the crowd

**NEW DELHI:** There is no larger symbol of the global sports shutdown than cricket's 110,000-seater Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad, opened by US President Donald Trump, but yet to see a ball bowled.

India's newest and the world's biggest cricket stadium lies empty because of the coronavirus pandemic. Where there should be the sound of leather on willow and the roar of the crowd, there is only silence.

Just a few weeks ago, it had been packed to capacity as Trump and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood side-by-side in a show of pomp and ceremony for the February 24 inauguration.

Eclipsing Australia's 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground, it was rumoured to be in line to host the final of this year's Indian Premier League, the world's richest Twenty20 tournament, watched by millions worldwide.

But then came COVID-19. The pandemic has brought the sporting world to a grinding halt with massive events including the Tokyo Olympics, football's European Championships, golf and tennis majors, and the glitzy IPL postponed.

"There was hardly any time between the Trump event and the pandemic," a senior Gujarat Cricket Association official told AFP on condition of anonymity, adding that once cricket resumes, the stadium could be ready "in double-quick time."

"Just five percent work is remaining and it just needs the finishing touches," the official added.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has pushed back the IPL from its original start date of March 29 to April 15, but with the number of coronavirus cases in India exceeding 5,000 and still rising, pressure is growing for it to be shifted again, truncated or scrapped.

The \$100-million, circular venue, promises unobstructed views and has state-of-the-art facilities including an Olympic-sized swimming pool as part of a multisports complex.

Next door, a refurbished venue on the site of the former 49,000-capacity Motera Stadium will serve as a venue for cricket, football and hockey.

Critics have charged that it is another "white elephant" vanity project in Modi's home state, following the completion of the world's largest statue there in 2018 - also dedicated to independence hero Sardar Patel.

The giant Statue of Unity measures 182 metres tall (597 feet) — twice the height of New York's Statue of Liberty. Modi was Gujarat chief minister for 13 years until 2014, and revamping the former Motera stadium had been long a pet project.

Home Minister Amit Shah, a close ally, headed the Gujarat Cricket Association till last year and his son Jay Shah is the secretary of the BCCI, the world's richest and most powerful cricket board.

Despite cricket being wildly popular in India, domestic first class matches — and even some international Test matches — are often played to



**AHMEDABAD:** File photo taken on February 24, 2020 shows people attending the 'Namaste Trump' rally at Sardar Patel Stadium in Motera on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. There is no larger symbol of the global sports shutdown than cricket's 110,000-seater Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad, opened by US President Donald Trump in February 2020, but yet to see a ball bowled. — AFP

near-empty stadiums.

The only matches guaranteed to attract big crowds are IPL games and one-day internationals — and even then it depends on the quality of the opposition.

The nation of 1.3 billion people already has more than a dozen stadiums capable of hosting international cricket, although in the off-season they can be

used for other events.

"You are left wondering whether it is a rock concert venue, (or) is it a cricket stadium?" ESPNcricinfo senior editor Sharda Ugra told AFP. "I would have hoped that there would have been some analysis on the kind of grounds that India needs now. 'We have a lot of these giant grounds in which you have one international match in two years.'" — AFP

## Athletes step up to help fight virus in Brazil

**BRASILIA:** As infections of the novel coronavirus rise steadily in Brazil and threaten to cause chaos in its densely populated favelas, some of the country's leading athletes are stepping up to help the most vulnerable communities.

Olympic judo medalist Flavio Canto is among those giving his time and money to battle the COVID-19 outbreak in South America's biggest nation, which has a confirmed 13,717 infections and 667 deaths from the virus as of Tuesday.

"When all this is over, those that have a lot are going to have a lot less but they'll still have more than most, and they have an obligation to help those who have nothing," Rio de Janeiro judoka Canto told Reuters.

A bronze medalist in the men's -81kg category in Athens, Canto is almost as famous in Brazil for his work with the Instituto Reacao, a charity that uses martial arts to help transform young people's lives.

Canto is raising funds for a project that will give a monthly stipend to thousands of families in Rio and Cuiaba who are under quarantine or suffering financially due to unemployment or the need to self-isolate.

The monthly stipend of around 100 reais (\$19.15) comes in the form of a pre-paid cash card that can be used in local supermarkets.

In a nation where corruption is rife and the government's coronavirus strategy has come under scrutiny, Canto said athletes were the ideal group to spearhead relief efforts because they are trusted by the people.

"One of the big problems in Brazil is that people lack the confidence their money and resources will be distributed properly," he said by telephone from Rio. "My charity has 20 years of experience in that field and the other athletes are people with the same profile, who have experience in charity work and therefore credibility."

One such athlete is Dunga, who captained Brazil's national soccer team to their 1994 World Cup win.

The former Internacional and Fiorentina midfielder is working with business contacts and former players - including ex-Brazil internationals Jorginho and Edmilson and Paulo Cesar Tinga - to help disadvantaged communities in his home state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Like Canto, Dunga has run a charitable foundation for many years, helping orphanages, old folks' homes and social projects.

In the last few days he has persuaded supermarket owners, food producers and transportation companies to donate and distribute more than 10 tons of food to local charities as more and more people suffer due to the virus.

"We saw that there are a lot of people in the favelas who aren't working and they don't have food so I called the friends I still play football with and said let's do something," Dunga told Reuters.

Dunga has spent much of his spare time over the last week not just calling friends asking for help but also loading boxes of produce into trucks and delivering fruit and vegetables to local charities.

His closest helpers are former players but some active professionals have also contributed. Argentine midfielder Andres D'Alessandro, who plays for Porto Alegre side Internacional, was with him on Tuesday as they loaded sacks of produce into cars and trucks.

Local media have also reported that Brazilian internationals Neymar, Roberto Firmino and Paulinho have also contributed in their home states. Dunga encouraged more to get involved.

"We ex-players still have doors open to us," he said. "Imagine what the players who are active today could do." — Reuters

## Spurs tell players to follow social distancing rules

**LONDON:** Tottenham Hotspur have told their players to respect the government's social distancing guidelines after several squad members were pictured training in a London park, the Premier League club have said.

Manager Jose Mourinho was photographed at an outdoor training session at Hadley Common with midfielder Tanguy Ndombele despite government guidelines for people to stay indoors due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Centre-back Davinson Sanchez and full back Ryan Sessegnon were filmed by passers-by running together through the park.

"All of our players have been reminded to respect social distancing when exercising outdoors. We shall continue to reinforce this message," a Spurs spokesperson told British media.

The Premier League was suspended last month because of the pandemic and the government has asked the public to stay at home to help slow the spread of the virus. — Reuters

## Completing NHL season 'may not be possible'

**LOS ANGELES:** National Hockey League commissioner Gary Bettman acknowledged Tuesday the 2019-2020 season could be abandoned as administrators wait to see how the coronavirus pandemic unfolds across North America.

In an interview with NBC Sports Network, Bettman said the NHL was leaving all options on the table as the league attempts to plot a course back to a resumption following its COVID-19 shutdown.

The league halted play last month as the coronavirus crisis sent professional sports in the US grinding to a halt. With play wiped out in April — when the postseason had been due to start — the hiatus leaves the NHL on a tight timetable to complete its season.

Bettman admitted that the shortening window could make completing the season impossible.

"The best thing, and the easiest thing, would be if at some point we could complete the regular season and then go into the playoffs as we normally do," Bettman said.

"We understand that that may not be possible and that's why we're considering every conceivable alternative to deal with whatever the eventuality is. "It doesn't even pay to speculate because nobody in any of the sports knows enough now to make those profound decisions."

Bettman participated in a weekend call involving professional sports administrators and President Donald Trump. While Trump has voiced optimism about sport resuming "sooner rather than later", Bettman has damped down speculation of a swift return.

"I think right now there's too much uncertainty," said Bettman. "Hopefully we'll all know more by the end of April. "From an NHL standpoint, we're viewing all of our options. We want to be ready to go as soon as we get a green light — and the green light may not be crystal clear because there may still be some places where we can't play and others places where you can. We're looking at all options. Nothing's been ruled in, nothing's been ruled out." — AFP



**SURPRISE, ARIZONA:** A man on a bicycle rides past the Texas Rangers and Kansas City Royals spring training facility, Surprise Stadium on April 07, 2020 in Surprise, Arizona. According to reports, Major League Baseball is considering a scenario in which all 30 of its teams play an abbreviated regular season without fans. — AFP

## 50-50 chance MLB is played in 2020

**BOSTON:** While Major League Baseball and the players union are exploring various avenues for starting the delayed season, at least one superstar isn't convinced the season will be held at all.

Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Christian Yelich told WEEI Radio in Boston on Tuesday that he believes there is as good a possibility as not that the coronavirus pandemic will wipe out the 2020 campaign entirely. "There's a very real chance that we don't play as much as there is that we do play. I would say it is probably 50-50," Yelich said on the "Ordway, Merloni & Fauria" show.

The radio hosts, Boston media personality Glenn Ordway, former Boston Red Sox infielder Lou Merloni and former New England Patriots tight end Christian Fauria, asked Yelich about the possible MLB plan reported Monday night that could see the season started with closed-door games between teams sequestered in the Phoenix area.

"I think late last night was the first time I'd actually heard of that plan," the 2018 National League MVP said. "I think a lot of guys have been talking about it today, obviously. I think there are a lot of challenges to that plan. "I don't think that is the plan that they

are for sure going with. I could be wrong. I would have to look into it a little more, but it would definitely be challenging. "Now, maybe that is something that we have to do just because of the times that we're in, and if that is our only option to play then maybe it is our only option to play. I think there's definitely a lot of hurdles and challenges that need to be talked through."

Yelich added that he has heard no whispers regarding a possible timetable for a rescheduled Opening Day. "Nobody really knows a start date or when that would even be a possibility, so that is the most challenging thing," Yelich said. "It is hard to plan for when we're going to start when we don't know when we are going to start and that impacts the schedule. There's a lot of options, and all this depends on when we're able to start and really if we're able to start."

"From the players' point of view, we all want to play, obviously, but, we want to make sure it is safe and that it's the right time to do it," Yelich, 28, finished runner-up in NL MVP voting last season after leading the league in batting average (.329), on-base percentage (.429) and slugging percentage (.671) while adding 44 homers and 97 RBIs.

In 2018, he paced the NL in batting average (.326) and slugging percentage (.598) while amassing 36 homers and 110 RBIs. In his major league career with the Miami Marlins (2013-17) and the Brewers (2018-19), Yelich has a batting line of .301/.383/.492 with 139 homers and 500 RBIs in 920 games. He has received three Silver Slugger awards and one Gold Glove honor. Yelich signed a nine-year, \$215 million contract with the Brewers this offseason. — Reuters

## Dutch FA plans for league to resume on June 19

**THE HAGUE:** The Dutch football federation (KNVB) said Tuesday it was hoping the top two divisions would restart on June 19 following their suspension due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The decision would keep the Dutch league in line with UEFA, which has warned teams risk exclusion from the next Champions League if their domestic competitions are ended prematurely.

The KNVB revealed its plans during a video conference with professional clubs and other major stakeholders, although leading sides including Ajax, AZ Alkmaar and PSV Eindhoven have called for the season to be ended.

The Belgian league recommended last week the current season be declared finished early with the present table accepted as final, becoming the first European league to take such a measure.

"At the explicit request of the clubs, we have explained what it would look like if the RIVM (health authorities) and the government gave the green light to restart certain activities in the Netherlands," the KNVB said in a statement.

The proposed scenario "now supposes that the end of competitions are played in June and July, starting from June 19," it added, with tentative plans to resume training in mid-May.

In the Netherlands, all social gatherings are banned until June 1, including football matches. Schools, restaurants and bars will remain closed at least until April 28. However, there is no lockdown like those in Italy, Spain, France or Belgium.

The Dutch government has said it will decide whether or not to extend the restrictions later this month. The KNVB indicated it would wait for further instructions from authorities before "being able to give more clarity". — AFP



**18** Jet ski master brings world records home



**19** Virus prevents play at Trump-opened world's biggest cricket stadium



**19** 50-50 chance MLB is played in 2020



## Paraguay court releases Ronaldinho



ASUNCION: Brazilian retired football player Ronaldinho arrives at a hotel in Asuncion where he and his brother will serve house arrest after a judge ordered their release from jail on April 7, 2020. — AFP

**ASUNCION:** A Paraguayan judge on Tuesday ordered the release of Brazilian football great Ronaldinho and his brother into house arrest while they await trial on charges of using false passports to enter the country. Judge Gustavo Amarilla told reporters that he had ordered the "continuation of house arrest in a hotel for Ronaldinho and his brother."

The pair were jailed one month ago to await trial, but their lawyers have posted bail of \$1.6 million.

Ronaldinho, considered one of the greatest footballers of all time, was a star of Brazil's 2002 World Cup win and played for European giants Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and AC Milan, among others.

The ruling means the brothers can swap their grim police cell block — which has also housed Paraguay's former soccer federation chief and the ex-speaker of the lower house of parliament — for a plush colonial-

style hotel in downtown Asuncion.

The brochure of the refurbished 107-room Palmaroga Hotel, located in the capital's historic center, describes it as offering "a seamless blend of early 1900s Renaissance grace and modern comfort as well as luxury."

"I have the assurance of the hotel managers that they, at their own expense, can observe house arrest there," Amarilla told a news conference.

Paraguay's appeals court last month rejected a request to release the pair, meaning the two-time world player of the year spent his 40th birthday behind bars. With Paraguay's capital on lockdown due to the coron-

avirus pandemic, the judge communicated his ruling in a cellphone call to the brothers, with prosecutors and defense lawyers — and TV cameras — present.

The judge and many others wore face masks as a precaution against the virus.

A beaming Ronaldinho, in a black T-shirt and matching headband, gave a thumbs up sign to show he understood the terms of his release.

### 'FAKE PASSPORTS'

He and his brother, Roberto de Assis Moreira — who is also his business manager — initially encountered no problems after arriving in Asuncion from neighboring Brazil on March 4.

However, shortly after their arrival, the brothers were taken into police custody when investigators raided their hotel following discovery that their passports were fake.

Ronaldinho, given a rock star's welcome to Asuncion by around 2,000 children and teenagers, said the passports had been given to him by sponsors of a charity working with disadvantaged children.

Fourteen other people have been charged in the case, which has expanded into an investigation into possible money laundering.

An arrest warrant has been issued for the Paraguayan businesswoman in charge of the charity foundation that invited Ronaldinho. He proved a popular inmate of the police headquarters jail where he was held, donating a trophy to the winning team in a recent prisoners' futsal tournament. —AFP



### Into house arrest in hotel

## Athletes face mental health challenge

**MELBOURNE:** When Olympic swimming champion Kyle Chalmers completed what he knew would be his final training session before the coronavirus shutdown, his overwhelming feelings were of sadness and the fear of what was to come.

Fear does not come easily to the strapping 21-year-old Australian, who has endured two heart operations since winning the 100 metres freestyle title in Rio and raises crocodiles and pythons for a hobby.

While it took some "processing" to digest the fact that his dream of defending his Olympic title in Tokyo had been shifted back 12 months, it was the prospect of not setting foot in a swimming pool for half a year that really had him rattled.

"That was my hugest fear, not being able to do what I love which is swimming, and if I couldn't do that for six months, I was getting pretty edgy about it," Chalmers told Reuters by phone from South Australia. "I love training and I love exercising. I think I love training more than I love racing."

Chalmers is one of thousands of athletes whose dreams have been put on hold following the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, while thousands more around the world are in lockdown with their sporting careers shelved indefinitely.

"Unknowns are quite challenging, especially for athletes whose days are mapped out from the minute they wake up to the minute they go to sleep," Chalmers added.

"And that's everybody's fear, and especially mine, getting out of that structured routine and just trying to work out what to do with that free time now."

### SHOCK PHASE

Health experts warn that a prolonged isolation could take a big mental toll on people whose livelihoods and self esteem are intrinsically linked to competition. "A lot of athletes are still in an initial shock phase, probably confused and also with some relief after all the chaos," Caroline Anderson, a psychologist who works with professional and Olympic athletes in Australia, told Reuters.

"Probably their two main coping strategies in life are having that competitive edge and being able to really push themselves physically for six-seven hours a day. They haven't got that anymore which is very difficult," Chalmers has taken to yoga, hiking and an exercise bike to keep in shape mentally and physically while he awaits the arrival of a loaned swimming pool

housed in a shipping container for his back yard.

Former Olympic butterfly champion Chad le Clos is trying to make the best of the situation by tethering himself to a bungee cord as he swims in his own small backyard pool in Cape Town.

"It is not ideal, but you have to be creative given the limitations you have," the South African told Reuters. "That will help to keep me going."

The top athletes possess exceptional drive, talent and the ability to perform under relentless pressure but they are no less vulnerable to mental health problems. Many have spoken openly of their battles with depression and their recoveries from nervous breakdowns. Others carry their burdens quietly. A slew have committed suicide in recent years.

Self-isolation raises the threat of acute psychological events, and not just for athletes with pre-existing conditions, psychologist Anderson said.

"That sudden stopping of the sport, from a physiological or biological standpoint, there's a reduction in endorphins but also (a loss of) identity," she said.

"They see themselves as athletes and sport is very tied up in that. Without the sport, the inability to train, these are absolutely risk factors."

### 'WIGGING OUT'

Many athletes are putting a brave face on the lockdown, converting garages and bedrooms into home gymnasiums and posting cheerful videos of

themselves on social media keeping fit by "bench-pressing" their children.

Tennis great Roger Federer cheered fans with a video of himself practising trick-shots against an outdoor wall as it snowed at his Switzerland home.

American middle distance runner Emma Coburn, who took bronze in the 3,000-metre steeplechase at Rio, told Reuters: "I'm not feeling stress or anxiety about it. I enjoy in general being at home."

But the weeks and months of the lockdown will be a time when mental health experts on the payroll of teams and federations earn their keep as they try to plot a path for athletes in what is effectively uncharted territory.

Frustration at the confinement has already spilled over on occasion, with high profile soccer players getting into hot water for breaching government orders on social distancing by hosting parties and drinking sessions. Such incidents usually occur as celebrations after competition, said Gearoid Towey, the founder of Crossing the Line, a charity focusing on the wellbeing of athletes. "I think this is slightly different. There isn't anything, per se, to celebrate. People are locked up in their houses," he said.

"You're probably going to get some incidents but with all the mental health resources in place, sports will generally know which athletes might be prone to 'wiggling out'. You'd like to think they'd have extra support for them." — Reuters